

Reconciliation through Economic Engagement of North and South Farmers in Sri Lanka

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Economic engagement between communities can lead to reconciliation

- 30 years of war has created a deep divide between the North & South; Sinhala and Tamil communities in particular.
- Although nearly 10 years have gone by after the end of the civil war, reconciliation is a challenge as the people are still living in the past.
- Reconciliation between communities can be achieved in numerous ways:
 - Through political and social initiatives: good governance, accountability and justice, accepting diversity, and understanding communities;
 - Through economic engagement: creating opportunities for economic engagement among communities fosters better understanding and dependency

Inter-relationship between Trade and Reconciliation

Trade relationship between communities



Understanding & inter-dependency beyond the business



Better understanding about a community & relationships



Improved reconciliation & harmony

Economic Linkages between North & South :

A Flashback Before the War

- Strong economic engagement between traders from the South and farmers from the North:
 - Jaffna-based agricultural products (Red Onion, Tobacco, Grapes, Chili) were heavily traded
 - Hundreds of lorries used to travel to the North every day to collect agricultural goods
 - Traders directly visited farmlands and markets to collect goods and offer the farm gate price
- Northern economy flourished with export trade to the South:
 - Farmers witnessed significant gain in income
 - Gained reputation (Having stone houses, demand for farmer bridegrooms)
 - Employment for many / all family members engaged in self-production

Relationships were built on trust and respect while engaging in business



Relationships built on trust

“It was a pleasant experience. They come here looking for various products, sometimes we go there to buy vehicles; they help us. We gave products for face value and they never defaulted. We had a lot of trust.” *(Farmer from Jaffna)*



Bonding beyond monetary terms

“The produce went directly to Colombo. If we knew the person, we wouldn’t go; they would sell it and send us the money through a money order. Those days we valued relationships, we had bonding. They used to visit us, and we also go to their houses.” *(Farmer from Jaffna)*

Trade was built on mutual benefit and shared values. Adequate, exploitation-free returns were ensured.



Focused on mutual benefit

“If I asked them what’s the price of tomatoes today? They’d tell me to set the price. And I would set it at 10 cents expecting no big profits for myself. Both parties should gain from trade; that is business”. *(Trader from Kandy)*



They looked for continued business with shared values

“They think when product is sold, we as traders need to get a profit and come back to them to buy more. They sold it with that intention to keep the business continuity.” *(Trader from Kandy)*

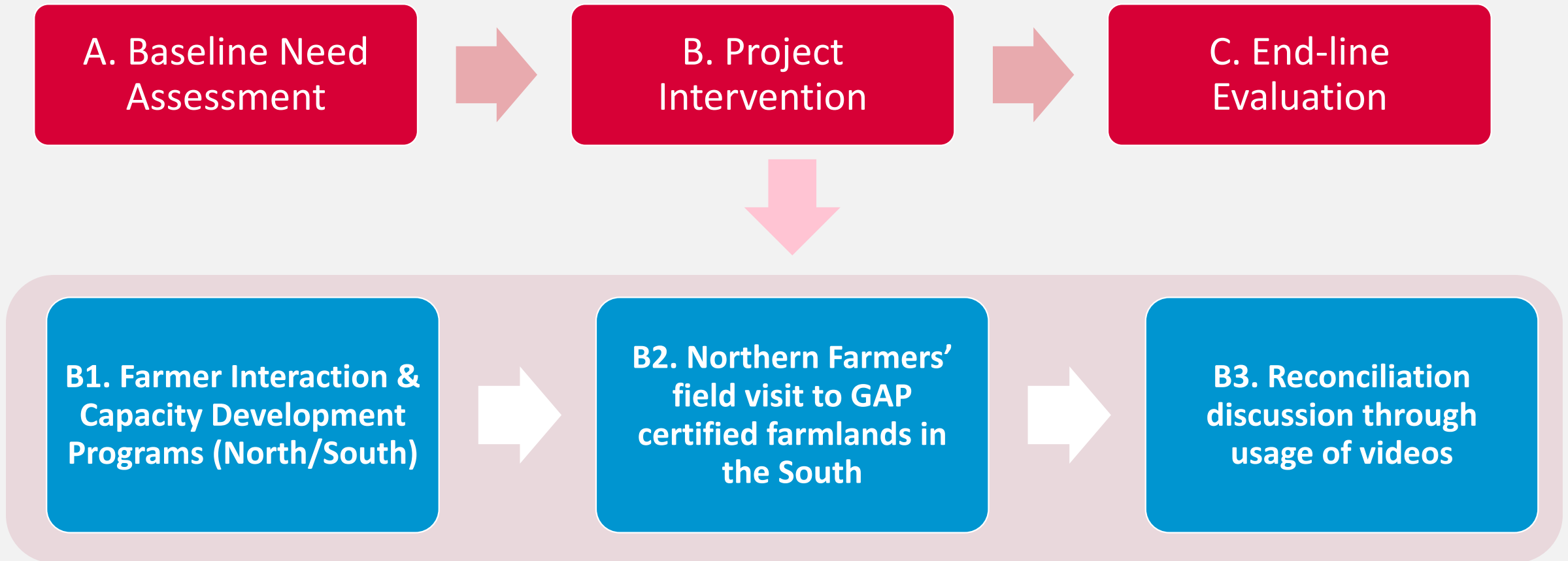
Trade links and relationships were lost to 30-year war

- Connections between North & South were lost during the late 80s'.
 - Travelling to North became difficult; as a result Sinhala retailers gradually stopped going to Jaffna.
 - Farmers displaced, migrated to Colombo and focus shifted towards foreign destinations.
- The new generation in business lacked values upon which to act.
- Even though farmers intend to re-establish networks they aren't ready to trust

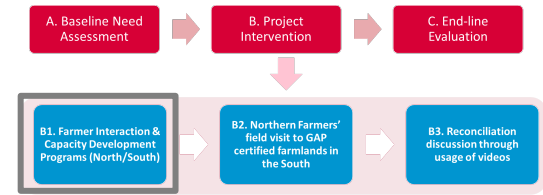


**Re-Establishing the Trade Link
could help in Reconciliation**

We designed a research program for interaction & knowledge-sharing among North & South Farmers

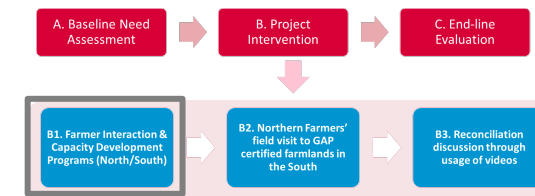


G.A.P Certified farmers from South visited North to share knowledge



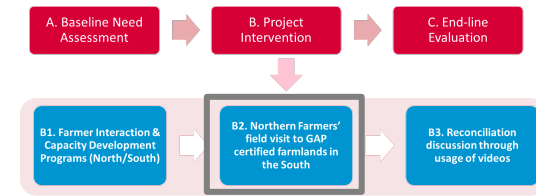


Farmers from North and South discussed how they could become a part of the Export Value Chain



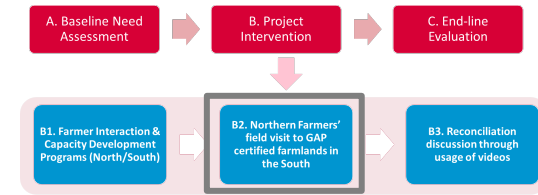
- 45 fruit and vegetable farmers from the North & 25 farmers from the South who have the capacity to export are the beneficiaries.
- Successful GAP certified farmers from the South travelled to share their success stories & motivate Jaffna-based farmers to join the export value chain.
- Jaffna-based farmers visited Negombo to take part in capacity development programmes and field visits.
- Interactive sessions were conducted to engage two groups of farmers in sharing their common beliefs and attitudes towards agriculture.
- Full-day training was provided on thematic areas of quality concerns in production, value chain development, establishing linkages, new management and marketing techniques, technological intervention and negotiation skills.

26 Farmers from North visited the South to take part in Training & Field-visits

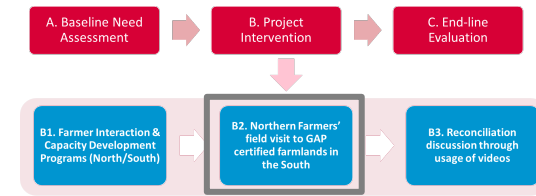




Jaffna-based farmers had never seen a Large-scale Commercial Cultivation

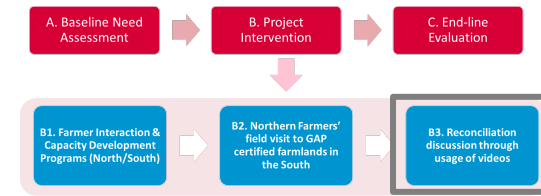


Field visits to G.A.P Certified Southern farmlands gave Jaffna farmers a different level of exposure



- Farmers from the North never had the opportunity to visit the farm fields in the South and interact with Sinhalese farmers.
- One of the goals of this Research program was to give such a field visit exposure.
- The LIRNEasia team took Northern farmers to G.A.P. certified farmlands in Chilaw and Dankotuwa areas.
- ‘Learning visits’ were helpful to increase farmers’ exposure to new approaches and establish interaction with the farmers from the South.
- Combining indoor training and practical application in the field, resulted in better understanding for the farmers.

A video documentary was prepared on oral histories of past economic relationships



- Most young farmers do not know about inter relationship between North & South prior to the conflict
- LIRNEasia team felt there is value in documenting these experiences before the witnesses pass away
- Northern farmers and Southern traders approached to share their experiences
- Ten-minute documentary was prepared highlighting how people had trade relationships in the past
- Documentary used to facilitate discussion during the North-South interactions took place during the capacity development programme.
- Link to the video documentary:
<https://lirneasia.net/2018/12/peace-to-the-farmers-fields/>

Expected outcome: To enable reconciliation through more Sustainable Engagement and Trade

- Agriculture is the livelihood for many residing in the Northern region (40% of labour force is in the Jaffna District).
- Growth can only be revived by strengthening the perception, inclusiveness and networking capacity of farmers.
- Activities conducted through this research program will enable farmers from North and South to understand each other better.
- Better network and understanding between communities improve the chance of trade and economic engagement.
- Ultimately, the research program aimed to enhance the chances of local farmers being a part of export value chains; thus supporting inclusive and accessible markets, value and supply chains for local communities, and expanding economic opportunities for local/marginalized communities.

Farmers were emotional during the interaction & thankful for the Learning Opportunity

- **First time interacting with farmers in the South**
 - “I didn't have a opportunity to talk with Sinhalese people; I never visited a farm land; I was scared. Today I am glad I managed to talk with them; they are so nice. They give me good advice to become a successful farmer. I made good friends, we took photos, we are now connected through Facebook also” (*Ananth, Jaffna*)
- **Thankful for LIRNEasia and NTT for this program**
 - “I am a farmer for 25 years. I never went through this type of learning. It is really an eye-opener for us. We are doing a lot of things in the wrong way; we need to think fresh. There are lots of opportunities in our region. Rather than complaining we need to work collectively. There are lots of people to help. You have done a wonderful work” (*Nadarasa, Urumpirai*)

Reference materials

- A LIRNEasia video project exploring the history of relationships between the North and South of Sri Lanka through the agricultural value chain. <https://lirneasia.net/2018/12/peace-to-the-farmers-fields/>
- The results of the baseline survey can be viewed here. <https://lirneasia.net/2018/11/market-knowledge-transfer-program-for-export-potential-farmers-in-jaffna-district-event-report/>

Further Reference

- Bloom with New Spirit: Reconciliation Through Economic Development <https://lirneasia.net/2018/11/bloom-with-new-spirit-reconciliation-through-economic-development/>
- Capacity development Event Report: <https://lirneasia.net/2018/11/market-knowledge-transfer-program-for-export-potential-farmers-in-jaffna-district-course-report/>

Thank You