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The Role of Traditional Leadership in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in Sinhala and Muslim Community: The Case of Panagamuwa, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

While conflicts are common feature in Panagamuwa Sinhala and Muslim rural community, an interesting novelty is the manner in which the traditional leaders play a pivotal role in resolving community disputes across the region. They are regarded as peace mediators and receive the bulk of the cases dealing with violence which might be related to political, domestic or antisocial behaviour. The main purpose of this study was to explore the roles played by the traditional leadership in conflict resolution and peace building in Sinhala and Muslim rural community in Panagamuwa in Kurunegala district and this was addressed by focusing on the study objectives as follows; to identify the types of conflicts seen in the area, the nature of traditional leadership in Sinhala and Muslim community in Panagamuwa, the strengths, trends, challenges, weaknesses, to produce suggestions to improve traditional leadership in conflict resolution and peace building mechanism and suggest the recommendations. Both primary and

secondary data were used to conduct this research study. Primary data were collected through questionnaires and focused group discussions. Random sampling was done and a sample of one hundred (100) respondents as forty (40) from Sinhala community and sixty (60) from Muslim community was randomly picked. The categories of people had varied backgrounds and included religious leaders, village officers (Grama Niladhari), teachers, and other government sector jobs representatives, staff from Community Based Organizations (CBOs), businessmen, elders, women and youth. The study found out that people in Sinhala and Muslim rural community acknowledge the important roles played by traditional leaders in conflict resolution. It is recommended that the government needs to strengthen the implementation process by offering formal recognition to traditional leadership in conflict resolution and peace building mechanism and linking it with various government agencies, to conduct conflict education and training for elders to enable them to understand conflict resolution methods of arbitration, negotiation and facilitation, involving all stakeholders, especially educated women and youth.

Keywords: Peace building, Conflict resolution, Traditional leadership, Sinhala and Muslim community