

Community conflict, tension and life in new environment: Conflict and its impact on Vadda community in Mahaweli resettlement schemes in Sri Lanka

Konflik komunitas, ketegangan, dan kehidupan di lingkungan baru: Konflik dan dampaknya terhadap komunitas Vadda dalam skema relokasi Mahaweli di Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

There is a strong relationship between conflict and resettlement, as displaced communities often undergo resettlement following violent conflicts. It is important to consider conflicts during and after the resettlement process and their impact on the community. This study aimed to investigate community disputes in resettlement areas and their impact on daily activities. The qualitative research used an inductive and exploratory approach, applying reflexive thematic analysis. Eighteen respondents were selected through purposive sampling for semi-structured interviews from a resettlement scheme in Hennanigala South, Mahaweli "C" Zone, Sri Lanka. Various types of conflicts were identified, including human-wildlife, community-government officials, identity, community, and resource conflicts. These conflicts are driven by factors such as population growth, agricultural modernization, illegal encroachment, and environmental imbalance. They have led to social, economic, cultural, and psychological impacts on the community. Addressing these conflicts requires establishing a conflict mitigation and resolution system at policy and practical levels. Effective resolution involves careful planning, community engagement, and policy enforcement to protect the rights and welfare of the resettled population. Resolving conflicts necessitates effective communication, empathy, and willingness to compromise.

Keywords: conflict, displacement, indigenous community, resettlement, resource

ABSTRAK

Terdapat hubungan yang kuat antara konflik dan relokasi, karena komunitas yang terdampak sering kali menjalani proses relokasi setelah konflik kekerasan. Penting untuk mempertimbangkan konflik yang terjadi selama dan setelah proses relokasi serta dampaknya terhadap komunitas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki sengketa yang terjadi di daerah relokasi dan dampaknya terhadap aktivitas sehari-hari. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan pendekatan induktif dan eksploratif dengan menerapkan analisis tematik reflektif. Sebanyak delapan belas responden dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling untuk wawancara semi-terstruktur dari sebuah program relokasi di Hennanigala Selatan, Zona Mahaweli "C", Sri Lanka. Berbagai jenis konflik diidentifikasi, termasuk konflik manusia dengan satwa liar, komunitas dengan pejabat pemerintah, konflik identitas, komunitas, dan sumber daya. Konflik-konflik ini dipicu oleh faktor-faktor seperti pertumbuhan populasi, modernisasi pertanian, pendudukan ilegal, dan ketidakseimbangan lingkungan. Konflik-konflik tersebut telah menyebabkan dampak sosial, ekonomi, budaya, dan psikologis pada komunitas.

Penanganan konflik-konflik ini memerlukan pembentukan sistem mitigasi dan resolusi konflik baik pada tingkat kebijakan maupun praktik. Penyelesaian yang efektif melibatkan perencanaan yang cermat, keterlibatan komunitas, dan penegakan kebijakan untuk melindungi hak dan kesejahteraan populasi yang direlokasi. Penyelesaian konflik memerlukan komunikasi yang efektif, empati, dan kesediaan untuk berkompromi.

Kata kunci: konflik, pengungsian, komunitas adat, relokasi, sumber daya

Introduction

Conflict can be defined as the incompatibility of interests, goals, values, needs, expectations, and social ideologies (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Conflicts are inevitable in human interactions (McKenna, 2016). Coser defined social conflict as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources (Coser, 1956). Conflict arises from differences in viewpoints, needs, or beliefs. They can stem from various sources, such as disparities in values, perspectives, or access to resources. Managing and resolving conflicts effectively is crucial for fostering peace and harmony in societies (Humphreys, 2005).

Development-Induced Displacement and Resettlement are on the rise in developing countries, posing challenges for those forced to relocate (Kumar & Talukdar, 2015). Power imbalances among stakeholders, including international financiers, governments, developers, and affected populations, often drive displacement (Mteki et al., 2017). This process can have significant impacts on individuals and communities, especially tribal and indigenous groups affected by large-scale projects like dams and industries leading to socio-economic consequences and injustices (Gori, 2023). Resettlement can lead to economic hardships due to land loss and resource constraints, with households cutting back on expenses for years (Hussain et al., 2022). Resettlement can have far-reaching implications. For example, many families persist in cutting down their spending for multiple years following their return to their original habitat (van der Ploeg & Vanclay, 2017). Forced displacement disrupts communities, erodes social cohesion, and increases poverty. To mitigate these impacts, tailored interventions and collaboration between host and displaced communities are essential (Hitchcock, 2012).

Displacement-Induced Resettlement (DIR) has numerous adverse effects on communities and individuals, including land deprivation, reduced access to resources, and increased vulnerability, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, individuals with limited education, and indigenous populations (Setiowati et al., 2023). Efforts to mitigate these negative consequences often involve providing compensation for lost possessions, assisting in relocation and resettlement, and supporting the restoration of livelihoods and community development (Terminski, 2013). However, these efforts are not always successful, as some affected groups continue to face challenges even after relocation. Effective DIR policies and practices require thorough planning, collaboration with affected communities, and a commitment to safeguarding the rights and well-being of all involved throughout the process (Zhang et al., 2022).

Resettlement has significant social impacts on communities, leading to tensions, identity erosion, lifestyle changes, and integration challenges. Disputes often arise due to unclear laws and unrealistic expectations, causing conflicts between communities, investors, and governments (Emmanuel et al., 2020). Traditional socio-economic surveys and community engagement methods can worsen these conflicts.

The consequences of resettlement include the loss of cultural traditions, unique spaces, and economic stability, altering daily habits and increasing women's reliance on men in marginalized communities (Hussain et al., 2022). The process of resettlement, which occurs as a consequence of development initiatives, not only entails the tangible loss of resources for marginalized individuals, but also contributes to the gradual disappearance of their cultural customs and sense of place. Western development initiatives can further erode cultural heritage and lifestyle of indigenous groups. Integration into host communities can provide challenges due to variables such as greater geographical distances, differing treatment, and the level of acceptance from the host group (Buheji, 2020). Following resettlement, individuals may encounter challenges in reestablishing a sense of belonging and camaraderie, with the degree of satisfaction with their new dwelling playing a crucial role in

cultivating community interactions (Keller et al., 2015). In addition to the social, cultural, and economic impacts experienced by resettled communities, resettlement induced by large-scale development projects also gives rise to complex conflict dynamics.

Megaprojects leading to development-induced displacement play a significant role in escalating conflicts (Vraneski, 2003). The absence of recognition and participation from local populations during the initial phases of these initiatives results in social problems and uncertainties, heightening the potential for conflict (Muggah, 2003). Resettlement leads to the erosion of social cohesion, economic standing, and the ability to access resources, which in turn generates conflicts and grievances among the impacted groups (Fiala, 2015). In particular, women, encounter challenges such as inequitable access to property, housing, and decision-making authority, intensifying their vulnerability and potential for conflict (Melketo et al., 2023). Disregarding the social and cultural consequences of forced resettlement exacerbates conflicts, as seen by interrupted social networks, modified traditions, and heightened social issues in resettlement locations (Wayland & Kuniholm, 2016). The factors contributing to conflicts in development-induced resettlement situations are complex and varied. Relocation from development projects can worsen conflicts by disrupting social networks, changing cultural practices, increasing violence against women, and giving rise to issues like alcoholism and illegal alcohol sales (Brunnschweiler & Bulte, 2009). Development-induced resettlement leads to loss of livelihoods, land, and confidence among smallholder farmers, potentially escalating conflicts due to inadequate compensation and deteriorating living conditions (Mteki et al., 2017). While many studies have focused on the impacts faced by resettled community post-resettlement, there is a lack of recognition of the conflict conditions in the post-resettlement period in the context of Sri Lanka.

The settlers in the Hennanigala area belong to an indigenous community that was traditionally self-sufficient, relying on hunting and Chena cultivation and forest resources (Gunasekara & Thimbiripola, 2023). After being relocated, the community had to establish a new way of life in a new setting. They chose not to conform to a formal lifestyle and instead followed their own customs. The forced relocation significantly altered their way of life, and government officials helped them adapt to their new surroundings. Conflicts often arise in post-resettlement communities for various reasons, increasing the likelihood of conflict escalation. This discord can disrupt the daily activities of resettled individuals and hinder the smooth functioning of social, economic, and cultural environments. The study aimed to investigate the different types of community disputes in resettlement areas and assess their impact on the efficient and effective performance of daily activities for resettled individuals. The research question of the study was: What types of conflicts exist between the Vadda community in the resettlement scheme, and how do these conflicts impact their daily lives?

Method

The study used an inductive and exploratory approach to examine conflicts that arise in resettlement sites, aiming to understand the conflicting experiences of resettled individuals. The research adhered to the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) guidelines (Tong et al., 2007).

Study design

The study employed an exploratory qualitative research approach to provide detailed explanations of the research problem from a subjective perspective (Stone, 2004). The study used an inductive research design and applied a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study employed an inductive and exploratory methodology to examine the experiences and perspectives of resettled individuals regarding disputes. The aim was to gain insight into the factors contributing to disputes in resettlement areas. The study adhered to the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research guidelines (Tong et al., 2007).

Participants

For this study, a total of eighteen (18) respondents were selected to participate in semi structured interviews. The participant group included twelve (12) settlers, comprising first, second, and third-generation members, two government officials (a Forest Officer and a Mahaweli Unit Manager), and three leaders from Community-Based Associations (CBA) (the Chairman of the Farmers Association, Water Association, and Fisheries Association). The participants were intentionally selected based on

their ability to provide insightful information on the region and conflicts in the resettlement area. They represented a diverse range of ages, generations, and employment backgrounds, offering a comprehensive perspective on the issues being investigated. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. They were recruited from resettlement scheme in Hennanigala South within the Mahaweli "C" Zone.

Table 1. Demographic data of respondents

<i>No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>
1	A	78	M	Farming	Married
2	B	63	M	Farming	Married
3	C	54	F	Farming	Married
4	D	76	F	Farming	Married
5	E	44	M	Labourer	Unmarried
6	F	59	M	Farming	Married
7	G	48	F	Labourer	Married
8	H	35	M	Fisherman	Married
9	I	29	M	Labourer	Unmarried
10	J	38	F	Labourer	Married
11	K	63	M	Labourer	Married
12	L	38	F	Farming	Married
13	M	17	M	Student	Married
14	N	19	M	Fishing/Farming	Unmarried
15	O	56	F	Farming	Married
16	P	38	M	Mahaweli Officer	Married
17	Q	43	M	Forest Officer	Married
18	R	27	F	Farming	Married

Data collection and setting

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants using three semi-structured interview guides tailored for settlers, government officials, and leaders of CBA. The guides contained open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses. Settlers and CBA leaders were interviewed to explore their conflict experiences and identify contributing variables, while other participants provided insights into ongoing conflicts and key factors. The interviews offered diverse perspectives on conflicts and contributing factors from settlers, community leaders, and public sector officials, which were thematically synthesized.

The interviews took place on-site, with active participation from all participants and no-one withdrew from the interview. State sector officials were interviewed in their offices, while settlers and CBA leaders were interviewed at their homes. Researchers documented participant narratives and observations in field notes.

The data were analyzed using the reflexive thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The collected data were examined daily. The author transcribed the data verbatim and analyzed it using manual coding. The relevant narratives were then translated into English (Stone, 2004). Braun and Clarke outline a six-stage method for conducting thematic analysis. The stages involve familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and refining the themes, defining and labeling the themes, and ultimately, producing the final analysis document (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of thematic analysis provided a robust framework for analyzing the data. After identifying initial themes, the findings were reviewed by five respondents, including leaders of the Community-Based Organization (CBA) and two government officials, to ensure the accuracy of the themes in representing the resettlement area. To ensure the reliability of the study, the quality criteria for qualitative research established by Lincoln and Guba were applied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability are used to assess the credibility of this qualitative research.

Result and Discussion

Types of dispute in resettlement area

The resettlement process often triggers various disputes among communities adapting to their new environment and way of life. Although aimed at improving living standards, resettlement can generate tensions related to the distribution of limited resources, changes in land access, and differing understandings and cultures. In resettlement areas, conflicts often arise between community members who previously lived in simpler conditions and now face increased demands due to population growth. These disputes not only occur within the community but also involve external parties, such as the government and resource managers. Common types of disputes in resettlement areas include conflicts over access to and distribution of natural resources, such as water and fisheries, as well as dissatisfaction with policies and regulations imposed by authorities. These tensions are frequently fueled by discrepancies between the expectations of resettled populations and the management of the region, leading to perceived inequities in resource allocation and facility management. The following sections will identify the primary types of disputes observed in resettlement areas based on field findings.

Conflicts within community based on resources in the area.

Community conflict is not a new phenomenon, as conflict is an inescapable occurrence in human life (Hitchcock, 2012). Various types of conflicts can arise in resettlement sites due to different human activities. The Vadda community resettled here originated from the Maduruoya forest when it was converted to a forest conservation area under the Mahaweli Development Project. They faced a completely unfamiliar environment and had to deal with numerous new experiences they had never encountered before. The first generation did not face many disputes as they had few needs and ample resources in the area. However, as the population of the second and third generations has grown, their needs and desires have increased. The following Figure 01 shows the most prevalent community conflicts in the area. The primary community conflict revolves around water and fishing in Hennanigala Lake. The community relies heavily on agriculture, with fishing in the lake being their second largest source of income. However, due to population growth, resources have become insufficient, leading to conflicts over access and usage.

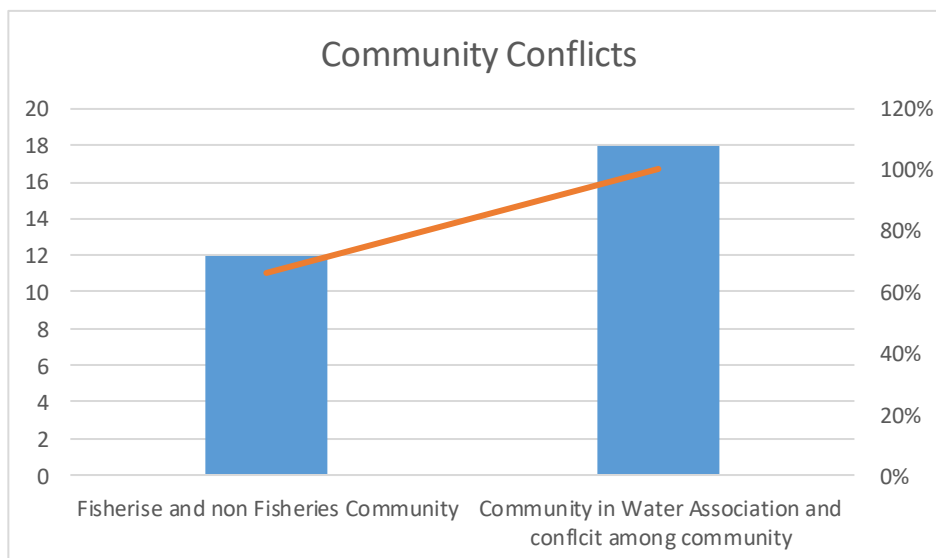


Figure 1. Community conflicts in resettlement area

Source: (Field Data, 2023)

Based on the chart, two main types of community conflicts have been identified. The most significant conflict involves communities associated with water distribution, particularly between a water association and another community (100%). Another prevalent conflict in the area involves the fisheries community and related disputes (66%). At the onset of resettlement in the area, the Mahaweli

Development Authority initially provided ample resources for agriculture and fishing. However, as the population grew over time, the resources did not expand accordingly. Community conflicts related to fishing activities were fewer compared to water-related conflicts. The water-related disputes primarily revolved around issues such as distribution of drinking water and water supply for agricultural activities.

Conflict in fisheries community

Although these areas are under the governance of the Mahaweli Development Authority, the community has established several associations at the local level to manage and distribute the limited resources available. However, these self-governing associations have led to conflicts within the community. The water association, fisheries association, and farmers association have been set up to distribute resources and have their own rules and regulations for resource usage. One participant mentioned,

"My main source of income is fishing, which I do at Hennanigala Lake, a small lake where not everyone is allowed to fish. To manage conflicts arising from limited fishing opportunities, a fisheries association was established. Settlers who wish to fish in the lake must become members of the association by paying a membership fee, which is used for fish breeding in the lake. Despite the established mechanism, conflicts still arise when non-members attempt to fish in the lake." (SI, 19 years old)

Non-members of the fisheries association do not join the association because they claim they cannot afford the membership fee. They argue that the lake is a common resource, so they should not have to pay to fish in it. The Fisheries Association is a community-driven organization, and no one can force anyone to become a member. Additionally, Mahaweli officers do not intervene in the affairs of this community association. The lake's fish population is not increasing at the same rate as the human population. To address this, the Fisheries Association has decided to artificially breed fish. Members pay to increase the fish population in the lake, while non-members do not contribute financially but still fish in the lake. This has led to conflicts within the community. The association regularly harvests fish and educates the local community on sustainable fishing practices to protect small-scale fish, but non-members may not be aware of these efforts. The chairman of the Fisheries Association stresses the importance of preserving the fish population for future generations.

"We collect membership fees from society members to fund regular fishing activities in the lake. We educate them on sustainable fishing practices to avoid depleting the fish population, providing them with appropriate fishing gear. Some merchants engage in illegal fishing practices, which can harm the overall fish stock and lead to conflicts among residents." (KI, 52 years old)

Water related conflict

All respondents reported experiencing water-related conflicts in the area (100%). They cited scarcity and a lack of clean drinking water in the resettlement area as the main issues. Water scarcity is a significant issue in the region due to its dry climate and limited rainfall. Despite receiving water from the Mahaweli Irrigation Scheme, the area faces challenges with the quality of drinking water. Numerous studies have linked kidney disease in the area to the lack of access to clean drinking water (Rajapakse et al., 2016).

According to data from the medical office of health in Dehiaththakandiya, there is a high number of Chronic Kidney Disease patients in Hennanigala South due to a lack of clean water. The area has one purification plant established by the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN), but the community is responsible for its maintenance. To ensure proper upkeep, a water association was formed, requiring settlers to be members and pay a fee to use purified water. However, disputes have arisen within the community. Some settlers have been taking water without paying the membership fee, leading to conflicts. The Chairman of the Water Association has stated that resolving these issues is crucial to ensure the sustainability of the purification plant and the health of the community.

"We formed the water association to ensure the efficient distribution of clean water. Although the association was established by the SLN, we are responsible for maintaining and repairing

the water treatment plant. Typically, one-time repairs cost at least 1500 LKR, but the last repair cost us 5700 LKR, which was a significant burden. To cover these costs, we collect money from residents who were get membership from the water association. Currently, we have 101 members, which represents only a small fraction of the 1100 families in the community. We collect a fee of 1 LKR per liter of water. While 1 LKR may not seem like much, some residents try to access water without paying, leading to conflicts between paying families and non-paying families.” (KI, 45 years old)

The community is in the area belong low income families and they have no money to pay for water even though the collection is very low. The low-income families in the area struggle to afford purified water, despite the low cost. The resettled Vadda community in Hennanigala faces challenges in paying for water due to socio-economic and systemic issues. The Vadda community in resettled areas find it difficult to transition to agricultural or wage-based livelihoods, as their traditional practices such as hunting and foraging are limited in new settlements. Due to limited access to stable income sources, even minor expenses like water payments can pose a financial burden.

Water-related conflicts and land and forest encroachment are the most prevalent issues in the area. According to respondents, all of them (100%) have experienced these two types of resource conflicts.

The Mahaweli Development Project was implemented in the dry zone of the country, and Hennanigala South, a dry zone village, is facing water scarcity issues. In this region, the demand for limited fresh water resources is rising due to population growth, economic development, and the deterioration of forest watersheds. Competition for water resources is intensifying among residents, authorities, institutions, economic sectors, and other livelihood groups. As one respondent mentioned,

“We do not have access to safe drinking water. Sri Lanka Navy has set up a water purification plant on the border of Hennanigala South and North. The plant primarily serves the people in the North, who control it and generate revenue to maintain its operations. We are unable to afford the cost of water. However, we urgently require clean drinking water. The people in the North are unwilling to provide us with water unless we pay them, leading to a dispute between us over water access.” (SI, 47 years old)

The lack of high-quality drinking water in the area has led to numerous cases of chronic illnesses, particularly kidney disease. Almost every family in the community has at least one member suffering from kidney problems. Despite repeated requests from the affected individuals, the government has not taken any action to provide a suitable water management system. Discussions between the community and the Mahaweli Authority have not yielded any solutions, with one respondent stating that the authorities have not shown any interest in addressing the issue.

“Access to safe drinking water is crucial in our area due to the prevalence of kidney illness. Many families have at least one patient, putting their dependents at risk and leading to family breakdowns. We have engaged in discussions with the MDA and other government agencies, but have not yet received a response. We urgently request access to high-quality water to address this pressing issue.” (KI, 45 years old)

Effective irrigation management is essential in this region as agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of the population. Water is a vital resource for agricultural activities and is primarily sourced from the MDA. Farmers in the area heavily depend on the water supplied by the MDA for their farming needs. Adequate water supply is crucial for them to sustain their agricultural practices.

“We are all farmers who rely on agriculture as our main source of income, which is heavily dependent on a consistent water supply. The MDA is responsible for managing the water supply, but some officers fail to provide water on time. This is often due to corruption, where individuals with money bribe officials to obtain water illegally. Despite our warnings against this practice, it continues unchecked. As a result, we face water shortages at crucial times, leading to difficulties in harvesting our crops from the paddy fields.” (SI, 27 years old)

Water is mainly distributed to farmlands through small irrigation canals. Proper water management is essential for the livelihoods of farmers. Inadequate management can lead to conflicts between farmers and authorities or among different farmer groups. This is a common issue in the community.

“The MDA has implemented a water distribution system. For years, we have followed the distribution schedule to receive water. However, some farmers on higher ground block the irrigation canal on days when we are supposed to receive water, causing unfairness to lower-level landowners like us. Despite reporting this issue to authorities multiple times, the problem persists. The recent conflict between upper and lower landowners highlights the ongoing issue.” (SI, 52 years old)

Land and forest encroachment

Restriction and unequal access to natural resources can lead to resource scarcity and serve as a source of conflict when connected to grievances related to equity, fairness, and justice (Philip, 2010). Land and forest resources in the area are limited due to restricted access. The predominant land use patterns consist of agricultural and residential lands, which were inherited by settlers from the MDA during resettlement. However, as the population has increased over generations, the amount of land owned by each family has not expanded. While the first and second generations did not face land issues, the third generation is experiencing challenges with insufficient land for living and paddy farming. The demand for residential land has surged with the growing population in the settlement, leading to encroachment, particularly on Mahaweli land and forest reserves. The Mahaweli officer in the area has reported an increase in encroachment incidents.

“There is currently no established procedure for distributing land to the third generation of settlers. Despite lacking legal authority to use Mahaweli lands, some settlers have encroached on the land for their own purposes. We have informed them that this is illegal, but they continue to occupy the same land.” (SI, 52 years old)

Illegal exploitation of natural resources by criminal networks has become a significant issue in the area, leading to disputes. Despite efforts by local settlers to maintain control through rules and regulations, powerful external groups have engaged in illegal operations on the reservation and Mahaweli territories. This results in the unfair extraction and trafficking of natural resources, potentially causing conflicts between communities. The presence of illegal possession and timber depots exacerbates the situation, leading to disputes among ethnic groups, individuals, and authorities. Timber depots and illegal transportation of timber are common in these areas, contributing to deforestation. One respondent highlighted the severity of the issue by stating:

“We are not allowed to enter the forest, but we often see vehicles carrying timber on certain days. These vehicles remove trees from the forest and transport them. Illegal loggers are operating within the forest, unlawfully possessing it. During our recent visit to the forest, we found illegal timber depots. While we are prohibited from collecting bee honey, these illegal loggers are able to cut down trees and transport them without consequences. We have relied on the forest for thousands of years, but now we are being labeled as illegal poachers.” (SI, 63 years old)

Conflict among settlers and government officers

Disputes among settlers and Mahaweli officers

Figure 2 illustrates the disputes between settlers and government officers. The figure highlights two main types of conflicts that exist within the settlement: conflicts between forest officers and the community, and conflicts between settlers and Mahaweli officers. Respondents reported experiencing more conflict between forest officers and the community compared to conflicts between settlers and Mahaweli officers.

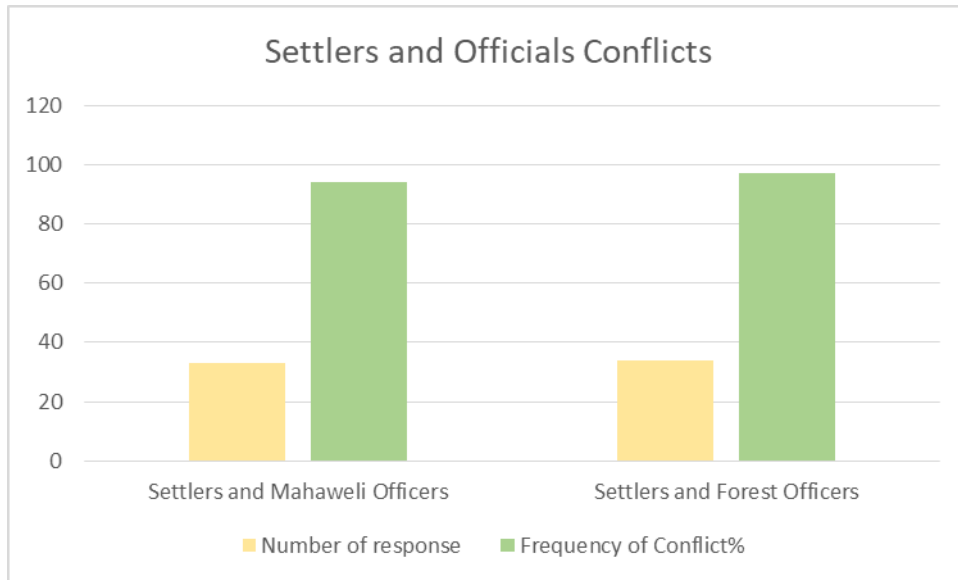


Figure 2. Disputes among settlers and government officers

Source: (Field Data, 2023)

The Mahaweli Development Authority oversees the entire Mahaweli resettlement region and controls all lands and resources within it. Additionally, the Maduru Oya reservation is situated on the border of the Hennanigala South area and is managed by the Forest Department, with Forest Department officials playing a crucial role in its governance. However, tensions have developed over time between the community and the government. Despite being the third generation of resettlement sites, the residents still lack a clear understanding of government and state structures, often relying heavily on government authorities. The resettled Vadda community in Hennanigala lacks a clear understanding of government and state structures and regulations due to historical marginalization and limited access to education and civic awareness programs. Traditionally living in isolated, self-sustained societies, their engagement with formal governance systems was minimal, leaving them unfamiliar with bureaucratic processes and legal frameworks. Resettlement has disrupted their traditional way of life, further alienating them from mainstream societal norms and institutions. The absence of tailored government outreach or educational initiatives exacerbates their difficulties in navigating state structures, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and excluded from decision-making processes that directly impact their well-being. This reliance was described by one respondent as...

“My father knows very little about government activities. Whatever they say, my father gives his consent. However, now we know that we have rights. If they were forced to move here, they should be responsible for guiding us and meeting our needs.” (SI, 59 years old)

Additionally, according to the resettlement strategy, first-generation settlers were allocated a mere two acres of farmland and half an acre of inland (Withanachchi et al., 2014). In the second generation, the landowner from the first generation had to divide the property among the family's children. Now, they are in the third generation, and the family is growing, but the land plots are not enough for each household. There are unused Mahaweli lands that settlers are requesting, but the authorities are not considering their requests, leading to a dispute. One settler described the situation as,

“We are currently in the third generation and facing challenges due to insufficient land to support our livelihoods. There is excess land under the Mahaweli Development Authority, which we have requested access to multiple times, but the unit manager and other officials have not addressed our concerns. We are eager to return to our previous way of life, but forest officers prevent us from entering the forest, labeling us as illegal poachers. How can we proceed in this situation?” (SI, 27 years old)

Mahaweli officers frequently fail to address requests to avoid dividing land for the second and third generations of the resettled Vadda community in Hennanigala, citing systemic, administrative, and

policy constraints. The Mahaweli Development Authority operates under land management regulations that prioritize equitable land distribution to accommodate population growth within resettled communities. However, these policies often overlook the unique cultural and social dynamics of indigenous communities like the Vaddas, who consider land a communal asset essential to their identity and way of life. Officers may also feel pressured to adhere to uniform administrative guidelines that prioritize land allotment for subsistence farming over preserving communal landholdings. Additionally, limited awareness or sensitivity toward the cultural significance of undivided land within the Vadda community further contributes to the lack of responsive action. This disconnect underscores the necessity for more inclusive policies that respect indigenous traditions while addressing population pressures.

Disputes among settlers and forest officers

The Maduru Oya forest was classified as a reservation forest, leading to the displacement of the Hennanigala South indigenous group who used to live, hunt and practice Chena cultivation in that area (Gunasekara & Thimbiripola, 2022). After making a reservation, they were unable to access the forest and witnessed people engaging in illegal encroachment. Upon being resettled in Hennanigala, they were promised the chance to access and continue their livelihood activities within the forest. After resettlement in the new environment, the community must adhere to various rules and regulations. The responsible officers overseeing these regulations are the Mahaweli officers and forest officers. Following the designation of Maduru Oya forest as a forest reservation, the forest officers have taken on the responsibility of protecting the forest and enforcing forest-related laws. The community's primary interest lies in maintaining their traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle, which is closely tied to the forest. On the other hand, the forest officers are focused on enforcing forest protection laws. This clash of interests has led to conflicts in the area.

As per the Sri Lanka Forest Act, it is not permitted to consider a reservation forest as a consumable forest. The Maduru Oya forest was designated as a reservation, which resulted in the Hennanigala South residential indigenous group being forced to move to this location. According to the Sri Lanka Forest Act, reservation forests cannot be used for consumable purposes. There are entry restrictions to the forest, but these individuals earn a living by selling bee honey and hunting, both of which require them to enter the forest. It is important to highlight that entering the forest is against the law.

“Upon resettling here, we were initially granted permission to access the Maduru Oya forest. However, after resettlement, we were prohibited from entering the forest. Hunting and gathering bee honey are our main sources of sustenance, which we continue to practice. Despite the ban, we still enter the forest to engage in our traditional activities. When caught by forest officers, we are fined and sometimes imprisoned.” (SI, 71 years old)

Upon being remanded, individuals are required to assume the role of an offender and pay fines for various infractions. Bringing matchboxes into the forest is prohibited by law, necessitating a refinement in the process from the matchbox to the axe. Traditional methods involving the use of smoke-inducing substances are still employed when gathering bee honey. The axe is a customary tool used for this purpose, and individuals always carry it with them, especially when entering the forest.

“We are part of a community with a long history of living in forests, where we have sustainably consumed resources for thousands of years without harming the environment. Agriculture is not a priority for us, and we follow traditional hunting guidelines that include avoiding harm to young, pregnant, or mating animals. Our sustainable practices have allowed us to coexist with the forest for centuries. However, recent incidents of deforestation by outsiders have restricted our access to the forest. My son was fined by forest officers for possessing hunting equipment, including a matchbox, which we had to pay by mortgaging our paddy field. Despite the challenges, we continue to enter the forest clandestinely to maintain our way of life. Granting legal access to the forest alone will not resolve this ongoing conflict.” (SI, 56 years old)

Identity Conflict

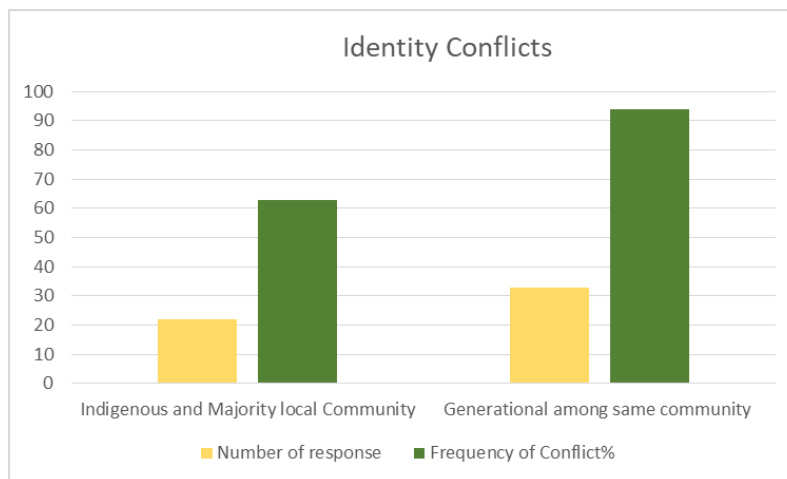


Figure 3. Identity conflicts in resettlement area

Source: (Field Data, 2023)

Displacement often triggers identity issues among resettled individuals. The resettlement process involves the challenging task of redefining and reconstructing identities in the new context. This community, belonging to the indigenous population of Sri Lanka, has preserved its cultural identity for centuries, including unique languages, culinary customs, attire traditions, and religious practices. The disruption caused by relocation from their original homes, social networks, and cultural norms intensifies feelings of identity crisis, assimilating and integration into society. The conflict between existing identities and the expectations of host communities often leads to tensions and reinforces stereotypes, underscoring the intricate relationship between relocation and identity development. The relocation of indigenous people has significantly impacted their cultural practices and way of life compared to their historical roots. The physical appearance of the Henanigala-South indigenous people differs markedly from that of their ancestors (Epa et al., 2023). The relocation of the indigenous population in Henanigala South has had a significant impact on their socio-cultural and economic aspects.

Identity conflict among Vadda community and majority groups

Hennanigala South is situated adjacent to Hennanigala North village, which is predominantly inhabited by the Sinhala community around the Village. The first generation of resettled individuals in Hennanigala North have preserved their identity, and the second generation is also taking steps to maintain their cultural heritage. To ensure the successful preservation of their identity and culture, it is essential to protect and promote their traditions. In an increasingly diverse society, fostering peaceful methods of integration is crucial (Gunasekara, 2023). In plural societies, different communities maintain unique differences to protect their identities while interacting with each other. However, they often struggle to preserve their cultural identity while adapting to the majority culture, particularly in terms of religion and language. The leader of the indigenous community highlighted the current conflicting conditions they face regarding religion and language.

“When we arrived here, our main worship tradition was the "Nae Yakuma" ritual, where we invited the demon of the mountains, demon Bilindi, or other deceased relatives' demons to seek favor for prey, fertility, and protection. Additionally, we performed rituals such as Bambara Yakk Pujawa, Dole Yakka Netuma, Rahu Yakk Puja, Wanagatha Yakk Netuma, Kiri Amma Pujawa, Pena Belima, Hethma Pujawa, and Kirikorha Naetiema. These spiritual activities aim to show gratitude to the environment and those who have supported us in sustaining our existence. While the practice of Buddhism is becoming more popular in our community, other beliefs are gradually fading away.” (SI, 56 years old)

Minority communities often face social, economic, and cultural challenges in pluralistic societies (Gunasekara, 2023). This group has its own unique language with a rich history spanning thousands of

years. Language plays a vital role in preserving and passing on one's identity. After relocating, these individuals integrated into the predominantly Sinhalese community and had to learn the Sinhala language, leading to a decline in their indigenous language usage. Most community members now primarily use the dominant language, making it challenging to preserve their own language. This linguistic shift has created tension between different age groups within the community, as expressed by a participant:

“We had a unique language that we used for generations. When we resettled, we had to learn to communicate with others in their language as our own language was forgotten. My generation and the second generation here still use our language, but the third generation prefers to use Sinhala exclusively. This concerns me as it raises the question of how our language will survive beyond our generations. It may become a dead language if not actively preserved and passed down.” (SI, 76 years old)

Intergenerational disputes

The third generation of the resettled group in this region exhibits contemporary behavior, incorporating modern tactics in their actions. They lack forest experience and have been directly exposed to the modern, globalized world through education. They acquire diverse qualities and behaviors through formal education in government institutions and are influenced by their environment. Despite their attempts to integrate into the mainstream culture, they face resistance from the dominant culture, which continues to discriminate against indigenous people. The third generation is currently grappling with the challenge of balancing assimilation into modern society with preserving their indigenous identity.

“I am currently enrolled at Hennanigala School, while my brother is enrolled in an advanced-level program at Medagama School. At Hennanigala School, we have the freedom to express ourselves and follow our culture and traditions, as every student is considered a member of our community. However, my brother faces challenges due to language barriers and certain behaviors, causing him significant discomfort. Our elders emphasize the importance of preserving our indigenous identity, and when we venture outside our community, we encounter obstacles that challenge our sense of self.” (SI, 17 years old)

The chart below illustrates the impacts of conflicts as reported by the respondents.

Table 2. Impact of conflict on resettled community

Impact	Criteria	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Social Impact	Violation of Rights	11	61
	Social Disorganization	16	89
Economic Impact	Livelihood Challenges	16	89
	Economic Hardships	16	89
Cultural Impact	Social Disintegration	10	55
	Cultural Displacement	15	83
	Identity Crisis	09	50
Psychological Impact	Insecurity Feelings	07	39
	Night Mares	04	22
	Trauma	06	33

Source: (Field Data, 2023)

Based on the table, four types of impacts on conflicts can be identified. The most prominent impact is economic, followed by social impact. Cultural impact is the third type, and psychological impact is the least significant. Social impact is primarily related to conflicts between humans and wildlife, as well as conflicts between communities and government officials. Economic impact is mainly caused by conflicts within the community and between government officials and communities. Cultural impact arises from identity conflicts, while psychological impact is primarily associated with conflicts between humans and wildlife.

Indigenous communities have historically relied on hunting, gathering, and small-scale agriculture (Bannon & Paul, 2003). However, restrictions on access to traditional lands for wildlife conservation have undermined their livelihoods. Wildlife authorities often impose restrictions that prevent indigenous people from hunting or gathering, further eroding their traditional way of life. Resettled communities face the challenge of adapting to new livelihoods while dealing with wildlife in close proximity (Painter, 2004).

The primary livelihood activity in the area is agriculture, with rice farming being a prominent activity. Rice farming requires proper water supply at different stages, but conflicts between Mahaweli officers and the community regarding water distribution have had a negative impact on the farms, especially during the dry season. Additionally, agricultural land is a crucial component of their livelihood. There is a conflict between Mahaweli officers and the community regarding land demand and distribution for second and third generations, which has adversely affected their livelihoods and quality of life. Despite the presence of relevant authorities such as the forest department and Mahaweli Development Authority, effective intervention to address these issues has been lacking, leading to economic hardships for families (Sarkodie & Strezov, 2018).

The constant threat conflicts can lead to psychological stress and a sense of insecurity within resettled communities (Wong & Herath, 2014). The loss of traditional ways of life, combined with new social and economic pressures, has contributed to a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement among many indigenous people. Further cultural displacement has occurred due to conflicts (Mteki et al., 2017). The indigenous group has resettled into areas that do not align with their traditional nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, disrupting their connection to the land and spiritual practices. Community conflicts often result in the erosion of indigenous culture and identity.

When indigenous groups are resettled into mixed communities, they are exposed to dominant cultural practices, leading to a gradual loss of their own traditions, languages, and cultural heritage. The Vadda language gradually disappearing from their daily usage as a result of language assimilation with majority Sinhala language. The pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture can also lead younger generations of indigenous people to abandon their ancestral customs, creating a deviation between the old and new generations. As a result of this, they have left following their customs and traditions such as annual traditional dance *Kiri koraha*, *Ne yakun pidima* (Relative Demons).

Community conflicts have a profound impact on resettled indigenous communities in Sri Lanka, particularly in terms of social, economic, and cultural aspects (Prakash et al., 2020). Marginalization and Social Exclusion can be generated due to these conflicts (Tong et al., 2007). Resettled indigenous communities often find themselves in areas where they are a minority, leading to social exclusion. The indigenous community, have been marginalized in resettled area, where their traditional way of life is not understood or respected by neighboring communities. This social exclusion has led to reduce access to resources such as land, education, and healthcare, making it harder for indigenous people to integrate into the wider society.

These conflicts have disrupted livelihoods and traditional practices, leading to economic hardships and identity crises within the community. Disputes over access to basic services, land ownership, and resources have further escalated tensions. Poor water quality and inadequate access to services contribute to conflicts, while cultural disruptions and loss of heritage exacerbate disputes among communities. Resettlement can alter social structures and relationships, challenging traditional leadership and cultural norms. The loss of cultural identity and traditions in a new environment can lead to tensions and conflicts among communities striving to maintain their heritage (Emmanuel et al., 2020).

These conflicts have led to the economic disparities in among the community. Resettled indigenous communities often face economic inequalities due to these conflicts they have limited access to land and resources (Wick & Bulte, 2006). In many cases, indigenous people are resettled into areas with poor infrastructure or infertile land, making it difficult to sustain their traditional livelihoods of hunting, gathering, and agriculture (Köpke et al., 2019).

Resources are vital components of society, as they generate wealth, drive industries, and shape identities (Humphreys, 2005). However, the exploitation of natural resources can have negative

consequences, such as environmental degradation, social conflicts, and economic instability. It is essential for governments and companies to manage natural resources sustainably to ensure long-term benefits for both the environment and local communities (Seto et al., 2023). The presence of other communities, particularly those with better economic means, further deepens the divide, creating tensions over resource allocation (Mteki et al., 2017). These disparities have led to conflicts over land use and access to water, especially in resource-scarce areas leading economic disparities

Further these conflicts lead to formal land rights in resettled areas often leaves indigenous people vulnerable to land grabbing and displacement by more powerful local actors (Vraneski, 2003). Politically powerful people and rich people from the outside come and grabbed Mahaweli lands as a result of deal in between those outsiders and Mahaweli officers. And it has created tension lead to conflicts over land ownership, both within and between communities, become a common source of tension. Indigenous communities often face challenges in accessing formal justice systems to address issues such as land disputes, resource conflicts, and human rights violations. Legal procedures are costly and complex, making it difficult for indigenous individuals to navigate effectively due to limited resources and legal expertise (Schmidt, 2011). Consequently, many community conflicts remain unresolved, leading to ongoing tension and marginalization.

As the population grows, conflicts arise due to resource scarcity, leading to disputes within and among communities (Bannon & Collier, 2003). The lack of intervention and sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms exacerbates tensions between settlers and government officials. The resettled community in Hannanigala South has faced challenges in adapting to a new lifestyle while maintaining their traditional practices. Government officials have labeled them as illegal squatters and poachers, leading to conflicts with forest authorities. The community's resistance to change and the lack of support from government agencies have fueled disputes and tensions.

Resettlement projects often lead to tensions and conflicts due to various factors such as unclear government policies, ethnic divisions, competition for resources, and inadequate preparation (Sleigh, 2014). These factors can escalate intra-community tensions and occasionally lead to violent confrontations. Resources play a crucial role in the development of a resettlement strategy in a specific area, as they are closely linked to communal life. After the relocation process, disputes may arise over resources, especially concerning land, water, and forests (Paranage, 2017).

The introduction of new governance systems in resettled areas often undermines traditional leadership structures of indigenous communities. For instance, the Vedda traditionally rely on tribal chiefs and councils to handle internal disputes and resource allocation. However, when these communities are resettled, they must adjust to new political systems that may not align with their customary methods of managing community affairs. This can result in a breakdown of traditional governance and increased internal conflict.

Conclusion

The conflict in the settlement is primarily driven by factors such as population growth, agricultural modernization, illegal encroachment, settlement conversion of forest areas into human habitats, non-interrogational administrative practices and an imbalance in the connection between humans and the environment. The study identified four main types of community conflicts in the area: conflicts within the community, conflicts between the community and government offices, resource conflicts, and identity conflicts. In addition to these four main types, eight sub-conflicts were also identified in the area. These conflicts have had a negative impact on the community, leading to social, economic, and cultural vulnerabilities. These conflicts have adversely affected the living conditions of settlers at both primary and secondary levels. Attempting to address and seek solutions for these conflicts without involving affected parties is ineffective. To effectively resolve these conflicts, decisive decisions and actions must be taken based on policies. Therefore, it is essential to establish a conflict mitigation and resolution system at both the policy and practical levels, designed to satisfy the needs of all parties involved in these conflicts. Addressing the community conflicts faced by resettled indigenous people in Sri Lanka necessitates a holistic approach that includes legal recognition of their land rights, protection of their cultural identity, and increased participation in decision-making processes. Without

these measures, indigenous communities will continue to experience marginalization and conflict, impeding their ability to thrive in a rapidly changing socio-political environment.

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Statement of originality and plagiarism-free

We inform that this article is original article and free of plagiarism.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare no conflicts of interest related to this research, authorship, or publication.

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