



Drivers of Pathways and Leverage Points of Conflict in Mahaweli Resettlement Scheme in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Large-scale forced displacement and resettlement present significant challenges to humanity in the modern world. A portion of the indigenous community in Sri Lanka was resettled as part of the Mahaweli Development project, impacting their original environment and traditional way of life, leading to disputes among various groups. The main objective of this research was to identify the central drivers of conflict that arose in a resettled community due to a modern development project. Data was collected through qualitative and quantitative methods, including focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis revealed social, economic, political, and environmental factors as the main contributors to conflict. Within these main drivers, cultural factors, social adaptability, land use patterns, traditional way of life, poverty, modernized development practices, macro-level policy design, weak implementation, intervention of powerful political groups, administrative patterns, resource scarcity, land and forest encroachment, overconsumption of common pool resources, and resource abundance were identified as key leverage points. The escalating conflict in rural resettlement schemes in Sri Lanka is primarily attributed to a lack of attention to conflict resolution and the neglect of minority and affected communities. It is crucial to identify these conflict drivers and leverage points to effectively address and prevent conflicts.

Key Words: Conflict, Drivers, Indigenous Community, Livelihood, Mahaweli Development Project, Resettlement

1. Introduction

Large-scale forced displacement and resettlement pose one of the greatest challenges to humanity in the contemporary world. It distorts regional, national, and local economies and tears apart communities and families (Hitchcock, 2012). Many countries implement resettlement schemes to provide housing, livelihood opportunities, and essential services such as education, health, and sanitation for displaced populations in new locations. However, research has shown that many resettlement schemes often face challenges in implementation and lack understanding of the socio-cultural context in which livelihood programs are conducted (Seto et al., 2023). Some studies on resettlement have examined its economic impacts. Negative consequences such as disruption of economic activities, loss of livelihoods, loss of fertile lands, and limited access to livelihood resources have been identified (Naab et al., 2016; Yankson et al., 2018). The disruption of economic activities due to resettlement has serious adverse effects on all aspects of the lives of the affected population.

From a conflict perspective, investigating the social drivers of conflicts in resettlement communities would offer valuable insights for conflict management and resolution interventions in the country. In this

study, aim is to explore the sociocultural, political, and environmental factors that contribute to conflicts and examine how these drivers escalate community conflicts and impede social cohesion, especially in resettled communities in Sri Lanka. This qualitative research study investigates the drivers and pathways of conflict in resettlement schemes. The main research questions were: 1) what are the main drivers that emerge and escalate conflicts in resettlement schemes? This aimed to identify causes of tension and conflict among affected communities, government, and other stakeholders. 2) What leverage points can be identified to mitigate conflict and enhance cooperation in the resettlement process? This question was used to explore specific interventions or strategies that can be implemented to reduce conflict and improve outcomes for the resettled population. The main objective of the study was to understand the dynamics of conflict in a resettlement context and identify potential solutions. The Greed and Grievances theory has been used to understand the background of conflict drivers in the area. The theory has been linked with drivers of conflicts and how they can become leverage points for resettlement schemes. By doing so, this research aims to enhance the understanding of the influence of drivers on conflicts in resettlement schemes and encourage further research on understanding conflicts in resettlement schemes and strategies to promote conflict management and resolution.

Resettlement schemes are increasingly seen as a crucial strategy for accommodating displaced populations (Drolet et al., 2017). Four main causal agents catalyze massive forced displacement and resettlement: natural disasters (such as floods and earthquakes), persecution (based on ethnicity or religion), development programs (such as dam construction, infrastructure projects, and urban development), and violent conflicts (Schulz & Taylor, 2018). Studies on post-conflict resettlement have focused on the consequences of displacement and the capacity for resettlement (Setiowati et al., 2023). Some research has examined patterns of post-conflict resettlement, which can vary along two dimensions: whether displaced civilians cluster together or resettle independently, and whether they remain within their home country or not. These factors combine to create four resettlement patterns: expulsion, segregation, integration, and dispersion (Steele, 2019). Some studies have found that conflict-induced resettlement has led to issues such as destruction and displacement. This has necessitated reconstruction and resettlement, posing additional challenges for the inhabitants of war-afflicted urban centers (Hemer, 2015). Another study focused on the aftermath of war and mass migration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) back to their places of origin. This study mainly explores the challenges and prospects in the resettlement and reintegration of IDPs (IDPs) (Andnet, 2017).

Some studies have shown that displaced or resettled communities experience various negative impacts, including loss of identity, loss of artifacts, loss of traditional homes, loss of ancestral places of worship, loss of grave sites, decline in social cohesion, and neglect of chieftaincy issues (Markos Mamude & Alemu, 2021; Naab et al., 2016; Yankson et al., 2018). Relocating people from culturally and spiritually significant areas in developing countries can have a detrimental impact on their psychosocial wellbeing. Many individuals in these regions have deep emotional connections to their ancestors, heritage, and ancient living spaces. Moving them from these cherished places can disrupt their sense of identity and belonging, leading to psychological distress (Markos Mamude & Alemu, 2021, Ogaboh et al., 2010; Yeboah et al., 2020).

Another cluster of studies provides evidence on the environmental problems caused by resettlement. These studies highlight the negative impact of resettlement on the environment, such as deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and disruption of ecosystems. Additionally, they point out the challenges of managing waste and pollution in resettlement areas. These studies highlight the importance of implementing sustainable and environmentally friendly practices during the resettlement process (Connell & Lutkehaus, 2017; Guilherme & Aguiar, 2017)

These studies offer valuable insights into the effects of resettlement schemes, shedding light on potential socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts. Surprisingly, research on resettlement schemes worldwide has primarily focused on the challenges faced by resettled individuals, with limited attention given to the post-resettlement conflict impact. Even when studies have attempted to examine the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of resettlement schemes, they have often been selective in their focus, exploring only specific aspects of the topic. For instance, some researchers attempted to evaluate the impact of resettlements on economic issues such as livelihood sustainability (Naab et al., 2016; Yankson et al., 2018), socio-cultural issues (Ogaboh et al., 2010; Atindana et al., 2015; Obour et al., 2016), and environmental issues (Obour et al., 2016; Forsyth & Peiser, 2021).

This type of impact assessment may lead to a limited understanding of the actual effects of resettlement

schemes on the resettled individuals and their social lives. For example, studies that solely concentrate on livelihood issues may overlook evidence of conflicts within the settlement scheme, which are crucial for the sustainability of planned resettlement programs and the well-being of the settlers in the post-resettlement phase. When considering indigenous peoples, it becomes even more critical to assess the impact of resettlement schemes on their social structures and cultural practices (Korah et al., 2019).

The current body of research primarily focuses on conflict-induced displacement, resettlement, and its impact on the resettlement process (Fiala, 2015; Setiowati. et.al. 2023; Emmanuel et al., 2020). Although some studies have investigated the social, economic, and cultural impacts of resettlement schemes, there has been less focus on conflicts within these schemes (Emmanuel et al., 2020).

In order to establish the Maduru Oya forest reservation, communities residing within the forest were displaced, leading to the resettlement of these communities near the project area. Like any resettlement scheme involving the relocation of a large number of people, the Maduru Oya reservoir resettlement scheme may have unintended negative impacts. It is crucial to assess the scheme's negative effects on different aspects of human well-being to determine if it has achieved the desired impact or if it has resulted in adverse consequences (Gunda et al., 2015). The lack of such valuable data may limit our understanding of the holistic impacts of the scheme and the lessons needed to (re)design effective future resettlement programs. Due to the project, the indigenous community residing in Maduru Oya forest had to relocate and adapt to a completely unfamiliar environment and way of life. As a result, their native environment was altered, leading to a parallel transformation of their traditional way of life. The group had to depend on an agricultural lifestyle, which was unfamiliar to them. They had to convert their livelihood to agriculture, and their livelihoods relied entirely on natural resources. With the population increasing, resources were not enough, ultimately leading to an increase in both intra-group and inter-group conflicts in the settlement scheme.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Greed and Grievances Theory

The rational choice paradigm explains conflicts that result from decisions made by individuals or groups. Literature on rational choice and conflict suggests a close connection between greed and grievances in recent conflicts involving natural resources (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). According to Paul Collier and Hoeffler, conflicts driven by greed are often masked as collective grievances but actually stem from elite competition for valuable natural resources. Economic, political, and social inequalities are deemed insignificant in this context, as these grievances are prevalent in all societies.

The greed and grievances theory elucidates how economic interests can lead to conflicts over natural resources. In the Mahaweli resettlement area, conflicting interests in land ownership, water rights, and resource access frequently ignite conflicts. According to this theory, conflicts arise from a mix of factors, including a quest for resources and grievances arising from perceived injustices or inequalities. In the context of natural resource conflicts in the Mahaweli resettlement area, competition for scarce resources like land, water, and forests can trigger tensions among different groups. Moreover, grievances related to displacement, loss of livelihoods, unstable livelihoods, and unequal resource distribution can further escalate conflict and strain relations among communities in the area.

3. Methodology

3.1 Description of the Maduru Oya project Under the Mahaweli Development Project and Resettlement

The Mahaweli Development Project (MDP) is the largest irrigation-based multipurpose development program in Sri Lanka and one of the largest agriculture-related programs globally. It was primarily implemented in the North Central region of Sri Lanka, covering a significant portion of the country's dry zone. The main objectives of the project include mitigating rural unemployment, reducing population pressure in the Wet Zone, providing land to landless farmers, achieving self-sufficiency in rice production, alleviating poverty, and generating hydropower.

The MDP, which was expedited, is Sri Lanka's most extensive development initiative. Its goal was to utilize the 335-kilometer-long Mahaweli River for hydropower generation and artificial irrigation. The project aimed to cultivate 640,000 acres of previously uncultivated agricultural land. It focused on three main components: constructing the headworks of the Victoria Dam, implementing downstream engineering works, and developing irrigation systems in downstream districts. The Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project relocated over 14,000 families, providing them with irrigated low-lying areas for

farming and personal gardens (Ranaweera & Ratnayake, 2017). The MDP converted forested areas inhabited by indigenous populations into catchment areas and wildlife reserves, leading to the fragmentation of the former "Veddas' Country" into alphabetical divisions (Takesada et al., 2008). The government also planned to establish a network of national parks that would extend from the boundaries of the newly acquired territories to the eastern coastline, creating a sequence of organic sanctuaries. The Maduru Oya National Park, spanning approximately 51,468 hectares, was established on November 9, 1983, as the ancestral territory of the Veddas. The park is currently managed by the Mahaweli Development Authority (Ranaweera, & Ratnayake, 2020).

The indigenous group's traditional methods of sustenance were suddenly declared illegal by the legal system. Poachers are descendants of ancient hunters and gatherers. Deprived of their primary means of survival, they turned to the government for assistance (Geekiyanage, & Pushpakumara, 2013). In 1983, as part of the accelerated Mahaweli Project, a policy decision was made to relocate the indigenous people living in Kandeganvila, a community located in Dabana within the Maduru Oya forest (Blundell, 2013). The individuals were resettled in the village of Henanigala (South) within the Mahaweli System C. The proposal suggests converting the remaining section of tropical forest, currently inhabited by indigenous people in Sri Lanka, into colonies and catchment areas for wildlife reserves (Ranasinghe & Cheng, 2017). A total of 5300 individuals from the indigenous community, including men, women, and children, were forcibly relocated to distant regions, disrupting their closely-knit social structure. The relocation lands are located outside the forest in rice-growing regions unfamiliar to the Veddas and unsuitable for their traditional small-scale farming practices. Consequently, the Veddas began to view other humans as intruders in their own forest (Blundell, 2013).

3.2 Target Population and Site

The research was conducted in Hennenigala South Village in the Dehiaththakandiya Divisional Secretariat area of Sri Lanka. The target population consisted of 1085 resettlers who belong to an indigenous community that was resettled due to the Maduru Oya reservation MDP in 1985. This area is known for its rich resources, leading to frequent conflicts between humans and animals.

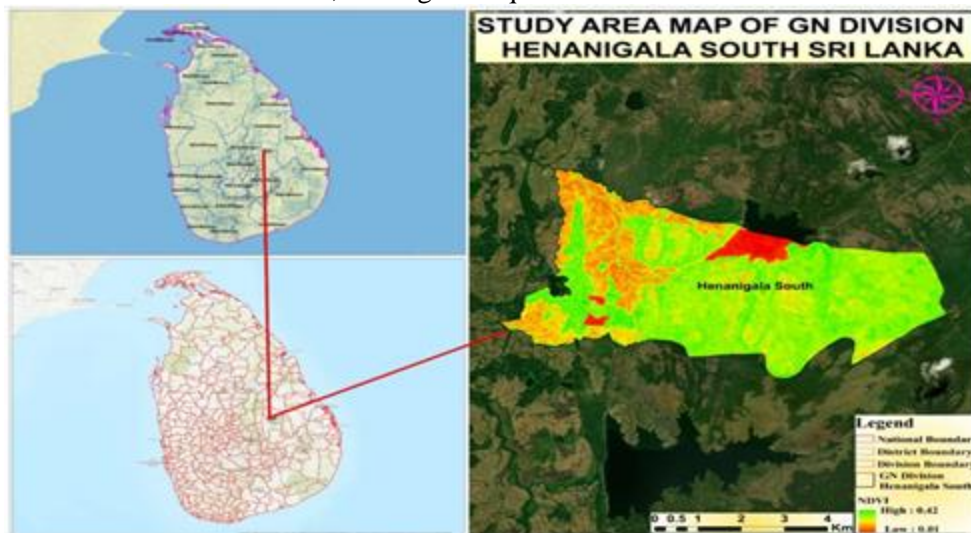


Figure 01: The Study Area Map

3.3 Natural Resources in the Study Area

The study site is a resource-rich area, as shown in Figure 02, which illustrates the natural resource diversification of the area. Respondents identified the most valuable resources in the area and emphasized that these resources are crucial for sustaining their lives and livelihoods.

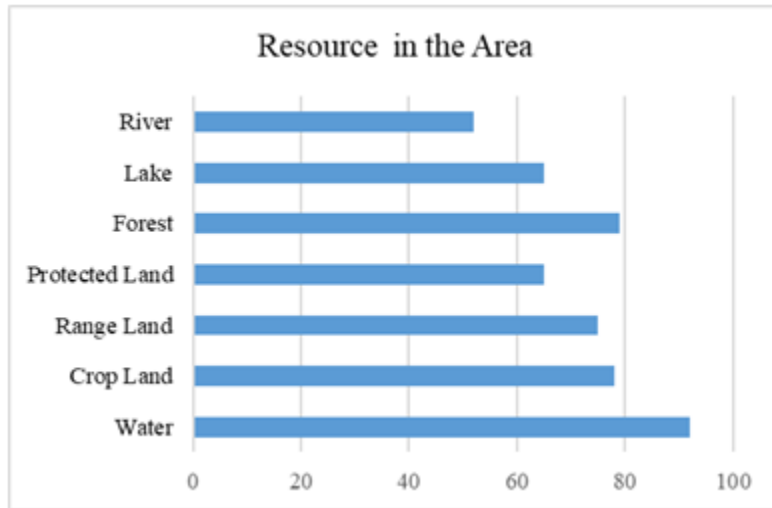


Figure 02: Important and usage of resources in the study area

Figure 02 illustrates the utilization and significance of resources in resettlement schemes for residents. Water, at 92%, emerges as a crucial natural resource in the study area. The increasing demand for fresh water resources is driven by factors such as population growth, pollution, contamination, and the degradation of watersheds. The forest, at 79%, is the second most important resource, providing herbal plants, bee honey, wood, timber, and shrubs for the community's daily needs. Crop land and range land are nearly equal at 78% and 75%, respectively, ranking as the third and fourth most vital resources for the resettlers. These lands are essential for the majority of the population's livelihoods. Fisheries resources are also significant, particularly in relation to the rivers, lakes, and streams in the area, such as Maduru Oya and Hennanigala Lake.

3.4 Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected through a mixed-method study, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. The primary data collection methods included focus groups, interviews, surveys, and ethnography. The data collection tools included unstructured interviews with settlers, key informant interviews with community leaders and government officers, questionnaires, and non-participant observations. Respondents were selected to ensure representation of various resource sources, population sizes, and generational differences, using a combination of snowball and stratified sampling techniques. The researcher lived with local host families in different parts of the village during fieldwork, allowing for observation of seasonal variations in livelihoods and resource sources, as well as interviews on the drivers of conflicts and resettlement schemes. A total of 35 in-depth interviews were conducted.

Table 01: Interviewee Breakdown

Women	Men	Age Range	1 st Generation	2 nd Generation	3 rd Generation
13	22	25-75	17	10	8

Source: Field Research - 2023

The semi-structured interviews covered topics such as the resettlement process, hardships and opportunities in the area, daily activities, household division of labor, water collection and allocation, resource existence and usage, cultural perceptions, impacts of resettlement, land usage and allocation, support from responsible parties, and intervention of outsiders for resources. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents were men.

The study also utilized observation guides to examine the drivers and nature of resource usage, which are perceived as sources of conflict in the study location. Additionally, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant (KI) interviews were conducted. Three FGDs were held to gain insights into the drivers of conflict in the study location, involving women's groups, fishermen, and a group of men engaged in hunting, gathering bee honey, and wild meat as a livelihood in forest areas. Each FGD consisted of 8-10 respondents. Five KI interviews were conducted with key individuals, including the Unit Manager of the Mahaweli Development Authority (MDA) in the area, a Forest Officer, an officer from the Hennaigala Army Camp, the chairman of the fisheries association, and the chairman of the water association.

A total of six key informant interviews were conducted with government officials, including the Mahaweli Unit Manager, Forest Officer, and Village Officer (Grama Niladhari). Additionally, three leaders of the community association in the area were interviewed. Thirty-five in-depth interviews were conducted with resettled individuals. Overall, both men (n = 20) and women (n = 15) participated in the study, representing diverse socio demographic backgrounds and different generations as indicated in Table 2. Table 3 presents the themes identified through the analysis, along with their corresponding descriptors. The narratives provided include insights from key informant interviews (KI), in-depth interviews (II) with community members, and focused group discussions (FGD) with fisheries groups and hunters.

Table Number 02: Demographic information of respondents

Index	Sex	Age	Civil Status	Highest Educational Qualification	Mode of Employment
In-depth interviews with community members (II)					
01	Female	41	Married	8 th Grade	Housewife
02	Male	55	Married	No Schooling	Hunting/Fishing/Bee collecting/Shaman Honey
03	Male	26	Unmarried	G.C.E.(O/L)	Cultivation/Yak Guru
04	Male	57	Married	No Schooling	Cultivation
05	Female	50	Married	No Schooling	Cultivation/ Fishing
06	Female	32	Married	Grade 11	Pre-School Teacher
07	Male	60	Married	No Schooling	Cultivation
08	Male	60	Married	No Schooling	Cultivation/Fishing
09	Male	40	Married	Grade 5	Cultivation
10	Male	26	Unmarried	Grade 8	Cultivation/Musician
11	Male	53	Married	No Schooling	President Vedi Society/Shaman
12	Female	32	Married	Grade 11	Housewife
13	Male	34	Married	Grade 11	Soldier in the Army
14	Male	36	Married	Grade 5	Farming
15	Female	42	Married	Grade 11	Provincial Council Member
16	Female	42	Married	Grade 8	Cultivation
17	Male	39	Married	G.C.E.(O/L)	Retired Army Soldier/Provincial Council Candidate
18	Male	65	Married	No Schooling	No Employment/ Hired Worker/Fishing
19	Male	68	Married	No Schooling	Cultivation/ Bee Honey Collecting
20	Male	62	Married	No Schooling	Cultivation
21	Female	59	Married	Grade 8	Housewife
22	Female	32	Married	First Degree	Teaching
23	Male	65	Married	No Schooling	Cultivation
24	Male	67	Married	No Schooling	Leader of the Indigenous Community in Henanigala
25	Female	40	Married	Grade 8	Housewife/Cultivation
26	Female	24	Married	Grade 11	Housewife
27	Female	39	Married	Grade 5	Housewife
28	Female	38	Married	Grade 8	Housewife
29	Female	27	Married	Grade 8	Housewife
30	Male	31	Married	G.C.E. (O/L)	Civil Security Soldier/ Hakme Shaman
31	Female	63	Married	No Schooling	Housewife
32	Male	65	Married	No Schooling	Leader Secondary level/ Cultivation
33	Male	30	Unmarried	First Degree	Teaching/Announcer

34	Male		Unmarried	Grade 09	Ex-Soldier
35	Male	35	Married	No Schooling	Hired Labour/ Fishing
Key Informant Interviews (KI)					
1	Male	45	Married	GCE A/L	Village Officer
2	Male	47	Married	Graduate	Mahaweli Unit Manager
3	Male	52	Married	GCE A/L	Forest Officer
4	Male	62	Married	Grade 10	Farmer (Chairman of Farmer Association)
5	Male	55	Married	No Schooling	Fisherman (Chairman of Fishery Association)
6	Female	42	Married	GCE)/L	Unemployment (Chairman of water Association)

Source: Field Data - 2023

Table 03: Themes and descriptors.

4. Result and Discussion of the Study

4.1 Result of the Study

The indigenous community is a unique social group with social characteristics that differ from the dominant social norms (Setiowati et al. 2021). For a long time, they lived in the forest and were known for sustaining themselves through Chena cultivation and hunting, using a simple production strategy (Stirrat, 2006). The indigenous social group was forcibly relocated as part of the MDP, the largest development initiative in Sri Lanka.

Theme 01: Social Drivers of the conflicts in the Resettlement Schemes

Figure 3 summarizes the social drivers of the conflict in the area. It identifies three major drivers: Cultural factors and social adaptability, land deviation and usage, and traditional way of life.

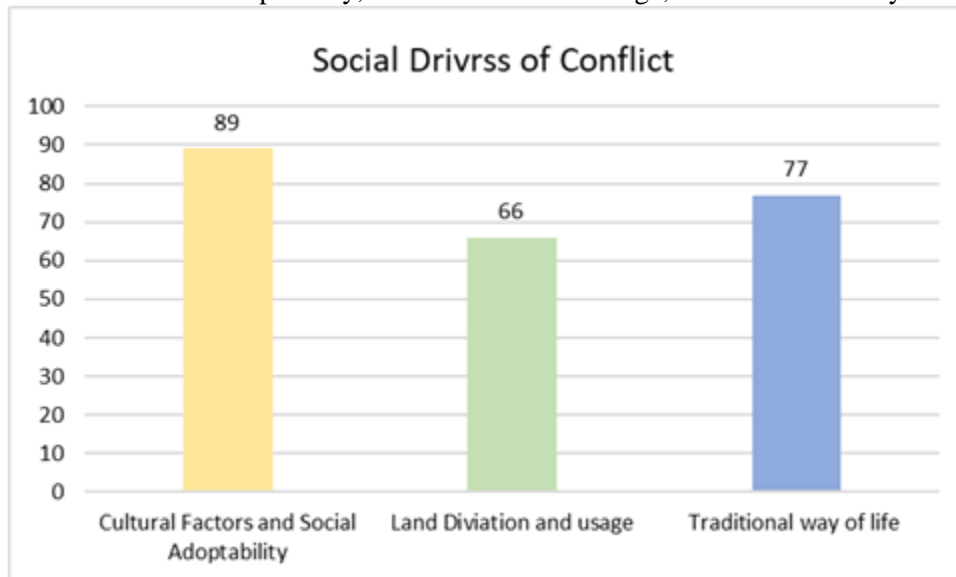


Figure 3: Social Drivers of Conflict in the Resettlement Scheme

Source: Field Research - 2023

According to Chart 02, cultural factors and social adaptability (89%) are the primary social drivers causing conflict within resettled communities. Land, water, and timber resources hold historical and cultural significance for indigenous people, who are deeply connected to ancient civilizations, historical artifacts, and cultural practices. These natural resources are essential to the collective identity of the community. The indigenous community views certain elements of the natural environment, such as forests and water sources, as having divine or supernatural importance based on their religious and cultural beliefs. Their behavior reflects a commitment to preserving these resources in a sustainable manner to maintain their way of life. This situation highlights the importance of understanding and respecting the cultural and historical ties that indigenous communities have to their environment.

“We have resettled here in order to adopt to agricultural life setting before 35 years. Still we could not properly adopt to agricultural setup. We had a strong bond with Environment. Environment and our culture was not two. It was same. After resettlement we had to adhere agricultural practices that we never used to practice. There is dilemma in between livelihood and social adoptability since we have no proper behavior to adapt to the new environment. Due to this reason, there is conflict with Mahaweli Officers and us” (Male, 72-years-old, II).

Land use patterns and deviation (66%) of the area also a main social drivers for the conflict in and unusual land usage practices have occurred when the demand for land resources increase and cannot be met by the existing supply. Because, the Mahaweli Development Authority (MDA) has neither planned nor distributed land for second and third generation and they have allocated range land for separate purpose instead the allocation of lands for later generations. The land resource has been primarily allocated for agricultural practices in the area, with the rest allocated for residential use. Lack of land for later generations and their usage of land has been violate the MDA rules and policies have become causes for conflicts. The following statement has explained how land become driver for the conflict in the area.

“We have two acres of farmland and half an acre of inland. We are now in the third generation, and we do not have enough land to divide among all family members. We have requested land for the second and third generations multiple times, but no action has been taken. Despite not having land to allocate to us, some land has been allocated to large-scale farm companies.”(Male, 75-years-old, II).

Further Mahaweli Unit Manager supports this.

“When the MDA distributed land, they were made aware of the rules and regulations regarding these lands. However, they are now violating these rules and have been using the Mahaweli lands illegally. Several issues have arisen regarding Mahaweli lands due to changes in land use patterns.” (Male, 45-years old KI)

These individuals must utilize their lands and shared lands, leading to changes in land use patterns in the area. The conflicts in the region stem from changes in land consumption and allocation practices. While the community has the right to use the land in this region, the actual ownership of the land belongs to the MDA. Agrarian problems encompass challenges faced by smallholder agriculture, such as low productivity, income, crop failures, indebtedness, and landlessness (Silva 2023). The transformation of agricultural lands, originally designated for farming, into residential areas by the second and third generations, as well as the use of the land for activities other than agriculture, has contributed to conflicts between the two generations, the community, and the MDA.

4.2 Theme 02: Economic Drivers of Conflict in Resettlement Scheme

The summary status of economic drivers of conflict in the resettlement scheme is depicted in Figure 4. The main four economic drivers that have impacted conflict in the scheme are modernized economic development pressure and the dialectics of development, poverty, lack of funds to expand resource capacity, and connections with the commercial industry.

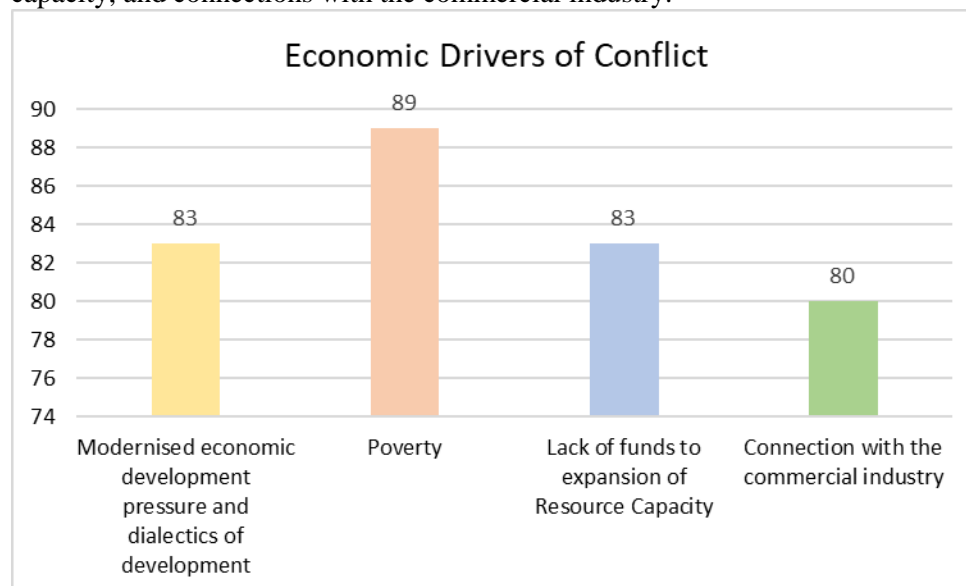


Figure 4: Economic Drivers of Conflict in Resettlement Scheme

Source: Field Research - 2023

Modern economic development pressures and the dialectics of development have led to conflicts in the area. Hunting has been the primary means of sustenance for this indigenous community for millennia, aligning with their identity and tradition (Köpke et al., 2018). Their primary economic activities included Chena cultivation, hunting, and gathering beehives and traditional herbs, leading to a self-sufficient status. However, resettlement brought significant changes to their way of life. They were prohibited from accessing the familiar forest, leading to conflicts with forest officers when they attempted to enter the forest for hunting. In the resettlement schemes, their economic status was measured differently from their self-sufficient pre-relocation era. They were now evaluated based on new criteria of progress, categorizing them as economically poor and underdeveloped. This dilemma highlights how modernized development has led to economic challenges for the community, creating conflicting conditions.

“The forest was a rich area with abundant resources, but the government selected the Dry Zone for their development projects, forcing us to leave the forest in the name of progress. In the forest, we had a self-sufficient lifestyle and everything we needed. However, in our new location, we lack money as most people struggle to meet their daily needs. We are not familiar with modernized agriculture, and the transition has been challenging. Since leaving the forest, we have encountered numerous hardships, leading to conflicts with various parties.” (Male, 65 years old, II)

Economic poverty, affecting 89% of the population, is the primary driver of conflict in the region. Many individuals engage in illegal activities in the forest to generate income due to their impoverished conditions. The community has shifted towards a consumerist culture, moving away from their traditional way of life. This shift has led to conflicts over the exploitation of environmental resources essential for their survival, resulting in tensions between forest officers and the community. The forest officers are in support of addressing this issue.

“Although the community is not allowed to enter the forest without a license, some individuals still enter illegally. When caught, they are fined a significant amount of money. However, once they pay the fine, they often return to illegal foresting because they lack the economic means to meet their daily needs.” (Male – 52 years old KI).

The lack of funds to increase resource capacity for resource development (83%) has led to resource conflicts. This has resulted in a decrease in the quantity and quality of resources, such as the reconstruction of water tanks, which in turn affects resource distribution. Population growth further exacerbates the issue by dividing the available resources among people unequally, leading to disparities in resource allocation within the settlement. This unequal distribution can cause conflicts among settlers. Grama Niladhari (Village Officer) has highlighted this issue.

“In the past, MDA provided funds for development activities in the area, including expanding resources such as irrigation canals and cleaning and expanding the lake. However, funding has not been allocated recently, leading to a severe issue. The lake is now overrun with invasive plants, hindering fishing activities. Unfortunately, we lack the necessary resources to remove these plants.” (Male 47 years old)

4.3 Theme 03: Political Drivers of Conflict in resettlement Scheme

Figure 5 summarizes the political drivers of conflict in the resettlement schemes as reported by the respondents.

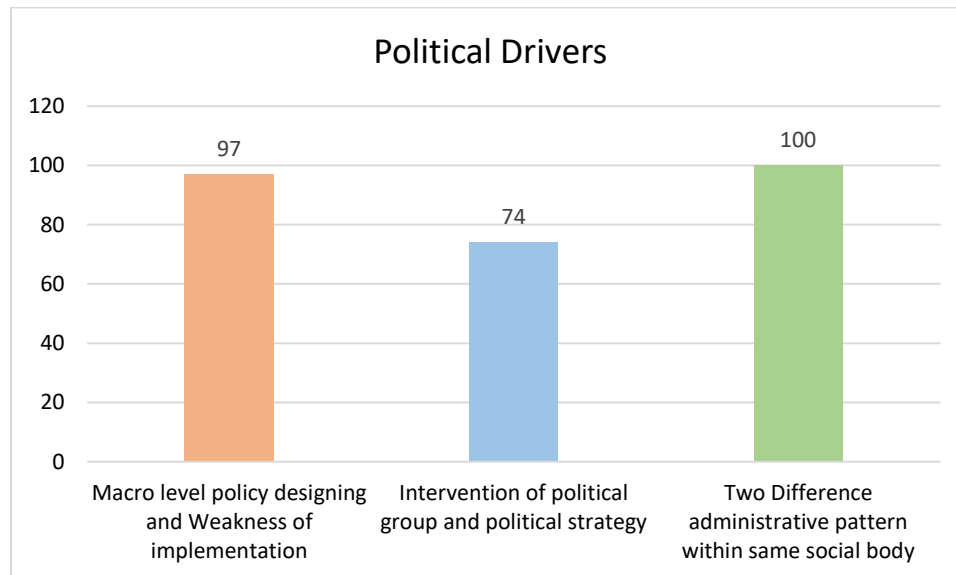


Figure 5: Political Drivers of Conflict on resettlement Scheme

Source: Field Research - 2023

The figure highlights the importance of macro-level policy design and the challenges in implementation, as well as the influence of political groups and their strategies on administrative patterns within a society. The adherence to two different administrative systems within the same social body has emerged as a major driver (100%) of conflict. Modern administrative systems often reflect contemporary societal norms, while indigenous structures are rooted in cultural values, leading to significant disparities between the two. This discrepancy has caused disorganization within the traditional social framework as it adjusts to the new administrative framework. This disorganization can contribute to conflicts between the traditional and contemporary administrative systems. When a community adopts two different administrative structures, conflicts can arise among community members and stakeholders. This situation is further elaborated in the following statement.

“Before resettling here, we were completely obedient to our leader ‘Thisahami.’ Then we followed the leader of our group, Rahe. After resettlement, we had to adhere to the rules of the Mahaweli office and also follow our leader. This created internal conflicts within our group.” (The leader of the resettled indigenous community)

Due to unequal social conditions, the community faced numerous conflicts. The lack of public participation and transparency is a persistent issue stemming from a top-down decision-making approach. When communities are not adequately engaged in natural resource decision-making, they are more likely to oppose related decisions and outcomes.

“We have two governing systems: our traditional system and a new administrative process. For centuries, we followed traditional leadership, but with the shift to modern administration, we have lost our traditional governing body. In the past, we had access to the forest, but now we do not. As a result, we are now struggling to navigate the new administrative procedures to reclaim our rights.” (Male, 56-years-old, II)

The lack of effective implementation of macro-level policies (97%) is the second most significant factor contributing to conflict in the area. The socio-economic and religious development of this community has not aligned with the cultural or political evolution of Sri Lanka as a whole. The planning of the MDP has overlooked the needs of minority populations, leading to a reduced ability to address the specific demands of these social groups (Paranage 2018). As an independent social group, this community has experienced marginalization within the broader social context, resulting in the perpetuation of stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination. These factors have further exacerbated conflicts within these communities. The development policies that have been implemented have not effectively included the indigenous community. This condition can be identified through the following statement.

“We were self-sufficient economically in our previous location. However, upon resettlement, we lost this self-sufficiency, and the government did not consider how to maintain our traditional lifestyle in the new area. Our children are required to attend formal education, even though they struggle to adapt to the new

environment. We are not allowed to access the forest. When developing and implementing policies, authorities should consider our unique needs as a distinct group.” (Female, 57-years-old, II)

Contemporary education systems have evolved significantly from traditional practices. However, children in certain communities are still required to adhere to outdated methods, creating disconnect between their school learning and real-world application. Policy makers often overlook the diverse needs of communities when implementing education policies, leading to conflicts within and between communities.

Political intervention, accounting for 74% of conflicts, plays a significant role in exacerbating tensions. Land use and rights are governed by a mix of statutory, customary, and formal rules, but external influences have introduced informal regulations through powerful political figures. Illegal activities, such as forest encroachment and deforestation by criminal groups, further escalate conflicts by crossing settlement boundaries and impacting natural resources. Conflicts arise when one group infringes on the rights of another, leading to tensions and disputes. (Wick & Bulte, 2006). This community often faces discriminatory policies, rights, and laws that marginalize certain resource-user groups. When one group controls access to natural resources to the detriment of others, communities dependent on those resources suffer. In this case, powerful individuals outside the community exploit forest resources while the local community is banned from entering the forest. This unequal distribution of benefits leads to negative feelings and tensions within the community (Kelechi Johnmary Ani, 2023).

“Outsiders have encroached upon our lands illegally, leveraging the political power of regional leaders. They disregard government instructions and interventions. These resources belong to us, so how can they use them in an illegal manner?” (Female, 47-years-old, II)

4.4 Environmental Drivers of Conflict in Resettlement Scheme

The main environmental drivers of conflict in the area are resource scarcity (100%) and common pool environmental resources (86%). Figure 6 illustrates the frequency of these factors contributing to conflict in the resettlement scheme.

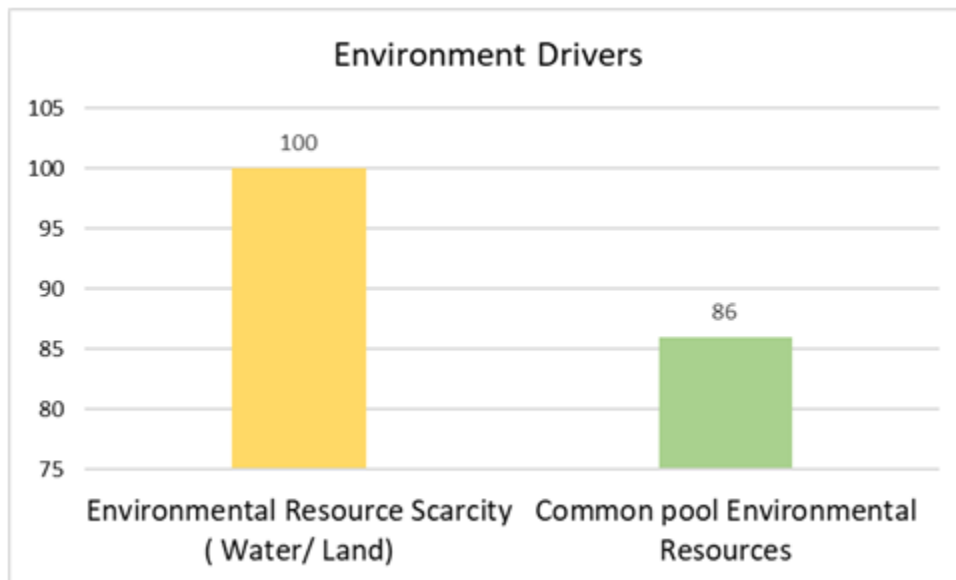


Figure 6: Environmental Drivers of Conflict in Resettlement Scheme

Source: Field Research - 2023

Resource scarcity is the primary environmental driver of conflict in the area. This scarcity manifests in various ways, including demand-induced scarcity, supply-induced scarcity, and structural scarcity (Shafwaty Saat & Lin 2018) in the area. Demand-induced scarcity occurs when the demand for a resource exceeds the available supply in the system (Hargreaves, 2015). Water and land fall into this category as the scarcest resources. Initially, there were sufficient resources for the resettlement, but as the population grew, consumption and demand increased while resources decreased. Water scarcity is a significant factor leading to conflicts and impacting various aspects of human security (Harris, 2002). Communities in the dry zone, who rely on agriculture as their primary source of income, face significant water scarcity (Fernando et al. 2021) 2021).

“The land was sufficient for the first generation, but now there is a lack of land for the second and third generations. We have raised this issue with the responsible parties, but no solution has been provided. Our second and third-generation families require more land.” (Male, 72-years-old, II)

Supply-induced scarcity occurs when the total supply of resources in an area is reduced (Abiodun Alao, 2007). Water supply, fisheries, and land resources are the main sources that can lead to supply-induced scarcity in the area. A reduction in the availability of these resources can threaten the livelihoods and lives of the people, leading to competition among users. This competition has resulted in conflicts among communities and responsible parties. The chairman of the water association supports this initiative.

“We are all facing a serious issue with access to clean drinking water. The Sri Lanka Navy has set up a water purification system in the area, but it is not sufficient to meet the needs of everyone. To address this, we are collecting funds to maintain the purification system. However, the distribution of water has become complicated and has led to conflicts. ” (Female, 42-years-old, KI).

Structural scarcity is a key factor contributing to resource scarcity (Silva , 2023). The limited resources in the resettlement scheme can lead to conflicts in the area. There is no mechanism in place to increase these resources, so when outsiders intervene, competition arises between insiders and outsiders, resulting in conflict.

“Some abandoned lands that belong to the MDA have been grabbed by outsiders, while resettled communities are continuously requesting and fighting for lands for their second and third generations. These outsiders are consuming these lands without any barriers. Some settlers leave home early in the morning and return in the evening. They wait at the Mahaweli office to report their grievances regarding lands. Despite leaving the office without hope, they return the next day with renewed hope for acquiring lands. (An observation narration)

Common pool environmental resources and resource abundance (86%) have become important environmental drivers for conflict. Communities need to collectively utilize natural resources in nearby areas to maintain their livelihoods. However, as the population and number of families increase in second and third generations, resources become scarce. Maduruoya and Hennanigala Lake serve as common pool resource grounds for fishing, supporting the livelihood of the resettled community. The community has developed its own mechanism to allocate scarce resources, but conflicts arise when using community-driven mechanisms for common pool resources to sustain their livelihoods. The chairman of the Fishery Association supports this approach.

“We established a fishery association to support the livelihood of fisherfolk. Initially, there was insufficient fish population to sustain all fishing families. To address this, we decided to artificially breed fish and formed the association, collecting funds for this purpose. We implemented rules stating that only association members could fish in the lake, as non-members did not contribute to fish breeding efforts. This has become a contentious issue.” (Male, 55-years-old, KI).

The drivers of conflict in the resettlement scheme have been summarized as follows. The likelihood of these drivers leading to conflict within the scheme is shown in Figure 07.

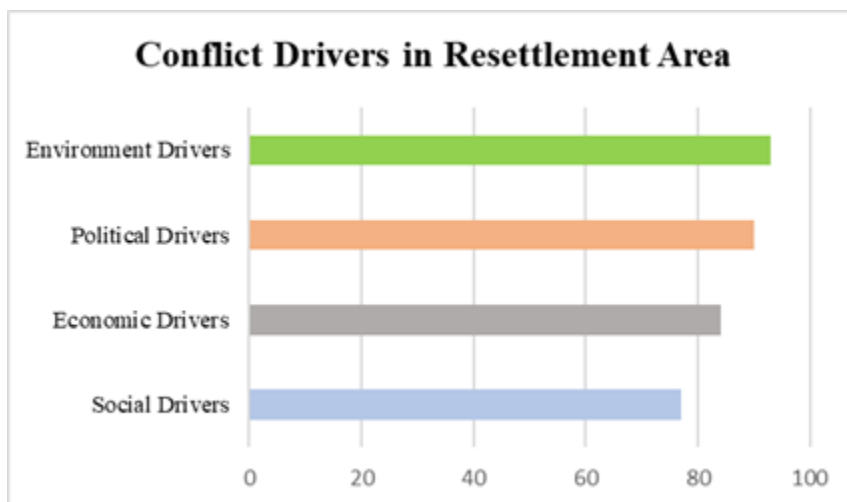


Figure 07: The overall probable drivers of conflict in resettlement scheme.

Source: Field Research - 2023

The data clearly indicates that environmental drivers (93%) are the primary cause of conflict in the area, followed by political drivers (90%). Economic drivers (84%) and social drivers (77%) are the third and fourth most significant factors contributing to conflicts. Conflicts in the resettlement scheme are a result of a combination of social, environmental, political, and economic drivers. Therefore, conflicts are defined as "a social or political conflict exacerbated by disagreements or competition over access to natural resources, and the unequal distribution of benefits and power generated from them" (Djanibekov et al., 2015).

Overall, these four domains of drivers collectively contribute to the prevalence and increased incidence of conflict in the resettlement scheme (Figure 8).

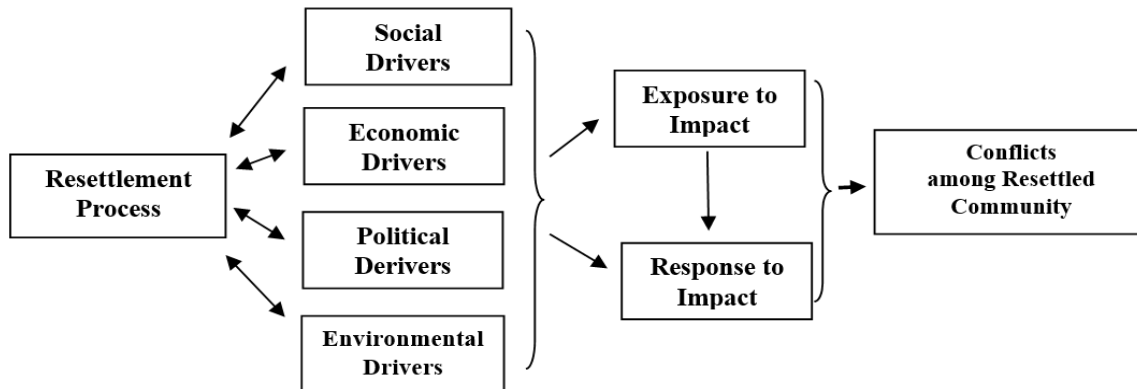


Figure 8. Driver domains contributing to the conflict in the resettlement Scheme

4.5 Discussion

The article discusses the drivers and leverage points of conflict among resettled Indigenous communities in Sri Lanka. Various factors such as social, economic, political, and environmental issues have contributed to these conflicts. Cultural factors, social adaptability, land use patterns, traditional ways of life, poverty, modern development practices, macro-level policy design and weak implementation, intervention by powerful political groups, different administrative patterns, resource scarcity, land and forest encroachment, overconsumption of common pool resources, and resource abundance are the main drivers of conflict in the scheme.

Due to the forced resettlement of a community with a unique cultural and traditional way of life, its members have had to make various efforts to preserve their culture while adapting to the newly developed society (Collier & Hoeffler, 2005). Conflicts in the area have arisen due to a dilemma between traditional ways of life and adaptation to the newly developed society. The lack of necessary infrastructure for adapting to the new lifestyle and practical difficulties in the new development models have heightened these conflicts.

Land is a crucial factor for the community as their livelihood depends primarily on agricultural activities (Hitchcock, 2012). Changes in land ownership and land use have led to conflicts among various parties and within the same communities (Humphreys, 2005). Conflicts have escalated due to the displacement and deprivation of the second and third generations of the community from their lands. Modernity, new consumption patterns, and challenges in adapting to modern development measures have created and intensified conflict situations in this area.

Political factors have played a significant role in fueling conflicts in the resettlement area (Jacob & Schreyer, 1980). The implementation of macro-level policy plans has led to conflicts in settlement areas, as they often do not align with the needs and aspirations of the community. Additionally, conflicts arise from contradictions between traditional leadership and legal frameworks and the new policies introduced through development processes. These conflicting factors contribute to tensions within the community (Martinez-Alier, 1995). The exclusion of the indigenous community from the policy preparation and documentation process, as well as their marginalization in mainstream development initiatives, have contributed to this situation.

The negative impact of institutional political conditions has also contributed to driving conflicts (Mikesell

& Raymond, 2020). The overconsumption and illegal encroachment of resources by outsider communities with political allegiances have intensified community and local conflicts (Painter, 2004). The involvement of external parties and political influences has exacerbated the conflict situation in the area. The lack of a proper system for resource distribution, outdated traditional methods of resource allocation, and inadequate resource management have further fueled the conflicts.

Common-pool resources are susceptible to the tragedy of the commons, where individuals, motivated by self-interest, tend to overexploit the resource, leading to its depletion for all (Djanibekov et al., 2015). In the resettlement area, settlers commonly use some natural resources collectively. These resources include fishing grounds, pastures, irrigation systems, and forests. It is challenging to restrict access to these resources, but their utilization may lead to depletion (Stedman, 2005). In the resettlement area, settlers commonly use some natural resources collectively. These resources include fishing grounds, pastures, irrigation systems, and forests. It is challenging to restrict access to these resources, but their utilization may lead to depletion (Djanibekov et al., 2015). As they commonly use these limited resources, disputes can arise due to their attitudes and behavior. Natural resources are integral to the collective identity of a community or group (Seto et al., 2023). Individuals develop a deep emotional bond with resources they have invested effort and hard work in, often passing down this connection through generations (Budruk et al., 2011). Scarcity is linked to conflict through two mechanisms: demand and supply scarcity (Carroll, 1988). This exclusionary behavior can perpetuate inequality and limit opportunities for marginalized communities. It is essential to address these power dynamics and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society (Shafwaty Sa'at & Lin, 2018).

The lack of alignment between contemporary development requirements and the customary needs of indigenous communities has disrupted the equilibrium in society. Conflicts have arisen due to the indigenous people's declining satisfaction with the failure to implement development ambitions and policies that respect their cultural and traditional values.

Further research is needed to explore the conflicts present in resettlement areas, with a specific focus on Indigenous minority communities. As a developing country, it is crucial to consider the protection of minority communities and their traditional way of life when implementing Western-centered modernized development practices.

6. Conclusion

The increased prevalence and escalation of conflict in resettlement schemes in rural areas of Sri Lanka is primarily caused by a lack of concern for conflict resolution and the neglect of minority and affected communities. This lack of attention can be attributed to various factors, including Social, Economic, Political, and Environmental drivers within the resettlement schemes. It is crucial to identify these conflict drivers and potential leverage points to address and prevent conflicts effectively. Currently, there is no established mechanism to prevent conflicts in the area, highlighting the urgent need for intervention. To address these conflict drivers, it is essential to consider the cultural and historical context of Sri Lanka's Indigenous people and strive for equitable solutions. Sustainable peace and harmony can be achieved by focusing on issues such as resource management, land rights, and community participation in decision-making processes, incorporating indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, it is vital to address both underlying grievances and root causes of greed to effectively manage and resolve conflicts in the Mahaweli resettlement area. By implementing strategies that promote inclusivity, respect for diversity, and equitable resource distribution, lasting peace and stability can be fostered in the community.

Abbreviation

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)
United Nation (UN)
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
Key Informant (KI)
In-depth Interviews (II)
Mahaweli Development Authority (MDA)
Mahaweli Development Project (MDP)

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