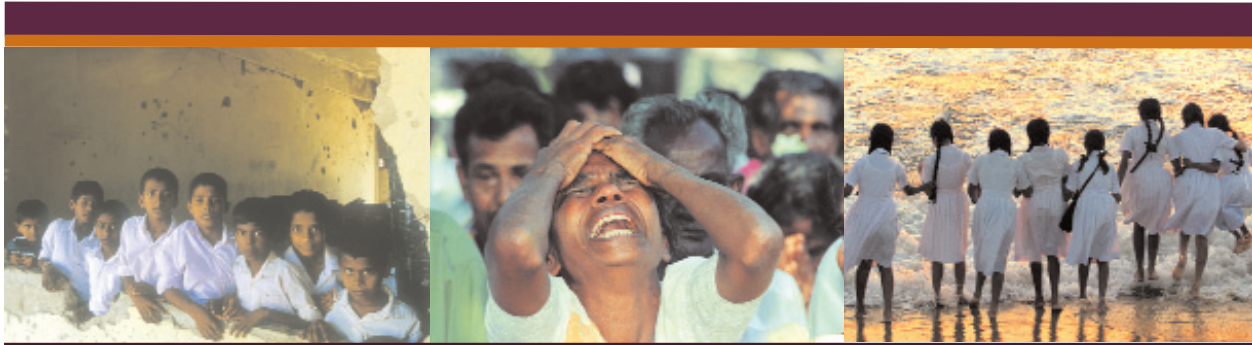


# KEY FINDINGS: STRATEGIC CONFLICT ASSESSMENT – AID, CONFLICT, AND PEACEBUILDING IN SRI LANKA



On January 30, 2006, five sponsoring agencies — The World Bank, The Asia Foundation, and the Governments of the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom — launched a study in Colombo, Sri Lanka, titled, *The Strategic Conflict Assessment – Aid, Conflict, and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka*, to guide the international community to better support the Sri Lankan people’s bid for peace after more than 22 years of conflict.

The study, researched and written by a team of prominent independent academics and consultants, covers the structures and dynamics of conflict and peace in Sri Lanka since 2000, and builds on an earlier “strategic conflict assessment” sponsored by the U.K. Department for International Development. It examines the actions of foreign governments and international aid agencies (diplomats and donors) thus far, and identifies how their strategies and approaches can best help strengthen peacebuilding efforts. Below are the key findings.

## BACKGROUND: THE SRI LANKA PEACE PROCESS SINCE 2000

- The conflict in Sri Lanka has a core state-anti state dynamic, as demonstrated between the Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), but there are also many additional and complex layers of conflict between and within key groups (Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims).
- For the first time in the history of the conflict, there was a rush by foreign governments to broker and support peace. This was due to:
  - A strong demand for international engagement by both the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE.

- Western capitals viewing Sri Lanka as a potential success story for resolving what has long been considered an intractable ethnic conflict.
- Related to this, shifts in international foreign policy since the end of the Cold War leading to Western governments experimenting with “liberal peace building,” which is a package of security, diplomatic, and economic measures to stabilize post-conflict countries.

## THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY’S ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS SINCE 2000

The study focuses on two forms of international engagement in the Sri Lankan peace process: first, the use by foreign governments of diplomatic and political resources to leverage peace and, second, use by bilateral and multilateral aid agencies (hereby referenced as *donors*) of development assistance and support for peacebuilding initiatives to leverage a political settlement. While there were at times differences in the emphasis and approach between diplomats and donors and between members of the international community, they were fundamentally working toward the same declared goal of a negotiated political settlement.

For foreign governments and for donors, there were a number of tensions that arose in their work:

1. The peace process focused on a bipolar model of conflict, when the conflict was actually multi-polar. This exposed not only deep seated intra-group divisions in both the North-East and South, but tensions between elites and their fractured constituencies.
2. Foreign governments and donors acted on the assumption that there were two clearly defined groups

with clear constituencies, the government and the LTTE; they believed their leadership could speak and deliver on their various constituents' behalf.

3. Governments and donors approached the conflict in phases and first tried to deal with immediate humanitarian and development needs while delaying attention to core political issues. They quickly learned that a lasting peace depends on not just a ceasefire and normalization, but the dual transformation of politics in the South and the North-East.
4. Donors attempted to tailor their programs to support the peace process and create economic incentives by tying large sums of aid to progress toward peace. But the South viewed this linkage as a form of conditionality and political interference. And once the tsunami struck, aid conditionalities in relation to conflict and peace had little relevance as tsunami aid came pouring in and Sri Lanka became "over aided."
5. Donors tended to overestimate their own influence and believed they could engineer complex political and economic change. There was a misplaced emphasis on the short term dynamics rather than providing long-term, conflict-sensitive aid.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND DONORS

International actors have neither the legitimacy nor the capacity to engineer peace in Sri Lanka on their own — but they can play a significant supporting role.

Recommendations for foreign governments:

1. **Focus on a transformative approach.** Tackle the underlying causes of the conflict and bring that perspective to all work done in Sri Lanka, whether it is providing tsunami aid, facilitating conflict negotiations, or implementing development projects.
2. **Be more inclusive.** Think more carefully about the inter-group and intra-group divisions between leaders and constituencies to ensure their concerns and interests are incorporated and taken seriously. This may involve widening

civil society participation or strengthening activities at the regional and local level.

3. **Aim for "Strategic Complementarity" and shared analysis.** The diplomatic, development, humanitarian, and human rights actors bring different assumptions and approaches, as do different foreign governments. Rather than trying to "harmonize" and ensure that everyone has the same perspective and approach, recognize the similarities in end goals and that different actors can reinforce and complement each other even if they don't always agree.
4. **Regionalize.** This means giving India a more visible and central role, if it desires to have one, and also taking time to learn regional models for peacemaking, governance, and economic development.
5. **Be prepared for long-term engagement.** Foreign governments need to remain engaged for the long-term and communicate to Sri Lankans that they are committed to the peace process.

Recommendations for donors:

1. **Do not try to stand on the same ground as diplomats.** In the past, there were unrealistic expectations of what aid and development work can achieve. The threat of withholding aid will have very little effect.
2. **Reprogram your work, do not add onto it.** Donors need to stick to their areas of comparative advantage. For instance, they can help to transform the underlying cause(s) of conflict, particularly in the South, through policies and programs that focus on governance, human rights, or poverty.
3. **Address the consequences of conflict.** Donors should substantially increase assistance to North-East Sri Lanka to meet immediate humanitarian needs and boost confidence in the peace process while not ignoring the South's development needs.
4. **Be prepared for long-term engagement.** Donors too need to remain engaged for the long-term and communicate to Sri Lankans that they are committed to the country's economic and social development.

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Award-winning photographs by Annruddha Lokuhapuarachchi, Dominic Sansoni, & Gemunu Amarasinghe from cover of *Aid, Conflict, and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka*.