

Access to Primary Education in the Context of Resettlement in War-torn Northern Sri Lanka: Problems and Challenges

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Abstract

Primary education is one of basic rights of each and every child around the world. Access to quality primary education, however, becomes increasingly challenging in civil war and post war situations alike. In particular, access to primary education is limited when state lacks proper plans and strategy toward resettling war displaced people even in their own place of birth following decades of stay at IDP camps. In Sri Lanka, the northern Muslims, among others, are the worst victims of civil war between the government and the LTTE and their vulnerability continues to remain even in the post war period. National security prompted strategy of resettling northern IDPs, especially those from the District of Mannar, in their own birth place has contributed to the deprivation of their basic rights including right to decent schooling. Disconnected from the neighbouring township, semi-militarization, limited and lack of sources of livelihood and unavailability of proper transport infrastructure and facilities are such important factors which have direct bearing on the level of access and enjoyment of decent schooling including primary education. This paper examines the link between government's resettlement (war IDPs) strategy and the quality of primary education in Sri Lanka's former war zones.

Keywords: resettled IDPs, access to primary education, Sri Lankan government, right to education

1. Introduction

Primary education plays a pivotal role in ensuring broad-based learning of the child. At the same time, achieving the right to primary education for all is one of the biggest challenges facing most of the developing countries of the world today. The Second International Development Goal addresses this challenge by declaring 'universalizing primary education in all countries by 2015' (UNESCO 2015). This is also one of the main objectives set at the World Education Forum of April 2000¹, where the right to basic education for all was reaffirmed as a fundamental human right. Enjoying this fundamental right becomes even more challenging in situation of conflict and conflict-induced displacement and post-conflict resettlement alike. Sri Lanka being a developing nation and a country which experienced devastating civil war has had long struggled to restore the provision of basic education particularly in the conflict-torn areas.

¹ World Education Forum Held in Dakar, Senegal emphasized the need for political will to realize the dream of Education for All.

Sri Lanka, internationally hailed for her achievements in literacy, has a long history of provision of free education including primary schooling as far back as in 1944 (W.Litte 2010 p1; Alawattagamage 2020 p2). Successive governments of the country since independence have sought to expand education access by providing free education from primary to university levels, and by establishing new public schools along linguistic and religious lines throughout the country. The break out of the civil war in 1980s, however, disrupted the smooth provision of free education particularly in war zones thus leading to the deterioration and deprivation of the right to education in those areas (D'Souza 2017). The end of the civil war in 2009, however, brought fresh hope for the return and resettlement of war IDPs in their original places. Government's post-war reconstruction policy coupled with ethno-political manoeuvring greatly has had affected the resettled IDPs in former war zones in many fields including education.

This paper examines how the government resettlement strategy of conflict-induced IDPs impact the level of access to primary education in resettled areas of Sri Lanka. In particular, the study pays particular attention to the dynamics of national security in militarily strategic areas in the District of Mannar in Northern Sri Lanka. In so doing, the paper splits itself into six sections. First, deals with overview of the state of primary education in Sri Lanka in general. Second, Review of Literature on the past studies focusing on the study area. Third, design of the study. Fourth, involves discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

2. Education system and access to education in Sri Lanka: An overview

The free education policy was introduced in Sri Lanka to allow all the children in the country equal opportunity to receive formal education (Alawattagamage 2020 p8). Children in Sri Lanka start school for the first time at the age of 5plus and are required to stay until the age of 16. Languages of instruction include Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Boys and girls in Sri Lanka are mostly schooled together, although some single-sex schools exist. Entrance to elementary school is usually based on a student's place of residence. Public secondary and higher education studies are free to all citizens, though those living in regions still in recovery from the civil war may have less access to quality education than those living in other regions. Regardless, in 2015 Sri Lanka has the highest reported youth literacy rate in South Asia at 98.77 percent, as compared to 89.66 percent in India, and 83.2 percent in Bangladesh. Along with the Maldives, Sri Lanka is one of only two countries in South Asia recognized by the UN as achieving "high human development"(World Data Atlas 2015).

Elementary school students across the island follow a national curriculum that consists of six subjects; first national language, second national language, English, Mathematics, Religion, and Environment (a combination of social, biological, and physical sciences). These subjects are mixed in with non-academic activities such as play. However, desk work is gradually increased each year from grades 1-5. At the end of grade 5, students have the option of taking a scholarship examination to gain entry to a prestigious national secondary school (<https://wenr.wes.org/2017/08/education-in-sri-lanka>). According to a 2017 report by the Ministry of Education, there are 10,194 government schools offering free education for 4.2 million student population in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka also has 560 "Pirivenas," or Buddhist centers that mainly focus on monastic studies. Sri Lanka has achieved almost universal elementary school attendance, youth literacy rates, and gender parity in schools.

2.1 Primary Education of Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, primary schooling forms the foundational stage of formal education. Primary education involves the schooling of five year period which starts from the age of six for both males and females. At

present, there are more than 1.7 million enrolled in primary education in well over 10,000 public schools across the country. This represents roughly 27 percent of the population under 18. Further to this, as of 2017, there are also 98 fee-based recognized private international schools providing primary education for over 40,000 pupils of which 90% are Sri Lankans (TISSL2018).

Sri Lanka being a South Asian country has shown tremendous achievements in literacy which exceed expected values (Sen 1981). Sri Lanka's achievement in education for all is best reflected in her literacy rates. The growth of literacy during the twentieth century is impressive. At the turn of the century the national literacy rate was 26 per cent. By 1921 it was 40 per cent. By 1946, just prior to independence, it was 58 per cent. In 1991, the literacy rate was estimated to be 87 per cent. Extremely high gross enrolment ratios for boys and girls were achieved in the primary grades of formal education in the 1960s. By 1998 the net enrolment rate among the 5 - 9 age group was estimated to be 96.5 per cent (Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Registrar General's Department figures), with almost identical rates for boys and girls. Given these facts, it is obvious that Sri Lanka has achieved almost universal elementary school attendance, youth literacy rates, and gender parity in schools.

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict however displaced hundreds of thousands of citizens, destroyed parts of Sri Lanka's educational infrastructure, and led to a scarcity of teachers, teaching materials, and more (Cardozo 2008 p20). The war and post-war reconstruction efforts also diverted funds away from education. Educational resources remain unevenly dispersed, and reform efforts inconsistently implemented. This state of affair is relatively serious with the resettled IDPs case in Northern Province where the majority of the war-induced IDPs come from.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's education system has undergone a number of reform efforts over the past 70 years. According to the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka enacted "comprehensive education reforms" in 1947, 1960-61, 1972, 1981, 1997 and 2006 (Gamage 2013). Most of the reforms are summarized below:

- 1947: Introduction of free education from Kindergarten to University
- 1961: Governmental take-over of denominational schools to establish a national system of education
- 1981: Reform proposal to decentralize educational administration and create "cluster schools" to pool resource-poor schools with schools with more resources.
- 1985: Establishment of National Institute of Education
- 1991: Establishment of National Education Commission [for teacher training]
- 1997: Reforms included a "four pronged strategy" to modernize curricula and textbooks, teaching methodology, distribute funds to improve school facilities, and provide management training to school principals.
- 1998: Enactment of compulsory education regulations
- 2006: Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (2006-2010) – a UN-funded initiative to improve flexibility in internal management, enhance transparency, prioritize communal needs and increase efficiency in the utilization of school resources.

The above reform efforts were aimed at streamlining education sector from primary to secondary by expanding access to schooling and uplifting learning environment.

2.2 Access to education: The Sri Lankan Experience

Efforts to improve access to education in Sri Lanka in general can be traced to at least as far back as the nineteenth century when the British colonial government made grants in aid available to a range of religious bodies to expand access to schooling (W.Little 2003 p10). As early as the early twentieth century, ordinances were introduced (but not enforced) to make education compulsory in both town and rural areas. And already by 1911 the adult male literacy rate was 43% and the female 12%. Free vernacular-medium (i.e. Sinhala or Tamil) primary education was provided by the government from the late nineteenth century. In the 1940s the Free Education Bill was based on the concept of the right to education and embraced free education from kindergarten to university. Although vernacular medium primary education had been fee free for decades, the significance of the Free Education Bill lay in the opening up of opportunities for poor families in rural areas to a fee-free education in the English-medium.

Table 1: Trends in Education Provision in Sri Lanka (1950-2008)

	1950	1960	1971	1981	1991	2002	2008
Government schools	3,188	4,394	8,585	9,521	9,998	9,826	9,662
Students in government schools	1,349,345	2,192,379	2,828,070	3,451,358	4,258,698	4,027,075	3,929,234
Teachers in government schools	38,086	69,658	94,858	135,869	177,231	191,812	212,683
STR in government Schools	35	31	30	25	24	21	18
Student: School ratio	423	499	329	362	426	410	406
Adult literacy rate	65	72	79	87	87	91	93

Source: W.Little 2011

Parental perceptions and aspirations provided another fillip to the social demand for education (Aturupane, 2009). In the current context Sri Lanka has a wide array of demand-side and supply-side policies in place to promote school enrolment and attendance, many of which have been in place for a long time (World Bank, 2011, MOE). Approximately 92% of children currently in school attend government schools. The remaining 8% attend private schools, *pirivena* (temple) schools and international schools (World Bank, 2011). By 2017 Sri Lanka's net enrolment ratio (NER) was estimated to be 99% among boys and girls in primary education (Grades 1-5). Approximately 99% of boys and nearly 100% of girls completed primary education. Nationally, dropout rates in primary education are very low at 0.7% and 0.5% for males and females respectively. These figures suggest that the EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on enrolment and gender equity have been close to being achieved over a long period of time, especially in relation to other countries in the South Asia region. However, completion of nine years of basic education falls some way short of 100%.

3. Government Resettlement Policy and Educational Opportunities in the Study Area

It is unfortunate that there is no clear-cut paper or document which sets out the government policy on resettlement of conflict-affected IDPs, although there are documents pertaining to post war development

policy framework like *Mabinda Chinthanaya* (Saparamadu and Lall 2014 p8). Therefore, we need to focus our attention to the actual government practices in order to understand government's plans and strategy with regard to resettlement of war IDPs in general and in the study area- the Mannar District.

4. State of Resettlement in the District of Mannar

The post-war return of War IDPs began in the Mannar District in a strained and difficult context where a suspicious military watched over a war-fatigued and resentful civilian population, especially the Tamils. Further, the North including Mannar District was mono-ethnic for 20 years and many had all but forgotten the presence of a substantial community of Muslims in the area. Muslim villages were decimated and their homes destroyed during the 20 years of displacement. Additionally, families have expanded and returning People's (both Tamils and Muslims) need for land, infrastructure and livelihood assistance is great. Currently there are many disputes between the returning Muslim and Tamil communities over land and rights to engage in livelihoods (Haniffa 2015 p3). Among the disputes, the competing claims to land from Muslim and Tamil returnees in Sannar, Mannar district and the dispute over the Upukulam village fishing harbour are noteworthy (Raheem and Thangaraja 2013)

5. Past literature on Primary Education in the District of Mannar

There has been a very few research studies conducted on the subject of access to education including primary education focusing on Sri Lanka in general and the research area of the present study, although there are quite a few studies focusing on the issues like low levels of achievement among primary school children in basic numeracy and literacy. In particular, National Institute of Education (NIE) conducted several research studies on the performance level of primary school children which were published in the 1980s. Moreover, the percentages of students judged to be underachieving in relation to curriculum expectations increased steadily from Grade 1 to Grade 5 (Kariyawasam 1985, Ekanayake and Sedere 1989).

Whereas studies systematic and non-systematic focusing on education in general in resettled areas of northern Sri Lanka and Mannar in particular is much limited meaning only a very handful number of surveys on education in general are available. Those studies which main objective was to analyse the general problems and challenges facing resettled people throw narrow light on primary education (mostly by UN affiliated agencies). Hence, they concentrate on institutional, curricular and performance related issues thus they consciously neglect the extra-institutional and social factors that may affect the educational (primary) access of the school aged children in the resettled areas of northern Sri Lanka in general and in Mannar in particular.

Of the studies dealing with educational problems in rural Sri Lanka, Angela W Little and others edited (2011) *Access, Attendance and Achievement in Rural Schools in Sri Lanka* makes comparison between schools in different rural settings of Sri Lanka ranging from agricultural, semi-agricultural and plantation settings area. Similarly, the same author's edited work on *Primary Education Reform in Sri Lanka* (W.Little 2000) too addresses into the similar issue in detailed manner. In the same study some chapters focus on the availability and on school safety in addition to learning attainment, and seek to compare and contrast the situation with rest of Sri Lanka. The past research studies in the form of survey and desk work, therefore, provide little or no account of the important factors and issues affecting the access to primary education in the context of resettlement after the civil war in Sri Lanka.

Given the vacuum in the existing literature on the subject, the present research study sets accessing primary education as the single important issue to approach and understand the problems and challenges of right to primary education of children in resettled areas in erstwhile war zones.

6. Research Design

The key concept used in the present study is access to primary education. Access is conceptualized as enrolment and attendance/absenteeism, and survival in primary schooling in the study area. Primary education connotes schooling of children aged between 6 and 10. In Sri Lanka primary schooling formally starts from the age of 6 for both sexes.

6.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

A number of factors and scenarios are accounted for the problems of equal quality primary education in general and in post-war resettlement context in Sri Lanka in particular. Of these factors, most of them are related to institutional, curricular and extra-curricular aspects of primary education and thus they provide no description on the physical and social factors which affect the level of access to primary education especially in the resettled areas in Mannar District. On account of the fact that the families and people resettled in these areas when there was no adequate basic facilities available including access roads, source and means of livelihood, safety and security and the people are just now getting started their new life in places of origin after 25years of displacement. The un-established state of living by the resettled people in terms adequate livelihood tends to have direct impact on many fields of their life including education. Preoccupation with making livelihood along with personnel safety from roaming wild animals into human settlement areas cripple people's free movement required to establish themselves physically and economically.

6.2 Scope and Method of the Study

The present study is based on both desk review and field survey due to the nature of the research problem which requires systematic in-depth inquiry into what problems and challenges are facing children in accessing primary education in resettled areas in the Mannar District. The study approach that is the rights perspective required additional attention in designing method and methodology of the research study.

The data required for the study were initially gathered from primary and secondary materials which were available in government offices and official websites such as Ministry of Education (MoE) and National Institute of Education (NIE), in NGO offices such as Save the Children and in libraries and information resource centres. As for the field data, it was collected using primarily two methods; semi-structured questionnaire and focused group interview. The first one was implemented among randomly selected respondents from community leaders, religious leaders and parents of school going children. The second one was conducted among purposively selected participants ranging from education officials to school management to informed civil society activists and community representatives.

6.3 Study Area

The study was based on the area called Musali in the District of Mannar in northern province covering the villages Marichukkatti, Karadikkuli and Mullikulam where there are range of problems and issues in accessing basic amenities and services needed to lead a normal living including primary education.

The study area consists of two distinct villages (Marichukkaddy and Karadikkuli combined to form one village and Mullikulam) predominantly inhabited by two different ethno-religious groups in the Musali Division of Mannar District. Marichukkady and Karadikkuli are inhabited purely by Muslims who follow the religion of Islam and they speak Tamil language. Whereas Mullikulam, it is predominantly a Tamil-Catholic village. People in the village speak Tamil language.

Table 2: Marichukkaddi and Karadikkuli

Num. of families displaced	Num families returned	Num. people live permanently
200	73	1500

Table 3: Enrolment and Attendance at Marichukkaddi School

From Grade 1 to Grade 5 (as of 2018)

Regd, enrolment		Total attendance Per year		Total school days Per year
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
20	24	2457	3591	189

Average regular attendance for boys is 13 and 19 for girls

Table 4: Enrolment and Attendance at Karadikkuli G.M.M.School

From Grade 1 to Grade 5(as of 2018)

Regd, enrolment		Total attendance per year		Total school days per year
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
22	26	2835	3402	189

Average regular attendance for boys is 15 and 18 for girls

6.4 Mullikkulam

Mullikulam is the village situated in the Musali Division of Mannar District. Around 400 families from the village displaced during the final stage of the civil war in 2007 and only half of them made their return to their places of origin in two phases-2010&2012.

Table 5: Mullikkulam

Num. of family displaced	Num family returned	Num. people live permanently
400	206	No reliable data available

It has only one school for the entire village. The point to be worth note here is that the only school available in the village is located far from the settlement area-3km away. The Mullikulam Roman Catholic Tamil Mixed School (RCTMS) was re-opened on 6th February 2013. Initially, the school catered around 35 children in elementary and junior secondary grades (from Grade 1 to Grade 9). In 2018, the total of number of students enrolled increased to 40. Of which 23 are primary grade children.

Table 5: Enrolment and Attendance at Mullikulam RCTMS

From Grade 1 to Grade 5 (as of 2018)

Regd, enrolment		Total attendance Per year		Total school days Per year
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
14	9	2268	1323	189

Average regular attendance for boys is 12 and 7 for girls

RCTMS is located in the area under Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) control and thus the SLN operates a separate bus to carry 35 students, 6 teachers and 2 cooks on school days. Also, the SLN pays monthly salary of LKR 64,000 for teachers, according to the adjoining Catholic Church authority. Because of the security and strategic importance of the area in which the school located, the SLN imposes set of restrictions on the movement of the people in the area. The Catholic Church adjoining the school plays a key role in the overall affairs of the people in the village including education. According to the church authority, Mullikkulam village is 'so-called resettled village' meaning it is virtually an open prison as the SLN continues to interfere the life of the people in the village by denying or restricting access to sea, lagoon, tank and paddy field for vocation. The lack of proper shelter (most of them live in makeshift house in bush) and limited access to make livelihood put the people in poverty that in turn affect the children education by not sending them to school on regular basis in most cases and not enrolling them on time.

7. Education for all and access to equal quality education in the Mannar District

During the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, communities in Mannar District were displaced between 1990 and 2007, and were resettled in their places of origin during 2009/2010. Despite housing reconstruction and rehabilitation of basic community infrastructure, there are many outstanding basic services and infrastructure needs in the district. Educational facilities are particularly inadequate with schoolchildren following classes outdoors or in temporary buildings without proper sanitary facilities, teaching materials or facilities for extracurricular activities. This affects the level of learning of the schoolchildren, which in turn limits their social opportunities and affects future employment opportunities.

The absence of residential facilities for teachers has also resulted in a shortage of qualified teachers who are willing to undertake appointments to the area. The poor educational environment has resulted in lower teaching standards and academic performance compared to other areas in Sri Lanka. The lack of access to education facilities keeps people trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty and affects people's decision to return to their places of origin after displacement. Marginalised children tend to suffer the most from inadequate schooling.

Although Sri Lanka has almost achieved universal primary education, a significant proportion of poor children in the compulsory age for schooling is still not attending school. Out of a total of 3.5 million children in the age group five to 14 years, 391,461 (or 11.3 percent) are poor. Of them 24,276 (or 6.2 percent) are not attending school. These facts have much relevance to the socio-economic circumstances of the research area of the study where limited sources of livelihood triggers poverty which in turn affects the unhindered access to primary education. This was transpired in the questionnaire survey and focused group discussions with participants from the areas who pinned the blame for the situation on government and the military for imposing administrative, legal and security restrictions on the movement and usage of land around such as forest and farm land. Further, it was brought to the attention over the course of the discussion that about 10-15% percent of school going aged children are out of school for various reasons of which family economic circumstances precedes over the others.

There exists however some specific problems and issues in addition to the above common ones in the District, though they vary in magnitude between the Tamil and Muslim villages of the study area. Those are as follow;

a. Parental disinterest

Lack of awareness of the importance of and interest in educating children among parents in both the Muslim and Tamil villages contribute to the phenomenon of low enrolment, low attendance, and drop-out and low survival rate. The lack of parental awareness and disinterest is particularly observed in low or non-participation in school meetings and other school organized activities. As one of the school principals pointed out, if there were any issues need to be discussed with parents regarding their children it is the school management which has to go to parents` place and not the vice versa, which is the norm. This shows how indifferent parents are in their children schooling. Moreover, parents do not show up and involve in school events such as annual *shramadana*(clean up activity) and sports meet nor contribute for them otherwise(monetarily or logistically). This trend however is not observed in the same vein in the case of Mullikkulam where the Roman Catholic Church plays the key role in taking care of the welfare of the people in the village. Moreover, people maintain close relationship with the Church as the latter is the forerunner in their struggle for restoring normalcy in the village. Hence, the Church serves as the driving force behind the parents to educate their child by not only providing spiritual guidance but also material support in the form school stationaries. On the contrary, compared to Mullikkulam, the two Muslim villages while they have active political leadership, trailed behind Mullikkulam in spiritual leadership and guidance.

b. Transport and access roads

In general, availability of the public transport facilities and access roads are very limited in all the resettled villages in the study area. In the case of Muslim villages, only two buses are operated between the villages and the nearby town, Silavathurai which is located 4km away. As a result, most school attending children have to walk few kilometres to school daily. Even school teachers who do not own a motor bike find it difficult to attend school regularly thus taking day off citing the reason of lack of not enough public transport facility. This scenario is not relevant to Mullikkulam as there is bus service provided by SLN to carry school children and teachers to and from school, although public transport and access roads problems are much more serious than in the Muslim villages.

c. Safety

As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, people who are resettled in the research area returned to their places of origin after 25 years of displacement to neighbouring districts. During this long period of non-existence in their own places, the areas became virtual jungles and thus they were roamed by wild animals

such as elephant, bears and wild boars. The continued roaming by the wild animals in the area even after the resettlement is a big threat to the people's free movement including school children. According to community representatives, many people have been killed by wild elephants. It was mentioned in the focused group discussion that in addition to these wild animals, increase in stray dogs in the areas has become a big threat to those who move on foot. Add to this, electricity problem remains the worst causing fear among the people when they want to go out of their shelter located in the surrounding of the jungle in night time for urgent and important purposes. Also, snake bite is another big problem especially in the case of Mullikulam where people live in makeshift houses in the bushes.

d. Livelihood

The major means of livelihood of the people in these villages are agriculture (paddy and chena cultivation), fishing (tank and sea) and cottage industry. They however do not have sufficient facilities to cater these industries. Lack of water, fishing gear and equipment make their livelihood even more challenging. The problem of making livelihood however is not the same among the two villages (Tamil and Mulsim) of the research area, though source and means of livelihood is a common problem to both the villagers. That is, people in Marichukkaddi and Karadikkuli are provided with land, mostly 1/2 acre for housing and additional 1 acre land for cultivation. However, since there is no irrigation system to irrigate water to their cultivation land and inaccessibility to tank water located in the forest reserve which they used to access prior to their displacement, they are unable to make use of those lands. Instead they largely engage in monsoon rain dependent *chena* cultivation. Whereas in Mullikulam where resettled people are left with no land for housing and cultivation as most of the private lands there has been occupied by the military (both Army and Navy) for strategic and security reason. Thus people who returned to the area live in makeshift cottages in bushes in the area. This has deprived the people of their right to fishing in the sea they used to enjoy traditionally.

e. Poverty

As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the above three factors together with unemployment account for the prevailing poverty in the area which can be minimized if not completely eradicated by improving the present state of affairs regarding unrestricted access to livelihood sources and means such as forestry, sea and lagoons, and proper public transport services, access roads and setting up irrigation system for periodic cultivation and preventing wild animals from entering and roaming in the villages.

f. Healthcare

Equally important among the problems of access to primary education is the availability and accessibility of healthcare facilities. Lack of private practicing clinics and medical centres in the area further deteriorate the situation. People in the villages need to go to Silavathurai town which is located some 5km away from the area. Children who fall sick and subject to snake bite have no access to first aid in their locality and thus they undergo either artisanal treatment at home or late hospitalization at the town hospital, absenting from school, if occurred on school days. This situation is relatively more prevalent among Mullikkulam people than Marichukkaddi and Karadikkuli.

8. Comparative summary of the problems and challenges of educational (primary) access in Muslim and Tamil villages

In general, there are more similarities of the problems and challenges facing the two villages (Tamil and Muslim) in the study area with regard to access to primary education, though the factors responsible may not appear the same in those two villages. It is worth to be noted that the convergence of the problems

and challenges and also the factors responsible are only a surface picture. Going into the bottom of the issue with critical mind, we find many things diverge regarding the causes of the problems and challenges of accessing primary education in the two villages. They are briefly discussed as follow;

Poverty: as we found earlier poverty plays a major role in affecting the access to primary education in the area. However, the impact of poverty on the educational access among the two villages (Tamil and Muslim) is not the same. This is to say that poverty level in Tamil villages in the research area is comparatively higher than in the Muslim villages. However, considering the percentage of enrolment, attendance and survival rate, Tamil school is one step ahead of the Muslim schools. This scenario may strike one's mind with whether poverty has anything to do with the access level to education in the study area.

Personal safety and security: personal safety and security is common a problem hampering the smooth access to primary education in both the villages. For instance, if the people in Muslim villages are primarily concerned about roaming wild animals, then the people in the Tamil village are faced with threat from wild animals and the restrictions imposed by Sri Lanka navy (SLN) on their movement, this particularly a serious problem in night time. Still, school drop-out rate is relatively low among school aged children in the Tamil village.

Livelihood: As mentioned earlier, the main means of making livelihood in these two villages are fishing (sea and tank) and agriculture (paddy and chena cultivation). There is almost equal access of these livelihood means for people in the two villages. In the case of people in Mullikulam, they are basically a fisheries community engaged in sea and tank fishing. In addition to that, they now engage even in agriculture after they are relocated to a far place from their original place which is very close to sea. On the other hand, people in the Muslim villages too enjoy the similar and equal degree of access to livelihood means, engaging in tank fishing and paddy and chena cultivation. Ironically, the school miss out rate (abstaining) of school aged children in Muslim village is relatively higher than the Tamil village.

Therefore, it is safe to claim that there exist commonalities of the problems and challenges of accessing primary education in the research area of the present study regardless of the profile of them but at the same time the degree of impact caused by different factors of the access problems in the two villages is not the same.

9. Discussion

The data and evidences presented in the preceding paragraphs on the problems and challenges of access to primary education in the context of resettlement in Mannar, especially in the two villages in Musali Division reveal the fact that there exist multiple factors and facets to the problem of educational access in the area. The following paragraphs discuss these factors in the context of resettlement and right to primary education.

9.1 Low enrolment, low attendance and low survival rate

The cumulative outcome of limited access to primary education is deterioration of education standard, literacy skill and lack of informed people in the community. As far as the research area of the present study is concerned, the existing state of affairs with regard to the access to education shows that a combination of factors and issues contribute to the ostensible degradation of primary education. Of these, there are primary as well as secondary factors affecting the access to primary education which are purely physical and social in nature. The physical factors particularly inform both the availability of sources and means of livelihood and the accompanying limits and restrictions in accessing them. Whereas

social factors involves parental, familial and communal level economic and psycho-social conditions/circumstances. The interplay between these two different sets of factors appear to have significant implications for the overall problem of education access in the area in the form of low enrolment, low attendance and low survival rate.

10. Suggestion for improving educational access

Expanding the access of primary education is imperative in order for the present state of affair pertaining to poor enrolment, attendance and survival rate of children of primary schooling aged to be improved.

- First and the foremost thing that should be done in this process is to finding ways to reintegrate children into the formal school system who are drop out and deprived of the opportunity to continue their education. Introducing of Catch up-Education program which was originally introduced for school going children in north and east provinces who were affected by the ethnic conflict will better serve the purpose. The program targets the children of age (5-14) of compulsory basic educations who are not in schools i.e. dropped out or missed some part of their education. The existing mainstream education system however poses challenges since it does not have the required capacity to handle this additional burden and respond adequately.
- Proper supervision and monitoring mechanism should be put in place to deal with the problem of access to education. To do this, there has to be proper coordination among the different entities involved in the provision and administration of education including school management and education office. Also, village level monitoring mechanism comprising Grama Niladhari(village level government officer)village leaders and community activists will be an added support for the purpose.
- Proper needs assessments should also to be carried out. Although much effort has been made in restoring education facilities in previously conflict-affected areas, there has been insufficient coherent analysis of children's needs (problems and challenges) in giving a second chance to education. For instance, surveys on school-going children, access to schools, need for catch-up classes along with the psychosocial support and need for transport, etc., can be carried out at regular interval.
- Developing institutional capacity within the Ministry of Education and other local authorities to develop a comprehensive policy and strategy for expansion of educational access and inclusion of school drop-outs into the mainstream school system may be another way to address the problem.
- It is important to establish safe `learning space` as part of the step to expand educational access in the area which is facing threat from roaming wild animals and street dogs.
- Teachers should be deployed from among the displaced population to assist in organizing schooling. This will help diagnose the possible reason behind low enrolment, attendance and drop out and find remedial measures.
- Last but not least, there should be mechanism put in place to release and return of lands under military occupation to its civilian owners on staggered basis without jeopardizing national security. This will ensure free movement of people leading them to enjoy sustainable livelihood which in turn will push parents to focus more on their child's schooling.

11. Conclusion

Sri Lanka has just emerged from the decades-long ethnic conflict which devastated most of the educational infrastructure in the war zones affecting the education of children who are victims of violence and displacement. The Sri Lanka Ministry of Education has committed to ensuring all children and youth have access to education. To this end, government is implementing programs to improve quality of education with its limited budgetary allocation for education which is presently 4% of total budgetary allocation. However, government programs aimed at ensuring equal educational access bear little fruits. This is mainly due to persistent politicization and ethnicization at the implementation end which turn educational resource distribution to discriminate against the target recipients along caste, region and ethnic lines. This observed common trend in education access in Sri Lanka has much implication for the state of affair with opportunities for primary education in the study area-Mannar District. Wherein the people's right to decent living including adequate education access continues to be problematic due to government's preoccupation with consolidating national security. Finally, equal access to primary education in general is a problem prevalent in most of the peripheries of Sri Lanka, although the problem is much grave in rural and former war-torn areas. Government efforts to achieve equal educational access shall, therefore, become reality only if it(government) expedites the process of restoring full-scale normalcy accompanying release and return of land under military control to its civilian owners, and decent and sustainable livelihood in resettled areas of former war zones-Mannar District.

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