

**GENDER IN CRISIS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON  
INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN  
INITIATIVES IN SRI LANKA**

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Gender in Crisis: An Anthropological Perspective on Internally Displaced

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## **DEDICATION**

In spite of all the challenges of creating and implementing appropriate policies and procedures, the heart of humanitarian work is found with those who are in the field, day in and out. Their compassionate care and sacrifice for those in need are an inspiration. They are still there, after the media is gone and after the “theme of the year” is no longer theirs. It is to the field staff that I dedicate this research and work. I am in awe and humbly thank them for allowing me into their lives, if even for the briefest of moments.

## **ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS**

Gender in Crisis: An Anthropological Perspective on Internally  
Displaced Persons and Humanitarian Initiatives in Sri Lanka

by

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This study presents an ethnographic and literature-based review of two distinct gendered themes in Sri Lanka as it wrestles with multiple crises: gender role change in crisis and humanitarian gender mainstreaming in crisis. Sri Lanka is a South Asian island where a several decade long civil conflict and the 2004 tsunami have created a rapidly modified world for much of the population, specifically touching vulnerable and minority groups. Key focus is placed on humanitarian organizations and their staff, discussing the ways in which they have defined gender roles and thus come to respond to these roles in relief work. Their personal and professional views on “gender” as a concept as well as gender mainstreaming in crisis is part of the discussion. Additional insight is provided by social scientists, employees with the United Nations and the Government of Sri Lanka. Moreover, the research seeks to place the work of humanitarian organizations in context by discussing the ways in which the social gender roles of Sri Lankan internally displaced persons (IDPs) are shifting in crisis, and the distinct methods of coping between the sexes. Underlying the research is a dialogue of women’s empowerment initiatives and the question of whether or not beneficiary men are adequately and appropriately engaged in gender relief activities. Strategies and recommendations to improve existing Gender and Development programs in crisis are presented based on the literature and the perspectives of humanitarian players. Aid organizations have a unique opportunity working in unstable situations to positively and strategically engage in the lives of IDPs. They can assist them in understanding and adjusting to their new gendered realities and make strides towards promoting gender equality in a traditionally patriarchal society.

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## ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-based organization
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DV	Domestic violence
GAD	Gender and Development
GAFM	Gender and Forced Migration
GBV	Gender-based violence
GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HDR	Human Development Report
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
IDP	Internally displaced person
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INGO	International nongovernmental organization
IPKF	Indian Peace-keeping Force
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NGO	Nongovernmental organization (locally based)
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
USD	United States Dollar
WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organization
WID	Women in Development

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<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym has been provided for the NGO that I closely worked with. Many thanks to the director, gender specialist and staff across the island as they assisted me in my research. I am grateful for the tremendous opportunity they graciously provided.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### NARRATIVE

*Vijay pulled the beedi from a cheap pink carton emblazoned with Ganesh-ji and methodically rolled it between his fingers. A Muslim walked by, his white cap blinding in the sun. Then two runny nosed kids who were living in the palatial two-bedroom house down the lane built by the Red Cross skipped by. It was hotter than hell today, and the sweat rolled down his bare chest, melting into his stained sarong. Finally. Vijay saw a fellow fisherman, Rajiv, saunter past his makeshift fence, take a measured step over a piece of driftwood and settle down beside him in the shade of a coconut palm. His elderly Hindu friend didn't say anything, but pulled out a match and lit the beedi now resting between Vijay's crooked front teeth.*

*Vijay sucked in the tobacco then blew out. It was the only movement in the still air. Rajiv was squatting on the ground and began drawing in the sand, absent-minded letters he was learning from his wife. "They're at the meeting again." Rajiv finally announced, not expecting any response.*

*"What to do?" Vijay shrugged, trying to hide the irritation in his voice. His wife, Priya, had joined an NGO loan group a few months ago and it seemed to him that she spent more time at the meetings than she did at home these days.*

*She'd changed, at least a bit, no longer spending hours sitting on the front porch of their hut staring into space, refusing to go to the temple or interact with their friends. It had been like that since their two-year old daughter had died when the great wave hit. But when the woman from Colombo had come and invited Priya to learn how to earn some extra money for the family, things had changed. He'd prodded her to go, of course. He thought the NGO might encourage her to snap out of her mood, to move on as there was no other choice, and finally tend to her husband as was her duty. He was tired of cooking for himself when she refused to move from her spot on the porch in the early evenings.*

*Instead she began a small shop with a neighbor, selling lacy white string hoppers from a roadside stall about a kilometer away. They saved the money and it seemed like she was always paying back the NGO more than bringing it home. At first he demanded she give it to him, the day she came to their hut with 100 extra rupees. But she resisted, and hid the funds. And finally told him that if he was man enough he'd go out and find a way to make 100 additional rupees himself. He could have some of the money, Priya said, if he asked her. Ask his wife for money?*

*Rajiv had coughed and spit red beetle juice into the dust when Vijay first told him about the change. The old Hindu offered advice to his young friend, "You have to beat it out of them isn't it? That's how women learn. These NGOs come and put big ideas into their heads. But don't hit her too much, right? If those social workers see fat bruises they'll raise a fuss."*

*He believed that made most sense. A small slap every now and then would do Priya some good, the stinging memory serving as a reminder that she was not to venture too far from his wishes.*

*Vijay stood and stretched, his back was aching from the hours spent in the boat last night. The catch had been poor and there were only a few fish for their dinner, then he'd have to go back out to the sea and do it all over again. There was no more Panadol. He cursed under his breath knowing he'd have to practically beg Priya for some money to buy the painkiller from a shop. Seems like there was never enough and he began to feel shame creep across his belly, then up into his throat and neck at the thought of asking her. His words seemed hollow somehow, and his hands began to sweat. Perhaps his fist would do the talking tonight.*

My fictional narrative is reminiscent of the experience of many men and women who have been displaced on the South Asian island of Sri Lanka. Inspired by a field visit to a rehabilitated fishing village in the Eastern Province, I had the opportunity to learn about the experiences of men and women in crisis. My Sri Lankan host family has verified the narrative as one of several experiences of displaced people within their country.

Many Sri Lankan lives have radically shifted under the pressure of natural and man-made disaster, as well as through interventions by humanitarian organizations seeking to assist them in rebuilding their lives. Not only have people suffered from lack of basic needs,

personal freedoms, and separation from loved ones, but their socially constructed gender roles are called into question.

### **CRISIS IN SRI LANKA**

Sri Lanka, the location of a 26-year civil conflict (1983-2009) and second worst hit country in the 2004 Asian tsunami, has been a unique location of crisis and struggle for its nearly 20 million inhabitants. Aside from the difficult issues it has faced, Sri Lanka is unique in terms of culture and human development when compared to its larger South Asian neighbors: it is predominantly Sinhalese Buddhist, with a minority Tamil Hindu and Muslim population, a 90% literacy rate, and a lesser amount of troublesome social issues as compared to India. Even so, the years of war (over 80,000 have died in the conflict) and the approximately 35,000 deaths from the tsunami have taken its toll. The 25,332 square mile island nation has been flooded with humanitarian organizations attempting to assist the population as their social worlds shift in the face of continuous suffering.

This assistance has been much needed; however, critiques and alternative suggestions have been offered to aid agencies over the years, specifically in the ways many responded after the tsunami. With the recent end of the war, Sri Lanka faces a new challenge: rehabilitating its nearly 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north of the country and helping them regain a sense of normalcy after a generation of living in crisis. Within the various policies, structures and institutional frameworks of humanitarian organizations, there rests the sector of “gender.” Often considered a crosscutting theme, gender is applicable at nearly every level of relief intervention; from sensitization of the staff, to the methods of distributing aid and ways in which support programs are run, to participatory meetings and planning with the actual populations. Incorporating gender in crisis is meant to shift the balance of power solely from men to women, with the ultimate goal of creating gender equality between the sexes. The process is called gender mainstreaming in its widest sense and is touted at the policy-level as being of importance in all humanitarian interventions.

The reality of crisis is immeasurable; its occurrence is unexpected and at times catastrophic to the lives of the people it touches. Gender policymakers have created massive analyses, checklists, and practices all of which attempt to offer the best possible programs

that are available in emergencies to help men and women cope. However, theoretical policies and lessons learned from other settings may not directly apply or be feasible in another emergency in a different part of the world, or even in a different region of the same country.

Additionally, the issue of gender role change in crisis amongst those who are displaced plays a tremendous role in their personal coping mechanisms and openness to ideas of human rights and gender equality. Having an awareness of the ways in which men and women's roles exist in a specific culture and setting and how they then shift in emergencies is key when implementing aid programming in a relief or rehabilitative situation.

This thesis seeks to follow three themes: understanding gender role change amongst IDPs, the ways in which aid agencies understand "gender" and Gender and Development (GAD), and the methods in which gender is (or is not) mainstreamed in crisis by humanitarian organizations. It elicits the voices of social scientists who have engaged in years of fieldwork with Sri Lankan IDPs in order to discuss their views on IDP gender issues. It also uses the scholars' voices to critique, sympathize and discuss the roles and programs aid organizations implement in devastating and difficult situations. Key focus will be placed on humanitarian, United Nations and government workers and how they understand and deal with gender in their personal and professional lives. Participant observation with one of the largest local nongovernmental organizations (NGO) in Sri Lanka provided me with a unique look into the challenges, successes and opportunities facing the aid industry.

### **ANTHROPOLOGY AND HUMANITARIANISM**

The discipline of applied anthropology has a long history of studying and describing the world of international relief development. Researchers are trained in ethnographic methods, a way of carefully observing, questioning and assessing the social world around them. Barbara Harrell-Bond, founder of the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University, explains that in situations of displacement, "people [who] have been forcibly uprooted have to adapt to their new social, economic and physical environments. This process challenges the utility of beliefs, values, technology, statuses, exchange systems, and all other aspects of society in which anthropology has a vested interest" (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992:9). Describing and understanding these scenarios can then lead anthropologists to deconstruct humanitarianism as they seek to assist vulnerable populations.

Anthropological knowledge can offer support to those who choose to work in the field of relief and development, or those who serve as consultants or trainers. Constructive applied anthropology seeks not only to understand local cultures, but recognize the reasons why aid doesn't always work as well as it should as well as offer in depth descriptions of positive relief/development programs. Applied anthropology is not merely an academic exercise in knowledge creation; it also has implications for shedding light on the ways in which donor funds are spent and the quality of assistance, as well as offering suggestions for modification based on the expressed needs of beneficiaries.

In the crises affecting the globe in the past several years, millions of dollars have been spent in relief efforts that had little value for affected populations or no longevity to allow for reconstruction. Iran only received a quarter of the promised aid after a 6.6-magnitude earthquake hit Bam. Relief shipments sat idle while government bureaucrats discussed how to distribute the supplies following Hurricane Katrina. Stretches of beach were filled with inappropriate clothing soaked in the tide in Indonesia before being burned to make room for more donations (Girardet 2005: 25).

Dealing with such scenarios is a massive undertaking for applied anthropology, but one which some might say, is a moral imperative. As more and more disasters and conflicts strike, the more relief will be needed. Both applied anthropologists and humanitarian practitioners should no longer sit back and allow inert policies that lack cultural context to reign. It is easy to criticize the system externally, but many are making the choice to create change from the inside. A relief worker assisting children in Uganda says that, "sometimes all you can do is help to change one life at a time" (in Girardet 2005:45). The same could be said of advancing positive results through humanitarianism.

My work may better inform humanitarian groups of the powerful impact that their presence is having on the gendered structures of societies and individuals. Indeed, their ability to accomplish their mission effectively could be advanced by employing a social science perspective. As relief and development organizations gain further insight and understanding into the gendered realities of their beneficiaries, strides may be made towards encouraging male/female equality and wellbeing.

## **MAJOR QUESTIONS**

The major questions of the study are:

- How and why have Sri Lankan internally displaced person's gender roles changed in crisis?
- How do humanitarian players in Sri Lanka understand "gender" and Gender and Development in crisis?
- How are humanitarian organizations mainstreaming gender in crisis (what are the gaps and how might their programs be improved)?

## **AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

- To describe gender role change in crisis as a means of contextualizing humanitarian gender mainstreaming in crisis.
- To expand the recent dialogue on mainstreaming gender in crisis and express the challenges of implementing gender policies in crisis.
- To provide a platform to discuss the various voices and understandings of humanitarian players who deal with "gender."
- To discuss practical and culturally relevant solutions towards encouraging gender equality in crisis and encourage committed relief professionals to look beyond institutional boundaries to produce and modify initiatives to better assist men and women in crisis.

## **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

- To increase awareness of men and women's issues in crisis and the Gender and Development programs addressing them.
- To shed light on impractical/culturally irrelevant programming that could hinder beneficiary wellbeing, rather than assist them.
- To develop an understanding of the challenges when mainstreaming gender in crisis and encourage humanitarian organizations and stakeholders to address these gaps as they are accountable to donors who require gender sensitivity, but most importantly, to the populations they serve.

## METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork was conducted in Sri Lanka for six weeks from April through May 2009, under the auspices of Global Opportunities Sri Lanka, one of the largest relief and development NGOs in the country. Having interned with their partnership office in India throughout the summer of 2008, I was able to make connections with the Sri Lanka office in January 2009 and received the national director's permission in support of my research project. I was chiefly assigned to work with the gender specialist who arranged for and accompanied me on 3 out of 4 of my field visits. With Global Opportunities Sri Lanka I conducted participant observation as well as semi-structured interviews with various members of their diverse staff. Additional interviews were carried out with social science, government and grassroots and international relief staff. This allowed me to obtain a broader understanding of gender among the vast and varied world of humanitarianism in Sri Lanka. I was able to meet these additional informants through cold-call emails requesting interviews, as well as connections through Global Opportunities and the host family I stayed with in Colombo.

I conducted a total of 16 semi-structured interviews (13 in person and 3 via email), and met with countless field staff. Before interviews officially began, informants were able to read through my consent form and gave their consent both verbally and in writing by signing the form. One particular individual did not believe in signing consent forms, and their verbal consent was given and tape-recorded. Most of the interviews were tape-recorded, unless the respondent specifically asked me to take written notes or if requested, to answer the questions via email. Interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours, depending on the availability of the respondent. A list of the key questions are found in the appendix; however questions were tailored to each individual person depending on the flow of the conversation and the particular role they played or were related to in humanitarian work, thus not all listed questions were asked of every person and additional questions were asked of people as the conversation unfolded.

My fieldwork took place during a unique time in Sri Lanka: the 26-year civil war was coming to a close and the country was permeated with political propaganda, rumors and fear. My time was divided between living in the capital of Colombo, a region of nearly 6 million people and home to the headquarters of thousands of aid agencies and nonprofits, as well as

weekly trips out of the city to humanitarian project sites throughout the country. Typically I traveled by auto rickshaw, cab or Global Opportunities vehicles, however whenever leaving Colombo for research purposes I always went with Global Opportunities staff in an officially designated vehicle, traveling anywhere from 5-12 hours depending on the location of the project.

Global Opportunities Sri Lanka established my field visit schedule and determined where I could and could not go within the country. This was somewhat of a limitation; however as I was specifically under their auspices and Sri Lanka remained in a state of war, I felt comfortable with the arrangements and understood the restrictions. During these visits I met relief staff in Batticaloa, an area hard hit by the conflict and tsunami, and witnessed them conducting a focus group with 35 IDPs; I also went to a government office in Puttalam and learned about the plight of the 70,000 displaced Muslims in the region; and I spent time with development field staff who discussed and showed me their work with beneficiaries in rural, poverty-stricken agricultural and tea plantation communities. Additionally, through informal meetings, chats with NGO staff through the war zone and on long drives around Sri Lanka, I was able to develop a distinctive anthropological perspective on the lifestyles, viewpoints, motivations and work ethic and methods of the people who make up the humanitarian sector. It is through their voices that I discovered the challenges and successes in working with crisis-affected people of Sri Lanka.

Additional material contributing to this project included international nongovernmental organization (INGO) and NGO reports and manuals, policymaking and academic literature as well as news articles. These were used in the literature review and as a means to contextualize the research area.

The constraints and limitations of the study were varied, and certainly apparent being that the country was in its final stages of war: security was tight and precarious, rumors and accusations of foul play by many organizations supposedly collaborating with the Tamil Tigers seemed to play with emotions and put many on edge, and fear of suicide bombing was a daily occurrence. I had hoped to visit an IDP camp in the Batticaloa region, but there seemed to be confusion as to the type of research I was conducting (which turned out to be a matter of miscommunication) so the visit was skipped and instead I went with the NGO staff to a meeting they conducted with relocated IDPs. Additionally, I wanted to spend a couple of

days in Vavuniya, an area that was quickly filling with IDPs escaping the last days of fighting in the northeast. I had asked if I could stay with the Global Opportunities staff in the region, however due to tight security and a reported incident with a researcher and relief staff being killed in the north, the potential trip was greatly discouraged. Time and finances were a restriction as well. I only had a limited amount of funds, which brought my trip to a close at the end of six weeks. The study was typical of a rapid assessment, characteristic of applied anthropology, as opposed to the traditional anthropological fieldwork period of a full year living and researching with a host population. This could be seen as both a limitation and an advantage: less time with the research community but experience conducting rapid and holistic research in constrained conditions.

I would have liked the opportunity to report on the actual viewpoints of IDPs, either those currently in camps or those who have been resettled, as a way to support the research. The added understanding of how gender programs are interpreted and applied by IDPs would have been invaluable. Unfortunately due, once again to time constraints, I was not able to engage in a lengthy university research permission process to incorporate the IDPs into this project as my trip to Sri Lanka had already been scheduled.

While the subject matter itself was not necessarily of a highly sensitive nature, the unstable climate that INGO/NGOs are currently working in remains and as such the informants will remain anonymous, unless they have explicitly given me permission to use their names and organizations. I should stress that not all of the views and opinions given by the research subjects reflect those of their respective employers. Though humanitarian organizations have specific mandates and policies, they are made up of unique individuals with assorted voices determined by their life experiences and personal ideologies.

Another limitation concerns the content of the study and the way in which “gender” programs are presented. I dominantly portray projects for women and projects for men less so--this is based on my limiting the study to Gender and Development rather than looking at all relief projects, as well as limited time in the field. A lengthier project would have allowed me to compare women’s and men’s relief initiatives in a quantitative way by looking at budget allocation (spending on programs aimed at men versus women in crisis) and impacts. Additionally a more extensive qualitative study would better express the reasons why a

strong focus on women has taken place and the exact position men have in relief and development programming.

The final limitations were due to my ethnicity, nationality and sex. As a Caucasian American female I may not (and in some cases clearly did not) gain as much information due to certain biases my interviewees may have held surrounding the notion that perhaps I could not accurately understand a Sri Lankan perspective or the type of work that they did. However, based on my multiple internships with grassroots and international NGOs both domestically and internationally, I felt my background was respected to a degree and people saw me both as a researcher but also as someone who had an understanding of the humanitarian world.

### **DIVISION OF RESEARCH**

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 utilizes academic, development, humanitarian and relief literature to introduce the recent history of Sri Lanka, focusing chiefly on the conflict and tsunami. I also discuss traditional gender roles in Sri Lanka and then move to theory and practice in Gender and Development. Within this discussion I incorporate a deeper discussion on the consideration of incorporating men and masculinity in Gender and Development relief scenarios. I then focus on gender role change in crisis in Sri Lanka and the views humanitarian organizations have on gender mainstreaming in crisis and the types of gendered programs that they implement. Chapter 3 deals with the perceptions and viewpoints on gender in crisis amongst humanitarian players in Sri Lanka: from those working in policy offices in Colombo, to the fieldworkers in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the island. Chapter 4 provides an anthropological analysis of the observations and findings, discussing the gaps in gender mainstreaming in crisis, diverse notions of gender equality and the challenges aid agencies face in incorporating gender in contextually appropriate ways. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a series of recommendations for humanitarian organizations and practitioners in an attempt to better serve the needs of displaced men and women in crisis.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **BRIEF HISTORY OF SRI LANKA**

Sri Lanka is a tear-shaped tropical island lying 20 miles off the coast of South India. It's a land characterized by exploitation and colonialism, transformation and traditions, disaster and conflict. The Portuguese invaded in the 16th century, soon replaced by the Dutch in the 17th, and complete power of the nation was handed over to the British in the early 1800's (Vesilind 1997:116). The profound influence and impacts of crown rule has played a role in the contemporary politics of the island as is discussed below.

The country is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual society. Comprised of the majority Sinhalese Buddhists and the Hindu and Muslim Tamils who make up the greatest minority population at 18%; there are also smaller groups of Burghers (colonial descendants), Malays, Eurasians, and the dwindling indigenous Veddas people (Effendi 2007:13). Long known as Ceylon under the British, the country recently changed to its current moniker in 1972 (Jordan 1979:127). Sri Lanka means "blessed island" in the predominant language of Sinhala, and while it does boast a 90% literacy rate, low population growth, and has been called "an India without the crushing social problems" the country has been engaged in ethnic conflict for over three decades. It has created a generation who know of nothing but war, fear and casualty (Vesilind 1997:116-117).

The conflict was prompted by discrimination against the Tamil people via the ruling Sinhalese, and was initially exacerbated by the British directive to "divide and conquer" (Vesilind 1997:117). During their colonial rule, the British instituted a "method to control the rebellious majority by providing a disproportionate share of political power to the submissive [Tamil] minority" (Karunaratne 2009). When Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, the Sinhalese quickly took control of the government. They began instituting policies which aggravated the Tamils in areas such as language, education, employment, land and power (Effendi 2007:13). Frustrations for the Tamils included the passing of a citizenship act that rendered many of them stateless for several decades, as well as the 1956 Official Language

Act which declared Sinhala the sole official language in the country (Perera 1992:139). This kept many Tamils from engaging in educational and business opportunities. Some have explained that the government's policies were a form of affirmative action, not meant to oppress the Tamils. Nonetheless the policies were "construed and propagated as 'discrimination,'" a topic which remains open to debate (Karunaratne 2009).

The Tamils were not the only population aggravated with its government. By the early 1970's both the under-privileged Tamil and Sinhalese youth began to rebel and protest lack of employment opportunities, rampant poverty and their "nepotism-ridden and corrupt" political system (Jordan 1979:123). Perera says that it is difficult to understand why the favored Sinhalese protested against their government, and "it is therefore possible to argue that the so-called Sinhalese-Buddhist state favoured the urban, privileged classes irrespective of their ethnic identities" (1992:137). A 1971 insurrection was crushed and over 20,000 Tamil and Sinhalese youths were held in detention centers for years (Perera 1992:140). The government also, and somewhat ironically based on Perera's argument, attempted to "confront [this] widespread dissension among people by articulating it in ethnic terms and directing it against the 'over privileged Tamils'" (Perera 1992:137). Increased tensions led to the creation of multiple nationalistic Tamil groups, who desired their own autonomous land in the north and the east of the island where the majority of their population resided.

In 1979, a Tamil lawyer stated how "Tamils are discriminated against in jobs and education and by the constitution, which deprives us of fundamental rights. The Sinhalese have colonized us. We want our own autonomous state. If we fail to work out a peaceful solution here, our youth may resort to other methods" (in Jordan 1979:132). And they did. On July 23, 1983, a group of young Tamil insurgents killed 13 Sinhalese soldiers outside of Jaffna, officially launching the internal conflict (Perera 1992:145). Rioting, looting and massacres immediately followed and over 400 people were killed in the Jaffna and Colombo regions (Effendi 2007:38; Vesilind 1997:117). Oddly, the government made no comment on the chaos and there were no official statements made until four days after the start of the riots on July 23. This prompted a critique that the government had little concern for the Tamil people (Perera 1992:145).

Velupillai Prabhakaran and his Tamil separatist group quickly rose in power and influence, creating a movement, now globally labeled as a terrorist organization, which

fought the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) for 36 years. Prabhakaran and his strategic and devoted followers are named the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), or more simply, the Tigers and their movement has been funded not only internally but also with money from the Tamil diaspora (BBC May 19, 2009). The force of the Tigers has been tremendous, as witnessed by the length of the conflict as well as a strategic move for their interests in 1990 when they forced 75,000 Muslims out of the north of the country primarily south into Puttalam and Colombo, giving them “from two hours to one week to quit the region” (Brun 2000:9). However, the Tigers made a key error when one of their female suicide bombers killed the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991, which greatly diminished many Indian’s sympathies and finances towards the rebel movement. The move to assassinate Gandhi came after Indian attempts at peacemaking proved unsuccessful. The Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) remained in Sri Lanka for two years, however it “awakened an old Sinhalese fear of invasion from the north” sparking the rise of a Sinhalese Marxist group which attempted to overthrow the GOSL (Vesilind 1997:117-188). International peacekeeping efforts continued when Norway stepped in at the request of the then Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prabhakaran in 2000 (Effendi 2007:59). A ceasefire agreement and series of negotiation meetings ended in gridlock between the GOSL and LTTE; and government accusations that Norway (perhaps due to its large Tamil diaspora and the strong internal political support they offer) was smuggling military tools and information to the Tigers (Effendi 2007:70). Thus, in spite of India and Norway’s attempts at conflict resolution, a successful and diplomatic end to the hostilities remained elusive.

The situation changed dramatically when the current president, Mahinda Rajapaksa took power in 2005 and began an offensive against the Tamil Tigers in 2006. By the spring of 2009 the government had overtaken the whole island, except for a sliver of land still held by the LTTE in the northeast. Heavy warfare ensued, and in spite of international pressure to call a ceasefire in concern over civilians trapped in the war zone, victory was finally declared in May 2009 (BBC May 19, 2009). In the same month Prabhakaran and several of his leading cadre were killed while attempting to escape through government lines in an ambulance (BBC May 24, 2009). In spite of the victory, there are approximately 300,000 IDPs in the country, and over 265,000 living in government-controlled camps in the northern Vanni region, many who had escaped from the warzone in the final months of fighting (UNHCR Sri

Lanka 2009; McInerney 2009). The government's task is an onerous one, and statement's are being made that they hope to resettle most of the IDPs by the end of 2009 (BBC July 20, 2009). The overall death toll for all the years of conflict currently sits at around 80,000 (BBC May 22, 2009).

While the land war has been finalized, there is still the question of political will, resentment, and rights amongst and for the Tamil people. The president made the following statement in May 2009, "At a time when we seek to embrace all of our people as members of a single nation, the celebration of this victory, as deep as it is felt, should be expressed with magnanimity and friendship towards all" (Rajapaksa 2009).

### **THE TSUNAMI**

On the morning of December 26, 2004, the massive Asian tsunami struck the shores of Sri Lanka, causing more than 35,000 deaths and placing the country second in terms of casualties (with Indonesia suffering the most). Additionally, 443,000 Sri Lankans were displaced along massive stretches of affected coastline. In all, two thirds of the coastline was hit; from Jaffna in the north, along the eastern coast through Trincomalee and Batticaloa, south past Galle and up into the capital of Colombo in the southwest. Damage close to \$1 billion USD hit various industries and sectors; including civilian housing, transportation, tourism, and fisheries (Asian Development Bank 2005). In the wake of the disaster, the country was flooded with international NGOs and relief organizations, as well as billions of dollars to set up assistance programs. While many advances were made in rehabilitating the affected population such as providing housing, income generation projects and safe psychosocial support spaces for children, there were several cultural gaffes and inadequate activities and initiatives instituted by humanitarian staff.

Post-tsunami disaster and relief strategies were often established by Western policy directors halfway across the world who lacked knowledge of the Sri Lankan context (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). For example, female items such as undergarments and sanitary napkins were not initially thought of as basic needs, and Sri Lankan university students came together to meet the need (Butterfield, field notes, March 2009; Salim, interview, March 24, 2009). Inadequate lighting and lack of privacy led to issues of sexual harassment towards women and one particular INGO thought it would be helpful to hand out

pamphlets on gender-based violence (GBV), though de Alwis was skeptical as to its impact (interview, March 9, 2009). Additionally, funds were spent inappropriately on culturally irrelevant play kits for children in camps. The cricket-obsessed Sri Lankan children had no idea what to do with European style toys given to them by aid agencies and begged for balls and bats instead. Men had very few opportunities to engage in finding support for one another outside of groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, or to deal with their newfound role as a single father if their spouse and/or family had died (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

Such gaps in humanitarian programming can have negative outcomes in the lives of those they seek to assist. Women can be sexually abused or their basic needs unmet leading to health problems; men may become idle, turning to drugs, alcohol, prostitution or violence against their families. These issues are all a part of “gender and crisis” and what constitutes the needs of males and females in emergencies. Without a proper understanding of the lives of men and women, how their roles shift in crisis and the methods and ideology of “gendered” relief assistance, positive steps will not be taken nor aid programming improved.

### **TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN SRI LANKA**

Today, what is described as a traditional gender role in Sri Lanka can be open to interpretation depending on the organization, worldview and person explaining the lives of men and women. While the country is in a state of rapid social change due to years of crisis as well as the impacts of globalization, much of the country maintains an archetypal outlook on the ways in which men and women’s lives should be constructed (de Alwis 2002). Whether this is positive or negative is open to debate, specifically within relief and development sectors and from many practitioners who wish to “empower<sup>2</sup>” women without jeopardizing the fabric of their culture (Niranjali, interview, March 17, 2009). However, couched within this debate should be the voices of social scientists that believe culture change is inevitable and a natural process in the course of human history due to processes of

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<sup>2</sup> Empowerment: The process of generating and building capacities to exercise control over one’s life. Empowerment programmes for women provide a climate where they can develop critical thinking skills, reactivate their minds and reorganise their perceptions about themselves and the environment in which they live. An empowerment programme would also offer women the opportunity to question and analyse issues in a different perspective in order for them to overcome the subordination syndrome and emphasise self-actualisation, self-identity and positive validation (World Vision International 2008:270).

innovation<sup>3</sup>, diffusion<sup>4</sup>, cultural loss<sup>5</sup> and acculturation<sup>6</sup> (Namie 2007). In many cases, humanitarian practitioners are so deeply embedded in the day-to-day practices of their work that they rarely use social science in their programming. Rather they tend to stick to implementing real-time, short-term, donor-driven projects and do not base these on historical considerations of the gendered lives of their beneficiaries (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). As a result, little improvement is made in terms of advanced knowledge on the changing lives of the people who they are there to serve; this includes their own post-assessment data.

Sri Lanka is typified as a patriarchal society, with men serving as the dominant and women the subordinate sex (de Alwis 1999; de Alwis 2002). McGilvray's (2008:108) anthropological work in the Eastern Province discovered matrilineal groups however these do not typify the majority of island culture. Regardless of religious or ethnic makeup, Sri Lankans "position women and men in particular ways...rendering women the bearers of 'tradition' and national culture...and men the protectors of the faith-nation and its property, women" (Hyndman and de Alwis 2003:220). Women's gender roles are maintained and expressed via relationship. They are not seen as their own person per say, rather their identity is "conceptualized through their relations with men: they are daughters, sisters, wives and mothers, not persons in their own right" (Schrijvers 1999:315).

The motivations for maintaining patriarchal society are manifold. Male dominance is a universal phenomenon and scholars discuss men's desire to preserve their power at all costs: claiming it biologically, historically and ideologically. Ahmed-Ghosh discusses how in India (a social and cultural "relative" of Sri Lanka) "the woman's very existence is created to cater to the patriarchy, which has 'mastered the craft' of creating a social order that ensures that service is provided not just with efficiency but also with devotion, silence, subjugation, and tolerance, even at the expense of glorifying the oppression through religion" (2004:95).

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<sup>3</sup> Innovation: Any new practice, tool, or principle that gains widespread acceptance within a group; occurs when someone within a society discovers something new that is then accepted by other members of society (Namie 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Diffusion: The borrowing and spread of cultural elements from one society to another (Namie 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Cultural loss: The loss of cultural elements, sometimes with replacement, but often without (Namie 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Acculturation: Major culture changes that people are forced to make as a consequence of intensive firsthand contact between societies (Namie 2007).

The Hindu religion, common in both countries, aggravates women's lowly status by, ironically, exalting them: "women are rewarded for their compliance by being referred to in almost reverential terms, such as *ghar ki devi* ([Hindi for] goddess of the house), the foundation [and light] of the family...the honor of the family [is absorbed] into her being, her behavior and her sense of duty and sacrifice" (Ahmed-Ghosh 2004:111). Pérez' (2002) work in Mexico amongst men and women dealing with shifting economic and labor opportunities amongst a traditionally male hierarchy adds to the discussion of continued male dominance. She describes how "women throughout Latin America and many other countries, are perceived as the stabilizing unit of tradition and unity, mainly as a consequence of their responsibilities for biological and social reproduction" (Pérez 2002:278). For many Sri Lankans the attitude towards men and women's roles simply remains, "that's the way it's always been" (Butterfield, field notes, March 17, 2009) and often men live in a relatively privileged position where there is no need for them to rethink or redefine their historical gender roles.

Throughout the recent history of Sri Lanka, the roles of men and women have been rigidly guarded by religious, political and social elites. If women deviate too far from the norm, they have been labeled as turning masculine as well as succumbing to foreign corruption (de Alwis 1999:182). This was occurring in the 1800's as many Sinhalese began wearing the dress of British colonizers. The nineteenth century Buddhist religious leader, Dharmapala, advocated for the covering of "black Sinhala legs" and the adoption of a white sari-like dress for women and loose pants and cloak for the men. His mother was the first to obey, along with many others, and the change happened practically overnight. However the men resisted and Dharmapala lamented the ways in which his countrymen insisted on wearing "the trousers of the foreign whites" (de Alwis 1999:181). This example of gender in "action" during the colonial period shows "the differential positioning of women within colonial modernity and patriarchy; there was more at stake in women signifying the purity of their 'culture than for men'" (de Alwis 1999:181). Later in the 1920's, women who chose to become involved in literacy, political and labor movements were publicly chastised and ridiculed. These were deemed activities for men, and editorials in local media described how "it is the opinion all over the world, that those who wish to become involved in such things are rebellious women who exhibit male characteristics" (de Alwis 1999:182).

Fear of foreign contagion in the social world of Sri Lankans did not end with the departure of the British. Even today women are restricted and discriminated against if their ideas wander too far from the norm, and rarely has attention been paid to the questionable behavior of men. De Alwis discusses the ways in which “the promiscuity of Sri Lankan men, their spendthrift qualities, and their susceptibility to alcohol and other vices are rarely censured or denigrated...[and] any woman who is perceived to not be conforming to her heteronormative roles of docile daughter, chaste wife, nurturing mother, or sagacious grandmother is thus open to censure” (2002:2). Deviant behavior in IDP camps, amongst garment workers, and women whose perspectives and values change after living abroad or in urban centers are questioned. It seems that the case of subjugating women has changed little over the centuries; rather it’s the particular issues and themes of this suppression that shift with time.

The encouragement of constructive and healthy behavior amongst beneficiaries, as well as the push for gender equality<sup>7</sup> in the work of humanitarian and development agencies is commendable and many advances have been made towards assisting men and women entrenched in crisis and poverty. However, there remains debate amongst gender professionals as to what extent a man or woman should move away from traditional Sri Lankan values and roles, as well as what tradition even is in a country long colonized and now dealing with globalization. To what degree must gender equality be pursued? And who or what should determine the acceptable level? Is gender equality purely based on universal human rights? Is it more about gender equity? Can men and women be equal while performing different roles? And finally, can gender equality be achieved based on what a culture itself believes to be equitable and fair? Keeping in mind the historical trend of culture change across the globe may be of great assistance when wrestling with such questions.

While Sri Lankan women do boast a slightly higher quality of life in comparison to many of their sister nations throughout South Asia, there is still much work to be done. The Asian Development Bank explains that the country has “yet to achieve gender equality or empowerment in consonance with international norms” (2004). Their belief is that poverty,

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<sup>7</sup> Gender equality: Refers to an equal sharing of power between men and women, in their equal access to education, health, administrative and managerial positions, equal pay for work of equal value and equal seats in parliament. It entails the same status, rights and responsibilities for women and men (World Vision International 2008:270).

retarded economic growth, the conflict and exacerbation of “gendered social norms have contributed to uneven development” amongst men and women (Asian Development Bank 2004). While equality is yet to be achieved, it is important to remember that women’s subjugation is not merely a reflection of post-colonial life in Sri Lanka, rather the status of women is seated within a centuries old struggle of power between the sexes that is felt universally (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

### **A HISTORY OF “GENDER” IN RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT**

Bringing “gender” into the forefront of relief and development work has been a long process, manifesting itself in slightly various forms over the past several decades. Gender, seen as the socially constructed roles of men and women, which differ from society to society (Gardner and Lewis 1996:65; Greig, Kimmel and Lang 2000:4; Krufeld 1994:71; World Vision India 2007:8), is a difficult and challenging topic in humanitarian operations. The distinct gender roles that men and women have also inform who has power within a society and how each member of the sex relates to the other.

Gender is not a static state of being, just as culture itself is constantly shifting in various ways as populations adapt to changing circumstances and environments. Gender shifts may be more subtle, given that gender is a fairly fundamental social construct that is related to biological sex and is the initial means by which humans refer to one another (i.e. he or she). This is clearly seen across the globe as most societies ascribe the two sexes to the two genders of “man” and “woman,” and any additional genders are typically considered taboo. Debate continues as to whether gender characteristics are a fact of nature or are culturally learned. How should one categorize or relate to those who deviate from gendered norms? Additionally, male gender dominance is evident as most populations are patriarchal with the man acting as head of all familial, civil and state organizations. Taking these issues into consideration may offer a partial explanation as to why suggesting or making changes to a gender is challenging and at times forbidden in many countries or cultural groups (Namie and Knowlton 2007).

Both men and women exhibit personal agency and interact with their social environment in unique ways, not always within the confines of the status quo. Moser and Clarke explain that, “the notion of agency attributes to the individual the capacity to process

social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. Within the limits of information, uncertainty and other constraints that exist, social actors are ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘capable’” (2001:4-5). From its inception to the evolved form today, incorporating the concept of gender in relief and development programs has been an uphill battle. Recognizing that men and women have different needs and capabilities as well as social worlds that intimately interact and connect with one another is a complex reality that is difficult for organizations to address in appropriate and constructive ways.

In 1975 the UN declared a Development Decade for Women, expressing that humanitarian projects must “give sufficient consideration to the interests of women” (Gardner and Lewis 1996:66) and get rid of their ‘male bias’ (Chant and Gutmann 2005:240). The idea of Women in Development (WID) also emerged with a basic concept declaring that women have diverse needs and interests and that development projects would affect and assist them in ways different from men. In some conferences during this time women’s issues were “perceived...as emanating from colonialism and the current capitalistic structure of global society” rather than a historical suppression within patriarchal societies (Jain 2005:80). Initially the main focus of WID rested on economic development and how women should be inserted in the planning and implementation of these activities to help generate income for their families (Gardner and Lewis 1996:122; World Vision India 2007:36). WID proponents also pushed for legal reform, advocating the equal status of women and men. The belief was that when women are recognized in such a way, specifically at the political level, then it would trickle down to their actual lives, a reality which has yet to be fulfilled in much of the world (World Vision India 2007:37). Criticism quickly arose to WID, claiming that “when women were integrated into pre-existing development projects, social structures that reinforced their inequalities were never challenged” (World Vision India 2007:36). Additionally, this idea of working with women in isolation from their social, political and cultural relationships and institutions proved unproductive (Gardner and Lewis 1996:122).

With the deficiencies of WID becoming apparent, development practitioners began to speak of Gender and Development, a concept that looks at linking men and women in the development process, closing disparities between men and women’s social roles and

encouraging gender equality, and helping men to engage in the betterment of women's lives and scrutinize power relations between the sexes (Chant and Gutmann 2005:240; Gardner and Lewis 1996:123; Hyndman and de Alwis 2003:214; World Vision India 2007:8). In 1999, the UN discussed the shift from WID to GAD as follows:

The GAD approach signals three departures from WID. First, the focus shifts from women to gender and the unequal power relations between women and men. Second, all social, political, and economic structures and development are re-examined from the perspective of gender differentials. Third, it is recognized that achieving gender equality requires transformative change (in Greig, Kimmel and Lang 2000:1).

Justification for incorporating gender into development and relief is imparted by concerned agencies. When addressing issues of gender equality, practitioners point to the fact that it's a basic right of human life. Numbers count as well, and World Vision India explains that, for them, "the most important rationale for linking equality and gender is that women constitute half of the world's population...[in addition to their Christian identity where] we believe that female and male are created equally in the image of God" (2007:9). Other faith-based organizations, such as the Sri Lankan NGO Sarvodaya, base their notions of gender equality on Buddhist philosophy. Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, founder of Sarvodaya, discusses how gender differences are merely a matter of an ignorant mind corrupted by the world. To rid people of their erroneous "gendered" concepts, he proposes that one not speak of gender at all; rather to open the mind to compassion and love through education, meditation and positive practices found in ancient South Asian traditions and Buddhist thought (Ariyaratne, interview, March 20, 2009).

Years have passed since the arrival of GAD, and scholars are critiquing the fact that "the terms of [WID and GAD] are often used interchangeably, and policies all too frequently focus attention only on women" (Gardner and Lewis 1996: 123). Indeed, GAD is often a concept vaguely understood by development practitioners and frequently remains an 'add-on' of women's projects (Gardner and Lewis 1996:123). Many reasons have been suggested as to why Gender and Development still equates women. Chant and Gutmann's research discuss several of them:

The concern to ringfence for women the relatively small amount of resources dedicated to women...worries about male hi-jacking of a terrain that women have had to work very hard at to stake out, lack of acknowledgement and understanding of men as gendered beings, the pragmatic difficulties of

incorporating men [into women's projects] and last, but not least, an apparent lack of interest on the part of men in gender and development in general and working with men on gender issues in particular (2005:240).

An additional reason for resistance may be that gender training workshops that seek to educate humanitarian staff are not adequate or practical within the contexts that they work. Many gender staff members and trainers are thrown into their roles merely because they are women (Greig, Kimmel and Lang 2000:17) and they have often been ridiculed by training participants for their simplified perceptions of men and women and have not taken into account the restrictions that humanitarian staff face in their daily work. Understanding gender is not always a simple cut and paste formula (Gardner and Lewis 1996:163). It takes time for organizational staff to accept the concepts and perhaps even longer for the beneficiaries with whom they work.

Gender and Development is often realized in relief and development organizations through a process of "gender mainstreaming." Gender mainstreaming is meant to bring an awareness of gender and its impacts on men and women throughout every part of a humanitarian organization—from agency policy and staff care to field project implementation. The goal of gender mainstreaming rests in achieving gender equality, and it takes into account the "implications for women and men of any planned action" (World Vision India 2007:40). An example of gender mainstreaming would be that of a refugee camp lacking adequate water. A gender practitioner would arrive on the scene with a series of assessment and analysis tools to discern the various roles that men and women play in the community in terms of water access and how the lack of water affects them differently. Then programs would be designed to bring in water in ways that are beneficial and create a sense of equality between the sexes. Mainstreaming gender, however, is still often relegated to discerning the capacities and vulnerabilities of women with little attention on men (as will be discussed below.) Additionally, El-Bushra explains how "the outcomes [of mainstreaming] have been palliative in nature, providing women with, for example, additional income, increased mobility or access to services while not confronting the ideological basis of discrimination against them" (2000:5).

Gender and Development has also been incorporated into relief settings, a unique and complex site where social worlds are rapidly modified, often within seconds. Gender

mainstreaming does occur in these situations; however the gaps between idealized policies and actual implementation are vast.

Gender and forced migration (GAFM) is a recent paradigm, and a derivative of the refugee studies movement. It looks at the disadvantages and vulnerabilities that displaced women and girls face in crisis, as well as the opportunity for addressing gender inequalities. Even with the continued programming bent towards women, scholars warn against negative outcomes if relief programs are only aimed at females. El-Bushra explains:

Giving preference to women in assistance programmes may contribute to eroding men's roles...and hence their social position and self esteem but still not challenge the dominant gender ideology in which men's and women's roles are both viewed as 'natural.' The situation of displacement is an opportunity for renegotiating gender relations (as well as relationships between generations): an opportunity which may be missed through prioritizing support to either women or men (2000:4).

This concept also asks that attention be placed on situational-specific interventions and an understanding of the shifting social worlds of the displaced. This relates to GAFM's call for further research in understanding how aid programs and policies affect the social roles and relationships of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Humanitarian organizations that choose to develop research in this area and create indicators to determine effectiveness of programs in crisis will be key in the coming months and years as our world continues to see dramatic influxes in the number of forced migrants. Torres explained that at the beginning of the 21st century "there are some 50 million uprooted people around the world, including both refugees and IDPs" (2).

### **MEN IN GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT**

The current wave of implementing gender as a cross-cutting theme in all relief and development work remains equated with women: from agriculture to livelihoods to healthcare to psycho-social support (Chant and Gutmann 2005:240; Cleaver 2002:1, 5; Connell 2003:3; Kimmel 2002:xi). This is counterintuitive to the descriptions of Gender and Development as a process whereby men and women's needs are evaluated and determined in tandem with one another. Matsuoka and Sorenson's work in Eritrean refugee camps shows how women do not live in "gender isolation":

They do not analyze their own situations as being separate from that of men, nor do they wish to see themselves in such a way. Although they recognize that

women face specific problems, women view their lives as being affected by the same social, political, and historical forces as men. They also see their lives as being inextricably interwoven with those of men (1999:226).

The impact of relief and development programs is better understood amongst female beneficiaries, however there is much work to be done when discussing the impacts it has on men (Kimmel 2002:xi). This is not to say that projects aimed at women or those that incorporate them into the larger relief and development arena are not needed and women have not been marginalized in this area both past and present (Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe 2003); but, within the GAD paradigm, women remain the key focus even though the mandate is to address the needs of both women and men.

While women and girl children continue to be “empowered” via various humanitarian initiatives, men are often ignored. Although male-privilege is indeed something to be considered when looking at the vulnerability of women, oftentimes in crisis men’s roles and sense of self are completely shattered as much, perhaps even more so, than women’s. In the 1970’s and 80’s the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) took a strong stance against affirmative action for women and instead encouraged work towards achieving gender equality. UNESCO felt that:

[It was better to] look at the problems of women’s education and advancement in different sociocultural contexts rather than by pinpointing specific activities to be undertaken on behalf of a single category such as women. An insider notes that as late as 1992, the theme of “temporary special measures” was still controversial. The underlying fear was that these measures would mean discrimination against men as “reverse discrimination” [something which can be argued for today] (in Jain 2005:91-92).

Traditional masculine roles of men as providers and decision makers and leaders within their families are shifting in today’s world of rapid social and economic change. Men are no longer the sole breadwinners in their families, and women are playing a greater role in earning income as well as speaking up for their rights (Chant and Guttman 2005:243). This has been termed a “crisis of masculinity” and further examples include “the low attainment of boys in education...the increase in proportions of female-headed households; and the absence of male role models for boys” (Clever 2002:3). The question then becomes, where do men fit in when their identities are being undermined by globalization, women’s empowerment and “no assured identity as the breadwinners” (Clever 2002:10)? Or in more basic terms, will men lose while women gain (El-Bushra 2000:4)? Addressing these issues

are not easy, and may explain that while relief and development organizations pay lip-service to Gender and Development, the task of “becoming embroiled in the personal politics of intimate relationships” is difficult, both for researchers, policymakers and field staff (Cleaver 2002:8). However, refusing to discuss shifting masculine roles may be dangerous. Loss of male power may result in increasing abuse towards women and children, and further personal demise for men through alcoholism, drug addiction and increased risk of HIV/AIDS, especially in crisis situations (Chant and Gutmann 2005:243). UNESCO shows that “where men lose power and status and are unable to enjoy their traditional entitlements, women may be the main victims” (in Chant and Gutmann 2005:243).

A second point to consider in this discussion is that studies continue to reveal how most women remain vulnerable in many developing nations and crisis settings. Even with such advances in empowerment schemes and human rights awareness, their voices struggle to be heard. Gender equality is far from realized worldwide and scholars are now arguing not only for continued women’s empowerment, but also the partnering of men in this process. Changing men’s attitudes and asking for their participation will not be straightforward. When one holds a position of privilege, one rarely recognizes it, and traditionally men don’t consider themselves as “gendered beings” (Greig, Kimmel and Lang 2000:1; Kimmel 2006). Even so, scholars discuss the fact that “gender equality is not possible without changes in men’s lives as well as women’s” (Kimmel 2002:xii) and they must become partners in the pursuit of gender justice, and not merely labeled as perpetrators of violence and abuse (Esplen 2006:4). Responsibility also plays a role and Greig explains that this accountability “confronts the danger of men simply excusing their attitudes and behaviours as products of gender pressures and norms, rather than examining their attitudes and behaviours in light of gender pressures and norms” (in Esplen:4). Scholars express the need for relief and development organizations to discover culturally specific methods of discussing and showing men the negatives of maintaining a male-dominant society. They need buy into the belief that their lives and families can be enhanced when taking on more positive, egalitarian roles. Greig, Kimmel and Lang also explain that “making masculinities visible and men more conscious of gender as it affects their lives and those of women is a first step towards challenging inequalities” (2000:17). Without this change in male perception, men will

continue to dominate political, social, and economic arenas and control the resources and access women need to have a more just and equitable existence (Connell 2003:3).

As men are now living in a period of social change and disruption, “renegotiating gender” may be ideal considering men who “suffer domination...and other forms of discrimination and violation from other men” due to issues such as ethnicity, sexuality, class and religion (Chant and Gutmann 2005:246). This occurs in much of the world, especially in locations of conflict. With such challenges, social scientists and development experts are seeking ways to combat gender inequalities. Suggestions concentrate on schools and teaching new “masculinities” to their young male students; “a pragmatic focus on child survival and family welfare issues, than directly through considerations of gender identity, sexuality and violence” (Cleaver 2002:20); focus group discussions and trainings for men and women on understanding gender role constructs (Bhasin 2001); recreational and technical skills training; recruiting male INGO/NGO staff with street credibility to lead programs; and providing alternative positive methods of coping (rather than resorting to alcoholism or beating) when dealing with conflict and stress (Thomson 2002:172).

When male masculinities are accurately addressed and made visible as a social construction, when men are no longer deemed a “problem” but rather key players in discovering “solutions” towards achieving gender equality, and when aid programs stop focusing solely on women, what Chant and Gutmann (2005) call the “de-feminization” of gender planning, and incorporate more men into Gender and Development staff positions, then there is a chance to “transform the unequal gender relations which drive and maintain women’s subordination” (Esplen 2006:2). Scholars also believe that encouraging gender equality is “a necessary means to achieving sustainable human development and the reduction of poverty” (Greig, Kimmel and Lang 2000:2).

### **GENDER ISSUES IN CRISIS**

Gender and Development is based on the belief that gender is a social construction that has the potential for change; thus I move to looking at the ways in which gender shifts due to mass disruption in people’s lives. When looking at gender role change and gender issues in crisis, Behera discusses the importance of understanding that “change...is the only constant [in life] and the changes that characterize this external world we inhabit are

internalized by us and have a significant impact on our lives...no one remains completely removed from the turmoil that surrounds them” (2006:7).

Here the “change” focus rests on displacement, due either to conflict or natural disaster. Gender shifts occur in displacement via external events that enter into people’s lives without their desire or foreknowledge. Cultural and social change occurs much more quickly in such circumstances as refugees and internally displaced persons lose “country, community, family, status, property, culture, and even a sense of personal identity” and replacements must be made as quickly as possible (Krulfeld and Camino 1994:x). Additionally, adjustments in conventional access to resources and livelihood opportunities can change in the ways in which men and women traditionally lived (Colson 1999:25; Krulfeld and Camino 1994:xii). Displacement also signals a shift in social relations, as refugees and IDPs often come in contact with people of different ethnicities and religions, thus creating new spaces for the sharing and exchange of ideologies.

Social scientists speak of the ability of displaced persons to creatively process and renegotiate their lives in such a setting (Moser and Clark 2001:4-5). While vulnerability is high in these circumstances, humanitarian organizations and other researchers must not always focus on the adversities and the “dysfunctional assumption[s] characterizing refugees as victims” (Krulfeld and Camino 1994:xiv). Many displaced people find ways to “thrive and prosper” and not “merely survive” and become agents of their own present and future (Krulfeld and Camino 1994:xiv; Turner 2000:8). However, Thomson (2002) contrasts such a viewpoint when discussing modifications in family life and arrangement. She explains how the younger generation and children of families in rapid social change may end up consuming obscure and mixed messages that could “lead to confusion and contradictory messages” (2002:170).

Such rapid changes can prove painful for the displaced and with the forced renegotiation of self-identity, beliefs and lifestyles relations between men and women often become intense, difficult and at times, harmful or deadly. Muecke’s (1995) work amongst Cambodian refugees displaced by the Khmer Rouge, discusses the breakdown of family structures and the traditional virtue and purity of women in camps. Because many of these women were no longer protected by their parents or had the support of society; situations of sex for food or rape were common. A Khmer woman’s purity and motives are in question,

even in the case of assault, and after leaving the camp she “must suffer her humiliation in silence to maintain membership in her [remaining] family and community” or choose to see herself as no longer “virtuous in the Khmer sense of the term” (Muecke 1995:41-42).

While displacement means modifications to social worlds, it may not always occur in negative ways. Scholars and relief practitioners discuss the opening of new spaces, specifically for women, to increase their independence and engage in roles that were formerly closed to them (Enarson 2008:250; Hyndman and de Alwis 2003:18; Krulfeld 1994:72). Behera explains how this opening occurs in sites of conflict, “As armed groups and security forces wage wars amidst multicultural spaces, civil society is suppressed and the public sphere of men collapses. Patriarchs can no longer play the role of the protector as women are literally and metaphorically forced to come out on the streets” (2006:35).

Hyndman’s work in Somalia discusses various scenarios that women might face in crisis: situations of vulnerability or empowerment. Though a Somali woman might be defenseless due to the fact that she has had to flee her homeland and has been separated from loved ones, her new autonomous position within a camp may give her the space to “emerge as a leader and decision maker, say as a health professional.” Her personal skills and experiences could be useful while assisting and helping others within the camp setting and it is “possible that she will become part of the decision-making apparatus in the health sector” (Hyndman 2000:72).

While women do have the chance to expand their social and familial roles, there is debate over whether or not their new identities will persist once the conflict ends and if they will be “pushed back into the kitchen” (Behera 2006:29, 62). Reports from gender specialists and researchers have discovered that women’s roles haven’t improved by exponential bounds. Brun (2007) notes that in the Aceh province of Indonesia, hard hit both by conflict as well as the tsunami, gender roles did change but not to a great extent. Relief agencies offered the women traditional economic opportunities, but “there is no evidence that this [modest economic empowerment and slight shift in gender roles] has improved women’s self esteem, has allowed for genuine economic empowerment or that it has increased women’s bargaining position at household and community levels as a result of improved social recognition” (Brun 2007:2). Jayawardena (in Giles 2003) discusses the importance of being vigilant post-crisis. For example, in South Asian spaces of conflict, where women are seen wearing fatigues,

fighting and carrying guns; they have become de-feminized according to their traditional culture. With the return of peace, the dominant patriarchal order may step in and stigmatize these women, or encourage their return to more “chaste” ways of life, for instance dressing in saris and wearing flowers in their hair. The potential for “patriarchal backlash” against women must be monitored and Jayawardena “warn[s] against the [possible] Talibanization” of their lives (in Giles 2003:208).

Government officials in Sri Lanka anticipate that at the end of the war the women will return to their traditional roles, however their expanded role via new experiences in displacement will remain due to poverty, increased economic demands, having had contact with different groups and an altered self-identity. Education will also play a big role in the move towards new viewpoints as most families have a strong desire to see their children educated and work in professional jobs (Sanuthi, interview, March 13, 2009).

### **GENDER ROLE CHANGE AMONG SRI LANKAN INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS**

Crisis affects men and women in various ways due to the fact that they have different biological and social roles (International Labour Office 2003:1). The ways in which the sexes struggle to adapt and cope in emergencies reflect “the constraints of [their socially constructed] gender [roles which] are as likely to grow stronger as to weaken” (Enarson 2008:250). This section will discuss the diverse experiences of men and women in Sri Lankan emergencies.

The ambivalent lives of women in Sri Lankan crises have been well documented by scholars and humanitarian practitioners (Enarson 2008:250; Giles 2003:1; Schrijvers 1999:321). In the particular case of war widows, Giles discusses the following:

While [these women] might openly acknowledge the relief they feel from the responsibilities of constricting marriages, the clutches of abusive husbands or tyrannical and exploitative in-laws, they still have to negotiate larger and similarly oppressive patriarchal, capitalistic, or militaristic structures as they confront government bureaucracies, work in the fields, or pass military checkpoints (2003:2-3).

In emergencies, women are typically described in one of two ways, first, as the most vulnerable in a crisis (in addition to children) and second, capable of surviving and coping better than men and inhabiting new social spaces which can then lead to their empowerment.

Without the traditional safety net of familial male support, Galappatti describes the sources of vulnerability women have encountered in crisis, specifically within the conflict setting:

[They, specifically Tamil women,] have been subjected to sexual assault by Sri Lankan armed personnel...and others; they have been disabled and injured by gunfire, shelling, mines, and torture; and many have been separated from their families, children, and spouses as they fled advancing battlefronts and were placed in “refugee” camps. The material hardships of the camps, along with the withdrawal of personal freedoms and loss of privacy and personal dignity, are unbearable to many. Suicide is becoming increasingly frequent among displaced women who are unable to cope with the conditions they live in [and women who resist the temptation to kill themselves do so for the safety of their children in fear that they will end up homeless or as beggars (Thiruchandran 2003:132)] (2003:124).

Women-headed households is a buzz-word in relief and development circles and expresses the situation where women have lost their husbands, either through forced recruitment into the LTTE, “disappearances” or death, and must now provide and support for all the needs of their family (Behera 2006:35-36; Benjamin and Murchison 2004:6; CIDA 2003:6). Even in cases where the husbands are still present and living with their wives, women often have more transferrable skills in crisis settings or are willing to work for the least amount of money (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). Traditional male livelihoods break down in crisis as many of the men are fishermen or farmers and due to displacement they are far removed from the sea and their agricultural land (Demusz 2000:44-45). In contrast, women go out of the camps if allowed, and work as domestic servants or laborers in fields. This represents a shift for women from the private to the public sphere of life, and they must now “contend with the military, [and] compete in the market...to survive economically” (Behera 2006:35-36).

While women’s lives are opened up to the extent that they have to deal in new economic and social realms in crisis, this does not necessarily mean it is a positive reality. Often this increases women’s workloads to exhausting levels as they typically “need to compensate for declining family income and social services; and to care for [their own as well as] orphaned children, the elderly and the disabled” (International Labour Office 2003:1). This is known as the “double burden” and suggests that “crisis-related hardships combine and compound old disadvantages” (International Labour Office 2003:1) rather than lead to additional freedom for women.

The move into public space is especially poignant in the lives of displaced Muslim women, whose culture dictates that they are to remain hidden within the household (Brun 2000:10). The displaced Muslim women of Puttalam, in northwestern Sri Lanka, have faced social stigmatization due to their new visibility. Allegations of affairs and other corrupt behavior are common. Not only does the host community question their moral character but that of their children as well. The situation became so intense between the two communities that the children had to attend school at separate times (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). This social ostracization is not merely limited to Muslims, and cases in the Eastern Province have shown how war widows are looked down upon by their community as well. They are referred to as “those who have eaten their husbands’ [and] their children are...made the butt of hurtful comments from their neighborhood peers” (Thiruchandran 2003:134). Additionally these war widows struggle with feeling secure as their lack of “protection” by a trusted male leaves them vulnerable to sexual abuse. These examples show that even though women may gain a level of freedom in crisis, they are not unleashed from the communities in which they reside.

Gender-based violence is a significant issue facing IDP women and girls. Rape and assault occur from a myriad of sources: military personnel, family members and neighbors in camps. Domestic violence is of major concern and across Sri Lanka it is estimated that 60% of women suffer from this form of abuse (Fisher 2005:16). Fisher’s research amongst Sri Lankan INGO/NGOs that assist survivors of GBV discusses how the “economic empowerment of women can [play a role] in decreasing vulnerability to GBV, not only through increasing the economic independence of women but also by contributing to increased perceptions of the worth of women” (2005:52-53). This is in contrast to reports that speak of how women’s new roles in traditionally male-dominated spheres have led to increased domestic violence in the homes as well as higher rates of divorce (Indra 1999:53; International Labour Office 2003:2). The violence of men towards their families is attributed to the stress of displacement, the loss of their livelihoods, idleness, depression, lack of privacy to engage in sexual relations and a dependency on alcohol and drugs (Benjamin and Murchison 2004:18; Fisher 2005:27). However, domestic violence is not merely a crisis issue, but is something that has occurred in Sri Lanka for generations. It remains a matter that is discussed privately between husband and wife, and even if brought to the local authorities

is often dismissed as a situation where “the wife must have done something wrong and deserved it.” Such perceptions are so dominant that when Fisher discussed her research with a human rights university student, she was told, “It’s not violence, it’s a family problem;” and she goes on to say how “it appears that even students of human rights may perceive human rights to be merely men’s rights” (2005:16-17).

Kimmel (2006) believes that the occurrence of domestic violence is an indicator that men’s power over their lives has gone awry and in this way order can be restored in their own minds. He says that “violence is not the expression of power, but the effort to reclaim it...[and how] violence is not a maintenance of patriarchal power but of it’s [perceived breakdown.]” Guttman expands on this in stating how “men [are] seek[ing] to ‘resolve’ the contradictions and confusion in their masculinities resulting from women increasingly declaring her independence from men” (in Pérez 2002:269). Scholars suggest that humanitarian practitioners should not only address the current situation of domestic violence in emergencies, but also deal with underlying cultural norms and values which accept men’s abuse of their wives and children in the first place (Benjamin and Murchison 2004:v; Fisher 2005:26; Giles 1999:87; Moser 2001:38-39).

In spite of the difficult issues facing women, they are also recognized as “engines of recovery” displaying strong resilience, coping mechanisms, leadership skills and interest in creating solutions for their communities (International Labour Office 2003:2). Women do exhibit a high level of tolerance and fortitude, perhaps due to the social networks women readily forge with one another as opposed to men, and the fact that historically, they are used to difficult lives. A Tamil IDP further explains, “You know, we are *women* and therefore used to being nobody. This is why we can cope better than the men” (in Schrijvers 1999:323). Schrijvers says that “whether high or low caste, affluent or poor, as women they had been used to having a low status and low self-esteem in their own circles in society. They could adjust themselves to the refugee fate precisely because they were already used to living dependent...and in many aspects oppressed lives” (1999:323). Schrijvers uses this perspective to suggest that “in terms of status and self-esteem” men have lost more than women (1999:323-324). With their gender roles completely shattered, they are in a sense more vulnerable than their wives.

This research shows that there is no one way in which women react to crisis and displacement. While women's roles will adjust and shift, the manner in which they do so varies. Even in cases where women desire self-actualization and further expression of their own agency, Galappatti explains that this process "will mean different things for different women: some will reject the traditional social roles; others will redefine those roles; and still others will use the traditional roles as a framework for achieving self-actualization" (2003:126-127).

The experiences of men, while discussed to some extent above, remain on the backburner in gender concerns. Men are spoken of in terms of how they "affect" women and their lives. At times the two sexes are discussed together, but again, this typically refers to the abuses men incur towards the females in their lives. It seems that such a dominant discourse is due to the belief that because men are patriarchal and hold the majority of power over their families and social worlds, their experiences are not as dramatic or perhaps, as difficult, as those of women in crisis. However, recent research is pointing to the vulnerabilities of men and the climate of fear in which they live. Sri Lankan men, specifically Tamils, deal with extreme terror and stress due to their ethnicity. They are either concerned over being forcibly recruited by the LTTE or accused by the government of partnering and working with the LTTE and thus subject to numerous situations of harassment and ill-treatment, even in front of their families. Instances have been reported where men have had to sit and silently watch while their wives are raped or abused in front of them (Anushka, interview, March 11, 2009). In addition to these horrific realities, "the idleness and humiliation of IDP life created by the militarization of camps, restrictions on movement, lack of employment opportunities and the loss of rights to determine the life course further impacts on often already reduced coping skills" (Quinn 2009:5).

De Alwis (interview, March 9, 2009) discusses how in the tsunami there were cases of male widows who were struggling with looking after their children, however because these were rather isolated incidents, it was rarely dealt with. In the face of these new roles as well as the loss of fulfilling socially determined gendered expectations men can suffer mental health issues, engage in self-destructive habits, as well as "dysfunctional and anti-social behavior" (Clever 2002:3-4).

This is not to say or suggest however that it has now been discovered that men are necessarily more vulnerable than women, rather it's an affirmation that the two sexes are affected in different ways in crisis and both of their needs should be looked at, both in isolation but most importantly, in tandem. The need for women's empowerment and the encouragement of gender equality still remains due to continuing patriarchal societies, but it can now be couched in an understanding of men's vulnerabilities.

### **REVIEW OF HUMANITARIAN GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN CRISIS**

Working in a situation of mass confusion and chaos, under rigid regulations, and dealing with daily casualties and endless requests for basic needs and services is not a task for the weary. Humanitarian staff often find themselves dealing with these issues and much more. Commentators express how “[m]any of these agencies do their best under horrific conditions—and sometimes their best is good. But all too often the help they can offer is at best a short-term palliative” (Hyndman 2000:xx). This is not to say that aid workers should give up and go home, but Hyndman does call for the creation of “clear, accountable, and current mandate[s]” (2000:xix). Many INGO/NGOs have them, but many do not, and even if they do the realities of being in the field are far removed from implementing policy in ideal ways. An NGO worker from Sri Lanka expressed it this way, “In war there are no rules,” the same could also be said of a natural disaster (Butterfield, field notes, April 16, 2009). After spending years in war-torn Kashmir, journalist Justine Hardy (2009) discusses the bureaucratic and socio-political, and “mercy mission photo-shoot” issues plaguing aid agencies in the October 5, 2005 earthquake that affected north South Asia. She summarizes in explaining that “it was the familiar theme of disaster relief: supplies pouring in, but a struggling delivery system on the ground” (Hardy 2009:187, 185). De Alwis states that in a meeting with UNHCR after the tsunami staff told her, “we were...just learning on the go” (interview, March 9, 2009). The statement struck her as it was coming from an agency that has worked in relief situations for years. In such a complex space it's not a surprise that meeting the basic needs of displaced persons is a full-time job in and of itself. However, humanitarian policymakers and donors have asked for and expect various sectors and crosscutting themes to be implemented in projects.

Incorporating gender into relief projects is a challenge in and of itself, both at the development level and even more so in crisis situations. Feminist scholars believe that humanitarian agencies “dilute” GAD and that it has little practical application in crisis “where logistical challenges are acute and survival is deemed the goal” (Hyndman and de Alwis 2003:215). These feminists feel this is an “emergency excuse” going hand in hand with notions of the “tyranny of the urgent.” Humanitarian consultants have expressed the importance of incorporating gender into relief as “*gender relations are a central organizing principle of social life* very much in play in disaster contexts” (Enarson 2008:249) determining who gets access to various resources and how one is treated and cared for. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) warns that ignoring gender “can mean that...assistance is not properly targeted which can have serious implications for the protection and survival of the people” (2006:1).

Humanitarian organizations often try to mainstream gender in emergencies but as discussed above, this typically only tacks women onto programs rather than look at emergency “frameworks of intervention, which remain unchanged and unproblematized” (Hyndman and de Alwis 2003:215). Additionally, the suggested methods of incorporating gender into emergencies can seem overwhelming to field offices just trying to get by. Gender specialists create methods of gender assessment, techniques in mapping gendered vulnerability, create gender sensitivity through project preparation and training, monitor and evaluate gender mainstreaming and on top of it all, must ensure that the community is directly involved in many of these procedures (Hyndman 2001:85). For an exhausted and understaffed office, the task is daunting and perhaps at times, unrealistic. Even if humanitarian organizations make an effort to create strategies for incorporating GAD in crisis before the conflict or disaster hits, the on-the-ground reality of emergency response often keeps this from occurring. This is due to the reality that a crisis is just that, an emergency, and there is only so much one can do in unanticipated situations that shatter human lives and social worlds. Many field staff believe gender can be implemented in more long-term relief strategies than directly following a crisis. A relief worker with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) articulates how gender can delay efficient response, “In some cases...the focus on ensuring gender equity (as with many rights-based

approaches) in programming can be slow and frustrating, leading to a delay in carrying out immediate programming needs that focus on saving lives” (CIDA 2003:3).

Understanding and discussing gender and notions of equality between men and women is a difficult challenge, something which organizations have struggled with over the years. Even the United Nations, a leader in global gender policy and the advancement of women, has had staff members express how: “the ingenuity of men [at the UN] in finding excuses for not recruiting and promoting women is truly impressive and is not unlike that of a child who can give a hundred reasons for not eating spinach” (in Jain 2005:151). If humanitarian management and directors are not on board or supportive in making gender a priority in programming, there is little chance this can be articulated at the beneficiary level. Gender training for staff is one way to encourage understanding and dialogue about men and women’s roles both organizationally and within the communities they assist in their initiatives. Moving gender mainstreaming from rhetoric to reality “require[s] substantial commitments of human resources from staff with expertise on gender issues and much time for training—changing the mindset of the individuals that comprise an entire institution requires more than one training seminar” (Jain 2005:152). Donor agencies have also stated that, “A few days of training is barely a beginning for an officer who wishes to become competent in gender analysis” (Jain 2005:152).

Relief and development organizations have traditionally employed females as gender specialists. This is perhaps due to the continued notion that gender equals women as discussed. However, by continuing to solely employ women in these positions, there are several unfortunate results. Hyndman and de Alwis discuss females working in Gender and Development:

Gender coordinators end up working exclusively with women’s groups and/or on women’s projects, thus rarely interacting with male beneficiaries or being provided with opportunities to make men rethink and change unequal gender hierarchies...[moreover] gender is increasingly considered a ‘soft’ issue, one that will not warrant the apportioning of significant resources if it does not produce ‘hard’ results based on monitoring and evaluation outcomes” (2003:218-219).

Thus, competent gender specialists must not merely explain the material in trainings, but discuss and advocate for its relevancy towards achieving positive project results and male/female wellbeing.

Aid agencies have historically treated women and children as the main vulnerable population within a crisis setting (Benjamin and Murchison 2004:v; Centre for Policy Alternatives 2009:38; CIDA 2003:3; El-Bushra 2000:4; Fisher 2005:10; IASC 2006:1; International Labour Office 2003:1; Quinn 2009:5; Schrijvers 1999:32) and some aid practitioners and psychologists even suggest that they “can never be expected to lead normal lives again” (Galappatti 2003:116). Nevertheless, based on her work amongst IDPs in Sri Lanka, Schrijvers believes that “the supposed vulnerability of refugee women [is] an image, a gender construct launched from above and from outside without any proof that this correspond[s] with the actual needs of [the] women themselves” (1999:32). She found the women to be strong, courageous and adaptable in situations that subverted many men.

While the tide is beginning to turn with the realization that men too, suffer keenly, albeit in different ways, this chiefly remains recognized within the development and academic literature and is rarely realized on the ground. Thomas explains that “work on masculinities is often concentrated in areas such as sexual and reproductive health or violence and conflict, in which the importance of gender relations is most directly obvious...not on how boys learn to be men [or process the masculinities they witness] and what this means for gender relations as they grow up” (2002:166). Humanitarian organizations may also need to take a critical look at the ways in which male gender identities shape their needs, functions and responsibilities in emergency settings and how they can then respond to these men.

Humanitarian players are beginning to pay particular attention to the reality that their presence in a crisis situation has and can create a sense of dependency amongst those they are serving (Gardner and Lewis 1996:93). While beneficiaries are certainly in need of basic supplies, food and living spaces immediately following an emergency; this relationship can turn dependent in the long run and create a deepening sense of loss of social roles as well as idleness. This has certainly been the case in Sri Lanka, as the war dragged on for decades and displaced persons resided in “welfare centres” (the government’s term for an IDP camp) for years and continue to do so (Schrijvers 2005:195). In the aftermath of the tsunami, INGO/NGOs scrambled to assist affected populations. However, due to the extreme amount of competition amongst the aid organizations, many displaced persons began to bargain and demand certain types of services (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). Turner’s (2000) work

studying Burundian refugees and UNHCR activities amongst them, expressed the difficulty many men faced in losing their role as breadwinner. They felt completely helpless and dependent on UNHCR and were frustrated that the aid organization had become a better “husband” than themselves (Turner 2000:8).

The additional task of listening to displaced persons, understanding their needs and actually working in ways that are based on their desires and not imposed by donor expectations or industry policy is a challenge for many humanitarian organizations. Oxfam had created a program, “Listening to the Displaced: Action Research in the Zones of Sri Lanka” to build a forum where IDPs could voice their opinions. Oxfam researcher, Demusz explains how the program “has tried to look beyond the immediate relief needs of the displaced groups to examine their local capacities and coping mechanisms, as a way to inform programme design” (2000:15). This is a challenging concept in both relief and long-term development work. Even though IDP voices, experiences and opinions are aired, moving their suggestions beyond the social workers and up to management for action is a complicated reality (Gardner and Lewis 1996:93).

### **REVIEW OF HUMANITARIAN GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN CRISIS**

Along with a focus on Gender and Development, the humanitarian establishment has begun the process of mainstreaming gender in their projects. The method of gender mainstreaming is the means by which GAD is achieved with the ultimate goal of creating gender equality between men and women. Gender mainstreaming is couched in human rights and declared that “the human rights of women, girls, boys and men are equally promoted and protected” in this process of moving towards gender equality (IASC 2006:2). The United Nations defines gender mainstreaming as:

...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (in Neimanis 2001:5).

One of the beginning phases of gender mainstreaming is to conduct gender sensitization of not only humanitarian directors and managers, but the implementing field staff

as well. Gender sensitization typically occurs through gender training workshops conducted by organizational staff or outside consultants who are “experts” in gender within a particular society. Staff sensitization would allow for a broader view of various gender issues which might occur when responding in a particular program or scenario.

Next, the project area is determined (be it a water project, awareness raising activity, or relief response) and staff travel to a program site to conduct a gender analysis. The analysis takes a critical look at the various ways in which men and women’s lives are constructed in a particular society, how various phenomena affect them and what their current needs are. World Vision International policy also explains the important of assessing the gender-based capacities as well as the gender based social vulnerabilities of a community (Enarson 2008:249).

Then the organization will use this information to assist in creating and implementing programs that should have equitable outcomes. These services ought to “ensure that women, men, boys and girls participate equally; train women and men equally; collect, analyse and report sex and age disaggregated data; and coordinate actions with all partners” (IASC 2006:1). Additionally the information gathered in gender analysis, may be used to address the “Four Essential P’s” when creating the project, which are as follows: Protection, Prevention, Provision and Participation (World Vision India 2007:12). Staff will determine how men and women can be protected in crisis, how to include them in crisis prevention activities, the best ways in which to provide them with services and basic needs in emergencies, as well as methods for ensuring a 50/50 spread of men and women in project participation.

After the program has been implemented, the appropriate humanitarian personnel should conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of projects, working closely with the community and field staff, to make sure the services are moving the particular community or social group towards a state of gender equality as determined by the organization.

Mainstreaming gender in crisis is a challenge, due to the life and death situations field staff encounter. Often workers may find gender concerns irrelevant when trying to provide basic needs (Enarson 2008:249; IASC 2006:1). Certainly there are appropriate times and places for gender mainstreaming in crisis, and organizations will determine these moments—be it two, three days after a disaster begins, or weeks or months as a crisis stretches into a

long-term relief situation. Ideally, humanitarian players would like to have gender mainstreaming policies and practices in place with their staff before an emergency hits. However, this is not often the case as new staff are often brought in to help in the delivering of basic services and there is no time for gender sensitization or training; programming staff encounter unexpected or unanticipated situations that throw their policies off track; and restrictions from governments, paramilitary groups or even terrorists disable the gender project plan. Even so, policymakers express that ignoring the various ways in which males and females react and deal with crisis, “can mean that our assistance is not properly targeted which can have serious implications for the protection and survival of the people” (IASC 2006:1).

Gender mainstreaming clearly has a focus on women, although, once again, it is deemed an issue that addresses both of the sexes in many policy documents (Enarson 2008:249-250; IASC 1999:1-9). However, women are the key focus here, from the UN to grassroots organizational manuals. Gender mainstreaming is often termed as achieving “women’s empowerment” at the broadest level, especially in a situation of crisis. As mentioned above, women are seen as a particularly vulnerable group in most relief and development work. When laying out the actual issues that gender mainstreaming can address such as access to health services, livelihood strategies, violence towards women, women in decision-making and project planning and implementation, one finds that men are rarely mentioned. Males are typically relegated to generic policy speech, as those who have different responsibilities and capabilities than women. Their own unique vulnerabilities and experiences remain in the shadows, especially in refugee and IDP camp situations. While men may receive some attention in discussions about forced military recruitment and the ways in which they abuse women in a war time setting, those who are sitting in the camps, traumatized, idle and emasculated are rarely given voice or dealt with in an appropriate way (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). IASC further expresses the situation: “ignoring gender equality in emergencies is not a neutral position [as] it supports discrimination” (1999:5).

## **REVIEW OF HUMANITARIAN GENDER PROGRAMS IN CRISIS**

The task of mainstreaming gender in crisis works in a myriad of ways. Policymakers and gender specialists create ideal frameworks, assessment tools and checklists at the global

level. It is assumed that national offices and field staff have the time, energy and resources to be adequately trained and to implement gender as a cross cutting theme in all relief activities. Certainly there is a range of experience and understanding of how to mainstream gender. Many programs are successful and bring about organizational definitions of gender equality, as well as support men and empower women. But often, gender mainstreaming is no more than a “tick the box” exercise saying that beneficiary women have been “included” or their needs “considered” in project design and implementation. Gender is rarely the unique understanding of the socially dependent lives of men and women in their own cultural/socio-political/ethnic context, but remains the “add women and stir” concept. It is also important to note the constraints and limitations facing relief staff in times of crisis. There are issues of governmental control on what humanitarian workers can and can’t do, time and access to the displaced and vulnerable populations, as well as the ways in which funds allocated by donors and supporting offices can be used.

Schrijvers’ (1997) research in Sri Lanka discusses how NGOs came into refugee camps in Colombo and offered handicraft and sewing classes for the women and girls as income-generating activities. However, “after the courses were over...no support was offer[ed] for selling their products or for entering some form of employment...Women who had attended such classes without any followup were in a sense worse off than before” (Schrijvers 1997:68). Similar situations have occurred with widows in the Eastern Province of the country. Several INGO/NGOs have initiated long-term microcredit initiatives however “they have been discontinued because of inability to sustain the activities. When [researchers] asked about the demise of these projects, [they] were told that the women have been unable to pay back the loans” (Thiruchandran 2003:136).

Some humanitarian interventions are chiefly aimed at addressing the impact of a situation, rather than trying to curtail and keep the situation from occurring in the first place—in other words, to begin changing oppressive cultural power structures and practices. In Somalia, Hyndman (2001) looked at a UNHCR’s Refugee Women’s Victims of Violence project and explained the issues: using “victim” in its title was minor in contrast to the difficulty women would have in their communities when admitting to being sexually abused or violated, an event which would often ostracize them from their families. While the Victims of Violence staff might “publicize the laws against sexual violence and seek

prosecution in cases of rape and related crimes...evidence suggests...that many of the Somalis would prefer to settle these matters out of public view, through more discreet agreements of compensation, usually between the men in the families affected by the woman's rape" (Hyndman 2001:80). Harrell-Bond has conducted work in Africa as well and also shows how humanitarianism tends to deal with affect rather than cause: "Everyone now knows that the requirements of fetching fuel and water renders women particularly vulnerable to the risk of rape and other assaults. Instead of addressing the problem in ways which reduce this risk, we chiefly have rape clinics in camps!" (in Indra 1999:58).

Projects are often aimed at assisting women, rather than dealing with the source cause of their oppression and difficulties: patriarchally inculcated men. In refugee and IDP camps women face the challenges of living with men who are addicted to alcohol and physically and/or sexually abuse them. De Alwis explains that working with men has been "hitherto vastly neglected...when it comes to consciousness-raising, organizing and counseling on such issues. Men-to-men programming must also be a part of a comprehensive strategy to address violence at its root" (2005:3-4, emphasis removed).

Brun (2000) discusses the impact men can have after they've understood and buy into awareness projects that can shift societies away from negative social practices such as dowry and unwanted arranged marriages. In Puttalam, young Muslim men of the community discussed these issues with women's groups. Eventually a mosque trustee board, which had initially shunned an NGO to engage with such challenges, granted them access to work under their auspices. Brun explains how "in this way, young men are used as active partners—and as mediators—to achieve strategic gender interests" (2000:12).

Attempting to increase awareness and educate beneficiaries on the importance of gender equality does not come without its difficulties. Brown's (2006) research on assessing the lasting impact of gender equality programs amongst Burundian refugees shows that while awareness-raising does change some opinions regarding men's dominant role, change remains slow. Brown's interviewees explained, "When we were in the camp we tried to follow those instructions about equality. Back home it is hard to follow. The man is always the man. When he orders you have to do it" (2006:34). In spite of this attitude, there were many women who began to voice their disapproval of alcohol use amongst their husbands and the purchase of liquor had been reduced based on the messages received from

humanitarian staff (Brown 2006:34). Brown believes that social change is protracted and deliberate and often community groups will make no real inroads unless there is a sufficient buy-in or incentive offered. Nonetheless, he says that relief workers are planting seeds for “later change and development in Burundi” (Brown 2006:39).

Other issues facing humanitarian organizations are based on the desire to pursue yearly themes, rolled out by global partnerships or the United Nations. Following these topics may not be in the best interest or reflect the contextual needs of a beneficiary population. Mass funds may be dispersed based on a particular theme and efforts ineffectively duplicated by a myriad of NGOs in the same area (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

Lastly, the continuous focus on women’s empowerment initiatives are critiqued by scholars who feel that “advancing women’s interests at a superficial, women-focused level...fails to challenge overall paradigms of gender difference leav[ing] women with new roles to fulfill but no institutional leverage to fulfill them effectively” (El-Bushra 2000:6). This continued focus on looking at women in isolation from their social worlds, specifically their relationships with men, is being challenged (Brun 2000:10; CIDA 2003:9). Of great importance is for humanitarian organizations to better understand shifting masculinities; ways in which to engage men in breaking down traditional patriarchal systems which have kept their relationships from flourishing and subjugating the women in their lives both in times of crisis and peace. Brun eloquently states that “men’s gender identities do not automatically change when women’s identities and practices change” which then leads to questions of sustainability of women’s so-called “empowerment” (2000:10).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **HUMANITARIAN PLAYERS: PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING GENDER AND CRISIS**

#### **A BACKGROUND OF HUMANITARIAN PLAYERS IN SRI LANKA**

The various perspectives, experiences, education, cultures and personalities which shape the people that make up the humanitarian world in Sri Lanka are wide-ranging and encompass diverse viewpoints: from those of the so-called “modern” West to the “traditional” East. During my time in Sri Lanka I was able to identify and spend time with this broad range of professionals, people who work under mandates to serve those in shattered and impoverished societies. There are expatriate staff who have studied for their master’s and PhDs in applicable work and serve as consultants, directors and managers of national level and field-level projects. Additionally, one would just as easily find a local Sri Lankan with the same credentials and expertise in identical positions (Butterfield, field notes, March 12, 2009).

Many Sri Lankans, although educated outside of their country or with prolonged exposure to Western notions of human rights and equality, still retain a deep commitment to the value and beauty they see in their culture and/or religion. Still others fight against what they view as repressive aspects of their culture and wish to bring in their perceived idea of an egalitarian society. Many Sri Lankans also have a deep sense of assisting their own countrymen due to abuses and difficulties they themselves have suffered. Westerners are often spurred to work in unstable environments, such as Sri Lanka, due to a sense of social duty, spiritual calling, addiction to “adventure” and family legacy (many humanitarian workers have grown up seeing their parents in a similar line of work). Other reasons, perhaps considered less noble, for engaging in humanitarian work may merely be due to personal connections and the ability to live as “big fish in a little pond” because many organizations pay high salaries to foreign workers (Butterfield, field notes, March 12, 2009).

Select respondents from my interviews as well as personal communication and data collected through participant observation with Global Opportunities Sri Lanka will now be presented: first, looking at individual backgrounds and particular views on humanitarian work and gender within the country, and secondly, a collective summarization as they discuss the key issues derived from my research questions.

Malathi de Alwis, a feminist and social anthropologist, has spent years working with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) in Sri Lanka, served as a consultant for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and currently works as a consultant anthropologist with the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies in Colombo. Having attended a missionary school in her early years, she admits to being influenced by liberation theology and expresses that she always had an understanding of the inequality that is prevalent in her country. She obtained two advanced degrees in the United States, and much of her work has focused on domestic violence, the position of women during the Sri Lankan civil conflict, and a critique of humanitarianism. She believes that the work of relief and development organizations is that of "social engineering" and she would like to see what more can be accomplished through long-term political activism. De Alwis seems to read "gender" through feminist analysis and sees a great disparity between the sexes. She believes that patriarchy is a global phenomenon and all relationships are "shot through with power" and the maintenance of that power. This is clearly seen in situations of abuse and domestic violence. While women in crisis are often viewed as having a "window of opportunity" when they become widowed or head of household to engage in new roles, de Alwis feels that this is a small minority and ultimately women are never completely free of pressures from their social communities (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

The government presents a unique, somewhat contradictory challenge, in terms of their views on humanitarian organizations in the country. While some express the frustration of its citizens becoming dependent on foreign aid, others elicit a distressed call for assistance as they struggle to work in small regional offices outside of Colombo. Sanuthi<sup>8</sup>, a director at the GOSL's Peace Secretariat office, views the presence of INGOs as problematic. She cites rumors of relief organizations which have assisted the LTTE in their fight, or engaged in

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<sup>8</sup> Sanuthi is a pseudonym.

proselytizing, which is greatly frowned upon by the government and the Buddhist elite. The aim of the Peace Secretariat is to bring the divided ethnic groups together and help them listen to one another; to bring an awareness of the varied and diverse cultures of the country, to rehabilitate and reintegrate ex-combatants and IDPs and create awareness of basic human rights amongst the population. At the grassroots level, Sanuthi believes that most people have a limited to nonexistent understanding of what their rights are, especially women and children. For her, rights are not necessarily brought about due to the awareness and recognition of a universal declaration, but rather to the balance that one finds in nature. Sanuthi speaks of growing up in a rural community amongst the paddy fields, where “we shared resources so we respected everybody’s rights and privacy.” However, she also goes on to express that Sri Lanka is indeed a patriarchal society and men “think they know everything” and a particular focus on women and children and their well-being is critical (Sanuthi, interview, March 13, 2009).

Niranjali is a gender specialist with Global Opportunities Sri Lanka based out of Colombo. She has worked with the organization for several years in various capacities and when the opportunity came to fill the role of gender specialist, she seemed an ideal choice. Bi-monthly she visits field projects across the country to train specific staff in gender sensitivity, and to monitor gender activities and gendered attitudes amongst the beneficiaries. She also organizes gender watch committees that are comprised of key community leaders who spread positive gender equality practices and ideas to their family and friends. She assists the communities in discovering their problems and finding solutions. Gender analysis tools, such as the Harvard Analytical Framework, are incorporated and she often explains to the communities that if gender-based issues are not addressed and “it happens to a stranger today, it [may] happen to your daughter tomorrow” (Niranjali, interview, March 25, 2009).

Niranjali has not spent much time working on gendered aspects of crisis programming in her organization; rather her job is relegated to the daily development activities. Her expertise and knowledge of the Tamil culture, however, would be well-suited to creating, assessing and monitoring the gendered aspects which inevitably will arise in disaster or conflict scenarios. Often, many INGO’s tend to bring in expatriate “emergency” staff who have little cultural knowledge of the actual groups for whom they are designing and implementing programs. Once again, “gender” becomes “women” and female

beneficiary involvement occurs via microcredit schemes or other similar “add on” programs. Niranjali explains how many gender issues become secondary in crisis to meeting basic needs and that the propensity remains for humanitarian organizations to focus merely on women. “We are very biased towards the women [in our work]” and she adds that, “men suffer in their own unique way” (Butterfield, field notes, March 2009).

Faithful to her Tamil identity and pride in her motherland Niranjali explains that “culture is a beautiful thing. I respect my culture, it does have some vulnerabilities to women, but if you really look at it, it respects the women.” For Niranjali, gender is viewed as a requirement for daily existence and positive gender roles can be negotiated within each individual society. Dealing with gender balance at the legislative level is secondary for her, and she is most interested in seeing gender equality expressed as families and communities live in harmony with one another. A concern with encouraging and achieving human dignity within a Sri Lankan context is key in Niranjali’s experience. When the human dignity of a man or woman is violated, then one should be concerned. This occurs in situations of domestic violence, alcoholism, and unfaithful marriage relationships, which are traditionally viewed as being caused, or is the fault of women (Niranjali, interview, March 17, 2009; Niranjali, personal communication, July 2, 2009).

Niranjali is deeply concerned with maintaining strong relations, whether it is encouraging families to maintain their spiritual lives or asking men and women to share their bedroom long after their children are born--in many cases the parents will split up, fathers sleeping with sons and mothers with daughters. She also expresses the importance of women to dress as nicely as they are able, to comb their hair and have a cup of tea waiting for their husbands when they come home, this serving as a way to keep interest alive in the marriage and deter the potential for affairs (Butterfield, field notes, March 25, 2009). Women have lost their “luster,” says Niranjali, and key issues such as eating nutritious food and maintaining proper personal hygiene should be addressed (personal communication, July 2, 2009).

For Niranjali, the difficulties, challenges and issues facing women in Sri Lanka can be addressed within her own culture. There are negative practices and behaviors that have been perpetuated in a vicious cycle over generations. She wishes to see “children enjoying their childhood free of domestic violence...to hear women’s success stories...to hear men commending their wives for their role in the society, their leadership qualities, [and] the hard

labor they [engage in to] support their family. Respect and trust among men and women is a must [and] this is Gender and Development for me.” Niranjali expresses that while her organization is a part of a global partnership, they still retain their own unique Sri Lankan perspective. “We are just one part of the larger body, so we don’t bring...the Western attitudes or concepts into our gender programming. You don’t need to, because our issues and concerns are very unique for the culture.” Niranjali adds, “We cannot have gender in the same framework [as other nations], the frame has to change to fit the picture” (interview, March 17, 2009; personal communication July 2, 2009).

Matthew<sup>9</sup> has been working with an INGO for over five and a half years, serving as a project supporter and manager in diverse emergency locations and programs: from Darfur to New Guinea to Sri Lanka. Although from a Western nation, Matthew was exposed to humanitarian work early on as his father spent many years serving with a global health organization. After obtaining a masters degree in Development and Environment, he networked his way into the INGO community. With a broad range of experience in emergency settings Matthew expresses the fact that, at times, the locations of suffering all become relative to one another, such as comparing Sri Lanka to Darfur for instance. And though people can easily turn into numbers, Matthew retains the motivation to continue his work based on a spiritual background as well as growing up in an environment of humanitarianism (Matthew, interview, March 23, 2009).

Having worked in various emergency settings, Matthew offers a perspective on gender couched within these experiences. He clearly views gender not in terms of biological sex but rather as the roles men and women carry out based on the societal norms into which they were born. Such an academic understanding of gender is not only limited to Westerners and Matthew is quick to point out that many of his global colleagues do see gender in such terms; however there are many who do not. Within a project, Matthew expresses the direction he would like to see his organization move toward in terms of mainstreaming gender: “We have to understand the community context that we’re working with, [of] which gender is a huge component, and make sure that we don’t do damage to the communities by bulldozing through gender roles but rather we try and use existing gender roles to improve

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew is a pseudonym.

the efficiency of our programming and where gender roles are a block to the rolling out of human rights that we try our best to change [roles] in a positive way.” While Matthew is admittedly not a human rights expert he does maintain a strong stance that human rights are nonnegotiable and if left to individual cultures themselves, can be open to interpretation. This reading may have negative impacts on the social lives of men and women and lead to continued oppressive traditional practices. He further explains his strong stance by concluding, “I’ve worked in cultures where they do interpret rights...in a different way and I don’t think it’s ok, the outcome of that is not ok” (Matthew, interview, March 23, 2009).

Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne is the founder of Sarvodaya, an organization begun in Sri Lanka in 1958. Ariyaratne explains that the organization is not an NGO but rather a movement of people reaching for truth and peace. He has faced threats and harassment from various sectors within the country for his work which seeks to assist those who are underprivileged and in 1996 received the Gandhi Peace Prize. He hopes to reduce the pain and suffering of his countrymen as they learn, with the help of his Sarvodaya staff and volunteers, to create their own empowerment and development which ultimately leads to a community exhibiting a positive moral and spiritual lifestyle. It seems that Ariyaratne feels that in order to move towards an equitable and just society, values must be based on the traditional Sri Lankan way of life. He shuns the West and the open economy, saying that this has led to corruption and the rupture of the family unit. Additionally, Ariyaratne explains that, “I don’t believe in any so called ‘gender’ having anything to do with psychosocial [constructs], except certain biological needs that are satisfied because of that gender division” and goes on to discuss how “the world is steeped in ignorance and this ignorance is formalized and put into philosophy by academics in the world, [most of whom] organize [this] ignorance” (interview, March 20, 2009).

Ariyaratne himself speaks philosophically, reflecting Buddhist thought, and breaks the human body down to its most elementary level and says that when people can understand the reality that they are all a part of one another and a universe made up of numerous atoms, that we can then begin to live peacefully. It is a shift in one’s level of consciousness that is key in Sarvodaya ideology and can be entered into via awareness, education and practices such as meditation. This said, Sarvodaya does have a specific Women’s Movement division and when discussing this, Ariyaratne explained that it is to help females engage in

microcredit projects, skills training, maternal health, and various activities that are for women (Ariyaratne, interview, March 20, 2009).

Much of the INGO/NGO world and the government are corrupt, according to Ariyaratne, and often their resources and donor funds have been wasted. He says, “As far as I’m concerned, I trust very few people. When I see sacrifice by people who are not doing it to earn money, then I trust them.” And his principle in serving others rests in his Buddhist faith and belief in karma, “As a Buddhist, I know that I cannot steal or escape. [In] the next birth it will come back to me and I will be punished. I must do good. I must do honest work. I would advise everybody to think that way spiritually; to find out if they are doing the right thing for the people who are suffering” (Light Millennium 2006).

Teresa<sup>10</sup> serves as an IDP coordinator working in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, serving those who have been displaced and affected by the conflict and the tsunami. She has assisted in the welfare of this vulnerable population for the past four years and spends much of her time on the road, traveling from village to village three times a week or more. Teresa believes that her ability to work closely with the displaced people is due to her matured age and experience, as well as a self-expressed unwavering commitment to them, “my nature is helping people, listening to people and visiting the old and sick.” After obtaining a degree in India and spending 25 years teaching in Pakistan, she felt called back to Sri Lanka to teach, and then later joined a faith-based INGO after the tsunami struck. Teresa explains that the secret behind her desire to serve others comes from the time she spent as a Carmelite nun, and she says, “I do [this work] for the Glory of God and for the love of humanity” (interview, March 17, 2009; personal communication, May 13, 2009).

The gender roles constructed for Tamil women are specific in Sri Lankan society; however as Teresa spent many years out of the country, she has developed different perspectives which impact how she currently chooses to live as a Tamil woman. She speaks of not wearing *pottu* (a decorative and traditional sticker or spot that is placed between the eyebrows or on the low forehead of a married woman) and when she was questioned about it by fellow Tamils, she simply said, “I’m not used to it so please don’t force me” and her wish was respected. As a widow she also does not feel the pressure to remarry and says that with

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<sup>10</sup> Teresa is a pseudonym.

her independence she can decide her own future. However, the displaced Tamils she works with are not often as free in movement or thought as Teresa is. The religious and cultural roles of men and women remain divided as the way of life has been in existence “from the beginning” as Teresa says. She explains that women should have more autonomy and equal rights; but change does not necessarily need to follow Western models. “Thinking in terms of today...people are changing. We [talk of the] Western world but we don’t follow it, but people like to change for a better life.” For example, she speaks of the dowry system, where a woman’s family gives money to a man before marriage. Rather than completely eliminate the practice, she suggests that the dowry be written in both the man and the woman’s name, and if a time comes when the man decides to divorce her, the woman can have something in hand as she is typically left with the children. Thus, for Teresa, working within the Sri Lankan culture, one can change oppressive practices (interview, March 17, 2009).

Salim<sup>11</sup> works with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) out of Colombo and is currently part of a group discussing issues of gender equality and gender in crisis for an upcoming Human Development Report (HDR). The HDR theme for 2009 is gender equality and the report is a policy and advocacy document focusing on the Asia Pacific region. Salim is a young American male, of Middle Eastern background, who has a strong understanding of feminist politics and believes that change does not merely occur through political will, but rather via support from strong institutions. He explains that humanitarian agencies need to better define their policy priorities and create a greater awareness of local culture when implementing programs in emergencies. Current gaps may be due to the fact that many INGO/NGOs are pressured to spend fast and deliver quickly due to influxes of aid, Salim says, and in such cases the normal operating procedures of an organization are not always applied (Salim, interview, March 24, 2009).

Gender is rarely understood in its context as meaning women and men, and Salim also believes that gender still equates women amongst many humanitarian circles. The upcoming HDR report is an attempt to de-mystify this concept. While women have been a major focus of gender programming, Salim feels that relief and development organizations often impose their own definitions on women rather than asking the women themselves what

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<sup>11</sup> Salim is a pseudonym.

they want and how they would like to redefine their lives. Salim holds that INGO/NGOs may invest in women at the bottom line for economic gain, but asks the question, “Should we invest in women not merely for economic reasons but because they are human beings?” He believes that women have become instrumentalized and WID ideology still prevails, especially in the face of mass microcredit schemes for women, clearly seen and advertised by most nonprofits both in relief and development programming. Moving from a sole focus on women to men is a challenge and Salim explains that the UN is identifying how “there’s been...alienation of men in a lot of development projects focusing on gender equality, but...really, [these projects are about] women’s empowerment.” In many South Asian countries the backlash towards this continued focus on women has resulted in increased domestic violence and frustration amongst men, and this confirms Salim’s belief that an emasculated man is a dangerous thing. He feels that bringing more men into the gender sector of humanitarian agencies would be a positive step towards addressing the issue of helping men adjust to women’s increasing autonomy, and the working group he is a part of has begun throwing around the idea that “men have more potential to change men than women to...change men” (Salim, interview, March 24, 2009).

Gender is a difficult topic as it deals with networks and webs of relationships that are challenging to deconstruct, understand and adjust positively. Many UN and aid organizations work in a simplified way; however, and gender is not always conducive to straightforward policies and projects. Salim explains that even in the face of this knowledge, organizations “have to be accountable to donors and government who want policy measures” which are not always accurate to the actual situation on the ground. He discusses how feminists, anthropologists and sociologists are often frustrated with this reductionist mentality. It is evident that contributions need to be made by both humanitarian staff and social scientists to create programming that is amenable to both parties and ultimately in the best interests of the beneficiary populations (Salim, interview, March 24, 2009).

Dulcy De Silva is founder of the 20-year old nonprofit, Mothers and Daughters of Sri Lanka, a peacemaking movement which stretches across the island and involves women of various Sri Lankan ethnic backgrounds. A 73-year old Sri Lankan widow of a government minister, this Buddhist woman believes that females are key in achieving lasting peace. De Silva maintains a strong stance of the equality between men and women and has little interest

in religious rhetoric which props up notions of male patriarchy. Her honesty and lack of intimidation have allowed her to demand integrity from a former female prime minister, as well as strongly question members of the LTTE. She believes and has proved that women can be mobilized in vast numbers for the peace movement and the betterment of their lives. De Silva also takes a strong stance that it is not merely men who oppress women; she says that half the blame for continued female oppression must go to the women themselves and explains that “they need to be thinking in new ways.” Additionally, De Silva explains that in the Sri Lankan culture, people are taught to treat men well, but men are not taught how to treat their wives. She is an advocate for educating men in these matters and believes that in time, their views will change (De Silva, interview, April 10, 2009).

De Silva feels that many NGOs are doing good work in the country for the betterment of women, however she explains that the aid sent to the country in the wake of the tsunami was used recklessly. “The foreign aid was not given to the victims,” she says and was swallowed up in bureaucratic processes by government and humanitarian staff. De Silva adds that, “if the aid had been used properly it could have built up three new Sri Lankas” (De Silva, interview, April 10, 2009).

She is also not afraid to deal with taboo and hidden topics in her country, such as monks who abuse children. She assists in improving and advocating for the wellbeing of prostitutes, many of whom have been forced into the work due to displacement and lack of economic opportunities. De Silva says that when she brings up these difficult issues many call her crazy, but she won’t let it stop her. With a deep sense of compassion, especially for internally displaced persons, De Silva remains committed to her cause, “[my work] is difficult to manage, [but] I am determined...my aim is to do something for this country and the women of the world” (De Silva, interview, April 10, 2009).

### **GENDER ROLE CHANGE AMONG THE DISPLACED**

The traditional roles of men and women are distinguished and hierarchical in Sri Lankan society, especially amongst the Tamils and Muslims. Many of the humanitarian workers of Sri Lankan origin describe theirs as a patriarchal society with a strong sense of community. The woman’s duty, ingrained in her from childhood, is to serve the men in her family and look after her husband, his family and their children. Anuradha Gunarathne

(interview, April, 7, 2009), with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, adds that men feel very little responsibility for the education and wellbeing of their children and leave it to their wives.

Rani Singarajah, a Tamil woman who has created her own nonprofit for women's development, explains that this continued oppression is due to the Hindu religion and cultural belief system. She says that these women have a large burden of work both domestically and in paid labor, and lack decision-making power. Their entire existence is dependent on the men in their lives; however they do gain a sense of respect when they become mothers and elders (Singarajah, interview, May 29, 2009). Domestic violence is common amongst Sri Lankan women and they are taught to submit as they are deemed the property of their husbands. If a woman questions her husband she may be at risk of bodily harm or even death (Badurdeen, interview, March 13, 2009). In spite of the negative aspects seen in Tamil culture, Niranjali discusses the positive side. She expresses how women are ultimately respected within Tamil society, and that there is a greater level of freedom amongst the women, as compared to India that has a strong panchayat (local body governing a village). She expresses how, in general, the communities in Sri Lanka are less cohesive and there is more independent thinking (Butterfield, field notes, March 2009).

In contrast to the Tamils, many of the Sri Lankan Muslim women live in a social system secluding them to their home. This is based on the religious values they hold and Gunarathne adds how "with their culture, ladies...have to keep quiet in front of her husband [as opposed to Tamil and Sinhalese women]" (interview, April 7, 2009).

The situation in IDP camps is not an ideal one. Sri Lanka has been burdened with groups of displaced people since the early 1980's when the war began and the so-called "welfare centres" have been locations of despair and discomfort for families over the years. Often the IDPs live in spaces no larger than 20ft by 20ft, in huts made of zinc sheets or sheds composed of cadjan--a product of coconut leaves used for building fences and roofs. The walls are often short and separation between family groups is minimal. The lack of privacy, while common in many refugee camps, is compounded by the fact that the government wants easy access and open space believing that it will make it more difficult for LTTE to hide in the camps. Women may suffer harassment as appropriate toilet and bathing facilities are not always common. INGO/NGOs are trying to sort out ways of decreasing their vulnerability

through better lighting and separate bath spaces (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). IDP camps are not typically divided into areas for people of certain religious, ethnic or caste groups, and very different families must live in uncomfortably close quarters and deal with new lifestyles. Badurdeen, a gender and conflict transformation trainer, explains how “there are a mixture of cultures in IDP camps, [and] with outside exposure and education, [the traditional idea of] gender is changing. You can’t maintain traditions in the camps, [and this] creates a traumatic experience for the elders.” She says that affairs and intermarriage occur and cause disruption to the traditional ways of life (Badurdeen, interview, March 13, 2009).

There is a range of experience which women encounter when they are displaced from their homes and traditional ways of life. From the destructive to the empowered, humanitarian players explain that female Sri Lankan IDPs are challenging expectations and carving new social spaces for themselves.

Many relief projects have focused on war widows or those whose husbands have died in the tsunami. Young widows are especially vulnerable to situations of sexual harassment as they lack male support for their personal safety (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). However, Teresa explains that this experience of fear only occurs amongst half the female population and many women do find independence and assistance from their communities when needed. While the pressure remains for widows to remarry, it is not always enforced. Nonetheless, the concern may remain for a widow’s parents as they will worry about how their daughter will be taken care of once they die. But women understand the implications of remarriage; that a stepfather may not treat their children or herself well, and if she has the financial means necessary, she may not choose to remarry (Teresa, interview, March 17, 2009). De Alwis furthers the discussion of female-headed households and women’s ambivalent empowerment. She explains that while widows and single young women “are able to have a little bit more flexibility” other research has shown that many of these women’s lives are exposed in the camps and men see them as sexually available and a source of prey. She adds, “I think the sense of freedom is a very fraught one” for these women (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

Gunaratne (interview, April 7, 2009) discusses how IDP women face a range of difficult issues: from lack of proper trauma counseling as many women have experienced the killings or disappearance of family members; few economic opportunities due to

confinement in camps; inadequate health care as there are limited medical clinics near the camps and in some cases one midwife for a population of 10,000-15,000 IDPs; and problems with idle and alcoholic husbands and male family members.

Many women experience a double burden, involvement in microcredit projects, and care of their meager existence and family (Salim, interview, March 24, 2009). Though many aid agencies declare the successes of female involvement in income-generating projects, Niranjali (interview, March 17, 2009) explains that in reality, out of a 100 women, only 10-15 will have employment. This lack of employment has led several women to exchange sex for food or money and there is a growing population of sex workers within the camps (De Silva, interview, April 10, 2009). The host communities and other IDPs have begun describing the camps as places of immorality; however it seems it is desperate circumstances which are driving women to this “work” (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

Women are becoming aware of the imbalanced roles between themselves and their husbands. Badurdeen says that Muslim IDPs in the Puttalam region are starting to express dissatisfaction with their spouses, “Our husbands go and enjoy [life] in Colombo, and we have to stay in the house and look after the children” (interview, March 13, 2009). Many of the Muslim women have begun working, being driven out on lorries into the onion fields. As discussed earlier, this has led to increased tension both within the home and the host community. Such a gender shift is remarkable as these women have moved far away from a lifestyle where they typically stay in their homes. De Alwis discusses the changes IDP women are facing in crisis, explaining that “it’s a very complicated scenario, because though you may have a little bit of freedom, you’re not rid of your community” which may still impose traditional gendered norms (interview, March 9, 2009).

While women face a plethora of difficulties in crisis, many humanitarian players feel that they are able to find creative solutions to their problems and remain resilient. Sanuthi says that women are “courageous, they won’t give up easily like men. They face the challenges and they face it positively and they can turn it around” (interview, March 13, 2009).

While men are considered the breadwinners and head of households in Sri Lankan culture, the affects of war and disaster on IDP males shift these traditional roles and create emasculated men who are confounded, confused and lifeless. Often they become dependent

on relief assistance and have little motivation or opportunity to find alternatives to provide for their families (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). This is due to the fact that the economic existence of men typically disappears after displacement, as they are far removed from their locations of livelihood. There are also militarized camps with restrictions on IDP movement. Sanuthi explains how “women are the ones who really work and bring more money to the family than the men. The men are becoming more and more dependent on the women, and on the handouts that they get” (interview, March 13, 2009) For males, displacement equates a crisis of identity as they find it difficult to navigate a new existence where they are no longer the masters of their own destinies.

Initially, camp management may provide cash-for-work programs and men will assist in building latrines, wells and housing, but afterwards there is little for them to do (Butterfield, field notes, March 25, 2009). There are more opportunities available for women, as most men are farmers or fishermen, who go out and procure jobs as domestic servants or work in a small shop (however, this may not occur in the militarized IDP camps in some parts of the country.) It is also important to note that women are willing to work for much less than men do (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

The increased feeling of helplessness amongst men has negative affects in their familial relationships. Domestic violence has become a large problem in the camps, and although it occurs in periods of stability, its exacerbation in crisis has been discussed. Badurdeen also works with the Alcohol and Drug Information Centre in Colombo and believes that men use alcohol as an excuse for violence. They explain that they abuse alcohol due to their jobless state and feelings of fear or being under threat (Badurdeen, interview, March 13, 2009). De Alwis says that the exacerbation of violence and alcoholism is due to the fact that IDPs are living in foreign environments and feel helpless. She explains that in spite of these circumstances, women continue to go out and earn whatever meager income they can and take care of their children while “men sit around, play cards and drink.” However, de Alwis does say that there are a few men who will take over the responsibility of caring for children or helping their wives with chores such as fetching water. Even so, most widowed men give their children over to female family members (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

De Alwis uses a feminist analysis to discuss the reasons and justifications for men beating their wives and feels that ultimately it's a scenario of patriarchy, "it's really one way [a man] shows his power over women. And men do it because they can" (interview, March 9, 2009). It seems that in crisis situations where men feel disempowered, domestic violence may be an easy way to attempt to reinstate one's sense of authority.

While there are many situations of eroded male behavior and masculinity, Teresa and Niranjali speak of situations where IDP husbands and wives have used the experience of displacement as a way to perhaps, unknowingly, strengthen their bonds with one another. The fight to survive, to see how their family members were hurting, created empathy in many of the IDPs they have worked with in the Eastern Province. Niranjali narrates:

Life was devastated and then it was the men and women together who had to struggle through...the men saw how the women were struggling, not even having enough space to change their clothes [and with no privacy.] And the women saw how the men were suffering. [One IDP told me], "We are people who cook a chatty full of fish and enjoy a meal but when we were in the camp our husband had to go and dig drains and things like that to earn 10 rupees, which is 10 cents, and buy two small fish [which] we cooked." Because of [this, the relationships have] become very complementary (interview, March 17, 2009).

Teresa goes on to explain that the difficulties in the camps have created unity for many families and though they were not able to enjoy their lives, "There's a sense that they have come together so that has taught them a lesson. When they came back [to resettle], having gone through those difficulties, they're [now] trying to lead a good, united life" (interview, March 17, 2009).

According to Salim (interview, March 24, 2009), in crisis one of two things can happen to social roles; first, the gender role changes can be transformative where more women become educated and achieve higher levels of autonomy, or second, the social fabric of a society goes out the window and relationships, identities and hierarchies disappear and cause chaos. It remains to be seen what the long-term impacts of gender role change will do to the diverse social worlds in Sri Lanka.

### **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN CRISIS**

Gender mainstreaming is the process of determining the specific gendered needs and ways in which men and women will respond in unique and individual ways to a development or relief intervention. Once the particular gendered dimensions of a community and its

implications in a project are understood, the program is designed in such a way as to increase the wellbeing of its male and female participants (Matthew, interview, March 23, 2009). The ultimate goal in gender mainstreaming is to help beneficiaries move towards achieving equitable gender roles, specifically for women as they have been deemed the most oppressed over history across many nations. Through humanitarian programming, beneficiaries are encouraged to change negative thinking patterns, according to the agency, specifically as it relates to the roles and wellbeing of women. Badurdeen (interview, March 13, 2009) explains that in Sri Lanka, a specific focus on gender training—the method of entering a community and explicitly explaining and breaking down gender roles and impacts—is not in prevalence. Rather the focus for relief and development organizations remains on addressing gender inequalities through gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is a way to address gender issues and inequalities “behind the scenes” as it is supposed to be built into program design right from the start with the input of local community members and humanitarian staff who have a strong knowledge of cultural norms, values and behavior. In a crisis scenario, gender mainstreaming will initially be articulated in the best ways to distribute food and other relief items, provide safe spaces in IDP camps and help families reconnect and support one another (Matthew, interview, March 23, 2009). Within a longer-term relief scenario (anywhere from a few months to years) gender mainstreaming may be incorporated in gender-based violence awareness programs, the creation of microcredit groups for women (and at times men), psychosocial counseling, livelihood creation and training, and housing construction (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

The concept of gender mainstreaming and being gender-sensitive and responsive to men and women's various needs in relief programs is not widely understood by all humanitarian staff members. During Matthew's work in emergency situations, he found that within his INGO "there's a spectrum of experience [about] the understanding of gender...it's a halfway house. People have started to understand that gender is more than just women but haven't really understood the implications of what it means to then take a broad gender approach or understanding of a contextual analysis." Matthew adds that in emergencies, "there's a lot of assumed gender awareness and gender knowledge in program responses" amongst relief workers (interview, March 23, 2009). To explain the historically misunderstood concept of gender to humanitarian workers, organizations will hire gender

directors or coordinators to facilitate gender training programs (both for staff and community stakeholders in project sites.) This training is meant to dispel myths and encourage new ways of thinking about gender and methods of incorporating gender into all aspects of a project cycle. It is not an easy task however, since gender as understood at the academic level is not always accepted or presented in appropriate or convincing ways (Butterfield, field notes, March 9, 2009; World Vision India 2007).

There is the added difficulty of having female trainers work with relief and development staff, says de Alwis. She explains that many gender trainers are feminists who behave and dress in ways unfamiliar or foreign to the workers who may not take them seriously. She adds that they may see the trainers as an anomaly, with no connection to their daily lives or work reality (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). However, this is not across the board and there are many INGO/NGO gender trainers who are familiar or have been raised within the local context who have sensitivity to the lives of the beneficiaries and fieldworkers (Butterfield, field notes, March 9, 2009). De Alwis suggests that gender training events be led both by women and men, believing if a man presents material which has never before been discussed or heard, this may generate more interest amongst male participants. Gender training is typically conducted in a two-day workshop, which some do not believe to be adequate in addressing and creating support for the breaking down of centuries held beliefs which hinder gender equality. De Alwis says that quarterly meetings with key and concerned staff may be of assistance in driving the point home and keeping gender on the radar screen of an organization that has a mandate to uphold gender as a cross-cutting theme in all their work. She also encourages trainers to be more creative in their presentation of the material, rather than solely relying on PowerPoint presentations and theoretical group discussions. A useful tool that has been implemented by UNICEF is the cartoon teledrama, "Meena" originally released in Nepal (now dubbed in Tamil and Sinhala) about a young girl, her family and pet parrot. It deals with issues such as dowry, early marriage, health care, education for children, and abuse. De Alwis (interview, March 9, 2009) discovered that children in Sri Lanka loved the cartoon and even wanted their parents to see it, and explains that such a tool would additionally be applicable in gender training situations to facilitate discussion.

There is much room for growth in terms of gender mainstreaming and the way in which relief workers advance social change. During my time at Global Opportunities Sri Lanka and in conversations with various field managers, program design departments and gender staff I discovered that the tyranny of the urgent still reins and one staff member explained that "we are simply responding to the need" (Humanitarian Manager, interview, April 5, 2009). Often, aid work within the IDP camps is restricted by the government. However there are other issues which account for gaps in gender mainstreaming practices which include a lack of gender balance amongst field staff, for example a humanitarian manager explained that "male staff working with female IDPs means we do not hear many of the real issues simply because cultural norms do not allow it" (interview, April 5, 2009). There is also a lack of specific gender design, monitoring and evaluation procedures and indicators in emergency programming. Situations have also occurred where Western managers decide on gendered interventions without consulting the local gender experts within their Sri Lankan national offices. In many humanitarian organizations gender was not given the prominence it should have had in the tsunami relief efforts and this may be the case in the more recent IDP crisis due to the conflict (Butterfield, field notes, March 2009).

De Alwis critiques the structure of humanitarian agencies and their methods of incorporating gender into projects. She believes many organizations place little value on research and knowledge creation that could contribute to the design of more effective and culturally appropriate gender programs that address both men and women's needs. Additionally, she cites organizations such as CIDA that form beneficiary committees believing that gender balance has been achieved when women are involved; however she explains, "usually they'll be younger women [in the groups] and they'll be completely cowed down...even though they make up the bodies, they rarely speak" (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). Matthew (interview, March 23, 2009) does counter this notion in regards to women's agency; he recalls a colleague witnessing community meetings in New Guinea where men were the only ones speaking; yet if the women disagreed with them, they would subtly kick their husbands in silent protest.

Redundancy is an issue in humanitarian programming and there are cases where organizations try to outdo each other or repeat their own programs without taking time to evaluate former projects, determine impact and build on prior interventions. De Alwis says

that agencies need to determine real need rather than rush off and ask for money for projects based on organizational or yearly development and relief themes; otherwise, initiating duplicate programs "is a complete waste of resources" (interview, March 9, 2009).

Gunarathne explains that while humanitarian groups are supposed to engage in networks and consortiums to ensure that they are not duplicating efforts, this rarely happens on the ground. "Coordination is there, but implementation is the problem," says Gunarathne, "corruption, misunderstanding and the people not working [together occur]. They're just talking [but] not working" (interview, April 7, 2009).

For de Alwis, social change may be difficult to achieve through socially engineered aid programs and she believes that more could be accomplished through long-term political movements. Following the 2004 tsunami, de Alwis describes how a mass influx of humanitarian organizations descended on the ravaged coastal communities in an effort to assist as well as spend the funds that were flooding their offices. "There's a huge amount of competition [amongst relief agencies and] it was really, really extreme in the tsunami," de Alwis recalls. Organizations "were just fighting for communities and the communities themselves were [seeing what they could get], saying 'How big is the house going to be? This other organization said they'll give us a house plus this.' It was very tragic." She explains that there is a huge sense of dependency which arises when so many INGO/NGOs are working within the same area. After meeting with a group of female IDPs in the Eastern Province who had determined issues of alcoholism and domestic violence amongst their community, de Alwis asked them, "Now that you have a sense of these problems, what are your next steps in addressing them?" They looked at her and said, "Well, next week an organization will be having a workshop and we'll know then." Rather than encouraging organic, community-centered solutions and critical thinking, beneficiaries are learning to rely on programming models which say "this is the best way to address domestic violence" (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

Niranjali discusses her perspective on the reasons why gender mainstreaming in crisis is a challenge. "Sometimes the needs are not expressed in terms of gender [within the initial days and weeks following an emergency]," she says, "we talk in terms of emergency needs for families...but we will not break it up into a woman's needs and a man's needs. [IDPs have shared that] for about three weeks [after the setup for a camp] they didn't have a

separate toilet or a well. So women had to go early in the morning, bathe and wait for the men to come [and escort them back safely to their tents]...they saw that yes, the toilet is a must, a bathing place is a must [but] the gender perspective came only about three or four weeks [later]" (Niranjali, interview, March 17, 2009).

An initial task in gender mainstreaming is conducting a gender analysis to determine the needs and realities of a particular community. Using this analysis is important as organizations such as Matthew's "make sure they understand the gender roles that individuals...have. [They] make sure that the activities they run take those gender roles and identities into account to bring about positive outcomes and to mitigate negative outcomes." Matthew does admit that gender analysis is weak across his organization, especially in long-term programming. While in emergencies, specific gender issues such as GBV quickly come to the forefront, in long-term relief and rehabilitation scenarios those conducting gender analysis "have to work...harder because the gender issues are a little bit more buried within society," says Matthew. Additionally, he also finds that one of the biggest challenges his organization faces within the various global contexts that they work, is that critical thinking is not utilized. "There's a range of reasons behind that," Matthew explains, "partly due to the fact that in many of places where we work, the education [our staff] receives in those countries doesn't teach them to think critically. [Many] people are not taught and encouraged to thinking critically within the organization and ask those sorts of questions and apply those sorts of analysis skills to a decision that's being made or a project that's being planned. And that's broader than just gender, but I think for gender to be taken seriously it also needs to be addressed" (interview, March 23, 2009).

### **HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS AND WOMEN IN CRISIS**

The participation of women and services for women in relief projects has been widely supported by aid organizations for decades. This is due to the supposed increased vulnerability of women in crisis. As discussed above, gender still equals women in many relief and development circles and this is clearly shown in strong GAD programming which focuses almost exclusively on females.

One of the most visible projects for encouraging female empowerment in both relief and development situations is the creation of women's microcredit schemes. A group of

women gather together and pool funds, either their own or with starter loans from an aid organization, and begin small businesses that may include selling handicrafts or services to their communities. Women have a high rate of loan repayment and they learn to manage the groups under the guidance of an INGO/NGO social worker or community mobilizer.

Badurdeen explains that microcredit groups work well in allowing for discussions on gender and helping improve women's wellbeing, however she says that "only women receive the money and the men are left out" (interview, March 13, 2009). There are instances where the money from the loans will go into the hands of men through force or intimidation; however Teresa (interview, March 24, 2009) discusses an IDP population she works with where men are beginning to understand that their wives will use the finances wisely and they willingly hand over their own incomes to the women for management. De Alwis (interview, March 9, 2009) also discusses the backlash many widows have faced because of their involvement in microcredit projects, due perhaps, to the fact that there are no men to reap the benefits.

Dealing with the challenge of protecting women and teaching them to safeguard themselves from situations of gender-based violence, specifically domestic violence, is an issue humanitarian organizations are addressing. Typically it falls to the women to deal with the issue, rather than engaging men in changing behavior and understanding the grief they are causing (Niranjali, personal communication, July 2, 2009). While Sri Lanka does have laws protecting women from GBV, it's very difficult to implement them especially as domestic violence is considered a familial issue that remains private within the home (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). INGO/NGOs, however, can assist women in creating awareness about their rights and how to protect themselves. De Alwis discussed a program UNICEF incorporated in a tsunami IDP camp where they sent out a pamphlet explaining the reasons why women should be respected, however she is suspect of the kind of impact it had. Other interventions have included the placement of complaint boxes in front of police offices or desks within camps, but de Alwis saw that these were rarely being used, due to the fact that "everyone can see you go drop [your complaint in the box.] There's no privacy in a camp." She says that trying to change issues such as domestic violence is rarely successful when it becomes couched in law and order, "[The government and INGO/NGOs are] imposing... forms of surveillance rather than working with the community itself" to solve this culturally rooted and crisis-enhanced problem (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

Helping families understand appropriate healthcare and family planning mechanisms is a struggle when trying to translate biomedical notions of wellbeing with traditional concepts of bodily maintenance. Gunarathne discusses the difficulties in assisting men and women in understanding concepts such as fertility regulation. She spoke with one IDP family, and the wife insisted that her husband needed to have more children, but discovered that it merely meant he didn't want to abstain from sexual relations. Another NGO attempted to create awareness around family planning in a camp ravaged by sexual harassment and rape by conducting demonstrations with condoms by putting them on the end of broomsticks. Thus, when the families decided to have sex, they would pull out their household broom and put the condom on it, believing that it would protect them from having more children. The concept of putting the condom on the men was foreign to many, and she says, "in Sri Lanka, not like [Western] countries, people are thinking family planning is a very bad thing. If you're using condoms, to rural area people they are thinking this is...bad for the body" (Gunarathne, interview, April 7, 2009). Gunarathne's examples demonstrate the reality that many IDP don't have a proper understanding of basic reproductive health and believes that more culturally appropriate education is needed.

Amenthi, an emergency program officer working with an INGO out of Colombo, explains that in many IDP camps humanitarian organizations have limited access due to government restrictions. Currently her organization offers basic needs services, private breastfeeding spaces, and food supplements for children and lactating mothers. However, Amenthi (interview, March 11, 2009) says that these projects are just scratching the surface of the gendered issues facing displaced people, and her organization doesn't specifically conduct concentrated programming towards women in the conflict-affected IDP camps of Vavuniya.

In spite of the struggles of addressing women's needs and encouraging gender equality, there are promising signs. Anushka works in emergency situations for a humanitarian organization and says that with the influx of INGO/NGOs into affected regions, women have begun to feel empowered:

We [have had] female and male discussions separately [amongst IDPs in Jaffna] and we asked the women...do they feel safe, dignified and respected? And they said, "Yes, the fact that we're sitting here talking to you means that we're confident, we're respected." They definitely attributed it to the NGOs [explaining

that,] “It’s because of people like you. You’re agencies that have given us a place in society, you’ve given us the ability to come speak in a forum like this confidently and we’re not worried” (interview, March 11, 2009).

Anushka went on to ask the women if they feel safe and secure, even if trusted males are not around. An IDP woman explained, “We can’t have our husbands follow us everywhere and protect us. We are in charge of our own security” (Anushka, interview, March 11, 2009). In this example, an INGO relief worker shows how increased confidence amongst these women may be viewed as a sign of women’s increasing autonomy in crisis.

### **HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS AND MEN IN CRISIS**

The concept of bringing men further into Gender and Development has been called “men-streaming.” Gender mainstreaming has been typically used as an activity which brings awareness to women’s needs and issues. However, gender mainstreaming is, in principle, about being responsive to the gender-sensitive needs of both men and women.

Traditionally, incorporating men into relief projects is limited to cash-for-work programs or other livelihood schemes (Teresa, interview, March 17, 2009). At times they may also be involved in camp management and food distribution. These programs have had little focus on helping men adjust to their changing social worlds and women’s increasing autonomy in crisis. Sanuthi says that the humanitarian organizations in Sri Lanka “have not focused very much on changing the men’s attitudes or focused on men. They always focus on women. Even with the livelihoods they try to go through the woman rather than the men, believing the man will [misuse] the money rather than the women.” Thus, she feels that in terms of gender, very little has been done and the whole process of Gender and Development in crisis is lacking. Sanuthi adds, “Even now I see most of the [INGO/NGOs] when they go to the IDP camps, they really want to help the women thinking that they will bring the family together [rather] than the men. I think we are [making] a mistake by doing that, we must bring [men] into the process” (interview, March 13, 2009).

Teresa (interview, March 17, 2009) discusses the lack of interest men may have in being involved in humanitarian work and the meetings that the aid organizations conduct. She explains that it is mostly women who attend the discussions and the men merely expect their wives to go and then come home and convey what was said. While Teresa’s organization has a mandate that men and women should be involved equally in projects, this

proves very difficult and often the community-based organizations (CBOs) comprised of IDPs are mostly women.

Many relief organizations operate on underlying assumptions and at times, can even change the way a social group operates. Though men may be involved in organization and operations within a camp, oftentimes INGO/NGOs may offer provision of cash grants or relief items to women rather than men, based on the idea that they will use them more wisely (Matthew, interview, March 23, 2009). At times these assumptions have led to abuse towards women and increased domestic violence (Schuler, Hashemi and Badal 1998:148). Matthew explains that this resulting behavior may be due to the fact that “men resent the women for taking what they perceive as something they’re not entitled too. [This is] something that has to be carefully mitigated and managed if [an NGO] is going to step into that sort of a gender changing [position]” (interview, March 23, 2009). Amenthi discusses an encounter she had with a man at a distribution in one of the northern IDP camps. Her agency was giving out relief items to the women first and the man had screamed at her saying, “We are vulnerable too, we’re in the same situation as the women are. Why is it that they always come first?” (Amenthi, interview, March 11, 2009)

The psychosocial mending of men who have suffered in crisis is limited. In fact, de Alwis believes that “a lot of [INGO/NGOs and UN organizations] who are doing psychosocial programs] themselves don’t know what it is” (interview, March 9, 2009). Amenthi (interview, March 11, 2009) additionally describes how there were many issues of cultural inappropriateness in terms of psychological/psychiatric trauma care after the tsunami, with staff members who did not speak the local language. Galappatti (2003:126) discusses how there are also issues of local staff reinforcing patriarchal norms in therapy rather than moving towards creating gender equality in care processes. For a displaced Sri Lankan man, dealing with one’s emotions is particularly challenging as Amenthi explains:

He now has no livelihood and he has to depend on handouts. There’s this cultural machoness that comes with the whole society and suddenly [the man thinks], “I want to cry but I can’t because it’s not macho. I want to talk to someone but I can’t because it’s a [sign] of weakness. And I can’t show my family that I’m weak.” Unfortunately the psychosocial mending in terms of men really has not happened. It happens quicker for women because women talk about [things], they share easily. It’s easy for [a woman] to go to a woman that [she] hasn’t seen before but who’s going through the same situation and sit and talk. But for men

it's a lot more difficult. [They have an] automatic sense of, "Who's the leader of this group? And I want to be the leader" (interview, March 11, 2009).

The male sense of social cohesiveness and finding support from others is a challenge, and various humanitarian organizations have tried to find unique interventions that might assist men in dealing with their disrupted identities. De Alwis discusses how some INGO/NGOs attempted to create interactive sports groups for the men, however she found that this did not serve the goals of creating gender equality and increasing male understanding of women, as the men were able to play while the women continued with their housework and childcare. Helping men open up and discuss their issues is important however, even though it's a long-term process. De Alwis believes that such a project could be facilitated by males that IDP men respect and trust. Additionally, it may be important to enter into these conversations with men not carrying the stereotype that, as de Alwis says, "men don't really like to discuss their feelings and what they're going through." Ultimately, she explains, "if you don't work with the men, and conscientize the men, you're not going to get anywhere" (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009).

Sanuthi believes that men are ready and willing to become involved in relief and development projects but it is difficult in her country context because many men are prideful. She explains that, "if it's microfinancing, [the men] want the women to go and get the money for a loan and they would like to be more involved in spending it... They don't want to come forward and they think it's like begging, [though] it's not. [These perceptions are things] we need to change, [such as the way in which] the support is given" (Sanuthi, interview, March 13, 2009). Matthew says that within his organization, "gender [basically] gets treated as a tick the box exercise where [staff] might make it a three or four line statement about understanding the roles of men and women in society but without there really being a serious in depth and analytical look at what that actually means for a particular community group and how that's going to interplay in a project" (interview, March 23, 2009).

Gender mainstreaming for men in crisis would ideally look at assisting men in returning to their traditional livelihoods, or training them in new ones, "getting them back into normal life as soon as possible," says Amenthi. Additionally, she states that encouraging gender equality may happen when INGO/NGOs work with men and women and teach them that there is no competition in gender roles. Amenthi explains that joint training may facilitate this concept:

You have a husband and the wife sitting in a training program for livestock [and] you would have men and women who have a cow and [you explain] this is what you're supposed to do with it. Right then and there you have roles being set up, the woman would milk the cow, the man would graze the cow (interview, March 11, 2009).

In this scenario they become a team and stop fighting against one another. Nevertheless, Amenthi admits that in emergency settings this is much more difficult as men have become emasculated and lost nearly everything (interview, March 11, 2009).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANALYSIS**

Understanding the social lives of internally displaced persons, the history of Gender and Development, and the voices of humanitarian players who work with and research gender issues and gender mainstreaming in crisis creates a synthesis of knowledge for discussing the major questions this study has undertaken. It should now be apparent that there is a difficult tension between theory, policy and practice when dealing with gendered issues in crisis due to a diverse range of approaches and perspectives.

#### **DISCUSSION OF GENDER ROLE CHANGE IN CRISIS**

Displaced people within Sri Lanka have experienced gender role change, most notably through the shift in lifestyle that comes as a result of living as a refugee. Their close proximity to people of other faiths and ethnicities, the loss of livelihoods and social status, trauma and exposure to relief and development organizations has created a modified social world. While social change is a common element of human life, it has traditionally occurred in a slower fashion. However, in our increasingly globalized world of interconnected people and a rapid spread of information that works itself into economics, media, politics and conflict, the shifts in perceptions of societal values and identities change more quickly. When one adds to these major crises such as natural disasters and war, social change becomes a way of life. This is clearly the case in Sri Lanka, as evidenced by the vast literature and this research. For the displaced, this is forced culture change, rather than change they have sought out, willingly invited into their lives, or had the opportunity to negotiate over time.

The changes wrought by crisis and/or humanitarian intervention can be both positive and negative for the person experiencing them. Cultural values and traditions are not prone to shift without challenges, as noted by de Alwis in the situation with Muslim IDP women in Puttalam. The enforced move from inclusion within a home to life working in the fields merely for economic purposes causes stress and strain. The actual moment of culture change

has taken place, but its acceptance has not. Both the Muslim women and their children are, at times, seen as morally corrupt by the host population, and possibly their families.

Teresa and Niranjali (interview, March 17, 2009) discuss more positive effects of gender role change amongst many women who are widowed and head of household in the Eastern Province. Although the war and the tsunami have wrought havoc in their lives, it has also opened up previously unavailable locations where they can work to earn and manage their own money; often without the pressure of a man demanding the cash for items such as drugs, liquor or cigarettes. In some communities there are even men who allow their wives to control and distribute their salary as they believe the women will make the best use of the income. Women's empowerment does come at a price, however, and the fight against social norms of women not working or not necessarily needing a man to protect or take care of them will have to be renegotiated by these women.

While IDP women all across Sri Lanka begin to move into spaces formerly unavailable to them and at times experience ambivalent empowerment or independence, their male counterparts are also dealing with modified identities. Men have lost their socially constructed sense of masculinity and role as head and provider for their families. With little to nothing to replace these roles, they exist in IDP camps in idleness, fear and frustration. Often they turn to alcoholism, drug use or violence against their families to deal with the situation. As a female IDP in Schrijvers' research stated, women are used to being nobody and they feel they can cope better in crisis (1999:323-324). It seems that men have yet to find meaningful and appropriate coping mechanisms in periods of stress. The creation of livelihoods is touted by some aid practitioners, but while many speak of this as an ideal option, in reality it is often not possible due to IDP camp restrictions and resources in the region. Merely focusing on livelihoods for men may additionally reinforce the traditional role of men as head of household. Discovering non-financial based uses of men's time and achieving a sense of purpose in displacement may be crucial for the wellbeing of the family.

Humanitarian organizations also play a role in the ways in which men and women view themselves and their roles after a crisis has occurred. Their programs are, theoretically, supported by a critical gender analysis and consideration of the gender culture within a project area. This does not always occur in practice, and Matthew explains that aid agencies must be thoughtful when implementing programs that may shift gender roles. He explains

that there is “risk of causing damage to the way in which a particular social group operates...you can have a negative impact on the viability of a family group” (Matthew, interview, March 23, 2009). Nevertheless, he does express that humanitarian organizations have potential for doing good, as was witnessed in the women’s group Anushka spoke with in Jaffna. Other development professionals have explained that in many cases across the globe when resources and services are given to the women, they directly support the family. Yet, creating situations of empowerment may also have negative affects in other areas of women’s lives. This was seen in increased cases of domestic violence and the suppression of male identity in crisis, both due to the conflict and tsunami as well as INGO/NGOs continued focus on programs for women.

The gendered future of IDPs in Sri Lanka will depend on several factors, the amount of support and the length of time determined by the government in rehabilitating and resettling the IDPs, the access INGO/NGOs have to incorporate culturally sensitive and rights based programming with IDPs, and the level of gender role change experienced by the IDP population. Several of my informants explained that they thought many traditional social roles would reign once the IDPs returned to a more stable and normal lifestyle. However, others felt that with the incorporation of women into jobs, and familial encouragement of educating both boys and girls, gender roles may continue to change in years to come. Sanuthi explains it this way:

[Some men might say to their wives] “I wish I had a lot of money so you don’t have to go to work and can stay home and look after our children.” I’m sure if you speak to 100 men, 90 would say that. But the economic situation, the competition and cost of living is such that [keeping women from working] is not something that they’ll still [be capable of.] And all that they want to do is give the best to their children (interview, March 13, 2009).

### **DISCUSSION ON HUMANITARIAN CONCEPTS OF “GENDER” AND GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT IN CRISIS**

Conceptualizing “gender” as well as Gender and Development in crisis and what it means to each individual within the array of humanitarian players in Sri Lanka shows a diverse experience of thought and practice. Indeed, the implementation of policy will vary on the ground due to individual beliefs and values, which may be in contrast or shift from the official gender mandate of their organization.

Several of my respondents exhibited an understanding that gender is socially learned roles ascribed to both men and women within a particular culture. Conversely, there are many others that I have spoken with in South Asia who had little knowledge of what Gender and Development means, even less so how GAD is incorporated in crisis. Though there are many relief and development practitioners who understand the intended principle of gender and GAD at policy level, the rhetoric tends to stagnate within academic and UN circles, and is rarely practiced on the ground. “Gender” remains code for “women.”

The perception of what equates gender equality from both a universal human/women’s rights perspective and that within a local culture continues to be debated as well. Jain explains that there are “different layers of meaning surrounding an idea of gender equality” (2005:1). For men particularly, even those who work in humanitarian organizations, patriarchy reigns. Having attended gender trainings in South Asia and interacted with various male relief and development staff members I have heard the following comment more than once, “I think men are still a little higher than women, but yes, women still should have rights.” Often this is based on a religious perspective where male domination or rule is the norm. Not only do gender specialists have the task of deconstructing gender from a cultural viewpoint, but they must also deal with imbedded religious thought and perceptions of theology and holy writ that are used, and at times manipulated, to maintain female subordination.

It is important to note that there are many women’s groups who are attempting to find and advocate for gender equality within their particular religious ideologies (Masruchah and Keenan 2005:169-185; Shuib 2005:186-203). This occurs in deeply embedded religious societies, where conversations about equal rights and equality couched in Western values may not be considered. Indeed, such groups bring out positive gender changes within their socioreligious context. However, de Alwis would say that bringing religious institutions and thought into notions of gender equality is problematic. She cites situations where faith-based agencies working with vulnerable women may be motivated to keep them from falling morally, and these moral codes are based on the norms and values of each particular organization (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). Such a strong moral undertone may in fact hinder efforts towards assisting women in achieving their own desired empowerment.

The “meaning” of gender is also articulated in a variety of ways between those of diverse cultures. A Western gender specialist may have a different perspective on equality and the design and implementation of a program than that of a local Sri Lankan gender specialist who grew up within the culture and intimately knows the ins and outs of men and women’s roles. My observations have shown me that in such cases there can be biases on both sides. For example, a North American or European may believe that “universal” (sometimes perceived as code for “Western”) notions of equality are applicable in every circumstance and automatically lead to the betterment of a community. The ultimate principle of the UDHR, which has been crafted by leaders from all over the world, would certainly endorse the words of activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali:

When you say “my culture,” you are limiting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the West. You are saying, “freedom is not universal; it's just for us. They are entitled to their backwardness, to their misogyny. Those human beings there, they can be tortured; that's fine, because it's their culture. Genital mutilation, that's their thing. The Chinese can lock up their dissidents, and it's all fine.” It's my conviction that there are no Arab or Chinese or African or American categories of human rights. There are universal rights (Condé Nast Traveler 2008).

This may be the case in some situations, but in others it may not. As discussed in this study, the promotion of women’s empowerment can have the potential to hinder or downplay those of men. Salim (interview, March 24, 2009) calls this “reverse affirmative action” and the UNDP is discussing what those ramifications might be.

Other biases may compel South Asian gender specialists to discourage acceptance of Western or universalized principles of equality. This could be due to the fact that “rights” are rife with stereotypes that Westernized equality means the encouragement of immorality or women who would divorce their husband’s for trivial reasons. For some, women’s rights can be achieved through one’s own culture. However, I would question how the knowledge of male/female equality originally comes to any culture, whether it arises organically or is revealed through a process of culture sharing and communication. Many South Asian states are a part of the Non-Aligned Movement, which has expressed an approach based on self-reliance and the notion that each country would determine what development policies should best serve its people (Jain 2005:81).

This lack of unity towards what gender equality and a UDHR actually means for men and women worldwide may explain why the incorporation of a solid and effective gender

perspective is missing in many relief and development programs. This is not merely an issue in Sri Lanka or other developing nations. For over 60 years the United Nations has sought equality and justice for women around the globe, and even today the quest struggles on. “The search for what equality actually means for women has never stopped, both within and outside the UN...[and] the elusiveness of this aspiration [continues]” (Jain 2005:1).

Barriers to achieving gender equality may also be due to the fact that many men across the world have yet to buy into the idea. As men and women share interconnected lives, with a strong bias towards patriarchy and male power, the advances may only occur as men’s minds begin to change regarding the status and place of women. The move from patriarchy towards an appreciation of gender equality has not come without great efforts; even today gender often works in isolation from other relief, development and UN departments. If men, both at the institutional and beneficiary level of humanitarian organizations, don’t have a desire to advocate for the worth and rights of women, the advances for equal rights may be hindered. Jain explains how “unless that valuation of woman is budged, knocked down, the web of inequality in which women are caught may not quite tear” (2005:165). Amenthi’s story of the man who screamed at her during the food distribution saying that women always come “first” is telling. If men resent the women who come first in some relief operations, how much will this encourage them to support notions of equality with their spouses and other female relatives?

Another potential barrier in the struggle for gender equality deals with so-called “oppressive cultural practices.” In Sri Lanka this may look like the dowry system, early marriage, parents favoring male children, and the belief that men have a right to beat their wives to keep them in order and disciplined. In the developing world there have been many steps to implement laws which safeguard and protect women and their rights, but UNESCO has countered that “the existence of traditions and customs meant that mere legal equality was not sufficient to ensure equality. It [is] also necessary to change gender relations” (Jain 2005:32). This may be due to the fact that social sanctioning serves as a kind of informal law that is stronger than nation-wide dictates that are rarely implemented, as has occurred in Sri Lanka. Teresa (interview, March 17, 2009) suggests that rather than completely eliminating negative customs, the practices should be modified in a culturally appropriate way with a more rights based perspective. UNICEF’s South Asian teledrama, “Meena,” utilizes cause

and effect when showing how some traditions affect families, especially young women (UNICEF). Such a tool could be useful in building discussions on what is and is not a healthy cultural practice.

South Asian culture is typified by patriarchy, cohesion and social balance; and gender equality, whether willingly or not, disrupts this balance. If gender equality is presented as a way for people to exert their “individuality” (a common concept in the West) rather than as something which benefits the community as a whole, adjustments in thinking and performance may be hindered. Gender equality projects may do well if they are couched in terms of Sri Lankan social values and corporate identity.

This research also suggests that field and country level staff may have less academic/policy knowledge of gender whereas policymakers/expats working in foreign countries have limited knowledge of local gender constructs, thus creating the potential for gridlock on effective programming.

### **DISCUSSION OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN CRISIS**

Aid establishments have continued to express that they utilize policies of gender mainstreaming in all aspects of their work, from the institutional to the beneficiary level. Nevertheless it is often merely employed at the point of offering isolated programs for women’s empowerment amongst vulnerable populations. The crucial aspect of gender analysis, which often initiates the process of gender mainstreaming is also lacking in many organizations. Staff may merely use a policy-oriented checklist or questionnaire to try to determine men and women’s roles and issues, however rapid assessments may not always get to the core of social problems and repercussions of programming.

Assumptions play a large role in relief and development work, especially as it relates to gender mainstreaming and how men and women will utilize and understand the projects in which they involved. For example, in relief settings, women are often given the food initially in the belief that men will not use it properly. While this may be based on some level of truth, perhaps such an issue should not be generalized across the board for every emergency scenario. It could have negative consequences without a proper gendered understanding of each context. At times there seems to be a lack of interest in the gender perspective, especially when Westerners arrive and implement projects in emergency settings. They may

not feel it is important to consult with local experts in gender and thus may risk projects that only have short term or little effect.

There is room for growth in country and context-specific research which can inform gender mainstreaming staff on whether aid initiatives should merely focus on women or incorporate men in GAD as well. De Alwis' research and consultancies in Sri Lanka have clearly addressed this gap, specifically in regards to including men in projects. Anne Marie Goetz, an advisor with UNIFEM, "argues that focusing on women in isolation from their social relationships does little to address the power imbalances rooted in these social relations that lead to women's greater vulnerability to poverty" (Jain 2005:108). Thus gender mainstreaming is not accurately balanced when projects only focus on women.

The *du jour* initiative, both in long-term relief and development, remains microcredit financing amongst women's groups. This gender mainstreaming activity is seen as a solution which assists women in managing their own funds and increasing their personal empowerment. However, as the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) "points out, microcredit by itself cannot undo the larger structures that put women in poverty, and it cannot overcome the overpowering force of globalization on national economics. Nor does it undo gender-based discrimination that has been practiced for centuries" (Jain 2005:141).

Mainstreaming gender is additionally watered down by relief and development policymakers. Volumes of manuals and attendance at training sessions is used to alert national level INGO staff of the latest and greatest in themes such as "gender in emergencies," "disability and emergencies," "good governance and emergencies," "capacity building in emergencies," "livelihoods and emergencies" and the list goes on. Alexandra, a humanitarian manager who worked in Sri Lanka with a major INGO following the tsunami, explains:

One of the most serious challenges is the variety of demands placed on field staff to learn various approaches, understand the policies that relate to them and be able to apply them as well as the lack of integration among all these approaches. For example, most agencies expect staff to be able to implement approaches in accountability, protection, gender, conflict sensitivity, child-focused, disabilities, risk reduction, etc. beyond just having expertise in their specific sectoral area. All are important and valid approaches but in the middle of an emergency, it is often a lot to ask to conduct a separate assessment/analysis in each of these areas and have a distinct strategy for each (interview, July 3, 2009).

The solution? Alexandra says that her organization is working towards creating an integrated method which meets the needs of all the different sectors that should be addressed in crisis. However, this is a challenge as she and her colleagues are trying to avoid creating a 200-page document that explains another new “approach” to crisis programming (Alexandra, personal communication, July 15, 2009).

De Alwis believes that humanitarian organizations would also be better served by redesigning programs based on internal and external evaluations. Often, though, these reports are glanced over then thrown into a closet and the lessons learned are not applied. In some cases, organizations never even take the time to critically assess the impacts of their gendered programs (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). It is also helpful to consider the bias internal monitoring and evaluation teams can have when looking at how gender has been mainstreamed in projects. Creating a sense of objectivity is difficult in highly politicized and stressful relief situations and having the additional perspective of an experienced outsider may be helpful in creating projects that speak more to the needs of the recipient group.

Ultimately, the work of aid agencies is to increase the wellbeing and sustainability of a particular population. While top-down policies and solutions may be of use, a bureaucrat from USAID explains that “we [have] to learn to listen to those whom we [want] to assist and to understand how they [want] us to work with them, not for them” (Jain 2005:120). The rhetoric of “participatory” relief and development can be a fraught one, and often beneficiaries become dependent on aid agencies to offer them solutions rather than create their own. Helping the communities to find organic, locally based solutions to their gendered issues may be more fruitful than moving from one development theme or project to the next.

Inappropriate relief and development ideas will have implications in the lives of beneficiaries; some have suggested that aid programs even perpetuate systems of inequality (Jain 2005:120). This may be due to what Salim calls, the “reductionist” mentality of many humanitarian organizations (interview, March 24, 2009). If projects based on simplified understandings of people’s social worlds are implemented, the results may not be beneficial or have long-lasting results. Indeed, many humanitarian agencies seem to perpetuate the Band-Aid approach by offering external projects and schemes which do not get at the core of discrimination against women and the need for men to renegotiate their dominant roles in

light of a changing world (de Alwis, interview, March 9, 2009). Hyndman and de Alwis explain:

If organisations merely use the terms ‘women’ or ‘gender’ in an effort to ‘include’ gender programming in their projects without truly understanding power imbalances that lead to gender inequality in the local context, they will fail to address social, economic and political structures that hinder progress towards gender equality (2002).

Overall, I would suggest an approach to Gender and Development in crisis which involves an analysis of beneficiary social behavior, as well as knowledge of life prior to displacement; a robust gender assessment; the development of solid baseline gender indicators that can be used to measure project impact (a challenge when organizations continuously change design, monitoring and evaluation programming); the support of community participation when designing and implementing gender-sensitive programs; and finally, culturally appropriate education for children that encourages egalitarian gender roles.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS: MOVING TOWARDS POSITIVE GENDER PRACTICES IN CRISIS

In a world of rapidly shifting gender roles due to conflict, disaster and displacement, it is important to understand the processes and impacts of gendered programming provided by humanitarian organizations and the lives of those they serve. These projects are supported by donors from the world over who have a belief that aid agencies will use the funds responsibly and assist people in beneficial ways. Sri Lanka is an example of a country facing crisis and is flooded with INGO/NGOs attempting to aid struggling IDPs. It has been suggested that the objective of gender mainstreaming in crisis as an effort to encourage gender equality between the sexes is “an ambitious and well-intentioned policy” (Brown 2006:39). Humanitarian organizations have a window of opportunity to assist IDPs in a positive way. I would also suggest that they have a moral obligation to refrain from becoming bogged down in the tyranny of the urgent or theme of the year as they work in the best interests of their beneficiary population. Directors and project managers may want to consider focusing on long-term campaigns which reduce the vulnerability of women in crisis and incorporate frustrated men into meaningful projects and offer them methods that encourage positive coping strategies. Foreman states that “the challenge of the future is to create societies where women’s strengths achieves its full potential without relegating men to insignificance” (in Chant and Gutmann 2005:246).

Notwithstanding the fact that humanitarian organizations should design culturally appropriate strategies and projects, it is important to recognize that pushing gender equality is not always possible. People are unique individuals who will absorb, process and understand gendered programming in ways which may not always be the same as how relief staff understand it. However, as Brown discovered in his research amongst Burundian refugees, “making these ideas available and introducing gendered balanced mechanisms...leave an undeniable impression on refugees. The exchange of ideas may seem like a small consolation

for the loss that [refugees] have endured, yet these ideas can be the seeds for later change and development” (2006:39).

This research project has examined the ways in which men and women’s roles shift in crisis to contextualize the discussion of Gender and Development programming. It is a unique location, where aid practitioners are dealing not only with age-old customs and traditions but emerging femininities and masculinities. Their target populations are dealing with stress on a myriad of levels and INGO/NGOs must find ways to best assist displaced persons with few resources in a highly politicized environment. While gender is often seen as an “add-on” in relief, CIDA explains that having “a gender perspective...can help save lives. It can assist in the profiling and understanding of vulnerabilities and capacities...[and] assist agencies [in] channel[ing] resources to those most in need” (2003:3-4).

The discipline of anthropology is well suited to research the interworking of culture and institutions. Gardner and Lewis state how “anthropologists have for many generations worked within governmental and non-governmental organisations, demonstrating how much the discipline has to offer in terms of improving the work of developers” (1996:153). This research is meant to highlight the promising practices and challenges humanitarian agencies face when incorporating gender into various levels of their practice. The uneasy interplay of theory, policy and practice should be addressed in order to provide the best possible interventions and services for those struggling and hurting in crisis.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS**

Key recommendations have been gathered from a variety of sources, but chiefly from my own research and observations in Sri Lanka and India, as well as those offered through the literature. Recommendations in reports and evaluations are often listed in abundance, and may be overwhelming for national offices that have few resources as well as limited staff and funds. A useful approach may be to take one or two points and incorporate them with each successive year. It can serve as a continual improvement system within aid agencies that may be expanded upon and discussed as deemed appropriate by the organization.

- Seek to create opportunities of learning from the beneficiary population and allow them to partner in the design, monitoring and evaluation of programs.

- Understand locally constructed gender roles and how these can be utilized to promote gender equality.
- Consider partnering with local religious leaders (priests, imams, pastors and monks) to assist in creating a dialogue around gender equality and support in helping IDPs deal with their shifting gender roles.
- Appoint male and female gender contact points within aid agencies who can work in tandem on gender issues to reduce the stigma that gender is merely a women's issue.
- Employ gender sensitized males in key field positions when working with beneficiary men on gendered issues.
- Move away from expressing women's issues as isolated projects or themes, but explain the relevance of male and female interactions and interdependence on one another.
- Move away from "gender" as merely meaning "woman" by not allowing gender to work in isolation from other programs; gender should not merely be women working with women.
- Encourage creative and unique techniques in gender training, such as UNICEF's "Meena" teledrama which can engage adults just as well as children and discuss cause and effect of negative social practices.
- In all programming, design for behavioral change and plan for the means to achieve goals rather than just focusing on outcomes.
- Create awareness within communities of the benefits they will experience in a gender equal society.
- Determine step-by-step processes and achievable goals in implementing gender mainstreaming activities that make sense and are feasible in crisis (from relief to rehabilitation) based on INGO/NGO resources, staff and capabilities.
- Create gender-sensitive indicators unique to emergencies for use by design, monitoring and evaluation staff which can be based on the current IDP crisis and the tsunami.
- Work with beneficiary communities to understand the ways in which they would seek to work with someone who has suffered traumatic experiences via

personal/familial/religious networks rather than implement irrelevant Western psychosocial programming.

- Develop culturally sensitive psychosocial support for men (rather than just focusing on women and children).
- Strengthen partnerships and communication between INGO/NGO networks to eradicate duplicated and irrelevant programs.
- Consider alternatives to women-only microcredit groups that can include men and reduce male resentment.
- Employ external gender consultants to ensure objectivity in monitoring and evaluation of programs.
- Policymakers at partnership/global levels should create plans to strategically implement gender programming in crisis, taking into account the workloads and on-the-ground reality of their staff workers, rather than expecting the local office to be able to implement everything at once OR allow national-level offices to develop their own culturally specific gender programming.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The following topics may be helpful in additional knowledge creation as it relates to Gender and Development in crisis and serve humanitarian organizations as they seek to design more effective gendered programming in emergency and long-term relief situations.

- Utilizing reports and research of social scientists who have identified humanitarian organizations with good and promising gender practices, conduct field visits and evaluate and discuss the ways in which they mainstream gender in the “tyranny of the urgent.”
- Discuss effective and contextually appropriate psychosocial programs for men and women in crisis by evaluating current projects in IDP camps in northern Sri Lanka.
- Determine institutional change procedures for humanitarian organizations struggling to focus on and constructively implement gender programming based on their available resources via meetings in which proposed changes are presented, debated and discussed as to their practicality with key humanitarian policymakers and relevant field staff.

- Conduct participant observation and field research in IDP camps or with resettled IDP communities to give them voice and show how they understand and implement gendered programs into their lives and the ways in which gender roles play out in their daily environment.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**HUMANITARIAN STAFF INTERVIEW**  
**QUESTIONS**

1. Explain your role at this organization and how you entered this field of work.
2. Define “gender” for yourself and within your organizational context.
3. What do you feel is your organization’s mandate in regards to gender and gender equality?
4. How do you understand gender within NGO work?
5. Have you gone through gender training?
6. What does Gender and Development mean?
7. Does your organization have gender balance in your staff?
8. Do you feel men work better with male beneficiaries or women with female beneficiaries?
9. Is there such a thing as universal human rights or should individual cultures be able to define what those are?
10. In a long-term crisis, like the tsunami or the conflict, what are the men’s and woman’s programs that your organization conducts?
11. How would you rate gender analysis in emergency settings?
12. How do you understand gender mainstreaming?
13. How is gender mainstreamed in current relief efforts?
14. What are the gaps when mainstreaming gender in crisis?
15. Why do global policymakers create vast amounts of gender policy which cannot be realized in real-life situations?
16. Are your programs focused more on empowering women or men?
17. Does your organization work more with men or with women?
18. How are men adjusting to women’s increasing empowerment via NGO programs? Should NGOs encourage shifting gender roles? What happens to the men when women become empowered?
19. Explain the situation for men and women in the IDP camps.
20. Who is most vulnerable in crisis, men or women?
21. How are widows and female head of households treated in their communities?
22. Is women’s autonomy increasing because of displacement? How?
23. Does your organization facilitate any sort of family social “reunification” in crisis settings? Helping families cope and adjust to changing social structures?
24. Do you feel the traditional gender roles will return when people go back to their normal lives after the war ends?
25. What contributes to unique situations of gender equality amongst displaced persons?
26. What does “gender equality” look like within Sri Lankan culture?

27. What underlying cultural norms and traditions keep women from becoming empowered or achieving equality with men?
28. Discuss domestic violence in the camps.
29. Discuss the social challenges of dealing with domestic violence in Sri Lanka.
30. What are your ideas for rehabilitation if you could create an ideal program for men and women dealing with issues such as stress, alcoholism, and DV. What would your organization's next steps be if money was not an option?
31. In a perfect world, where would you like to see your organization go in better implementing and understanding "gender" in emergencies?

**APPENDIX B**  
**SOCIAL SCIENTIST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Explain your interest in gender issues and humanitarianism.
2. Does gender still equal women in Gender and Development?
3. How do women's empowerment programs affect the husband/wife relationship?
4. How does gender role change in conflict settings, specifically in camps amongst the IDP men and women?
5. Do you believe in universal human rights or that each culture determines what those rights are?
6. What underlying cultural norms and traditions continue to keep men dominating women in Sri Lanka?
7. Have you witnessed any NGO programs that have successfully dealt with breaking down patriarchal structures or attitudes?
8. Have you spoken to any open-minded IDP men in your research?
9. Do the men readily accept that their wives are making more money due to NGO microcredit projects?
10. NGOs historically engage women in projects. What are they doing for men in crisis?
11. Are there certain key topics that work in engaging men in a round about way regarding gender equality?
12. Why are NGOs afraid of moving from a "Band-aid" approach to long-term interventions and political campaigns?
13. Do NGOs speak with one another to make sure they aren't duplicating efforts?
14. Are NGOs engaged in any new and upcoming programs in crisis settings?
15. How are religious institutions being mobilized to assist NGOs in dealing with "gender" issues?
16. Discuss gender training within NGO organizations. How effective/ineffective is it?
17. Discuss the issue of domestic violence in IDP camps.
18. Explain the justification and reasons why men continuing to abuse their families.
19. How are NGOs helping survivors of domestic violence?
20. How are NGOs engaging men in domestic violence prevention?
21. How are boys taught to treat girls, and vice versa in Sri Lankan families?
22. Do NGOs have gender balance in their staff?
23. What will happen once the war ends?