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The consequences of post conflict reconstruction: a review of literature

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Abstract: Conflicts are a significant form of disasters not only because of the mass destruction of lives but also due to its long term impact on livelihoods, physical infrastructures, governing institutions, social cohesion and trust. Post Conflict Reconstruction (PCR), therefore, should take a holistic approach of rebuilding shattered livelihoods while restoring governance and trust, in order to avoid future conflicts. Sri Lanka is a country that went through a protracted ethnic conflict for nearly 30 years. After the end of war in 2009, large investments have taken place in terms of physical infrastructure reconstruction. While it remains a question whether these reconstruction efforts have created any benefits, adequate amount of research has not taken place to analyse the consequences of the PCR in Sri Lanka. In the present application of PCR, there are several examples of failed intervention and of achieving contradictory results. In existing PCR literature, there is a lack of clear understanding of consequences of PCR intervention in terms of physical infrastructure, and focus has been limited to impacts on certain issues like conflict prevention, poverty reduction, inequality, land grabbing and governance. This paper highlights the need for comprehensive analysis of consequences of PCR. Drawing from previous research, it brings together a list of consequences to be analysed prior to implementing infrastructure projects. It also emphasises the significance of PCR consequences in the Sri Lankan post conflict context and how they can relate to long term stability.

Keywords: consequences, infrastructure, intervention, post conflict reconstruction

1. Introduction

Conflicts affect the lives of people not only due to the large scale loss of lives, but also due to the destruction that it causes on infrastructure and livelihoods. Thus, conflicts create a long term impact on social, economic and political systems making it difficult for societies to revive back to normal on their own. The period after conflict poses several challenges for the communities and governments to recover the economic and social systems, while maintaining stability and achieving sustainable peace. The recovery process necessitates post conflict reconstruction (PCR) interventions both by the internal government and external actors. These interventions mainly take the form of soft and hard infrastructures.

After a protracted period of nearly 30 years, Sri Lanka's conflict was ended by military interventions in 2009. In order to face the post conflict challenge of economic recovery, the period that followed was characterised with large-scale investments in physical infrastructure reconstruction. Reconstruction of physical infrastructure is a significant step towards post conflict recovery, but essentially not the only component. It is necessary to place

each individual PCR interventions within the whole PCR strategy with a long term vision to achieve stability and sustainable peace.

The previous research provides examples of failed PCR interventions and creating negative impacts. Since the intervention in post conflict context is different from non-conflict context, the PCR process is expected to be sensitive to the conflict specific dynamics. On the other hand, it is important to understand the potential consequences of the PCR intervention prior to its implementation and position the intervention correctly within the overall PCR strategy. This study is an in depth analysis of the consequences of PCR, focusing on hard infrastructure interventions. Using the previous research, it examines the significance of understanding the potential negative and positive consequences of a PCR intervention at the policy and decision making level. It also presents a discussion of PCR interventions and their consequences in the context of post conflict Sri Lanka.

The section that follows presents the justification behind the research and introduces the research problem addressed in this paper. Section three provides an explanation of the research method adopted in addressing the

problem. Fourth section of the paper provides the discussion pertaining to the consequences of PCR interventions focusing on the Sri Lankan context. The final section concludes the paper and provides some insights for future research.

2. Justification

Post conflict studies are mostly concerned with analysing the effect of conflict on the social, economic and political structures, and addressing the challenges faced by post conflict societies. PCR theory lacks comprehensive understanding of the potential consequences of PCR interventions. Understanding the cost of war is crucial to move forward during the post conflict period [1-3]. Economic recovery, establishing democracy, and rebuilding the public sector and justice system are few of the major challenges faced by post conflict societies [4-6] [7] [8]. Among the other topics discussed in post conflict literature, donor strategies, community participation and social capital are of main importance [9-12] [13, 14]. However, evaluating the results of project implementation is a significant component of PCR. Post conflict context is different from non-conflict situation [15]. Interventions can create new conflicts as much as it can prevent them [6, 16]. If the dynamics of conflict are not considered during PCR process, the projects may not be successful [12, 17]. Previous research provides examples of failed PCR projects [12, 16]. To prevent this from happening, PCR interventions require a clear guideline for the consequences that occur after intervention in post conflict context. This also helps to minimize the negative consequence of interventions that are highlighted in the literature. Although there are frameworks that are used in PCR, most of them do not essentially focus on consequences [18, 19]. Existing frameworks in PCR do not cover a range of potential consequences that are significant in post conflict context [20]. Some frameworks used in PCR practice lack theoretical justification [18, 21]. Therefore, this research suggests the need for a comprehensive guideline to account for potential consequences of a PCR intervention.

3. Method

Initially the concepts related to consequences of PCR interventions are identified through the literature review. Existing literature is

summarised, synthesised and analysed in order to derive concepts and understand their relationships. Next, using the conceptual analytical method, the concepts are analysed within the context and meaningful relationships are built among them. This method is used by Jabareen [20] in developing a narrative of concepts related PCR and reconstruction during conflict. Same approach is adopted in developing the narrative of this paper and arriving at conclusions.

4. Discussion

This section provides the analysis based on the concepts identified through literature and provides the narrative of how the consequences of PCR intervention are related to the post conflict context and long term stability.

4.1 Significance of PCR

According to united nations an event that critically disturbs the functioning of the society can be classified as a disaster [22]. Within the typology of disasters, conflicts and wars comes under the category of complex emergencies. Typically caused by human actions, these disasters result in large scale mortality, displacement, human rights violations and food insecurity [23]. Angstrom [24] claims that when an armed conflict is characterised by intensified, large-scale violence it can be classified as a war. Such a war can typically have impacts on socio economic systems of the society, and one reason for this is the damage inflicted upon infrastructures. Often the severity of war is measured by the damage to infrastructure [13]. The development gets stagnated through limited the production capacity which results from large scale destruction of infrastructure [25, 26]. Adding to this lack of facilities, new investments in infrastructure do not take place due to the continuity of war [27, 28]. As a result communities become fragile, and thus it is difficult for them to revive back to normal conditions on their own [29]. In addition, these societies suffer from corruption and war economic conditions [12] [5]. Therefore, it is necessary to invest in large-scale reconstruction not only in order to rebuild the neglected and destroyed physical infrastructure, but also to strengthen the productive base and improve trade [30].

A PCR intervention generally aims at rebuilding shattered livelihoods and preventing the communities from drawing back to conflicts. The intervention should centrally aim at transforming failed state into a new entity addressing social, political, economic and cultural aspects of life [20]. Reconstruction in post conflict context is a process of rebuilding and addressing development needs while being sensitive to the post crisis issues of political economy, security, gender and justice [17, 31]. Reducing the political and economic risks through PCR intervention could attract new investments and lead to faster growth [10]. PCR can also be used as a mechanism of rebuilding social capital, especially in case of community based reconstruction initiatives [14]. It is an approach to solve development issues in an innovative manner [17] while reducing the risk of reverting back to conflict [20].

Such PCR interventions mainly take place in the form of soft and hard infrastructures. The private investors are generally reluctant to invest in conflict affected countries. According to Schwartz and Halkyard [10], it is necessary to invest in infrastructure to attract private investors and sustain economic growth. According to MacDonald [32] external intervention in infrastructure could bring in both positive and negative impacts. While providing opportunities for growth, divisions can be created due to employment, profits and benefits created through infrastructure. Anand [33] explains that there is a trend to focus on hard infrastructure soon after the conflict, and development of soft institutions are postponed to later stages. While it is important to maintain a balance of two types of infrastructure, restoration of physical infrastructure is vital to establish the market economy and form the community relationships [34, 35]. It provides the basis for modern development and also supports the reduction of tensions [32].

Although, much research has been done on the challenges and nature of PCR, there is a lack of research on the actual impact of such reconstruction. The next section brings together the different consequences of PCR interventions that are highlighted in existing research.

4.2 Consequences of infrastructure reconstruction

Achieving economic development is one of the main purposes of PCR. Since there is no direct relationship between reconstruction and development, it is essential to link them through PCR strategy [36]. The interventions that encourage production backed by clear policies for development can produce sustainable economic solutions [5]. It is typical for post conflict countries to achieve high growth soon after conflict due to reconstruction investments [6] [30]. Yet, in order to sustain the growth it is necessary to reduce economic and political risk through a clear vision for infrastructure reconstruction [10] [13]. Development of infrastructure can also contribute to reduce poverty and rebuild livelihoods, two of the key challenges faced by post conflict societies [18, 33]. It is crucial to provide access to resources and markets, to create linkages among economies [16].

A possible negative impact of infrastructure improvement is the relocation of economic activities to developed areas [37]. As a result of unequal economic distribution the divisions and tensions may be heightened. Inability to distribute the reconstruction and thereby its benefits equally among the war affected people can increase the horizontal inequities [34]. Inequity of resource distribution is a common root cause of conflict, and its re-emergence in post conflict period may recreate violence [33, 34]. Bender [38] highlights that PCR practices that exploit the resources and increase inequalities worsen the vulnerabilities of people. Infrastructure development often causes environmental damage. Although considering environmental consequences is widely practiced in infrastructure construction, it is not given adequate priority in post conflict projects. Brown [13] explains how infrastructure reconstruction in Iraq caused oil discharge in desert, water contamination and marshland destruction.

The role of infrastructure is vital in building social capital after conflict through community participation [14, 35]. Community participation can be used to empower communities, and rebuild the networks and relations destroyed during conflict. This approach gives significance to people rather than to the physical factors of the projects [13]. Community participation is an alternative to centralised approach which is typically used by governments soon after conflict. Central

authority is appropriate when planning infrastructure projects and positioning them within the PCR strategy [16]. If the central authority is exercised extensively at the ground level, it can further damage the trust between state and war affected communities [6]. The centralised approach may also hinder the capacity to employ local knowledge and resources in reconstruction [13].

Improved infrastructure may also contribute to exploitation and thereby increase violence in post conflict societies. Unruh and Shalaby [39] highlight that due to increased value of land after reconstruction, dominant groups in the society grab lands and exploit resources. The involvement of politically and militarily powerful people in infrastructure activities contributes to increased tension and insecurity. The capacity for local elites to control the infrastructure resources, hinders the development of conflict affected societies [35, 40]. At the same time, the post conflict societies typically suffer from corruption at all levels of governance [12, 29]. Corruption in PCR activities further increases the power of elites, as well as the vulnerability of people [29].

One of the consequences of PCR that is highly criticised in literature is westernization. PCR interventions can influence the countries to adopt western notions of neo-liberal development [40, 41]. Market economy and demand driven growth are considered to be the way to achieve peace and it is often confused with peace [36]. Infrastructure development oriented towards market economy may increase the vulnerability and inequality that already prevail in the societies [42]. The donor interventions tend to assume that peace is equivalent to western democracy, which is irrelevant for local context [41]. Understanding the local practices and incorporating them in the PCR process are crucial for establishing sustainable peace [8].

4.3 Consequences and long term stability outcomes

Previous section has dealt with the potential consequences of PCR interventions, which included different economic, environmental, social and political consequences. These consequences are linked to the post conflict context and long term stability of the society.

End of war and implementing infrastructure projects do not guarantee peace in a war torn society. Incorporating peace building strategies to the PCR process is essential for conflict prevention in the long run [6]. If PCR interventions do not contribute to poverty alleviation and sustainable development, the conflicts may re-occur causing negative long term impact [36]. On the other hand, successful PCR solutions supported by a clear vision for recovery can bring about sustainable peace [13]. Therefore, conflict prevention should be one of the central elements of PCR strategy, and it should be extended to individual projects. Achieving economic development through PCR interventions can prevent future conflicts and establish peace [6].

If the PCR interventions increase the political exclusion of communities it can increase the ethnic divisions and thereby instability of the society [43]. Certain interventions implemented through the central government may increase the mistrust of communities towards government due to extensive practice of authority [6]. The infrastructure projects should be implemented while being sensitive to the conflict dynamics, and not being so may create power imbalances and increase violence [36]. If the reconstruction needs are not effectively addressed state building process will be weakened making the communities even more vulnerable [33].

Physical infrastructure reconstruction is not sufficient to achieve sustainable peace. Governance building and state stabilisation form a significant part of PCR process. According to Hamieh and Mac Ginty [41] policies to achieve development can be promoted through strong governance institutions. It is also important to maintain security through the involvement of state to carry out development activities [7]. Participation and inclusion of marginalised communities during the reconstruction process is important to strengthen governance institutions. The external parties can provide the facilitation for this participatory process [36]. Höglund and Orjuela [6] suggest that PCR can be used as an opportunity to address the root causes of conflict and lay the foundation for political reforms. Economic stability achieved through physical reconstruction is essential to form the stable state, through which the government can address root causes of the conflict and provide political solutions.

Given the significance of infrastructure in PCR, the following section describes how physical infrastructure reconstruction has taken place in post conflict Sri Lanka.

4.4 Consequences of PCR in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka suffered from protracted violent ethnic conflict for more than 25 years, which was ended through government military intervention in 2009. Though the means by which the government ended the war was highly criticised by internal oppositions and external governments [44], the immediate period after the conflict was marked by political stability for the government with the majority support, a large inflow of aid and assistance, a boom in the tourist industry, increased capacity to borrow and renewed investor confidence [30]. The provision of infrastructure became the development priority in post conflict reconstruction phase of the government [45]. The government chose reconstruction and economic development as the main path of sustaining the peace and preventing conflict [6]. It was clear that investment in infrastructure reconstruction was needed to rectify for the large scale damage inflicted by 30 years of war [30]. One cannot deny the fact that construction of new infrastructure is one of the notable achievements during the post conflict period [46]. However, the reconstruction initiatives were undertaken with highly centralised and militarised approach, with the involvement of military force. Instead of increasing the role of provincial councils in development efforts, reconstruction was planned and carried out by central government, again demonstrating the centrality of authority [6].

While the under-usage and the absence of benefits from reconstruction remain to be investigated, the actual effect of such reconstruction in the post conflict context has not been analysed to this point. Development may decrease the poverty, but the overflowing authority of central government can increase the powerlessness and insecurity felt by the communities in war-torn region, and thus may create new conflict [6]. On the other hand, due to the extensive use of resources, the large infrastructure reconstruction contributed to the growing fiscal deficit of the country [30]. Goodhand [47] also points out that although there has been extensive physical infrastructure

development in war affected regions, they may have contributed to economic and political centralisation. The development seems to have accelerated the ongoing nationalisation process.

5. Conclusion

The present discourse of literature lacks the analysis of consequences of PCR interventions. Post conflict studies are mostly concerned with analysing the impacts of PCR on peace and conflict related aspects. In the non-conflict literature there is a trend to analyse economic and social aspects, and thus it is difficult to apply them in the post conflict context. The consequences are often discussed in isolation and not analysed comprehensively in relation to each other. This study brings together a comprehensive list of consequences of PCR intervention using the previous research. These consequences have linkages to the post conflict context and long term stability, which in turn can create conflicts or establish peace. At the same time, there are linkages among these consequences which can be crucial in the specific context of post conflict societies. In Sri Lanka, though there have been many PCR interventions, especially in terms of hard infrastructure, no proper evaluation has occurred in order to assess their impacts. Assessment of consequences will help the future planning and implementation of PCR projects. There is a gap in literature of a clear guideline to analyse the potential consequences of PCR interventions. Existing frameworks do not capture a range of different consequences, and some frameworks lack theoretical justification. Therefore, there is room for future research to develop a framework to analyse potential negative and positive consequences of PCR intervention.

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