Building Sustainable Peace through Business Linkages among Micro-Entrepreneurs: Case Studies from the North and East of Sri Lanka

Amina Yoosuf[1] and S. P. Premaratne[2]

1. Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo

2. Department of Economics, University of Colombo

While literature on peacebuilding and reconciliation emphasizes the need for stakeholders at all levels of society to be engaged in peace and reconciliation for peace to be sustainable, no study can be found on how the development of business linkages contributes to reconciliation for peace in post-conflict areas. This paper examines the nature of business linkages and the role played by business linkages among micro-entrepreneurs and their contribution to reconciliation. It also examines the development of business and social linkages among entrepreneurs from the North and the East of Sri Lanka and their first excursions into the rest of the country. The case study method is used to study two projects, one implemented in the Ampara district, and the other currently being implemented in the five districts of the Northern Province. Findings from the East have validated the hypothesis that through a group approach, entrepreneurs learn and profit from the experiences of their counterparts. The networking and relationship building opportunity offered to them through joint activities will empower their SMEs to continue to strengthen the linkages introduced through the activities undertaken jointly. Findings from the North indicate that these micro-entrepreneurs are willing to forge ties with other entrepreneurs and business development service providers. Entrepreneurs can make use of their business linkages to enhance their businesses and to build sustainable peace in post-conflict areas. It will be interesting to study and analyse further how social and economic networks can support micro-entrepreneurs in former conflict regions to make use of new opportunities.

Keywords: Peacebuilding and reconciliation, Post-conflict areas, Entrepreneurship, Social and business networks.