

**EVERYDAY NETWORKS, POLITICS, AND INEQUALITIES IN POST-  
TSUNAMI RECOVERY: FISHER LIVELIHOODS IN SOUTH SRI  
LANKA**

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

*Michaelmas Term, 2010*

To

the tsunami survivors of Sri Lanka who languish in poverty, yet thrive in determination, spirit,

and hope

and

Aththammi, if you only knew the geographer that I have grown to be.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **EVERYDAY NETWORKS, POLITICS, AND INEQUALITIES IN POST-TSUNAMI RECOVERY:**

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The aim of this thesis is to explore how livelihoods are recovering in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka through the lens of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and the social networks approach—methods of inquiry that have gained considerable impetus in livelihoods research. The study is conducted with reference to two tsunami-affected fisher villages in the Hambantota District, Southern Province. It employs a qualitative ethnographic methodology that examines narratives emerging from households, local officials of government and non-government organizations, office bearers of community-based organizations, local politicians, village leaders, and key informants. Focus is on evaluating how particular roles, activities, and behaviour are given importance by these groups in specific post-tsunami contexts and how these aspects relate to broader conceptualizations of social networks, informal politics, social inequality, and ethnographic research in South Asia.

The findings support four major contributions to the literature. First, social networks are significant as an object of study and a method of inquiry in understanding livelihoods post-disaster. Second, paying heed to varied forms of informal politics is critical in post-disaster analyses. Third, the concept of intersectionality can extend and improve upon prevailing

approaches to social inequality in disaster recovery. Fourth, ethnographic research is valuable for understanding everyday networks, informal politics, and change in South Asia. Collectively, these findings present a human geography of post-tsunami livelihoods in Sri Lanka, where networks, politics, and inequalities, which form an essential part of everyday livelihoods, have been reproduced in disaster recovery. The thesis constitutes a means of offering expertise in the sphere of development practice, highlighting internal differentiation in access to aid as a key issue that needs to be identified and systematically addressed by policymakers and practitioners.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AGA	Assistant Government Agent
CBO	Community-based organization
CNO	Centre for National Operations
DFO	District Fisheries Office
FI	Fisheries Inspector
FCS	Fisheries Cooperative Society
GN	<i>Grama Niladhari</i>
INGO	International non-government organization
JBS	Janashakthi Bank Society
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
MFAR	Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-government organization
RADA	Reconstruction and Development Agency
RRWO	Ruhunu Rural Women's Organization
SLF	Sustainable Livelihoods Framework
TAFLOL	Task Force for Law and Order and Logistics
TAFOR	Task Force for Relief
TAFREN	Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation
TAFRER	Task Force for Rescue and Relief
TSP	Transforming Structures and Processes
USD	United States Dollar

## GLOSSARY AND NOTES

Bahasa Melayu	Language of the Malays
Berava	Drummers caste
<i>Dushanaya</i>	Corruption
<i>Grama Niladbari</i>	Village officer
Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna	People's Liberation Front
<i>Hajjia</i>	Returned pilgrim from Mecca
<i>Kappam/Pagava</i>	Bribe
Karave	Fisherfolk caste
Lakh	100,000 Sri Lankan rupees
<i>Mudalali</i>	Merchant
<i>Naraka charitha</i>	Immoral behaviour
<i>Oru</i>	Non-motorized boats/Outrigger canoes
<i>Paru</i>	Beach seine boats
<i>Samurdhi</i>	National poverty alleviation scheme benefits
<i>Seettu</i>	Rotating credit
Sinhala/Sinhalese	Majority ethnic group in Sri Lanka; also refers to their language
<i>Suddha</i>	White man
Three-wheeler	Motorized, three-wheeled cabin cycle
<i>Vanka</i>	Dishonest

In 2009, the approximate currency conversion for 100 Sri Lankan rupees was 1 USD.

For administrative purposes, Sri Lanka is divided into 4 layers: 9 Provinces, 26 Districts (of which 14 are coastal Districts), 325 Divisional Secretariats, and 14,110 *Grama Niladhari* Divisions or villages, in descending order of hierarchy.

References to the term ‘Third World’ in this thesis is based on the meaning accorded to it by French economist and demographer, Alfred Sauvy, in 1952. His use of the word ‘third’ implied that it was excluded from its proper role in the world by two other worlds, not that it was inferior (Hadjor, 1993: 11). ‘Western’ is used as the converse of ‘Third World’ and represents North America, Europe, and Australasia. The term ‘First World’ is avoided due to notions of superiority that it can imply.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The 2004 Tsunami: Five Years On

We lost everything—everything went with the tsunami. Our house got uprooted from its foundation. I was at home with our three children at the time. I tucked the little one under one arm, held the younger boy with the other hand and ran. The wave hit us from behind and we were thrown up. I clung to the roof with the two little ones clinging to my neck. We were saved. But, not my older boy. I could not get hold of him. He was 9 years. He will be 12 today. My husband had gone to get the fish and got washed away. He survived because he got entangled in one of the nets (Navadivi Purawara, September 2008).

These were the iconic images of the tsunami<sup>1</sup> of 26 December 2004. Asoka (42 years), a fisherman's wife, lived to tell her tale but 31,000 others did not. Her household is just one amongst 150,000 coastal households whose livelihoods were completely destroyed. The tsunami was triggered by a megathrust earthquake occurring some 1,500 km off the western coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra; measuring 9.0 on the moment magnitude, it was the second largest in the instrumental record (Bilham, 2005). Despite statistical variations in the demographic impact, it is estimated that 31,000 people were killed, 5,600 went missing, and 500,000–800,000 were displaced (Emanuel, 2006: 7; IPS, 2005: 5; Oxfam International, 2005a: 2). Two-thirds of the country's coastline was affected, with coastal Districts in the Northern and Eastern Provinces bearing the brunt of the impact, followed by the Southern Province (Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted from the Japanese term, meaning harbour wave, 'tsunami' refers to one or a series of giant sea waves generated by earthquakes or similar large-scale disturbances of the ocean floor. Barely discernible in the open ocean, the amplitude of a tsunami can greatly increase as it approaches shallow coastal waters causing devastation to low-lying coastal areas (Byrant, 2001).

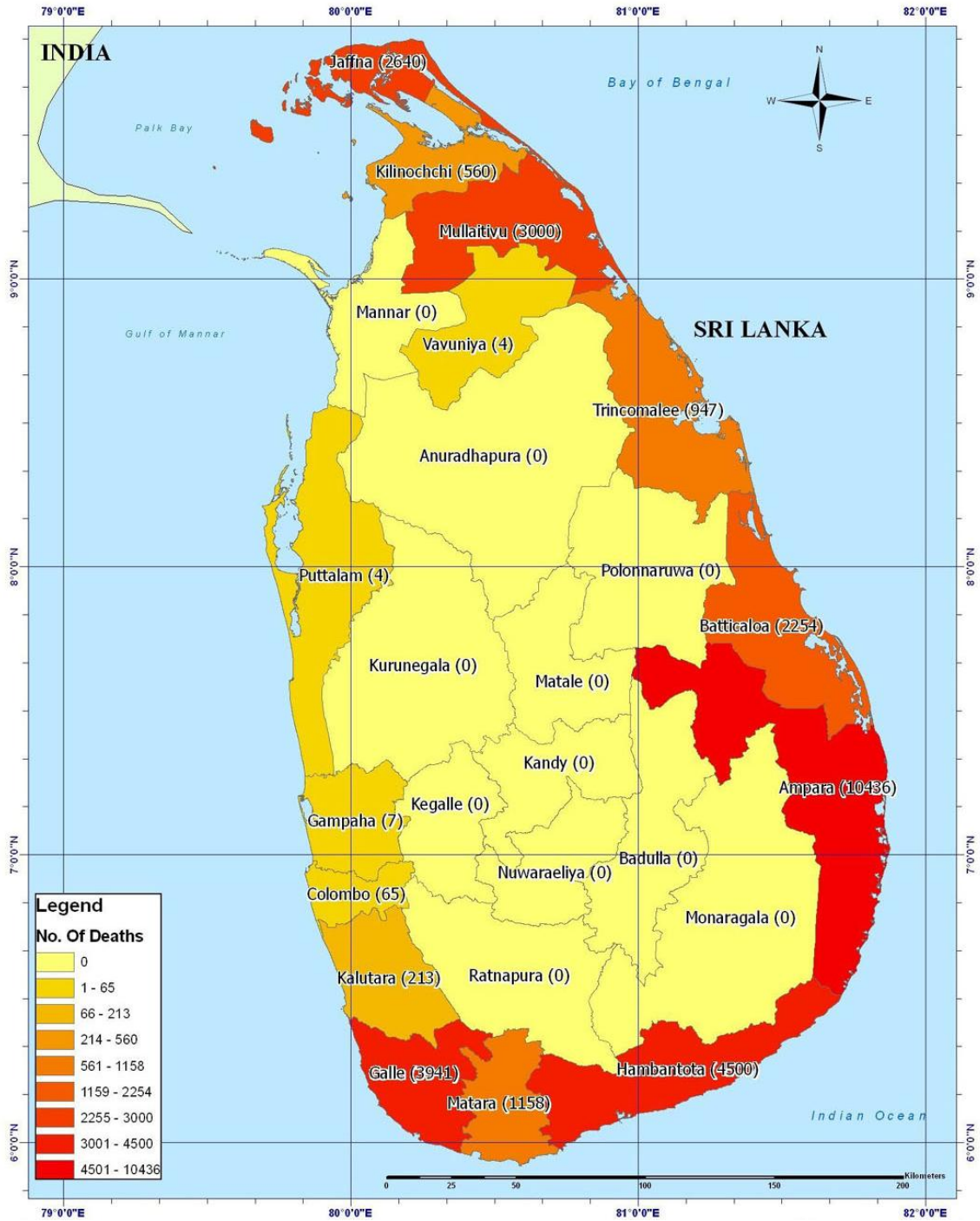


Figure 1. Number of deaths due to the tsunami at the District level (Source: CGIAR-CSI, 2005).

Death and destruction has been inherent to a Sri Lankan polity beset by violence and civil war. The Northern and Eastern Provinces have suffered from an ongoing ethnic conflict

between the separatist forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the government of Sri Lanka since the 1980s. The Southern Province witnessed militarized violence during youth and Sinhala-nationalist insurrections of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP or People's Liberation Front) in 1971 and 1987–89. A range of complexities associated with these events, including a stalled peace process, ethnic polarization and socio-economic insecurity, contextualized the tsunami of 26 December 2004 (Uyangoda, 2005). Yet, with natural disaster experiences confined to periodic droughts, floods, landslides, and occasional cyclones, the occurrence and impact of the tsunami was unprecedented (Wickramasinghe, 2005: 543).

There was a massive outpouring of aid that transcended barriers of race and creed. Instant emergency relief revved up and deployed by local community groups in adjacent areas was closely followed by aid provided by central and local government, local non-government organizations (NGOs), international NGOs (INGOs), politicians, and private donors. Essential medical aid, emergency food, and other relief supplies were mobilized within a day. National military personnel were deployed in rescue operations, identification and burial of dead, and debris clearance. Displaced families found shelter in various emergency camps, in schools and temples, or with friends and relatives in unaffected areas. Immediate repairs of basic infrastructure such as roads, major pipelines, and electricity were executed by the government, supported by international funding. For a country that had not previously experienced a disaster of such magnitude, there was general consensus that the relief effort was singularly successful in meeting the immediate needs of the affected people (SLDF, 2005).

Yet when the series of giant sea waves swept across Sri Lankan coastlines, it also washed away the livelihoods of an estimated 150,000 people (RADA, 2005: 15). With many affected Districts having poverty levels higher than the national average, the loss of lives, infrastructure, and housing plunged large numbers of tsunami survivors into instant poverty. The impact on

small-scale fisher folk<sup>2</sup> was particularly severe. Around 79 per cent of fishing fleet was damaged or destroyed, whilst 10 out of 12 fishing harbours in the country were severely affected (DFAR, 2005: 6). Out of a total of 89,000 houses damaged or destroyed, 30,000 belonged to households whose primary source of income was small-scale fishing (IPS, 2006: 2, 22). Nearly half of those who lost their main source of income due to the tsunami were small-scale fisher folk (RADA, 2005: 15).

As Sri Lanka's long term recovery effort gathered pace, it faced the daunting task of assisting tsunami survivors, especially small-scale fisher households like Asoka's, to rebuild and recover their livelihoods. Five years on, livelihoods recovery has become a fraught process. Corruption and political patronage are widely held to have distorted post-tsunami policies and aid interventions, leading to irregular distribution of aid resources (Auditor General, 2005; *Groundviews*, 2007; Moonesinghe, 2007; Sarvanathan and Sanjeevanie, 2008; *The Island*, 2006). Pressures from politicians have also grossly distorted the efforts of NGOs to act impartially (Haug and Weerackody, 2007; TEC, 2006a). Women have been shown to suffer more severe consequences in the recovery process due to their perceived lower status relative to men (Oxfam International, 2005b; TEC, 2006b; World Bank, JBIC, and ADB, 2005). Thus, livelihoods recovery has been highly uneven; some have experienced a relatively robust recovery, whilst others have been marginalized. Given the strong desire for effective post-tsunami recovery, *how* livelihoods recovery has unfolded in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka warrants scholarly examination.

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<sup>2</sup> As opposed to commercial fishing, small-scale fishing entails using less capital and energy, small fishing vessels, shorter trips close to the shore, targeting a wider range of fish species, and using multiple fishing gear and strategies to suit the seasonality of fish stocks (FAO, 2004).

## 1.2 Setting the Stage for Investigation

Livelihoods recovery following natural disasters is not a mere physical endeavour, but also a process embedded in social and political relations. Post-tsunami analyses in Sri Lanka have discussed ways in which recovery has been influenced by the surrounding political environment (Brun and Lund, 2008; de Mel, 2007; Gunewardena, 2008; Hyndman, 2007; Kapadia, 2008; Klein, 2005; Korf *et al.*, 2010; Ruwanpura, 2008; Uyangoda, 2005). Similar experiences have been documented following the 2001 Gujarat earthquake in India (Simpson and Corbridge, 2006) and the 1992 Hurricane Andrew in Miami, United States (Dash *et al.*, 1997). Natural disasters, as summarized by Klinenberg (2002: 23–4), also offer an excessiveness that allows us to better perceive the facts than in those places where, although no less essential, they still remain small-scale and involuted (Mauss, 1916; quoted in 1979). When forced into catastrophic situations, people reveal most starkly their abilities and their beliefs about their abilities to change, to seize power, and to be controlled (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 2002). Therefore, post-disaster livelihoods are influenced by ongoing social and political structures, everyday relationships and inequalities, and the larger historical circumstances that shape these matters.

Yet, to date, studies on post-tsunami livelihoods in Sri Lanka are usually framed in technocratic and apolitical terms, such as those produced by aid agencies and research institutes (IPS, 2005; RADA and ILO, 2006; World Bank *et al.*, 2005) and some scholars (Birkmann and Fernando, 2008; de Silva and Yamao, 2007; Doocy *et al.*, 2006). They have deployed process-oriented approaches linked to the idea of Sustainable Development, such as the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), and frameworks for understanding vulnerability. The focus has been on the structures required for social relationships to work in

relation to post-tsunami livelihoods recovery and development. Notable exceptions include studies that examine how gendered structures influence the dynamics of post-tsunami livelihoods strategies (Ruwanpura, 2008) and relations of power in the post-tsunami recovery effort (Kapadia, 2008), and the linkage between housing and homemaking in the post-tsunami context (Brun and Lund, 2008).

This thesis pays heed to the commonly overlooked social and political processes embedded in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka. The overall aim is to explore how livelihoods are recovering in post-tsunami Sri Lanka with reference to two fisher villages in the Hambantota District, Southern Province, and through the SLF and the social networks approach. The SLF brings together the principal components thought to comply with the definition of Sustainable Livelihood, whilst demonstrating the interactions between them. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living; it is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shock and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, whilst not undermining the natural resource base (Chambers and Conway, 1992: 7–8). The SLF identifies access to different types of ‘livelihood assets’ and the ability to put them to productive use to reduce the ‘vulnerability context’ as central components of growing out of poverty, and recognizes that ‘transforming structures and processes’ (‘TSP’) influence the ‘livelihood strategies’ and ‘livelihood outcomes’ of the poor (Scoones, 1998). The social networks approach is based on an ‘anticategorical imperative’ that rejects all attempts to explain social processes solely in terms of the categorical attributes of actors, such as gender, social status, and political party affiliation (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994: 1414). There is renewed interest in its ability to comprehend the everyday lives of poor people (Devereux, 1999; Lourenço-Lindell, 2002). Thus the thesis addresses four specific research questions:

1. What has been the role of informal social networks in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery? How useful is the SLF in analyzing these networks?
2. To what extent is corruption the outcome of post-tsunami informal social networks? What are its practices and meanings at the local level?
3. What has been the relationship between local politicians and households in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery? What is the role of NGOs in these relationships?
4. What has been the role of women in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery? How does this challenge the assumption of women's marginalization in post-disaster recovery?

The motivation behind Research Question 1 lies in the overall thesis approach, explained above. The importance of Research Questions 2–4 lies in their relevance to socio-economic development in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. They relate to three major themes that preoccupy most researchers, policymakers, and practitioners: practices of corruption, political interference, and marginalization of women in the aftermath of the tsunami. Whilst existing post-tsunami analyses on gender reflect on how the tsunami exposed pre-existing inequalities (Ruwanpura 2008), the present study adds a further dimension to this via its focus on women's capacity to respond positively. In examining these four questions, the thesis seeks to advance conceptualizations of social networks, informal politics, gender inequality, and ethnographic research in South Asia. It employs an overall qualitative ethnographic methodology.

As background to the present study, the remainder of this introductory chapter provides a description of the case study villages and people, followed by a review of the literature to which the four key research questions posed above aim to contribute. It concludes by clarifying the boundaries of the project and outlining the organization of the thesis.

## 1.3 Kudawella West and Kirinda Villages

### *1.3.1 Pre-Tsunami Setting*

As shown in Figure 2, the villages of Kudawella West and Kirinda villages in the Hambantota District, Southern Province, were selected for the purposes of this study.<sup>3</sup> The villages are located approximately 190 km and 270 km, respectively, from the commercial capital of Sri Lanka, Colombo. Kudawella West is located in a more urban area, at the Kudawella Junction exit from the Colombo–Kataragama Road that runs through the cities of Matara, Dickwella, and Tangalle. Kirinda is a more rural locale; the closest cities are Tissamaharama and Hambantota. The main mode of transport for travel out of these villages is bus and, occasionally, three-wheeler and motorcycle. Bus services that run between Kudawella Junction, Tangalle, and Dickwella are commonly used by residents of Kudawella West. There are no bus routes to Kirinda; residents commute by foot, bicycle, motorcycle, or three-wheeler to Tissamaharama and Hambantota. Despite its relatively high population, as Table 1 shows, Kirinda is less densely populated than Kudawella West.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The rationale behind this selection is presented in Chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup> Within the confines of this study, the exact area figures for the two villages could not be ascertained.

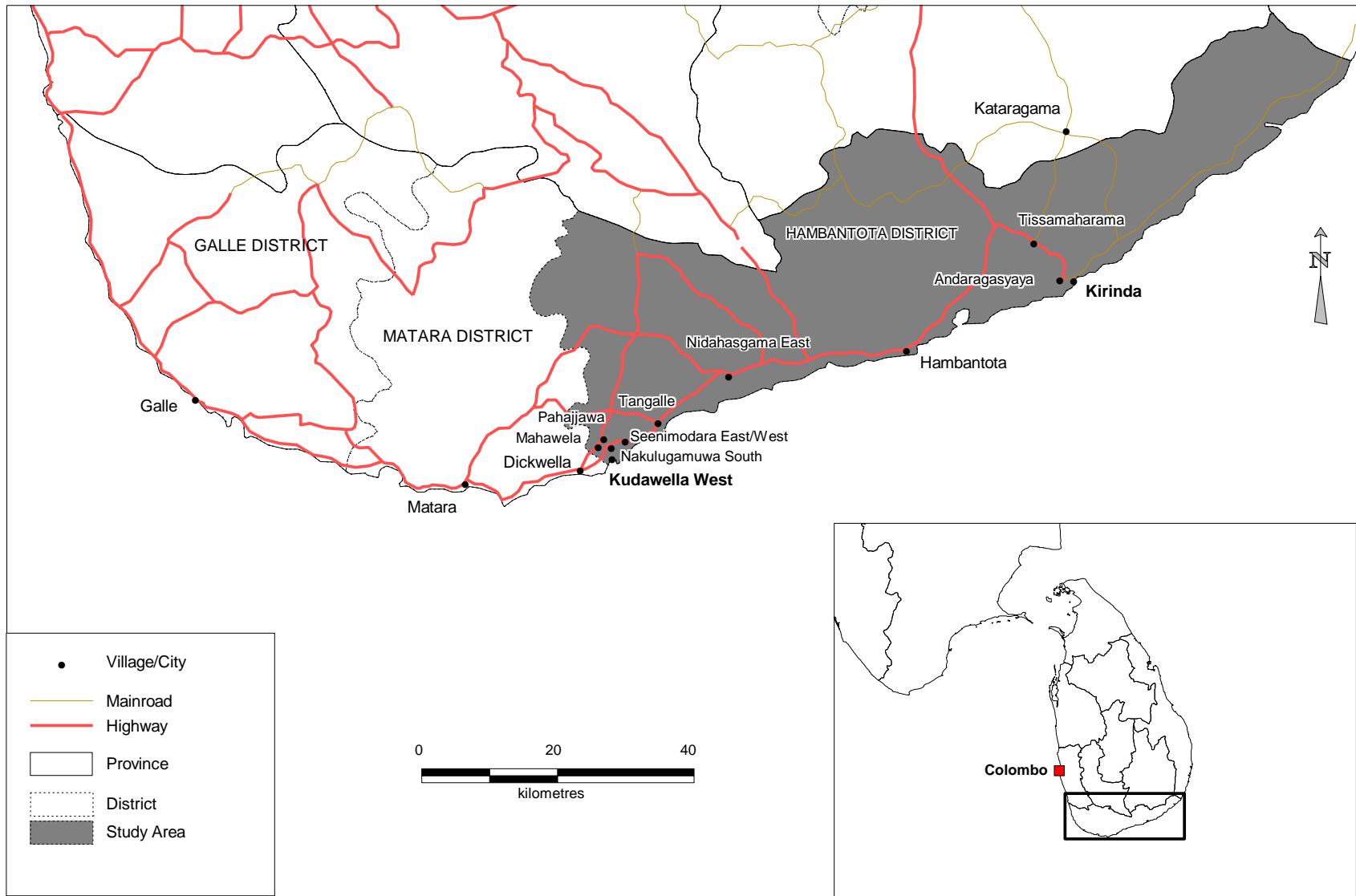


Figure 2. Post-tsunami study area in the Hambantota District, Southern Province

Table 1. Kudawella West and Kirinda villages: pre- and post-tsunami background

Period	Category	Number	Kudawella West	Kirinda
Pre-tsunami	Population <sup>1</sup>	Persons	1260	2805
		Households	272	646
		<i>Samurdhi</i> recipient households*	103	303
	Fisheries <sup>2</sup>	Multiday boats	156	23
		Day boats	28	1
		Outboard fibre reinforced (FRP) plastic boats	48	183
		Outboard engine motorized boats	101	4
		Non-motorized boats	99	50
		Beach seine boats	1	12
		Ethnicity <sup>3</sup>	Sinhalese	1260
	Malay		0	1756
	Tamil		0	15
	Muslim (Non-Malay)		0	12
Post-tsunami	Population <sup>1</sup>	Deaths	88	36
		Housing <sup>3</sup>	Fully damaged	78
	Partly damaged		124	46
	Fisheries <sup>2</sup>	Multiday boats	17	7
		Day boats	9	12
		Outboard FRP boats	24	68
		Outboard engine motorized boats	55	25
		Non-motorized boats	77	20
Beach seine boats	2	3		

Sources: <sup>1</sup>DCS 2001, 2005; <sup>2</sup>Hambantota DFO, 2009; <sup>3</sup>Kudawella West GN Office, Kirinda GN Office, 2009.

\*Note: Monthly income less than 1500 rupees.

Kudawella West is amongst a cluster of villages—Kudawella East, Kudawella Central, Kudawella South, and Kudawella North—collectively known as Kudawella. Although it is not possible to determine precisely the date when Kudawella West became a settlement, some senior residents claim that many ancestral generations have lived and engaged in fishing in the Kudawella area, whilst others believe that Kudawella inhabitants are descendents of soldiers employed to guard the coastal region and who eventually adopted fishing as a livelihood. There are some small shops and tea kiosks catering to local needs, two schools, and a Buddhist temple. The village is home to a majority Sinhala-Buddhist population<sup>5</sup> (Table 1).

<sup>5</sup> The Sinhalese in Sri Lanka are primarily Buddhist. However, some Sinhalese are of Christian faiths.

Approximately 40 per cent of households in Kudawella West receive *Samurdhi* or national poverty alleviation scheme benefits. The village belongs to the Tangalle Divisional Secretariat, the native residence of the former Prime Minister and incumbent President of Sri Lanka, and has benefited from both large-scale (harbour) and small-scale (rural roads) infrastructural investments. The Tangalle Divisional Secretariat is also the political base of the nationalist political party, JVP. Thus relative to other parts of Sri Lanka, Tangalle is renowned as a highly contested political division.

Kirinda is a focal point for many tourists and pilgrims due to its scenic location and historic Buddhist temple, which is associated with a legend of the Ruhuna Kingdom<sup>6</sup> (Figure 3). Many small shops and tea kiosks on the beachfront cater to local and foreign clientele. Other noteworthy constructions include a Muslim school and Mosque. Kirinda is home to a mixed Sinhala-Buddhist and Sri Lankan Malay population<sup>7</sup> that co-exist in a well integrated environment (Table 1). Poverty levels are somewhat higher in Kirinda than in Kudawalla West; approximately 50 per cent of households receive *Samurdhi*. Kirinda belongs to the Tissamaharama Divisional Secretariat, which in terms of political activity is marginal compared to Kudawella West.

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In addition, there are various religious practices that Sinhala-Buddhists have adopted whose roots can be traced to the Hindu tradition, thereby making distinct ethno-religious identities less clear.

<sup>6</sup> The area identified with Ruhuna in ancient times is mainly the Southern Province, a large part of the Uva Province, and small parts of the Sabaragamuwa and Eastern Provinces.

<sup>7</sup> The Sri Lankan Malays, so termed by the British colonizers because of their Indonesian Malay lingua franca, are Sunni Muslims. Their arrival in Kirinda is associated with Hambantota being a regular port of call for Javanese trading vessels on route to Madagascar and the African coast during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, the word 'Hambantota' itself is a derivation from the Malay word, *sampan*, meaning 'boat' (Osman and Sourjah, 2005: 48).



Figure 3. Pilgrims and tourists flock at the Kirinda Temple. Legend, dating back to 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., recounts that this was the place where Princess Viharamahadevi drifted ashore after being sacrificed to the sea to atone for her father's, King Kelanitissa, sacrilegious act of killing a monk by putting him in a cauldron of boiling oil. After receiving the Princess, King Kavantissa, the ruler of Ruhuna at that time, married the young princess. The couple had two sons; Dutugemunu, the eldest son, became one of the legendary Kings in Sri Lankan history.

Small-scale fishing is a diverse occupation. Activities are full-time, part-time, or seasonal, and cater to domestic markets and subsistence consumption. A mixed bag of traditional and mechanized techniques is used (Table 1). Traditional techniques comprise mainly planked beach seine boats (12 m in length) known as *paru* and non-motorized boats (3–10 m in length) known as outrigger canoes or *oru*, such as that shown in Figure 4. These are used in laying beach seine nets in shallow waters and for prawn fishing up to 32 km off the coast, respectively. Mechanized techniques comprise multiday boats (45–50 ft in length) with cabin and ice hold, day boats (28 ft in length) with inboard engines, FRP boats (17–23 ft in length)

propelled by outboard engines, and outboard motorized boats which are traditional crafts powered by an outboard engine. Multiday boats exploit deep sea fish resources; equipped with facilities for fish preservation, these boats stay at sea for one to four weeks at a time. Day, FRP, and outboard motorized boats operate in coastal waters up to about 15 km from the shore.<sup>8</sup>

There are fish producers, post-harvest workers, and ancillary workers (e.g. net-makers, boat-builders, and engine repair and maintenance workers). They occupy a range of organizational levels as self-employed individuals, hired workers, *mudalalis* (merchants), and informal micro entrepreneurs. Figure 5 depicts a typical working day at the Kudawella West harbour. Fishing is often supplemented by secondary income generating activities undertaken by fishermen and/or other members of the household. Small local shops, food preparation, dressmaking, and handicrafts are common activities in both villages. In addition, households in Kudawella West engage in grocery trade, as shown in Figure 6, and coir-making, maldive/dried fish-making, masonry/carpentry, and three-wheeler hire.

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<sup>8</sup> For an explicit description on fishing techniques in South Sri Lanka, see Amarasinghe (2005).



Figure 4. Fishermen at sea in Kudawella West use rod and line technique in non-motorized boats.



Figure 5. Once multiday boats are docked in at the Kudawella West harbour, their fish catch is unloaded, boxed in ice, and loaded into trucks that transport the fish to trade and consumer markets elsewhere.



Figure 6. Women sell vegetables, fruits, and coconuts at the weekly market in Kudawella West.

### ***1.3.2 Post-Tsunami Setting***

With no history of natural disasters, the occurrence and impact of the 2004 tsunami in Kudawella West and Kirinda was unprecedented. It resulted in a significant number of deaths and substantial damage to housing and fishing boats in both villages (Table 1). The devastation to fisheries harbours was estimated at USD 4.8 million and USD 5 million in Kudawella West and Kirinda, respectively (DFAR, 2005: 7). Road networks and water supplies as well as local shops, schools, and temples sustained serious damage. Emergency relief was instantaneous, led by local community groups and closely followed by government, non-government, and international aid. Overall, this relief effort was deemed a success in meeting the immediate needs of tsunami survivors in these villages.

In the six months following the tsunami, those affected were supported through national compensation schemes: 15,000 rupees per household towards funeral expenses, 2,500 rupees per household towards kitchen utensils, and 375 rupees in cash and rations per person per week. Various income generating projects were implemented by NGOs. Transitional shelters were built by NGOs to bridge the gap between emergency accommodation and permanent housing. Households resided in these between six months to two years before moving to permanent housing.

The government remained the central authority in implementing relief and recovery. As Table 2 shows, over a period of three years it created multiple task forces and operation strategies that were combined and divided over line ministries, agencies, and programmes of two Presidents. Since mid-2007, any remaining responsibilities have been absorbed by the Ministry for Nation Building and Development. INGOs and local NGOs distributed aid for relief and recovery via direct intervention, subcontracting and partnership arrangements with local NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs), or official agreements with the government.

Table 2. Government institutions created in response to the 2004 tsunami

<b>Date</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Mandate</b>
December 2004	Centre for National Operations (CNO)	Apex tsunami relief coordinating body
	Task Force for Rescue and Relief (TAFRER)	Oversee operations of CNO
	Task Force for Law and Order and Logistics (TAFLOL)	Coordinate logistics of relief work and function in conjunction with CNO and TAFRER
February 2005	Task Force for Relief (TAFOR)	Provide food, cash allowances, transitional shelters and other relief needs, and absorb activities previously under TAFRER and TAFLOL
	Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation (TAFREN)	Spearhead long-term recovery through livelihood schemes, education, health and protection programs, and infrastructure development
November 2005	Reconstruction and Development Agency (RADA)	Coordinate and implement policy relating to tsunami issues, following the dissolution of CNO
		Single government agency to focus on recovery issues across all sectors and stakeholders in affected areas, following election of a new President of Sri Lanka and dissolution of TAFOR and TAFREN
Mid-2007	Ministry for Nation Building and Development	Absorb any remaining activities from RADA's mandate, following its dissolution

Sources: Data from PPC, 2007: 17; RADA, 2005: 16.

In housing reconstruction, most NGOs signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the government and provided aid through an 'owner-driven' or 'donor-driven' model. Under the owner-driven model, NGOs funneled aid through direct funding to the government, which provided cash grants to beneficiaries to rebuild houses in pre-tsunami locations. A house requiring repairs in excess of 40 per cent of its replacement was considered fully damaged, and less than 40 per cent, partly damaged; these were compensated with cash grants of 250,000 rupees and 100,000 rupees, respectively (TAFREN, 2005: 1–14). Under the donor-driven model, NGOs reconstructed standardized houses for beneficiaries in relocation sites, generally through contractors although beneficiaries provided labour input in some cases (RADA, 2005).

These models of reconstruction were affected by a politically controversial and evolving buffer zone policy. In January 2005, a 1981 Coast Conservation Act which prohibited

development activity within 300 metres of the mean high tide mark was reinforced post-tsunami as buffer zones of 200 m in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and 100 m elsewhere. Households outside the buffer zone were allowed to rebuild in situ and eligible for government grants and donor aid; those inside had to relocate to new housing schemes funded and constructed by donors, primarily INGOs (TAFREN, 2005). In October 2005, amid criticisms of an arbitrary policy and the looming Presidential Election, the government abandoned the 100/200-metre blanket restriction in favour of individually specified setback zones across different coastal areas based on existing conservation guidelines. Indeed, buffer zones used fear to rationalize their implementation and unwittingly produced anxiety and conflict in their wake (Hyndman, 2007: 366).

Table 3 details the main relocation sites in which households from Kudawella West and Kirinda resided post-tsunami. These were located across the District and constructed by various donors. Households relocated from Kudawella West resided in housing schemes in the villages of Mahawela, Seenimodara East/West, Pahajjawa, Nidahasgama East, and Nakulugamuwa South, whilst those relocated from Kirinda lived in housing schemes in Kirinda itself and the village of Andaragasyaya (Figure 2). In Mahawelagoda Housing (Mahawela), Nakulugamuwa Housing (Nakulugamuwa South), and Goal Housing (Kirinda), households undertook the task of constructing their houses using NGO funding. In all other schemes, households were provided with standardized housing structures; Colliers Housing and Navadivi Purawara, shown in Figures 7 and 8, provide apt examples.

Table 3. Post-tsunami housing schemes, Hambantota District

<b>Origin</b>	<b>Housing Scheme</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Village</b>	<b>Donor</b>	<b>Number of Households*</b>	
Kudawella West	Mahawelagoda Housing	Mahawelagoda	Mahawela	Various	8	
	Seenimodara Housing	Koswatte / Koskoratuwa	Seenimodara East/West	Small Fishers Federation	100	
	Navadivi Purawara	Bogahahena	Pahajjawa	Navajeevana	55	
	Ruingama Housing	Ruingama	Nidahagama East	Small Fishers Federation	150	
	Nakulugamuwa Housing	Wewa Egodawatte	Nakulugamuwa South	Various	12	
	Kirinda	Goal Housing	Nidangalawella	Kirinda	Goal	11
		Colliers Housing	Nidangalawella	Kirinda	Colliers International	67
Emirates City		Nidangalawella	Kirinda	Embassy of the United Arab Emirates	20	
Rajapakse Padanama		Peruppamulla	Andaragasyaya	D.A. Rajapakse Memorial Fund/Small Fishers Federation	93	
	Soyurupura	Kirindagama Paswala	Kirinda	World Vision	100	

\*Note: This represents the total number of households, from Kudawella West and other villages, residing in each housing scheme.



Figure 7. Colliers Housing, Kirinda.



Figure 8. A fisher household from Kudawella West in their post-tsunami house in Navadivi Purawara, Pahajjawa.

## 1.4 Everyday Networks, Politics, and Inequalities in Disaster Recovery

Contextualized within this case study, this thesis seeks to challenge, contribute to, and advance existing concepts and research traditions in human geography and the wider social sciences. As a preliminary to discussing the four research questions posed earlier in this chapter, a brief explanation of the terminology used in the title of the thesis is necessary here. Everyday networks, or informal social networks, are based on the objective of achieving a reciprocal exchange of information and/or favours. The emphasis is on a one-to-one networking effort as opposed to formal social networks that have an organizational culture attached to it, such as formal structure, rules, policies, mission, philosophy, leadership, membership, eligibility, and funding. They are also often hidden compared to formal social networks, which are easily identifiable. Everyday politics, or informal politics, involves people embracing, complying with, adjusting, and contesting norms and rules regarding authority over the allocation of resources and doing so in mundane and subtle expressions and acts that are neither organized nor direct. It differs from formal and advocacy politics in that it involves little or no organization, is usually low profile and private behaviour, and is done by people who often do not regard their actions as political.<sup>9</sup> Everyday inequalities refer specifically to the differences between men and women as well as amongst women in their day-to-day lives. All these are construed in relation to post-tsunami recovery in Sri Lanka, the parameters of which are explained in Chapter 2.

Research Question 1 relates to the meanings and processes of social networks in everyday and post-disaster society. Since the 1990s, development studies witnessed a shift in focus to social relationships and their significance in development. The concept of social capital, in

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<sup>9</sup> See Kerkvliet (2009) for a useful distinction between everyday politics and other types of politics.

particular, rose to prominence (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993; Woolcock, 1998) alongside renewed emphasis on participation, grassroots development, and empowerment in development projects (Bebbington, 1997). Since rising to prominence in 1998 both uses and users of the SLF have become highly diverse. Numerous researchers and aid agencies use it as a ‘process’ tool to identify key constraints and opportunities for post-disaster interventions (de Silva and Yamao, 2007; Hoon *et al.*, 1997; Sanderson, 1999; Twigg, 2001). Communities endowed with a diverse stock of social networks and civic associations are argued to be in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability (Moser, 1996; Narayan, 1995). The poor are claimed to possess tight-knit and intensive stock of ‘bonding’ social capital that can help them to ‘get by’ (Holzmann and Jorgensen, 1999), but lack the more dispersed and far-reaching ‘bridging’ social capital used by the non-poor to ‘get ahead’ (Narayan, 1999). This thesis is interested in these potentially positive social networks. Yet, its focus lies in the quality, value, and nature of these networks, not merely their structural form. Drawing on critical insights of the SLF (de Haan and Zoomers, 2003, 2005; Lautze and Raven-Roberts, 2006) and livelihood studies that utilize the social networks approach (Devereux, 1999; Lourenço-Lindell, 2002), it seeks to re-examine popular notions of the SLF.

Research Questions 2 and 3 serve as a contribution to a new wave of discussions of everyday human geography that underpins informal politics, outside of an analysis of elections, political parties, major political events, and social movements. There has been a long history of anthropological and ethnographic perspectives on politics in South Asia since the 1950s. A noteworthy contributor, Bailey (1963), analyzing the role of village party leaders as brokers between local and state levels in Orissa made a seminal contribution to Indian political studies in the 1960s and influenced later conceptualizations of the state as crucially subject to rich-peasant and bourgeois power. There has since been a proliferation of South Asian research in

the everyday sociology of politics in India (Fuller and Bénéï, 2001; Gupta, 1995; Parry, 2000) and Sri Lanka (Brow, 1996; Moore, 1985; Spencer, 1990). Studies on NGOs in development have also tied in with informal politics in the region (Karim, 2001; Lewis, 2004). This thesis seeks to advance these discussions with reference to post-tsunami Sri Lanka. Focus is on unveiling how corruption has manifested itself, political patron–client relationships have come into play, and NGOs have intervened in a post-disaster setting.

Research Question 4 relates to contemporary understandings of social inequality, especially gender, and the mechanisms through which these inequalities are reproduced. Women have been routinely ascribed passive roles as victims unable to cope with the new and demanding environment, in post-tsunami Sri Lanka (Oxfam International, 2005b; TEC, 2006b; World Bank *et al.*, 2005) and the wider disaster literature (Enarson and Morrow, 1998). This part of the thesis seeks to re-examine this prevailing ideology. The concept of intersectionality is used as an analytical device. Intersectionality addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist studies: the acknowledgement of differences amongst women. Inspired by the early work of Butler (1990), prominent human geographers maintain that subject formations and social relations are constructed through a set of relationships amongst the multiple dimensions of being (McDowell, 2008; Valentine, 2007). Situated within these discussions, the thesis seeks to explore the ways in which women in the case study villages have responded to the tsunami.

Embedded in Research Questions 1–4 is an overall aim to explore the value of ethnography for understanding change in South Asia. Since the 1990s, the notion of ‘doing’ critical ethnographies has become one of the central themes infusing human geographic study. Whilst there is heightened concern that research on the socially disadvantaged and marginalized should be sensitive to the life experiences of the researched (Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999: 195),

ethnography is portrayed as a profitable strategy in understanding the lives of such people (Megoran, 2006). Yet, assumptions that research is an objective and ‘value-free’ endeavour have been dismissed (Bennet, 2002; Cloke *et al.*, 2004; McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1997). Recognizing that both researcher and researched are equally positioned, interconnected, and involved in the changing social and cultural relations under study is argued to be paramount (Crang and Cook, 2007; Madison, 2005). Drawing from these insights, the thesis seeks to unveil the politics of doing research—the highly uneven power relations that contextualize fieldwork and analysis—in post-tsunami Sri Lanka.

### **1.5 Outline of Thesis**

The core of this thesis consists of four research papers. Whilst it retains the functions of a conventional doctoral thesis, the main empirical chapters are also stand alone research papers that have been submitted to academic journals. Due to the requirements of the journals, each of the papers has its own research questions, literature review section, and methodology as well as stylistic attributes, such as grammar and punctuation. The main advantage of this ‘four papers’ model is that it helps facilitate a multidisciplinary research enquiry essential to understanding the complex ground level realities in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. Four different topics—livelihoods and social networks, corruption, political patronage, and gender—are addressed in Chapters 3 through to 6 and correspond to the four key research questions of this thesis. Conceptually, however, all four papers form part of a common research aim that seeks to explore the post-tsunami livelihoods recovery process in Sri Lanka. A conventional thesis in which the empirical chapters must be read collectively could not have dealt as productively with the findings of this project as has been done here.

Chapter 2 presents a reflexive and theoretically informed exploration of the ethnographic methods employed in the study in order to expose the diverse politics that operate through the fieldwork and analysis process. The fieldwork experience, in particular, is shown to be underpinned by multiple subjectivities, identities, positionalities, and situated knowledges. The chapter exposes tensions between the ease with which ethical procedures are spoken and written about and the realities of following these through in practice. The relationships with the people being researched, how images were captured, and how constructed data were interpreted and presented in the final thesis, amongst others, bring to the fore issues concerning ethics and the researcher's conduct. Reiterating the perspectives of key writers on ethnography, it shows how behaving 'ethically' in post-tsunami Sri Lanka is not always straightforward.

The paper presented in Chapter 3 has been submitted to *Development and Change* and corresponds with Research Question 1. It assesses the analytical value of the SLF and social networks approach in understanding livelihoods recovery in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka with reference to the two case study villages. The paper reveals four interlinked forms of informal social networks that have played a major role in the livelihoods recovery process of fisher households: reciprocal credit, official bribery, kith and kin, and political patronage. These networks are shown to embody disaggregated social relationships, asymmetrical power relations, multi-local dimensions, and historical specificities—elements that are critical for conceptualizing and understanding post-tsunami livelihoods.

The paper presented in Chapter 4 has been submitted to *Political Geography* and corresponds with Research Question 2. It examines the practices and meanings of corruption in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. The focus of this paper is on the narratives of corruption emerging from the case study villages, in order to understand the system of corruption. It highlights three key

forms of post-tsunami corruption: spoils of office, political patronage, and moral conceptions. The paper shows how these have become enmeshed in the extreme circumstances of the post-tsunami context in these villages. It demonstrates how the system of corruption has benefitted particular individuals, yet disadvantaged others. More importantly, it unveils specific *meanings* of corruption that have influenced these *practices* of corruption.

The paper presented in Chapter 5 has been submitted to *Contributions to Indian Sociology* and draws parallels with Research Question 3. It examines the system of political patronage in post-tsunami Sri Lanka with reference to livelihoods recovery in the case study villages. Attention is paid to evaluating how households, politicians, and NGO officials perceive each others' roles, activities, and behaviour in specific contexts, and how these relate to understanding intermediaries and NGOs in South Asia. It exposes three key features of the post-tsunami system of political patronage: politicians as agents of equity and corruption, households as proactive clients, and NGOs as complicit in corruption at the local level. The discussions in this paper help broaden our maps on political patronage in South Asia.

The paper presented in Chapter 6 has been submitted to *Gender, Place and Culture* and is consistent with Research Question 4. It examines the role of women in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in the case study villages. At the heart of this analysis is an evaluation of how particular roles, activities, and behaviour are weighted, or given importance, by women at particular moments and in specific contexts, and how these aspects relate to ethnicity and location. The findings illuminate four key livelihoods recovery strategies involving women: mobilizing kin networks, carework, economic activities, and participation in CBOs. These strategies unveil women's immense capacity to overcome socially constructed tsunami impacts. Moreover, the paper argues that women's ability to respond positively is grounded in specific geographic and cultural contexts, making location and ethnicity of profound consequence.

The collective significance of these substantial pieces of research is presented in a concluding piece in Chapter 9. It focuses on broader scenarios of the study. It begins by bringing the reader up to date with the status of livelihoods recovery in Kudawella West and Kirinda. This is followed by a brief restatement of the topics explored across the preceding chapters, a presentation of the findings of the thesis consolidated in the form of four key contributions to the literature, and an explanation of the research impact in terms of policy and development practice. As our understanding of a particular phenomenon widens, there will inevitably be unanswered questions and potential avenues for future research—the chapter concludes by reflecting on these.

## CHAPTER 2

### POLITICS OF DOING ETHNOGRAPHY IN POST-TSUNAMI SRI LANKA:

#### FIELDWORK AND ANALYSIS EXPERIENCES

##### 2.1 Introduction

It is not simply what topics we explore as academics that are important, but *how* we approach these topics. For a qualitative human geographic study to uphold its intellectual rigour it must recognize the various politics, in the field and academy, which influence the research process. This chapter describes, justifies, and reflects on the ethnographic fieldwork and analysis used to explore the post-tsunami livelihoods recovery process of fisher households in Kudawella West and Kirinda villages in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka. The highly uneven power relations traversing the social realm—the intellectual and everyday lives—have contextualized fieldwork. They have energized as well as constrained my ability to implement practices of data construction and interpretation. The politics of conducting research must be taken into account in any serious study, and conducting research in post-tsunami Sri Lanka is no exception.

The value of ethnographic research is particularly evident during the process of disaster recovery, when people must traverse the difficult path between recovery and change (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 2002: 12). As discussed in Chapter 1, most studies on post-tsunami livelihoods in Sri Lanka, including those produced by aid agencies and research institutes (IPS 2005; RADA and ILO, 2006; World Bank *et al.*, 2005) and some scholars (Birkmann and Fernando, 2008; de Silva and Yamao, 2007; Doocy *et al.*, 2006), are framed overwhelmingly in technocratic, apolitical terms and employ methods that may efface the agency of ordinary

people. With the exception of analyses concerning gender dimensions of livelihoods (Ruwanpura, 2008) and the politics of tsunami aid in Sri Lanka (Kapadia, 2008), there is little grounded ethnographic research on post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka.

Since the 1990s, the notion of ‘doing’ critical ethnographies has become one of the central themes of human geographic study. Whilst the lens of critical geographers has widened from a narrow focus on capital–labour relations to encompass broader processes of social disadvantage and marginalization, there is heightened concern that the geographer’s research on the latter should be sensitive to the life experiences of marginalized groups (Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999: 195). Several geographers have focused on the politics of doing research in terms of the complex social relations between the researcher and the researched, dismissing assumptions that research is an objective and ‘value-free’ endeavour (Bennet, 2002; Cloke *et al.*, 2004; McDowell, 1992; Megoran, 2006; Rose, 1997). Positionality has been portrayed as an important element of any successful project since it forces the researcher to acknowledge personal power, privilege, and prejudices, whilst being critical of the power structures that surround research participants (Crang and Cook, 2007; Madison, 2005). Critical consideration of this process is particularly important where inequalities are built into the process of field research in South Asia (Gupta, 1995; Parry, 2000) and the Third World (Brockington and Sullivan, 2003).

Following key post-tsunami livelihoods analyses in Sri Lanka (Hyndman, 2008; Kapadia, 2008; Korf *et al.*, 2010; Ruwanpura, 2008, 2009), this thesis takes an ethnographic approach to human geography. It draws on the aforementioned literature concerning the practice of critical ethnographies. This chapter seeks to carry out a reflexive exploration of the ethnographic methods employed in the study in order to expose the diverse politics that operate through the fieldwork and analysis process. It is structured in four main sections. The first section sets the

stage for the investigation by describing the personal politics that are implicated in the formulation of the research topic, aims, and design as well as the rationale behind the specific case study selection. The technical methodological details of the study and three key methods of ethnographic data collection—interviews, focus group discussions, and observation—are discussed in the next section. This provides the backdrop for interpreting the micro politics of research, specifically the various positionalities of the researcher and respondents, in the third section. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the exploitative relations inherent in the project and emphasizing the need for a continually updated set of ethics for human geographic encounters in specific locales.

## **2.2 Personal Politics and Case Study Selection**

Researchers carry with them their own unique geographical imaginations, which take different pathways through different means. Fieldwork for this DPhil research was originally prompted by a personal harrowing encounter in the tsunami of 26 December 2004 in Sri Lanka, which left an aspiration to learn from as well as contribute to the recovery of communities that survived the disaster. This interest was further developed when I worked as an intern and volunteer in the organization and distribution of post-tsunami relief conducted by various government agencies, NGOs, and private donors in the three months that followed the disaster. In June–July 2005 and December 2005–February 2006, I worked as a volunteer in livelihood needs identification projects of two NGOs in parts of Southwest and South Sri Lanka. Participating in aid coordination meetings and spending time in villages and transitional shelters revealed myriad discordances between macro level aid interventions and village-level realities. Combined with a desire to conduct research from a human geographic standpoint,

these experiences and observations became points of departure for fieldwork conducted in June–July 2006 as part of an Honours degree thesis on post-tsunami livelihoods recovery, and later a research paper, at the University of Melbourne (Mubarak, 2007).<sup>10</sup> The DPhil thesis reflects a decision to further pursue this topic of inquiry in Sri Lanka. As Cloke (2004: 1) writes, a researcher’s interest in particular subjects/objects/modes of human geographical study are not found solely in the quality and persuasiveness of the study that already exists. The present study has been forged through the permutation of the persuasiveness of human geography and my own subjectivity and positionality.

Familiarization acquired and the network of contacts made through the aforementioned work and research experiences was important in setting up fieldwork for DPhil research. In December 2007, during a one-month visit to Sri Lanka, various academics, NGO officials, and contacts were approached in Colombo to discuss DPhil research interests, case study sites, and methods of gaining access. Two main field visits were conducted over eight months, in May 2008–January 2009, and three months, in June–September 2009. The break between the two visits was useful to reflect on overall research aims, identify gaps in the data collected, and improve interview questions ahead of the next visit. A final one-month visit was made in December 2009, mainly to collect secondary data and local literature. In total, approximately one year was devoted to DPhil fieldwork.

At the outset, the case study selection warrants explanation. Given the time and budget constraints of a DPhil project, the focus of research was restricted to a specific livelihood: small-scale fishing. This selection was dictated by two key facts. First, small-scale fishing

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<sup>10</sup> The study drew upon the need to understand how tsunami survivors in Sri Lanka were experiencing the process of livelihoods recovery and used the SLF as a mechanism for analysis. Focus was on masons, or bricklayers, in the tsunami-affected village of Polhena, Matara District; 20 masons, 6 officials of government agencies and NGOs, and 2 key informants were interviewed.

contributes extensively to the economy of the coastal belt in Sri Lanka and thereby the well-being of the communities living in the area. It is the predominant form of fishing in Sri Lanka and significant in terms of employment, food security, and foreign exchange earnings (DFAR, 2005). Second, as detailed in Chapter 1, small-scale fishing bore the brunt of the tsunami impact and was most affected by it.

The implementation of a particular policy can vary greatly between different areas and over time. Given such geographical and temporal dimensions, and to accommodate a somewhat uniform institutional environment, the study focused on the Hambantota District in the Southern Province. Coastal Districts in the Northern and Eastern Provinces were the worst affected by the tsunami, yet the prevailing security situation precluded fieldwork in these areas. Hambantota District, a 151 km belt of land, recorded the second highest number of deaths in the Southern Province (Chapter 1: Figure 1). Considering its relatively high poverty index—65 per cent of households receive *Samurdhi* (DCS, 2001)—the impact on livelihoods was particularly severe. Hambantota is also significant in terms of fisheries production, ranked fourth out of 14 coastal Districts contributing to national fish landings (Amarasinghe, 2006: 14).

A harbour village was deemed ideal for the purpose of this study since fishing is the main livelihood in such communities. Three of the main fishing harbours in Sri Lanka are located in the Hambantota District: Kudawella, Kirinda, and Tangalle. Kudawella West and Kirinda villages, based around the first two harbours, were chosen as the study sites and justified in three respects (Chapter 1: Figure 2).

First, the locational and ethnic background of Kudawella West and Kirinda, described in Chapter 1, capture significant discrepancies that exist in the Hambantota District. Kudawella West is more urbanized and densely populated, and has somewhat higher poverty levels,

compared to Kirinda. Location was also deemed to have an impact on post-tsunami recovery on account of variations in political activity across these villages. Two predominant ethno-religious groups in Hambantota—the Sinhala-Buddhists and Sri Lankan Malays—are represented in these villages. Being able to accommodate these differences proved useful for investigating informal social networks, corruption, political patronage, and women’s roles.

Second, the fact that Kudawella West and Kirinda represented villages that were severely affected in the tsunami proved instructive for the wider project. They recorded the highest destruction to harbour infrastructure and housing compared to other villages around the District’s three key harbours (DCS, 2005: 4, 7; DFAR, 2005: 7). The number of deaths and fisheries equipment impacted due to the tsunami was also significant (Chapter 1: Table 1).

Third, the ability to access and collect data in the two villages through prior personal contacts influenced their selection. Various contacts were established in each village through the District-level project activities of the Sri Lanka Centre for Development Facilitation,<sup>11</sup> Small Fishers Federation,<sup>12</sup> and Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce.<sup>13</sup> The fact that different households were approached via different contacts made through these various organizations helped to even out possible bias, if any, in overall responses. Most interviews with politicians were facilitated through personal contacts, devoid of organizational affiliation, in the area.

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<sup>11</sup> Established in 2002, this is an NGO that addresses issues of poverty and inequality to achieve sustainable human development throughout the country. It forms a District consortium of 16 NGOs and 170 CBOs in Hambantota.

<sup>12</sup> Established in 1992, this is a non-government development network of small-scale fisher folk organizations in Sri Lanka.

<sup>13</sup> Established in 1993, this is a private sector organization that undertakes various economic growth and development initiatives in the District by supporting private enterprise.

## 2.3 Constructing Ethnographic Data

Cloke *et al.* (2004: 169–70) write that ethnography involves the recognition that its main research tool is the researcher and the ways in which he/she is used to acting in more familiar circumstances and learns to act in the often strange and strained circumstances of his/her research settings. An ethnography was judged the most appropriate method for the study in three respects: first, informal social networks can usually only be recognized through intimate knowledge of actors in the field; second, paying attention to non-verbal aspects of interviewing was crucial in terms of unpacking the nuances and tensions of the seemingly ‘ordinary’ lives of villagers; third, loosely structured interviews enable the researcher to guide the interview giving consideration to traumatic experiences of respondents and their sensitivity to certain issues. England (1994: 82) defines reflexivity as the self-critical, sympathetic introspection and self-conscious, analytical scrutiny of the self as a researcher. Supporting a reflexive approach to ethnography, this section interrogates the technical methodological details of the study followed by three key methods of ethnographic data collection.

### ***2.3.1 Technical Methods: Sampling, Recording, and Analysis***

Technical methodological details matter because they determine the nature of the data being constructed and influence its subsequent interpretation. Being the primary functional unit of society, households were used as the unit of analysis for livelihoods. Households are a co-resident group of individuals who share most aspects of consumption, drawing on and apportioning a common collection of resources, including labour, to ensure material production (Schmink, 1984: 89). A combination of ‘snowball’ and ‘purposeful’ sampling

techniques were used. Initial interviewees were approached via personal contacts; these interviewees were in turn requested to introduce others. Snowballing helps overcome the problem of gaining the trust of respondents (Valentine, 2005: 117)—this was particularly crucial in tight-knit fisher communities where outsiders are eyed with suspicion. Purposeful sampling was used wherein particular people assumed to possess characteristics deemed critical to the study were deliberately selected (Maxwell, 2005: 87–91; Patton, 1990: 169–86).

A total of 152 interviews and 5 focus group discussions were conducted.<sup>14</sup> The sample comprised 80 households (48 from Kudawella West and 32 from Kirinda) whose primary source of income was fishing or fishing-related activities. It also represented a cross section of the tsunami-affected community, including the range of fisher livelihoods, supplementary livelihoods, ethnic and religious positioning (Sinhala-Buddhists and Malays), and post-tsunami housing location identified in Chapter 1. Household responses were examined alongside views of 17 government officials, 12 NGO officials, 13 office bearers of CBOs, 7 politicians, 4 village leaders, and 19 key informants. Many impromptu discussions with individuals, such as school teachers and elderly folk, were useful in gaining insights into critical issues.

Apart from some interviews with officials and key informants conducted in English, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in the local language, Sinhala. My fluency in Sinhala was significant as it made participants feel at ease, and facilitated effective communication and richer interpretation of responses. In Kirinda, the language of the Malays, who live alongside the majority Sinhala-Buddhists, is Bahasa Melayu, but most are proficient in Sinhala. In two instances where respondents communicated in Bahasa Melayu, a translator was used. Interviews and focus group discussions lasted approximately 1–2 hours depending on the inclination of the respondents.

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<sup>14</sup> A list of interviewees is provided in Appendix 1.

A strategic combination of both audio and note-taking provided a complete record of each interview with least threat to the interview relationship. All interviewees were generally comfortable with the audio recorder, and the technique allowed more time to organize the next prompt or question and maintain the conversational nature of discussions. Note-taking proved useful as it demanded continual concentration and enabled an instant cross check on any contradictory statements. The qualitative material generated from focus group discussions took the form of audio transcripts. However, notes were taken on general group dynamics throughout these discussions and, within the limits of audio transcription, details of emotional nuances and forms of expressions were noted. Written Sinhala notes were woven into the verbal record and translated to English during the transcription phase. Whenever possible, transcription was carried out soon after the interview for ease of recollection. Moreover, immersion in the data provided a preliminary form of analysis which assisted in subsequent interviews.

The timeframe for ‘post-tsunami recovery’ varied across households. The start of recovery was defined as the time in which a given household engaged in reviving at least one aspect of their everyday livelihood (e.g. fishing or housing). Phases of recovery are open-ended; some households reported they had reached pre-tsunami income levels, but in general there was reluctance on the part of households to concede they had regained livelihoods completely since other aspects of their livelihood had changed.

Qualitative findings were extracted from both interviews and focus group discussions via ‘analytical hierarchy’: from data management to descriptive accounts, and finally explanatory accounts (Spencer *et al.*, 2003: 213–7). Using NVivo qualitative data analysis software, transcripts followed by sections of text were coded thematically and used to construct descriptive and explanatory accounts. Select ‘stories’ that capture the rich diversity of

experiences in the case study are presented throughout the thesis. Pseudonyms are used to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

### ***2.3.2 Interviews***

Interviewing is a key means through which ethnographic researchers attempt to comprehend the contexts and contents of the everyday social, cultural, political, and economic lives of different people (Crang and Cook, 2007: 60). Interviews were used as an unfolding performance, allowing the relating of particular narratives rather than an extraction of the truth. Narrative techniques, according to Miles and Crush (1993), have considerable potential for unearthing hidden stories, contesting academic androcentrism and eurocentrism, and reinstating the marginalized as makers of their own past (i.e. giving them a voice to be heard). With respect to the topic of corruption, directly probing aspects viewed as ‘immoral’ or ‘illegal’ in a highly charged and politicized environment of post-tsunami recovery was deemed counterproductive since it threatened betrayal of trust or confidence of the informants with whom I had developed a strong rapport. As shown in the works of Gupta (1995) and Parry (2000), preserving the complexity of narratives is particularly useful to unravel local meanings of concepts such as ‘corruption’.

The interviews often followed a set of pre-determined themes.<sup>15</sup> Basic pre- and post-tsunami household information was collected around the key components of the SLF, specifically focusing on ‘livelihoods strategies’, ‘social asset’, and ‘TSP’. Across all interviews, I probed certain issues with reference to the four main research questions posed at the start of

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<sup>15</sup> Two sample transcripts of household interviews conducted in Kudawella West and Kirinda are provided in Appendix 2.

this thesis. The forms and functions of social networks were queried: why members chose one network over another, specific network functions, priority of one network over another, member benefits, age of networks, and frequency of interaction (Research Question 1). Incidences of corruption and the various meanings attributed to the term were explored by encouraging interviewees to construct in their own words their experiences in post-tsunami aid distribution (Research Question 2). Interviews with households, politicians, and NGO officials focused on how they perceived each others' roles, activities, and behaviour in various contexts (Research Question 3). During interviews with female members of household, the focus was on women's own formulations of their situation and how they came to make livelihood decisions (Research Question 4).

Interviews were people-oriented and conducted in conversational-style, yet guided by the above themes. This was useful in that I was able to probe certain issues and the interviewee was able to raise issues that the interviewer may not have anticipated. Interviews were held in locations familiar to participants, such as homes and workplaces, to facilitate more relaxed conversation. Household interviews were conducted mainly in participant homes; additionally, this enabled me to observe living conditions and to accommodate gender perspectives since female household members were often present.

With regards to interviews with politicians, the use of contact networks was paramount in gaining access and cooperation. Without an introduction through an individual known to the politician it was very unlikely that one would gain access. Interviews with local politicians invariably had to be preceded by an introduction made through a telephone call by a contact. The interview itself would be started off by reiterating this contact. This pleased the interviewee since it was made clear that they were recognized within their relevant networks, and also helped establish my legitimacy and reduce perceived threat. During two interviews

with politicians in Tangalle, I was accompanied by a contact who was a local politician from an opposing party. He claimed to be friends with the two politicians; his presence provided much mutuality and stimulated relaxed conversations during interviews. Yet, the contact's presence may have influenced the interviewee to withhold or distort information.

The timing of interviews with politicians mattered greatly in terms of the general political happenings in the country at the time. The impending Southern Provincial Council Elections in October 2009 had mixed impacts on research conducted in August–October 2009 in Kudawella West and Kirinda. In the midst of election fever, local political candidates were eager to be seen as cooperative and were not likely to refuse to be interviewed by a student conducting research in his local area. In terms of access, the timing was possibly the best. Yet, in practical terms, securing an appointment for an interview was made very difficult due to the politicians' heavy schedules and the large numbers of local people who also flocked to their offices, making use of the occasion to seek favours. For example, an interview with a Member of Parliament in Tangalle was made possible only by my queuing outside his house with throngs of others from 6 am until 1 pm. When I finally reached the head of the queue, the politician concerned was unable to spare time for a meeting; this was despite an introduction secured through a contact.

Careful consideration was also given to the timing of interviews with politicians in relation to those with households. It was expected that conducting both sets of interviews in the same timeframe would jeopardize my attempts to establish a rapport with the subjects during household interviews. Interviews with local politicians were therefore conducted during the second stint of fieldwork, after most household interviews had been concluded. In tight-knit communities, associations with politicians may be viewed with suspicion and imply a political affiliation. However, these attempts by no means guaranteed the trust and confidence of

household respondents. Although the objective of the study was clearly explained and the respondents were assured of anonymity of any information given, the villagers, especially those in Kudawella West where a highly competitive political environment prevailed, may have viewed me as having a political bias. They may have been somewhat guarded in their responses or said the 'right thing', fearing that the information may be fed back to the politicians.

There were instances when informants put the researcher in difficult situations. A local government official from Tangalle, in office during the time of the tsunami, was introduced to me by a local politician. During a brief meeting with them both, a date and time was set for me to conduct a one-on-one interview with the official. However, at the appointed time and place, the official could not be reached. When contacted on the telephone she claimed to be out of station, although it was revealed later that she was in the building. A second appointment that was scheduled was similarly abandoned. It was clear that she did not want to be interviewed. The official in question had been accused by many interviewees of having engaged in corrupt practices—granting special favours to friends and relatives, and getting people on to beneficiary lists in return for bribes. Anecdotal evidence suggests she was interdicted from her position and was facing a court case at the time. Reiterating the experiences of other researchers (Cook, 1993; Johnson, 1992), the incident demonstrates that in situations where relatively powerful people are being studied, the researcher may be seen as having power to open out these people's lives for contestation or blame by other groups and the general public and, hence, viewed as a threat.

Although the case could have been probed further by securing a meeting with the official through the intervention of the politician through whom the original contact was made, I refrained from doing so for two reasons. Fisher villages comprise tight-knit communities and any attempt on my part to dig deeper into the incident to determine the reason for the official's

reluctance to be interviewed would have drawn unnecessary attention to my work, impeding other interviews in the village. It could also seriously affect the official's future. Being sensitive to these ethical and practical considerations was paramount during fieldwork.

Complex situations were also faced during interviews with politicians. The interview with a politician who held a Ministerial role during the time of the tsunami provides an apt example.

As he commented at the end of the interview:

My wife's sister's husband is our party organizer in England. What I would like to do is to have you meet with him and get an understanding of our work. If you would give me your personal address and contact number, I will make the connection. They will get in touch with you. [...] There is also a request I have to make of you, but please don't misunderstand me. I told you these details not with expectation of any favour. But, this job of ours is run with great difficulty. On the 10<sup>th</sup> we have the elections coming up—we don't get a cent for our activities! So, I would like to ask you, if you are able to in anyway, to give us some support—a contribution (Tangalle, September 2009).

The researcher is not always able to simply walk away from research situations with tapes and notes. He/she has to be mindful to ensure that the respondent is not offended or disappointed, whilst not getting caught up in unethical dealings.

Both these incidents emphasize the fact that power relationships are not fixed or unidirectional. Certainly, interviews cannot be assumed to represent a collaboration of equals; the fact that a government official evaded being interviewed and a politician requested a contribution to the party for his services shows how interviewers themselves can in some ways be overpowered by their subjects. The examples also reveal the fact that behaving 'ethically' is not as uncomplicated as it may seem.

Researchers are the privileged ones in that they can choose when to come and go. They then bear the responsibility for negotiating ethical means of ending their fieldwork (Kindon and Cupples, 2003: 206–11). Methodology for showing appreciation to research participants

was considered necessary and was developed during fieldwork so that it did not set dangerous precedents or divide participating communities. Gift-giving can be politically difficult where those who participated in the research benefit over non-participants in the same community in similar circumstances, in this case victims of a disaster of great magnitude. It can also generate expectations that participation in a research project should be rewarded and this could impact on future researchers in the same communities.<sup>16</sup> Thus, efforts were made to interact socially with participants in between interviews—having meals with them, chatting, and spending the evenings together so that they would feel valued and friendships could be cemented. Showing informants that I valued their information and knowledge was also a way of ensuring the research experience was rewarding for informants. Some of the poorer households who were usually ignored by visitors to the village and had little or no association with people from the higher classes were enthralled to be interviewed; it made them feel special and cared for.

### ***2.3.3 Focus Group Discussions***

People work out their thoughts and feelings about certain matters in social contexts. Focus group discussions are a key means of unraveling these thought processes by creating a situation where people meet to discuss amongst themselves and with the researcher their experiences and understandings about topics that are the subject of research (Crang and Cook, 2007: 90). It has been heralded as a valuable approach in geography through the work of Burgess *et al.* (1988a, 1988b) who made use of in-depth discussion groups to explore the contested meanings associated with nature conservation and environmental values. The variety of voices and the

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<sup>16</sup> Gifts in kind, however, were given to research assistants and contacts in appreciation of the specific help they provided during fieldwork.

feeling of ‘safety in numbers’, which enable a group to establish its own agenda and not be continually guided or manipulated by the researcher and research agenda, was deemed useful for this study.

Five main focus group discussions were conducted. Discussions with two groups of fishermen from Kudawella West and Kirinda helped construct data on the general nature of fishing and, in terms of Research Question 1, the social networks inherent in the occupation. A meeting with office bearers of the Kirindagama (Sinhalese) Fisheries Cooperative Society was conducted to investigate pre- and post-tsunami workings of this CBO. In particular, corruption issues relating to fisheries Entitlement Certificates and political intervention in aid disbursement were probed at this gathering, which provided information for Research Questions 2 and 3, respectively. With reference to Research Question 4, two focus group discussions were held with women. A session with a group of Malay women in Kirinda explored their pre- and post-tsunami life experiences in relation to their religious beliefs and customs, whilst discussions with NGO officials of the Ruhunu Rural Women’s Organization in Kudawella West helped unravel pre- and post-tsunami CBO aid processes for women’s recovery. During these focus group discussions, I introduced topics and probed specific matters relevant to the research, but the group was left to be the experts on the topic. The depth with which topics were discussed and the sequence in which it was discussed depended on the importance of the topic for the group.

Once contact had been made with one or two individuals, the group was formed by ‘snowballing’ along their existing social networks so as to maintain familiarity amongst participants. They were single sex groups, which helped circumvent possible inhibition or intimidation of females by male co-participants. As with the interviews, focus group discussions were held in locations familiar to participants. The focus groups with fishermen

were arranged at each of the village harbours where participants usually gather to tend to their daily fishing activities. Whilst being a location in which the fishermen were comfortable, it also gave me further insight into their livelihoods. All other groups were held at one of the participant's homes, since privacy and comfort were considered important in terms of what participants were willing to discuss or how they respond to questions.

Group sizes ranged between 3–8 participants, with the NGO women's group representing the smallest group due to the unavailability of two officials. Although this initially seemed a disadvantage, it turned out to be a lively discussion with participants freely discussing the details of how they dealt with corruption allegations leveled against them by villagers during post-tsunami aid distribution. A smaller group size is hence not necessarily a disadvantage; the in-depth discussion can help facilitate a deeper understanding of issues and reveal interesting and critical data. Focus group discussions were held as one-off meetings. Burgess *et al.* (1988a, 1988b) advocate focus groups that meet more than once, allowing relationships to develop between individuals and thereby influencing the content of conversations. Yet, sustaining multiple meetings amongst a fisher community with their multifarious tasks was not possible due to the practical difficulty of gathering participants at the same time. Where additional information or clarification was deemed necessary following focus group discussions, interviews with particular participants were arranged.

With the participation of at least two or more members, household interviews often resembled focus groups. These provided informal forums for the expression and discussion of the plurality of sometimes conflicting views of household members. Such 'spaces of resistance' enabled participants to explore and enable their social agency and collective knowledge production (Hyams, 2004: 106). However, its implications in terms of accommodating women's perspectives were mixed. In some households it facilitated an understanding of how

women perceive certain matters in social contexts. In others, where women were not encouraged to contribute ideas, to debate or to challenge ideas expressed by male household heads or other authoritative members, group discussion had little value. An exemplary case is an interview in Kudawella West with Asanga, a crew member of a multiday boat, and his wife, Soundarie, who was engaged in coir-making activities. The following discussion occurred when I inquired about household expenditures:

[Asanga] Our telephone bill for a month is around 5000 rupees. [Soundarie] It depends on how much we talk. Our daughter is married now and has left the house, we need to speak to her often [Asanga] You just wait without talking! Let me explain [...] Transport cost is the thing—around 1500 rupees per month. We have to take this from the money Soundarie makes from selling her coir ropes. [Soundarie] There is business sometimes, but now there's no business [Asanga] Now don't you butt in! [Soundarie] OK, all I was saying was... [Asanga] (raising his voice) Miss (the researcher) will get confused. Let me do the talking. You keep interrupting! I'm sorry, Miss, my wife is not very educated and doesn't know how to explain things properly (Kudawella West, September 2008).

Clearly, implicit tensions relating to patriarchal ideologies made it difficult to accommodate Soundarie's perspectives. Such incidents were decidedly more common in interviews with Malay households in Kirinda due to the rigid Muslim culture; women were reticent about expressing their views and husbands, or other male members of household, tended to provide answers on behalf of their wives or female members of household. As Fishman (1978: 404–5) writes in her analysis of the details of conversational activity of couples in their homes, there is a division of labour in conversation and men control what will be produced as reality by the interaction. It was important to be aware of the social power inherent in the everyday rules and habits of conversation between men and women in these villages that tend to produce bias in favour of the view of men over those of women. If the perspective of the female householder was deemed vital, individual interviews were arranged subsequently.

### ***2.3.4 Observation: Participation, Photography, and Field-noting***

Observation is the pivotal source of information in ethnographic methodology. Certainly, the purpose is also served via other sources of information in the field, such as interviews, focus group discussions, and informal conversations. Nevertheless, observation is what distinguishes ethnographies from other methodologies. Participant observation was important in understanding the nature of fishing and other livelihoods and how communities work ‘from the inside’ in these villages (Cook, 2005: 167). Continuous residence inside Kudawella West and Kirinda was up to two weeks in each village, whilst participant observation during the remainder of fieldwork was conducted through daily visits from the outskirts of villages. Although this does not relate to the long term immersion ethnography practiced by anthropologists, it certainly allowed both self and other to merge within a single narrative that carries a range of dialoguing voices (Tedlock, 2000: 471).

Basic photographs of field sites and people engaged in their livelihood activities served two purposes: to usefully complement the writing of field notes and as visual supplements to the analysis in this thesis. Attempts were made to capture more ‘natural’ images of everyday livelihoods, such as village markets and fishing. However, this was not always possible owing to ethical considerations, such as having the consent of the subject or the relevant authority in high security locales (e.g. fishing harbour) and the need to preserve anonymity. When photographing a distinct group of people, homes of the respondents, or security sensitive areas, prior consent was obtained from the relevant individuals or authorities.

It is important to acknowledge that these photographs do not simply record facts from the field. Photography can never show unmediated reality. The technology, its capabilities, and the social relations surrounding its use by photographers, the photographed, and their audiences

always make a difference (Crang and Cook, 2007: 105). I have exercised significant power in terms of how the reader will experience the physical environment and livelihoods in Kudawella West and Kirinda. Some images may have been taken in preference to others; my discriminatory powers came into play in determining what was there to be photographed. The same would hold in choosing photographs to include in this thesis. Photographs have been used alongside written explanations to set the backdrop from which to interpret the subsequent findings of this thesis. Considering that most readers are unlikely to have visited these villages, I take on the role of the mediator between reader and image. The inclusion of photographs of Third World places or people in First World publications can also open the researcher to accusations of othering, exoticism, or aestheticising suffering and poverty (Kindon and Cupples, 2003: 224). According to Rose (2007: 2), the images produced by researchers are never transparent windows to the world since they interpret and display the world in particular ways. Photographs presented in this thesis are, thus, modest visual aids and not windows to the real world.

Observation research is intended to provide its readers with a vivid impression of 'being there' (Cloke *et al.*, 2004: 198). Thus, an essential part of this research was field-noting. A research diary was maintained throughout fieldwork comprising observations on the field, thoughts in relation to these observations, and thoughts on the overall research. Highly detailed scenes, characters, and roles were written during the first stint of fieldwork. Field-noting narrowed its foci during the second stint of fieldwork to recording changes to these established scenes. This helped identify patterns, regularities, and dominant discourses in the field whilst serving as a crosscheck on claims made by interviewees. Throughout the fieldwork, note-taking was also used to discuss the micro politics involved in the practice of research and how it affects the construction of research data. For example, descriptions of how I identified

and (un)successfully attempted to build relationships of trust with the respondents, how respondents appeared to be reacting to me due to my socio-economic/ethno-religious background, and how I attempted to work around these to the best advantage of the research. Reflections of these are provided in the next section.

## **2.4 Reflecting on Positionality**

An increasing number of ethnographers acknowledge the fact that ethnographic research requires cognizance of the position and powers of the researcher. Positionality is the researcher's standpoint, based on his/her biography, which influences the study. In her excellent scrutiny of the links between theory and method in critical ethnography, Madison (2005: 8) asserts that the 'new' or post-critical ethnography is the move to contextualize our own positionality, thus making it accessible, transparent, and vulnerable to judgment and evaluation. Research is an embodied process; therefore, the multiple and shifting positionalities of respondents can also enable as well as constrain (Madison, 2005: 25). It is vital to explore such micro politics involved in the practice of research and the ways in which they affect the construction of research data.

My presence in the field represented multiple identities—researcher, lodger, friend, and confidant, amongst others—which shaped directly the relations and interactions with research participants and what they were willing to divulge. Tedlock (2000: 466) argues that 'insider' status may give an ethnographic researcher easier access to certain types of information than a completely foreign researcher. My mixed ethnicity—Indian Muslim/Southern Sinhala-Buddhist—helped gain this 'insider' status, treated in solidarity amongst Muslims in Kirinda, and Sinhala-Buddhists in Kirinda and Kudawella West. Being a young student was also helpful,

as villagers were keen to divulge information about their lifestyles, their village, and their problems to a young outsider who was willing to learn. The fact that I was always accompanied by a contact from the village and from the same ethnic group also helped erode any structured social realities. My English-speaking, middle class social background was downplayed as interviewee responses tended to be influenced by this social difference. Appearance can also have a great impact on a researcher's performance in these villages. Culturally appropriate attire—basic and conservative—helped me feel included and minimize participant suspicion. Recognizing these lines of identification and the ways in which interviewees tend to 'place' the researcher was vital in facilitating rapport between interviewer and interviewee and thereby producing a rich, detailed conversation based on empathy, mutual respect, and understanding. Interactions with villagers earlier on in fieldwork helped identify characteristics that would allow me to be more or less acceptably placed in the world views of respondents and establish how common ground might be found. As Cassell (1988: 87; cited in Crang and Cook, 2007: 42) writes, the researcher needs to assume a role or identity that merges with the values and behaviour of the group being studied, without seriously compromising the researcher's own values and behaviour and not inventing an identity.

Self-positioning during interviews with local politicians had to adapt according to the circumstance. In some instances, the fact that I was a Sri Lankan student from a university in the United Kingdom worked in my favour. The fact that someone from an academic institution in the West should be interested in particular individuals and their opinions was considered flattering. In other instances, portraying oneself as an 'insider'—the aforementioned local identities—was more appropriate in order to stimulate flowing responses from the interviewee. Striking a balance between being an 'insider' and 'outsider' and cultivating an ability to represent oneself according to the situation was of critical importance.

An attempt was made to present the researcher as ‘an intelligent, sympathetic, and non-judgmental listener’ (Cassell, 1988: 85, cited in Crang and Cook, 2007: 46), neutral towards personal issues in post-tsunami recovery, yet supportive of people’s desire for an effective post-tsunami recovery. However, this was not always a prudent approach. Presenting oneself as a ‘neutral’ character in these communities can sometimes court an impression of unfeeling and, therefore, undeserving of the respondent’s attention and time. There was a need to express personal opinions and take particular stands; for example, to denounce the mismanagement of aid by a local government official.

Despite giving conscious attention to behaviour and performance, such that I will blend into the research context, the social difference between researcher and participant can never be eliminated. Being frequently referred to as ‘Miss’ by respondents clearly reflects this social divide. In Sri Lankan colloquial language, the term is used to differentiate women from a middle or upper social class.<sup>17</sup> This difference between the researcher and researched is not necessarily a problem in itself; some respondents in fact reported they were more comfortable in giving information to outsiders. It is vital to acknowledge, however, that I remained ‘unlike’ participants and belonged ‘outside’ the community under study. Furthermore, as Rose (1997) has pointed out, there is a need to be aware that researchers cannot ever fully recognize or represent their positionality. Whilst it is important to engage with the values and subjectivities of the researcher, it is also important to realize the limits to knowing subjectivity.

Research participants, through their own positioning and enmeshed in various social relations, are not pure mediums through which to interpret the social world. On the one hand, in a highly politicized post-tsunami setting, respondents in interviews and focus group discussions are likely to have been selective in what they reveal and conceal. Some respondents

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<sup>17</sup> Sri Lankan males associated with this background are referred to as ‘Sir’.

provided information in the hope that they might benefit from the study in terms of aid money or resources. This occurred in spite of the research aims being explained—that it was primarily for academic purposes and findings would be disseminated to aid agencies, but how they would be used for development-oriented projects was unknown. On the other, respondents are themselves embroiled in larger social, cultural, economic, and political processes; they are not objects, but subjects with agency, history, and their own idiosyncratic command of a story (Madison, 2005: 25). Therefore, they can foreground different aspects of their identity in different situations. Be it an interview or a focus group discussion, the findings of this thesis cannot proclaim a true depiction of respondent identities. As Kong (1998: 80) comments with reference to the subjectivity of knowledge in an Asian context, geographers who use interviewing should be careful to resist claims that they have discovered the ‘truth’ or that they have distilled public opinion.

Recognizing that both researcher and researched are positioned, interconnected, and involved in the changing social and cultural relations under study was paramount. The field of study is a seriously relational experience, an ‘interworld’ (Crossley, 1996, cited in Bennet, 2002: 141) between the researcher and respondent where the subjectivities of both become entangled. Both researcher and respondent consciously and unconsciously construct their own meaning, objectify ‘others’, recognize themselves in them, and play on their performances accordingly to engage as best as they can (Bennet, 2002: 159). This intersubjective nature of the research encounter is a necessary reflection of the researcher and researched as co-constituent of resulting knowledge produced in this thesis.

An inevitable outcome of this is that all knowledge constructed during fieldwork is subjective; neither the subjectivity of the researcher nor that of the researched can be eliminated. Yet, this does not suggest it is invalid. Stories told in the research encounter are not

merely to be regarded as means of mirroring the world, but as the means through which it is constructed, understood, and acted out (Crang and Cook, 2007: 14). All statements expressed in interviews and focus group discussions are partial truths from specifically positioned participants and are a way these individuals make sense of their post-tsunami environment. The purpose of this research is not to represent the voice of individual respondents, but to draw on their words and experiences produced through partial and situated knowledge, and to contribute to relevant debates in the literature on social networks, informal politics, and social inequalities in post-disaster recovery.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a theoretically informed reflection on the many different twists and turns inescapably present in the course of ethnographic fieldwork and analysis in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. From the personal interest that has led to this research, to the technicalities of setting up for fieldwork, and to the construction and interpretation of data, the research process has been underpinned by multiple subjectivities, identities, positionalities, and situated knowledges. The fieldwork experience, in particular, has been highly political. The process of negotiation between what has been lost and what is to be reconstituted in the wake of the 2004 tsunami has involved tensions amongst diverse interest groups—villagers, government and NGO officials, and politicians—and values. Positionality is vital in such instances as it forces the researcher to acknowledge personal power, privilege, and prejudices, whilst being critical of the power structures that surround research participants (Crang and Cook, 2007; Madison, 2005). This reasserts the importance of ethnography for understanding change in South Asia (Gupta, 1995; Parry, 2000) and the Third World (Brockington and Sullivan, 2003).

The authority of ethnography throughout the fieldwork experience and subsequent analysis has been carefully considered. Attempts were made to give power to participants. For instance, by giving them the ability to choose co-participants for focus group discussions and the locality where meetings were conducted, ask their own questions during interviews and focus groups, and terminate discussions at any stage, and by maintaining the anonymity of respondents in the final thesis and associated journal publications. Yet, it is acknowledged that the adoption of such ethnographic methods does not release the researcher from exploitative relations. To even presume to empower implies 'contestable notions of domination' (McDowell, 1992: 408).

There is a tension between the ease with which we talk and write about ethical procedures and the realities of following these through in practice. During the course of this study, the relationships with the people being researched, how images were captured, and how constructed data were interpreted and presented in the final thesis, amongst others, brought to the fore issues concerning ethics and the researcher's conduct; behaving 'ethically' was not always straightforward. Challenges to establish, maintain and/or revise the researcher's ethical stance did not only come from within academia, but had to be negotiated within the particular locale of the study. The need to take responsibility for thinking ethically on a day-to-day basis is crucial in these contexts.

## CHAPTER 3

### LIVELIHOODS, NETWORKS, AND RECOVERY IN POST-TSUNAMI SRI LANKA:

#### TOWARDS A SOCIAL NETWORKS APPROACH

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### 3.1 Abstract

This paper explores the role of informal social networks in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in two fisher villages in South Sri Lanka. It reveals four interlinked forms of informal social networks, drawing attention to the disaggregated social relationships, asymmetrical power relations, multi-local dimensions, and historical specificities embedded in them. An ability to address these social dynamics is crucial for understanding post-tsunami livelihoods recovery. Within this context, the paper assesses the analytical values of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and the social networks approach. By arguing that the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework lacks mechanisms to deal with social relationships, power, space, and history, the paper contributes to the limited critical analyses of the framework in disasters. By illuminating the ability of social networks to dissect meanings and processes inherent in livelihoods, the paper adds to Indian and African studies that reflect on social networks as an object of research and method of inquiry, respectively. The paper concludes by highlighting the significance of informal social networks in post-tsunami recovery and the broader relevance of the social networks approach for conceptualizing livelihoods post-disaster.

*Keywords:* Social networks; Sustainable Livelihoods Framework; Disaster recovery; 2004 tsunami; Sri Lanka

### **3.2 Introduction**

Livelihoods recovery in the wake of the 2004 tsunami has been highly uneven in Sri Lanka. Some communities have displayed a remarkable and dynamic recovery, while others have struggled for survival. Reflections on the disaster one year on emphasize a need to devise frameworks for understanding this variance in recovery (Buranakul et al., 2005: 247). Since rising to prominence in 1998, one of the most popular mechanisms for conceptualizing post-disaster livelihoods has been the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), guiding interventions by aid agencies (Hoon et al., 1997; Sanderson, 1999) and social scientists (de Silva and Yamao, 2007; Lautze and Raven-Roberts, 2006; Mubarak, 2007; Twigg, 2001). The SLF identifies access to different types of ‘livelihood assets’ and the ability to put them to productive use to reduce the ‘vulnerability context’ as central components of growing out of poverty, while recognizing that ‘transforming structures and processes’ (‘TSP’) influence the ‘livelihood strategies’ and ‘livelihood outcomes’ of the poor (Scoones, 1998). The innate focus of the framework is on the structures required for social relationships to work in relation to recovery and development. The suitability of such a device for understanding a highly politicized, unequal post-tsunami recovery process is questionable.

The aim of this paper is to explore the role of informal social networks in post-tsunami Sri Lanka and thereby assess the analytical values of the SLF and the social networks approach in understanding post-tsunami livelihoods recovery with reference to two fisher villages in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka. The paper reveals four interlinked forms of informal

social networks. It is argued that these networks embody disaggregated social relationships, asymmetrical power relations, multi-local dimensions, and historical specificities, which the SLF is unable to portray. It brings fresh perspectives to the debate on the analytical value of the SLF, particularly the deficiency of 'livelihood assets' in accounting for political power (Baumann and Sinha, 2001; de Haan and Zoomers, 2005; Lautze and Raven-Roberts, 2006), vertical social networks (Fine, 2001; Meagher, 2005), and multi-local and historical aspects (de Haan and Zoomers, 2003; 2005), which typify livelihoods.

The social networks approach, it is shown, offers a more constructive approach for understanding post-tsunami livelihoods and the informal social networks therein. Originating from sociological perspectives (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994), the approach has gained considerable impetus in livelihoods research. African scholars deploying social networks have found complex patterns of exploitation and assistance, and continuity and change that epitomize livelihoods in prolonged economic crises (Devereux, 1999; Lourenço-Lindell, 2002). The approach is particularly apt where informal social networks are an important part of livelihoods in everyday society (de Sardan 1999; Harriss-White, 1997, 1999; Jeffrey, 2000) and post-disaster contexts (Barnshaw, 2006; Korf et al., 2010; Quarantelli, 1960). The paper adds to this exciting arena of scholarship, by reflecting on social networks as an object of research and a method of inquiry for understanding post-tsunami livelihoods.

The paper is structured in four sections. The first reviews the SLF and the social networks approach and how these can be drawn into a study of post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka. The next section contextualizes the case study by describing the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka, fisher livelihoods and villages, and qualitative ethnographic methods employed. This provides the basis for interpreting four key interconnected categories of post-tsunami informal social networks and how they would fit in with the SLF. The final section draws attention to

the wider significance of informal social networks in understanding livelihoods in everyday society and post-disaster contexts.

### **3.3 Conceptualizing Disaster Recovery**

Informal social networks form a significant part of livelihoods in everyday and post-disaster situations. They are based on the objective of achieving a reciprocal exchange of information and/or favours, emphasize a one-to-one networking effort, and are usually hidden.<sup>18</sup> Informal networks have resurfaced under political patronage and corruption in India (Harriss-White, 1997, 1999; Jeffrey, 2000) and Africa (de Sardan, 1999). According to Quarantelli (1960), emotional bonds embedded in networks of kith and kin are crucial in regaining a sense of community and interconnectedness post-disaster. Barnshaw (2006) points to the spatial density of such networks as critical to an individual's ability to access social capital and engage in disaster recovery. In post-tsunami Sri Lanka, Korf et al. (2010: S72) show how the 'gift' of foreign aid was re-appropriated by local political patrons who made it their patrimonial gift to be given to their clients. In essence, understanding post-tsunami livelihoods recovery warrants paying heed to the motivations, claims, and power imbalances inherent in informal social networks. Thus, this paper considers two key approaches: SLF and social networks.

#### ***3.3.1 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework***

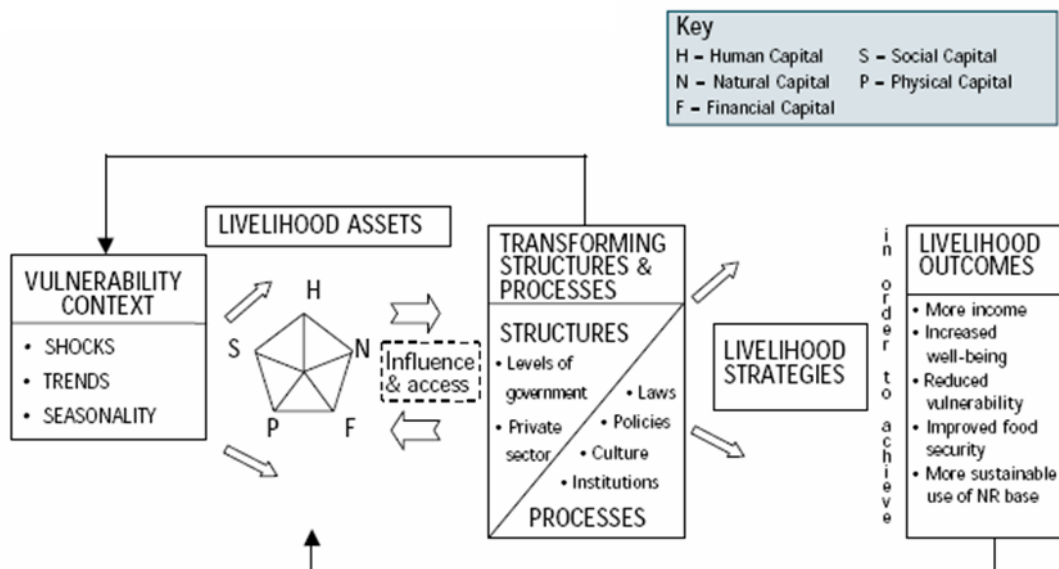
A significant conceptual development in understanding how communities and individuals

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<sup>18</sup> This compares with formal social networks, which are characterized by an organizational system and easily identifiable.

‘get on’ and ‘get by’ has been the SLF. The framework is inspired by Sen’s (1981) capabilities and entitlement approach and recognizes livelihood as the capabilities, assets (both material and social resources), and activities required for a means of living (Chambers and Conway, 1992: 7–8). It is based predominantly on the body of intellectual work produced at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex in the 1990s, including the design of the framework depicted in Figure 1. Today, the SLF is widely acknowledged as a useful, logically consistent framework for thinking through complex issues influencing the lives of the poor. It has helped launch a new field of research, analysis, and action in development studies (Scoones, 1998) and geography (de Haan and Zoomers, 2003, 2005; Batterbury, 2001; Bebbington, 1999), and guided post-disaster interventions by aid agencies (Hoon et al., 1997; Sanderson, 1999) and social scientists (de Silva and Yamao, 2007; Lautze and Raven-Roberts, 2006; Mubarak, 2007; Twigg, 2001).

Figure 9. Sustainable Livelihoods Framework



Source: DFID, 1999: 1

Note: The SLF depicts stakeholders as operating within a ‘vulnerability context’ in which they have access to certain ‘livelihood assets’. These gain their meaning and value through the prevailing social,

institutional, and organizational environment—“TSP”. This context decisively influences the ‘livelihood strategies’ open to people in pursuit of their self-defined, beneficial ‘livelihood outcomes’. Significant feedback is likely between ‘TSP’ and the ‘vulnerability context’, and ‘livelihood outcomes’ and ‘livelihood assets’.

The significance of the SLF lies in the attention it accords to ‘livelihood assets’—an element that the poor draw on in constructing livelihoods. It has, however, attracted much criticism. It is claimed to be inadequate in representing political capital. Scrutinizing the SLF in complex humanitarian emergencies, Lautze and Raven-Roberts (2006) find that the use of ‘livelihood assets’ is mediated not merely through the formal governance environment embedded in ‘TSP’, but also through the many layers of informal policies, institutions, and processes. Following from their work in decentralized natural resource management in India, Baumann and Sinha (2001) argue that considering power relations as a sixth asset—‘political capital’—provides a more structured and rigorous analysis of power. As de Haan and Zoomers (2005) summarize, power is overlooked as an explanatory variable in access to resources in the SLF.

There is a protracted debate about the intellectual merits of ‘social capital’. Fine (2001) and Meagher (2005) highlight concerns that ‘social capital’ is a neutral asset deprived of politics, befitting agencies like the World Bank who occasionally associate it with horizontal, rather than more challenging vertical, social networks. Critics further maintain that the portrayal of ‘livelihood assets’ as fixed in local capacities and time conflicts with realistic scenarios. According to de Haan and Zoomers (2003: 385), livelihoods across the globe are increasingly interconnected; individuals resemble nodes connected by social networks along which flow remittances, information, and food. Livelihoods also entail different ‘pathways’ because different individuals are embedded in different power relations, institutional processes, and historical processes that influence their subsequent decision making (de Haan and Zoomers, 2005: 45).

### ***3.3.2 Social Networks Approach***

The social networks approach originates from a set of implicit assumptions concerning fundamental issues in sociological analysis. Mitchell (1969: 2), one of the early and most influential proponents of the approach, defined social networks as a specific set of linkages among a defined set of persons, with the additional property that the characteristics of these linkages as a whole may be used to interpret the social behaviour of the persons involved. He stated that a network can emerge from a set of consciously recognized rights and responsibilities between the persons involved (*ibid.*). The point of departure for the social networks approach is what Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994: 1414) call the ‘anticategorical imperative’; an imperative that rejects all attempts to explain social processes solely in terms of the categorical attributes of actors, such as age, gender, social status, ethnicity, and political party affiliation. The focus of this paper lies not in formal representations of the approach that place powerful mathematical tools at the disposal of structural analysts (Knoke, 1990),<sup>19</sup> but the underlying conceptual understanding of social networks and the renewed interest in its ability to comprehend the everyday lives of poor people.

Studies drawing on the social networks approach to understand livelihoods in prolonged economic crises in Africa reveal valuable findings. In his study on informal safety nets in the context of economic shocks in Malawi, Devereux (1999) suggests that traditional practices of horizontal redistribution—between people of similar economic and social status—remain widespread, but are highly vulnerable to covariant risks, such as drought. With reference to livelihoods in a slum neighbourhood in Guinea-Bissau, Lourenço-Lindell (2002) shows how

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<sup>19</sup> See Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) for an elaborate critique of the formal network approach, stressing its inadequate conceptualizations of human agency and culture.

wider economic pressures and local power relations influence the ability of the poor to diversify their informal social networks and enforce claims within them. The social relations within these networks represent a mixed bag of solidarity, opportunism, autonomy, and subordination (ibid.). While wider processes of a crisis environment influence the extent and types of informal social networks at the disposal of the poor, these networks mask social ties that vary in terms of trust, mutual understanding, personal decisions, and external influences relating to social, political, and economic obligations.

This paper contributes to scholarship that underpins informal social networks in everyday and post-disaster livelihoods (de Sardan, 1999; Barnshaw, 2006; Harriss-White, 1997, 1999; Jeffrey, 2000; Korf et al., 2010; Quarantelli, 1960) and draws on those that utilize social networks as a method in livelihoods analysis (Devereux, 1999; Lourenço-Lindell, 2002). With reference to post-tsunami Sri Lanka, it reveals four key forms of informal social networks: reciprocal credit, bribery networks, kith and kin, and political patronage. Attention is paid to the meanings of these networks, processes through which they have emerged, and transforming power relations therein. Contributing to critical insights on the SLF, the paper highlights political power, disaggregated social relationships, spatial dimensions, and historical specificities as four major elements downplayed in the framework, yet crucial for understanding post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka.

There are reasons to be cautious in applying social networks. Fukuyama (2004) argues that the heterogeneous nature of social networks is a major theoretical weakness when analysing empirical evidence from developing countries. The flaws of the social capital paradigm can also manifest itself in social network analyses; for example, in African informal economies, social networks have been conceptualized as social capital to the extent that they either promote economic efficiency and accumulation or turn into social liabilities (Meagher, 2005: 219). To

avoid these pitfalls, it is crucial to contextualize the relevant research by defining the background, parameters, and methodology.

### **3.4 Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka**

Death and destruction has been inherent to a Sri Lankan polity beset by civil war. The Northern and Eastern Provinces<sup>20</sup> have witnessed a concentrated ethnic conflict between the separatist forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the government of Sri Lanka since the 1980s. A range of complexities associated with this pre-existing warfare formed the backdrop against which the tsunami of 26 December 2004 occurred (Uyangoda, 2005). Yet, with natural disaster experiences confined to periodic droughts, floods, landslides, and occasional cyclones, the tsunami was the greatest natural disaster to hit Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe, 2005: 543).

Despite statistical variations in the demographic impact, it is estimated that 31,000 people were killed, 5,600 went missing, and 500,000–800,000 were displaced (Emmanuel, 2006: 7; IPS, 2005: 5; Oxfam International, 2005a: 2). As is usually the case with disasters in developing countries, impacts fell disproportionately among the poorest and most vulnerable population groups. The relief and recovery effort was characterized by an influx of external resources and new organizations, resulting in conditions that fostered new forms of contact and cooperation. Various government agencies, local non-government organizations (NGOs), international NGOs (INGOs), and private donors contributed in cash and kind. Nonetheless, the government remained the central authority in tsunami relief and recovery.

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<sup>20</sup> For administrative purposes, Sri Lanka is divided into 4 layers: 9 Provinces, 26 Districts (of which 14 are coastal Districts), 325 Divisional Secretariats, and 14,110 *Grama Niladbari* Divisions (villages), in descending order of hierarchy.

### ***3.4.1 Livelihoods, Villages, and Ethnography***

Small-scale fishing<sup>21</sup> was selected as the focus of research due to its extensive importance to livelihood in Sri Lanka in terms of employment, food security, and foreign exchange earnings (DFAR, 2005), and the severe impact it experienced in the tsunami (IPS, 2006; RADA, 2005). Harbour villages suited the purpose of this study since fishing is the main livelihood in such villages. Although coastal Districts in the Northern and Eastern Provinces recorded the highest number of deaths due to the tsunami, they were precluded during fieldwork due to the prevailing security situation. The Hambantota District, a 151-km belt of land shown in Figure 2 (Chapter 1), recorded the second highest number of deaths in the Southern Province. Considering its relatively high poverty index—65 per cent of households receive *Samurdhi* or national poverty alleviation scheme benefits (DCS, 2001)—the impact on livelihoods was particularly severe. Hambantota is also significant in terms of fisheries production, ranked fourth out of 14 coastal Districts in contribution to national fish landings (Amarasinghe, 2006: 14).

Two of the three main fishing harbours in Hambantota are in the villages of Kudawella West and Kirinda (Chapter 1: Figure 2). They are located approximately 190 km and 270 km, respectively, from the commercial capital of Sri Lanka, Colombo. The fact that they represent villages that were severely affected in the tsunami proved instructive for the wider project. They recorded the highest destruction to harbour infrastructure and housing compared to other villages around the District's three main harbours (DCS, 2005: 4, 7; DFAR, 2005: 7), and, as Table 1 (Chapter 1) shows, a significant number of deaths and destruction to fisheries

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<sup>21</sup> In comparison with commercial fishing, small-scale fishing uses less capital and energy, smaller fishing vessels, shorter trips close to the shore, targets a wider range of fish species, and uses multiple fishing gear and strategies to suit the seasonality of fish stocks (FAO, 2004).

equipment.

A mixed bag of traditional and mechanized fishing techniques are employed by fishermen in these villages. Traditional techniques comprise mainly beach seine boats (12 m in length) and non-motorized boats (3–10 m in length), while mechanized techniques include multiday boats (45–50 ft in length) with cabin and ice hold, day boats (28 ft in length) with inboard engines, fibre reinforced plastic boats (17–23 ft in length) propelled by outboard engines, and outboard motorized boats, which are traditional crafts powered by an outboard engine (Chapter 1: Table 1). There are fish producers, post-harvest workers, and ancillary workers who occupy a range of organizational levels as self-employed individuals, hired workers, *mudalalis* (fish merchants), and informal micro entrepreneurs (Figure 10). Secondary livelihoods, such as maldivian/dried fish-making, coir-making, and small local shops, typify the informal sector workforce (Figures 11 and 12). In other words, labour relations are based largely on casual employment, kinship, or personal and social relations rather than contractual arrangements (ILO, 2005).

Figure 10. Post-harvest workers, Kudawella West harbour



Note: Small-scale fishing is highly diverse, involving various ancillary activities like fish transport, storage, and ice loading.

Figure 11. Local shop by the beach in Kirinda



Note: A *mudalali* runs a shop, selling coconuts, *kalu dodol* (a traditional sweetmeat in Hambantota of Portuguese origin), *belimal* flower drink, and *ranawara* herbal tea, amongst others. He also dries maldive fish and sells wholesale to local buyers.

Figure 12. Coir-making in Kudawella West



Note: A fisherman spins coir, together with his wife and neighbour, as a supplementary income generating activity.

Kudawella West is home to a majority Sinhala-Buddhist population and Kirinda a mixed Sinhala-Buddhist and Sri Lankan Malay population, thus representing two predominant ethno-religious groups in the Hambantota District. The pre- and post-tsunami context in Kirinda saw Sinhalese and Malay communities co-existing in a well integrated environment. Cultural, religious, and practical concerns of the two communities have led to the establishment of two distinct Fisheries Cooperative Societies (FCSs)<sup>22</sup> in 1989—Kirinda (Muslim) and Kirindagama (Sinhalese)—while the segregated housing for Malay communities that existed before the

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<sup>22</sup> FCSs are government-established CBOs that channel credit/subsidies, maintain savings deposits, and supply fishing requisites (e.g. fuel and fishing gear) for fishermen.

tsunami has been largely maintained in post-tsunami relocation.

The villages differ in terms of their political attributes. Kudawella West belongs to the Tangalle Divisional Secretariat, the very residence of the incumbent President of Sri Lanka, and has benefited from both large-scale (harbour) and small-scale (rural roads) infrastructural investments. Tangalle is also the political base of a nationalist political party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, and renowned as a highly contested Divisional Secretariat. The Tissamaharama Divisional Secretariat, to which Kirinda belongs, is considered marginal in comparison.

Data were collected over one year of fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2008–9 through interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, supplemented by policy reports, newspaper articles, and local literature. Familiarization was acquired through a previous study (Mubarak, 2007) and intermittent work and research experiences in the area in 2007–8. An ethnography was judged the most appropriate method in three respects: first, informal social networks can usually only be recognized through intimate knowledge of actors in the field; second, paying attention to non-verbal aspects of interviewing was crucial in terms of unpacking the nuances and tensions of the seemingly ‘ordinary’ lives of the villagers; third, loosely structured interviews enable the researcher to guide the interview giving consideration to traumatic experiences of respondents and their sensitivity to certain issues.

Being the primary functional unit of society, households were used as the unit of analysis. Households are a co-resident group of individuals who share most aspects of consumption, drawing on and apportioning a common collection of resources, including labour, to ensure material production (Schmink, 1984: 89). The sample comprised 80 households—48 from Kudawella West and 32 from Kirinda—whose primary source of income was fishing or fishing-related activities. It also represented variations in secondary livelihoods, ethno-religious backgrounds, and post-tsunami housing location. Households relocated from Kudawella West

resided in housing schemes in the villages of Mahawela, Seenimodara East/West, Pahajjawa, Nidahasgama East, and Nakulugamuwa South, while those relocated from Kirinda lived in housing schemes in Kirinda itself and the village of Andaragasyaya (Figure 2).

Household responses were examined alongside views of government officials (17), NGO officials (12), office bearers of community-based organizations (CBOs) (13), politicians (7), village leaders (4), and key informants (19). Village interviews were conducted mostly in the Sinhala language; in two instances that respondents communicated in Bahasa Melayu, the language of Malays, a translator was used. To protect the anonymity of respondents, all names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

Basic household information was collected around the key components of the SLF, pre- and post-tsunami. All interviews queried the form/function of informal social networks: why members chose one network over another, specific network functions, member benefits, age of networks, and frequency of interaction. As shown in Table 4, informal social networks were grouped according to their form/function and the key actors that provided entry into them. The term 'livelihoods recovery strategies' was used as shorthand for a series of choices constrained to a greater or lesser extent by macroeconomic circumstances, social context, cultural and ideological expectations, and access to resources (Wolf, 1990). The timeframe for recovery varied across households. The start of recovery was defined as the time in which a given household engaged in reviving at least one aspect of their everyday livelihood (e.g. fishing occupation or housing). Recovery is open-ended; some households reported they had reached pre-tsunami income levels, but in general there was reluctance on the part of households to concede they had regained livelihoods completely since other aspects of their livelihood had changed. What follows is an analysis of four key interconnected forms of informal networks and a discussion of how they fit in with the SLF.

Table 4. Livelihoods recovery strategies and informal social networks: household responses

Livelihoods Recovery Strategy*	Informal Social Network		Number of Households Kudawella		
	Form/Function	Actor	West	Kirinda	Total
Use of personal credit assets	Mutual credit	Co-worker	37	22	59
	Low interest loans	<i>Mudalali</i>	21	14	35
		<i>Seettu</i>	Kith and Kin	15	29
	Commodities on credit	Shopkeeper	20	14	34
	High interest loans	Moneylender	5	1	6
Reliance on kith and kin support	Interest-free loans	Kith and Kin	20	10	30
	Cash/kind donations	Kin	4	8	12
	Livelihood support	Kin	7	7	14
	Aid collections help	Kin	10	12	22
	Emotional solace	Kith and Kin	25	30	55
	Migrant remittances	Kin (Overseas)	2	7	9
Use of institutional resources**	Access via kith and kin, bribery, or political support mobilization	AGA	44	29	73
		GN	39	27	66
		FI	40	29	69
		CBO Office Bearer	37	17	54
		Local Politician	40	22	62

Notes: \*Although grouped separately, households frequently pursued a combination of livelihoods strategies involving a variety of informal social networks;\*\*This comprises household perceptions.

### 3.5 Post-Tsunami Informal Social Networks

#### 3.5.1 Reciprocal Credit

Two major sources of credit are associated with fisher households: formal and informal institutions. The former comprises formal state and commercial banks, FCSs, NGOs, and microcredit institutions, and the latter various reciprocal exchanges. Akin to pre-tsunami times, inability to meet collateral prerequisites, high interest rates, and complex and prolonged procedures were a deterrent to fisher households in accessing formal credit. Although pawning at established financial institutions, such as banks, was commonly practised, credit acquired was insufficient in meeting costs of reconstruction. Moreover, pawning was not an option for

those who lost their assets in the tsunami. Despite being sources of low interest credit,<sup>23</sup> the influx of new members and extended waiting lists post-tsunami meant FCS loans were inaccessible to most households. Cash grants and loan schemes, or a combination of both, were introduced by NGOs and microfinance institutions to support livelihoods recovery. Yet, with escalating prices these proved inadequate. A nation-wide survey of 595 tsunami-affected households, conducted one year after the tsunami, found that the provision of credit, grants, transfers, training, and equipment by NGOs contributed to income recovery of less than one per cent of households; micro credit had ‘not penetrated’ these communities with only 15 per cent of households applying for loans (IPS and ADB, 2006: 23).<sup>24</sup>

With myriad problems associated with accessing formal credit, households fell back on informal systems. Reciprocity and reciprocal credit are characteristic of fisher communities due to the fact that income fluctuates significantly depending on the catch. Mutual insurance mechanisms whereby small interest-free loans are exchanged, give inter temporal flexibility in adjusting to consumption needs. Fishermen also borrow from their *mudalali* and typically such borrowings are set off against subsequent earnings. Amanthi (60 years), mother of a boat manager involved in ancillary activities at the Kudawella West harbour, explains:

We borrow from the *mudalali* my son works for. The *mudalali* provides the fishing boats and gear and we sell the catch to him. So, if we are faced with a problem or an emergency, he takes care of us. [...] After the tsunami, we asked him for some money. When we are able get a good catch, we will pay him back. It will be set off against the money he pays us for the catch (September 2008, Navadivi Purawara, Pahajjawa).

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<sup>23</sup> Post-tsunami interest rates in FCSs ranged between 3–6 per cent per annum, compared to 6–10 per cent in other CBOs, 12 per cent at microfinance institutions, 18–20 per cent at formal banks, and 20–5 per cent with village moneylenders.

<sup>24</sup> Reasons for this trend were not provided, although lack of access to markets and other infrastructural facilities were suggested.

*Mudalalis* desirous of a guaranteed supply of fish, willingly lent money on the understanding that the fisherman would deliver future fish landings exclusively to him. The relation dynamics of such reciprocal arrangements, including forms of insecurity and risk present in coastal fishing-based occupations in Sri Lanka, are addressed in excellent, though somewhat outdated, discussions by Alexander (1973) and Amarasinghe (1989). As the fishing industry resumed activities post-tsunami, these pre-existing networks came into play.

Kin networks extending as far as third-cousins were largely present and intact in both villages; they were the basis of inter-household relationships, as is the case in many peasant societies and agricultural villages in Sri Lanka (Leach, 1961; Obeyesekere, 1967; Yalman, 1967). Kith and kin were the first in line as sources of support for households faced with an emergency, such as income failure and food scarcity. These networks acted as short term buffers in post-tsunami recovery. Sanjana (32 years) is the wife and mother of two fishermen who work in multiday boats in Kudawella West. Their house was partly destroyed in the tsunami, but they did not qualify for relocated housing as they resided outside the 100-m ‘no build’ buffer zone—a coastal regulation implemented post-tsunami.<sup>25</sup> As Sanjana comments:

We returned to our house and tried to live there. But we couldn't. We had nightmares. We were scared. So, when the NGO came and said they would repair the broken parts of the house, I said ‘No. The children don't like to live here anymore. We don't want this house’. They didn't heed me. [...] In the end, another NGO said they would give us the money to build somewhere else, but we had to buy the land. To be honest, it was difficult for us. We didn't have the money. So, we sought help from our relatives. Some gave money. Some gave jewellery to pawn (September 2008, Mahawelagoda Housing, Mahawela).

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<sup>25</sup> A 1981 Act which defined the ‘no build’ coastal zone as 300 m, although not strictly enforced, was reinforced in January 2005 as buffer zones of 200 m in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and 100 m elsewhere. In October 2005, amid criticisms of an arbitrary 100/200-metre blanket restriction and the looming Presidential Election, the policy was abandoned in favour of individually specified setback zones in different coastal areas based on extant conservation guidelines (Hyndman, 2007).

The buffer zone policy left stranded households, such as Sanjana's, who were disinclined to return to their pre-tsunami homes. Lacking official aid, the financial support offered by relatives was invaluable for such households.

Kin and friends unaffected by the tsunami also provided support to households by way of small interest-free loans and/or by purchasing products of self-employment activities; e.g. garments from households engaged in tailoring activities. Two households in Kudawella West and seven in Kirinda received remittances from kin employed overseas (Table 4). In Kirinda, these were all female household members working as housemaids in the wealthy oil-producing states of the Middle East. The migration of labour from Sri Lanka forms part of a complex transnational movement of populations, commodities, currencies, and ideologies (Gamburd, 2000: 19). The kinship system linked households to wider circles of cooperation outside the spatially-bound context of the tsunami. Indeed, livelihoods are interconnected through inter-local networks at different spatial scales (de Haan and Zoomers, 2003).

A rotating credit group based on a network of trust and used to raise financial asset is the *seettu*. Customarily, members of a *seettu* contribute an agreed sum of money to a pool, on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis. This collection is awarded to one member at a time, in a pre-agreed sequence, usually determined by drawing lots. Households participated in *seettu* to recover household items lost in the tsunami (e.g. furniture and crockery) or redeem pawned assets. As Tariq (40 years), a day boat owner in Kirinda, remarks:

It's only if we join a *seettu* that we can save money and get something done, because we're compelled to put some money down (October 2008, Kirinda).

Thus, *seettu* enabled households to save and gain access to a lump sum of money, which they would otherwise have found difficult to acquire post-tsunami.

While households like Tariq's living in pre-tsunami locations restarted *seettu* activity, those relocated had mixed experiences. *Seettu* are typically organized into groups formed within the neighbourhood; interaction and trust are determining factors in their establishment and maintenance. The larger housing schemes often recognized the original community arrangement in relocation. For example, Colliers Housing (Kirinda) comprised 67 houses for a community of Malay households who lived in the same area pre-tsunami; households lived among pre-tsunami neighbours and had restarted *seettu* activity. This was in stark contrast to the experiences of households relocated to smaller housing schemes. Mahawelagoda Housing (Mahawela), for example, comprised 12 houses constructed by various NGOs—three of its residents were from Kudawella West, while the rest were from different villages across the District. Not surprisingly, this was a deterrent to the revival of *seettu*.

Village moneylenders and shopkeepers also extended credit to households. Moneylenders were more accessible than formal lending institutions since there was no requirement for collateral or guarantors, merely an unwritten commitment and trust. Yet, due to 'fiery' interest rates (20–5 per cent) households rarely approached them—for those who did, it was a last resort. Shopkeepers occasionally sell grain and other commodities to regular clients on credit. No interest is charged and prices are not increased to indebted households, but strict credit limits meant these were not sources of substantial credit for households.

Reciprocal credit networks, which spread risk and smooth consumption over time, were critical in alleviating the problem of accessing financial aid post-tsunami. Reasserting claims in everyday livelihoods (Haan and Zoomers, 2003), households have accessed networks of trust and mutual accountability that link individuals in the local community and beyond. Yet, the ability of all households to access reciprocal credit is questionable. Since the tsunami was a generic shock that affected all members of a spatially concentrated community more or less

equally, mutual exchanges were apt to be the least effective (Barnshaw, 2006). Furthermore, post-tsunami aid processes (e.g. housing schemes) hindered the revival of some reciprocal networks (e.g. *seettu*).

### ***3.5.2 Bribery Networks***

The government was the central authority in the overall aid process, but in practice responsibilities were poorly demarcated between central and local levels of government, policymaking remained driven from the centre, and there was no solid framework for aid disbursement at the village level. Additionally, post-tsunami policies and regulations were often unclear and confusing. The numerous circulars issued by the central government were frequently inconsistent and poorly communicated to local government. Implementation became the subjective interpretations of three key local government officials—Assistant Government Agents (AGAs), *Grama Niladharis* (GNs), and Fisheries Inspectors (FIs)—who thereby gained opportunity to maximize the spoils of office.

At the local level of government, AGAs, who head Divisional Secretariats, played a key coordinating role in the recovery effort. They were the most important operational point of contact, providing information on government regulations and requirements to NGOs and introducing NGOs to relevant government officials. AGAs also maintained beneficiary lists, identified village needs, assisted in selecting locations for housing schemes, approved building plans, issued various permits, and authorized aid. GNs, or village officers, conducted assessments on housing and livelihood needs in their villages and compiled beneficiary lists, which were provided to the AGA. Ground level progress was monitored by AGAs mainly through GNs. In reality, however, there was no clear mechanism for accountability. To be

selected as a beneficiary or granted specific compensation for housing or livelihood, households depended on certification by these officials who thereby acquired substantial discretionary power.

FIs head the smallest fisheries administrative unit, the FI Division,<sup>26</sup> and are responsible for ensuring that fishing activities in sites under their purview comply with the various ordinances and acts that govern such activity. Among others, they register fishing boats and gear, renew these registrations, and issue fishing licenses. The loss or destruction of fishing boats and gear in the tsunami had to be substantiated by an Entitlement Certificate, detailing the type and amount of loss, issued by the FI. It was a methodology introduced by the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to help government and non-government aid actors identify genuine beneficiaries. Entitlement Certificates had to be countersigned by the Assistant Director of the District Fisheries Office and the AGA, but this was a mere formality. As Piyasiri, the FI in Kirinda since 2008, explains:

If 200 certificates went from each FI, about 2000–3000 certificates would have ended up on their desks during this period! They had no way of verifying the accuracy of what was written in all these. So, I could write out certificates on whatever I want, to whomever I want (September 2009, Kirinda).

Fishermen seeking redress lodged claims with the FI, or the local police or GN, which were also referred to the FI. Thus, FIs enjoyed considerable discretionary power in legitimizing a loss for the purpose of compensation.

It was an ‘open secret’ that anyone could pay *kappam* (bribes) to these three officials to

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<sup>26</sup> This differs from the smallest administration unit, the village. Kudawella West, together with four other villages, belongs to the Kudawella FI Division, and Kirinda, together with 12 other villages, to the Kirinda FI Division.

circumvent rules and regulations. For instance, individuals who had never been to sea, had no exposure to any form of fishing, or were not even in the Fisheries Sector were reported to have obtained Entitlement Certificates through 5000-rupee *kappams* paid to the FI. Bribing, however, was not confined to households ineligible for aid. Despite having the necessary license for the outboard motorized boat he lost in the tsunami, Isuru (56 years), a fisherman from Kudawella West, had to bribe the FI to get his Entitlement Certificate:

It is not something I paid out of a sense of appreciation, because something was going to be done for us. It was because of a demand made by the FI (September 2009, Kudawella West).

The FI acted as a custodian of the aid that was due to Isuru. Thus, bribing was a means of accessing aid, regardless of whether households were qualified for it or not. Similar to everyday state–society relations in India (Harriss-White, 1997, 1999; Jeffrey, 2000), bribery networks were promoted by local government officials seeking ancillary incomes from their official positions as well as households seeking post-tsunami aid.

Despite the fact that no household ever admitted to giving *kappam*, it is important to distinguish nine households who explicitly professed reasons for not doing so. Four households felt it was immoral to bend the rules of bureaucracy for personal advantage. One of them was Singith (37 years), a diver from Kudawella West, living in relocated housing:

I am a very upright person. I don't go around collecting aid through dishonest means—even after the tsunami, I did not. All of what I have got, I was entitled to by law (September 2008, Navadivi Purawara, Pahajjawa).

Loss of close family members was too harrowing for two households who found they were not in a state to negotiate *kappam* with aid officials. As one of them, Jayanthi (50 years), the wife of

a fisherman in Kudawella West, conveys:

We lost our child and had to bury him. While people were running here and there meeting officials and giving *kappam* we stayed home, thinking of our child and crying over him. We were not in a state of mind to do anything else (September 2008, Navadivi Purawara, Pahajjawa).

Reasons of economic poverty were also highlighted by three households who felt they were too poor to bribe. In essence, not all households have access to, or participate in, bribery transactions.

Bribery networks involving AGAs, GNs, and FIs have played a significant role in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in these villages. They typify informal social networks that have emerged under local level corruption in India (Harriss-White, 1997, 1999; Jeffrey, 2000).<sup>27</sup> Post-tsunami, however, presented a novel situation. Bribery networks were fueled by the opportune environment due to the influx of aid and overall ambiguous, flawed, and unaccountable aid procedures. They were further intensified with demands made by local communities who considered external aid as being crucial for livelihoods recovery. Yet, bribery networks were not a resource that all the poor had access to or engaged in.

### ***3.5.3 Bonds of Support: Kith and Kin***

Reciprocity is what strengthens and reaffirms effective bonds of kinship and friendship in these communities. Apart from reciprocal credit, households valued these networks for a variety of other reasons. Early in the recovery processes, households faced immense

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<sup>27</sup> Harriss-White (1997, 1999) and Jeffrey (2000) show how local government officials in rural India abuse public office for private accumulation and the powerful tend to win out in relation to corruption.

frustrations in trying to cut through bureaucracies of government and NGO machinery. It necessitated a considerable amount of time, energy, and skill—kith and kin networks proved an ideal source of support. Households who had extended families were able to dispatch family members for meetings and aid assessments when required. In contrast, households who did not have access to kin, or had kin who were injured in the tsunami, were at a distinct disadvantage.

Households also valued kith and kin for the emotional support they provided. For most households in Kudawella West, however, these relationships were not accessible after the tsunami. The fear of returning to their pre-tsunami house by the sea and being ineligible for a house within the village left Sanjana's household with no option but to relocate. Relocation, however, has taken its toll on their emotional well-being:

There's a new set of people around us. Not people from our village. These people are very good. It's just that we like to have our own people around. We used to all be together once. Thinking about things like that makes us sad (ibid.).

Sanjana's thoughts were echoed by other households relocated from Kudawella West to unfamiliar neighbourhoods of smaller housing schemes. Those who remained in the village were left with a feeling of desolation. As Shiranganie (52 years), wife of a fisherman in Kudawella West, observes:

There aren't many people here now. There are a lot of petty thefts—drug addicts—they run off with gas cylinders. This sort of thing didn't happen before the tsunami. It was such a good area back then. This place used to be like a city with houses everywhere! Now we're so lonely—especially after sunset a strange feeling of loneliness comes over us (September 2008, Kudawella West).

Deterioration in social values with the half-collapsed houses in the village becoming a breeding

ground for anti-social activities, such as alcohol, drug abuse, sexual activities, and burglary, were frequently expressed by interviewees. For households, such as Shiranganie's, segregation has altered their sense of community to the extent that they regard their lives in two distinct segments: before and after the tsunami.<sup>28</sup> The relevance of family contact, stability, and networks to the individual's sense of normalcy in post-disaster recovery cannot be overemphasized (Quarantelli, 1960).

Relocated households from Kudawella West noted further difficulties in their everyday lives. Leaving a child in the care of neighbours, for example, was no longer possible. They attempted to work around these constraints. Some households in Nakulugamuwa Housing (Nakulugamuwa South), approximately three kilometres from Kudawella West (Figure 2), resorted to daily visits to the village. Typically, they arrived in the morning with cooked meals for the day, the fisherman went to sea, the rest of the family stayed at a relative's house or in their tsunami-damaged house while tending to other needs, and returned to their house at night. Post-tsunami relocation disrupted emotional and physical support lent by kith and kin as it did the *seettu* networks which gave financial support. In Kirinda, where nearly all relocated households lived among pre-tsunami neighbours, these were rarely cited as concerns. Spatial density of kith and kin is indeed critical to households' ability to engage in disaster recovery (Barnshaw, 2006).

Kith and kin networks also embodied another form of support: nepotism. Office bearers of CBOs, which NGOs used as conduits to channel post-tsunami aid to communities, were often partial to their relatives and close friends. The Tsunami Fisheries Association, an unregistered CBO for fishermen in Kirinda, provides a fitting illustration. The CBO was floated in 2005 by

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<sup>28</sup> It is also possible that Shiranganie expresses nostalgia for what was rather than what village life was really like pre-tsunami.

an INGO that arrived in the village post-tsunami, in conjunction with an influential *mudalali* in Kirinda. The *mudalali*, installed as its President, was accused by villagers of forming a committee of his own relatives and close associates who thereby benefited from the inflow of aid.

Such nepotistic attributes were not confined to CBOs established post-tsunami—the Kudawella West FCS is a case in point. FCS President, Nimal, joined as a member of the Kudawella West FCS in 1995; he later held the post of President in both the FCS (2001–to date) and the Hambantota District FCS Association (2002–6), the umbrella organization which amalgamates village-level FCSs across the District. Using an INGO donation, acquired via the District FCS Association, Nimal launched a credit programme offering interest-free loans to households who had members who died in the tsunami. The general perception was that Nimal manipulated his position of authority to secure funds for his personal benefit, and that of his kith and kin. This partiality in FCS loan programmes has continued from pre-tsunami times; the society was in fact dormant when the tsunami occurred due to malpractices of its office bearers.

Nepotism in kith and kin networks extended to other CBO office bearers, local government officials, NGO officials, and politicians. These networks were often an implicit means of maintaining social relations. In these communities, kith and kin who accede to posts of responsibility, such as CBO office bearer or GN, have an obligation to repay those who befriended them in the past, when they were unimportant, weak, and in need. As Mohan (40 years), a fisherman who obtained a bicycle he was not entitled to, remarks:

The GN gave it at the village temple. It was from some organization. We knew the GN—he was related to us. Otherwise, we wouldn't have got it (September 2008, Kudawella West).

The GN was a cousin twice removed and that, for Mohan, was a qualifier to receiving aid. It is likely that the GN was reciprocating a past favour and that Mohan may also reciprocate sometime in the future. These are forms of exchange that signify social pressure in the direction of the accumulation of wealth in view of redistribution, what de Sardan (1999: 43) calls ‘the logics of redistributive accumulation’.

Households for whom kinship and friendship ties served as conduits of social support in the past were inclined to depend on them in the present, even if the present took place in an extreme environment. Kith and kin are bound by emotional and physical support networks (Barnshaw, 2006; Quarantelli, 1960) and social acts of redistributive accumulation (de Sardan, 1999), which have been crucial in reconstructing livelihoods post-tsunami. These networks embody two distinct forms of redistributive transfers: horizontal transfers between equally poor kith and kin and vertical transfers from wealthier to poorer kith and kin (e.g. GNs to households). Wealthier kith and kin in vertical transfers occupy an intermediate position between ‘reciprocal’ and ‘patron’ as they hold kinship or friendship ties with households, whilst occupying a higher financial and/or political position compared to households.

### ***3.5.4 Political Patronage***

Traditionally, political institutions in Sri Lanka have a limited role and few resources. Sub-national level political institutions played a minor role in the tsunami rebuilding process. However, individual politicians became significant as an informal means of accessing aid. This reiterates everyday life and politics of Sri Lankan society wherein, since independence, politicians have moved in to assume the ‘personalistic’ ties between the lowest levels of the administration and the population (Hettige, 1984; Spencer, 1990). Local government and

NGO officials, CBO office bearers, and key informants reported ‘political interference’ in the form of requests for particular households to be included in beneficiary lists for housing, fishing, or other livelihood needs. Politicization in the distribution of aid was reported across all political factions. The higher proportion of households who reported such politicization in Kudawella West than in Kirinda alludes to the political background of the Tangalle Divisional Secretariat and its emergence as a political ‘hot bed’ for competing interests in reconstruction efforts (Table 4).

The politician and political party one supported played a key role in access to networks of political patronage. Singith, who lost his day boat in the tsunami, received an Entitlement Certificate and was eligible for a new boat. However, when government aid was distributed, there was an unexpected turn of events:

They brought a big container and, publicly, boats were distributed—but, only among their supporters! In the end, they just walked over helpless people like us (*ibid.*).

Singith’s household did not support the political party of the Minister of Fisheries in office at the time and cited this as the reason for discrimination. For political patrons, mass support gave them political clout, which translated into opportunities for acquiring personal wealth, social entry, and improved status in the wider political arena. The outcome at the local level was that supporter clients gained access to aid, while others, such as Singith’s household, were excluded.

Some households attempted to maneuver political influence in their favour. Piyatissa (57 years), for example, was a crew member of a multiday boat in Kudawella West who also helped his wife with their supplementary business of coir-making. He lost both fishing gear and coir machines in the tsunami, but was not compensated for his losses. He explains his experience

of seeking redress from the former Deputy Minister of Fisheries:

The Minister is like a brother to me. I was in that party those days. [...] I sat with him. In the midst of his bodyguards I reminded him of how I helped him get to the position he enjoys today. But, he got angry. He is alright with me now, but we didn't get any help from him. I was only asking him for what I lost (September 2008, Kudawella West).

As with networks of kith and kin, Piyatissa felt that the Minister was bound to express fundamental virtues; to repay his support to him in the run up to the position he now enjoyed. Here, the moral obligation was further strengthened by the conviction that he was a rightful tsunami beneficiary.

Being government-established cooperatives, a considerable amount of political interference was reported in FCSs. The Kirinda (Muslim) FCS has a history of political interventions where public resources have been channeled to particular fishermen via society loan programmes. Rummy, who has been the society Treasurer since 2000, relays his experience:

In 2002, our FCS got 2 lakhs<sup>29</sup> with instructions from the Fisheries Minister that it be distributed to people in his political party. We have records. In 2005, 1 lakh came from another Minister with similar instructions. In 2008, political intervention came in the form of a tsunami loan programme from yet another Minister. Instructions were, '20,000 rupees each to the following, 5000 rupees each to the following, and so on'. The repayment installment and interest were also specified. They are now paying back and we send monthly reports to the Ministry (October 2008, Kirinda).

Rummy's explanation draws a parallel with other FCSs in Sri Lanka, where political favouritism is entrenched in day-to-day operations (Amarasinghe, 2006). The authority and power gained from their official positions enabled politicians to lend informal aid to households as they did

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<sup>29</sup> One lakh is equivalent to 100,000 Sri Lankan rupees (USD 911).

before the tsunami.

The bargaining power of households in relationships of political patronage must not be underestimated. Colliers Housing (Kirinda) was funded by Colliers International—an INGO—designed by a renowned Japanese architect, and managed by a local project team from Colombo. The project had the patronage of the government. However, several structural and cultural design flaws contributed to discontent and resentment among the residents. As Fawzi (50 years), a one day boatman and resident in this scheme, comments:

It is impossible to live in these houses. They are not worth a cent! But, we are destitute people and have to live with what was given. The politicians never visited. Not even to see what the INGO had built! We got no assistance from them—I will vouch for it any day. We voted for them, but never again (October 2008, Kirinda).

Fawzi was disappointed by the fact that the politicians who gave their blessings to this project never intervened to rectify the shortcomings. Households were not always 'passive' victims in relationships with 'dominant' political patrons; the latter constantly faced the risk of losing their supporters.

Local politicians who have established themselves as a key medium of patronage and power at the local level were a striking feature in this study. Similar to politicians in India (Jeffrey, 2000), they wielded their influence in government or with persons in authority to obtain benefits for those whom they favour. The bargaining power of households in these networks must not be underestimated. Overall, political patronage pre-existed the tsunami, but has been reproduced and consolidated as aid became incorporated into the exchange relation forged between political patrons and voters (Korf et al., 2010). This has made households without access to political patronage more vulnerable post-tsunami.

### *3.5.5 Downside of the SLF: Power, Relationships, Space, and History*

Asymmetrical relations of power, embedded in four interconnected informal social networks, have shaped the post-tsunami livelihoods recovery process. They represent three distinct forms of power transfers: horizontal, vertical, and intermediate. Horizontal transfers were made with the expectation that help given now will be reciprocated when required in the future or to spread risk and smooth consumption over time (e.g. reciprocal credit and kith and kin support), vertical transfers were made for reasons of patronage (e.g. bribery networks and political patronage), and intermediate transfers were made where kith and kin adopted a position between reciprocal and patron (e.g. GN who holds familial ties with a household).

‘TSP’ in the SLF provides some scope for considering these forms of power with reference to formal networks. Yet, this aspect of power proves insignificant in the Sri Lankan context where formal political bodies played a minor role in post-tsunami planning and decision making, and political power was routinely exercised through informal means. It may also be possible to link power to the ‘social capital’ component of the SLF; as Bebbington (1999) asserts, social capital inheres in the types of relationship that allow access and is thus a critical precursor to access being possible.<sup>30</sup> However, ‘social capital’ embodies a weak link to ‘TSP’ in the SLF as policy processes and power relationships are seen to operate merely through specific institutions and organizations that influence people’s choice of ‘livelihoods strategies’. In reality, household relationships with local government officials and politicians were unequal, exploitative, and disempowering as well as inclusive and mutually supportive. This inflexible

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<sup>30</sup> Yet, in mediating access to other livelihood assets social capital may not be ‘neutral’ as is often portrayed. As Fine (2001) argues, social capital introduces various social concerns without considering fundamentals, such as party political action, and the controversial politics surrounding modern-day struggles for livelihood.

representation of power means that livelihoods are reduced to a mechanistic definition where they become an outcome of rational choice. The SLF overlooks the varying levels of power in patron–client relationships, drawing attention away from the potential of poorer people to claim support from the powerful.

There are further quandaries with ‘social capital’ as it fails to cater to the realistic situation of post-tsunami informal social networks. While ‘social capital’ tends to portray networks in rigid vertical or horizontal terms, it fails to capture the dimensions of kith and kin in intermediate positions. Horizontal transfers identified in this study are critical of the role of trust, normative obligations, and expectation in ‘social capital’ that ensure network members provide assistance when needed. Strong pre-tsunami links to kith and kin, for example, did not guarantee help post-tsunami. Furthermore, informal social networks were neither a resource accessed by all households nor a source of support for all those who did access them. Some households did not have opportunity to engage in informal transactions because they were injured, too poor to offer *kappam*, or did not have kith and kin in the ‘right places’ or links to political patrons. These shortcomings give rise to problems in the social capital concept upon which this component of the SLF is based. As Meagher (2005: 232) rightly argues, social capitalist approaches are inclined to portray networks in terms of one or the other: bonds or bridges (Narayan, 1999), fragments or flows (Castells, 1997), fix or flux (Geschiere and Meyer, 1998). The tendency of the SLF to depict networks in terms of abstract models of solidarity and connectivity is clearly inadequate for a coherent analysis of post-tsunami livelihoods.

Incorporating the spatial and temporal dimension in post-tsunami recovery is crucial. Although a relatively small proportion, the element of migrant workers in Kirinda reiterate the fact that multi level, not merely micro level, analysis is needed to gain an understanding of livelihoods (de Haan and Zoomers, 2003). Informal social networks reflect relationships

fostered by circumstances unique to the post-tsunami environment as well as pre-existing relationships. The outcome is a complex post-tsunami depiction of continuity and change. Different households may have reached the same post-tsunami livelihood status through completely different pathways (de Haan and Zoomers, 2005). The SLF tends to conceal such variation in historical trajectories. Thus, facilitating a disaggregated analysis of the multifarious networks that have emerged in post-tsunami recovery is beyond the ability of the SLF.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This paper set out to explore the role of informal social networks in post-tsunami Sri Lanka and thereby assess the analytical values of the SLF and the social networks approach in understanding post-tsunami livelihoods recovery. Four key interlinked forms of informal social networks were examined. Networks of reciprocity, linking individuals in the local community and beyond, have been critical in helping break the problem of access to credit post-tsunami. Households have engaged in bribery networks with AGAs, GNs, and FIs in order to access aid, regardless of their eligibility for it. Households have benefited from relationships with kith and kin in equal economic and social status as well as those in higher positions. Networks of political patronage, wherein local politicians mediate household access to aid, have also played a role in livelihoods recovery. Households have actively constructed these four forms of networks by consciously nurturing acquaintances, selecting kith and kin, and strategically investing in those types of ties that give the highest returns or that they value the most. Yet, they were neither a resource accessed by all households nor a source of support for all those who did access them.

People's ability to combine the most advantageous mixes of ties was not unrestrained since

wider processes of the post-tsunami environment influenced the extent and types of social resources at their disposal. Reiterating the works of others (Barnshaw, 2006; Devereux, 1999), the tsunami impact has rendered many horizontal transfers, such as reciprocal credit and kith and kin support, ineffective. Post-tsunami aid processes, such as housing relocation, have also disrupted these transfers. Consequently, informal social networks with links to formal aid structures have come to the fore in livelihoods recovery. Such networks have embodied unequal, exploitative, and disempowering as well as inclusive and mutually supportive relationships. Relationships of unequal social exchanges depicted in studies of everyday society (de Sardan, 1999; Harriss-White, 1997, 1999; Jeffrey, 2000), have in effect been transformed and reproduced post-tsunami (Korf et al., 2010). Networks do not simply reflect, but also reproduce inequalities.

Turning to the analytical value of the SLF, the 'TSP' and 'social asset' components meant to facilitate a discussion of power in the framework, are insufficient in portraying household links with formal structures. This inability to examine important power relationships obstructs a coherent analysis of livelihoods (Baumann and Sinha, 2001; de Haan and Zoomers, 2005; Lautze and Raven-Roberts, 2006). There are further dilemmas with 'social capital'. On the one hand, it fails to capture the dimensions of kith and kin in intermediate positions as it confines analysis to *a priori* horizontal or vertical transfers (Meagher, 2005). On the other, it assumes erroneously that notions of trust, obligations, and expectation will ensure network members provide support when needed. Informal social networks also encompass a spatial and historical dimension, which the 'snapshot' approach in the SLF fails to capture (de Haan and Zoomers, 2003, 2005).

The social networks approach lends itself to an unraveling of the processes through which networks emerge, the meanings attached to social relationships within networks, and an

examination of shifting power relations therein. It supports the viewpoint that social networks are as much about power as they are about solidarity. This gives it an ability to unveil internal differentiation in access to support—an attribute that has typified post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka. There is a need to be concerned with widely used formulations, such as the SLF, and concepts that have an immediate intuitive appeal, such as social capital.<sup>31</sup> This paper offers an alternative lens for conceptualizing livelihoods post-disaster. If livelihoods research and intervention in post-tsunami Sri Lanka and disasters in general are to address ground level realities, paying attention to the various forms of informal social networks is paramount.

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<sup>31</sup> Several ideas embedded in the concept of social capital have made a noteworthy contribution to our understandings of poverty, power, and social exclusion. Yet, as evident in the works of Fine (2001) and Meagher (2005), contemporary interest in social capital by social scientists, policymakers, and practitioners is misguided and warrants careful reconsideration.

## CHAPTER 4

### READING 'STORIES' OF CORRUPTION: PRACTICES AND MEANINGS OF EVERYDAY CORRUPTION IN POST-TSUNAMI SRI LANKA

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#### 4.1 Abstract

This paper examines the practices and meanings of corruption in two post-tsunami fisher villages in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka. It brings to the fore three key forms of corruption, which can be identified within the post-tsunami context. It is argued that the entrenched system of corruption has benefited powerful officials of local government agencies and non-government organizations, office bearers of community-based organizations, politicians as well as householders who possess financial or social wealth. Different meanings have been attached to corruption. While it is portrayed as undermining morality, it is also seen as a social obligation and a way in which people construe and construct their relationship with the state. The paper adds to studies on low level corruption involving officials and politicians in the Third World. It makes a contribution specifically to the few intensive ethnographic accounts of corruption in South Asia. It stimulates discussions on the practices and meanings of local level corruption and emphasizes the broader relevance of the study for understanding the phenomenon in diverse socio-political locales.

*Keywords:* Corruption; Ethnography; Rural livelihoods; 2004 tsunami; Sri Lanka

## 4.2 Introduction

Nimal grabbed everything. He's a person who has grabbed more than enough. I did not beat around the bush, I asked him directly, 'what did you do with the society fee you collected from us?'. I asked him why our names were not on the list. I was a member. Tsunami money was given to societies to be distributed. Everyone else's names were there, but not mine. He had a relative of his in my place (September 2008).

This was an interview with a fisherman who alleged that post-tsunami aid money due to him had been misappropriated by the President of the village Fisheries Cooperative Society (FCS). Villagers were not unfamiliar with acts of corruption by local government officials, officials of non-government organizations (NGOs), politicians, and office bearers of community-based organizations (CBOs). It was something they encountered, exploited, or fell victim to in their day-to-day lives. Yet, the widespread allegations of corruption were an intriguing aspect that surfaced during post-tsunami fieldwork in South Sri Lanka.

This paper examines the practices and meanings of corruption at the local level in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. Drawing on field research in two fisher villages in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka, the paper explores three key forms of corruption that have surfaced in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery. The paper heeds the insistence that ethnographic methods should inform analyses of ordinary people's experiences (Megoran, 2006). It focuses on the narratives of corruption emerging from the study villages and then looks at the system of corruption. The paper contributes to research that has taken a systematic and intensive ethnographic approach to everyday corruption (Gupta, 1995; Jeffrey, 2000; Parry, 2000).

The paper draws on relevant insights from socio-political and anthropological accounts of corruption in the Third World. Studies on corruption in India argue that state officials abuse their office for private accumulation and that powerful individuals tend to benefit from corrupt

transactions (Harriss-White, 1997; Jeffrey, 2000; Wade, 1982). Corruption is shown to be ingrained in relationships of mediation and political representation in Sri Lanka (Brow, 1988; Spencer, 1990) and India (Corbridge & Kumar, 2002; Jeffrey, 2002; Ruud, 2001; Simon, 2009), and relationships of clientelism in Africa (Szeftel, 2000). The paper contributes to these discussions by demonstrating how the system of corruption was advantageous to powerful local government officials, NGO officials, CBO office bearers, and politicians as well as households who were wealthy in terms of financial status or social connections. In exploring the meanings of corruption, the paper positions itself alongside studies that link corruption to a type of moral legitimacy (de Sardan, 1999; Myrdal, 1968; Parry, 1989) and those that portray it as a medium through which local people construe and construct the state (Gupta, 1995) or resist and respond to the state (Scott, 1985; Tripp, 1997). The paper advances these notions by revealing the new moral urgency concerning corruption that emerged in post-tsunami recovery.

Post-tsunami provides an ideal opportunity to probe ongoing corruption since disasters reveal the nature of social structures, including informal connections (Klinenberg, 2002). Aid agencies and policy-oriented research institutes, which have produced much of the existing research on the topic, link occurrences of post-tsunami corruption to a weak administrative framework devoid of mechanisms for transparency and accountability (ADB, 2005; TEC, 2006a; TISL, 2007). A handful of scholarly contributions assert that the recovery effort produced particular opportunities for local officials and politicians in exercising power and profit-making (Kapadia, 2008; Lyons, 2009; Moonesinghe, 2007). Despite these reflections, no published ethnography has yet attempted to understand post-tsunami corruption at the micro village-level in Sri Lanka.

The paper is structured in four sections. The first section reviews the practices and

meanings of everyday corruption and how these can be drawn into a study of post-tsunami recovery in Sri Lanka. The next outlines the background and tsunami experience of the study villages and the research methods used. This provides the basis for interpreting the 'stories' of corruption, which are grouped into three main ethnographic forms, in the subsequent section. The final section concludes by drawing upon the wider relevance of the research for understanding everyday corruption in divergent socio-political settings.

### **4.3 Practices and Meanings of Everyday Corruption**

Corruption is a central component in manipulating power in order to maintain social position and economic advantage. While most authors recognize the complexity of defining corruption (Brown & Cloke, 2004), the phenomenon is commonly depicted as the abuse of public office for private gain (World Bank, 1997: 8). Although this is the general public concept of corruption, how it is practiced at the local level and the connotations people attach to it are important in understanding its manifestation. Writings on post-colonial corruption began in the 1970s, when Myrdal (1968) promoted the perspective that development cannot be seriously tackled without confronting the problem of corruption. Among others, he emphasized improved governance and a firming up of moral standards, especially among the higher echelons of the civil services, if corruption is to be curbed. Studies on corruption in the Third World have since proliferated. However, those focusing on everyday corruption at the local level are limited and few systematic and intensive ethnographic studies have been conducted (Gupta, 1995; Jeffrey, 2000; Parry, 2000).

Recent studies on corruption in India have highlighted state officials who abuse their office for private accumulation and powerful individuals who tend to forge ahead through corrupt

relations. Wade (1982) explains the basic patterns of subcontinental corruption in his classic study of corruption in the irrigation bureaucracy of a South Indian state, as close intermeshing of economic and political calculations in exchanges between patrons and clients. Harriss-White (1997) argues that informal 'shadow states' in India are promoted by state officials seeking ancillary incomes from their official positions and through intermediate classes, such as agricultural merchants and rich peasants, seeking subsidies and concessions from the state. Jeffrey (2000) draws attention to networks of corrupt practice involving rich farmers and state officials that are implicated and embedded in local processes of class and cultural reproduction.

Corruption has been embedded in customary relationships of mediation and political representation. Studies describing the socio-political dynamics that transformed Sri Lankan village life in the 1980s expose politicians who intervene to channel various resources (e.g. housing) at the disposal of the state in directions that would reward and build the support of their followers and benefit their close kin (Brow, 1988, Spencer, 1990). In their analyses in rural India, Corbridge & Kumar (2002), Jeffrey (2002), and Simon (2009) show how communities link to the state through village-based brokers who support an agenda of corruption in the form of bribery, nepotism, and opportunism. A similar tendency is evident in Africa where, as Szeftel (2000) highlights, corruption is a key mechanism through which politicians build their electoral support. The role of the poor in all this must not be underestimated. As Ruud (2001: 121) writes with reference to a village in West Bengal, the poor approach the rich or powerful with an eye to winning something, to obtain what one does not have, or to make a cautious move against future mishaps.

Corruption also relates to a type of moral legitimacy. Myrdal (1968) saw the roots of corruption in developing regions in vestiges of traditions in pre-modern societies, where gifts, tributes, and other social obligations were customary and normal in social networks.

Describing gifts to funeral priests in the holy city of Benares, India, Parry (1989) shows how money is not treated as an impersonal instrument, but, like other gifts in kind, retains moral qualities. These early South Asian perspectives signified the need for greater cross-fertilization between corruption and morality. More recently, Parry (2000) claims that presumed widespread corruption in allocation of jobs, promotions, and contracts in India is complicated by a distinction between ‘gift’, ‘commission’, and ‘bribe’, and the varying degree of moral censure attached to such payments. Likewise, de Sardan (1999) finds that corruption in Africa is socially embedded in acts of negotiation, gift-giving, solidarity, predatory authority, and redistributive accumulation. Corruption is shown to exist in these contexts because it undermines a collection of moral values to which people are committed.

Corruption, and the narratives that surround it, are central to the understandings that local people have of the state. Gupta’s (1995: 389) analysis of state officials in North India illustrates that the discourse of corruption enables local people to construct the state symbolically and to define themselves as citizens. Drawing from Scott’s (1985) reasoning on everyday peasant resistance and open revolts, Tripp (1997) shows how people in Tanzania’s urban informal economy resist state policies by pursuing various strategies of noncompliance, including corrupt activities. They were not merely responding to necessity, but consciously and vigorously resisting the state (*ibid.*: 138). Corruption is used by local people to define what state actions are considered legitimate and how ideas of the rights of citizens and subjects are constituted as well as to make the state more responsive to their needs.

In sum, an analysis of corruption warrants awareness of everyday politics—the mundane and subtle expressions and acts of local officials, politicians, and people regarding the allocation of resources—as well as the value systems and cultural codes that permit a justification of corruption by those who practice it. This paper expands on the ethnographic

work of Gupta (1995), Jeffrey (2000), Parry (2000), and other writers on low level corruption in the Third World by exploring manifestations of corruption in rural villages in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka. It provides insights into three key forms of post-tsunami corruption—spoils of office, political patronage, and moral conceptions—showing that prevailing relationships and conceptions have become enmeshed in post-tsunami circumstances.

#### **4.4 Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka**

Death and destruction has been inherent to a Sri Lankan polity beset by civil war. The Northern and Eastern Provinces<sup>32</sup> have witnessed a concentrated ethnic conflict between the separatist forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the government of Sri Lanka since the 1980s. A range of complexities associated with this pre-existing warfare formed the backdrop against which the tsunami of 26 December 2004 occurred (Uyangoda, 2005). Yet, with natural disaster experiences confined to periodic droughts, floods, landslides, and occasional cyclones, the tsunami was the greatest natural disaster to hit Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe, 2005: 543).

Despite statistical variations in the demographic impact, it is estimated that 31,000 people were killed, 5,600 went missing, and 500,000–800,000 were displaced (Emmanuel, 2006: 7; IPS, 2005: 5; Oxfam International, 2005a: 2). For a country that had not previously experienced a disaster of such magnitude, there was general consensus that the relief effort was singularly successful in meeting the immediate needs of the affected people (SLDF, 2005). As the long

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<sup>32</sup> For administrative purposes, Sri Lanka is divided into 4 layers: 9 Provinces, 26 Districts (of which 14 are coastal Districts), 325 Divisional Secretariats, and 14,110 *Grama Niladbari* Divisions (villages), in descending order of hierarchy.

term recovery effort gathered pace, it faced the daunting task of assisting tsunami survivors to rebuild and recover their livelihoods. Five years on, livelihoods recovery has become a fraught process.

Corruption is widely held to have distorted post-tsunami policies and aid interventions, leading to irregular distribution of aid resources in Sri Lanka. The effect of these distortions has had to be borne mostly by the poorest of the tsunami-affected communities. An interim report on post-tsunami activities by the Auditor General (2005) revealed numerous irregularities in tsunami reconstruction, rehabilitation, and fund management, such as the lack of records on the collection of aid money and absence of any government sanctioned scheme for the utilization of this money. Media reports blamed ‘corrupt elements in the garb of public servants, who lined their pockets with tsunami relief’ (*The Island*, 2006) and ‘cronyism and corruption in the handling of beneficiary lists’ for contributing to an ‘unconscionable rape of the system’ (*Groundviews*, 2007).

Much of the existing research on post-tsunami corruption draws on the work of aid agencies or policy-oriented research institutes. Post-tsunami corruption has been linked to the inefficiency of government agencies and NGOs to install a transparent and accountable reconstruction programme (ADB, 2005; TEC, 2006a; TISL, 2007). Scholarly perspectives on post-tsunami corruption are limited to a handful of analyses. Studies by Moonesinghe (2007), Lyons (2009), and Kapadia (2008) reflect on how the recovery effort has tended to produce particular opportunities for exercising power and profit-making in corruption. A focused academic analysis on low level corruption, however, is clearly lacking.

The 2004 tsunami provides a window into ongoing situations of corruption in Sri Lanka and ongoing debates about the practices and meanings of corruption. At the heart of contemporary social science research on disasters, as summarized by Klinenberg (2002: 23–4),

is that extreme events offer ‘an excessiveness which allows us to perceive better the facts than in those places where, although no less essential, they still remain small-scale and involuted’ (Mauss, 1916; quoted in 1979). Situated in the aforementioned socio-political and anthropological contributions on the practices and meanings of local level corruption in the Third World, this paper investigates small-scale fisher livelihoods in two post-tsunami villages in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka, using a predominantly ethnographic approach.

#### ***4.4.1 Kudawella West and Kirinda Villages***

Small-scale fishing<sup>33</sup> was selected as the focus of research due to its extensive importance to livelihood in Sri Lanka in terms of employment, food security, and foreign exchange earnings (DFAR, 2005), and the severe impact it experienced in the tsunami (IPS, 2006; RADA, 2005). Harbour villages were suitable for the purpose of this study since fishing is the main livelihood in such villages. Although coastal Districts in the Northern and Eastern Provinces recorded the highest number of deaths due to the tsunami, they were precluded during fieldwork due to the prevailing security situation. The Hambantota District, a 151-km belt of land shown in Figure 2 (Chapter 1), recorded the second highest number of deaths in the Southern Province. The District is also significant in terms of fisheries production and is ranked fourth out of 14 coastal Districts in its contribution to national fish landings (Amarasinghe, 2006: 14).

Two of the three main fishing harbours in Hambantota are in the villages of Kudawella West and Kirinda (Chapter 1: Figure 2). They are located approximately 190 km and 270 km, respectively, from the commercial capital of Sri Lanka, Colombo. The fact that they represent

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<sup>33</sup> In comparison with commercial fishing, small-scale fishing uses less capital and energy, smaller fishing vessels, shorter trips close to the shore, targets a wider range of fish species, and uses multiple fishing gear and strategies to suit the seasonality of fish stocks (FAO, 2004).

villages that were severely affected in the tsunami proved instructive for the wider project. They recorded the highest destruction to harbour infrastructure and housing compared to other villages around the District's three main harbours (DCS, 2005: 4, 7; DFAR, 2005: 7), and, as Table 1 (Chapter 1) shows, a significant number of deaths and destruction to fisheries equipment.

Approximately 40–50 per cent of households receive *Samurdhi* or national poverty alleviation scheme benefits in these villages (Chapter 1: Table 1). A mixed bag of traditional and mechanized fishing techniques are employed by fishermen. Traditional techniques comprise mainly beach seine boats (12 m in length) and non-motorized boats (3–10 m in length), while mechanized techniques include multiday boats (45–50 ft in length) with cabin and ice hold, day boats (28 ft in length) with inboard engines, fibre reinforced plastic boats (17–23 ft in length) propelled by outboard engines, and outboard motorized boats, which are traditional crafts powered by an outboard engine. Secondary livelihoods, such as maldivian/dried fish-making, local shops, and coir-making, typify the informal sector workforce. In other words, labour relations are based largely on casual employment, kinship, or personal and social relations rather than contractual arrangements (ILO, 2005).

Kudawella West is home to a majority Sinhala-Buddhist population and Kirinda a mixed Sinhala-Buddhist and Sri Lankan Malay population, thus representing two predominant ethno-religious groups in the Hambantota District. The villages differ in terms of their political attributes. Kudawella West belongs to the Tangalle Divisional Secretariat, the very residence of the incumbent President of Sri Lanka, and has benefited from both large-scale (harbour) and small-scale (rural roads) infrastructural investments. Tangalle is also the political base of a nationalist political party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, and renowned as a highly contested Divisional Secretariat. The Tissamaharama Divisional Secretariat, to which Kirinda belongs, is

considered marginal in comparison.

#### ***4.4.2 Doing Ethnography***

Data were collected over one year of fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2008–2009. Familiarization was acquired through a previous study (Mubarak, 2007) and intermittent work and research experiences in the area in 2007–2008. As Megoran (2006) maintains, ethnography is a profitable strategy for geographers seeking to understand the meanings and senses that others make of their world. The few, valiant publications that document low level corruption and villagers' encounters with local government institutions employ ethnographic techniques (Gupta, 1995; Parry, 2000). Drawing from these insights, an ethnography was judged the most appropriate method in three respects: first, corrupt networks can usually only be recognized through intimate knowledge of actors in the field; second, paying attention to non-verbal aspects of interviewing was crucial in terms of unpacking the nuances and tensions of the seemingly 'ordinary' lives of villagers; third, loosely structured interviews enable the researcher to guide the interview giving consideration to traumatic experiences of respondents and their sensitivity to certain issues.

Narrative techniques, according to Miles and Crush (1993), have considerable potential for recovering hidden stories, contesting academic androcentrism and eurocentrism, and reinstating the marginalized as makers of their own past (i.e. giving them a voice to be heard). Focusing on narratives was also crucial to explore the wide range of meanings attributed to the term 'corruption' in the context of fieldwork. The strategy was, therefore, to listen to people's 'stories' and preserve the complexity of narratives.

Being the primary functional unit of society, households were used as the unit of analysis.

Households are a co-resident group of individuals who share most aspects of consumption, drawing on and apportioning a common collection of resources, including labour, to ensure material production (Schmink, 1984: 89). The sample comprised 80 households—48 from Kudawella West and 32 from Kirinda—whose primary source of income was fishing or fishing-related activities. It also represented variations in secondary livelihoods, ethno-religious backgrounds, and post-tsunami housing location. Households relocated from Kudawella West resided in housing schemes in the villages of Mahawela, Seenimodara East/West, Pahajjawa, Nidahasgama East, and Nakulugamuwa South, while those relocated from Kirinda lived in housing schemes in Kirinda itself and the village of Andaragasyaya (Chapter 1: Figure 2). Household responses were examined alongside views of government officials (17), NGO officials (12), CBO office bearers (13), politicians (7), village leaders (4), and key informants (19).

The timeframe for ‘post-tsunami recovery’ varied across households. The start of recovery was defined as the time in which a given household engaged in reviving at least one aspect of their everyday livelihood (e.g. fishing occupation or housing). Recovery is open-ended; some households reported they had reached pre-tsunami income levels, but in general there was reluctance on the part of households to concede they had regained livelihoods completely since other aspects of their livelihood had changed.

Village interviews were conducted mostly in the Sinhala language; on two occasions that respondents communicated in Bahasa Melayu, the language of Malays, a translator was used. What follows is an examination of the narratives of corruption emerging from the study villages and thereby how corruption is practiced and the connotations attached to it. To protect the anonymity of respondents, all names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

## 4.5 Reading 'Stories' of Corruption

### 4.5.1 *Spoils of Office*

The government was the central authority in the tsunami recovery effort. Yet, in practice responsibilities were poorly demarcated between central and local levels of government, policy-making remained driven from the centre, and there was no solid framework for aid disbursement by NGOs at the village level—an administrative system that lends itself to issues of decentralization in Sri Lanka (Porter, 2004). NGOs too rarely gave consideration to planned and accountable interventions as the tsunami recovery operation was driven by the need to deliver goods and services as quickly as possible. Overall, the recovery effort was characterized by an uncoordinated, disorganized, and confounded aid mechanism that lacked a comprehensive system of accountability and transparency (ADB, 2005; TEC, 2006a; TISL, 2007). Implementation became the subjective interpretations of local government officials, NGO officials, and CBO office bearers, who thereby gained opportunity to maximize the spoils of office.

At the local level of government, Assistant Government Agents (AGAs), who head Divisional Secretariats, played a key coordinating role in the recovery effort. They were the most important operational point of contact. On the one hand, they provided information on government regulations and requirements to NGOs and, on the other, introduced them to relevant government officials. AGAs also maintained beneficiary lists, identified village needs, assisted in selecting locations for housing schemes, approved building plans, issued various permits, and authorized aid. *Grama Niladharis* (GNs), or village officers, conducted assessments on housing and livelihood needs in their villages and compiled beneficiary lists, which were

provided to the AGA. Ground level progress was monitored by AGAs mainly through GNs. In reality, however, there was no clear mechanism for accountability. To be selected as a beneficiary or granted specific compensation for housing or livelihood, households depended on certification by these officials who thereby acquired substantial discretionary power.

In the Fisheries Sector, Fisheries Inspectors (FIs) head FI Divisions, the smallest fisheries administrative unit.<sup>34</sup> They are responsible for ensuring that fishing activities at sites under their purview comply with the various ordinances and acts governing such activity. Among others, they register fishing boats and gear, renew these registrations, and issue fishing licenses. After the tsunami, the loss or destruction of fishing boats and gear had to be substantiated by an Entitlement Certificate, detailing the type and amount of loss—a methodology introduced by the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to help government and non-government aid actors identify genuine beneficiaries. FIs issued Entitlement Certificates based on pre-tsunami information on registered boats and gear, collated against post-tsunami losses reported by fishermen. For unregistered boats, such as non-motorized or beach seine boats used by casual fishermen, issue of Entitlement Certificates was dependant on the FI's knowledge that a given boat existed pre-tsunami. As Piyasiri, the FI in Kirinda since 2008, explains:

I had authority to distribute Entitlement Certificates in whatever way I thought fit. Certainly, higher authorities have to countersign the certificate. But, if 200 certificates went from each FI, about 2000–3000 certificates would have ended up on their desks during this period! They had no way of verifying the accuracy of what was written in all these. So, I could write out certificates on whatever I want, to whomever I want (September 2009).

Entitlement Certificates had to be countersigned by both the Assistant Director of the District

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<sup>34</sup> This differs from the smallest administration unit, the village. Kudawella West, together with four other villages, belongs to the Kudawella FI Division, and Kirinda, together with 12 other villages, to the Kirinda FI Division.

Fisheries Office (DFO) and the AGA, but this was a mere formality. Fishermen seeking redress lodged complaints with the FI, or the local police or the GN, which were also referred to the FI. Thus, FIs enjoyed considerable discretionary power in legitimizing a loss for the purpose of compensation.

It was an ‘open secret’ that a 5000-rupee *kappam* to the FI would guarantee an Entitlement Certificate and 10,000–50,000-rupee *kappam* to the AGA or GN would secure a place on a housing beneficiary list. These transactions took place regardless of whether households were eligible for aid or not. For fishermen, such as Rajind (49 years) in Kudawella West, this was a clear disadvantage. His house was completely damaged in the tsunami and situated within the 100 m ‘no build’ buffer zone, a coastal regulation implemented post-tsunami.<sup>35</sup> Buffer zones were associated with two policy frameworks for housing aid (TAFREN 2005: 1–14). Those outside the zone were eligible for government grants and donor aid to rebuild to rebuild in situ. Those inside the zone had to be resettled in new housing projects, funded and constructed by donors. Thus, Rajind was eligible for relocated housing, but as he comments:

The GN sent us a note asking for 50,000 rupees to get on the beneficiary list. We didn’t have that sort of money! So, we lost out (September 2008).

Rajind’s inability to pay the *kappam* that was demanded resulted in his house being categorized as ‘partly damaged’ and ‘outside the buffer zone’. He received the relevant government cash grant (250,000 rupees), but this has been inadequate for meeting the reconstruction costs of his

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<sup>35</sup> A 1981 Act which defined the ‘no build’ coastal zone as 300 m, although not strictly enforced, was reinforced post-tsunami as ‘buffer zones’ of 200 m in the North and East and 100 m elsewhere. In October 2005, amid criticisms of an arbitrary 100/200-metre blanket restriction and the looming Presidential Election, the policy was abandoned in favour of individually specified setback zones in different coastal areas based on extant conservation guidelines (Hyndman, 2007).

house. Bribery demands left households who were too poor to bribe in a vulnerable position.

In the non-government sphere, local NGO officials were accused of similar malpractices. In initiating aid distribution in the villages, many INGOs deployed local individuals, often from Colombo or Hambantota. Shafeek (61 years), President of the Kirinda (Muslim) FCS, relays his experience with a reputed INGO:

The *suddha* [white man] came here, stood under this very tree, and asked me 'Did you get these things? Were these things done? Is it being done?' I can't explain to the *suddha*, I don't know enough English, so I have to tell the local officials who came with him. The *suddha* left satisfied. But, a few days later, those local officials came here and got household lists from me. They asked me, 'Who is this person? Who is that person? How is it for that person?' They got the complete rundown from me. Then, they formed a society out of households who could offer *kappam*. It was just a front. They gave things to those households and struck others off the list. [...] At the end of the day, aid had not gone to the person who should have got it! They [local officials] made money. There was nobody whom we could report to. The *suddhas* came, but because we can't speak English we explain to the local gentlemen who come with him. I tell him one thing and he tells the *suddha* another (October 2008).

Shafeek's response underscores the lack of a systematic and participatory approach to beneficiary selection, the absence of a mechanism for accountability and redress, and complete disregard of the implications of the language barrier. This enabled local officials of the INGO to perpetrate corrupt acts with little punitive risks.

Some INGOs approached a villager, 'a catcher' who was influential in the area or known to them, who in turn gathered a small group of potential beneficiaries into a society. The Tsunami Fisheries Association, an unregistered CBO for fishermen in Kirinda, was floated in 2005 by an INGO that arrived in the village post-tsunami, in conjunction with an influential *mudalali*, or merchant, in Kirinda. The *mudalali*, installed as its President, was accused by villagers of forming a committee of his own relatives and close associates who thereby benefited from the inflow of aid. Similar cases of nepotism were reported in Kudawella West. The observation of Sunil (53 years), a fisherman in Kudawella West, exemplifies overall household perceptions of

such CBOs:

Say I'm the office bearer. I have my son. I don't give the loan to the eligible person—I will give it to my son. One of my own people will propose it and another will second it. The eligible person has no say! (August 2008).

These CBOs were set up on an *ad hoc* basis with little consultation and little or no verification of the credibility of the people chosen to lead them. The expectation of INGOs was that these would gradually grow into village-wide CBOs. However, CBOs, such as the Tsunami Fisheries Association, wound up within two years of establishment, and with them the INGO projects.

Nepotism was not confined to CBOs established post-tsunami—the Kudawella West FCS is a case in point. FCSs are government-established CBOs that channel credit/subsidies, maintain savings accounts, and supply fishing requisites (e.g. fuel and fishing gear) for fishermen. FCS President, Nimal (43 years), joined as a member of the Kudawella West FCS in 1995; he later held the post of President in both the FCS (2001–to date) and the Hambantota District FCS Association (2002–2006), the umbrella organization which amalgamates village-level FCSs across the District. Using an INGO donation, acquired via the District FCS Association, Nimal launched a credit programme offering interest-free loans to households whose members had died in the tsunami. The general perception was that Nimal manipulated his position of authority to secure funds for his personal benefit and for his relatives and close associates. The commentary referred to in the introduction of this paper typified household reactions.

It was important to query how decision making and management was monitored in the Kudawella West FCS. Customarily, monthly General Meetings of FCSs are attended by a government representative from the DFO, usually the Cooperative Officer or the FI. Nimal's

aggressive rejoinder to the question posed in this context was:

I have studied up to the Advance Level Examination and held the post of President in societies since 1993. I have participated in many workshops and have extensive knowledge of the Fisheries Sector. I have held several posts in organizations related to this field. So, with that experience and knowledge I don't need an officer to sit in on meetings. Besides, it is because of people like us that the cooperative movement developed. [...] So, I know the cooperative law—I know what is meant by 'cooperative fisheries' and the rights of the members of a FCS. How a democratic fisheries cooperative should function, the responsibilities of the officers, the rights of the members—all that I know. Not all, but I know enough to make decisions. Whatever problem that arises at a General Meeting, I have the capacity to resolve it. I don't need an officer. There are no problems that arise which can't be resolved by the President, by me. If I think it necessary, I will invite them (October 2008).

The statement clearly portrays the authority Nimal wields. Importantly, nepotism was commonplace in the Kudawella West FCS in pre-tsunami times. The society was in fact dormant when the tsunami occurred due to malpractices of its office bearers. This also reflects trends in channelling resources to fishermen in FCSs throughout the country (Amarasinghe, 2006). Manifestations of nepotism, however, have been more extensive post tsunami due to the opportunistic environment.

Post-tsunami aid disbursement foresaw the potential for local level corruption as it depended on unrestricted powers of not only local government officials (Lyon, 2009), but also NGO officials and CBO office bearers. The system of corruption benefited these individuals by way of financial accumulation. Households who could afford to pay *kappam* or had familial or friendship ties with local officials and office bearers were also at an advantage. As studies in rural India have suggested, powerful people tend to win out in relation to corruption (Harriss-White, 1997; Jeffrey, 2002; Wade, 1982). In Sri Lanka, this characteristic pre-existed the tsunami as evident from reflections on post-colonial and post-independence corruption (Amarasinghe, 2006; Brow, 1988; Myrdal, 1968; Spencer, 1990), and the case of the Kudawella West FCS. It has, however, been consolidated and reproduced post-tsunami. This can be

attributed to the influx of aid organizations and resources post-tsunami, the absence of an overall comprehensive mechanism for managing and accounting for this incursion, and the mounting demand for aid at the local level.

#### ***4.5.2 Political Patronage***

Traditionally, political institutions in Sri Lanka have a limited role and few resources. Sub-national level political institutions played a minor role in the tsunami rebuilding process in Sri Lanka. However, individual politicians became significant as an informal means of accessing aid. The government's centralized framework in implementing post-tsunami recovery meant that the administrative machinery was virtually inaccessible to the ordinary villager. The politician, with his contacts to all departments, became the ideal conduit. This mirrored the flourishing tradition of political patronage in Sri Lanka, wherein political patrons have been instrumental in creating and limiting various opportunities for the clients of the state (Amarasinghe, 1989; Brow, 1988; Spencer, 1990).

In the allocation of housing, the government stipulated that each family unit in an affected household be given separate housing. Some households secured housing aid for their relatives by claiming that they were residing in the one house before the tsunami. In such occasions, households sought to legitimize their claim by seeking the intervention of politicians. The fact that the given claim had no grounds for justification was known not only to the politician, but also to the local government officials concerned. However, the power politicians could wield in appointments, transfers, and promotions of public servants is such that officers generally complied with the politician's orders. As found in rural North India, local government officials were motivated to assist politicians out of a fear that the opposition to a directive of a

politician would have serious repercussions (Jeffrey, 2002).

Political patronage in aid disbursement is not a novel phenomenon—the Kirinda (Muslim) FCS<sup>36</sup> is a case in point. Romy (48 years), FCS Treasurer since 2000, reports:

In 2002, our FCS got 2 lakhs<sup>37</sup> with instructions from the Fisheries Minister that it be distributed to people in his political party. We have records. In 2005, 1 lakh came from another Minister with similar instructions. In 2008, political intervention came in the form of a tsunami loan programme from yet another Minister. Instructions were, ‘20,000 rupees each to the following, 5000 rupees each to the following, and so on’. The repayment installment and interest were also specified. They are now paying back and we send monthly reports to the Ministry (October 2008).

The Kirinda (Muslim) FCS is run with government patronage and could therefore be manipulated by politicians in the government to channel state resources to their political supporters and electorates. In fact, it has been found that the channelling of state resources to fishermen in FCSs fluctuate heavily with shifts in political hierarchy in Sri Lanka (Amarasinghe, 2006).

Be it as a member of a FCS or in an individual capacity, political patronage depends on one’s political affiliations. Malini (38 years), the wife of a fisherman from Kudawella West, relates her experience after her household was relocated in Navadivi Purawa (Pahajjawa):

Nuwanga *mudalali*’s [Provincial Council Minister] water bowser went around, but we were ignored! The people responsible for those bowsers said they were told not to give us water. We had to buy our drinking water. Even the house we’re living in now—they were not going to let us have it. It’s through Amaranath *mudalali* [Provincial Council Minister] that we finally got this place (September 2008).

Malini’s household did not support Nuwanga *mudalali*’s political party and this is cited as the

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<sup>36</sup> Kirinda comprises two FCSs, Kirinda (Muslim) and Kirindagama (Sinhalese).

<sup>37</sup> Lakh is a Sri Lankan measure of 100,000 rupees; equivalent to 880 United States Dollars.

reason for discrimination. Their house was completely destroyed and they were eligible for new housing, but it was made possible only through the intervention of a Provincial Council Minister they supported.

Gaining the support of a politician from an opposing political party was not entirely impossible; yet, households had to be willing to pay the price. Mahinda is a politician who made his debut as a candidate at the Southern Provincial Council Elections in October 2009. He was also the Chairman of tsunami recovery operations of an INGO in Hambantota in 2005-2007. Mahinda was responsible for approving building plans for households that his INGO had pledged support. He relays his encounter with a fisherman from Kirinda:

A guy came—he came to my room in fear and trepidation. He did not even sit—I made him. He told me, ‘I have a building plan to get approved’. It was a standard plan—I had approved these previously. I told him there was no problem. I only needed documentary evidence that he was actually caught up in the tsunami. He gave me the police report, the GN report... all that he gave. I approved it, stamped it, and gave it to him. He continued to sit there without going. I asked him if there was anything else he wanted. He asked me, ‘What do I have to do for you? Tell me what you need’. I said, ‘All I want is for you to construct your house and move in there’. His eyes filled with tears. He was getting 7½ lakhs to build the house. He had been told that I was a UNPer [United National Party] and that since he was a SLFPer [Sri Lanka Freedom Party] he would need at least 1 lakh for my seal (September 2009).

Mahinda’s narration relates to the general perception in these villages that *kappam* guaranteed the help of a politician one did not support. These transactions contrast to those explained in the case of Malini’s household on two fronts. First, transactions between households and politicians they do not support tend to proceed on relatively lower levels of trust. Second, it is generally households in more desperate situations that subscribe to such transactions.

The bargaining power of households in political patron–client relationships must not be underestimated. Dakshita (50 years), a fisherman who catches prawns in a non-motorized boat in Kudawella West, lost his boat and prawn nets in the tsunami. The FI had rejected Dakshita’s

request for an Entitlement Certificate on the grounds that he had not registered his equipment prior to the tsunami. His appeal to a Member of Parliament he had supported in the run up to the last election fell on deaf ears. He retorts:

He won't get our votes. We should put up a notice saying 'there are no votes here'. Our household has eight votes. Not a single one of those will be given to him. Yes. There's no point is there? He didn't come to see what was happening to us or even give us a meal (September 2008).

Dakshita judged the politician in terms of his ability to 'deliver' post-tsunami aid. The power he could wield as a constituent is clearly evident in his statement. This counters assertions in post-tsunami Sri Lanka that structural hierarchies ingrained in partisan politics 'muffle the voice of the people at grassroots levels' (Moonesinghe, 2007: 7).

Akin to bribery transaction at the local level, political patronage has pre-existed the tsunami, but been strengthened and reproduced under the extreme conditions of the post-tsunami environment. By mediating the interface between households and local officials in post-tsunami aid disbursement, politicians have gained political clout, which translates into opportunities for acquiring social entry and improved status in the wider political economy. Drawing similarities to intermediary politicians in Sri Lanka (Brow, 1988; Spencer, 1990), India (Corbridge & Kumar, 2002; Jeffrey, 2000, 2002; Simon, 2009), and Africa (Szeftel, 2000), politicians have thus become complicit in acts of corruption. Households were not blind followers in these exchanges; in actual practice their political patrons were at constant risk of losing followers (Ruud, 2001). Thus, the bargaining power of households in political patron-client relationships must not be underestimated.

### ***4.5.3 Moral Conceptions***

As well as being an idiom of abuse and a channel for resources, corruption was a context in which people articulated their visions of society. For most villagers, corruption was a real pathology that provoked a sense of outrage. The wide range of meanings attributed to the term in the context of fieldwork personifies these local perceptions. The Sinhala term *dushanaya* covers roughly the same semantic field as corruption. It refers to activities that may be illegal, violate societal norms, or meet with moral disapproval. In other words, actions can be ‘corrupt’ because they fail to meet one or more standards of legal, social, or moral purity. Similarly, *kappam* or *pagava*, *naraka charitha*, and *vanka*, occupying much the same ground as ‘bribe’, ‘immoral behaviour’, and ‘dishonest’, respectively, were used to signify corruption. It is precisely the ability to slip between these different connotations that give corruption the kind of currency it has attained in public discourse in Sri Lanka. Exploring these conceptions with reference to post-tsunami recovery is crucial for understanding meanings of corruption in post-tsunami Sri Lanka.

Some households felt ethically uncomfortable with corrupt transactions. Radika (53 years) is the widow of a fisheries clerk in Kudawella West. Their house was partly damaged in the tsunami and outside the buffer zone. They were eligible for the relevant government cash grant (100,000 rupees), but as she remarks:

The GN said he would give us an additional 1½ lakhs if we gave him 10,000 rupees. My husband didn't like that sort of thing. I told the GN to give us only what we were entitled to (September 2008).

Radika's household considered it immoral to bend the rules of bureaucracy for personal

advantage. Sanjana (32 years) is the wife and mother of two fishermen who work in multiday boats in Kudawella West. Their house was partly destroyed in the tsunami, but they did not qualify for relocated housing as it was located outside the buffer zone. She was advised by her neighbour to pay *kappam* to the AGA in order to get on the beneficiary list for relocated housing. She comments:

My husband would not hear of it. He reprimanded me, 'You don't need to get involved in that kind of thing! You don't need to go there!'. He insisted that I should not go paying homage to the AGA (September 2008).

Sanjana's household considered it below their dignity to submit to patronizing relations with local government officials. Evident in the statements of Radika and Sanjana is a conflict between a culture of corruption and a deeply ingrained sense of what is 'right' and 'wrong'. The fact that these households resisted being drawn into a surrounding culture of corruption, in the face of ethical imperatives, shows that post-tsunami corruption also relates to a social conception of morality (Parry, 2000).

At the wider village-level, there was consensus among interviewees that the aftermath of the tsunami had witnessed a decline in fundamental moral values. Azeez, a senior resident in Kirinda and member of the Mosque Society, laments:

After the tsunami people changed—they became selfish and greedy. People's *naraka charitha* surfaced. 'I will do whatever it takes to get what I need' was the general thinking. Before the tsunami, they were a cooperative lot, but no more (October 2008).

Households were seen as being 'out to grab' as much as they could after the tsunami. The set of moral values they were committed to before the tsunami—trust, cooperation, self-control,

and integrity—had been subjugated by self-seeking attitudes and behaviour. The prevailing sense of corruption existed partly because corruption had subverted these values.

Implicit in practices of corruption is also the notion of gift-giving. This is a form of patronage practised equally in the direction of superiors, equals, and inferiors. A member of kith or kin who accedes to a post of responsibility, such as GN or CBO office bearer, has an obligation to those who befriended him in the past, when he was unimportant, weak, and in need. As Mohan (40 years), a fisherman who obtained a bicycle he was not entitled to, remarks:

The GN gave it at the village temple. It was from some organization. We knew the GN—he was related to us. Otherwise, we wouldn't have got it (September 2008).

The GN was a cousin twice removed and that, for Mohan, was a qualifier to receiving aid. It is likely that the GN was reciprocating a past favour and that Mohan will also reciprocate in the future. These are forms of exchange that signify social pressure in the direction of the accumulation of wealth in view of redistribution, what de Sardan (1999: 43) calls 'the logics of redistributive accumulation'.

Similar notions of gift-giving were embedded in political patronage. Piyatissa (57 years) was a crew member of a multiday boat in Kudawella West who also helped his wife with their supplementary business of coir-making. He lost both fishing gear and coir machines in the tsunami, but was not compensated for his losses. He explains his experience of seeking redress from the former Deputy Minister of Fisheries:

The Minister is like a brother to me. I was in that party those days. [...] I sat with him. In the midst of his bodyguards I reminded him of how I helped him get to the position he enjoys today. But, he got angry. He is all right with me now, but we didn't get any help from him. I was only asking him for what I lost (September 2008).

Piyatissa felt that it was obligatory for the Minister to express what he considered fundamental virtues; to repay his support of him in the run up to the position he now enjoyed. To refrain from giving the ‘gift’ when deserved is considered a sign of bad manners.

There is a complex, variable, and indistinct relationship between sincerity and cheating. Priyan, the FI in Kudawella West in 2003–2007, was accused by many other respondents in Kudawella West of issuing fraudulent Entitlement Certificates for *kappam*. Although Priyan denied irregularities under his authority, his statement draws attention to his perception of bribe-taking as something that can be inherently human:

If we say there was no bribery at all, these things in the newspapers would have to be lies, wouldn't it? People are human and officials are human so there can be situations where they may try to help in various ways (September 2009).

The role of ‘gifts’ in establishing links and alliances and in building morally binding relationships cannot be overemphasized. As others have noted (Parry, 2000; Ruud, 2001), the distinction between ‘gift’ and ‘bribe’ is a very fine call. Many practices of petty corruption, such as those referred to by Mohan, Piyatissa, and Priyan, can enter into this former category.

The narrow scope and coverage of aid interventions in the villages meant there was an inequitable distribution of goods and substantial variations in what people received. For households, this was a sign of corruption. As revealed in a discussion with the Vice President (Leela) and Secretary (Radika<sup>38</sup>) of a rural women’s CBO, the working unit of a District-wide NGO established in 1984:

[Leela] Aid isn't given in just one round is it? So, in the next round of aid distribution, we

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<sup>38</sup> Radika was also the widow of a fisheries clerk, mentioned previously.

included those who hadn't been in the first. Households were informed of the fact. [Radika] But, we were accused of *dushanaya!* [Leela] It was a battleground! [Radika] They literally came to blows! It's like this... Everyone wants everything at the same time. But, the practical situation is, we are asked to distribute among 300 people aid enough for 75! The other problem is we can't use our own judgment; we have to do as the Sirs [NGO officials] tell. [Leela] 'So much' to those in the maldive fish business, 'so much' to those in the fish business, and so on. That's how they send aid (September 2008).

The lack of a mechanism for coordinating aid among the many providers is a liable factor in all this. Nevertheless, the fact that 'inequity' in aid distribution has been identified with corruption reveals the moral connotations attached to the phenomenon.

People's complaints of corruption are an interesting and useful lens through which to probe the meaning of corruption. Households complained of corruption out of displeasure at not having received something, as revenge in wanting to degrade an individual or entity, or in the hope of obtaining aid. Overall, these complaints imply how the fishing community interpreted their relationship with the state. Since the country's independence in 1948, the government has expended considerable public resources in developing the small-scale Fisheries Sector and the fishing community has become increasingly dependent on government support (Amarasinghe, 2005). Against this backdrop, households placed tremendous faith and expectation in government aid for post-tsunami livelihoods recovery. Complaints of corruption in post-tsunami recovery can be seen as a way in which the fishing community expressed their collective identity as citizens betrayed by the system. Akin to their role as proactive clients in political patronage, households actively articulated injustices by the state through complaints of corruption (Gupta, 1995; Scott, 1985; Tripp, 1997). More than the *reality* of its existence, the portrayal of its *wide* existence means that complaints of corruption were intentional—it was a means by which people made the government more responsive to their needs.

Reinforcing the literature on everyday society in India (Gupta, 1995; Parry, 1989, 2000),

post-tsunami corruption has encompassed moral connotations. The findings presented here identify with four distinct meanings of corruption. Some dealings were regarded as corrupt as they undermined ethical values. Some exchanges that appear corrupt were associated with positive attributes of gift-giving. Some transactions that were officially sanctioned were deemed corrupt because they signified inequity. Complaints of corruption were linked to a means of making the state more responsive to household needs. In a post-tsunami context, where discourses on access to resources are far more prevalent than in everyday lives of people, the question of what is 'moral' and 'immoral' is particularly important in understanding corruption. In sum, post-tsunami has witnessed a new moral urgency surrounding corruption.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This research suggests three ethnographic moments in relation to post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka. The spoils of office benefited powerful local government officials, NGO officials, and CBO office bearers, in terms of private financial accumulation. Households who could afford to pay *kappam* or had familial or friendship ties with local officials, benefited in terms of gaining access to aid. Political patronage was advantageous to both politicians and households who engaged in such relationships in order to gain, respectively, political support and aid for recovery. The meanings attached to corruption depict the phenomenon as undermining morality, a means of maintaining social relations, and a way of construing and constructing people's relationship with the state. These are prevailing relationships and conceptions, which have become enmeshed in a set of circumstances characteristic of the post-tsunami environment. The injection of post-tsunami aid brought new dynamics to existing practices and meanings of corruption. On the one hand, the resources

and opportunities for abusing official and political positions were amplified. On the other, people's efforts to rationalize corruption or critique other people's corruption were energized.

These findings resonate with some significant contributions on everyday corruption in the Third World. Indeed, officials abuse public office for private accumulation and the powerful tend to win out in relation to corruption (Harriss-White, 1997; Jeffrey, 2000; Wade, 1982) and political patronage explains manifestations of corruption (Brow, 1988; Corbridge & Kumar, 2002; Jeffrey, 2002; Ruud, 2001; Simon, 2009; Spencer, 1990; Szeftel, 2000). More importantly, however, is the need to understand that there are *meanings* of corruption that influence these *practices* of corruption. Certain types of relationship-mediated goods and cash that appear as corrupt are, in reality, rooted in socio-cultural contexts of gift-giving and redistributive accumulation (de Sardan, 1999; Parry, 1989, 2000). Households also actively articulate visions of injustice by the state through complaints of corruption (Gupta, 1995; Scott, 1985; Tripp, 1997). An exploration of the meanings attached to corruption provide a better understanding of why the phenomenon finds such a favourable ground for extension and has become commonplace in post-tsunami Sri Lanka.

The paper also illuminates the importance of ethnographic research in political geography (Megoran, 2006), and in particular, exploring multifarious manifestations of corruption at the local level. It is not so much the reality and the widely held belief of its existence but the complex narratives that enfold it and the new relationships and objects of study that those narratives create, that prove critical for discerning corruption at the local level. This study was designed to deal with narratives and representations, rather than direct observations. Focus was on how respondents classify behaviours as appropriate/inappropriate, moral/immoral, or legal/illegal in the context of locally accepted standards and practices. This helped to surpass disembodied theorizing and distinguish corruption as it was defined by the respondents

themselves. Everyday conversations of corruption must not be brushed off as mere superficial rhetoric.

As clearly demonstrated in this paper, understanding everyday corruption is important because of its role in aggravating economic and social differences in the lives of the rural poor. Investigating the manifestations of corruption in divergent localities provides an interesting and significant direction for future analysis. It would serve to highlight how different types of corruption operate across different localities and how they are influenced by the dynamism of culture, the vagaries of situations, and the influence of history.

## CHAPTER 5

### ABIDING SYSTEM, ADAPTED PRACTICES: POLITICAL PATRONAGE IN POST-TSUNAMI SRI LANKA

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#### 5.1 Abstract

This article examines the system of political patronage in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in two tsunami-affected villages in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka. It reveals three key features with reference to local politicians, households, and non-government organisations, demonstrating that the system of political patronage has reproduced and consolidated itself in post-tsunami Sri Lanka, albeit in a modified form. In lending informal assistance to households, politicians have become agents of equity and corruption in post-tsunami recovery. Households have been proactive clients, deriving authority from their post-tsunami marginalisation as 'victims'. NGOs distributing aid have come to occupy a niche within these all-encompassing local power structures. This study adds to South Asian research concerning local level intermediaries and NGOs in development. It contributes to revitalize the NGO discourse in South Asia by drawing attention to NGO involvement in political patronage at the ground level, and emphasises the need for further research on the multiple and transforming political patron–client relationships across the region.

## 5.2 Introduction

On 26 December 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami, one of the most destructive natural disasters known to mankind, devastated coastal communities along two-thirds of Sri Lanka's coastline. In Kudawella West and Kirinda, fisher villages in the Hambantota District, Southern Province,<sup>39</sup> it killed 124 people, destroyed 340 houses,<sup>40</sup> and wrecked 319 fishing boats. Given the unprecedented impact of the disaster, emergency relief was singularly successful in meeting the immediate needs of those who survived. The recovery of livelihoods five years on has been a different story. Asela,<sup>41</sup> a 55-year old fisherman from Kudawella West who had tried and failed to obtain a replacement for the day boat he lost in the tsunami, was keen to express his views:

The person who has political influence will get. The person who doesn't will be left standing in long queues in the hope of aid or will have to suffer without (September 2008).

Asela believed that access to aid for post-tsunami livelihoods recovery was not merely dictated in terms of what was lost in the disaster, but also in terms of connections to local politicians.

The government's centralised framework for post-tsunami aid disbursement meant that the administrative machinery located outside the village was virtually inaccessible to the ordinary person in Sri Lanka. Thus, the ability of tsunami-affected communities to garner political patronage has been crucial for their livelihoods recovery (Haug and Weerackody 2007;

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<sup>39</sup> For administrative purposes, Sri Lanka is divided into 4 layers: 9 Provinces, 26 Districts (of which 14 are coastal Districts), 325 Divisional Secretariats, and 14,110 *Grama Niladbari* Divisions (villages), in descending order of hierarchy.

<sup>40</sup> This comprises houses that were fully and partly damaged. A house requiring repairs in excess of 40 per cent of its replacement was considered fully damaged, and less than 40 per cent, partly damaged (TAFREN 2005:1–4).

<sup>41</sup> To protect the anonymity of respondents, all names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Moonesinghe 2007; Sarvanathan and Sanjeevanie 2008). Anthropological and ethnographic perspectives on ‘intermediaries’, also known as ‘brokers’ or ‘fixers’, who mediate the interface between the poor and the state in the global South have particular relevance in this milieu. Bailey’s analysis (1963) of the role of village faction leaders as brokers between local and state levels in Orissa made a seminal contribution to Indian political studies in the 1960s. In western Nigeria, Berry (1985: 9) argued that Yoruba chiefs, as local agents of the colonial state, could to some extent mediate their subordinates’ access to resources controlled by the state. Contemporary descriptions of intermediaries have been heavily influenced by Reddy and Haragopal (1985), who described the *pyraveekar* as influential middlemen who broker or ‘fix’ deals between government bureaucracies and members of civil society in Andhra Pradesh, India. In post-independence Sri Lanka, Spencer (1990) draws attention to politicians who moved in to assume the ‘personalistic’ ties between the lowest levels of the administration and the population. Where bureaucratic structures reveal a strong propensity for the centralisation of power and authority, acts of mediation have been shown to shape the everyday lives of poor people.

There has been a proliferation of research interpreting the various roles of intermediaries in rural India. They have been portrayed as bringing solutions to the problems of the people whom they claim to represent at the grassroots level (Manor 2000; Reddy and Haragopal 1985; Simon 2009; Veron et al. 2003) and as part and parcel of practices of corruption in rural areas (Jeffrey 2000; Jeffrey and Lerche 2000). Giving preferential treatment to kith and kin is also characteristic of intermediaries (Jeffrey 2000; Simon 2009). In all this, the role of their clientele must not be underestimated. Most of the poor are able to actively comprehend and use intermediaries for their own purposes rather than being merely its passive victims (Fuller and Harriss 2001; Ruud 2001). Paying heed to these multifaceted roles and relations of power that

underlie intermediary relationships is crucial to understanding the ground level political realities in post-tsunami Sri Lanka.

Post-tsunami saw an influx of non-government organisations (NGOs). Pressures from politicians grossly distorted the efforts of international NGOs (INGOs) to act impartially (TEC 2006a: 78), whilst both local NGOs and INGOs were blamed for supporting politicians to build up their images (Haug and Weerackody 2007: 106). Thus, it is important that the literature on intermediaries is incorporated into the wider discussion of NGOs in development. The South Asian debate on NGOs, however, has become somewhat polarised between those who see their interventions as a solution through its supplanting of existing patron–client structures (Appadurai 2001; Blair 2005; Hulme and Edwards 1997),<sup>42</sup> and as a problem through its promotion of neoliberal ideas (Feldman 1997; Kamat 2002). In Sri Lanka such perspectives unfold against the backdrop of a protracted civil war between the separatist forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the government of Sri Lanka, where dispensing humanitarian aid via NGOs has become a mainstay in conflict-ridden areas (Hyndman and de Alwis 2000; Wickramasinghe 2001).

Less illustrative are the decisive ways in which NGO interventions interweave with political patronage at the ground level. In Bangladesh, Karim (2001) shows how NGOs encourage their group member clients, whom they provide with credit and other services, to vote for a particular political party at forthcoming general elections in return for continued support from the NGO. Further developing this evidence, Lewis (2004) finds that NGOs are rarely

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<sup>42</sup> This perspective is rooted in early conceptualisations of NGOs. The system of political patronage, particularly in South Asia, was argued to work against collective enterprise because it reproduced vertical solidarities, which are internally organised along hierarchical lines and are mutually exclusive. In rural Bangladesh, for example, Jansen (1987) associated the lack of significant corporate units directly with the prevalence of clientelistic networks. In 1989, with the opening up of Eastern and Central Europe, an NGO discourse infused with notions of public participation, greater representation of poor people, and more equitable access to resources gained currency (Fisher 1998).

democratic and cannot be conceived as a realm separate from, and uncontaminated by, political patronage. In post-tsunami Sri Lanka, Korf et al. (2010: S72) unveil local patrons who re-appropriate the foreign (humanitarian) gift, making it their patrimonial gift to be given to their clients.

This article expands conventional discussions of intermediaries and NGOs in South Asia by examining political patron–client relationships in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. With the exception of a post-tsunami reflection on how aid became a culturally-charged, political commodity (Korf et al. 2010), no research has yet attempted to understand the system of political patronage in post-tsunami Sri Lanka.<sup>43</sup> The present article centres on the roles of, and relationships between, local politicians, households, and NGOs in the villages of Kudawella West and Kirinda. It illuminates three key features that help define the post-tsunami system of political patronage: local politicians as agents of equity and corruption, households as proactive ‘victims’, and NGO interventions as complicit in clientelism.

Following from Megoran (2006), who insists ethnographic methods should inform analyses of ordinary people’s experiences, and given the requisite for a flexible research inquiry that gives consideration to traumatic experiences of respondents and their sensitivity to certain issues, the investigation employed a qualitative ethnographic approach. Field research combined interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation with secondary data collection. Narrative techniques, according to Miles and Crush (1993), have considerable potential for recovering hidden stories, contesting academic androcentrism and eurocentrism, and reinstating the marginalised as makers of their own past (i.e. giving them a voice to be

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<sup>43</sup> The vast network of NGOs devoted to the cause of development in Sri Lankan society has been shown to be engaged in patronage, political manipulation, and power games (Orjuela 2003; Ruwanpura 2007; Walton 2008; Wickramasinghe 2001). The present study differs from these key analyses as it focuses on the role of NGOs in a post-tsunami setting.

heard). Thus, listening to ‘stories’ of politicians, households, and NGO officials and evaluating how these groups perceived each others’ roles, activities, and behaviour in specific contexts formed an important part of the study.

The following section of the article reviews the pre-tsunami system of political patronage in Sri Lanka, with particular reference to politicians and NGOs, in order to establish a context for the analysis. The article then introduces the methodology, describes Kudawella West and Kirinda in the Hambantota District, and outlines post-tsunami aid efforts. The subsequent section considers the narratives emerging from the study villages under the three key features of the post-tsunami system of political patronage. The conclusion summarises the main findings and underscores the need for extended research on political patron–client relationships in divergent political settings in South Asia.

### **5.3 Times Past: Political Patron–Client Relations in Sri Lanka**

The system of political patronage in Sri Lanka is deeply entrenched in a cultural tradition extending more than 2000 years. Its existence in pre-colonial times can be traced around the structural setting of the feudal village (Houtart 1976: 10–11). A core feature of this ancient model was reciprocity between the king and population: land in exchange for labor. This relation linked a number of actors into larger, sometimes diffuse, patron–client networks, directly and indirectly connecting the villagers to the king (Leach 1959: 17). The king–villager association was, on occasion, mediated by village-level elites or nobles who owned and controlled the land. These nobles maintained a direct dyadic relationship with the peasants as well as their primary patron, the king—they became the clients of the king and sub-patrons to the villagers.

The Portuguese and the Dutch colonial periods in Sri Lanka, beginning in the 16th and 17th centuries, respectively, are documented as periods in which many attributes of the ancient feudal society remained intact (Rogers 1994: 13–4). However, the accumulation of private wealth due to changed economic circumstances (e.g. growth of offshore trading) and the instigation of commercial relationships with these colonisers (Devasiri 2007: 5), strengthened the economic and social position of some low caste members in the traditional caste hierarchy—a new identity that was challenged by the existing wealthy classes (Jayawardena 2007: 192). Maintaining this newly acquired status required efforts geared towards the strengthening of their economic positions and enhancing their image at political, social, and cultural fronts.

The arrival of British colonisers in 1815 played a crucial role in encouraging patron–client relations. Following the establishment of a centralised system of government administration, the British formed alliances with indigenous dominant classes in order to consolidate political rule and facilitate economic expansion (Akram-Lodhi 1987: 162). The granting of universal franchise in 1931 assumed and promoted an idea of popular sovereignty, but control of electoral politics remained firmly in the hands of this established local elite. Anyone aspiring to electoral power had to capture the votes of the rural Sinhalese masses (Farmer 1957). This facilitated a political alliance between the Sinhalese dominant classes and the rural Sinhalese subordinate classes wherein the Sinhalese elite gave economic concessions to the rural masses in order to be returned to political positions (Akram-Lodhi 1987; Moore 1985, 1989; Samaraweera 1981).

These relations were further strengthened following Sri Lanka's independence in 1948. In agriculture-based villages, politicians with constitutionally guaranteed responsibilities became the key way to access state-provided resources, whether they be subsidised loans for

purchasing a boat (Alexander 1973; Amarasinghe 1989), obtaining a house under a state-run housing scheme (Brow 1996), or accessing benefits from other rural development projects (Moore 1985). A classic, contemporary depiction of this is the political environment in the Hambantota District. As the native residence of the former Prime Minister and incumbent President of Sri Lanka<sup>44</sup> and the political base of a significant nationalist political party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, the District has witnessed fierce competition in the allocation of public resources since before the tsunami. The villages of Kudawella West and Kirinda themselves are representative of this political struggle. Kudawella West belongs to the Tangalle Division, the very residence of the former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, and has benefited from both large-scale (harbour) and small-scale (rural roads) infrastructural investments. The Tissamaharama Division, to which Kirinda belongs, is marginal in comparison.

Emerging as grassroots organisations focusing on volunteerism, self help, and peoples' participation during the times of ancient kings, NGOs were a social phenomenon prior to the arrival of the first colonial powers in the early 16th century (Abeydeera 2002: 86–8). A new set of church-based NGOs focusing on welfare and charity was established in the 1800s (Wanigaratne 1997: 218). Yet, NGOs mushroomed in the 1980s and 1990s, largely on account of an influx of foreign funding following widespread ethnic violence and the onset of civil war in 1983. The intensification of conflict over the years saw a proliferation of NGO activity in the Northern and Eastern Provinces; NGO involvement, INGOs in particular, in the Southern Province remained modest.<sup>45</sup> The advent of NGOs reinforced deep-rooted expectations amongst ordinary people as receivers of what their political patrons deliver (Hettige 2000: 10f).

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<sup>44</sup> He was elected to the Parliament of Sri Lanka in 1970 and served as Prime Minister from April 2004, until his victory at the Presidential Election in 2005.

<sup>45</sup> This was also influenced by the anti-NGO culture that took hold in the Sinhalese South due to the international attention paid to human rights violations in the North and East (Wickramasinghe 2001).

In many ways, contemporary forms of political patron–client relationships are largely the legacies of past traditions in which identifiable groups of people became patrons or clients. In general, pre-colonial patron–client relationships that operated without serious challenges from the primitive clientele have undergone a gradual and significant transformation since colonial times (Jayawardena 2007). Today, villagers expect their political patrons to allocate resources, be it sourced by government agencies or NGOs, to their supporters. This article broadly supports the idea that understanding these political patron–client relations are the key to analysis of most dimensions of economy, society, and culture in rural Sri Lanka (Moore 1992: 39).

#### **5.4 Setting and Methodology**

With natural disaster experiences confined to periodic droughts, floods, landslides and occasional cyclones, the 2004 tsunami was the greatest natural disaster ever to hit Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe 2005: 543). Despite statistical variations in the demographic impact, it is estimated that 31,000 people were killed, 5,600 went missing, and 500,000–800,000 were displaced (Emanuel 2006: 7; IPS 2005: 5; Oxfam International 2005a: 2). The Northern and Eastern Provinces were the worst affected. However, the prevailing security situation precluded fieldwork in those areas. Hambantota District, a 151-km belt of land shown in Figure 2 (Chapter 1), recorded the second highest number of deaths in the Southern Province. Considering its relatively high poverty index—65 per cent of households receive *Samurdhi* or national poverty alleviation scheme benefits (DCS 2001)—the impact on livelihoods here was particularly severe.

Small-scale fishing<sup>46</sup> was selected as the focus of research due to its extensive importance to livelihood in Sri Lanka in terms of employment, food security, and foreign exchange earnings (DFAR 2005), and the severe impact it experienced in the tsunami (IPS 2006; RADA 2005). Harbour villages suited the purpose of this study since fishing is the main livelihood in such villages. Two of the three main fishing harbours in Hambantota are in Kudawella West and Kirinda villages, located approximately 190 km and 270 km, respectively, from the commercial capital of Sri Lanka, Colombo (Chapter 1: Figure 2). The fact that they represent villages that were severely affected in the tsunami proved instructive for the wider project. They recorded the highest destruction to harbour infrastructure and housing compared to other villages around the District's three main harbours (DCS 2005: 4, 7; DFAR 2005: 7), and, as Table 1 (Chapter 1) details, a significant number of deaths and destruction to fisheries equipment due to the tsunami.

As shown in Table 1 (Chapter 1), approximately 40–50 per cent of households receive Samurdhi in these villages. A mixed bag of traditional and mechanised fishing techniques are employed by fishermen. Traditional techniques comprise mainly beach seine boats (12 m in length) and non-motorised boats (3–10 m in length), while mechanised techniques include multiday boats (45–50 ft in length) with cabin and ice hold, day boats (28 ft in length) with inboard engines, fibre reinforced plastic boats (17–23 ft in length) propelled by outboard engines, and outboard motorised boats, which are traditional crafts powered by an outboard engine. Secondary livelihoods, such as coir-making, maldiver or dried fish production, local shops, and food preparation, typify an informal sector workforce. In other words, labour relations are based largely on casual employment, kinship or personal and social relations

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<sup>46</sup> In comparison with commercial fishing, small-scale fishing uses less capital and energy, smaller fishing vessels, shorter trips close to the shore, targets a wider range of fish species, and uses multiple fishing gear and strategies to suit the seasonality of fish stocks (FAO 2004).

rather than contractual arrangements (ILO 2005). Two predominant ethno-religious groups in Hambantota—the Sinhala-Buddhists and Sri Lankan Malays—are represented in these villages. Kudawella West is home to a majority Sinhala-Buddhist population and Kirinda a mixed Sinhala-Buddhist and Sri Lankan Malay population. The villages are also significant for their different political attributes, discussed previously.

The government was the central authority in implementing tsunami relief and recovery.<sup>47</sup> In housing reconstruction, the policy for assembling beneficiary lists was based on ownership of houses prior to the tsunami. The *Grama Niladhari* (GN), or village officer, conducted assessments on housing needs in his village<sup>48</sup> and compiled beneficiary lists, which were provided to the Assistant Government Agent (AGA), who heads Divisional Secretariats. With respect to fisher livelihoods, the loss or destruction of fishing boats and gear had to be substantiated by an Entitlement Certificate, detailing the type and amount of loss. Entitlement Certificates were issued by the Fisheries Inspector (FI), who heads the smallest fisheries administrative unit, based on pre-tsunami information on registered boats and gear, collated against post-tsunami losses reported by fishermen.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the recovery process, local NGOs and INGOs distributed aid via direct intervention or subcontracting and partnership arrangements between the two.

Of noteworthy mention is the ‘no build’ buffer zone, a post-tsunami government policy that

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<sup>47</sup> The Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation was established in February 2005. Responsibilities were passed on to the Reconstruction and Development Agency in November 2005, following the election of a new President of Sri Lanka. Since mid-2007, any remaining activities have been absorbed by the Ministry for Nation Building and Development.

<sup>48</sup> These were conducted jointly with the Provincial Technical Officer of the National Housing Development Authority, representative of District Sponsors Consortium nominated by the District Secretary, and a member of the Village Rehabilitation Committee.

<sup>49</sup> These were carried out by teams of Fisheries Survey Officers—students, appointed by the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, who had recently passed the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level Examination, the highest level of qualification in secondary education.

prohibited reconstruction within 100 m of the coastal mean high tide mark.<sup>50</sup> Buffer zones were associated with two policy frameworks for housing aid (TAFREN 2005: 1–14). Those outside the zone were eligible for government grants<sup>51</sup> and donor aid to rebuild to rebuild in situ. Those inside the zone had to be resettled in new housing projects, funded and constructed by NGOs, although beneficiaries provided labour input in some cases. These were known as ‘owner-driven’ and ‘donor-driven’ models, respectively. Households relocated from Kudawella West resided in housing schemes in the villages of Mahawela, Seenimodara East/West, Pahajjawa, Nidahagama East, and Nakulugamuwa South, whilst those relocated from Kirinda lived in housing schemes in Kirinda itself and the village of Andaragasyaya (Chapter 1: Figure 2).

Data were collected over one year of fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2008–9 through interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, supplemented by secondary data, such as policy reports, newspaper articles, and local literature. Familiarisation was acquired through a previous study (Mubarak, 2007) and intermittent work and research experiences in the area in 2007–8. Being the primary functional unit of society, households<sup>52</sup> were used as the unit of analysis. For the purpose of this study, households whose primary source of income is small-scale fishing and living in houses constructed via owner-driven and donor-driven models were approached. The politicians considered in this article hold formal political positions, such as

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<sup>50</sup> A 1981 Act which defined the ‘no build’ coastal zone as 300 m, although not strictly enforced, was reinforced post-tsunami as ‘buffer zones’ of 200 m in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and 100 m elsewhere. In October 2005, amid criticisms of an arbitrary 100/200-metre blanket restriction and the looming Presidential Election, the policy was abandoned in favour of individually specified setback zones in different coastal areas based on extant conservation guidelines (Hyndman 2007).

<sup>51</sup> A fully damaged house was compensated with a cash grant of 250,000 rupees and a partly damaged one, 100,000 rupees.

<sup>52</sup> Households are a co-resident group of individuals who share most aspects of consumption, drawing on and apportioning a common collection of resources, including labour, to ensure material production (Schmink 1984: 89).

Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Members of Parliament (MPs), and Provincial Council Ministers from the District.<sup>53</sup> In explicitly focusing on this category, this study excludes politicians who do not hold formal positions and other intermediaries (e.g. village leaders). Nevertheless, it takes into account individuals who were either consciously referred to, or strategically approached by, households in this study. In the non-government arena, the article scrutinises local NGOs and INGOs implementing post-tsunami housing and livelihoods recovery projects in Hambantota.<sup>54</sup>

The article draws on the responses of eighty households (forty eight in Kudawella West and thirty two in Kirinda), seventeen government officials, twelve NGO officials, thirteen office bearers of community-based organisations, seven politicians, four village leaders, and nineteen key informants. Apart from some interviews with officials and key informants conducted in English, interviews were conducted in the local language, Sinhala. The language of Malays is Bahasa Melayu, but most are proficient in Sinhala. In two instances where respondents communicated in Bahasa Melayu, a translator was used.

The focus during household interviews and focus group discussions was on people's own formulations of their situation and how they came to make livelihood decisions pertaining to political intervention in post-tsunami recovery.<sup>55</sup> During analysis, focus was on evaluating how

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<sup>53</sup> MPs are elected at National Elections to serve a six year term. Ministers and Deputy Ministers are appointed from amongst MPs by the President and head national level Ministries. Following the 13th amendment to the Constitution in 1987, the Government devolved political and administrative decision-making authority to the Provinces at the lower level by establishing Provincial Councils (GOSL 2003). In each Province, Provincial Council Ministers are elected at Provincial Council Elections to serve a five year term.

<sup>54</sup> Despite the distinction between local NGOs and INGOs, it is important to note that most local NGOs depend to some extent on donor funding, including from INGOs.

<sup>55</sup> The timeframe for post-tsunami recovery varied across households. The start of recovery was defined as the time in which a given household engaged in reviving at least one aspect of their everyday livelihood (e.g. housing or fishing occupation). Phases of recovery are open ended; some households reported they had reached pre-tsunami income levels, but, in general, there was reluctance on the part of households to concede they had regained livelihoods completely since other aspects of their

households, politicians, and NGO officials perceived each others' roles, activities, and behaviour in specific contexts, and how these relate to conceptualisations of intermediaries and NGOs in South Asia. What follows is an analysis of three major characteristics of the post-tsunami system of political patronage.

## **5.5 Abiding System, Adapted Practices**

### ***5.5.1 Local Politicians: Agents of Equity and Corruption***

Vimal (42 years), a fisherman who works on a multiday boat in Kudawella West, and his wife Thirusha (39 years) live with their family of three teenage children and a son and daughter aged two and seven, respectively, in Seenimodara Housing (Seenimodara East/West). Their house was outside the 100 m buffer zone and partly destroyed in the tsunami. They were eligible for a cash grant from the government for in-situ housing reconstruction. As they comment:

[Thirusha] The lagoon is directly behind our house and we just managed to save our children. How can we live here and face another tsunami? I don't want to risk it because of my children. [Vimal] That is why we wanted a house outside of the village. Some people give bribes to the AGA Madam and the GN to get on beneficiary lists. [Thirusha] But, we had no money to give. [Vimal] We had to use our own connections and fall back on people we knew. [Thirusha] I went to the President's Office in Tangalle. From there, they called the AGA Madam in Tangalle. I got her approval! I got her signature in the end! (September 2008).

In terms of the stipulated buffer zone and housing aid policy, this household did not qualify for a house outside the village. Their underlying emotional reason—the fear of living close to

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livelihood (e.g. physical/mental health, secure housing or accessible transport) had changed.

the sea—was not recognised by official regulations. Many who found themselves in similar situations resorted to bribing relevant officials in order to get on the official beneficiary list. For people like Vimal and Thirusha, who did not have the money, the only option was to exploit the long standing political connection they enjoyed.

Harith (58 years), a casual fisherman in Kudawella West, lives in Navadivi Purawara (Pahajjawa). He was a squatter within the 100 m zone before the tsunami; his house, comprising unfinished floors, wattle and daub walls, and simple palm leaf roofing, was completely destroyed. The housing policy of ‘a house for a house’ excluded Harith who did not have title to his house. Appeals were often made by such households to AGAs and GNs and they were considered on a case-by-case basis. This very process was beyond the ability of Harith and his household:

We lost a child—my grandson. People ran around getting things done, meeting various officials, and stating their case. We were not in a state of mind to do any of that. We were still thinking of our little boy. All our other losses paled into insignificance. By the time we came around, it was too late. The beneficiary lists for the various housing schemes had been drawn up. So, we went to Nuwanga *mudalali*<sup>56</sup> [Provincial Council Minister] and explained our case. If not for him, I don’t know where we would be now (September 2009).

This family was shattered by the loss of a young family member and was in no state to negotiate aid, although such negotiations were indeed possible. Nuwanga mudalali, whom Harith’s households strongly supported, helped resolve their problem by accompanying Harith to the AGA’s office and mediating the ensuing negotiations. In the context of a post-tsunami aid framework where the emphasis on physical asset replacement effectively favoured the more ‘well to do’ and disregarded psychosocial impacts of a disaster, the intermediary role of

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<sup>56</sup> Mudalali is the Sinhalese term for merchant.

politicians was invaluable for households.

Some households were able to defy post-tsunami regulations and gain aid through the help of politicians. In the allocation of housing, the instructions given were that each family unit in an affected household should have separate housing. In Kudawella West and Kirinda, some households secured housing aid for their relative's families claiming they were residing together, in the one house, before the tsunami. On such occasions politicians were commonly approached by households to legitimise their claim. Politicians were aware that the claims made for multiple houses had no grounds for justification, as were the AGAs and GNs whom politicians approached with respect to the case at hand. However, the power politicians could wield in the appointment, transfer, and promotion of public servants held sway over such officers who complied with the politician's orders. As found in Uttar Pradesh, India, local government officials are often motivated to assist politicians out of a fear that the opposition to a directive of a politician would lead to some unfavourable condition (Jeffrey 2000; Jeffrey and Lerch 2000). Thus, politicians were complicit in corrupt practices.

The potential to influence decisions made in everyday public service, bestowed on politicians the power to assist households with their requests in the context of post-tsunami livelihoods recovery. Reiterating the role of intermediaries in India (Jeffrey 2000; Jeffrey and Lerch 2000; Manor 2000; Simon 2009; Veron et al. 2003), a 'link' with a politician provided an important bargaining counter for households in negotiations with local government officials. By bringing post-tsunami aid to households who were faced with various social problems that were rendered invisible to post-tsunami policies, politicians represented agents of equity (Manor 2000; Simon 2009; Veron et al. 2003). In diverting aid resources to undeserving households, politicians drew similarities with rural Indian brokers complicit in acts of corruption (Jeffrey 2000; Jeffrey and Lerche 2000; Simon 2009). However, they also differed

from such brokers in that they ‘facilitated’ acts of corruption, but did not engage in it as means of private accumulation.

### ***5.5.2 Proactive ‘Victims’***

The system of political patronage in rural Sri Lanka that gave politicians access to, and control over, government welfare resources, offered villagers themselves a certain bargaining power. As Moore (1985: 5) writes, the population would ‘use politics to receive favourable public allocations of resources’. These existing trends became even more prominent after the tsunami as households, experiencing devastation to their livelihoods, were desperate to obtain aid for housing, fisheries, and other livelihood-related needs. Politicians rendered support to households either in return for electoral votes and/or political support (e.g. helping in election campaigns) extended at previous elections or with the expectation of securing and maintaining votes and support at a future election. Households were very much aware of such political intents and sometimes manipulated them to their own advantage.

Mangala (75 years), a fisherman who works on a day boat, lives in Navadivi Purawara (Pahajjawa). He goes fishing occasionally in Kudawella West, whilst his son who is a crew member of a multiday boat contributes to the bulk of household income. Their house, located outside the 100 m buffer zone, was partly damaged in the tsunami. Although they did not qualify for it, with the intervention of a high ranking politician, they managed to get on the beneficiary list for relocated housing. As Mangala remarks:

We could not have got this house if he did not arrange it for us. I don’t have very much longer to live now. But, at least I have these good people to provide for my children (September 2008).

Mangala's statement is a clear indication of the faith in which he viewed his political patrons. He harboured no doubts that the politicians who helped him today would do so if ever they were in need.

Households who were unsuccessful in their attempt to get help from politicians had strong reactions. Dakshita (50 years), a fisherman who catches prawns in a non-motorised boat in Kudawella West, lost his boat and prawn nets in the tsunami. The FI had rejected Dakshita's request for an Entitlement Certificate on the grounds that he had not registered his equipment prior to the tsunami. Dakshita appealed for help from an MP he had supported at the last election, but was turned down. He retorts:

No votes, no votes! He won't have our votes! When I went to him, he asked me to show him my registration license. If I had that, why would I be asking for his help? We won't give our votes to him this time (September 2009).

Dakshita judged the MP in terms of his ability to 'deliver' post-tsunami aid. It is through such judgments that those able to deliver rise to positions of power as politicians and continue to remain thus. The MP's inability to support Dakshita's household meant he will lose out on their votes at the next election.

The expectation that politicians would provide for their people in terms of access to post-tsunami aid was similarly expressed in interviews with Malay households in Kirinda. Mohamed (48 years) is a fisherman in Kirinda. His household, along with other households in the area, did not have access to pipe-borne water before the tsunami. A local politician undertook to improve this situation post-tsunami. Mohamed remarks:

It has been five years. But, where is the water line? He (the Minister) hasn't even come this way to look into it. He has sealed his fate at the elections! None of us will vote for him (September

2009).

Scholars of political patronage in Sri Lanka reach their conclusions on the basis of analyses of Sinhalese communities (Akram-Lodhi 1987; Alexander 1973; Amarasinghe 1989; Brow 1996; Farmer 1957; Houtart 1976; Leach 1959; Moore 1985, 1989; Samaraweera 1981). The perspective of Mohamed demonstrates that, despite differences in ethno-religious background, households share the same perspective: people are the grassroots power base of politicians and must be treated as such.

Where ties of kinship or friendship overlapped with ties of political patron–client relations, households were in an even stronger position to demand the support of their politicians. Thilaka (67 years), from Navadivi Purawara (Pahajjawa), is the widowed mother of a mudalali engaged in the prawn business in Kudawella West. He lost three boats and fishing nets in the tsunami, but received replacements for only one boat and the nets. As she remarks:

He has lodged an appeal with the FI to include the other two boats on his Entitlement Certificate. If he doesn't get it, I will tell the Deputy Minister [Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources] and he will speak to the AGA Madam. He's a relative of ours. After all, we're genuine victims! And relatives have to help isn't it? (September 2008).

Kin-based relationships in Sri Lankan society are established and manifested through reciprocal obligations, as are those based on friendship. Similar to rural Indian brokers (Jeffrey 2000; Simon 2009), politicians tend to assist friends and relatives in negotiations with 'higher ups'. The Deputy Minister was a cousin thrice removed, and that in Thilaka's opinion made it mandatory on the part of the politician to help out in her son's situation.

The bargaining power of households across Sinhalese and Malay communities in relationships of political patronage must not be underestimated. Indeed, poor people tend to

use the system of political patronage 'as best they can' in the expectation that they will benefit from their own adequately competent manipulation of political and administrative systems (Fuller and Harriss 2001: 25). The evidence reiterates the fact that poor people are not submissive in their 'client' status (Ruud 2001), and counters post-tsunami assertions that structural hierarchies ingrained in political patronage 'muffle the voice of the people at grassroots levels' (Moonesinghe 2007: 7). In pre-tsunami times, being marginalised as 'villager' and 'voter' enabled households to pressurise their political patrons to access certain resources. Post-tsunami, through an added marginality as 'victims', households gained an increased authority to demand aid. Households with links to political patrons through kinship or friendship were in a stronger 'client' position.

### ***5.5.3 NGO Interventions: Complicit in Clientelism***

The government was the central authority in implementing recovery. There was however no solid framework for aid disbursement by local NGOs and INGOs at the village level. Some functioned closely with the local government, whilst others operated independently. Akin to various NGOs in Sri Lankan society that seek to build a deep or progressive democracy that involves social reform (Orjuella 2003; Ruwanpura 2007; Wanigaratne 1997; Wickramasinghe 2001), NGOs operating in post-tsunami Sri Lanka were largely infused with notions of public participation, greater representation of poor people, and more equitable access to aid (Haug and Weerackody 2007; TEC 2006a). Yet, NGOs will not always have a democratic content, aspire to being vehicles of social change or even gain legitimacy in local contexts (Wickramasinghe 2001). In the process of aid distribution NGOs became reliant on, and encumbered by, the mechanisms governing the local system of political patronage.

The general practice amongst NGOs was to select beneficiaries based on lists from the AGAs that were cross-checked with lists prepared by the NGOs' own surveys of household needs. NGOs that worked through the government bureaucracy to obtain beneficiary lists incessantly complained of slow government systems that were subject to much red tape. Verification of beneficiary lists was also time-consuming, with technical officers having to revisit claimants. Some NGOs, particularly large INGOs, were keen to complete the rebuilding process swiftly as they had defined budgets, strict timelines, and wanted to report progress to their donors.<sup>57</sup> These NGOs often turned to the informal help of politicians who were considered to be knowledgeable about their local area and therefore able to list tsunami beneficiaries.

Politicians in turn capitalised on the opportunity to select beneficiaries. As Mahinda, who was the former Chairman of tsunami recovery operations of an INGO in Hambantota and subsequently became involved in politics,<sup>58</sup> discloses:

The INGO tells the politician, 'We came to build 25 houses can you help us?'. The politician will give them a list of 25 households and they will build the 25 houses and leave. Another INGO will come and make a similar request. They say, 'We are going to build 50 houses'. The politician gives them the names of 50 households—those who already have houses will also come into the list! (September 2009).

Politicians directed aid to households that would benefit their own political agenda—supporters from the electorate that had made specific requests for assistance or those households whose vote could be 'bought over'. As Mahinda continues:

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<sup>57</sup> INGOs arriving in Kudawella West and Kirinda for the first time set out livelihoods recovery and housing reconstruction projects that lasted between one and four years.

<sup>58</sup> In October 2009, he made his debut as a candidate at the Southern Provincial Council Election.

The MPs and Ministers like to say, 'It was I who sent the NGOs to the village' and get credit for themselves.

This is clearly a reflection of the importance that politicians attach to being recognised through spatial markers, such as housing. This is more so because of the significance attached to owning a house in Sri Lanka due to its articulation of identity, protection, and rights (Brun and Lund 2008: 278). Assisting significant proportions of the community as opposed to a few isolated households enabled politicians to project their own image in the area (Brun and Lund 2008, 2009; Ruwanpura 2009), reiterating pre-tsunami state-sponsored housing programmes such as *Gam Udawa* (Village Awakening) (Brow 1988, 1996). Indeed, the symbolic distribution of durable assets, such as houses, across communities becomes a means by which the reach and power of the politician and his political party is represented (Brun and Lund 2009).

NGOs that carried out meticulous beneficiary selection were also not free from political mediation. Narada was the former Project Coordinator of a regional NGO based in Tangalle. In selecting beneficiaries for their housing aid project, which mostly housed tsunami-affected households from Kudawella West, the NGO verified official lists against records prepared via their own assessments. As Narada confesses:

Although we adhered to the stipulated government policy and selected only households within the 100 m zone when choosing beneficiaries, an MP interfered and requested that houses be given to particular households who were not even within the 100 m zone! Madam [NGO Founder/Chairperson] has acceded to such requests (September 2009).

There are politicians who approached NGOs and prevailed upon them to accept requests from 'their people'. According to Narada, the MP was a friend of the NGO Founder/Chairperson. Whilst local NGOs, such as the above, were subject to influence from politicians due to

familial bonds, others succumbed merely because of the authority wielded by the politicians. Since politicians had the capability, through their formal position, of blocking the implementation of certain development projects, local NGOs preferred to tread a path of least resistance in the interest of their projects.

Political mediation occurred in instances where INGOs handed their project implementation to local staff. Emirates City (Kirinda), a housing scheme for 20 Malay households, was constructed by Middle Eastern donors via the United Arab Emirates Embassy in Sri Lanka. The task of managing the scheme was entrusted to Azeez, a senior resident in the village. Shafin, who works on a day boat and lives in his pre-tsunami house in Kirinda, relays his experience in this context:

We were on the initial list of 20 beneficiaries. After the list was compiled and the houses were partly done, they started allocating the houses outside of the list and I was kicked out! Why? I was not a party supporter! (September 2008).

Shafin's views concerning political favouritism in the implementation of this housing scheme were echoed in most interviews in Kirinda. His household is among five households alleged to have been crossed out of the initial list. Azeez, being a supporter of the political party in power, is reported to have been influenced in beneficiary selection by a Minister. NGOs were limited in the aid they could provide, which meant that a new household could be brought into an existing beneficiary list through political intervention only at the expense of a household already in it.

For their part households also expected the intervention of politicians in securing NGO aid. Colliers Housing (Kirinda) was funded by an INGO, Colliers International, designed by a renowned Japanese architect, and managed by a local project team from Colombo. The project

had the patronage of the government. As Fawzi (50 years), a one day boatman and resident in Colliers Housing, comments:

Look at the lavatory—when you go in you can hear—as a father of three girls I find it hard to bear up. I feel embarrassed. I feel more ashamed than the children. As parents we must bring up our children in a nice way isn't it? So, I tell them to go to my sister's house. But you shouldn't have to use the toilet in another house when you have your own isn't it? We told them [the INGO] to make the toilets outside—they did not. We told them to construct the kitchen with a chimney—they did not. The house gets wet. The doors don't close. The INGO said they will look after the houses for five years, but they never came. The shortcomings are endless. Now look, did a single MP come this way? A single politician? This is their electorate. They come here and open this and that and place foundation stones here and there and go. None of them ever visited this scheme to check out what the INGO built. We are not moneyed people. We bought the stuff for this house from what we earned. We are living today because of our own efforts. You can be sure none of these households here will be voting for these politicians come elections (October 2008).

Several structural and cultural design flaws have contributed to discontent and resentment amongst the residents. They were disappointed to be given an unfinished home. Their distress was aggravated by the fact that the politicians who gave their blessings to this project never intervened to rectify the shortcomings. The project was hailed as a groundbreaking construction and a benchmark for post-tsunami housing constructions (*Daily News* 2007), which further infuriated residents like Fawzi who claimed that politicians were quite ignorant of the ground situation and insensitive to their needs (Brun and Lund 2008, 2009; Ruwanpura 2009). Indeed, the arrival of NGOs has come to reinforce, contest and transform deep-rooted patron–client relations between politicians and ordinary people (Hettige 2000: 10f; Wickramasinghe 2001).

For households or villagers seeking to negotiate terms of aid with INGOs, the English language was a significant barrier to effective communication, but the communication gap between INGO officials and politicians was significantly less problematic. Drawing parallels with the political fixer in India (Reddy and Haragopal 1985: 1159), politicians hence were in a

better position to accomplish tasks in the post-tsunami livelihoods recovery process than households.

Given the shortcomings in the government structure for aid disbursement, NGO requirements for swift project implementation, and the all-encompassing system of political patronage that is continuously cultivated both by patrons and clients alike, NGOs have come to occupy a familiar, older political niche in post-tsunami aid distribution. Be it intended or unintended, NGO efforts to help tsunami-affected households in Sri Lanka have got entangled in and constrained by local power structures—a finding that resembles development practices in Bangladesh (Karim 2001; Lewis 2004) and post-tsunami Sri Lanka (Brun and Lund 2008, 2009; Ruwanpura 2009; Korf et al. 2010). Contrary to a discourse that sees the rationale for NGOs intervening in society in South Asia as a means to democratise access to resources and supplant patron–client relations (Appadurai 2001; Blair 2005), these findings expose the fact that NGO interventions in post-tsunami Kudawella West and Kirinda in Sri Lanka have been inclined to reproduce clientelism.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This article suggests that the system of political patronage has continued to reproduce and consolidate itself in post-tsunami Sri Lanka, albeit in new a guise. Sri Lanka has a tradition of political patron–client relationships, identified through the reciprocal model of the feudal system, social and political hierarchy engrained in colonial structures, and granting of constitutionally guaranteed responsibilities to politicians and mushrooming of NGOs in the post-independence era. In the post-tsunami period, the authority and power gained from their official positions, enabled politicians to lend informal assistance to households. Politicians

thereby became agents of equity and corruption in the livelihoods recovery process. Households have maintained their pre-tsunami status as proactive clients; they have gained a certain authority in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery by being marginalised as ‘victims’. Within this all-encompassing system, NGOs engaged in post-tsunami aid distribution have come to occupy a familiar niche in the system of political patronage.

The study has broadened our maps on political patronage in South Asia. It presents evidence concerning the role of intermediaries in contexts where bureaucratic structures reveal a strong propensity for the centralisation of power and authority (Bailey 1963; Manor 2000; Reddy and Haragopal 1985; Spencer 1990). It resonates with scholarship that portrays intermediaries as an active and efficient cause of equity in development (Manor 2000; Simon 2009; Veron et al. 2003) and as individuals embroiled in low level corruption (Jeffrey 2000; Jeffrey and Lerche 2000; Simon 2009). The concurrence of NGO interventions and the persistence of clientelistic practices may seem a paradox, especially in a post-tsunami environment where much of the NGO *raison d'être* has focused on a commitment to empower the poor. Yet, as revealed in post-tsunami Sri Lanka (Brun and Lund 2008, 2009; Ruwanpura 2009; Korf et al. 2010) and everyday society in Bangladesh (Karim 2001; Lewis 2004), the objective to help the poor gets entangled in and controlled by local power structures.

The somewhat polarised South Asian debate on NGO interventions, between those who distinguish them as democratic, empowering, and a means of freeing poor people from patron–client structures (Appadurai 2001; Blair 2005; Hulme and Edwards 1997) and those who perceive them as being part of the problem due to their endorsement of neoliberalism (Feldman 1997; Kamat 2002), can easily be overdrawn with the result that it places political patronage as abstractly residing in the state. The debate obviates a potentially more fruitful engagement with what actually exists. Based on research in an area that has attracted little

academic attention, this article has uncovered the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in NGO aid processes in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. Although NGOs are providing access to resources, they are doing so by being complicit in patron–client relations at the ground level. The article thus adds to key a Sri Lankan study that portrays NGOs as an elite project producing ‘new circles of power’ (Wickramasinghe 2001).

Political patron–client relationships are unequal, hierarchical, and exploitative, but this is not always how poor people essentially experience or evaluate them. The system of political patronage is far more enduring and flexible than is assumed and is capable of accommodating a variety of situations and activities, including those centrally involving NGOs. Whilst this article has offered insights into this system with reference to the specific case of post-tsunami recovery in Sri Lanka, there is a need to know more about the wide and rich range of experiences across South Asia that are inadequately described with the term ‘political patronage’. A more complete conceptualisation can come about through further research on the different kinds of political intermediaries and NGOs that continue to operate across the region today.

## CHAPTER 6

### POSITIVE RESPONSES, UNEVEN EXPERIENCES: INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER, ETHNICITY, AND LOCATION IN POST-TSUNAMI SRI LANKA

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#### 6.1 Abstract

This article examines the role of women in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in two tsunami-affected villages in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka. It considers four key livelihoods recovery strategies involving women, unveiling their immense capacity to overcome socially constructed disaster impacts. Their ability to respond positively is grounded in specific geographic and cultural contexts, making location and ethnicity of profound consequence. While pre-existing ethnic backgrounds, influenced by religious and patriarchal structures are critical indicators of the uneven ways in which women engaged in livelihoods recovery, the tsunami also generated new patterns of cultural practice. It is argued that the roles, activities, and movements of women are not fixed, but dynamic and continually created and recreated through processes of post-tsunami recovery. The article adds to research that goes beyond the simplistic representation of women as undifferentiated 'victims' in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. It contributes to stimulate discussions on the lived experience of intersectionality in feminist geography, and emphasizes the broader relevance of the study for understanding the multiple and transforming positionalities that constitute the post-disaster lives of women in divergent socio-political contexts.

*Keywords:* gender, intersectionality, 2004 tsunami, rural livelihoods, Sri Lanka

## **6.2 Introduction**

The gender-based vulnerability of women in disasters is well documented. The overwhelming focus, however, has been on the victimization of women (Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe 2003; Begum 1993; Enarson and Morrow 1998; Ikeda 1995; Wiest, Mocellin and Motsisi 1994). In the wake of the 2004 Asian tsunami in Sri Lanka, women have been shown to suffer more severe consequences in the recovery process due to their lower status relative to men (Oxfam International 2005b; TEC 2006b; World Bank, JBIC, and ADB 2005). The tendency has been to focus exclusively on the universal category of ‘vulnerable woman’, relegating her as passive and unable to cope. This conceptualization is oversimplified and reinforces stereotyped gender roles, which can in turn hamper disaster recovery. There is a need to systematically consider the category of ‘woman’ alongside other social markers of dominance and subordination.

This article explores the role of women in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka. Drawing on field research in two ethnically distinct tsunami-affected villages in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka, the article examines four key livelihoods recovery strategies involving women. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, it focuses on women’s narratives emerging from the study villages and then looks at the variations in their responses in terms of ethnicity and geographic location. The article contributes to research that overlooks the naive portrayal of women as undifferentiated ‘victims’ in post-tsunami Sri Lanka (de Mel 2007; Hyndman 2008; Ruwanpura 2008) and to encourage debates in feminist geography on the lived experience of intersectionality (McDowell 2008; Valentine 2007). It is argued that notwithstanding the importance of vulnerability in their lives, women have great

capacity to resist and overcome socially constructed disaster impacts and that their ability to engage in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery is shaped in nuanced and complicated ways at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and geographic location.<sup>59</sup>

The article draws on relevant insights in feminist geography on intersectionality, a concept that addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist studies: the acknowledgement of differences among women. Prominent scholars maintain that subject formations and social relations are constructed through a set of relationships among the multiple dimensions of being (McDowell 2008; Valentine 2007). Empirical observations have looked at how gender intersects with various categories, including ethnicity and location, and thereby shapes everyday experiences of women in spaces of home and community (Mandel 2004; Ruwanpura and Humphries 2004; Sultana 2009). In post-tsunami Sri Lanka, scholars underscore the imperative of exploring optimism in the livelihoods recovery process without overlooking inequalities and exclusions among women (Hyndman 2008; Ruwanpura 2008). Situated within these feminist geographic perspectives, this article focuses on the ways in which gender, location, and ethnicity intersect in terms of women's ability to respond positively in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. In addressing women's livelihoods recovery strategies, the article positions itself in gender analyses that consider women's ability to mobilize social networks (Cupples 2001; Griffin 2009; Ruwanpura 2006), provide emotional and physical care (Enarson and Morrow 1997, 1998), and engage in economic activities (Gray 1993; Ruwanpura 2008) following disasters.

The article is organized in four sections. The first section conceptualizes the role of women in post-tsunami recovery by considering livelihoods strategies of women in disasters and the

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<sup>59</sup> While different ethnic communities in Sri Lanka have been shown to negotiate post-tsunami recovery based on their different class positioning (Ruwanpura 2008), notable class-based variations were not evident in the post-tsunami response of women in this study.

concept of intersectionality. The next contextualizes the case of post-tsunami Sri Lanka, including the locational and ethnic variables of the study and research methods. This provides the foundation for interpreting women's narratives, grouped into four main livelihoods recovery strategies, in the subsequent section. The final section concludes by emphasizing the significance of intersectionality for analyzing women's responses to destruction, dispossession, and resulting impoverishment.

### **6.3 Role of Women in Post-tsunami Recovery**

Classifications of women as hapless victims are evident in much of the literature on gender and disaster (Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe 2003; Begum 1993; Enarson and Morrow 1998; Ikeda 1995; Wiest, Mocellin, and Motsisi 1994). To date, aid agencies and research institutes, where much of the work on women in post-tsunami Sri Lanka have been produced, have tended to universalize the social category of 'woman' and compartmentalize women's role in tsunami recovery as 'vulnerable'<sup>60</sup> (Oxfam International 2005b; TEC 2006b; World Bank, JBIC, and ADB 2005). The pre-tsunami marginalization of women due to, among other factors, the lack of power and ownership in their work, a lack of occupational mobility, and economic disadvantages is claimed to have magnified post-tsunami with the addition of new categories of inequality in a disaster environment. However, such conclusions need to be treated with caution. To explore how women respond positively to crisis situations and the variations inherent in such responses, this article examines gender analyses on post-disaster livelihoods and the concept of intersectionality in the context of post-tsunami Sri Lanka.

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<sup>60</sup> The term 'vulnerability' is defined as the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a natural hazard (Blaikie et al. 2004:11).

### ***6.3.1 Livelihoods Strategies<sup>61</sup>***

It is vital to consider women as individuals situated within webs of kin relationships, which provide key inputs to improving their condition. Considering the gender dimension to network support in the context of war in East Sri Lanka, Ruwanpura (2006: 155) finds that investing in reciprocal relationships embedded in networks of kin is an effective strategy adopted by female-headed households since this increases their chances of having such support reciprocated during personal crises. Analyzing the recovery phase of the 2008 Hurricane Ike in Texas, United States, Griffin (2009) demonstrates how women were a significant influence in the use of kin networks, particularly concerning childcare support and temporary housing. In the context of the 1998 Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua, Cupples (2001) reveals women who draw on the ‘mothering work’ of various female relatives in the community.

The emotional and physical needs of spouses, children, dependent elders, and the ill or disabled are met predominantly by women in everyday life. The term ‘carework’ is used as it acknowledges the important emotional dimensions involved (i.e. care) and the complexity of physical demands (i.e. work) (Zimmerman, Litt, and Bose 2006: 3–4). This ordinary, invisible role of women is an essential part of disaster recovery. Conducting a qualitative sociological analysis of women’s experiences following the 1992 Hurricane Andrew in Miami, United States, Enarson and Morrow (1997, 1998) highlight women’s contributions in terms of ‘emotion work’ as critical to spouses and dependents as well as to the physical aspects of recovery, such as housing reconstruction. Despite conceptions that dependent carework make them less mobile than men, women also play decisive roles in seeking external aid. In post-

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<sup>61</sup> Livelihoods strategies is used as shorthand for a series of choices constrained to a greater or lesser extent by macroeconomic circumstances, social context, cultural, and ideological expectations and access to resources (Wolf 1990).

hurricane Miami, for example, it was primarily women who faced the bureaucratic tasks of recovery and sought aid (Enarson and Morrow 1997).

Women's resourcefulness and resilience in disaster recovery is evident in their economic activities. Scrutinizing the political, economic, and militarized dimensions affecting women's livelihoods in South and East Sri Lanka, Ruwanpura (2008: 331) shows how despite manifest levels of poverty in the Batticaloa District, the economic activity in the Tamil section of the temporary housing shelters was remarkably 'entrepreneurial'. Exploring the effect of drought and economic decline on rural women across distinct ethnic groups in Bireka, Western Sudan, Gray (1993) shows how crisis afforded change among poorer Burgo women as they started economic activities (e.g. tea and beer-making) that were not sanctioned by the village as a whole. Their economic successes manifested in other spheres as they became more autonomous in their decisions and social locations. The events have caused men and women to redefine their rights and obligations towards one another (ibid.: 96).

Collectively, these studies showcase the proactive roles of women in disaster contexts. Contributing to these discussions and focusing on two tsunami-affected fishing villages in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka, this article illuminates four key livelihoods recovery strategies carried out by women: mobilizing kin networks, carework, economic activities, and participation in community-based organizations (CBOs). Gender can be defined as the process through which differences based on presumed biological sex are defined, imagined, and become significant in specific contexts (Nightingale 2006: 171). Social inequalities that are usually obscured in everyday life, including those inherent in gender, tend to be revealed in disasters. However, this does not suggest that women become more vulnerable, marginalized, and subordinate with the addition of a new category of inequality (King 1988). Identifying other categories, including but not restricted to differences between the sexes, will assist in

understanding how some women are able to resist and overcome socially constructed disaster impacts. This warrants an exploration of the complex intersections within the category of 'woman'.

### ***6.3.2 Incorporating Intersectionality***

Since the mid-1980s, the focus of feminist scholarship has moved away from the dichotomy of gender to the reconsideration of differences and inequalities *between* women. Crenshaw (1989), a legal scholar, is accredited with coining 'intersectionality' to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of women of colour fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse. She emphasized the need to take both gender and race on board and show how they interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's experiences. Intersectionality has since been heralded as a significant contribution to the social sciences and, in particular, to human geography where it is widely accepted that identities are relational (*Geografiska Annaler* 2004). It can be defined as the interaction between gender and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (McDowell 2008; Valentine 2007).

The significance of intersectionality is illustrated through the works of two prominent feminist geographers. With reference to the complex inequalities and construction of difference among transnational migrants in service sector occupations in Greater London, McDowell (2008: 497) argues that gender at particular locations is continually created and recreated through everyday social and cultural practices, producing an illusion of a 'fixed' and 'natural' gender. Women are therefore not necessarily fixed and bound to territorial

coordinates, but to social practices that are fluid, contested, and ambiguous (McDowell 1999: 2–6). According to Valentine (2007), feminist geography can advance the theorization of intersectionality by paying more attention to questions of power and social inequalities in practical research. She advocates a focus on how privileged or powerful identities are ‘done’ and ‘undone’, rather than on experiences of non-privileged groups (Valentine 2007: 14). These assertions are inspired by the early work of Butler (1990) who insisted on thinking about gender as a fluid performance that is formed through the repetition of acts and does not have meaning prior to an actor’s performance of them.

McCall (2005) suggests that case studies represent the most effective way of empirically researching the complexity of how the intersection of categories are experienced in subjects’ everyday lives. With reference to women-headed households in the context of conflict in East Sri Lanka, Ruwanpura and Humphries (2004) reveal ethnic distinctions in the ways in which these women became the heads of their households and the strategies they embrace in order to cope. Based on research conducted in Porto Novo, Benin, concerning women’s ability to be mobile vis-à-vis their livelihood strategies, Mandel (2004) highlights ethnicity as an important factor to understanding why some women have more mobility than others. The substantial mobility of Yoruba women, for example, is shown to reflect cultural norms associated with ethnicity that encourage women to be economically independent (ibid.: 278). In her work on arsenic contamination of drinking water in Bangladesh, Sultana (2009) demonstrates that gender–water relations are not just intersected by social axes, as generally argued by feminist scholars, but also by physical location with regard to water. For example, the greater distances needed to be traversed from the *bari* (homestead consisting of a kin-based cluster of households) to get safe water have given rise to older patterns of gendered divisions of labour, thereby increasing women’s burdens in providing water for their families (ibid.: 434). These

studies question homogenizing accounts of the everyday lives of women and draw attention to ethnicity and location, among others, as a source that produces difference among women.

Writing on the 2004 tsunami, feminist geographers have been influential in advancing insights into the diversity of women's traits, roles, and behaviours. In the context of war and the tsunami in East Sri Lanka, Hyndman (2008) contends that 'widows' and 'women' are unstable categories. She underscores the need to focus not only on the differences between men and women after the tsunami, but simultaneously on the differences within the category of 'woman' and 'widow' since both vary in terms of ethnicity and the type of disaster that may have precipitated it (i.e. conflict versus tsunami) (ibid.: 117). Ruwanpura (2008) shows how responses across various ethnic groups in East and South Sri Lanka are embedded in structures of gender and ethnicity. For example, the fact that Tamil women in Batticaloa overcame the tsunami-wrought adversity is associated with their resilience and hardiness from having encountered and steered through decades of violence as a result of the civil war (ibid.: 330).

In sum, insights into women's post-tsunami livelihoods strategies will be informed by the overlapping of multiple identities, as in the case of intersectionality, and with particular focus on the categories of ethnicity and location. As Valentine (2007: 18) notes, it is important to develop a new body of empirically grounded research on intersectionality, rather than relying on theorization alone to develop the concept. While existing post-tsunami analyses reflect on how tsunami recovery and pre-existing conflict overlap (de Mel 2007; Hyndman 2008) and the tsunami brought to the forefront pre-existing inequalities (Ruwanpura 2008), the present study adds a further dimension to these via its focus on women's capacity to respond positively in a non-conflict environment. The ambiguity and open-endedness of intersectionality can obstruct its usefulness for feminist inquiry (McCall 2005). Therefore, it is crucial to define the background, parameters, and methodology of intersectional analysis by contextualizing the

relevant research.

#### 6.4 Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka

With natural disaster experiences confined to periodic droughts, floods, landslides and occasional cyclones, the tsunami of 26 December 2004 was the greatest natural disaster ever to hit Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe 2005: 543). Despite statistical variations in the demographic impact, it is estimated that 31,000 people were killed, 5,600 went missing, and 500,000–800,000 were displaced (Emanuel 2006: 7; IPS, 2005: 5; Oxfam International, 2005a: 2). Post-tsunami saw a broad-based mobilization of aid, as government agencies and local government bodies, local non-government organizations (NGOs), international NGOs (INGOs), local politicians, and private donors contributed in cash and kind. However, the government remained the central authority in tsunami relief and recovery.

Small-scale fishing<sup>62</sup> was selected as the focus of research due to its extensive importance to livelihood in Sri Lanka in terms of employment, food security, and foreign exchange earnings and the severe impact it experienced in the tsunami (DFAR 2005; IPS 2006). Although the Northern and Eastern Provinces<sup>63</sup> were the worst affected by the tsunami, the prevailing security situation precluded fieldwork in these areas. Hambantota District, a 151-km belt of land depicted in Figure 2 (Chapter 1), recorded the second highest number of deaths in the Southern Province. Considering its relatively high poverty index—65% of households receive

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<sup>62</sup> In comparison with commercial fishing, small-scale fishing uses less capital and energy, smaller fishing vessels, shorter trips close to the shore, targets a wider range of fish species, and uses multiple fishing gear and strategies to suit the seasonality of fish stocks (FAO 2004).

<sup>63</sup> For administrative purposes, Sri Lanka is divided into 4 layers: 9 Provinces, 26 Districts (of which 14 are coastal Districts), 325 Divisional Secretariats, and 14,110 *Grama Niladhari* Divisions (villages), in descending order of hierarchy.

*Samurdhi* or national poverty alleviation scheme benefits (DCS 2001)—the impact on livelihoods was particularly severe.

Harbour villages suited the purpose of this study since fishing is the main livelihood in such villages. Two of the three main fishing harbours in Hambantota are in Kudawella West and Kirinda villages. These were selected as study sites due to the fact that they recorded the highest tsunami destruction across the three harbour villages—demographic, housing, fishing livelihood, and harbour infrastructure (DFAR 2005: 7)—and capture significant ethnic and locational discrepancies in Hambantota. Ethnicity is a major dividing line in Sri Lankan society, with Hambantota comprising predominantly Sinhalese, Muslim, and Sri Lankan Malay groups.<sup>64</sup> Location was deemed to have a varying impact on post-tsunami recovery on account of variations in socio-economic deprivation across villages and a post-tsunami ‘no build’ buffer zone regulation that led to households residing within 100 m of the mean high tide mark having to relocate.<sup>65</sup> In focusing explicitly on ethnicity and location, the article does not fully consider other elements of identity formation, e.g. socio-economic status and caste. Nevertheless, it examines the categories that were either consciously expressed or strategically mobilized by women in this study.

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<sup>64</sup> While it is often assumed that Sri Lanka’s multi ethnic community has a common language and religion, in reality ethnicity in Sri Lanka is not closely linked to a particular religion or language. Muslims and Malays practice Islam, but Muslims speak both Tamil and Sinhala, depending on their location, and Malays speak Bahasa Malayu. The Sinhalese speak Sinhala and are primarily Buddhists, although some are Christians. There are various religious practices that Sinhala-Buddhists have adopted, whose roots can be traced to the Hindu tradition, thereby making distinct ethno-religious identities less clear. For excellent explanations on Sri Lankan Malay identity see Osman and Sourjah (2005) and on Sinhala people see Scott (1995).

<sup>65</sup> A 1981 Act which defined the ‘no build’ coastal zone as 300 m, although not strictly enforced, was reinforced post-tsunami as ‘buffer zones’ of 200 m in the North and East and 100 m elsewhere. In October 2005, amid criticisms of an arbitrary 100/200-metre blanket restriction and the looming Presidential Election, the policy was abandoned in favour of individually specified setback zones in different coastal areas based on extant conservation guidelines (Hyndman, 2007).

#### ***6.4.1 Village Setting: Location and Ethnicity***

Kudawella West and Kirinda are approximately 190 km and 270 km, respectively, from the commercial capital of Sri Lanka, Colombo. The closest cities to Kudawella West are Dickwella (8 km) and Tangalle (4 km), and to Kirinda are Tissamaharama (16 km) and Hambantota (45 km) (Chapter 1: Figure 2). As Table 1 (Chapter 1) shows, despite a high population, Kirinda is a low density, rural village with nearly 50% of households receiving *Samurdhi*, as opposed to the relatively high density and urbanized Kudawella West, where nearly 40% receive *Samurdhi*. Kudawella West belongs to the Tangalle Divisional Secretariat, the native residence of the former Prime Minister and incumbent President of Sri Lanka and has benefited from both large-scale (harbour) and small-scale (rural roads) infrastructural investments. Tissamaharama Divisional Secretariat, to which Kirinda belongs, is considered marginal in comparison.

Households residing outside the stipulated buffer zone were eligible for government grants and donor aid to rebuild in-situ. Those residing inside the buffer zone had to be resettled in new housing projects funded and constructed by donors. These were known as ‘owner-driven’ and ‘donor-driven’ models, respectively, with the latter constructed generally through contractors although beneficiaries provided labour input in some cases (RADA 2005). Those outside the village were predominantly residing in 10 sites across the District, comprising six large-sized (55–150 households) and four small-sized (8–20 households) housing schemes. Households relocated from Kudawella West resided in housing schemes in the villages of Mahawela, Seenimodara East/West, Pahajjawa, Nidahasgama East, and Nakulugamuwa South, while those relocated from Kirinda lived in housing schemes in Kirinda itself and the village of Andaragasyaya (Chapter 1: Figure 2). Housing schemes occupied by Kudawella West residents were situated away from the village. Apart from one, all housing schemes occupied by Kirinda

residents were situated within Kirinda itself.

Kudawella West is home to a majority Sinhalese population and Kirinda a mixed Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Malay population (Chapter 1: Table 1). Religion has considerable influence on the traditional forms of culture practised by different ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. In Kudawella West and Kirinda, the Sinhalese are mostly Buddhist and the Malays are Muslim. Owing to the rigid patriarchal system that cuts across ethnic and religious lines, many of the cultural practices, social values, and attitudes inspired by notions upheld by religion tend to perpetuate women's subordinate status in these communities (Grossholtz 1984; Jayawardena 1986; McGilvray 1989; Risseuw 1988; Seneviratne and Currie 1994).

#### ***6.4.2 Doing Ethnography***

Data were collected over one year of fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2008-9 through interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, supplemented by secondary data, such as policy reports, newspaper articles, and local literature. Familiarization was acquired through a previous study (Mubarak 2007) and intermittent work and research experiences in the area in 2007-8. An ethnography was judged the most appropriate method in three respects: first, informal relationships can usually only be recognized through intimate knowledge of actors in the field; second, paying attention to non-verbal aspects of interviewing was crucial in terms of unpacking the nuances and tensions of the seemingly 'ordinary' lives of villagers; third, loosely structured interviews enable the researcher to guide the interview giving consideration to traumatic experiences of respondents and their sensitivity to certain issues.

Being the primary functional unit of society, households were used as the unit of analysis. Households are a co-resident group of individuals who share most aspects of consumption,

drawing on and apportioning a common collection of resources, including labour, to ensure material production (Schmink 1984: 89). The sample comprised households whose primary source of income was fishing or fishing-related activities. This article draws on the responses of women from 70 households—42 in Kudawella West (all Sinhalese) and 28 in Kirinda (21 Malays and seven Sinhalese)—living in the aforementioned post-tsunami housing locations. They were aged 27–67 years and represented those engaged in economic activities, such as coir-making, dried or maldivian fish production, food preparation, dressmaking, and handicrafts. Women were interviewed in their homes. In instances where male members of household were present interviews accommodated their contributions. However, it was important to be mindful of the social power inherent in the everyday rules and habits of conversation between men and women in these villages that tend to produce bias in favour of the view of men over those of women. If the perspective of the female householder was deemed vital, individual interviews were arranged subsequently.

According to McDowell (1992: 56), we have reached a self-reflexive moment in human geography, influenced by feminism, the literary turn in ethnography, and postmodernism. Intersectionality calls for a human geography that is based on the recognition of diversity. Narratives are central in such a geography, since narrative techniques, according to Miles and Crush (1993), have considerable potential for recovering hidden stories, contesting academic androcentrism and eurocentrism, and reinstating the marginalized as makers of their own past, i.e. giving them a voice to be heard. Thus, listening to women's 'stories' was an important part of this study. The focus was on women's own formulations of their situation and how they came to make livelihood decisions.

Household interviews were cross-examined with the views of two women's focus groups, 17 government officials, 12 NGO officials, 13 CBO office bearers, 7 politicians, 4 village

leaders, and 19 key informants. Apart from some interviews with officials and key informants conducted in English, interviews were conducted in the local language, Sinhala. Although the language of Malays is Bahasa Melayu, most are proficient in Sinhala. In two instances where respondents communicated in Bahasa Melayu, a translator was used. To protect the anonymity of respondents, all names used in the article are pseudonyms.

The timeframe for ‘post-tsunami recovery’ varied across households. The start of recovery was defined as the time in which a given household engaged in reviving at least one aspect of their everyday livelihood (e.g. fishing or housing). Phases of recovery are open-ended; some households reported they had reached pre-tsunami income levels, but in general there was reluctance on the part of households to concede they had regained livelihoods completely since other aspects of their livelihood had changed. During analysis, focus was on evaluating how particular roles, activities, and behaviour were weighted or given importance by women at particular moments and in specific contexts, and how these aspects relate to ethnicity and location. What follows is an analysis of four main livelihoods recovery strategies involving women.

## **6.5 Positive Responses, Uneven Experiences**

### ***6.5.1 Mobilizing Kin Networks***

Kinship networks constitute an important source of support and are the first recourse for many households when faced with an emergency. These networks epitomize inter-household relationships in Kudawella West and Kirinda, as is the case in many peasant societies and Sri Lankan agricultural villages (Leach 1961; Obeyesekere 1967; Yalman 1967). Kin extending as

far as third-cousins were largely present and intact in both villages. The social component embedded in creating and maintaining such networks—chatting, visiting, and caring—fit better with the lifestyles of women in these villages rather than with those of the men. Women had a significant effect on households' ability to utilize these relationships, and associated social capital,<sup>66</sup> in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery for both economic and non-economic gains.

The experiences of Chitra (48 years) and her husband, Piyatissa (57 years), a fisherman in Kudawella West, provide a useful illustration of economic support gained via kinship ties. Piyatissa is a crew member on a multiday fishing boat.<sup>67</sup> Chitra contributed to household income by joining two other women in the neighbourhood in making coir rope; Piyatissa supported Chitra in managing the business. The tsunami completely destroyed their house and their livelihood. The cash grant of 750,000 rupees they received from an INGO to reconstruct their house in-situ, was inadequate in the face of escalating prices. Although both Piyatissa and Chitra both got back to their economic activities post-tsunami, the income generated was inadequate to help bridge the shortfall in funds. As they comment:

[Chitra] Do you know that with the 7½ lakhs<sup>68</sup> given to us, we could build just the two rooms? We needed to replace all the doors and windows, and rebuild a kitchen. [Piyatissa] I went to the NGO office to inquire about it. The *suddha* [white man] said, 'Please, please! We have finished our work now!' So, who can we go to? We needed about 3½ lakhs more! [Chitra] We were helpless. We had to fall back on our own earnings. We needed to build up our coir business. [Piyatissa] A phone can make a difference. We can take orders over the phone and be ready with the supply on market days, Saturday and Tuesday. We can call up a three wheeler to transport the rope. But, we did not even have money enough for that. [Chitra] I told my brother how things were—he lives in Tangalle. He gave us a cell phone with a connection. Our coir business picked up! (September 2008).

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<sup>66</sup> While there is a protracted debate about the intellectual merits of social capital in development studies (Fine 2001), for the purpose of this analysis the concept is defined as the social resources upon which people draw in pursuit of their livelihood objectives (Bebbington 1999).

<sup>67</sup> Multiday boats exploit deep sea fish resources; equipped with a cabin for the crew and ice hold for fish preservation, they stay at sea for one to four weeks at a time.

<sup>68</sup> One lakh is equivalent to 100,000 Sri Lankan rupees.

Their house is still unfinished, but they have managed to replace doors and windows and reconstruct parts of the kitchen—support from kin made this possible. Reciprocity is what strengthens and reaffirms effective kinship bonds. It is likely that Chitra's brother was reciprocating a past favour and that Chitra will also reciprocate in the future. The renewal of such networks assumes various forms since help can be reciprocated and support stored up in many different channels (Ruwanpura 2006: 157).

Similar examples can be drawn from the experiences of Malay women in Kirinda. Nazrath (39 years), the wife of a fisherman who works on non-motorized and day boats,<sup>69</sup> lives in Soyurupura (Kirinda). Pre-tsunami, Nazrath ran a wayside boutique, selling fruits, spiced chickpeas, *appa* (bowl-shaped rice flour pancakes), and *vadai* (dhal or urad gram fried dumplings). The boutique was completely destroyed in the tsunami. An INGO agreed to give her 20,000 rupees worth of goods, on the basis that she constructed the boutique on her own. However, as she remarks:

It was going to cost 30,000 rupees! How would we have that kind of money! So, I asked my two sisters in Hambantota. They gave me gold jewellery. I pawned it together with my own gold bangles and raised the money. They're my sisters, so they will help! I will return the jewellery when we are able to earn enough to redeem it (October 2008).

As in other parts of South Asia, it is common practice among rural communities in Sri Lanka to mortgage or sell gold jewellery in times of financial distress (Amirthalingam and Lakshman 2009: 54–6). Approaching kin for assets to pawn was commonplace among women in both villages. Implicit in Nazrath's statement is also the fact that some households took for granted

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<sup>69</sup> Non-motorized boats are used for prawn fishing up to 32 km off the coast. Fixed with inboard engines, day boats operate up to about 15 km from the shore and engage in fishing trips not exceeding one day.

that their kin would offer support in situations of difficulty and distress.

Economic assistance women obtained from kin extended to small interest-free loans and trading favours. The latter involved purchasing products of self-employment activities, such as garments from households engaged in tailoring. The cases of Chitra and Nazrath reveal networks that were mobilized in situations where external aid proved insufficient. Since kin networks within the village were affected similarly by the tsunami, rendering them incapable of exchanging economic resources, women drew on kin unaffected by the tsunami and residing outside of the village. Distinct ethnic or locational differences among women in accessing kin networks for economic gain were not apparent.

Non-economic help from kin involved intimate and ongoing relations, such as sharing of toilet facilities, preparing meals, and caring for children and family members who were disabled, injured, or aged. These forms of support point to gendered reasons why kin networks comprise women (Cupples 2001; Griffin 2009; Ruwanpura 2006). Although there were no ethnic variations in how women mobilized kin networks for such tasks, those from Kudawella West living in relocated housing noted difficulties due to location. As Chamila (43 years), the wife of a fisherman, living in Nakulugamuwa Housing (Nakulugamuwa South) comments:

My daughter is 14 years old. I can't leave her alone when I go out. When I was in the village I used to ask my relatives in the neighbourhood to look out for her. That sort of thing can't happen here; people behave like those in urban areas (September 2008).

Excluding housing schemes that adopted a community arrangement in relocation—Navadivi Purawara (Pahajjawa) and Seenimodara Housing (Seenimodara East/West)—all other households from Kudawella West found themselves among households relocated from various villages across the District. Women attempted to work around these constraints. Some women

in Nakulugamuwa Housing (Nakulugamuwa South), approximately 3 km from Kudawella West, resorted to daily visits to Kudawella West. Typically, they arrived with their husband and children in the morning with cooked meals for the day, the woman stayed at a relative's house or in their tsunami-damaged house while the husband went to sea and the children went to school, and returned to their house in Nakulugamuwa at night. In Kirinda, where nearly all relocated households lived among pre-tsunami neighbours, these were rarely cited as concerns.

The task of managing the bureaucracy of numerous aid assessment meetings and society meetings also fell upon women who did so by dispatching members of kin as and when deemed necessary. When male family members were occupied in fishing activities, women drew on support from male kin for tasks, such as visits to government departments, NGO offices, and travelling. Malay women, in particular, were reluctant to appear in public and interact with people outside their immediate circle and therefore relied extensively on male relatives to represent them and their households in interactions with government and NGO officials. Across both ethnicities, help from male kin was often reciprocated through assistance provided to their wives or other female members of their household.

Reciprocity is largely based on empathizing with each other's vulnerability and recognizing their susceptibility in times of crisis. Resonating with the works of Ruwanpura (2006), Griffin (2009) and Cupples (2001), investing in reciprocal relationships embedded in networks of kin was an effective strategy adopted by women. Geographic proximity, and similarity of peer class groups (Cupples 2004), mattered in terms of women's ability to mobilize intimate non-economic support, such as caring for dependents. Women from Kudawella West, living in the village, and from Kirinda, both in the village and relocated housing, were better placed to mobilize kin in this context than women from Kudawella West residing in relocated housing.

### **6.5.2 Carework**

The pivotal role of women in carework is largely the result of social arrangements historically rooted in culture and the political dynamics of gender relations, as it is the world over (Zimmerman, Litt, and Bose 2006). The pre-tsunami lives of women in Kudawella West and Kirinda involved caring for others—nurturing children, nursing the sick, and helping the disabled and elderly—alongside home management, housekeeping, and related domestic chores (e.g. laundry and meal preparation). Post-tsunami saw a dramatic expansion in these chores that had to be shouldered by women, emulating post-disaster experiences elsewhere (Enarson and Morrow 1997, 1998). Children, husbands, and other dependents had to be consoled as they came to terms with evacuation, losses, relocation, injury, and death, among others. This ‘emotion work’ extended beyond households to the elderly, people with disabilities, relatives, friends, and children within the community. Women also helped male members of household in reconstructing houses. Women’s multifaceted labour—simultaneously unremunerated/feminised and involving hard physical labour/masculinised—created spaces in which gender relations in the community could be reworked (Cupples 2004) and thus helped produce living conditions that made basic human health and well-being possible post-tsunami.

In responding to the emotional needs of their spouses, Sinhalese women in Kudawella West met with a serious impediment—alcohol consumption. Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol and Buddhism counsels against it. However, it is a ubiquitous part of Sinhalese fishermen’s lives, where beer, toddy (fermented palm nectar), arrack (distilled palm nectar), and *kassipu* (an illegally distilled beverage) are consumed in great quantities. Typically, drinking occurs upon a fisherman’s return from sea, using the money earned by selling his catch. There

was a noticeable increase in alcohol consumption post-tsunami, severely affecting women and their ability to sustain well-being within households. Niranjalie (33 years), the wife of a fisherman who works on a day boat in Kudawella West, claims her husband's alcohol consumption had increased significantly post-tsunami and attributes it to the loss of their youngest son of six years in the tsunami:

He's always saying, 'If I was at home, my child would've been saved. He would've at least climbed this tree'. [...] He worships the Lord Buddha with daily offerings of flowers and light. He does it better than I. He is up at the crack of dawn to pluck flowers. He even spent 20,000 rupees in reconstructing a Buddha statue in the school here that was damaged in the tsunami. But, then he also drinks arrack daily. There are days he drinks a whole bottle. He acknowledges the fact, but tells me that he is paying for his sins! (August 2008).

The post-tsunami circumstances led men to drink. It provided short term physical and emotional gratification in the face of social suffering (Gamburd 2008: 110). It is not only the emotional state that contributed to alcoholism, but also the abundant supplies of alcohol. Post-tsunami, small-scale alcohol outlets and illicit brewing units proliferated. Niranjalie relates her predicament:

Once I told him, 'I myself will get the arrack, but you can drink only in the evening'. From the time he gets up in the morning he pleads for a drink and by noon the bottle is over! [...] I tried. Now I'm sick of trying. We are sick of our lives. He doesn't see what he is doing to us. When they drink, they're like mad hatters (ibid.).

Her husband's alcohol addiction, has not only affected the economic recovery of Niranjalie's household, but compromised her ability to engage in restorative carework.

The case exemplifies the experience of women in Kudawella West living with male household members addicted to alcohol. With alcohol outlets being far less accessible to fishermen from Kudawella West in relocated housing schemes, fewer incidents of alcoholism

were reported by women in these areas. Meanwhile, in Kirinda, there were no reported cases of alcohol consumption affecting the carework of women. There are, in fact, no known liquor stores in Kirinda and this can be attributed to the presence of a significant population of Malays who are of the Islamic faith. Islam considers alcoholism the ‘mother of all sins’ and strictly forbids consumption of alcohol in any form and, as such, the Malays are largely non-drinkers. Thus, the ethnicity in this village was a factor that contributed positively to the carework of women post-tsunami.

In Kudawella West, some women who were relocated found their new neighbourhood more conducive to carework. Danushka (62 years) lives in Navadivi Purawara (Pahajjawa) and is the guardian of a young family whose parents were killed in the tsunami. As a close friend and neighbour, Danushka took on the task of caring for the four siblings: the eldest aged 25 years, a multiday boatman in Kudawella West, and three school-going children aged 18, 15, and 11 years. She explains:

This place is better for the children. They have to study. In the village, if someone comes to your house, you can't even talk peacefully—houses were that close. Here, everyone is peaceful. People mind their own business and there are no fights and brawls in the evening. The village was not a good place to bring up children in (September 2008).

Danushka's statement embodies the protective aspects of carework. Mothers and guardians like her found the high density population, aggressive community, and drinking culture of Kudawella West an unsuitable environment for nurturing children.

A household's ability to respond positively in post-disaster recovery is dependent on the emotional and physical well-being of its members. The socially prescribed role of women as careworkers placed them in a pivotal position in post-tsunami recovery. Sinhalese women in Kudawella West were constrained due to increased male alcohol consumption—a reflection

both of cultural attitudes to drinking and of the increased availability of alcohol at that location. Compared with the village of Kudawella West, relocated housing was deemed a better environment for raising children. By contrast, women in Kirinda, both Malays and Sinhalese, were unaffected by this phenomenon on account of both cultural and location factors. Clearly, location is linked to social practices that are fluid, contested, and ambiguous (McDowell 1999: 2–6).

### ***6.5.3 Engaging in Economic Activities***

Women's livelihoods in these communities are assigned to prevailing gendered structures that confine them to home-based work. These roles are embedded in a rigid patriarchal system that traverse religious and ethnic boundaries; they construct women as reproducers, nurturers, and disseminators of tradition, culture, community, and nation and propagate the ideology that women's roles must be that of a 'docile daughter', 'chaste wife', 'nurturing mother', or 'sagacious grandmother' (de Alwis 2002: 679). Household income generation was derailed with the destruction of livelihood assets in the tsunami. Although men resumed their fishing livelihood, their income was invariably insufficient to meet post-tsunami expenditures. Within these parameters, there are many examples of women engaged themselves in various economic activities with positive outcomes.

Rohini (32 years) is the wife of a fisherman working in a multiday boat. Pre-tsunami she worked with her mother and a neighbour in spinning coir; coir machines are operated in groups of three. Her mother died in the tsunami and her neighbour relocated post-tsunami. Compelled to seek an alternative activity, Rohini started small-scale dried and maldivian fish production—an activity she engaged in occasionally before the tsunami for household

consumption. The only utensil needed was a pot to boil the fish, which she already had. Her husband brought the fish home:

I've asked him to buy fish only when it's going cheap—about 50–60 rupees a kilo [kilogram]. Yesterday, it was 200 rupees. He didn't buy—at that price I can't make a profit. I don't get more than 30 kilos at a time, because I'm doing it on a small-scale. I sell my products to the *mudalali* [fish merchant] at the harbor. I have to negotiate the price. A kilo of maldivian fish will sell for about 800 rupees. Dried fish will be about 200–300 rupees a kilo. Before the tsunami, these sold for less; 200–300 rupees for maldivian fish and 80–90 rupees for dried fish. So, we're able to get a profit at the moment (September 2008).

Evidently, Rohini had developed business acumen post-tsunami. She was very conversant with the market prices and was capable of negotiating a deal with the *mudalalis*. Populated by male fishermen, *mudalalis*, ancillary workers, and administrative officers, harbours in Hambantota are not places frequented by women. Women are even less likely to bargain with *mudalalis*—an activity undertaken by males. In adopting more masculine subject positions in relation to work women like Rohini are able to create spaces wherein gender relations in the community can be reworked, often with positive outcomes in terms of identity renegotiation (Cupples 2004).

Some women began economic activities for the first time post-tsunami. Thilaka (67 years) is the widowed mother of a *mudalali* engaged in the prawn business in Kudawella West. He was the sole income earner. He lost three day boats and nets in the tsunami, but received replacements from an NGO for only one boat and the nets. Thilaka attempted to better her household finances by selling cloth. She used a small contribution from her son's daily earnings to buy the cloth and sold it to households in Kudawella West and neighbouring villages. She moved around on foot, her sales were poor, and she was exhausted. Yet, she forged ahead with a new business:

One day, I went to the weekly marketplace with my bag of cloth. I didn't open my bag, but just watched the merchants doing big business. I thought I would like to do like they do. I talked it over with my neighbour and together we started a new business. We now go to Dickwella in a three-wheeler, buy vegetables and coconuts, and sell it at the village marketplace. On good days, we make 7000–10,000 rupees. [...] After the tsunami, I felt I had to do something, contribute something towards household expenditure. My son says we don't need the money, but I know we do. I now make enough to cover most of our household's consumption (September 2008).

Thilaka's story conveys the great capacity of an elderly woman to resist and overcome the tsunami impact that disrupted household income.

Both Rohini and Thilaka have pushed the boundaries of 'home-based' livelihood. While it is widely accepted that Buddhism offers more freedom to women than other religions, the patriarchal structure within these villages supersedes the philosophical principles of equality upheld by Buddhism as it has elsewhere in Sri Lanka (Grossholtz 1984; Jayawardena 1986). As Seneviratne and Currie (1994: 596) explain, the Buddhist philosophy recognizes equality of men and women, and both sexes are charged equally with the duty of following the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha which lead to enlightenment. However, the interpretations of these notions in the Buddhist texts and folklore have led to the concept of male dominance and the subordination of women in the course of its institutionalization (*ibid.*). Thus, Rohini's willingness to interact with male *mudalalis* in selling her fish products challenges the stereotypical role of women in these communities. The fact that Thilaka was determined to make a business of her own and be financially independent in spite of a son who was willing to support her, demonstrates her willingness to stand up to patriarchal norms.<sup>70</sup>

The coir industry is a popular means of livelihood for women in Kudawella West. The instant breakdown of coir groups was inevitable in the aftermath of the tsunami. Some women

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<sup>70</sup> While this reiterates women's experiences in pre-tsunami Sri Lanka (de Mel 2001; Gamburd 2000; Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999; Ruwanpura and Humphries 2004), moments of historical turbulence, conflict and disaster also offer new spaces for women to adapt and transform. However, there are limits to the ways in which women can push boundaries in such instances due to material inequities.

who remained in the village were able to revive their groups or form new groups, but this was not an option for those in relocated housing. Coir-making activities in the village were often conducted on abandoned land (government-owned) and in the backyards of two adjoining houses. Relocated housing was very structured with organized dispersion of households in segregated plots of land. There were no vacant plots. Thus, those in relocated housing not only found themselves among new and unknown neighbours, but also with no space for setting up coir-making activities. All women who were engaged in coir-making pre-tsunami and now living in relocated housing were unable to resume this activity post-tsunami.

Seeking alternative forms of income generation was also a constraint for such women. Geethanjalee (47 years), the mother of a fisherman who works on a multiday boat, could not recommence her coir-making activities after moving to Navadivi Purawara (Pahajjawa). In search of an alternative means of restoring her household income, she started a small grocery shop at her new house using a small donation from a local NGO. She bought items from Dickwella and sold it at her shop keeping a small margin. However, there were three other households running similar outlets at Navadivi Purawara. Moreover, even though it cost them more, some of the residents preferred to travel to Dickwella to purchase their requirements. The limited selection Geethanjalee was able to offer her customers and the slightly higher price was a deterrent. Geethanjalee's shop was shut down one year later. As she laments:

In Kudawella West, I could even grow something—vegetables, coconuts—and sell it at the marketplace. Things would be easier if I was in the village (September 2008).

Thus women who were unable to resume coir-making post-tsunami were also disadvantaged in commencing alternative economic activities.

The role of Malay women in economic activities is a somewhat different story. The majority

of Malay women were not engaged in economic activities before or after the tsunami. Compared to Sinhalese women, in Kudawella West and Kirinda, Malay women have greater social restrictions placed on their mobility and they depend more on male household members for financial support. They are not encouraged to visit public spaces and gender spatial segregation is strictly enforced even within household compounds. Since women's mobility is perceived to be linked to sexual license in the eyes of the average Muslim, controlling their mobility becomes an essential component of respectability (McGilvray 1989: 212). Interviewed Malay women acknowledged the ways in which underlying patriarchal structures and values inhibited their involvement in economic activities.

Yet, Shafeek (61 years), President of the Kirinda (Muslim) Fisheries Cooperative Society (FCS)<sup>71</sup> and long term resident in Kirinda, decries the inability or the unwillingness of Malay women to involve themselves even in home-based economic activities. Shafeek was also the sole income earner of a household including three women—wife and two daughters—who are implicitly referred to in his statement:

The men have to go out and earn. The women will cook, eat, and stay home. Even if there is only one man, but many women in the house, the story is the same. But, there is space; they can do some cultivation, home gardening, or raise chickens. It is the societal norm from those days! It is not like that in the Sinhalese community. Those women look to develop themselves. This is our community's weakness (October 2008).

Despite having access to assets (e.g. space) to engage in activities (e.g. rearing chickens), which require little or no start up fund or mobility, some Malay women did not get involved in such activities. Aside from patriarchal structures, the cultural practice of Malay women who depend

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<sup>71</sup> FCSs are government-established CBOs that channel credit/subsidies, maintain savings deposits, and supply fishing requisites (e.g. fuel and fishing gear) for fishermen.

entirely on men to provide for the household has also influenced their limited involvement in economic activities.

The study encountered three Malay women who have risen to meet the unprecedented challenges that confronted them in reviving household income post tsunami. Nazrath, mentioned previously, was able to reconstruct successfully her boutique and resume business. Nazeela (36 years) lives in Emirates City (Kirinda) and is the wife of a fisherman who earns his living by catching prawns and lobsters. Nazeela's husband lost his fishing nets in the tsunami. Despite appeals made to various NGOs, he was unable to secure replacements. He was compelled to fall back on a loan from a microfinance institution. Following a training programme conducted by an INGO in the village and using the start up money loaned to her by the INGO, Nazeela started a small business making papyrus bags:

Muslim women like me usually didn't do these things before the tsunami. But now, because we need the money, we have to get involved in some sort of self employment activity (October 2008).

She sells the bags from home and the money earned has been useful in meeting day-to-day expenses in running the house. Indeed, crisis can create moments of opportunity for new and different livelihoods strategies (Gray 1993).

There were women who went a step further and took to activities that required travelling outside of their home. Mumtaz (68 years old), who lives in Kirinda, was widowed pre-tsunami. Her son is a fisherman, but was injured in the tsunami and is unable to work. Mumtaz was engaged in economic activities from pre-tsunami times; she prepared traditional short eats—savoury snacks, such as fried patties and Chinese rolls—and sold it from her home. She has now sought to widen her market by travelling to Tissamaharama:

What else is there to do? We have no income. There is no reason to be ashamed. They say Muslim women shouldn't go out and work. So some people don't go. But poor people like us go. Everyone can't be *hajjias* [returned pilgrims from Mecca] and *mudalalis* you see. If we don't help ourselves who will? (August 2008).

For women like Mumtaz, adhering to cultural norms of her community would jeopardize economic recovery in the aftermath of the tsunami. The economic corollary of cultural norms that limit women's mobility in public spaces is that it greatly constrains their ability to gain access to economic resources readily and freely (Ruwanpura 2006: 55). Mumtaz refers to *hajjias* and *mudalalis* to convey the notion 'rich men'. While the economic welfare of her household was the prime concern for Mumtaz, implicit in her statement is also a willingness to criticize and challenge patriarchal norms that constrained Muslim women's interests and rights.

Women in these villages have demonstrated remarkable abilities to respond to changes brought on by the tsunami by engaging in economic activities. Their responses, however, are varied. In Kudawella West, women living in the village had an advantage over those in relocated housing. Sinhalese women were better placed than Malay women due to inherent cultural differences which stem from their different ethnicity; the Sinhalese women were less constrained under patriarchal structures and were less dependent on male members of the household. Not all women have equal opportunities for mobility and, consequently, the same chances for engaging in a beneficial livelihood activity (Mandel 2004). However, three Malay women sought to overcome typical cultural norms. Considerable financial responsibilities rendered their income essential to household sustenance which in turn facilitated autonomy and independence in economic activities. In effect, this signifies new patterns post-tsunami in Malay women's attitudes to, and involvement in, economic activities. While existing inequalities, across ethnic and patriarchal lines, were exacerbated in the wake of the tsunami (Ruwanpura 2008), the disaster has also brought new opportunities for social transformation

(de Mel 2007).

#### ***6.5.4 Participating in CBOs***

NGOs replaced a direct ‘individual approach’ for aid disbursement used in the relief phase, with a ‘community based approach’ in the recovery phase that meant working through existing CBOs, or calling for potential beneficiaries to form CBOs or ‘small groups’ that would gradually assemble into village-wide CBOs. For households, attending CBO meetings was crucial in terms of accessing aid resources. Invariably, male members of household were out at sea or engaged in housing reconstruction. It was left to the women to attend CBO meetings. Interviewed office bearers of CBOs established in villages since before the tsunami and key informants reported a significant increase in the proportion of women attending CBO meetings compared to pre-tsunami.

CBO meetings are held in the village on a monthly, bi-weekly, or weekly basis. Proximity to the village was a key element in being able to attend these—an aspect that inconvenienced women from Kudawella West residing in relocated housing. The cost of travel was the prime factor, particularly for women living in Ruingama Housing (Nidahagama East), the housing scheme furthest away from Kudawella West at approximately 17 km (Figure 1). There are no direct buses from Navadivi Purawara (Pahajjawa) to Kudawella West. The only bus that stops at both locations takes this route just twice a day; thus, the logistics of travel was another issue. Three-wheelers are an option. However, the cost involved—anything up to 400 rupees—was too steep for most households to bear on a regular basis. Women from poorer households resorted to walking the entire distance in the hope that participation at CBO meetings would bring them some material benefit.

For women like Sujatha (40 years), the wife of a one day boatman and mother of children aged years 11 and 3, in Seenimodara Housing (Seenimodara East/West), distance was a problem in attending CBO meetings due to household responsibilities:

I didn't go for meetings since I came here in January 2006. By the time I get organized with the little ones, I'm sick of the whole thing! If I was in the village I can simply run over (September 2008).

Not attending CBO meetings had its consequences. In Sujatha's case, she was a member of the Kudawella West FCS, Janashakthi Bank Society (JBS),<sup>72</sup> and Ruhunu Rural Women's Organization (RRWO)<sup>73</sup> since pre-tsunami times. Her membership in the FCS was cancelled as she had not attended meetings for six continuous months. In the RRWO, Sujatha was barred from taking loans as members are required to be present at meetings for six continuous months to be eligible to apply. The JBS fined her 20 rupees for each month she did not attend a meeting. Sujatha also lost out on various aid programmes mainly on account of her inability to attend meetings of other 'small groups' established mainly by INGOs that arrived in the village post-tsunami.

Women from Kudawella West living in relocated housing cited irate husbands as a reason why they could not attend CBO meetings. As Chamila (39 years), the wife of a crew member of a multiday boat, states:

When he is at home, he does not like me to go anywhere. But, more importantly, I have to be home at the time he returns from sea! If not, he gets very angry (September 2008).

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<sup>72</sup> JBS is a micro credit union that forms part of an NGO, Janashakthi, established in 1989 with the aim of empowering rural women in the Hambantota District.

<sup>73</sup> RRWO is the working unit of an NGO established in 1990, devoted to improving the socio-economic conditions of rural women in the Hambantota District.

Interestingly, the husbands of women who highlighted this as a concern went out to sea in multiday boats and were away from home for one to two weeks at a time. By contrast, in Kirinda, both Sinhalese and Malay women did not raise this as a concern, possibly because multiday boat fishing is rarely practiced in that location. Physical obstructions at the Kirinda harbour—frequent sea sand deposits which restrict navigation at the harbour inlet, limited space to anchor many boats, and lack of infrastructural development—have severely restricted the use of large multiday boats. Difference in ethnicity also comes into play here as Muslim fishermen prefer not to travel long distances as this disrupts their daily prayers.

Location was not a hindrance in terms of attending CBO meetings for women from Kirinda, in both the village and relocated housing, since relocation predominantly occurred within Kirinda. However, underlying patriarchal structures and values restricted most Malay women in Kirinda from participating in CBO meetings, as it did their involvement in economic activities. Nonetheless, this ideological norm does not necessarily apply across all Malay women. As revealed through the voices of Mumtaz, Nazreena, and Tasneem:

[Mumtaz] You see, because we are Muslims we don't go out much. It was only after the tsunami that we came out and joined these CBOs. Now, of course, if any organization calls us for CBO meetings we are ready to run to it! Before, we were shy and afraid. All that is now gone!  
[Nazreena] To be honest, I didn't even know there was something called 'CBO' in pre-tsunami days. [Tasneem] Because of the desperate state we are in we have become brave! (August 2008).

The sudden breakdown of livelihoods and the need for men to become more intensely involved in economic activities or housing reconstruction has resulted in these women becoming more aware of their institutional environment and, in some cases, even stepping into more powerful, decision-making roles. Implicit in the expressions of Mumtaz and Tasneem are feminist impulses and their willingness to challenge the patriarchal status quo that prescribes

particular gender roles.

Women played an imperative role in securing aid and loans from CBOs post-tsunami. Personal mobility, reflected in the distance women travel from their residence in order to attend CBO meetings, is no doubt an important factor in the creation of profitable livelihood strategies (Mandel 2004). The relatively shorter distance to travel for CBO meetings meant that women living in Kudawella West had a greater advantage over those in relocated housing who faced issues of transport cost and logistics, household responsibilities, and traditional male-dominated structures. Sinhalese women faced far fewer restrictions on mobility than Malay women and were definitely at a distinct advantage with respect to attending CBO meetings. Patriarchal social structures create female identities that limit women's spatial mobility and their access to resources (Sultana 2004). Yet, post-tsunami recovery has also generated new openings for a minority of Malay women to renegotiate their roles, activities, and mobility.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This article suggests that women have great resilience and resourcefulness to overcome socially constructed tsunami impacts and that their ability to engage in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery is shaped in nuanced and complicated ways at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and location. Four key livelihoods recovery strategies are revealed: mobilizing kin networks, carework, engaging in economic activities, and participating in CBOs. The fact that women's involvement in economic activities and attendance at CBO meetings depended on the degree of female mobility permitted by their community, and that women's carework is influenced by their community's drinking culture, suggests that ethnicity is of profound consequence to how women respond post-tsunami. The distance women travel from their residence to engage in

economic activities and/or attend CBO meetings, the sufficient demand for business ventures, the number of liquor sales outlets, and the density of residents in their neighbourhood are all factors that point, in varying degrees, to the importance of location in forming profitable livelihood recovery strategies for women.

The study presents evidence concerning the more positive roles of women in disasters with respect to their ability to mobilize social networks (Cupples 2001; Griffin 2009; Ruwanpura 2006), provide emotional and physical care (Enarson and Morrow 1997, 1998), and engage in productive economic activities (Gray 1993; Ruwanpura 2008). It resonates with feminist scholarship in post-tsunami Sri Lanka (de Mel 2007; Hyndman 2008; Ruwanpura 2008) and in everyday contexts (Mandel 2004; Ruwanpura and Humphries 2004; Sultana 2004), which demonstrate that the interconnections within gendered existence produce multifaceted, complex, and potentially contradictory identities for women. The differentiation is not merely between locations—women residing in Kudawella West, Kirinda, or relocated housing across the District—but, also based on ethnic variations among women within those locations. This illuminates the fact that the geographical specificity of place is a contested and fluid social process (McDowell 1999: 21).

Pre-existing ethno-religious backgrounds are important markers of the uneven ways in which women engage in post-tsunami livelihood strategies (Hyndman 2008; Ruwanpura 2008). However, the tsunami has set changes in motion—it brought about fissures along the patriarchal system giving women, particularly Malays, greater leeway to engage in certain aspects of livelihoods. Such women have not rejected their culture, but aspired to change certain traditions in order to promote livelihoods recovery. These shifts in women's gendered circumstances bring with them the potential for social transformation. This reinstates the argument that the roles, activities, and movements of women are not fixed, but dynamic and

continually created and recreated through processes of post-tsunami recovery (McDowell 2008; Valentine 2007).

The strengths of intersectionality are that it helps avoid fixed and homogenized assumptions of identities and a fixation on the sex–gender dichotomy in feminist theorizing and analysis that marginalizes the effects of other differences on women. At a time when human geography calls for recognition of diversity, theories rooted in personal experience, and a greater tolerance of difference, an intersectional analysis using narrative techniques proves valuable. It has the potential for initiating a process of discovery in disaster research that yields new and critical insights for understanding the multiple and transforming positionalities that constitute women’s responses and the power relations that are central to it.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 State of Recovery

At the end of 2010, whilst many households across the world will reflect upon the year past, for households in Kudawella West and Kirinda it will bring back acute and painful memories of one of the most destructive natural disasters known to humankind that devastated their lives and livelihoods. Although households have recovered in many ways, for most life has never been the same.

Five years down the road there is no denying that both villages have benefitted from reconstruction efforts that significantly improved village infrastructure. This is particularly so in Kirinda where, pre-tsunami, most households lacked essential public amenities, such as electricity, pipe-borne water, and health services. Some of these households relied on community taps located in central locations and carried water in buckets to their houses. Those less fortunate either bought water from a tanker truck or resorted to using water from freshwater lakes that dot the landscape around Kirinda. Post-tsunami, INGOs arriving in the village have implemented rainwater harvesting programs thereby alleviating to some extent the problem of limited water supply in this village.<sup>74</sup> Pre-tsunami, many houses in Kirinda were also not connected to the power grid, whilst nearly all post-tsunami houses are. Worthy of mention here is Colliers Housing, which installed the first solar powered street lamps in the village (Chapter 1: Figure 7). In terms of public health, before the tsunami, households were

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<sup>74</sup> The rainwater, however, is only available during the monsoon season.

compelled to travel to hospitals in Tissamaharama, which is nearly 14 km away, or elsewhere in the Hambantota District. The Kirinda Peripheral Hospital built by a post-tsunami INGO has, undoubtedly, been a significant improvement.

Both villages have gained from an influx of tsunami aid that developed the facilities of their fishing harbours, such as the boat docking area, enclosed market, and boat repair workshop. In Kirinda, INGOs have supported dredging of the tsunami-damaged inlet in order to provide for the passage of larger crafts, including multiday boats.<sup>75</sup> Across these villages, new and improved tar roads have replaced earlier gravel roads and destroyed schools have been reconstructed, through government and donor funding. Households in Kudawella West have benefitted from a new construction for their village market and an office building for the FCS, whereas meetings had to be conducted in member homes prior to the tsunami. In Kirinda, a new village market has been built by the central government, whilst several community halls have been constructed by various NGOs, providing venues for CBO meetings.

Overall, in terms of physical asset replacement at the village-level, households have not only recovered, but by and large bettered their pre-tsunami livelihoods. The recovery of other aspects of livelihoods is a somewhat different story. The overarching message emerging from households is that they have ‘not recovered’ livelihoods—capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living—after the tsunami. Some reached or bettered their pre-tsunami income levels, whilst others living in temporary coastal dwellings pre-tsunami benefitted in terms of a permanent house. Yet, even on the part of such households, there is reluctance to concede that they had regained livelihoods completely. This can be linked to the fact that other aspects of their livelihood had changed. For instance, despite benefitting from a new house

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<sup>75</sup> Keeping the harbour free from sand deposition, however, has always been a struggle. Thus, the success of this exercise is yet to be seen.

and improved facilities (e.g. water and electricity), for some households relocation restricted the revival of place-based livelihoods (e.g. coir-making). Households are also troubled with feelings of hopelessness, uncertainty, unhappiness, fear, and anxiety post-tsunami. These perspectives and feelings on post-tsunami livelihoods, across Sinhala-Buddhist and Malay communities and varying socio-economic groups therein, signify enduring hardships in the post-tsunami livelihoods recovery process in these villages.

## **7.2 Summary of Thesis**

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the post-tsunami livelihoods recovery process in Sri Lanka through the lens of the SLF and the social networks approach. The study focused on the case of fisher households in two post-tsunami villages, Kudawella West and Kirinda, in the Hambantota District, South Sri Lanka. A qualitative ethnographic methodology was applied, paying significant attention to the politics of conducting research in post-tsunami Sri Lanka (Chapter 2). In response to the four research questions set out in Chapter 1, each of the core Chapters from 3 through 6 took a different theoretical approach. The analytical value of the SLF and the social networks approach in understanding post-tsunami livelihoods recovery was assessed (Chapter 3). The practices of corruption and the meanings people attach to it were examined drawing from ethnographic accounts of low level corruption in South Asia (Chapter 4). The system of political patronage in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery was scrutinized alongside South Asian analyses on intermediaries in everyday society and NGOs in development (Chapter 5). The role of women in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery was explored, stimulating discussions on the lived experience of intersectionality in feminist geography (Chapter 6). Through an interdisciplinary approach that draws on human

geography, development studies, and feminism, this thesis has lent clarity and cogency to the complexity of everyday life in a disaster context and contributed to a better understanding of Sri Lanka's post-tsunami livelihoods recovery process.

Whilst most households continue to occupy vulnerable positions in their post-tsunami livelihoods, the findings of this thesis have underpinned their recovery as highly uneven. Some have responded much more vigorously and effectively in livelihoods recovery than others, and surprisingly so. Chapters 3 through to 6 of this thesis are substantial pieces of research, each with their own conclusions taking into account the implications for literature, policy, and development practice. However, wider conclusions can be drawn by considering their key findings in relation to the literature on everyday livelihoods, networks, politics, and inequalities.

The remainder of this chapter is structured in three sections. The first section presents four main scholarly contributions emerging from this thesis. The intent of the first three contributions is not to classify and repeat all the findings from Chapters 3 through to 6, but rather to present briefly the major findings of the process of post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka such that it helps conceptualize everyday livelihoods, networks, politics, and inequalities in a disaster context. The fourth contribution embodies a cross-cutting conclusion. The second section discusses the implications of the thesis for policy and development practice. The chapter concludes in the third section by indicating possible directions for future research.

## 7.3 Understanding Livelihoods in Disaster Recovery

### 7.3.1 Social Networks: Object of Research, Method of Inquiry

The findings of this thesis underscore social networks as significant for understanding livelihoods post-disaster, in two respects: informal social networks as an object of study and the social networks approach as a method of inquiry. The findings presented in this thesis show how households affected by the tsunami rely significantly on informal social networks, often for basic survival. Households have engaged in a multitude of overlapping networks comprising kith and kin, co-workers, *mudalalis*, members of *seettu*, shopkeepers, moneylenders, CBO office bearers, local politicians, government officials, and NGO officials. These networks have acted as dynamic, inconspicuous conduits for accessing resources and challenging hierarchy in post-tsunami recovery. They embody three salient features.

First, the options for recovery generated through wider processes of the post-tsunami environment alter how households are able to use these networks to meet their goals post-tsunami. As shown in Chapter 3, the widespread tsunami impact rendered most reciprocal relationships ineffective and post-tsunami housing relocation initiatives obstructed reciprocal networks, such as *seettu* and emotional bonds inherent amongst kith and kin. Thus, people's ability to use informal social networks is often undermined by the effects of the physical disaster (Barnshaw, 2006; Devereux, 1999) as well as reconstruction policies that fall within the broader rubric of the disaster environment.

Second, post-tsunami informal social networks are flexible in form. Reiterating the increasingly interconnected characteristic of everyday livelihoods (de Haan and Zoomers, 2003), they involve links with individuals in the spatially-bound context of the tsunami as well

as beyond. Given that the boundaries between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ are frequently blurred, informal social networks also often comprise links to actors in official government or non-government positions. As demonstrated in the context of livelihoods and crises in Africa (Devereux, 1999), these informal–formal links can involve vertical transfers (e.g. bribes to GNs, FIs, or AGAs) as well as intermediate transfers (e.g. CBO office bearers favouring their kith and kin in aid distribution).

Third, networks can reproduce inequalities in post-disaster recovery. This is evident in the findings of Chapters 4 and 5 where intensive explorations of two particular forms of post-tsunami informal social networks, bribery networks and political patronage, draw attention to processes of network reproduction in a post-disaster environment. This reproduction has been fueled by, on the one hand, the opportune environment created post-tsunami due to the influx of aid and ambiguous, flawed, and unaccountable procedures and, on the other, the tremendous faith placed by local communities on external aid.

Whilst these findings accentuate informal social networks as a significant part of livelihoods, they also challenge a popular method of inquiry in the social sciences for conceptualizing livelihoods: the SLF. Certainly, the SLF is significant in its offering of a logically consistent framework for social scientists and aid agencies concerned with post-disaster recovery (Lautze and Raven-Roberts, 2006; Mubarak, 2007; Twigg, 2001; de Silva and Yamao, 2007; Hoon *et al.*, 1997; Sanderson, 1999). However, when examining how people cope with their livelihoods in disaster circumstances, it is not simply the *structure* of networks—memberships of CBOs, relationships of trust and reciprocity, and access to wider institutions in society as postulated by the SLF (Scoones, 1998)—that matter. Disaggregated social relationships, asymmetrical power relations, multi-local dimensions, and historical specificities embedded in informal social networks are also crucial. In essence, the *meanings* of networks—their quality and value—are

vital in livelihoods analyses.

The thesis offers an alternative lens for investigating livelihoods in post-disaster contexts: the social networks approach. As Chapter 3 unveils, the approach lends itself to an unravelling of the processes through which networks emerge, the meanings attached to social relationships within networks, and an examination of shifting power relations therein. It supports complexity and encourages creativity, helping researchers raise novel questions and explore uncharted territory in understanding dynamic social relationships, which typify informal livelihoods. Therefore, the thesis advances livelihoods studies that go beyond the focus on the simple architecture and morphology of social networks (de Haan and Zoomers, 2003, 2005; Lautze and Raven-Roberts, 2006; Devereux, 1999; Lourenço-Lindell, 2002).

### ***7.3.2 Importance of Informal Politics***

Following from observations in this thesis, paying attention to non-institutionalized or informal politics is critical in post-disaster analyses. An important function of informal politics in post-tsunami Sri Lanka has been to fill in lacunae in the reach of the government and NGO aid mechanism. In the sphere of government interventions, the coastal buffer zone regulation and associated housing aid policy provides an exemplary case in point. The emphasis on physical asset replacement—‘a house for a house’—effectively favoured the more well-to-do and excluded households that did not have titles to their house. Underlying emotional reasons (e.g. fear of living close to the sea) and psychosocial impacts of the tsunami (e.g. loss of family members) were not recognized by these official statutes. In the context of NGO aid, the narrow scope and coverage of their interventions in the villages and the lack of a mechanism for coordinating aid amongst the many providers resulted in an inequitable distribution of

goods. For households marginalized by these aid policies and processes, informal politics in the form of corruption and political patronage often served as an effective way to ‘get things done’.

Informal politics was not new to post-tsunami Sri Lanka. With reference to the system of corruption, the injection of post-tsunami aid brought new dynamics to existing practices and meanings of corruption. On the one hand, the resources and opportunities for abusing official positions—government, non-government, and political—at the local level were amplified. On the other, people’s efforts to rationalize corruption or critique other people’s corruption were energized. A similar scenario was witnessed in the system of political patronage. The existing authority and power gained from their official positions enabled local politicians to lend informal assistance at the grassroots level. In these political patron–client relationships, households maintained their pre-tsunami status as proactive clients, but gained authority post-tsunami through their marginalization as ‘victims’. NGOs also played a role; shortcomings in the government structure for aid disbursement, NGO requirements for swift project implementation, and the all-encompassing attribute of patron–client relationships in Sri Lanka led to NGOs occupying a niche in the system of political patronage. In essence, corruption and political patronage were prevailing systems that became enmeshed in the set of circumstances characteristic of the post-tsunami environment. This demonstrates that, akin to any other social phenomenon, informal politics change over time.

Despite the recognition of informal politics in India (Gupta, 1995; Parry, 2000; Fuller and Bénéï, 2001) and Sri Lanka (Moore, 1985; Spencer, 1990; Brow, 1996), aid agencies and research institutes in post-tsunami Sri Lanka have treated corruption and political patronage as an abnormal dimension of formal politics (TISL, 2007; ADB, 2005; TEC, 2006a). This stems from the fact that they associate politics exclusively or nearly exclusively with the state.

Certainly, politics is far more extensively and effectively formalized in the state than in any other type of organization and the modern state is accorded sovereign power and status. Yet, this does not suggest that politics resides abstractly in the state. As Fuller and Bén  i (2001) argue, state and society merge in the everyday lives of ordinary people, and the boundary between them is blurred and negotiable according to social context and position. Politics is everywhere. A preoccupation with state level politics would predispose researchers to concentrate on organizations and authorities pertaining to governments, political parties, revolutionary movements, and groups and associations aimed at supporting, influencing, or opposing government officials and programs at the expense of informal politics and a more deep and sound understanding of the post-tsunami actions and beliefs of ordinary people, government and NGO officials, and politicians at the ground level.

### ***7.3.3 Social Inequality via Intersectionality***

The insights gained from researching the role of women in post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in this thesis underpin intersectionality as a concept that can extend and improve upon prevailing approaches to social inequality in disaster recovery. Most of the existing research on post-tsunami livelihoods recognizes the differential experiences of women in recovery (TEC, 2006b; World Bank *et al.*, 2005; Oxfam International, 2005b). Their focus, however, is on the binary opposition of man versus woman. Furthermore, the marginalization and victimization of women is claimed to have magnified with the addition of new categories of inequality after the tsunami (*ibid.*). These assertions relate to contemporary feminist theory, which adopts a ‘triple jeopardy’ approach to gender by exploring how, with the addition of each new category of inequality, the individual becomes more vulnerable, more marginalized,

and more subordinate (King, 1988). This way of thinking is confronted by the findings in Chapter 4 as dangerously essentialist because of the way it interprets women's identities as a set of separate and fixed differences added incrementally to one another. For instance, Islam was considered to be uniformly detrimental to women due to male dominance in decision-making and ideological constraints; the onset of the tsunami, it was believed, would aggravate this status for Malay women in Kirinda. In reality, however, the tsunami set changes in motion that brought about fissures along the patriarchal system, giving these women greater leeway to engage in certain aspects of their livelihoods. In this case, gender and ethnicity are enmeshed in each other and the particular intersections involved produce specific effects; they cannot be tagged onto each other mechanically.

The findings in Chapter 4 also reiterate the fact that identities are fluid and continuously (re)produced and performed in different spheres of everyday life. In other words, time and context matter. Particular identities of women have become salient or foregrounded post-tsunami. Drawing on the case of Malay women in Kirinda, the tsunami disaster and resultant livelihood stresses caused fissures in the patriarchal status quo, paving way for potential cultural transformation with respect to hitherto entrenched gender roles. Such roles, as McDowell (2008: 497) writes based on the earlier work of Butler (1990), are dynamic and constructed through a series of repetitive performances that produce the illusion of a 'fixed' or 'natural' gender.

Intersectionality, which is applied in Chapter 4, proves a useful concept for yielding critical insights for understanding variations in women's responses post-tsunami. The chapter contributes to, and stimulates, discussions on the lived experience of intersectionality in feminist geography (McDowell, 2008; Valentine, 2007). It also resonates with feminist scholarship in post-tsunami Sri Lanka (de Mel 2007; Hyndman, 2008; Ruwanpura, 2008) and

the everyday lives of women (Ruwanpura and Humphries, 2004; Mandel, 2004; Sultana, 2004), which demonstrate that the interconnections within gendered existence produce multifaceted, complex, and potentially contradictory identities for women. Although the focus is on the specific intersections of gender, ethnicity, and location in post-tsunami recovery, the thesis draws broader connotations to the ability of intersectionality to examine social inequality in post-tsunami recovery and the mechanisms through which these inequalities are reproduced.

### ***7.3.4 Ethnographic Approach to Change, Networks, and Politics***

The collective significance of Chapters 2 through to 6 lies partly in its demonstration of the value of an ethnographic approach. Following from the works of critical ethnographers in human geography (Rose, 1997; McDowell, 1992; Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999; Bennet, 2002; Cook *et al.*, 2004; Crang and Cook, 2007; Madison, 2005; Megoran, 2006), this thesis reasserts the importance of ethnography for understanding everyday networks, informal politics, and change in South Asia. The whole of this thesis is greater than the sum of the parts—this can be elucidated in three aspects.

First, an ethnographic approach is central in examining informal social networks and corruption since these can usually only be recognized through intimate knowledge of actors in the field. Corruption, in particular, gives rise to unusual practical and methodological constraints that render much orthodox fieldwork and commonplace social science methodology ineffective. Directly probing aspects viewed as ‘immoral’ or ‘illegal’ in a highly charged and politicized environment of post-tsunami recovery is counterproductive since it threatens betrayal of trust and confidence of the informants with whom the researcher has developed a strong rapport. Exploring narratives is also crucial to discover the wide range of

meanings attributed to terms, such as ‘corruption’, at the local level.

Second, studies in Third World and post-disaster contexts involve highly uneven power relations and politicized environments that call for a reflexive ethnographic inquiry. As detailed in Chapter 2, there are politics to ‘doing’ research that energize as well as constrain the researcher’s ability to implement practices of data construction and interpretation. Positionality is vital as it forces the researcher to acknowledge personal power, privilege, and prejudices, whilst being critical of the power structures that surround research participants (Crang and Cook, 2007; Madison, 2005). My presence in the field represented multiple identities; recognizing these and the ways in which respondents tended to ‘place’ the researcher was vital in facilitating rapport between researcher and respondent and thereby producing a rich, detailed conversation based on empathy, mutual respect, and understanding. Respondents themselves were embroiled in larger social, cultural, economic, and political processes. In a highly politicized post-tsunami setting, they were often selective in what they revealed and concealed. Indeed the backgrounds of both the researcher and researched must constantly be borne in mind in the course of undertaking fieldwork, which inevitably involves achieving a critical and careful consideration of ethical issues, practical challenges, and local sensitivities.

Third, ethnographic research is particularly valuable in investigating post-tsunami livelihoods recovery—a process that inescapably involves change. Loosely structured interviews enable the researcher to guide the interview giving consideration to traumatic experiences of respondents, their emotional sufferings in post-tsunami transition, and their sensitivity to certain issues. It pays heed to the heightened concern in human geography that research on the socially disadvantaged and marginalized should be sensitive to the life experiences of such people (Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999). An ethnography that employs narrative techniques is also helpful as it enables people to make their own formulations of their

transformed situation and thereby facilitates an understanding of how they came to make livelihood decisions post-tsunami.

#### **7.4 Research Impact: Policy and Development Practice in Disaster Recovery**

This thesis offers expertise not only in the relevant literature, but also in the sphere of policy and development practice. The findings demonstrate how post-tsunami recovery has been consistently biased against households that do not have the capacity to negotiate access to aid. If the lives of households in Kudawella West and Kirinda are to be improved or communities in future natural disaster contexts are to be supported, this internal differentiation in access to aid is an important issue that needs to be identified and systematically addressed by policymakers and practitioners. Despite considerable efforts in creating the ‘right’ policy frameworks, there is often little attention paid to the relationship between these frameworks and the practices and events that they are expected to generate or legitimize in particular contexts (Kumar and Corbridge, 2002; Mosse, 2004). Corresponding with the four main scholarly contributions of this thesis discussed above, the diagrammatic framework in Figure 11 suggests key elements that warrant consideration by policymakers and practitioners involved in post-tsunami recovery efforts in Sri Lanka.

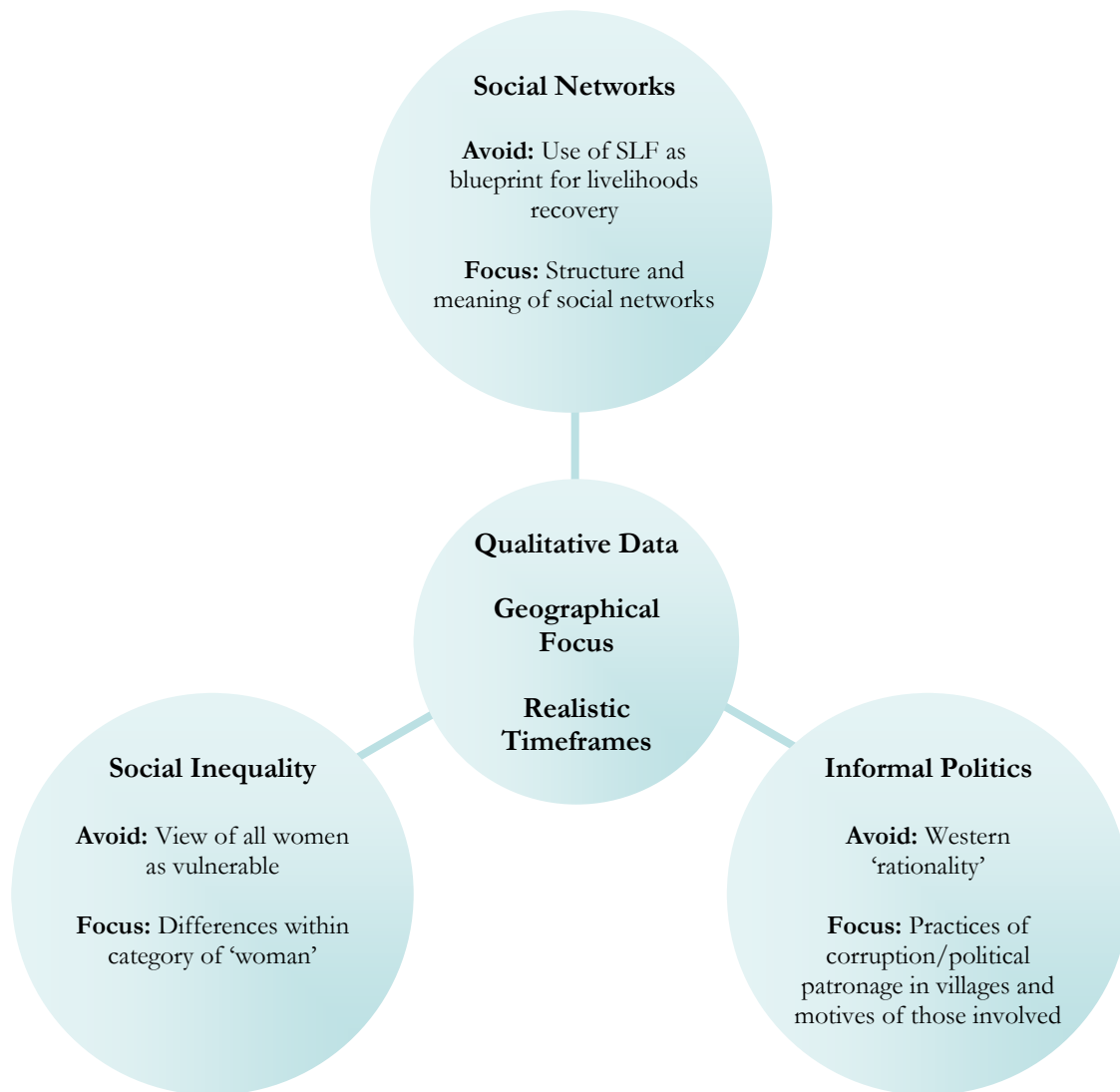


Figure 13. Implications for post-tsunami policy and development practice in Sri Lanka

By their very nature, qualitative data can give the more subtle information needed on how aid is accessed within informal social networks, systems of informal politics, and contexts of social inequality. Being able to count and measure phenomena is often seen as the 'best' approach since it is thought to allow attribution of cause and effect. This scientific tradition seeks to provide objective knowledge that is not shaped by people's beliefs or prejudices as qualitative data may be. Indeed, there is a great deal of contemporary human geographic work

that challenges the assertion that the scientific method is impartial (Cloke *et al.*, 2004; Crang and Cook, 2007). Nevertheless, the dominant atmosphere in policy circles is that quantitative data are invariably 'better' than qualitative data. Especially in Sri Lanka, policymakers in government and non-government aid agencies prefer the use of quantitative survey data of public attitudes as it provides simple figures, which can be more easily assimilated and enough people can be surveyed to be able to claim the sample was representative. However, the complexity of why people hold the views they do is lost. It is important that qualitative approaches complement quantitative survey techniques.

For NGOs, and INGOs in particular, geographical focus is vital. In order to improve knowledge of the local area, they need to prioritize quality relations with a small number of households or communities over superficial relationships with large numbers of households or communities. NGOs have been criticized for their short-term livelihoods recovery projects that focus on ensuring budgets are disbursed. The ability to expend large amounts of funding within a short period of time is often viewed as the prime indicator of agency capacity and effectiveness (Haug and Weerackody, 2007: 159). Realistic timeframes need to be established at the outset of operations to enable NGOs to adopt appropriate methodologies that allow them to gain knowledge of the local area and implement projects. The findings of this thesis suggest that improving the present status of tsunami-affected households in Kudawella West and Kirinda would require longer term interventions by NGOs.

There is a need to reassess popular methodological tools, such as the SLF, and adopt approaches that recognize the structure as well as the meaning of social networks. Particular attention needs to be given to corruption and political patronage. Insights into how these are practiced at the village level and the motives of those involved (e.g. reciprocity and exploitation) will help refine beneficiary selection procedures. To date, Western 'rationality' is

often taken as the benchmark criteria to evaluate post-tsunami issues relating to corruption and political patronage in Sri Lanka. The manifestation of post-tsunami corruption has been linked to a weak administrative framework devoid of mechanisms for transparency and accountability (TISL, 2007; ADB, 2005; TEC, 2006a). Such views have filtered into popular notions of post-tsunami corruption (*The Island*, 2006; *Groundviews*, 2007), whilst the government has been urged to rectify the situation (Auditor General, 2005). In a similar fashion, politicians have been blamed for spreading inequality, hierarchy, and exploitation in post-tsunami aid disbursement (Haug and Weerackody, 2007). These conceptualizations reinforce stereotyped notions of ‘corrupt culture’ and ‘exploitative clientelism’, respectively. As shown in this thesis, however, corruption is not always linked to institutional deficiencies and politicians are sometimes agents of equity.

Considering women in post-tsunami recovery, the tendency has been to classify them as passive and unable to cope (TEC, 2006b; World Bank *et al.*, 2005; Oxfam International, 2005b). This standard, off-the-shelf view can hamper post-disaster recovery efforts as it conceals the ability of some women to respond positively. It is vital for policymakers and practitioners to identify differences not just between men and women, but also within the category of woman.

Importantly, these recommendations are not prescriptions for policymaking and development practice. Policymakers and practitioners are commonly portrayed as ‘active agents’ and those in the field as ‘passive recipients’ of their policies and interventions. Yet, in reality, numerous government agencies and NGOs are actively pursuing different policies and interventions and reacting to one another (Mosse, 2004). Policymaking and development practice is a process itself, which is open-ended, interactive, cognitive, and political. This thesis makes a contribution to this process of interaction that can affect the actions and reactions of

several actors. The ultimate goal is to transform the way the issue of post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka and, more broadly, disaster recovery across South Asia and the globe is conceptualized and addressed by a wide range of actors.

### **7.5 Avenues for Future Research**

This thesis has aimed to inspire discussion, analysis, and action with reference to post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in Sri Lanka. It has explored post-tsunami livelihoods recovery through the SLF and the social networks approach and thereby advanced understandings of social networks, informal politics, social inequality, and ethnographic research in South Asia. Suggestions for policymaking and development practice, which target the needs of households that were investigated and survivors of future disasters, have also been provided. Yet, it is not possible to comprehend reality completely. There remain unanswered questions and potential avenues for future research.

Whilst informal social networks are essential foundations of the process of post-tsunami livelihoods recovery, their structural and qualitative attributes are unique to the context within which change is sought. Understanding the subtle processes through which such networks facilitate access to resources for tsunami survivors requires consideration of the situated context. This research focused on the villages of Kudawella West and Kirinda in the Hambantota District. A more thorough representation of post-tsunami livelihoods recovery in the Southern Province could be drawn if the case study was extended to include villages in the other two Districts in this Province, Matara and Galle. Whilst this study considers the circumstances in the specific instance of the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka, it would be advisable to extend the study to other tsunami-affected countries in South Asia as well as to other

incidents of natural disaster and livelihoods recovery across the globe.

Caste hierarchy is not entrenched in Sri Lankan society as it is in some other South Asian contexts, such as India. Furthermore, caste-based discrimination in post-tsunami aid disbursement has been considered marginal in Sri Lanka compared to Tamil Nadu, India (Sarvanathan and Sanjeevanie, 2008: 343). Yet, the encounter with Devaka, a Sinhala-Buddhist fisherman from Kirinda, belonging to the low caste Berawa (the Drummers), suggests otherwise. Devaka resided in Goal Housing (Kirinda), situated on a relatively high land area and ostracized from the communities around it. Interviews with key informants reveal that all residents in this scheme belong to Sinhalese low caste groups, including the Berawa, who had lived independently of the majority higher caste community, the Karave (the Fisherfolk), since before the tsunami. Evidently, this segregation has been maintained in post-tsunami relocation. According to Devaka, he was not able to gain replacements for his lost fishing boats despite appeals to relevant government authorities and politicians—a situation he associates with his household's low caste status.

Although an isolated incident, Devaka's case underpins the link between caste and post-tsunami livelihoods recovery as an important topic for further inquiry.<sup>76</sup> The caste system in Sri Lanka has been represented as a potential base for exclusion and discrimination (Hettige, 1984). In India, scholars demonstrate how upper or middle-ranking castes are able to obtain privileged access to government contracts, employment, and grants (Jeffrey, 2000). Studies by Schrijvers (1999) and Thiruchandran (1997) suggest that gender relations may be as part and parcel of caste in Sri Lanka, but since Yalman (1967) there is a lacuna in this regard and it is a

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<sup>76</sup> This topic could not be investigated within the context of the present study due to two reasons. First, apart from Devaka's household, the remaining 10 households in Goal Housing (Kirinda) were from other villages and thus fell outside the study sample. Second, a significant amount of data had already been collected on Kudawella West and Kirinda. Changing the focus of research, such as to include other villages, was unfeasible given the time and budget constraints of the project.

topic needing closer scrutiny. In sum, the situation of low caste groups can be precarious. Fundamental questions could, accordingly, form agendas for future research: What role does caste play in household access to resources in post-tsunami recovery? How do households, marginalized by their caste, engage in post-tsunami recovery? What is the link between the system of caste and that of political patronage? How does caste influence the role of women in post-tsunami recovery?

A thesis of this nature undoubtedly opens up new responsibilities to apply geographical research. This chapter has offered critical insights into various issues faced by practitioners and policymakers engaged in mitigating the conditions and overcoming the problems that have bedeviled Sri Lanka's post-tsunami livelihoods recuperation as well as disaster recovery elsewhere. Yet, for this agenda to be taken forward, a practical framework that can be applied in the field is crucial. Constructing a device for understanding livelihoods and targeting aid in disaster contexts, which draws on the SLF and the social networks approach, could form part of such a future research agenda.

Social inequalities have shaped the Sri Lankan landscape in significant ways. Natural disasters, such as the 2004 tsunami, cannot annihilate these inequalities; rather, they are reconfigured and reproduced in the process of disaster recovery. It is hoped that the proposals outlined above will be expanded, sharpened, clarified, and strengthened through collective use and dialogue that this thesis, and the scientific papers therein, will help facilitate. Moreover, it is hoped that the dissemination of the thesis findings will help alleviate the strain of recovery for households in Kudawella West and Kirinda, and tsunami-affected communities elsewhere in Sri Lanka, who struggle to live with a sense of worth in difficult circumstances.

## APPENDIX I: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

### Interviews

Category	Description	Numbers	Total
Households—	Kudawella West	19	48
Kudawella West	Mahawelagoda Housing (Mahawela)	3	
	Seenimodara Housing (Seenimodara East/West)	3	
	Navadivi Purawara (Pahajjawa)	14	
	Ruingama Housing (Nidahagama East)	2	
	Nakulugamuwa Housing (Nakulugamuwa South)	7	
Households—Kirinda	Kirinda	14	32
	Goal Housing (Kirinda)	1	
	Colliers Housing (Kirinda)	4	
	Emirates City (Kirinda)	2	
	Rajapakse Padanama (Andaragasyaya)	2	
	Soyurupura (Kirinda)	9	
Government Officials	Presidential Advisor (Colombo)	1	17
	Committee Member, RADA (Colombo)	1	
	Director, Hambantota DFO	1	
	Deputy Director, Hambantota DFO	1	
	Official, Hambantota DFO	1	
	Official, Hambantota District Office	1	
	Tangalle AGA (former)	1	
	Manager, Hambantota District FCS	1	
	Official, Tangalle Coast Conservation Department	1	
	Kirinda GN	1	
	Kudawella West GN	1	
	Kudawella West GN (former)	1	
	Kudawella West FI	1	
	Kudawella West FI (former)	1	
	Kirinda FI	1	

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	Andaragasyaya GN	1	
	Andaragasyaya GN (former)	1	
NGO Officials	Executive Director, Transparency International Sri Lanka (Colombo)	1	12
	Coordinator, Sri Lanka Centre for Development Facilitation (Tangalle)	1	
	Project Coordinator (former), Navajeevana (Tangalle)	1	
	President, Deevara Diriya (Kudawella)	1	
	Accounts Manager, Small Fishers Federation (Hambantota District)	1	
	Field Officer, Sewa Lanka (Kudawella)	1	
	President, Kirinda Human Resources and Environment Protection Organization	1	
	Vice President, Kirinda Human Resources and Environment Protection Organization	1	
	Field Officer, Small Fishers Federation (Kirinda)	1	
	Field Officer, World Vision (Kudawella West)	1	
	Field Officer, Praja Sansandaya (Kudawella West)	1	
	Secretary, RRWO (Kudawella)	1	
CBO Office Bearers	President, Tsunami Fisheries Association (Kirinda)	1	13
	Secretary, Kirinda World Vision Society	1	
	President, Kirinda Mosque Committee	1	
	Committee Member (former), Kirinda Mosque Committee	3	
	Manager, Kudawella East FCS	1	
	Manager, Kudawella Central FCS	1	
	President, Kirinda (Muslim) FCS	1	
	Treasurer, Kirinda (Muslim) FCS	1	
	Manager, Kirindagama (Sinhalese) FCS	1	
	Secretary, Kirindagama (Sinhalese) FCS	1	
	President, Kudawella West FCS	1	
Politicians	Various	7	7

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Village Leaders	Head Priest, Kirinda Temple	1	4
	Head Priest, Tissamaharama Temple	1	
	Head Priest, Kudawella Temple	1	
	Principal (former), Kirinda Muslim School	1	
Key Informants	Lawyer—Coastal Land Policies (Colombo)	1	19
	Media Officer, YA TV (Colombo)	1	
	Official, Urban Development Authority (Colombo)	1	
	Architect (Colombo)	1	
	Fisher Households (Kudawella East)	3	
	Fisher Households, Rassandeniya Housing (Matara)	2	
	School Teacher, Kirinda Muslim School	1	
	<i>Mudalali</i> (Kudawella West)	1	
	Businessman (Tangalle)	1	
	Committee Member, Tangalle Hotels Association	1	
	Local Academics	6	
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>152</b>

### Focus Group Discussions

Category	Topic	Numbers	
		Participants	Sessions
Fishermen, Kudawella West	Fishing Occupation	6	1
Fishermen, Kirinda	Fishing Occupation	4	1
Office Bearers, Kirindagama (Sinhalese) FCS	Pre- and Post-Tsunami Functions of FCS	4	1
Muslim Women, Kirinda	Islam and Customs	8	1
NGO Officials, RRWO	Aid for Women Post-Tsunami	3	1
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>5</b>

## APPENDIX II: SAMPLE INTERVIEWS

### Sample Interview 1: Kudawella West Household

- Date: 28 September, 2008
- Location: Respondent's pre-tsunami house, Kudawella West
- Interview details: Conducted in Sinhala Language, recorded on digital voice recorder, translated to English during transcription
- Participants: Vimal (household head), Thirusa (wife), Radika (personal contact from Kudawella West, widow of a fisherman, and CBO office bearer), and Kamakshi (researcher)
- Household: Vimal (42 years), Thirusa (39 years), three sons (19, 15, and 8 years), and two daughters (17 and 2 years)

**Kamakshi:** Your little one here was born after the tsunami?

**Thirusa:** Yes. That is right.

**Kamakshi:** So who was at home when the tsunami hit?

**Thirusa:** We were all here—in this house. When I heard the people shouting and running I stepped out and people said ‘the sea is coming in!’. There was nothing to do—my mother was here. My brother was here with his family and two children. About 10 people were in the house. They said ‘the sea is coming in!’. I picked up the child and ran across the road. The water did not touch us—when we looked back the water was coming in from the other side—we ran all the way to Maha Oya. We went to the temple—the Weuvdaththa Temple. When we got there

people said the water was coming in that direction. Dear God! What could we do? There were some vehicles. We got in and we went to a temple in Doowa. All of us.

**Kamakshi:** How long did you stay in that temple?

**Thirusha:** We were there for about two days and then we went back to the Weuvdaththa Temple and stayed there. After that we stayed in the school and then moved into plank housing—the temporary houses. We were scared to go back. Whenever people shout ‘there, the water is rising’, we run! Wherever we are, we run—we were that scared. After that, we came here—our livelihood is here no?

**Kamakshi:** When did you return to this house?

**Thirusha:** It is about... We did not stay too long in the plank house. People put up those temporary shelters on vacant plots of land. It is not as if the land belonged to us. Somehow there would have been about 25–30 families there. So we did not stay there too long. You can’t really live in those plank structures.

**Radika:** The land to the rear of this house had caved in. Because the land is on a slope the water drained—on the other side is the lagoon. That area caved in a lot.

**Thirusha:** That room [shows the room] you can see is caved in. Initially, we tried to fill it up with rubble and repair it a bit.

**Vimal:** It is largely as it was—it has not been redone.

**Thirusha:** The tsunami hit no? The house is as it was then—we did not do any repairs.

**Kamakshi:** Was your house categorized as partially or fully damaged?

**Vimal:** Partially damaged.

**Kamakshi:** Did you get any compensation for this from the government?

**Thirusha:** We got the 100,000 rupees from the government.

**Radika:** After that they got another piece of land and got aid from an organization. They built elsewhere—on another piece of land. They live there, but because it is inconvenient for their livelihood they come here.

**Thirusha:** There is no electricity or water there still.

**Kamakshi:** How far is this house from the beach?

**Thirusha:** This? About 200 m—not even that, possibly, but it is even closer to the lagoon. The water actually came in from the lagoon. As the water came in—it came in from that side, over the bund, into the lagoon and from then it flowed in here.

**Vimal:** Water first came in from the lagoon.

**Thirusha:** When we got out of the house and tried to go this way [shows the direction] water was coming in from this side [shows the direction]. So we went to the other side. My mother and others were on top of trees! What could we do? Mother on top of that coconut tree. Sister a top of that Bo tree! Kuley was on that, there was a Neem tree there, and he was on that! We were helpless. That is how things were. Then a dead body in the house... When we went over the bridge the water had not come in yet. I don't know to say what happened. I thought my mother was finished.

**Vimal:** I was out at sea. We came ashore on the 29<sup>th</sup>—the tsunami hit on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Thirusha:** I of course pray that none of our kids will ever have to go through this again.

**Kamakshi:** You said you have a house on another piece of land?

**Thirusha:** We got a piece of land and Navajeevana built the house, but it is not complete. There's no electricity or water.

**Kamakshi:** Where's the house?

**Thirusha:** In Seenimodara Housing. They didn't do the pavements in front like we have

here. They only did the doors and windows of the house and handed it over.

**Kamakshi:** Did they give you the money to build the house?

**Thirusha:** No no. They built it and gave.

**Radika:** Navajeevana said they would give aid to build their house here, in Kudawella West, but they did not want it here.

**Thirusha:** The lagoon is directly behind our house and we just managed to save our children. How can we live here and face another tsunami? I don't want to risk it because of my children.

**Vimal:** That is why we wanted a house outside of the village. Some people give bribes to the AGA Madam and the GN to get on beneficiary lists.

**Thirusha:** But, we had no money to give.

**Vimal:** We had to use our own connections and fall back on people we know.

**Thirusha:** I went to the President's Office in Tangalle. From there, they called the AGA Madam in Tangalle. I got her approval! I got her signature in the end! I was expecting my daughter at the time and even then I went around to get this done.

**Vimal:** Because we were outside the 100 m mark, they said we were not entitled to a house. The people, they had told the GN that and had our names struck off the list.

**Thirusha:** They had struck our names off saying our families were not affected. We managed to save our children—there were 10 in all, because of our efforts. They don't realize it. It's a big thing to have saved 10 people's lives in this household isn't it!

**Kamakshi:** Who is 'they'?

**Thirusha:** It's like this. The GN who was there then had put this house down as a partly

damaged house. He, along with those technical officers, make these assessments based on various parameters—on how well connected you are, how well you are known to him...

**Radika:** Based on bribes you give.

**Thirusha:** At the time we didn't have money to give. We didn't have that kind of money—you have to give money to the tune of 50,000-100,000 rupees.

**Vimal:** People bribed the GN with lakhs. No sooner you pay a lakh he will certify it!

**Thirusha:** Yes it was like that, they gave *kappam*. After that the GN was chased out. Because of these sorts of unjust doings... There were people who had houses who got two or three more houses. Those people have now sold those houses and have come back and are living in their houses in the village.

**Kamakshi:** How much did Navajeevana spend on the house?

**Thirusha:** They said they would spend 7 lakhs. But they did not give it to us. They bring their own people and do it. We made the foundation ourselves with the money that was given to us on account of a partly damaged house. They told us to build the foundation and show it to them. But, it cost us more than that. It cost us about 1½ lakhs to build the foundation. We had to put in our own money as well. We borrowed on interest. They did not do the foundation. You see, Navajeevana didn't give us the money. They brought in a contractor who bought the bricks and cement and did the job. So, although they told us they are spending 7 lakhs, they did not. The house is worth 5 or 6 lakhs only. That means, they didn't make the pavements in front of the house. They didn't put white on the walls.

**Kamakshi:** So, why are you in this house now?

**Thirusha:** We come here because of the convenience of going to work. When this one [husband] goes out to work we go there and stay for about a week or two and come back. It's because he has to go to sea that we stay here. It's also closer to the school and the hospital from here. When we stay there, we have to come early morning by bus to take the children to school. They are still small children no? The elder girl does not go. Also it is close to the beach.

**Kamakshi:** Soon after the house was built did you go and stay there?

**Thirusha:** Yes, we went and stayed there. We were there for about 3–4 months. As soon as he goes on his job we go and stay there. In the night we have to light lamps because there's no electricity there. We need to get electricity, but you need money for that.

**Kamakshi:** Do the other houses there have electricity?

**Thirusha:** There are about 10–15 houses there. There's a canal there and on the other side of the canal there is electricity. From about our house to about Anitha Sister's house they have got electricity.

**Vimal:** There is electricity right round. It is those houses that were built by this organization that don't have electricity.

**Kamakshi:** Who are the people along that stretch? Are they also from Kudawella?

**Vimal:** No no. Those are people who were living there since pre-tsunami times. They are not Kudawella people.

**Thirusha:** There's no problem there except for the lack of electricity and water. We're scared to stay there at night with our kids. You can't say what will happen can you?

**Vimal:** To draw the electricity connection to our house they have to erect posts. Maybe

about 15 or 16.

**Thirusha:** Water lines of course have come close. Pipes have been laid. They laid out concrete on the roads and at that time we gave money to lay the pipes and that has been done. The electricity is the problem. We need money for that.

There are six children here—there are days when work is there and days when there is no work. It is like this... if he falls sick then sometimes for a month or two he is at home and then we buy groceries and things on credit from the village store here. When we get the money—it just goes—there is so much to do for the children.

**Kamakshi:** Where would you prefer to live now—in the village or in your Seenimodara house?

**Thirusha:** We can't live like this every day no? The children will grow up. We also like to have a nice house with electricity, with water. We would go to the other house if those were there.

I would like to get some nice furniture and things and live happily with my children. That is what I want the most. I don't want my children to have hardships. I am not saying I want to make my home a palace—that, I don't like. I want to give them to eat what they would like first, and if there is anything extra then buy things for the house.

This situation came about mostly because we were hit by the tsunami. We were living happily. Earning enough. We had built a kitchen. Then the tsunami hit. At

least we were saved and our house still stands. There are others who are just dead bodies. They have nothing. Because of that my wish is to earn enough to give the children enough to eat well and live happily.

**Kamakshi:** You have given me a lot of information. I hope I haven't taken too much of your time!

**Thirusha:** Not at all. We must tell you the real story isn't it? [laughs]

**Kamakshi:** Thank you—I really appreciate it.

## Sample Interview 2: Kirinda Household

Date: 16 October, 2008

Location: Respondent's house, Colliers Housing (Kirinda)

Interview details: Conducted in Sinhala Language, recorded on digital voice recorder, translated to English during transcription

Participants: Fawzi (household head), Iqbal (personal contact from Kirinda, fisherman, and resident of Soyurupura), and Kamakshi (researcher)

Household: Fawzi (50 years), two daughters (18 and 16 years)

**Kamakshi:** So what happened when the tsunami hit?

**Fawzi:** The house was destroyed.

**Kamakshi:** Completely destroyed?

**Fawzi:** Yes. The house was completely destroyed.

**Kamakshi:** Was it just the three of you in the house at the time?

**Fawzi:** At the time of the tsunami, there were four people. I have another daughter who was living with me then. But she got married and is gone. She lives separately now.

**Kamakshi:** Where do you go right after the tsunami?

**Fawzi:** We went to the camp.

**Kamakshi:** For how long did you have to stay there?

**Fawzi:** We stayed there for one and a half years. And then came here.

**Kamakshi:** Who built this house for you?

**Fawzi:** Colliers.

**Kamakshi:** How does this house compare with the house you had before the tsunami?

**Fawzi:** It is like the earlier one.

**Kamakshi:** Are there any problems?

**Fawzi:** Problems? Well this is the problem. These two houses [points to neighbouring houses] were the first ones they built as models for us to see. Then they called everyone—all 100 families in the camp—to a meeting. The AGA madam, Mr Jehan [local project Manager], and the Japanese architect fellow—they came and they talked it over with us. They said they want to build houses for us in the way those two were done. They said this is the building plan and asked us for our views. People did not like it. They said, ‘We don’t want these houses’. You see, these houses don’t have any plaster binding the bricks. The bricks have been just stacked one on top of the other. Look here [points to wall], you can see how it is. So, we said we didn’t want these houses. Then, the AGA madam said you all go and stay in the camps till the houses are built for you. There were numerous NGOs that came from here and there to Kirinda—from CARE, World Vision, and others. They too said, ‘Go back to your houses in the camp and, if you like it, you can take these houses once they are done. For those whose houses were completely destroyed we will also give 2½ lakhs’. They said this didn’t they? [seeks confirmation from Iqbal]

So, we agreed. You know women, don’t get angry with me for saying this, but women, they like to have some money also no? So we said OK and they built these houses and we moved in. But, we did not get the 2½ lakhs they promised. They said they would give it, but they did not. There are people in the 100

houses—they will vouch for it. They did not give 2½ lakhs. We can prove this even in a court of law, anywhere, any time. There are Muslims as well as Sinhalese who will vouch for it. We believed their word. There were 100 householders there that day—not a small number is it? There was Mr Jehan, there was the *suddha*, there was Mr Wilmot [official from the Land Commissioner’s office], there was the *Samurdhi* Officer, there was a Miss called ‘Jacintha Miss’ from the AGA’s office. The GN was there. The clergy was there. In front of all these people they promised to give 2½ lakhs. But when we went to get it they said that the organization spent the the money constructing the house. According to them they spent 13 lakhs on each house. Had they given us that money we would have erected two-storey houses!

Now look at this house. This here is the kitchen [shows]—can we cook and eat here? Here see [points to ceiling], the house gets wet. We are not moneyed people no? We live off a daily income. The doors don’t close. Lots of shortcomings—when we told the AGA Lady she did not listen to us. They said they will look after the houses for five years but they never even came this way—they settled us here without even giving us a chair to sit on. World Vision people, to this date, gave us nothing—not a chair, not a thread. They said five years, but where? In the Rajapaksa Foundation the people were given 25,000 rupees when they were resettled. They have even given them their immediate household requirement of groceries.

**Kamakshi:** Have you been given deeds to this house?

**Fawzi:** We are people who had deeds to our houses—when we ran we could not stop to

collect our deed and then run? We were trying to save our lives at the time. We did not take any of our belongings—we all ran only with what we had on us. We did not even take our gold jewellery. So many people died—they are eating the very soil they walked on. The tsunami benefited those who were not affected by it—no solace for those people who were destroyed by it. We did not get five cents to buy anything for the house. At least those other people [NGOs] gave 25,000 rupees to buy stuff for the houses they constructed.

We are living today because of our own efforts. These houses are useless—not worth five cents. Everybody's houses are like that. Look at the lavatory—when you go in you can hear—as a father of three girls I find it hard to bear up. I feel embarrassed. I feel more ashamed than the children. As parents we must bring up our children in a nice way isn't it? So, I tell them to go to my sister's house. But you shouldn't have to use the toilet in another house when you have your own isn't it? We told them [Colliers International] to make the toilets outside—they did not. We told them to construct the kitchen with a chimney—they did not. The house gets wet. The doors don't close. The INGO said they will look after the houses for five years, but they never came. The shortcomings are endless.

Now look at what Mr Jehan did. There is a three-storey hotel in this village. He bought it for 1½ million rupees. I am telling the truth—I am not a man who makes a life out of lying. The AGA madam, the GN— they are all not on good terms with me because I tell the truth. I will swear upon my mother. I am

outspoken. I tell this everywhere—even at meetings. I have said this to Ministers as well. Dhilina Perera's [a land proprietor in the area] land has been bought for 17 lakhs.

**Kamakshi:** Who did that?

**Fawzi:** Mr Jehan. After that, Navagamuwage Aiya's [another land proprietor in the area] house was bought at 9 lakhs. The coconut land belonging to our previous boss was bought at 17 lakhs.

**Kamakshi:** And who did that?

**Fawzi:** Mr Jehan—who else? All of this was bought by Mr. Jehan. He is the one who is running the Colliers organization here. Then, he also bought the land on the other side for 7 lakhs. I am a Muslim man, but I associate more with the Sinhalese. I am a person who walks everywhere. After five in the evening, I am not at home, I am with friends. Near the 10<sup>th</sup> mile post he bought another plot for 12 lakhs. I will show anyone who comes all his lands. I know all of it. We don't mind what he takes, but he must use some of that money to do for us also. He said he will look after our houses for five years. They must at least give us a chair to sit on before dumping us here. Is this the way to settle us?! What can we do? We have to live with what we got for ourselves. We have to just lie down on what we have.

**Kamakshi:** How did you buy the stuff for the house then?

**Fawzi:** From what we earned. When the children ask for things we have to get it for them no?

**Kamakshi:** How much did you have to spend?

**Fawzi:** I spent from what I earned. When the children go to other houses, they see what

they have. You must have a TV in the house don't you think? A cassette [music player]? We have to get them these things. I had to somehow manage with what I could earn. The state did not give us a cent. Not a thread. We lived in the camp for one and a half years, but we got nothing from the state.

Now look, did a single MP come this way? A single politician? This is their electorate. [Calls out] Iqbal! You ask him also. Otherwise, you will think I am lying. [Speaks to Iqbal] We were in the camp no? How many times did the President come there? This is his electorate. Has he ever come? Has his brother [an MP] ever come?

**Iqbal:** No.

**Fawzi:** They come here and open this and that and place foundation stones here and there and go. None of them ever visited this scheme to check out what the INGO built. We are not moneyed people. We bought the stuff for this house from what we earned. We are living today because of our own efforts. You can be sure none of these households here will be voting for these politicians come elections.

I am not talking of a racial divide here. If the High Commissioners did not come to our aid we would have died! Why are you smiling?! I am telling the truth. I will even tell this in front of His Excellency—if they want, they can kill me. That's OK. Someday I have to die no—so that's OK.

**Kamakshi:** No one in the camp got assistance from the state?

**Fawzi:** No, no one got. He [Iqbal] was also there with us. He left a little before us. He

also did not get anything. We came here because it was becoming impossible to live in those houses. It was getting very hot in there.

But, look at us now. It is impossible to live in these houses. They are not worth a cent! But, we are destitute people and have to live with what was given. The politicians never visited. Not even to see what the INGO had built! We got no assistance from them—I will vouch for it any day. We voted for them, but never again. I will answer to any journalist. Miss, you can take my name down.

**Kamakshi:** Is there any one you can go and report these problems to?

**Fawzi:** No, who is there? We can tell the AGA lady, but there is no point. AGA lady says, 'It is not your problem. I will look after it'. When we tell them the wrong things that are being done by the GN, they are not happy with us.

Can they give houses to people in Colombo? Can they give houses to people in Borella? Can they give houses to people in Maharagama? How can they? I am not jealous about houses being given to others. You have to give houses to those who don't have—that you *have* to do. I am not saying that—I am saying that everyone must have a house. A place where they can sleep. People [NGOs and other aid providers] came here to help those affected by the tsunami no? We had a few goats—all were lost but to this day we have not got a single goat. Did one organization give us even a goat kid?

**Kamakshi:** Did they give goats to other houses?

**Fawzi:** Why not? Of course they gave. They gave to so many households. They gave to people who did not have goats before. Even to people who were not caught up

in the tsunami.

**Kamakshi:** Who gave?

**Fawzi:** The government gave. NGOs also gave. What do you say? [speaks to Iqbal] I am telling the truth—even if I have to die, I will tell the truth. Now look at the barrels—when you go round you will see all the houses having big barrels.

**Kamakshi:** What barrels?

**Fawzi:** They distributed barrels to collect water—plastic barrels—2000 L barrels from Arpico. You have a look around and see if those people who were destroyed by the tsunami have barrels anywhere here. Once there was a meeting. I took signatures of everyone and took it to the NGO and said all of us have not got water barrels. Then they said, ‘Your organization will give you’. I said, ‘These people who did not give us even a single chair are they going to give us barrels?’. I told them ‘You ask Mr Wilmot from the Land Commissioner’s office, ask Jacintha Miss. They said they will give us 2½ lakhs. But, we did not get that’. They asked me whether they gave it in writing. I said what they said in front of a 100 people does not have to be given in writing. It is this that we will state in a court of law. We did not get barrels. Now, we haven’t had water for two days. If we had a barrel we could have stocked the water and had enough water at least to go to the toilet. These things came to be given to the people who were affected no? But they will not look at their needs. I had so many goats, but did I get a single goat? No.

**Kamakshi:** How many goats did you have?

**Fawzi:** We had goats but could not get replacements. Before the tsunami, I sold some of the goats I had and that’s how I bought my boat. Not even two months passed,

the tsunami hit. I got a boat from Caritas. From that I earn a living. I don't go for any CBO meetings. If I go there and talk, I will be sidelined. That's how it works here. I am outspoken. It is the case everywhere—the man who tells the truth has to face the repercussions.

**Kamakshi:** Do you go for FCS meetings?

**Fawzi:** Yes. I go. I go to the Kirindagama [Sinhalese] one. But there was no support they could give. I was a member from the beginning.

**Kamakshi:** What about fisheries implements?

**Fawzi:** We got from the same organization [Caritas].

**Kamakshi:** When did you recommence your livelihood activities?

**Fawzi:** I came here after one and a half years in the camp, and then it was about three months after that I went on my job. Until then, we were able to get casual jobs and live off that.

**Kamakshi:** How much were you able to earn from the casual jobs?

**Fawzi:** That gave 400 rupees per day, so I earned about 8000 rupees per month.

The rich people brought us food no, so there was no shortcoming by way of food. I don't need to lie and say that we did not have enough to eat. People came and gave us. That is the truth.

But we did not get anything from the state. I got caught in the tsunami and stayed in a torn sarong for five days until I spoke to the *Samurdhi* Officer and got a sarong. He gave me some old sarongs and told me to select one. We were people who were earning well and living comfortably. So, why did I have to

select from some old sarongs? When there were new sarongs why were they giving us the old ones?

From the day we went to the camp what did they give us—they fed us bread fruit, pumpkin, and dhal—isn't that so? [speaks to Iqbal] I thought to myself, 'There are stacks of tinned fish, sacks of potatoes'. Then I thought, 'These things have been brought for us isn't it?'. There were stacks of powdered milk packets and tinned fish. When we went that way we see them loading it into lorries. One day, there was a policeman going past. So, I called out to him and asked him, 'Have the tinned fish been brought for us or what?'. He said, 'Yes, for you all'. I said, 'It has been seven days since we came here. Why is it we have not got anything but pumpkin and dhal? If we don't get fish and potato today we are going to stage a protest'. He told me be fair—'don't do that'—I said, 'I am being fair'. It was only that day we got sardine! That day we got tinned fish and potato! It was only after they brought the air force to guard the camp that the pilfering of stocks stopped. As far as we could make out, it was one officer who took three-quarter of what came in. Not anyone else—not any of the tsunami victims. I thought if I stay there any longer I will speak out and cause further problems. So we went and stayed in this house and that house until we moved to the 100 houses scheme.

You see, that is what happened to us. Even though we were the victims of the tsunami we got no benefit.

**Kamakshi:** Would you think you have now regained your livelihood to the pre-tsunami state?

**Fawzi:** Yes, generally speaking yes. With our own efforts. With no help from the government, we have got somewhere. At least to a level that we can live.

**Kamakshi:** Did you get fisheries implements against an Entitlement Certificate?

**Fawzi:** Yes, for that. We got everything from one organization. Caritas? Ah, we got 10 nets. I think we got the nets from the man who came to the mosque. The boat engine was from Caritas.

**Kamakshi:** All that was against the certificate?

**Fawzi:** Yes, for the certificate.

**Kamakshi:** Where did you get the certificate from?

**Fawzi:** Err... I got it from the Fisheries Ministry.

**Kamakshi:** You go in a day boat?

**Fawzi:** Yes.

**Kamakshi:** Do you go every day of the year?

**Fawzi:** No, no—not every day. There are days when I don't go.

**Kamakshi:** Why is that?

**Fawzi:** We spend a lot on the oil for the boat no? It is a big cost and it is one of the things that affect our daily living. We spend 1500–2000 rupees on oil. If we pump 15 L it will definitely be 1500 rupees. Then, there is the kerosene. So, we have to have enough money to get the oil. Then, the cigarettes for the fishermen. So, invariably there is a cost of at least 2000 rupees. If we have a small catch—say about 500-1000 rupees—then we have to divide it amongst us and then there isn't enough money to get oil to go to work the next day. Then, we have to cut out on the food and even go hungry the next day to have money to go the day after. They said they were giving financial assistance for oil, but that also we did

not get—they gave oil for four months, but we got only for two months. That too they did not do properly. They cheated on that too. The FI kept a cut on it. Even when you complain about an officer who does wrong, nothing happens. It still will not get resolved. The officers are not scared either. That is what is happening here.

**Kamakshi:** So, the household lives off your income?

**Fawzi:** Yes. Yes.

**Kamakshi:** Is any other member of your family engaged in some kind of self employment?

**Fawzi:** No no. I am the sole income earner—no other.

**Kamakshi:** Do you still do any animal farming?

**Fawzi:** No, I did not get the goats. It is people who were unaffected who got. I feel sad when I see these things. But what to do—we can't complain and fall out with those people who have goats. Because of that I don't even go for CBO meetings.

**Kamakshi:** Do you think the CBOs are of any use?

**Fawzi:** Yes, there is some use. But, we don't get our things done through them, so there is no point going there and wasting our time.

**Kamakshi:** How do you think they should have selected the tsunami beneficiaries?

**Fawzi:** It is like this Miss. NGOs come. They say, 'set up a society'. They put their people in place and those people give to the people they want to give.

**Kamakshi:** So how would you say they should do it?

**Fawzi:** If they want to do a good job they must appoint suitable people—people who can handle the job.

**Kamakshi:** Do you get *samurdhi*?

**Fawzi:** Yes we get. From the time of President Premadasa, we have been getting benefits

through the Janasaviya scheme.

**Kamakshi:** How much do you get?

**Fawzi:** Those days we got a 1000-rupee bag of groceries. And 500 rupees went to the bank savings book. Then after two years or so there was 25,000 rupees collected. Then they gave us the interest of 250 rupees monthly through the post office. That scheme has now been converted to *Samurdhi*. Now we get 360 rupees in food stamps—that won't increase, that is fixed. The rice we buy with that is infested with weevils! But, they don't listen to us—we have to take what they give us. They don't clean it properly—the grains of rice look like monkey teeth. To clean it, we would have to take it to the mill. But, we can't take a few kilos [kilograms] to the mill.

**Kamakshi:** Have you taken any loans?

**Fawzi:** No, no—I don't want to take loans from anyone. No bank loans and no bank accounts either. I don't want to take loans. If we can't pay back and they come to our homes it is shameful isn't it?

**Kamakshi:** Do the children go to school?

**Fawzi:** Yes one is going. The other has sat the O/L [Ordinary Level] exam. She is at home nowadays. The small one goes to school, but the last two days, she did not because we don't have water.

**Kamakshi:** How do you get about?

**Fawzi:** By bus. But we don't get about that much. There is no need. Those days we used to go to Tissa [Tissamaharama] for everything. But now everything is available around here. So, we don't go about that much unlike in those days. There is no need also. The market is here—twice a week. Those days we went to Tissa for

everything. Now everything is available here itself.

**Kamakshi:** What can you tell me about your future expectations?

**Fawzi:** It is the responsibility of the two children that I have to shoulder. They are girls, so the responsibility is more than with boys. After the elder girl gets married we must give the house to her and move out. It is not easy to build a house now.

**Kamakshi:** Are the people around you the same as before?

**Fawzi:** Yes, they are the same people. After the tsunami, when we moved into housing schemes the numbers reduced a bit—it is a bit lonely now. There were 65 families that went to Soyurupura. When you say 65 families, that is a lot isn't it? We feel the emptiness.

**Kamakshi:** There are no issues with the ethnic difference?

**Fawzi:** No, no—we all live together. We go to their funerals they come to ours. We eat in their homes and they eat in ours. Occasionally there are little tiffs—sometimes the younger ones have arguments. But there is nothing serious. There are few problematic people, but then you get them everywhere don't you?

In general, it is OK. We should not start that kind of thing, then, we won't be able to live! We eat in each other's houses. There are no problems. We must not create problems. We all will die off eventually.

**Kamakshi:** It has been a great help talking to you. Thank you very much for giving me your time.

## APPENDIX III: SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES

### Images for Chapter 1



Figure 14. Local tourists enjoy the breaking waves at the Kirinda beach.



Figure 15. The fish auction hall at the Kirinda harbour, where fishermen and *mudalalis* typically engage in bargain trading for the fish catch.



Figure 16. The remnants of a fisherman's tsunami-struck house in Kudawella West; it has been abandoned following the 100 m buffer zone regulation.



Figure 17. A Malay fisherman lives with his wife and child in their post-tsunami house in Colliers Housing, Kirinda.



Figure 18. A boutique outside a fisherman's house in Nakulugamuwa Housing, Nakulugamuwa South. It is managed by his wife; an INGO provided her with 20,000 rupees worth of goods to sell, whilst the structure was built through her husband's daily earnings.

## Images for Chapter 7



Figure 19. The Kirinda Peripheral Hospital. Its facilities, comprising prenatal and early child health care and treatment of illnesses and minor injuries, are widely used by villagers.



Figure 20. The inlet at the Kirinda harbour; despite constant dredging (right), only smaller sized boats are able to navigate through its narrow passageway.



Figure 21. The new office of the Kudawella West FCS.



Figure 22. One of 11 houses in the isolated community of Goal Housing, Kirinda.

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