Resource and Vulnerability Assessment Framework:

*A tool to identify vulnerable children affected by war in Sri Lanka*

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Executive Summary

A former Portuguese, Dutch and British colony, Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948. From the 1950s tensions between Tamils and Sinhalese grew considerably, especially after Sinhalese was made the only official language (instead of both Sinhalese and Tamil) in 1956. The 20-year-old civil war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has seriously undermined the country's enormous development potential.

Nearly 900,000 children live in areas affected by the ethnic conflict and the majority of the children in the North East have known nothing but conflict in the last two decades. The impact of war and conflict on children has been well documented in academic literature. The recent generation of children and adolescents in North East Sri Lanka has been exposed to extensive social and military violence unprecedented in modern history.

On 22 February 2002, the United National Front Government entered into a formal ceasefire agreement with the LTTE. The commencement of peace negotiations has increased humanitarian access to many areas in the conflict-affected North and East regions of the country. The impact of the Tsunami of December 2004, has added yet another dimension of complexity to the conflict areas of the East and North.

This resource and vulnerability mapping (RVAM) was commissioned by the key partners of the Action Plan for Children Affected by War (‘Action Plan’) – a multi-agency and multi-sectoral collaboration of the Government of Sri Lanka, LTTE, UN, and NGO partners designed to improve the living conditions of children affected by war in all eight districts of the North East of Sri Lanka. The resource and vulnerability mapping was undertaken from mid-January to mid-February to assist key Action Plan partners to identify priority geographic areas for community based Action Plan activities.
The objectives of the **Resource and Vulnerability Assessment** were to develop a working definition of vulnerability, to develop a set of indicators to enable partners to identify particular vulnerable communities in the North East, with a focus on high degrees of vulnerability amongst children, to identify and consolidate information from existing resource and vulnerability mappings that have been carried out in the North East, to put in place a system that will enable partners, in consultation with local communities, to identify particular vulnerable communities and to identify the availability of key resources in the community.

The outcomes of the **Resource and Vulnerability Assessment** were a working definition of ‘vulnerability’, a set of vulnerability and resource indicators and a comprehensive framework to identify, prioritize and refer communities with the highest concentration and most severely vulnerable children in the North East.

The research was carried out by an international team of two Researchers from the Centre for International Health at Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia over a period of eight weeks. During the intense in-country period of four weeks, the primary researchers travelled to six of the eight districts of the North East (Ampara, Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Mannar, Kilinochchi) and carried out focus group discussions, key informant interviews, visits to schools, IDP camps and welfare centres. Data analysis and report writing took place during the third phase of the study at the Centre for International Health at Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia.

A working definition of vulnerability was developed by the researchers and refers specifically to children in Sri Lanka in the areas of protracted conflict in the North and East, who are more exposed to risks than their peers and less able to cope. This group encompasses and includes groups of children identified in the Action Plan of 2003. In an operational context these are children who are most likely to become invisible and not partake of regular programs.

The asset pentagon developed by DFID in 1999, within the vulnerability context was used to identify five types of capital: human, social, physical, natural and financial. Based on the asset capital categories, 13 parameters were identified and 40 indicators
were developed by the researchers. The indicators are a comprehensive and extensive list that was developed after observations and field visits in six districts of the North and East of Sri Lanka. The 40 indicators cover resources available to the community, vulnerability aspects and the exposure to risks/hazards.

The framework, including the set of indicators and the definition of vulnerability, are designed to assess the relative vulnerability of children in a particular community or area, compared to other communities/areas. Guidelines are provided on how to use the framework, the contexts it should be applied to, as well as who should apply this tool.

The framework is a solid working tool to be used in future community-based programming and planning throughout the North-East of Sri Lanka. As researchers and practitioners we sincerely hope that the framework continues to develop, that it is used and adapted as a flexible tool and that it will help in identifying vulnerable communities and children so that targeted interventions will help those children in the North and East of Sri Lanka who are most vulnerable, the poorest, the exploited, abused and forgotten.