

REHABILITATION

**Sri Lanka's Rehabilitation Program:
The Humanitarian Mission Two**



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Malkanthi Hettiarachchi

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Paper based on article by author to the PRISM Journal:
M. Hettiarachchi, Sri Lanka's Rehabilitation Program:
A new frontier in counter terrorism and counter
insurgency, PRISM Journal for complex operations,
NDU, Vol 4, Issue 2, 2013.

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ISBN 978-955-9073-27-7

First Published: February 2014

Contents

	Page
Abstract	7
Introduction	8
Terrorism and Rehabilitation in the Sri Lankan Context	10
Rationale for the Sri Lankan Rehabilitation Program in the Context of Global Rehabilitation Programs	12
Genesis of Sri Lanka's Rehabilitation Program	15
Risk Categorization and Assessment of Detainees	19
Modes of Rehabilitation	20
Effectiveness of Rehabilitation	30
Engaging the Beneficiaries	31
Investigation	33
Ethos of rehabilitation	34
Skill Acquisition to Develop the Rehabilitation Program	36
Rehabilitation Staff and Effective Management	37
Radicalization and importance of De-Radicalization	39
Reintegration and Aftercare in the Community	42
Challenges experienced within the rehabilitation program	44
Conclusion	49



Sri Lanka's Rehabilitation Program: The Humanitarian Mission Two¹

ABSTRACT



Sri Lanka launched its first terrorist rehabilitation program with the defeat of the Tamil Tiger terrorists also known as the LTTE² in 2009 - "its time to launch 'humanitarian mission 02', to get them back on track with their normal lives".³ The state considered the terrorist detainees as "misled by the terrorist leadership into engaging in terrorist activity" but nevertheless, "citizens". The way forward was to rehabilitate the former terrorists with a view towards reintegration into civil society. The multifaceted rehabilitation program was geared towards supporting the rehabilitees to come to terms with their actions within the terrorist movement in a safe environment. The program also studied how terrorist cadres and their leaders denied basic liberties and manipulated their followers during training. The aim was to address these abuses in the rehabilitation program

¹ Paper based on article by author to the PRISM Journal: M. Hettiarachchi, Sri Lanka's Rehabilitation Program: A new frontier in counter terrorism and counter insurgency, PRISM Journal for complex operations, NDU, Vol 4, Issue 2, 2013.

² Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam also known as the Tamil tigers.

³ HE President Mahinda Rajapakse at the Inaugural session of the Presidential Committee on Development and Reconciliation, Presidential Secretariat, Colombo, 02 July 2009. Extracted from the National Framework Proposal for Reintegration of Ex-combatants into Civilian Life in Sri Lanka, Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights (2009)

Arie W. Kruglanski, Defence Seminar 2012:
Rehabilitation of Tamil tigers



in order to facilitate participant re-engagement in civilian life. To move beyond mere disengagement from violence, designing and implementing well-crafted rehabilitation programs to reverse the process of radicalization was essential. Winning hearts and minds was the overarching principle of each rehabilitation center. To ensure standards of excellence, program effectiveness was evaluated by the center and progress made by rehabilitees assessed by independent assessors.⁴ Sri Lanka has currently reintegrated 11,902⁵ rehabilitated terrorist cadres into civil society.

INTRODUCTION

The most crucial security risk to nations and neighbouring countries is terrorism and the risk of terrorism. The optimal strategy is a blend of both hard and soft approaches⁶ to counter and prevent terrorism from manifesting and reinventing⁷ itself within the community and vulnerable segments of society.

⁴ Arie W. Kruglanski and Michele J. Gelfand, “Rehabilitation of Former LTTE Cadres in Sri Lanka: A Preliminary Report,” (University of Maryland, College Park, 2011). Also see Kruglanski, Defence Seminar 2012: Rehabilitation of Tamil tigers <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-XDYL13a2M>

⁵ The BCGR reintegrated figure as of February 2014

⁶ Combination of the two approaches, the kinetic and intelligence approach with the rehabilitative and community engagement approach are referred to as “smart power” Gunaratna, R. (April 2011). Terrorist rehabilitation: a global imperative *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 6, NO. 1, 65-82. Routledge

⁷ Political groups that promote the terrorist agenda gaining access into civil administrative systems, international political groups, with access to unlimited terrorist funding; as well as human rights activist groups and NGOs funded to further the terrorist agenda as “research bodies and think tanks”.

It is essential for nation states to consider 4 pillars in the soft approach to counter terrorism: The security risk to the nation and stability; the damage to the economic progress of the nation and development; the splitting of the community and psychosocial reconciliation; and the impairment to the psychological wellbeing of the detainee⁸ and resilience.

Nation states bear responsibility to protect⁹ the public and must focus on reducing and managing the risk posed by terrorists.¹⁰ Terrorism destroys the wellbeing of citizens¹¹, rips the social fabric¹², damages the economy¹³ with resources diverted to counter terrorism, and few investors in countries gripped by terror. Terrorism polarises communities¹⁴, with fear and suspicion growing within and between communities.

8 This paper refers to terrorists who surrendered or were apprehended for rehabilitation.

9 Community resilience building to prevent vulnerable groups from being manipulated into violent extremism and terrorism.

10 A sound security and intelligence presence to pre-empt attacks and risk of attacks.

11 Living with a sense of fear of terrorist attacks, potential loss of family members through such attacks, general sense of needing to be alert to terrorist activity, witnessing the daily death toll of citizens and security personnel, and becoming desensitised to violence. Terrorism has touched every family in Sri Lanka, through the loss of a family member, friend, colleague or neighbor as terrorist attacks have not spared any part of the country.

12 Suspicion of the other, reduced social activity, reduced public events, tension at peak traffic times, with families and society at large instinctively cognizant of suicide attacks.

13 A struggling economy pushes people into hardship that is fertile ground for recruitment by terrorists and a bulging criminal (underworld and petty theft) and drug population. Lack of investment by the business community, lack of tourism and rise in unemployment leads to economic hardship, general societal discontent and insecurity.

14 Communities split over supporting and not supporting terrorist ideology and activity; intercommunity harmony breaks down, and a reduction in value for life.

Terrorism distorts thinking, emotions and behaviour of the recruit delving into the depths of the psyche and enhancing emotions such as anger and hatred, training to focus on aggression and killing of civilians as the perceived enemy, reinforcing destruction, distancing the recruit from value for life, depersonalizing the perceived enemy, developing the capability of destroying a person they have never met or seen and to destroy one's self in an effort to kill others.¹⁵ Therefore investing resources in terrorist rehabilitation is a global imperative.¹⁶

Terrorism and Rehabilitation in the Sri Lankan Context



Dominating parts of the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers¹⁷ waged a violent secessionist and nationalist campaign to create an independent state¹⁸ in the north and east of Sri Lanka for the Tamil people. This campaign evolved into the Sri Lankan Civil War that ended with the defeat of the Tamil tigers by Sri Lankan

¹⁵ Terrorism brings out the killer and destroyer within the human mind. A suicide cadre articulates the changes that take place during the black tiger (suicide) training "There they taught us to turn love into a passion for killing. All what we received and knew was hatred, murder and destruction".

¹⁶ Paper presented by Professor Rohan Gunaratna on Terrorist Rehabilitation: A Global Imperative, at the Inaugural International Conference on Terrorist Rehabilitation, February 2009, Singapore.

¹⁷ This separatist militant group was founded in May 1976 by Prabhakaran.

¹⁸ "Its ultimate goal: to seize control of the country from the Sinhalese ethnic majority and create an independent Tamil state. Along the way, it has launched suicide attacks, assassinated politicians (including a government minister this week and even the Sri Lankan President), taken hostages, and committed all of kinds of crimes to finance its operations. The resulting civil war has taken the lives of nearly 70,000 Sri Lankans on both sides of the conflict since 1983 alone" http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil_tigers011008

Security Forces in May 2009.¹⁹ The Tamil tigers, also known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), were considered one of the most ruthless insurgent and terrorist organisations in the world.²⁰

To rehabilitate the **11,664**²¹ Tamil tiger surrendees and captives, Sri Lanka developed a multifaceted rehabilitation program to engage and transform the violent attitudes and behaviours of the Tamil tiger leaders, members and collaborators.²² Since the end of the LTTE's three-decade campaign of insurgency and terrorism, there has not been a single act of terrorism in the country. Many attribute the post-conflict stability to the success of the insurgent and terrorist rehabilitation program, the effectiveness of the intelligence services, the reconciliation initiatives and economic development activities. Globally, rehabilitation and community engagement is a new frontier in the fight against ideological extremism and its violent manifestations – terrorism and insurgency.²³ Following a period of

19 Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe, (May 15-June 14, 2010), Defeat of the LTTE and its significance, *Asia Defence News: Asian Defence Analysis*, Volume V, Issue 5.

20 Tamil Tigers are among the most dangerous and deadly extremists in the world. For more than three decades, the group has launched a campaign of violence and bloodshed in Sri Lanka, the island republic off the southern coast of India' retrieved in November 2009 http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil_tigers011008

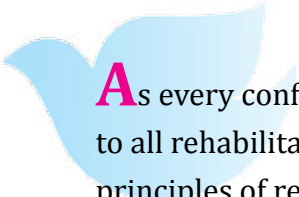
21 Commissioner Generals for Rehabilitation, "Defence Seminar April 2011, August 2012, and Workshop at the Lakshman Kadirgamar Center in July 2012. This is not a static figure as detainees are referred to rehabilitation from detention through courts and at the recommendation of investigation officers.

22 Rohan Gunaratna, "The Battlefield of The Mind," *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 21 (October 2009). Professor Rohan Gunaratna is from the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research and is the advisor for global terrorism programs including Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program.

23 A.W. Kruglanski, M.J. Gelfand, and R. Gunaratna, "Aspects of De-radicalization," in *Terrorist Rehabilitation*, ed. L. Rubin and R. Gunaratna (New York: Routledge, 2012). A.W. Kruglanski, M.J. Gelfand, and R. Gunaratna, "Terrorism as Means to an End: How Political Violence Bestows Significance," in *Meaning, Mortality and Choice*, ed. P.R. Shaver and M. Mikulincer (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2012).

captivity or imprisonment, insurgents and terrorists are released into society. Without their disengagement and de-radicalization, they will pose a security threat. The recidivist will carry out attacks and politicize, radicalize, and militarize the next generation of fighters. Furthermore, they will become a part of the insurgent and terrorist iconography. To break the cycle of violence, governments of countries that suffer from terrorism must build partnerships with communities and other stakeholders in maintaining peace and stability. Working with communities, the media, academic circles, and the private sector, governments should invest time and energy into mainstreaming the thinking of those who have deviated into ideological extremism and violence.

Rationale for the Sri Lankan Rehabilitation Program in the Context of Global Rehabilitation Programs



As every conflict differs, there is no common template applicable to all rehabilitation programs. Nevertheless, there are some common principles of rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is about changing the thinking and behaviour of offenders. Prior to the reintegration of former terrorists into mainstream society, offenders must move away from violent extremist thinking. If the mindset is locked into an ideology of intolerance and violence against another ethnic or religious community, strategies must focus on changing these patterns of thinking. In order to facilitate a shift within the offender to a non-violent lifestyle, the violence-justifying thought patterns must be

identified, as well as the mechanisms that introduced, nurtured, and reinforced these thought patterns. Genuine and continuous engagement is required in both the custodial rehabilitation and community rehabilitation phases²⁴ to facilitate this transformation in thinking,

Global rehabilitation programs can be categorized into developed, developing, and defunct programs. The developed programs are in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. The developing programs are in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Colombia, while defunct programs are in Egypt, Yemen, and Libya.²⁵ Whilst the rehabilitation model is uniquely Sri Lankan, the program benefited from drawing practical lessons and applicable concepts from existing rehabilitation programs, and particularly from Singapore. For example, the term “beneficiary,” used in Saudi Arabia to refer to terrorists undergoing rehabilitation, was recommended by Singapore to visiting Sri Lankan officials. Sri Lanka subsequently shared this term with Pakistan.²⁶

In the process of creating a program that was applicable to Sri Lanka, existing global programs in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were reviewed. Through emphasizing national ownership, the rehabilitation staff and advisors helped to indigenise the best practices of other programs. Singapore’s rehabilitation model, considered one of the best global programs with its large number of psychologists and

24 Rehabilitation that occurs within a Custodial or secure setting and within the community setting, upon reintegration .

25 Mohamed Feisal Bin Mohamed Hassan (Associate Research Fellow, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research), interview by author, July 21, 2012.

26 FATA Secretariat, “1st Strategic Workshop on Rehabilitation & De-radicalization of Militants and Extremists,” (FATA Capacity Building Project, May 18-19, 2012).

religious counsellors, was particularly instructive. The six modes of rehabilitation developed in Singapore were indigenized and developed to a high standard in Sri Lanka. The founders of the Sri Lankan rehabilitation program named it the “6+1 model.”

The rehabilitation concept adopted by the Sri Lankan program engaged the beneficiaries in six modes of rehabilitation and community engagement:²⁷

1. Educational
 2. Vocational
 3. Psychosocial and creative therapies
 4. Social, cultural, and family
 5. Spiritual and religious
 6. Recreational
- Plus 1: Community rehabilitation

²⁷ Brigadier Dharshana Hettiarachchi, “Terrorist Rehabilitation in Sri Lanka,” (National Workshop on Terrorist Rehabilitation, Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies, July 21, 2012). Brigadier Dharshana Hettiarachchi was 4th Commissioner General of Rehabilitation in the period ending June 2013.

Genesis of Sri Lanka's Rehabilitation Program



The Sri Lankan spirit itself was conducive for embracing rehabilitation. Sri Lanka embraced the restorative justice model²⁸ rather than adopting the classic retributive justice model. The then Attorney General Mohan Peiris crafted the legal framework for rehabilitation. Sri Lanka drew from its own rich heritage of moderation, tolerance, and coexistence with communities living side by side for centuries.²⁹ Sri Lanka had a history of rehabilitating violent youth after the insurrections in the south in 1971 and 1987-1989. Sri

28 The retributive justice model involves punishment by sentencing. The restorative justice model promotes repentance and transformation.

29 Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation. The LTTE systematically evicted and ethnically cleansed Sinhalese and Muslim inhabitants from areas under its control, and using violence against those who refuse to leave. See Bandarage, A., (2012), Sri Lanka Towards Peace: An Alternative Perspective, *India Quarterly*, 68:2, p. 103-118. The eviction of Muslim residents happened in the north in 1990, and the east in 1992 see Library of Congress Country Studies (1988), "Sri Lanka: The Eastern Province Question" at [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+lk0012\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+lk0012)) During the period of the 30 year war against terrorism, Tamil people have lived in the South of the country amongst the Sinhalese and Muslims. Prior to the "Ethnic cleansing in the Jaffna University: Muslims and Sinhalese students were driven out" <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2005/02/18/ethnic-cleansing-jaffna-university-muslims-and-sinhalese-students-were-driven-out>, the separatist agenda in the 1970's and the politically motivated riots of 1983 all ethnic groups have lived together for centuries and fought together to gain independence from British rule. "The previously multi-ethnic northern province is not an ethnically homogenous Tamil region" Bandarage, A., (2009), *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy*. London: Routledge. Today the ethnic distribution of Colombo has reached equal proportions, with an increasing number of Tamil people settling in Colombo. "Sri Lanka's ethno-cultural mosaic is nurtured by a rich and shared heritage inherited from the past" (p.37) see Seneviratne, S., (2013), Heritage of an island civilization, in CHOGM 2013 Special Report, FIRST: London.

Lanka's first experience in rehabilitation³⁰ was after security forces defeated the Peoples Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna), a Marxist-Leninist group that adopted Maoist tactics. Although the programs were not as robust as the contemporary program, there was hardly any recidivism among the participants.³¹ After a period of incarceration, the state did not oppose and at times facilitated some of the key players of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna to join the political mainstream.

The Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR) was founded as the special state authority responsible for the rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorists. The first center to be set up was in Thelippalai on 1 May 1998 and managed by the National Youth Services under the Ministry of Rehabilitation. Later, BCGR was in operation from the time that terrorists were detained in Pallekelle in 2007, under Mr Suhada Gamalath. The prison environment in Pallekelle was not considered suitable, which led to the opening the Ambepussa center on 1 March 2008 to accommodate the Tamil tiger captives and surrendees.³² As the centers increased to accommodate the swelling number of detainees, several centers were set up in the Welikanda and Vavuniya districts. As these centers moved towards the

30 General Ananda Weerasekera (now a Buddhist monk at Buddangala Temple in Amparai) was a pioneer in the art of rehabilitation during the period of the JVP and taught much of what he knew to Major BDC Jayawardene (currently teaching at Nalanda College). Major Jayawardene is reported to have shared his learnings with the staff engaged in terrorist rehabilitation.

31 There was no recorded evidence of those who participated in the rehabilitation program returning to violence.

32 The author visited Ambepussa in June 2009 and met with beneficiaries and staff. Some staff from the original cohort continue to serve in rehabilitation centers to date (Colonel BS Herman Fernando and Captain Jayani Herath) as well as on the community teams (Major Pooliyadda and Major Chanaka Weerasekera)

ethos of rehabilitation, they were named Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centers (PARCs), accommodating nearly 11,500 detainees that either surrendered or were identified while masquerading as Internally Displaced Persons [IDPs] at the end of the conflict.

Approximately 254 staff³³ work within the rehabilitation centers, attending to the welfare requirements of the beneficiaries as well as facilitating the rehabilitation programs. This figure does not include the perimeter security. The Sri Lankan Government has currently spent almost 14 billion rupees³⁴ as of September 2013, to manage the rehabilitation centers. The figure spent annually fluctuated based on the number of beneficiaries within the centers. This figure does not include the costs incurred by specialists, well-wishers, Charities, National Non-Governmental Organisations, International Non-Governmental Organisations, Government institutions, and Ministries in conducting the several programs within the centers.

Rehabilitation was conducted with a view to reintegrate the former Tamil Tiger leaders, members, and collaborators into the community. Beneficiaries within the PARCs were supported to engage in a range of activities and through these activities reconnected to essential aspects of individual and community life, including family, society, culture and religion. The beneficiaries were supported to shift their thinking away from the narrow hate-filled ideology targeted towards the Sinhalese, Muslims, national and international figures that opposed the Tamil Tiger agenda. Upon reflection of their actions and experiences, the

33 Staff working directly with the beneficiaries are primarily from the Army Cadet Corps – who are trained professional educators (school teachers).

34 Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program costs from January 2009 to 2013 was approximately USD 10,427,048.25, BCGR.

former terrorists and insurgents found new meaning in their lives. They were encouraged to champion peace building initiatives with values of moderation, tolerance, and co-existence replacing hate, anger, and the mono-ethnic single narrative.³⁵

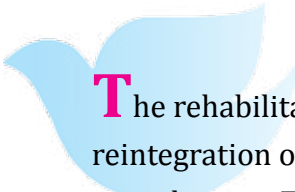
The majority of the beneficiaries were reintegrated within the mandated 24-month period and as of November 2012 approximately 11,044³⁶ beneficiaries were reintegrated. A total of 594 child beneficiaries³⁷ were reintegrated following the stipulated one-year rehabilitation period. The BCGR prioritised the reintegration of students, the disabled, and the elderly, while engaging all segments of the community to enlist their support for rehabilitation. As of February 2014, the BCGR remains responsible for the rehabilitation of approximately 160 beneficiaries allocated through Courts.

35 The Tamil tigers promoted a mono-ethnic separatist agenda that was weaved into a “single narrative” away from diversity, peace building, and community cohesion.

36 Statistics provided by the Bureau for the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation, 22 November 2012.

37 BCGR statistics from 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 were presented at the Sri Lankan Defense Seminar, Sri Lanka in April 2011 and 2012.

Risk Categorization and Assessment of Detainees:



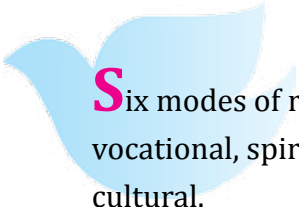
The rehabilitation phase was geared towards the successful reintegration of the beneficiary through reconciliation and resettlement. The first step in rehabilitation was to categorize the surrendered and apprehended terrorists. Utilizing interviews and background information, law enforcement authorities and intelligence agencies categorized former terrorists based on their depth of involvement, period of involvement, and activities conducted during involvement. They were categorised as high, medium, or low risk, and allocated to detention and PARCs accordingly. Assessing the risk level of the detainees enabled the service to categorize them into A, B, C, D, E, and F groups.³⁸

Detainees categorized into the A and B groups were those who were involved in planning attacks, conducting attacks and taking on a leadership role in mobilizing others for suicide bombings and attacks. These frontline leaders and members were allocated to detention to go through the judicial process. Following the outcome of the investigation and assessments of the detainees' levels of cooperation, the detainees were offered the option of joining the rehabilitation process or the judicial process. The moderate group (category C and D) were assessed and allocated to either detention or to one of the twenty-four PARCs. The low risk category E and F were allocated to the PARCs.

³⁸ BCGR, "Action Plan," (March 2010). This action plan provides the framework for the rehabilitation process based on DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Rehabilitation).

Ongoing assessment was conducted to gauge the degree of radicalization and changing attitudes and opinions of the beneficiaries over time. The longitudinal survey conducted by psychologists Arie Kruglanski and Michele Gelfand of the University of Maryland, found a significant decline in the levels of radicalization attributed to the programs conducted, and particularly the manner in which the staff interacted with the beneficiaries within the centers, where the beneficiaries felt respected and the center conditions as adequate.³⁹

Modes of Rehabilitation:



Six modes of rehabilitation conducted at the PARCs were educational, vocational, spiritual, recreational, psychosocial, familial, social, and cultural.

Educational rehabilitation: The Tamil Tigers recruited from the community at large but mostly from the more vulnerable - poor and under-aged groups. Many of the terrorists had neither completed their education nor achieved the country's minimum national standard - the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level Examination (requiring ten years of study). Approximately ten to twenty-five percent of beneficiaries needed help with reading and writing in the Tamil language. The majority spoke neither the national language of Sri Lanka, Sinhalese, nor the link language, English.⁴⁰ The aim of Educational Rehabilitation was to strengthen the beneficiaries

³⁹ Arie W. Kruglanski and Michele J. Gelfand, "Rehabilitation of Former LTTE Cadres in Sri Lanka: A Preliminary Report," (University of Maryland, College Park, 2011).

⁴⁰ In December 2009, approximately ten to twenty-five percent of beneficiaries were taught to read and write in each rehabilitation center.

through education and reduce their lack of education from being manipulated by violent extremist groups. Education helps with critical thinking and broadening the thought process.

The rehabilitation program created a space for providing formal education to those beneficiaries under-eighteen years of age within a residential school environment. Supplementary education was provided for adults in need of literacy and numeracy skills. Informal education also took place in groups within each rehabilitation centre. Beneficiaries identified with teaching skills conducting informal classes to facilitate learning to read and write Tamil, as well as to learn English, Sinhala, and Math.

Vocational rehabilitation: Almost all beneficiaries aspired to be employed. The follow-up surveys indicated that beneficiary desires for vocational training and employment gradually increased as their period in rehabilitation progressed.⁴¹ The BCGR facilitated vocational training based on the beneficiaries' interests, their families' traditional vocations and businesses, and regional vocational opportunities. The beneficiaries were allocated to centers for a variety of courses including agriculture, carpentry, masonry, motor mechanism, beauty-culture, and the garment industry. Members of the different industries' business communities provided training in house and within their factories. Some of these companies pledged jobs following their training programs and others pledged on the job training in their factories.

⁴¹ Follow-up surveys indicated greater aspirations by beneficiaries to engage in vocational training and self-employment. KAC Karunarathna, "Transformation in Thinking on Aspirations for Employment", (report, June 22, 2012).



More than forty vocational training programs were conducted within rehabilitation centers and externally by NGOs, INGOs, private businesses, state ministries, and volunteer organizations.⁴² The different business communities provided residential facilities for the beneficiaries to engage in vocational training programs on-site with the mainstream population. The beneficiaries received company benefits also received by the mainstream interns. The vocational training helped to gradually develop beneficiary confidence in being able to use their own skills to carve out a livelihood for themselves. The beneficiaries were motivated to engage in vocational training that provided the possibility of securing future financial stability but even more the dignity of engaging in a vocation that will allow them to help themselves, their families, their communities, and their country.⁴³

⁴² See www.bcgr.gov.lk and the presentation by General Sudantha Ranasinghe on rehabilitation of ex-combatants, the Sri Lankan Model, Defense Seminar, Sri Lanka, August 2012.

⁴³ Beneficiaries were found to have a greater sense of citizenship and developed a sense of belongingness and desire to contribute to the development of the country through employment. KAC Karunaratna, "Transformation in Thinking on Aspirations for Employment (report, June 22, 2012).

Spiritual rehabilitation: During the course of rehabilitation, many beneficiaries were faced with the realities of their actions. They felt the need to spiritually reconcile with their past and look forward to the future. The Brahma Kumari⁴⁴ spiritual group from India conducted yoga and meditation for beneficiaries that relaxes the mind and nurtures a healthy balance between the inner and outer worlds. The Goenka Vipassana⁴⁵ program from India provided training in mindfulness. This training involves developing self-awareness of emotions and thoughts.⁴⁶ Those beneficiaries trained in mindfulness supported their peers to practice this method of meditation. Different religious organizations, including leaders from the Hindu, Satya Sai, and Christian traditions, also conducted religious ceremonies, rites, and rituals based on each person's faith. Praying and chanting constituted a large part of spiritual rehabilitation with each PARC constructing its own Hindu *kovils* for prayer and faith practice. Spiritual rehabilitation provided the opportunity for beneficiaries to reconcile within.

Recreational rehabilitation: Most beneficiaries gained weight during their period of rehabilitation. It was essential that beneficiaries exercised both their mind and body. Cricket, volleyball, traditional sports, and other sports activities were conducted at every centre on a daily basis. Specific sports programs conducted included "Cricket for Change," regional athletic meets, inter-school cricket and netball

44 The Brahma Kumari's were involved in providing this service within rehabilitation centers from the inception of the centers in Vavuniya and Welikanda.

45 The Vipassana Mindfulness Training was introduced to the rehabilitation centers by Ms Sudarshini Rasappa.

46 Beneficiaries were reported to gradually express remorse for their own actions and express gratitude for the second chance in life through rehabilitation. KAC Karunarathna, "Transformation in Thinking on Aspirations for Employment (report, June 22, 2012).



matches, sports meets, and New Year Festival activities. Board games such as carrom were also popular. Home gardening was carried out in small plots within the centers by those interested in gardening. Recreational rehabilitation also provided the opportunity for beneficiaries to engage in sports with the staff of the rehabilitation centers playing on side in the spirit of enjoyment rather than winning and losing.

Psychosocial rehabilitation: Enhanced interpersonal interaction contributed to beneficiaries expanding their skills in relating and engaging with people at a social and community level. Beneficiaries were observed to have undergone a significant transformation in their attitudes and behavior towards the Sinhalese, Muslims, and security forces personnel over the course of the first seven months of rehabilitation. This cognitive transformation appears to have taken place through informal interpersonal engagement with the center staff, work and training placements and the various professionals that conduct programs. Beneficiaries were supported to develop interpersonal skills to reintegrate into society.



The beneficiaries built an excellent rapport with the staff and engaged in meaningful discussion related to the future and desire to lead a peaceful life. The thinking espoused was that there are no winners and losers in war but tragic loss of life on every side. Having the opportunity to share their thoughts with the staff, the interpersonal interactional initiatives were a large part of the rehabilitation program because it allowed beneficiaries to engage in discussions cultivating their thinking in terms of family, future, and peace building. Less time was spent with thoughts of violence and hatred. Engaging in discussion related to society, social responsibility, and contributing towards the economy helped to cultivate a sense of citizenship.

The psychosocial programs included training in Emotional Intelligence, counseling training and mentorship training. Through the emotional intelligence program the beneficiaries were able to learn a range of emotion regulation skills that included managing emotions and the appropriate expression of emotions. Counseling for those that required the service and counselor training to provide beneficiaries with the skills required to support themselves and to help others work

through personal adjustment was assessed to be one of the most successful programs in rehabilitation, followed by the mindfulness training program.

The Mentorship programs were essential to shift beneficiary thinking away from violence and separatism. These programs included peace building, conflict resolution, value in diversity, the role of the man and woman in society and interpersonal relating. These were also considered essential skills for individuals to begin life in a diverse society.

Successful and well-respected persons in the Tamil community engaged as mentors and role models, reflecting a sense of responsibility and a shared future that is achievable through unity rather than divisions. They motivated the beneficiaries to work hard and to build a successful future.⁴⁷ These business people, film stars, and athletes were testimony to the ability of people from the region to make a successful life with the opportunities available in Sri Lanka.

Other psychosocial rehabilitation programs included for the young⁴⁸ beneficiaries were Girl Guiding and Boy Scouting programs, creativity therapy programs, and art therapy. The guiding and scouting programs were conducted by the Sri Lanka Girl Guides and

⁴⁷ Mr Eswaran, a Tamil Business Entrepreneur (Eswaran Brothers), motivated and supported individuals to live their lives on a basis of ethical principles.

⁴⁸ Children recruited by the LTTE globally referred to as “Child Soldiers” were viewed as survivors of terrorism rather than as victims of terrorism, and supported to regain part of their lost childhood. Slogans such as “bring back the child”, “I want to be a cricketer/ dancer / student – not a child soldier” helped to secure public support and empathy for the rehabilitation of the children.



Former LTTE child combatants turn girl guides

Pic: Courtesy : Army Media

http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20100509_05

Boy Scouts.⁴⁹ These programs were aimed at building a sense of social responsibility and comradeship among young people during rehabilitation.

Creative therapy rehabilitation provided effective ways for beneficiaries to express their inner thoughts and feelings through creative means. Creative therapies have a healing effect on large groups of people. Examples of creative therapy conducted in the centers included art work, forum theatre, drama, and music programs designed to help beneficiaries communicate and transform their audiences.

Art work and art therapy provided a medium for expression and assessment. Beneficiaries engaged in art work to give expression to issues close to their hearts. They expressed their desires for family life, freedom, peace, and unity. Creative writing exercises included poetry, short stories, and booklets related to the themes of freedom, loss, appreciation of rehabilitation, new thinking, future plans, and development.

⁴⁹ “Former LTTE Child Combatants Turn Girl Guides & Boy Scouts,” December 12, 2010, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20100509_05

Those beneficiaries who expressed an interest in dance and music were trained by Anoja Weerasinghe and her team.⁵⁰ The performing arts included not only music and dance but also drama. Drama therapy included productions of plays that reflect unity. The beneficiaries had access to short stories, articles, and historical words of wisdom that promote peace and unity. Narrative and Biblio-therapy involved the recitation and reading of historical and contemporary texts that promoted reflection. Beneficiaries were also engaged in making jewelry, soap carvings, cards, knitting caps, and baby clothes. Opportunities to make handicrafts, especially ornaments using coconut shells, were especially appreciated. Some were purchased by visitors to the centers and exhibited at popular community events which gave pride and recognition to the work.⁵¹

Social, Cultural and Family Rehabilitation: Social and Educational tours exposed the beneficiary to the different parts of Sri Lanka, hitherto inaccessible due to the Tamil Tiger control of the north and east of the country. The majority of beneficiaries (99%) during in their lifetime had not travelled out of the conflict area of the north and east to witness social and cultural life in the rest of the country. The beneficiaries who were ready to receive this exposure witnessed a part of their own country developed, that was not held in the grip of the terrorist group. It was vital for them to see all ethnic communities living together in the rest of the country, the inter marriages, working

50 Shamindra Ferdinando “From Vanni to Cinnamon Grand : Ex-fighters display dancing skills at IOM reception,” The Island, Sri Lanka, May 24, 2011

51 These products were displayed at exhibitions “Dayata Kirula” as well as Art Exhibitions in Colombo – a public witness of the products of rehabilitees. Currently a reintegrated beneficiary of rehabilitation has set up a workshop in the East and employs approximately 20-30 former beneficiaries in making these products – developing this skill as a livelihood.

together, studying in universities, in schools, partaking in sports and all walks of life. The beneficiaries realized that it is possible to develop and grow in strength in the absence of violence and terrorism.

A welcoming and relaxed atmosphere enabled family or next of kin to visit the beneficiaries in the PARCs and helped to strengthen family bonds. The level of perimeter security was low as beneficiaries have little reason to run away if treated with dignity and respect. Family visits were encouraged and staff engaged with the family members if required to facilitate the family engagement process. The terrorist group functioned as a pseudo family, with the terrorist commitment and loyalty to the group instead of responsibility towards family. Often young people joined the terrorist group against the wishes of their family which made it harder for them to face the families. Therefore the restoration of fragmented family bonds was an essential part of the rehabilitation process to ensure the individual nurturing family relationships instead of idolizing the terrorist group.⁵²

Although the beneficiaries had no access to personal phones, they had the opportunity to call their families. The beneficiaries also could write and receive letters, and even had the opportunity to visit their home in the event of a celebration, illness or a death. Social, cultural and family rehabilitation brought the beneficiaries close to their family and prepared the beneficiaries for reintegration into society.

⁵² Interviews with former LTTE cadres revealed that a “good cadre” was one that would not go home and would not maintain family ties. The aim was to maintain the person within the group and even married to members of the terrorist group, to keep the loyalty within group.

Effectiveness of Rehabilitation:



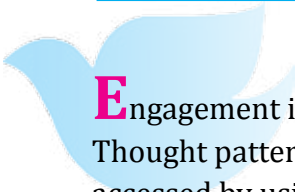
Four pillars of assessment helped to obtain a broad understanding of the individual. First, interviews with the beneficiary, second, reviewing of past records, third, observations noted by the staff working day to day within the PARCs documenting the response to a range of activities and programs, and fourth, formal assessment using psychometrics where possible. This method of assessment ensures a comprehensive process to overcome deception. Assessment needs to occur in a safe and secure environment where the beneficiaries are free to engage in discussion and express genuine thoughts without fear of reprisal.

Assessment should be an ongoing process to capture beneficiary attitudes and opinions as they change overtime. Profiling in December 2009, when compared with initial profiling soon after the terrorism was brought to an end, indicated some inconsistencies. However, with greater confidence in the process the beneficiaries provided more accurate and detailed information. Therefore, the timing of assessment and ongoing assessment was an important part of the program.

The reputation of well managed rehabilitation centers had a significant impact on terrorist decision making at the battlefield, whether to surrender, escape or suicide. Interviews disclosed that some had referred to the Thelippale rehabilitation center that was operational since 1998 and remarked, “we knew the government will treat us well.”⁵³ These terrorists had encouraged others to surrender and enter the rehabilitation process.

⁵³ Interview with a beneficiary, January 1, 2010

Engaging the Beneficiaries:



Engagement is the key to understanding the individual mindset. Thought patterns are intangible. Whilst thought patterns can be accessed by using interviews, paper and pencil tests, one must heed aspects such as deception and social desirability. Particularly in the case of the Tamil tigers, both ruthlessness and deception were a part of the training. Considered masters at deception⁵⁴, a few of the terrorist cadres that entered rehabilitation did not disclose the full extent of their involvement. Similar examples are found in Iraq and Afghanistan, where former terrorists of the Al Qaeda movement worked with the US military and other agencies but without revealing their true intentions. In the Sri Lankan case, as the conflict had come to an end, there were only a few within rehabilitation that attempted to deceive.

Overtime, beneficiaries understood the rehabilitation process. They became less anxious and more confident about the process. As the beneficiaries reflected on their past, they rejected violence and embraced peace. They voluntarily provided more accurate and detailed information. There were some instances of information contaminated with peer opinions and theories, and information doctored to gain early reintegration. There was evidence of deception in the creation of a phantom individual and projecting one's role onto another individual and/or denial of own actions. At the same time the beneficiaries that disclosed their identity and actions, also informed the interviewers of those that hid their identity and involvement.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Some of the Terrorist cadres that entered rehabilitation did not disclose their involvement within the LTTE. <http://tamiltigeractivities.wordpress.com/2012/09/07/masters-of-deception-colombos-praba-caught/>

⁵⁵ Interviews with rehabilitation officials, May 15, 2010

Some senior members of the terrorist movement within the PARCs attempted to maintain a senior position.⁵⁶ They attempted to get the junior members to do their chores.⁵⁷ Another aspect noted was that with time, the beneficiaries were more open to speaking about their activities when working with the terrorist group.⁵⁸ These changes occurred within the PARC atmosphere that was relaxed with no fear of reprisal. These disclosures were taken as part of the healing process. However, those beneficiaries that lied at the assessment or withheld information were detained for further investigation.⁵⁹

Deception and resistance would occur when one believes that the information provided by the beneficiary would result in a custodial sentence and/or when the beneficiary does not wish to transform. Therefore it is vital that the staff engaging the beneficiary within rehabilitation do not function in an investigative capacity. It was necessary to keep the investigation and rehabilitating processes separate to ensure effective engagement.

Service personnel who engaged with beneficiaries within rehabilitation focused on their welfare and on supporting the service providers to deliver effective programs. The military that was responsible for the security of the perimeter did not interact with the beneficiaries, and maintained the security of the premises. Officers in charge had a clear understanding of what was required at each level. Effective engagement required staff training, guidance and discipline.

⁵⁶ Interview with a beneficiary, January 1, 2010

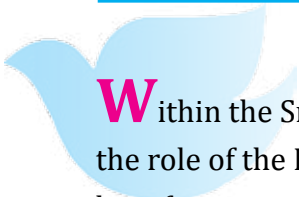
⁵⁷ Interview with a beneficiary, January 1, 2010

⁵⁸ Interviews with rehabilitation officials, May 15, 2010

⁵⁹ Interviews with rehabilitation officials, May 15, 2010

Although some staff were naturally oriented towards engagement and did not require training, staff guidance and discipline was considered an imperative.

Investigation:



Within the Sri Lankan context, the role of investigation officers and the role of the BCGR were separated. The information shared by the beneficiaries within rehabilitation did not have a negative impact on the beneficiaries. This ethos helped to minimize resistance and deception, as it was important to engage the beneficiary genuinely and consistently to facilitate the person to re-engage in community life instead of violence.

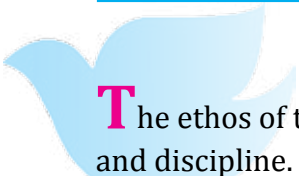
Investigation and reinvestigation occurred when new information was received on those who have not disclosed their actual in-depth involvement with the terrorist group. In some cases, those living in the community disclosed a greater depth of involvement with identified Tamil Tigers than those who had not entered rehabilitation. The Tamil community living in the villages expressed their anger towards the former Tamil Tigers who held them hostage and persecuted them with a law unto themselves. The anger towards the LTTE was reflected among the displaced Tamil population within IDP centers.⁶⁰ The internally displaced persons were temporarily housed within these

⁶⁰ IDPs (Internally displaced people) identifying LTTE cadres in Lanka refugee camps: Army, ANI, May 25, 2009

centers, until the terrorist cadres were identified and villages were cleared of mines to enable resettlement.⁶¹ The IDPs assaulted the Tamil Tigers hiding among them and those that had lost their children due to recruitment. The Tamil civilians suffered much at the hands of the LTTE. A civilian remarked that during the final stages of the fight to defeat terrorism 'they knew they were going to lose, so why keep us as a shield for them to be protected? They did not care about us, it was all about what they wanted.'⁶²

The staff working within the PARCs engaged in a caring and supportive role and assessed risk. It is vital that the staff engaging the beneficiary do not function in an investigative capacity. To ensure effective engagement to commence moving towards transformation, it was necessary to keep the investigative and rehabilitating processes separate.

Ethos of rehabilitation:



The ethos of the center staff reflected professionalism, compassion, and discipline. Security incidents related to rioting and attacks on staff were virtually absent, with a relatively small number of security personnel guarding the perimeter both in June 2009 and December 2009. There were less than five isolated incidents reported over the years where beneficiaries have requested to go to hospital and then absconded. The ethos was to treat the ex-combatants with care and

61 In Pictures, Inside Sri Lanka's Vast Refugee Camps, BBC News, October 8, 2009 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8297760.stm<

62 Interview with a IDP, July 12, 2011

respect, and help them to return to society. The approach within the centers involved beneficiary engagement. With these guiding principles the beneficiaries settled quickly and began to appreciate the rehabilitation initiative and admired the staff that engaged with them day to day in rehabilitation. This is evident in the positive ratings reported by the ex-combatants on the positive perceptions reported of the rehabilitation center staff (96.43%),⁶³ the rehabilitation center (70.14%)⁶⁴ and the rehabilitation center guards (94.57%).⁶⁵

The treatment of beneficiaries within rehabilitation was commended by the U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Patricia Butenis, in her message to mark America's Independence Day, "the government has also made great progress with the rehabilitation of ex-combatants."⁶⁶ Several beneficiaries are championing peace initiatives today.⁶⁷ Some have returned to the rehabilitation centers following reintegration to reside and follow courses. LEADS, a National NGO facilitated 'Preschool Training' for a group of reintegrated beneficiaries who opted to return to the Vavuniya PARC. Several beneficiaries moved on to employment and self-employment from the garment to the film making industry⁶⁸, and worked with NGOs, INGO's and with the government.

63 Rehabilitation of the Tamil tigers – assessment conducted by Prof. A. Kruglanski. This study is ongoing since 2009. Perception of being treated fairly, with dignity, staff level of helpfulness, staff level of understanding of their problems and ability to trust staff.

64 Perception of whether rehabilitation is helpful, if they feel there is an improvement in their situation, and rating on the conditions of the center.

65 Perception of whether guards are respectful and treat beneficiaries with dignity.

66 "Remarks for the July 4th Celebration by Ambassador Butenis," US Embassy, Colombo, July 4, 2012 <http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/sp-4july12.html> <accessed August 15, 2012>

67 Shanika Sriyananda "Ex-LTTEer Reborn in Selvam: Gokulan Takes to Acting, Sunday Observer, Sri Lanka, December 4, 2011 <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2011/12/04/fea10.asp> <accessed August 15, 2012>

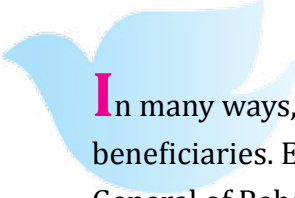
68 See 'Abina' drama for Trauma Therapy website: <http://www.abhina.com/events.html>

Skill Acquisition to Develop the Rehabilitation Program:



Whilst the Sri Lankan military managed the centers and carried the overall responsibility, they engaged civilians to conduct the intervention programs. The Sri Lankan military was versatile and quick to acquire skills required to manage a vast number of former Tamil tigers. Terrorist rehabilitation was a new field and those tasked with the responsibility, accessed the knowledge and developed the skill base. Minister Milinda Moragoda, the Minister of Justice and Law Reform, who was in charge of the rehabilitation program during its inception, was keen to learn and he received briefings from the specialist staff engaged in rehabilitation at Singapore's International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR). Similarly, General Daya Ratnayake, the then Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (CGR) visited Singapore and Columbia and studied their modes of rehabilitation. They quickly embraced the idea of rehabilitation, drew from the key concepts, and practical lessons. Although formal knowledge on how to rehabilitate terrorist cadres was useful, the Sri Lankan rehabilitation program developed largely through a commonsense approach. Many of the qualities essential to engage communities and work with beneficiaries at the rehabilitation centers were acquired by the Sri Lankan military personnel during their training, their service to the community and through their personal life experiences.

Rehabilitation Staff and Effective Management:



In many ways, the CGR built a standard by his own conduct towards beneficiaries. Envisioned and implemented by the first Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, General Daya Ratnayake overcame several challenges from funding to a legal framework. He managed to steer the rehabilitation process chartering new territory with sound leadership. Following the end of the war against terrorism, the BCGR was managed by five Commissioners General since 2009. General Daya Ratnayake, General Sudantha Ranasinghe, General Chandana Rajaguru, Brigadier Darshana Hettiarachchi and the current CGR, General Jagath Wijetilleke. Much of the ground level responsibility is managed by the Center Coordinators. Colonel Manjula Gunasinghe was the longest serving Coordinator for Rehabilitation in Vavuniya and worked with four consecutive Commissioner Generals of Rehabilitation. He provided the highest quality of leadership and managed the staff of the Vavuniya PARCs that housed male, female and child beneficiaries without a single incident. With the careful guidance of successive Commissioner Generals all center coordinators in Vavuniya, Thelippalai and Welikanda, harnessed their staff, provided the required care and facilitated rehabilitation intervention programs without compromising safety and security. Managing staff and beneficiaries of multiple centers was no easy task. BCGR's commitment to staff training, the need to work with a range of INGOs, NGOs, religious bodies, volunteer professionals; corporate sector and Ministries to implement rehabilitation interventions to a large number of beneficiaries required sound coordination.

It was observed that the military training to follow clear guidance combined with the natural compassion inherent in the culture helped the staff at the ground level to effectively engage with the ex-combatants. Captain Aluthwala, an officer conducting rehabilitation, stated “when we give a 100% to the beneficiaries it is a combination of 50% from our head and 50% from our heart”. He elaborated further to say that they would be mindful, alert and also compassionate. Other officers have described “the importance of understanding the person from within their context, to be able to help them adjust to a new reality”.⁶⁹ Still others have said that though the majority of the staff are injured and the injuries were sustained during the battle with the terrorists, “I don’t want my children to grow up with terrorism”, and “I don’t want to leave terrorism to be faced by the next generation”.⁷⁰

The rehabilitation personnel received their guidance and supervision from within the hierarchical structure and from among their peer group. Formal training arranged for staff were few and far between in the early days of rehabilitation. The staff learnt from practice and applied commonsense to situations and the compassion instilled within the culture and religion was extended to the beneficiaries. A rehabilitation staff member who had lost 7 of his family and extended members in the fight against terrorism, expressed his perspective on working with the former terrorist cadres in rehabilitation. He stated that “I don’t want my children to see another war”, pointing to a beneficiary he added, “I want my children to be able to play with his children and in that way we won’t have another war”.⁷¹ His words captured the essence of motivation of the security forces

69 Interviews, Rehabilitation Centre, Vavuniya, April 12, 2012

70 Interviews, Rehabilitation Centre, Vavuniya, April 12, 2012

71 Interviews, Rehabilitation Centre, Vavuniya, April 12, 2012

personnel working tirelessly within the rehabilitation centers. Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program does not have the luxuries of the Saudi Rehabilitation Program, the facilities of the Singapore program, nor the luxury of American funding of the Pakistani program, but it is rich in commitment, compassion and genuine in its effort.⁷²

Almost every citizen in the country has lost someone in the thirty-year war. The Tamil Tiger terrorists inflicted many casualties and indeed most staff conducting rehabilitation were wounded, and carried embedded shell pieces, others were aware first hand of the terrorists having massacred border villages, and still others have had their friends die in battle. Most stated that they did not know how they could work with the former terrorists, but gradually they realized the importance of guiding the beneficiaries onto a peaceful path. Most stated that the terrorist cadres were made to believe in a different reality, under terrorist control.

Radicalization and importance of De-radicalization



The individual has to be de-radicalized to be able to disengage from violence and re-engage in harmonious living⁷³. Rehabilitation is the method to achieve this end. The terrorists developed the mastery of indoctrinating the masses, especially the vulnerable youth. They groomed and motivated their members to sacrifice themselves in a

⁷² Personal observations of the author on studying the global programs and observing the manner in which the staff works on the Sri Lankan program.

⁷³ Terrorist Cadres are likely to disengage but not deradicalize.

suicide attacks and to sacrifice the wellbeing of one's own kith and kin in the pursuit of a violent radical ideology. Radicalisation was the tool used to engage and sustain its membership. Therefore a multifaceted rehabilitation program was necessary to engage the surrendered and apprehended detainees' hearts and minds to facilitate de-radicalization.

The impact of radicalization and the importance of rehabilitation in the transformation of thinking are articulated by a 16 year old child soldier groomed by the Tamil Tigers:

As vultures that eat dead bodies and hands that stretch out to beg
Terrorism destroys communities and destroyed our wellbeing until the end.
Loosing and separating mother and child,
Communities bore the tears of the people,
They trapped us by giving false hopes saying even death can become life, the
tombstone an Epic.⁷⁴

She refers to terrorism preying upon and thriving on the dead, and on the unsuspecting poor. The terrorist group used powerful narratives of those that died to motivate their members to conduct acts of terror. Tales of heroism was used to motivate potential recruits and they were mobilized by generating anger, hatred and revenge. Terrorists also used the vulnerable poor who were more easily recruited and given significance, power and a means of livelihood to ensure unquestioning loyalty to the terrorist group.

The impact of terrorism on communities is devastating, splitting the family unit, and loss of the child groomed into death. The Tamil Tiger

⁷⁴ Extract from a booklet written by an 16year old former female LTTE child soldier during her period of rehabilitation, entitled: *New life in a rehabilitation centre* (unpublished).

policy of recruiting one member of each household led families to give their under age children in marriage to older men to protect them, or got them pregnant to prevent recruitment. Children were also turned against their family members and required to demonstrate their loyalty, through their violent actions, to the terrorist group.

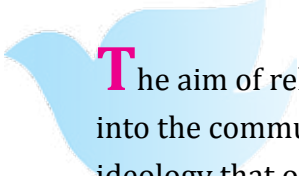
The indoctrination of the Tamil tiger membership with the perception that through suicide terrorism one achieves continued life as martyrs, resulted in young people attracted to “heroism”. The terrorist group promoted suicide terror by justifying and glorifying the act of mass murder through suicide attacks and used these events to celebrate, motivate and recruit more.

Deradicalization is not an all-or-none phenomenon. Given that radicalization happens at a thought and emotive level over time, the rehabilitated individual could be vulnerable to re-radicalization by individuals or groups with a violent radical ideology. Therefore the longer the reintegrated former rehabilitees are supported to rebuild life and engage in the community the more resilient the individual will be. The deradicalized and reintegrated former terrorist is likely to be vulnerable re-radicalization.

The conflict in Sri Lanka was an ethno-political conflict that radicalized and militarized a generation of youth during the thirty years of sporadic and later sustained violence. Those detained for rehabilitation included male and female adults, adolescents and children who were members and helpers within the terrorist group. The detainees were of injured and non-injured categories, and battlefield (guerilla) and off the battlefield (terrorist) fighters.

The massive investment made by the state in rehabilitation to bring back the citizens from terrorism was viewed by many beneficiaries as a “second chance to live life in the community”. The rehabilitees are likely to be vulnerable to groups, factions and political parties advocating the separatist agenda that has previously led to the formation of a terrorist and insurgent group. It is imperative that the context within which these individuals live are not contaminated by the separatist violent agenda, to ensure that the reintegrated individuals have the best possible chance to remain deradicalized in the community for a sufficient number of years to reduce their vulnerability manipulation and re-radicalization by ethnically and politically motivated separatists.

Reintegration and Aftercare in the Community



The aim of rehabilitation is to reintegrate the beneficiary or detainee into the community. The gradual shift away from a violence justifying ideology that occurs within rehabilitation needs to be sustained in the community. Ideological transformation from violence into non-violence is not an “all or none state”. Ideological transformation that occurs in an artificial environment is tested when the individual returns to his or her own environment and is exposed to potential radicalizing elements yet again.

The process of aftercare supports the individual to draw from and be sustained by the cultural, religious and familial roots of the individual, consolidated within rehabilitation through re-engagement with the individual’s own cultural religious and familial heritage. Several

factors come into play in the successful reintegration of a former rehabilitee: the reintegration into mainstream society and sustaining the individual within the mainstream frame work.

The Socioeconomic and Welfare Coordination Teams support the post rehabilitation aftercare phase. These teams located within the civil administration are responsible to ensure the welfare of the reintegrated beneficiaries. They focus on ensuring that the reintegrated beneficiaries do not get unduly frustrated when re-entering civil society and have access to the required grants, low interest bank loans, livelihood start up projects, applications for land, housing, employment and facilities offered to reintegrated individuals.

A criticism aimed at the state by Tamil civilians in the reintegrated areas is that the beneficiaries coming out of the rehabilitation program have greater support and facilities. Whilst this may be a legitimate criticism, the state continues the support extended to reintegrated beneficiaries but not necessarily award special treatment, as this group could be vulnerable to re-radicalization. Socioeconomic comparisons occur within communities and between communities the world over. The Tamil civilians themselves have suffered at the hands of the Tamil tiger terrorists, and it is about finding a balance in the community, with the power shifting back into the hands of the community instead of to individuals that belonged to a group that terrorised the community. The community and people need to have confidence and be able to live life safely in civil administered areas instead of living in fear of a terrorist group re-emerging.

The process of rehabilitation provides the opportunity for the individual to re-engage with one's own familial and community

network as opposed to the pseudo-culture of the terrorist group. The individual's re-engagement with culture, society, religion, family, and livelihoods through education, training, and development of critical thinking, facilitates re-engagement with civil society. It reduces the vulnerability of the individual to manipulation by the violent extremist ideology. The process of aftercare helps the transition from a secure setting to a community setting. The individual is supported to internalise and consolidate the new role and identity as a civilian in mainstream civil society.

Challenges experienced within the rehabilitation program



Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program faced many challenges.

The personnel assigned to staff the program had to be both formally and informally trained. While most of the staff was committed to the idea of rehabilitation, others needed convincing that this was the way forward.

The program lacked resources from its inception. This led to the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation having to work with a range of state and private sector partners. The Sri Lankan private sector played a significant role in supporting both custodial rehabilitation and community reintegration. Sri Lankan blue chip companies⁷⁵ supported the vocational training to build skill and later employ

⁷⁵ Leading private companies and businesses both provided training within rehabilitation centers or provided residential training within their training centers in the community and offered employment to those who wished to return. See www.bcgr.gov.lk to see the 40+ partnerships formed to conduct rehabilitation programs.

the former combatants. A number of INGOS and NGOS, notably the International Organization of Migration (IOM)⁷⁶ that had access to the rehabilitation centres, assisted and also worked closely with government to support the rehabilitation program. These funding challenges however led to building a low cost program with greater participation from the community that evolved into a fully Sri Lankan program.

The rehabilitation programs conducted changed over time with the availability of resources, contacts and with newer ideas emerging. The support extended by organisations and well wishes to the BCGR also changed as each Commissioner General for Rehabilitation (CGR) was replaced at the end of the tenure. It was the skill of the Commissioner General to access and sustain the support for the programs, manage the staff, beneficiaries and service providers. The changes in programs provided a variety and a renewed spirit brought in by those who wanted to support the service. Amidst these changes there was continuity of care extended to beneficiaries as the cadet corps staff cohort providing rehabilitation was consistent.⁷⁷

The initial lack of participation and support by the Tamil community in the rehabilitation process was a major challenge to be overcome. Much effort was put into securing the participation of the Tamil Community by the first Commissioner General⁷⁸ and the Minister of

⁷⁶ “Norway Backs IOM Reintegration of Former Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka,” http://www.iomsrilanka.org/iom/?page_id=1554.

⁷⁷ staff from the original cohort that was in rehabilitation from 1998 in Thelippale and 2008 in Ambepussa continued to serve in rehabilitation centers to date (Colonel BSH Fernando and Captain J Herath) as well as on the community teams (Major Pooliyadda and Major C Weerasingha, Major N Weerasekera)

⁷⁸ General Daya Rathanayake, currently the Commander of the Sri Lanka Army.

Justice⁷⁹ at the time, who recognised that the backing of the Tamil community was essential if rehabilitation was to be a success. They continued to pursue and engage key members of the community until they were convinced that the rehabilitation efforts were genuine. The Hindu Congress and key individuals in the community then provided input and took responsibility to mainstream the former combatants, recognising the need at the time. The center Coordinators had to locate family members and ensured that the family members and beneficiary engaged and renewed their family relationships, as each beneficiary was to be handed over to the family. This was accomplished through visitations, letters, and phone contact, and on occasion home visits. The reintegration ceremonies marked the re-entry of the beneficiary into society with the family taking responsibility.

A major challenge was to refocus the beneficiaries away from the terrorist group onto family life within the period allocated for rehabilitation. There were male and female combatants, who had relationships, yet could not marry due to the rules of the terrorist group. Once these individuals expressed a desire to be married a mass marriage ceremony of fifty-three former LTTE cadres was organised by the BCGR and their transfer to the peace village supported the beneficiaries to move towards family life.⁸⁰ In this way, the responsibility for guiding, mentoring, and mainstreaming former combatants was gradually transferred to the family and then the local communities.

79 Mr Milinda Moragoda, Minister of Justice. The BCGR at the inception was under the Ministry of Justice.

80 Jason Burke, "Sri Lankan Tamils Tie the Knot in Mass Detention Center Wedding: 53 Couples Married in Detention Center as Government Tries to Rehabilitate Former Tamil Tigers," *The Guardian*, June 13, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jun/13/tamil-tigers-sri-lanka-mass-wedding>, London edition.

Once the rehabilitation program was underway it was a challenge to plan for the reintegration and gain the acceptance of the receiving Tamil community. Although the public in the south who had been targeted and suffered from Tamil Tiger terrorism and suicide attacks supported rehabilitation, the Tamil community in the northern and eastern regions appeared more apprehensive of their return.⁸¹ In the North, the Tamil tigers had forcibly recruited children, extorted funds, and induced untold suffering upon the civilian population they controlled. This earned the resentment and anger of these families. In the last phase of the battle to liberate the country from terrorism, the Tamil Tigers left their village bases and took nearly 300,000 Tamil civilians hostage to buffer, or as a shield to protect the terrorist leadership. The Tamil community directly affected rejected the former Tamil Tigers returning from rehabilitation, while most family members were found to be more sympathetic. The BCGR however planned several community awareness programs to engage the religious community in areas where the beneficiaries will be reintegrated.

Criticisms aimed against the state initiatives were largely due to the restriction of international agency participation or access particularly to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with the exception of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) headed by Mohammed Abdiker and support later extended by Clive Jachnik. The INGOs that were limited from access were those agencies that were considered to be involved with the terrorist group during

⁸¹ Some reintegrated beneficiaries feel it is difficult to live within their community that think they will start trouble. Reported by some young men who had as a result left Jaffna and were now living in Killinochchi where they work with the Civil Service Division (Interviews conducted by author in July 2013)

their 30 year campaign. This led to heavy criticism and undue suspicion by the international community.

Had state diplomats improved communication with the international community, it is likely to have led to greater understanding, reduced negativity⁸² and improved funding for the programs.

Finally, whilst the rehabilitation program is considered a success, the state has not been able to market its success effectively both locally and internationally. Given that the media is generally interested in what goes wrong or badly, it is not surprising that a successful initiative is less news worthy. However this very phenomenon if taken into consideration could be overcome by dedicating a few minutes of a week for a “counter terrorism news desk” update where the progress and challenges of rehabilitation, resettlement and reconciliation initiatives in the country are discussed.

⁸² Shenali Waduge (September 2012), accessed from: <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2012/08/11/sri-lanka-international-defense-seminar-2012-%E2%80%93-impressive-show-achievements>

Conclusion



Sri Lanka's rehabilitation process took place away from the focus of the international community and the media, by a dedicated team of personnel from the Bureau of the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation. Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program has since its inception contributed to the global terrorist rehabilitation initiative.⁸³ The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) put together the "Rome Memorandum of Good Practises in the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders. Sri Lanka was one of the pioneering programs that contributed to the good practices listed in the Rome Memorandum. According to General Douglas Stone "Sri Lanka practices all these aspects listed in the memorandum, and it was before the memorandum was put together in 2011."⁸⁴

Sri Lanka succeeded in rehabilitating the bulk of the leaders and members of one of the world's most dangerous terrorist and guerilla groups, the LTTE. When communities are radicalized into violence, individuals are transformed from within and the mindset is locked into a violence justifying ideology. The radicalizing ideology becomes a vehicle and the person wishes to live by it, promote it and die for it.

⁸³ Sri Lanka has contributed by sharing experiences of good practice in terrorist rehabilitation at conferences in Pakistan, Algeria, Tajikistan, Singapore, and The Hague.

⁸⁴ General Douglas Stone's opening remarks at the session on the "Rome Principles in Action", Hedayah Conference in Abudhabi 3 June 2013.

Sri Lanka's rehabilitation efforts centered on reaching the hearts and minds of the beneficiaries through several activities that are transformative. Therefore within rehabilitation, the radicalization process is reversed and the beneficiary is transformed from within by engaging in several activities. The beneficiary re-engages with self, family and society and the need for violence is delegitimized. The beneficiaries are supported to move away from violence towards peaceful co-existence.

Some of the essential components identified in the success of Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program are the political will and the confidence of the leadership's that rehabilitation was the way forward. The Presidential Amnesty⁸⁵ provided the hope and opportunity for beneficiaries to engage in the civilian process, and the message was to "treat them as your own children".⁸⁶

It was essential that parallel to the process of rehabilitation, a clear message is given that terrorism is an offence and punishable by law. This was demonstrated through the indictments and prosecutions of terrorist criminals for breaking the law.

The sound leadership provided at every level is vital to maintain standards and security at each facility. The ethos of the rehabilitation centers was similar to a residential training center where individuals engage in a series of life skills to develop self and promote peace and harmony. The beneficiary gradually begins to see the "other" as non-

⁸⁵ A Presidential Amnesty was provided to the Tamil tigers that entered rehabilitation, 2009.

⁸⁶ Presidential briefing on how to conduct rehabilitation to the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, May 2009.

threatening, observing in the “other” behavior and values to emulate, thereby invalidating the distorted images propagated and maintained of the “other” by the terrorist group.

Rehabilitation and community engagement is a counter terrorism strategy that is long lasting and sustainable. Terrorists who are rehabilitated are vulnerable in the community to potential recruits. The community is the base from which individuals are recruited and groomed into terrorism. Therefore the rehabilitation and the de-radicalization of former terrorists is an ongoing process. It is essential to continuously assess rehabilitation programs and the progress made by the former terrorist cadres. The aftercare process of the reintegrated beneficiary is a vital aspect to facilitate the smooth transition of the beneficiary into community life. While within rehabilitation the beneficiaries are supported to de-radicalize and re-engage into the community. It is essential to conduct Community Engagement Programs⁸⁷ to prevent re-radicalization of the reintegrated beneficiaries as well as to build community resilience as a sustained counter terrorism and counter insurgency strategy.

⁸⁷ International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Singapore, held its first International Conference on Community Engagement (ICCE), September 21, 2011.

Design & Printing Layout by:

Media Tec Advertising & Printing Services

Published by:

Research & Monitoring Division

Department of Government Information, Sri Lanka

Printed by:

Department of Government Printing, Sri Lanka.