

# 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 )*

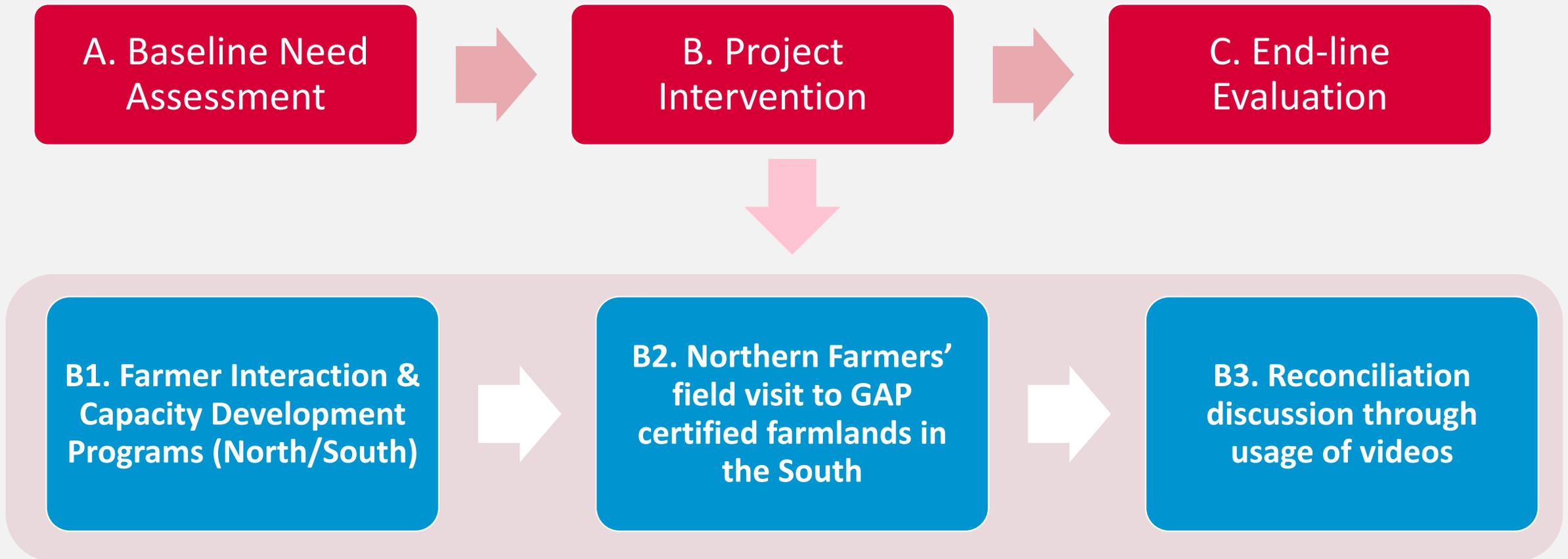
# Trade links and relationships were lost to 30-year war

- 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

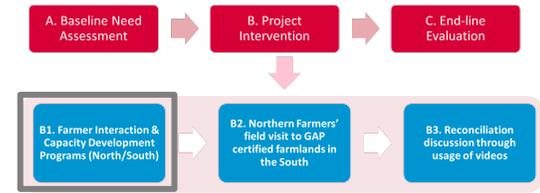


**Re-Establishing the Trade Link  
could help in Reconciliation**

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

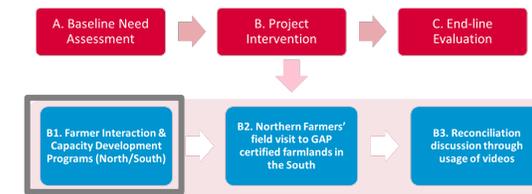


# G.A.P Certified farmers from South visited North to share knowledge



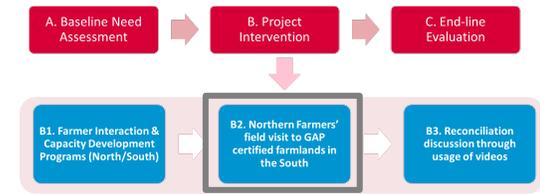


# Farmers from North and South discussed how they could become a part of the Export Value Chain



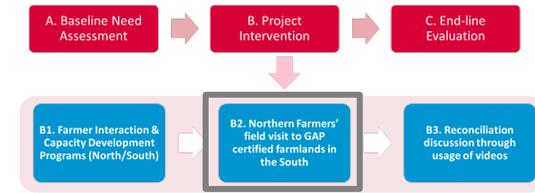
- 45 fruit and vegetable farmers from the North & 25 farmers from the South who have the capacity to export are the beneficiaries.
- Successful GAP certified farmers from the South travelled to share their success stories & motivate Jaffna-based farmers to join the export value chain.
- Jaffna-based 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

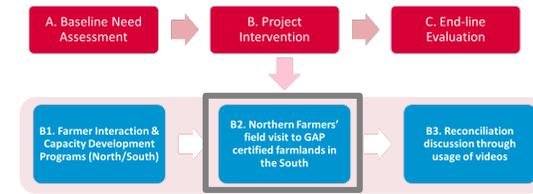




# Jaffna-based farmers had never seen a Large-scale Commercial Cultivation

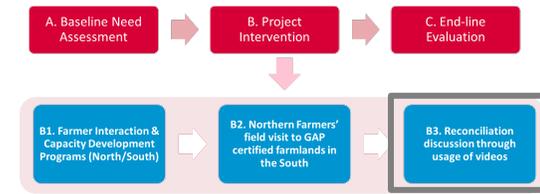


# Field visits to G.A.P Certified Southern farmlands gave Jaffna farmers a different level of exposure



- 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**