CBMS as a Measure for Peace-Building and Conflict Transformation? Suggestions from Case Studies in Batticaloa, Eastern Sri Lanka

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1 Rationale for piloting CBMS in conflict-affected areas

CBMS challenges conventional approaches towards poverty-related data acquisition and management organised and conducted by central government offices that usually depend on a high level of human and technical resources. Centrally acquired statistical data is without doubt crucial to monitor a broad variety of social and economical trends. However, it is frequently inaccessible and every so often largely irrelevant to community-based organisations and individuals dealing with processes of local-level change in rural areas. Data inaccessibility is often both a physical and cognitive problem. National statistical data sets are mostly one-dimensional and fail in explaining local level poverty dynamics and the many social, economic, environmental and political factors that impinge on rural households and local-level decision making processes. Also, the processing and publication of centrally administered data is usually geared towards scientists, policy-makers and highly specialised staff of the private sector, which may pose a cognitive barrier to data use for communities with limited access to education.

These shortcomings apply in particular to areas affected by prolonged violent conflict and civil war. In north-eastern Sri Lanka, for example, a prolonged conflict between the state and armed rebel groups have left the rural areas in ruins, with an estimated number of 60,000 people killed in over 20 years of conflict, and hundred thousands displaced either within the country or abroad. The structural consequences of such prolonged phases of armed conflict are visible throughout the region: dilapidated infrastructure, inoperable local level institutions, and a lack of local-level planning capacities, to name but a few.

The aims of investigating options for CBMS in eastern Sri Lanka therefore were twofold: First, is was anticipated to explore if and to what extent CBMS can offer alternatives for community-level data collection in the specific context of latent violent conflict and thus fulfil a basic prerequisite for any local level planning initiative. With its distinct approach, CBMS anticipates bridging the gap between the ‘sample’ and the ‘user’ of socio-economic data. It provides an opportunity for gathering, managing and using poverty related data directly at community level, with community members, administrative officers and external researchers cooperating. CBMS data can subsequently be used by
community-based organisations for displaying and explaining their livelihood, identifying development goals and obstacles to government authorities, non-governmental organisations and other local decision-makers. This can in turn lead to a more informed cooperation between communities and external organisations, and a more proactive role of communities in the process of project planning and implementation. The outcomes of the CBMS pilot study carried out in Batticaloa, eastern Sri Lanka, will be assessed against this major objective (see Chapter 2 below).

The second objective, however, takes CBMS a step further and aims at integrating it into existing local-level efforts of transforming a society that has suffered from prolonged conflict and develop its capacity to deal with local development challenges in a peaceful, constructive way – what is commonly understood as conflict transformation (see Lederach 1995; Rupesinghe 1995; Miall 2001). As the discussion in Chapter 3 will show, a CBMS that is also designed as an initiative for promoting participatory and more equitable local-level decision making can offer several entry points for long-term conflict transformation. The example of a conflict assessment training program that was carried out in Batticaloa for governmental and non-governmental decision-makers acting on the community level revealed important benefits of including decision-making bodies and individuals in a CBMS process. It also highlighted opportunities of such outreach for conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

2 Pilot study on CBMS in a conflict zone: Alternatives for local-level planning

2.1 Goals of the Batticaloa case study
The CBMS case study in Batticaloa District focussed on evaluating possible causes for an increase or decrease of marginalisation of communities or individuals, i.e. the dynamics and relational aspects of poverty. Here, a special focus lay on the consequences of the violent conflict and changes during the peace process. Beyond that, the pilot study also aimed at investigating the characteristics of desired life-chances and aspirations of specific target groups (gender-, caste-, class-, age-related) in a heavily conflict-affected area. A further study goal was developing adequate methodologies for CBMS and local-
level planning in a conflict-/post-conflict context, based on experimental empirical studies, as well as investigating options for the institutionalisation of CBMS in an area affected by prolonged violent conflict.

2.2 Methodology
The CBMS pilot study was carried out simultaneously in two villages in Batticaloa District (Iyankerny in Eravur D.S. division and Mavilangathurai in Manmunai Pattu D.S. division), over a period of five months in 2003 and 2004. While investigations on the community-level formed the main part of the study, key informant interviews were also held with government officials outside the communities. In order to identify and analyse the various effects of violent conflict and provide alternatives for local level planning, a variety of assessment and planning methods were tested and evaluated with regard to their suitability for the purposes of CBMS. The methods tested out during the pilot study were drawn from general quantitative and qualitative social science research methodology (Berg 1989; Bloor, Frankland et al. 2001; Bernard 2002), from participatory assessment methodology (Mukherjee 1993; Chambers 1994), and from experiences with specific methods with conflict-related social research (Fisher, Abdi et al. 2000; Austin, Fischer et al. 2003; Ross 2003). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the applied methods in greater detail, Table 1 below provides a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the different methods tested during the pilot study.

The experience during the Batticaloa case study showed that linking up individual respondent information with the outcomes of group-based activities was a very useful way of obtaining valid and informed poverty related data. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodology produced a multifaceted data basis for a poverty analysis that also enables the exploration of dynamic social processes instead of merely assessing a household’s social status and its attributes. With regard to highly sensitive topics such as the socio-economic consequences of conflict, quantitative assessments (e.g. using a structured questionnaire) were found to be difficult in two ways: First, the respondents did not seem confident nor comfortable in providing quantitative information that was recorded on a standardised sheet of paper due to fear
of political consequences of providing such data. Consequently, the quantitative data collected was found to be very unreliable and extremely difficult to analyse. This process of ‘forcing’ people into a standardised set of questions and answers was found to be extremely critical from an ethical point of view. Second, within its inflexible structure the quantitative survey could not ‘dig deep’ enough into understanding the complexities of the socio-political changes that had occurred since the beginning of the violent conflict in Batticaloa. While some important issues were touched upon, understanding the linkages between different aspects of conflict impact could only be achieved in separately held semi-structured interviews.

Individual in-depth interviews with household members and problem ranking exercises were discovered to be most informative for the analysis of relational aspects of poverty. While individual interviews may reveal more sensitive information, e.g. on conflict impacts, income and community politics, etc., group discussions held during participatory appraisal session, e.g. problem ranking, can point out to some major structural issues that prevent people from improving their livelihoods according to their aspirations and ideas. Likewise, other participatory methods such as mobility maps were also found useful for meeting local planning needs. With all participatory assessments, however, it is crucial to take account of the frequently dissimilar needs and aspirations of different social strata (particularly of age and gender) within one community. Like conducting interviews with different individuals will reveal different opinions, conducting participatory planning sessions on a specific topic with different social groups is likely to reveal differing views. Therefore, reliability of the data can only be achieved by working separately with several groups and subsequently discussing the outcomes of various group sessions with all participants.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Tools / Methods</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Problem identification and ranking (group exercise)</td>
<td>• useful to identify major obstacles to community development&lt;br&gt;• straightforward implementation: not much time needed for preparation and explanation&lt;br&gt;• can facilitate vivid discussion among participants (warm-up)</td>
<td>• some participants often dominate the ranking and the discussion&lt;br&gt;• several exercises with different gender / age groups necessary to obtain a unbiased picture</td>
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| 2 | Mobility map  | useful to analyse social networks in and outside the village  
  (group exercise)  | provides insights into cultural / gender mobility differences between communities  
  | same as above¹ |
| 3 | Impact diagram  | can trigger or boost causal problem analysis  
  (group exercise)  | may lead to simplistic explanations of the causes for specific problems  
  | forces participants into a 'western academic' way of thinking (cause – effect)  
  | identifying and assigning assets raises suspicion (welfare, taxes) |
| 4 | Social & resource mapping  | useful to get an overview of the village’s natural assets, population distribution, and housing condition  
  (group exercise)  | identifying and assigning assets raises suspicion (welfare, taxes)  
  | may lead to simplistic explanations of the causes for specific problems  
  | forces participants into a 'western academic' way of thinking (cause – effect)  
  | identifying and assigning assets raises suspicion (welfare, taxes) |
| 5 | Wealth ranking  | can provide an idea of the relative distribution of wealth in the village  
  (group exercise)  | helps understanding the local perception of 'wealth'  
  | identifying and assigning assets raises suspicion (welfare, taxes)  
  | may lead to simplistic explanations of the causes for specific problems  
  | forces participants into a 'western academic' way of thinking (cause – effect)  
  | identifying and assigning assets raises suspicion (welfare, taxes) |
| 6 | Informal poverty dynamics interview  | fast and casual way of obtaining an first overview on the development of financial and physical assets  
  (individual)  | eclectic, does not give a holistic idea of poverty dynamics  
  | may lead to simplistic explanations of the causes for specific problems  
  | forces participants into a 'western academic' way of thinking (cause – effect)  
  | identifying and assigning assets raises suspicion (welfare, taxes) |
| 7 | Standardised questionnaire survey  | generates comparable socio-economic data on a wide range of livelihood issues  
  (individual)  | can only partly grasp causes and dynamic processes of livelihood changes  
  | imbalanced relationship interviewer - respondent  
  | lengthy process, requires a lot of time  
  | difficult to analyse and compare  
  | identifies and assigns assets raises suspicion (welfare, taxes) |
| 8 | Semi-structured in-depth interviews  | generates detailed, individual accounts of HH livelihood dynamics  
  (individual)  | ideal way to learn about coping strategies  
  | respondent can decide what to talk about for how long  
  | lengthy process  
  | very inquisitive, need to have established good rapport |
| 9 | Life histories & family trees  | creates an understanding of the HH members background & social networks  
  (household members)  | addresses inter-generational poverty dynamics  
  | easy to compare different HHs  
  | creates an understanding of a HH’s changing resource dependency & environmental changes  
  | lengthy process  
  | very inquisitive, need to have established good rapport |
| 10 | Resource use histories  | creates an understanding of a HH’s changing resource dependency & environmental changes  
  (individual)  | --- |
| 11 | Group discussions  | useful to verify outcomes from individual interviews  
  | see 1 above |

¹ The limitations given for the ‘problem identification and ranking’ exercise apply to all PRA-type group exercises.
2.3 Understanding conflict-related obstacles to community empowerment and planning

Drawing from the village case studies, the relational aspects that affect rural livelihood security are manifold. While most of them seem to be rooted in well-known structural problems rural communities are facing in various parts of Sri Lanka (and in other developing countries), many of the identified issues are evidently linked to the legacies of prolonged violent conflict.

Two major facets of the conflict seem to impinge on rural livelihoods in the two villages under investigation: First, the political-level conflict, as being negotiated and challenged by political leaders in Colombo and Kilinochchi, and second, the community-level conflicts between the different ethnic groups. While the respondents expressed that they were powerless with regard to the higher-level political struggles and full of fear that the peace process may not succeed, they spoke of many positive changes the politically negotiated peace process has brought about in their day-to-day life interaction with other ethnic groups at the community level. As a result, some community members were actively involved in renewing contact with the ethnic other. The overall perception was that at the village level, only little open resentment towards other ethnic groups remained. Despite that, the deep and often hidden psychology of conflict was still perceptible, for example when members of the Muslim community expressed that they were still afraid of going to Tamil areas that are now largely under the control of the LTTE.

While ethnic violence dominated and restricted many economic activities for several years, the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 2002 brought considerable relief and freedom to the residents in the selected villages, in particular for resource-dependent occupational groups such as fishermen. Displaced families were able to come back to their houses, which they often found destroyed and plundered. Freedom of movement without fear was seen as the most significant improvement. Despite these positive developments, the residents of the two villages raised grave concerns over the fact that they still had no certainty about the future of the peace process and therefore have to be extremely cautious with regard to capital investments. Also, many households were
more vulnerable than before the conflict started because they had lost major physical assets. For fishermen, the loss of fishing canoes was the main setback they were still struggling to come to terms with. A number of people said that the physical and (to a lesser extent) psychological stress they experienced during the war was still impinging on their ability to work hard for earning an income. Therefore, many families adopted alternative mid-term coping strategies, such as temporary labour migration.

2.4 Recommendations: Institutionalising CBMS in a conflict zone

Initiating CBMS in a relatively uncertain political environment of conflict transition needs to take into account a range of external and internal risks and consider strategies for institutionalisation that are adapted to the specific political and socio-cultural setup. When the different authorities and government officials were contacted to inform them on the purpose of the pilot study and the CBMS project at large, the feedback was generally positive and supportive. All three District Secretaries contacted in the course of the study were – in principle – supportive of CBMS. However, some difficulties were encountered in clarifying intended local-level benefits of CBMS. Some officials did not think community members were able to collect poverty related data, while others did not see a necessity for it. This resentment towards new projects seems to stem from an overload of NGOs working in Batticaloa district. Due to the complex political situation and a high number of non-state actors in the area, NGOs do not necessarily have a positive image in the rural communities. Up to date, the coordination of development interventions remains a largely unresolved challenge, leading do duplication of efforts, institutional overlap, and confusion about the various goals of different organisations. The D.S. in Eravur pointed out to the confusion that had been created when different NGOs working in Eravur Town D.S. division conducted similar community assessments in the same locations. Such logistical problems on the implementation level had obviously created considerable resentment towards the community-level work of NGOs in the area.

The Divisional Secretaries in all three areas recommended channelling the project through the G.S. of the respective village – an approach that was then adopted during the pilot study. Thus, the G.S. officers played a key role in facilitating community liaison
and participation. Due to the complex political structures in the Batticaloa area, the support and commitment for a long-term institutionalisation of CBMS would at least in mid-term perspective largely be dependent on some key players who were willing to take on ownership of the project. At the end of the pilot study, the enthusiasm for implementing the second phase of CBMS was vested in a limited number of individuals who seemed to be truly supportive of the project’s aims, while others were supporting the researchers in their daily work without interest in the overall proliferation of the approach. Theses experiences call for a careful selection of local partners for the second phase of CBMS, considering political, ethnic and religious affiliation, as well as personal commitment of officials.

However, if CBMS is vested in a few key stakeholders, there is a high risk of bias and politicisation of the whole project, which may lead to unintended negative effects in the communities and poor quality of data. In view of these risks, clear-cut responsibilities for anyone involved in the project are necessary in order to sustain its long-term implementation, especially if data collection is intended to be implemented on a regular (annual) basis. A special institutional mechanism, e.g. having one person at the D.S. level in charge as ‘task-manager’, can help ensure the timely administration of the CBMS annual update and the successful implementation of the process.

Another problematic issue is that any local resident that were to collect household data is charged with certain social and political attributes and is accordingly perceived by the respondents. Therefore, from the experiences gained during the pilot study it seems unavoidable to include outsiders in data collection, particularly with regard to qualitative data on sensitive topics such as conflict impacts, political and social networks, etc. For that, a clearly defined cooperation with a local university could be a practical solution. After initial training, final year B.A. students could collect the data, feed it back to the communities, but also analyse it as part of their final theses. That would provide them with a practical experience in social research, which can further qualify them for finding employment. However, due to the high level of politicisation of universities, and depending on the future developments of the local-level conflict between Muslims and Tamils, the students would have to be chosen very carefully. They would also need
sound training in social science research, particularly in the PRA-type field methods discussed above, before exposing them to the real-life situation in the villages. Thus, the capacities for such training would need to be assessed in the relevant institutions, and, if necessary, improved.

3 Building capacities for community-level monitoring and conflict-sensitive planning

Due to the political frame conditions in Batticaloa and the above mentioned obstacles to an entirely ‘bottom-up’ approach to CBMS, the need for working on the administrative and decision-making levels became apparent during the pilot study. The options towards such a ‘hybrid’ approach to CBMS that integrates community-level monitoring efforts with conflict-sensitive planning were investigated during a capacity building programme on local conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive planning carried out in Batticaloa in 2004 and 2005. Apart from meeting the specific planning needs of rural communities in a conflict-affected area, this Conflict Assessment Training (CAT) program also aimed at promoting local-level mechanisms for conflict transformation.

3.1 CBMS and Conflict Assessment Training

In the following Conflict Assessment Training (CAT) is introduced as a training concept for the development and application of conflict-sensitive planning at the local level that anticipates contributing towards the proliferation of long-term conflict transformation. CAT stands for an experimental development of a training schedule for including conflict sensitivity and analysis at the planning level. It was initiated in September 2004 by a small interdisciplinary team of young researchers and development practitioners at the Improving Capacities for Poverty and Social Policy (IMCAP) Program at the University of Colombo in cooperation with the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Colombo, Sri Lanka. CAT was developed on the basis of existing experiences with various approaches to working in conflict (see Goodhand 2001) documented in the academic and ‘grey’ literature and by drawing on the working group’s grassroots experiences of local-level conflict assessments in Sri Lanka’s northeast. The first CAT training was conducted for mid-level staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations working in rural
development in the highly conflict affected Eastern province of Sri Lanka. With respect to the proliferation of CBMS, the overall goal was to foster lasting institutional support for CBMS by integrating a capacity-building program (CAT) for conflict-sensitive planning that helps bridging the gap between community level action and the decision-making levels in Batticaloa.

3.2 Goals of CAT
Conceptually, CAT focussed on avoiding conflict risks by analysing acute and structural conflicts at the local level using the Do-No-Harm approach (Anderson 1999), while also providing insights into existing potentials for proactive peacebuilding (i.e. also trying to ‘do some good’). The aim was to integrate existing experiences from other countries and conflict scenarios (e.g. the results of the Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCCP, Anderson 1999) into a coherent concept for training key decision makers at the lower administrative levels of government and non-governmental organisations in conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive project planning, using PCIA as a guiding approach.

It is worthwhile to mention that the methodological aim of developing CAT was to provide the necessary methodological guidance and supervision for flexible application of assessment methods, according to the particular needs of the local situation. With basic theoretical and conceptual foundations at hand, as well as with practical testing of field assessment methods, trainees should be enabled to decide on the assessment methodology themselves and compile an assessment sequence according to the needs of a particular situation. The underlying assumption was that in practice, local planning should be a mix of, on the one hand, reflecting on existing experiences and basic guiding planning concepts, and on the other hand, making use of a flexible set of planning and assessment methods that can be adapted and extended where possible, depending on the hypotheses developed during the planning stages. With a strong focus on planning, such an approach stresses the need for hypothesizing on conflict risks and selecting appropriate tools for conflict analysis based on assumptions that need to be verified in the field.
3.3 **Sequencing of the CAT program**

The training was geared towards the practical implementation of conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive project planning. It consisted of theory and methodology inputs as well as a supervised application in the field. The target group were development practitioners from governmental and non-governmental organisations, usually working at the mid-level of the respective organisational hierarchies, e.g. programme planning officers, field extension coordinators, etc. The training inputs were given during a series of workshops of two to four days held in Colombo and Batticaloa (see Table 4) as a continuous and supervised learning process over a period of 5 months\(^2\).

| Workshop 1 | Theory and Concepts of Conflict Sensitive Planning and PCIA | 29.-30.9.2004, Colombo |
| Workshop 2 | Methodology of Conflict Sensitive Planning | 8.-10.11.2004, Batticaloa |
| Workshop 3 | Field Exercise  
Unit 1: Conflict Analysis  
Unit 2: Assessment of Conflict Risks and Peacebuilding Potentials | 29.11.-2.12.2004, Batticaloa |
| Workshop 4 | Outcomes and Analysis | 21.-22.3.2005, Batticaloa |

During the first workshop, theoretical input was provided and applied to local contexts in exercises and discussions. Topics such as the foundations of conflict theory and conflict resolution, awareness creation on the objectives and expected outcomes of mainstreamed conflict sensitivity, and research skills necessary for gathering information needed on conflict-related topics were discussed.

The second workshop focussed entirely on developing assessment and planning skills. It combined awareness creation and training in basic social research skills, such as interviewing skills and the development of short semi-structured questionnaires, with applied training in a selected number of common techniques for field assessment and desk-based conflict analysis (Table 8). The techniques rely on common PRA.

\(^2\) Due to the tsunami disaster of Dec. 26\(^{th}\) 2004 and the following reconstruction activities, the final workshop of the CAT program had to be postponed from January to March 2005.
methodology and had been tested in peace and conflict assessments in other countries and within Sri Lanka. Fisher et al. provide a detailed overview on the relevance of the selected methods and their implementation (Fisher, Abdi et al. 2000). The tools were tested out in group and plenary work, using concrete examples from Batticaloa district as points of reference.

The third workshop consisted of a practical field exercise in several locations in Batticaloa district where local-level planning methods were tested out in the project areas of the trainees’ organisations. A state-of-the-art assessment of conflict risks and peacebuilding potentials was planned and undertaken in selected field locations in groups of 4-6 trainees.

In the following, an example for assessing the implications of prolonged conflict on local-level planning is presented. The case study is the outcome of the field assessment exercise that formed part of the CAT. For the purpose of critically assessing the conflict analysis and local planning potential of CAT, no additional primary or secondary information sources were used for the presentation of the case study; the problem analysis is solely based on the outcomes of the field appraisal, the observations of trainees and facilitators3, and the analytical discussions held within the assessment team prior and after the field visit.

3.4 Case study analysis: Problems of lagoon resource use in Pankudaveli

Pankudaveli is a lagoon fishing village in Batticaloa District, located in the area controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is also referred to as the ‘uncleared area’. Since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in 2002 and the security improvements in the area, an increasing number of fishermen on the lagoon has aggravated ecosystem degradation, especially in the area controlled by the Sri Lankan armed forces (‘cleared area’). The objective of the assessment was to investigate conflict-related obstacles to sustainable resource use of lagoon fishermen in

3 In this report, trainers or facilitators refers to the IMCAP supervisory staff; trainees refers to the group of development workers who participated in the CAT, whereas the persons (village residents, government officials, etc.) met during the field appraisals are addressed as participants.
the ‘uncleared area’, and to explore which planning steps are needed to ensure sustainable and equitable use of the lagoon’s resources.

Based on existing information on the area, the assessment team had expected disputes between traditional and non-traditional fishermen in the area with regard to access and usage of the lagoon and tank fishing resources (see Figure 1). The expected disputes between traditional and non-traditional fishermen were not confirmed during the field assessment. In fact, it seemed that there was no sign of such conflict among the fishermen, as the lagoon area where Pankudaveli fishermen go fishing in is large enough to accommodate all local fishermen.

However, a latent dispute between Pankudaveli and the neighbouring village Narippulluthoattam came to light during the assessment. Here, the problem is an inflow to the lagoon from a nearby tank, which is obstructed by metal nets in order to stop fish from moving in and out of the lagoon. For the fishermen of Pankudaveli this inflow used to be a lucrative fishing spot, which has disappeared.

Also, the decrease of lagoon fish abundance – a well-known issue throughout the lagoon – is affecting fishing activities and thus income generation negatively. Major causes of this decline are, according to the Pankudaveli fishermen, an increasing number of fishermen on the one hand and the use of illegal fishing gear, e.g. nets with small mesh size, on the other hand. The latter partly seems to be a result from growing competition over limited resources. The Pankudaveli case study, though not revealing a situation of acute conflict, shows the need for integrated local planning and a resource management system for Batticaloa lagoon.

Initiating such planning processes, however, has to bear the complex political setup in the area in mind. Firstly, there is a latent risk for increasing resource-based conflict among fishermen in the area due to a mutually reinforcing process of declining fish populations and increasing competition among fishermen. All fishermen seem to engage in unsustainable fishing practices. There is an urgent need for management and control of the fisheries resources through government authorities, e.g. the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. A thoroughly development management system for the entire
lagoon would need to tackle these issues of deteriorating ecosystem by introducing a zoning system based on through consultations with fishermen and other primary and secondary stakeholders (e.g. paddy farmers, fish traders, etc.). Also, alternative options for income generation would need to be established in the long run.

Secondly, since triggering such dialogue runs the risk of disputes over resource access and use among different stakeholders groups, there also is some potential risk for political instrumentalisation. Resource disputes can easily be used by political actors from different areas and ethnicity to highlight differences among identity groups, which may have a polarising effect on fishermen groups from different areas and ethnic or religious background (e.g. Muslims and Tamils).

The local fishermen seem to be very accommodating for the problems of resource users from other areas and accept that they are not the only ones who use illegal fishing methods. Even though they complained about other fishermen they don’t want to spoil their good relationship with them. They pointed out that one step in fighting illegal fishing methods should be to take legal action against the traders who sell illegal fishing equipment. This relative unity of the fisher folk seems to have a good potential for a constructive solution to the increasing environmental and social problems related to lagoon fishing. A joint initiative for sound lagoon management would need to be supported by different political stakeholders and would need to include representatives of the fishing community from both sides of the lagoon (‘cleared’ and ‘uncleared area’). Such an effort holds great potential for a truly positive progress in rural development while constructive solutions to social conflict by focussing on mutually agreeable non-political development goals (e.g. the conservation of the lagoon as a fishery resource).

While such initiatives would need to be agreed upon at the political level, their planning and implementation would have to be based on broad participation of the local fisher folk, and also include experts from the government, academic and NGO sector. Development organisations can play a supportive role in this process. As discussion during the CAT showed, such an initiative can create considerable positive spin-off effects for conflict transformation, as considerable interaction, mutual planning and, to some extent, compromise will be necessary in order to avoid a further deterioration of
the ecosystem. The lagoon, as a matter of mutual interest, could thus become a pilot case for positive conflict transformation.

**Figure 1: Hypothetical conflict map created by CAT trainees prior to the field assessment in Pankudaveli**
4  Outlook

As the two different approaches to investigating options for CBMS as an approach to local conflict transformation and planning have shown, CBMS is a promising alternative to provide communities and local decision-makers with the capacity for assessing rural livelihood systems in areas where micro-level data is chronically lacking and the political climate is still dominated by instability and dynamic change in the course of prolonged violent conflict.

Several limitations have been identified, particularly with regard to finding lasting institutional support for CBMS, since the institutional setup in conflict-affected areas is weakened or entirely inoperable, particularly on the local level. Community level planning and decision-making is often overshadowed by factional politics that filter down from the macro- and meso-levels, which makes it hard for village residents to voice their needs and interests openly. This challenges the methodology for community-based assessments, which need to be more conflict-sensitive in their approach. Including external facilitators and focussing on capacity building seems a viable approach to tackle these highly sensitive issues of local politics in a context of latent conflict. Applied capacity building programs such as CAT can help re-establishing a link between the rural population and micro- and meso-level decision-makers by exposing the latter directly to the needs of rural residents. It can also help creating ownership among the decision-makers themselves for a more community-oriented approach towards local planning. Such an approach, however, necessarily has to take on a mid- to long-term perspective. It aims as changing people’s attitudes and ways of relating to each other as part of a process of structural conflict transformation. The Batticaloa case studies have revealed some key aspects of such an approach to CBMS. More pilot projects are needed to build up knowledge on how CBMS can become an integral component of local conflict transformation efforts.
References


