6 Energy transitions in a post-war setting

Questions of equity, justice and democracy in Sri Lanka

Gz. MeeNilankco Theiventhran

Introduction

An exceptional technological transformation of the global energy system is anticipated in the next half-century or so, with alternatives, mainly renewable energy sources gradually replacing the conventional fossil fuel sources. Amongst all our technological infrastructures, energy systems are arguably those that are most deeply embedded in modern economies and societies. Energy transitions require considerable reconfiguration in the sociopolitical and economic spheres of society. This will have impacts especially for vulnerable population groups and disadvantaged communities (Sovacool, 2017; Healy and Barry, 2017). Communities in the periphery of existing power structures will be most affected since they lag behind and have little or no role in the policymaking, planning or implementation (Munro, 2019; Golubchikov and O'Sullivan, 2020).

Energy is high on the political agenda globally owing to concerns over increasing energy needs for development, security of supply, rising costs and climate change (Potocnik, 2007; Sovacool, 2014). It is not easy to reconcile these needs with international climate commitments. Energy systems and energy transitions engender and give expression to power relations, fairness, and comparative advantage. A key challenge is thus to ensure equity and justice in energy transitions whilst accommodating these other commitments (Bulkeley and Fuller, 2012).

The chapter contends that in countries coming out of prolonged conflicts, energy transitions raise particular equity and justice issues where democracy may be undermined. In the face of changing dynamics, political fluidity and economic challenges, as well as competing interests, the introduction of renewable energy systems may contribute to ethnic, religious, regional, gender or socio-economic inequities. The discussion sheds light on the difficulty and complexity of energy transitions in post-war societies. Sri Lanka as a case study illustrates how renewable energy projects as part of post-conflict development become spaces for contestation through different discourses in the post-war context, and how the new energy economy produces political outcomes. It illustrates the interlinkages between spatial politics and political economy and how energy transitions concern structural differences that have evolved over time and space.

The chapter begins by distinguishing between post-conflict and post-war settings and contends that the tendency to think that post-war societies are also post-conflict is misplaced. In fact they are significantly different. It is crucial to be conflict-sensitive; otherwise, energy transitions are likely to deepen conflicts and possibly undermine the viability of renewable energy projects. The following section underlines the basis for energy transitions in post-war societies and analyses why and how energy transitions are part of post-war transitions. The chapter then proceeds to a discussion on energy challenges in post-war Sri Lanka. Case studies examine challenges to democracy, equity and justice raised by renewable energy projects in the post-war setting. The case studies underline how, whilst private investment, innovation and scale are essential for renewable energy uptake, equity and justice need more attention in post-war societies, where technocratic interventions may do more harm than good.

Post-war state and post-war setting

Energy transition is a nonlinear progression; the nature and condition of the state determine and influence energy transition pathways. In a post-war state, the transition from war and the energy transition need to be understood together, not least the actors, interests and dynamics in play. A post-war transition focuses on development to achieve the peace dividend and socio-economic advancement. Technocratic interventions then often stem from international development assistance, whose premise for the interventions is normally a post-conflict peace and development narrative. But there are differences between post-war and post-conflict. These differences are important.

Differentiating post-war and post-conflict

Scholarship on energy and energy transitions in societies emerging from conflict frame these societies as post-conflict societies (Gonzalez-Salazar et al., 2017; Lappe-Osthegea and Andreas, 2017). Once the war is over, either through negotiated settlements or through military victory, the next phase has been termed a post-conflict setting, and the state and the society are framed as post-conflict (MacGinty, 2016; Toft, 2010; Langer and Brown, 2016). But, in reality, the end of a *war* does not mean or guarantee that the *conflict* has ended or is resolved (Walter, 2004).

Post-war transition connotes fundamental and intense changes in society (“transition”), after the ending of large-scale organised violence (“post-war”), without necessarily addressing the direction, the drivers or the outcome of these changes (Klem, 2018). In post-war, the conflict may well remain, if in different forms and means. The root causes of conflict – which led to war – may remain and need addressing. The key actors, issues, institutions and history are still partly or entirely in place at the end of the war, and inevitably continue to play out post-war. In the post-war setting, the transition towards peace is just the beginning and not the end of the *conflict*, and the initial “peace” is in fact

little more than the mere “absence of violence” (Galtung, 1969). Cleavages and antagonisms persist at the end of war; energy transition in these settings needs special care as it may tend to maintain or even exacerbate the cleavages and divisions.

In the particular case of the end of war through military victory, the victor concentrates on suppressing further manifestations of conflict. Ministering to conflict manifestations often could make a qualitative difference to people’s lives (Paris et al., 2009; Rocha Menocal, 2011). But without addressing the causes of the conflict, the conflict may remain dormant only to re-emerge years or even generations later.

Technocratic interventions and the quest for democracy

Internationally supported efforts to deal with conflict manifestations often boil down to technocratic interventions (such as reform of government institutions under the “Good Governance” agenda). This applies also to the energy sector. Here as elsewhere, the technocratic view is often poorly equipped to deal with behaviour and perceptions. The affective dimension of conflict, including elements of hatred, prejudice, grievance, fear and insecurity, is a key to resolving underlying conflict but is often overlooked by technocratic interventions. These “peacebuilding” interventions are commonly supported by bilateral and multilateral actors to advance liberal peace with “peace through development” set as the goal to achieve longstanding peace (Stokke, 2009).

It has been emphasised that development practices in former war zones often exploit resources and increase inequalities that worsen the vulnerabilities of people (Bender, 2011). In post-war states – whether weak or strong – development presupposes democracy or, at least, a good measure of genuine popular participation. Strong states have been defined as states that are able to ensure internal political stability, economic growth and the possibility of social development, as well as to mobilise resources for achieving their goals (Tsygankov, 2015). In weak post-war states, development is commonly used to build state authority, capacity and legitimacy (Call and Wyeth, 2008). However, strong states too may prefer to undermine democracy, justice and equity and push for development to gain political advantage and address socio-economic needs. Jarstad and Sisk (2008) point out that democracy and peace do not always move forward hand in hand.

Post-conflict literature about development initiatives as technocratic interventions suggests that these do not take the post-war setting and its problems of democracy into consideration. The interventions are top-down, and they may aggravate the underlying, unresolved tensions. Most are liberal and focus on the relationships between states, markets and citizens (MacGinty and Hamieh, 2010). Considerations of state and markets may outweigh considerations about the citizens, not least in a post-war setting achieved through military victory. The losers become even more vulnerable. Technocratic interventions must take note of the importance of the value of democracy in the post-war settings.

Energy transitions in post-war societies

Trajectories of post-war states share some common characteristics. The end of war brings a huge sense of relief, and the post-war states then prioritise the economy and development as a way to rebuild (Paris and Sisk, 2009; Langer and Brown, 2016). The trajectories are conditioned by factors such as mode of government, governance structure, donor aid, international relations and local political dynamics. Notably, actions of the post-war state are determined by how the war has ended. If the war has ended with a peace deal, it guides the state's actions. But in the case of one-sided military victory for the state, then as the victor the state has attained the power to decide largely on its own (Licklider, 1993; Luttwak, 1999; Toft, 2010).

Energy is a critical sector of the post-war state and cuts across socio-political and economic lines, and influences economic priorities and development goals. Energy is an integral part of any post-war state-making, since it potentially powers the state, empowers people, drives the economy and accelerates development. The needs to address social inequalities and socio-political grievances, post-war reconciliation and the quest for state-building are part of the post-war state. These competing interests and demands make energy governance challenging.

The energy trilemma

Post-war governments focus on economic recovery and securing energy. Making energy affordable is also a key requirement of their energy transition (Flores and Nooruddin, 2008). Affordable and uninterrupted energy supply is a primary goal of any energy governance in post-war states. There is a need to transit from pre-existing policies, procedures and energy sources to address the energy demand and reconfigure it to new local and global realities. However, the global goal for decarbonisation has also made states commit to cutting emissions and moving towards renewables. Energy is at the centre of climate change mitigation, and energy transition efforts mostly incorporate renewable energy solutions as well as energy efficiency moves. However, energy governance encompasses several dimensions including accessibility, affordability and availability. Central to energy governance is the challenge of the “energy trilemma” involving the interconnected and often competing demands of energy security, environmental sustainability and energy equity (Gunningham, 2013). As societies in transition, post-war societies are often compelled to choose between availability and affordability. Societies are compelled towards trade-offs between the different aspects of the trilemma. Not unsurprisingly, energy supply and security tend to top the list of priorities, with little room to also address the climate challenge and equity. Balancing the energy trilemma is difficult due to the post-war condition (Mulligan, 2010; Lappe-Osthegea and Andreas, 2017).

Need for energy equity and justice

In a post-war setting, energy equity needs far more attention, since memories of conflict remain fresh and wounds remain unhealed. Energy projects need to

consider local contexts and how the transition from war to peace evolves over time and space. This understanding is crucial for any energy project in a post-war state – especially when it is executed in the former war zones or among the people affected by war, as in Sri Lanka. Ethnic and religious tensions make energy transition in post-war societies complex, given major factors such as the multi-cultural nature of society and regional power dynamics. It is essential to explore the impact of the energy transition on the economic, cultural and social aspects of communities. The energy equity aspect of the energy trilemma is decisive for developing countries. Attention needs to be drawn to the poorest in the societies and the embedded inequalities of energy systems.

Energy: a development paradox

Development is a central component of peacebuilding literature (MacGinty and Sanghera, 2012). Achieving peace through development is the liberal peacebuilding narrative, which suits post-war governments whose focus generally lies more in the direction of development than building substantive peace (Stokke and Uyangoda, 2011). Development is seen as a way of building the peace; with energy being one main pillar of their development paradigm. Energy governance and transition should also play a key role in ensuring that communities feel that development projects are for the greater common good. Renewable energy projects are part of this development matrix, seen as ensuring energy security and affordability to communities affected by the war. An interesting aspect of renewable energy projects is that they fit well with the three narratives: clean and green initiatives, post-war development and ensuring energy access to communities.

Yet the above mentioned three narratives have pitfalls. Even though renewable energy projects are clean and green, it does not mean they are useful or do no harm to their communities or to the environment. As discussed below, some renewable energy projects have caused equity and justice issues and undermined democracy. When certain sections of society challenge renewable energy projects, the “clean and green” narrative enables the government to convince many, whilst suppressing opposing voices. In a post-war state, when the victor’s peace is in place, these narratives play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions. The “clean and green” narrative offers a feel-good perspective, and is easier to sell among the communities even if undermining equity and justice.

Energy challenges in post-war Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a lower-middle-income country in South Asia, and is in a transitional phase after a long civil war. Colonial legacy and the ethnic conflict have long undermined peace and development. The ethnic conflict has its roots in independence from the British in 1948. Ethnic marginalisation and ethnocentric politics play a major role in Sri Lankan affairs, including policymaking which has questioned fundamental democratic principles of the modern state. Sri Lanka is also transitioning from a rural-based economy towards a more urbanised economy

oriented around manufacturing and services, one of the main challenges of this being energy supply. Economic growth has slowed and reached an 18-year low in 2019 according to a poll conducted by Reuters (Aneez, 2019). The high level of public debt is another problem for the Sri Lankan government. Hence, moving towards clean energy alternatives to ensure energy security and affordability has been challenging. The following section discusses the Sri Lankan post-war context and its energy challenges.

Long road to a post-war state

Sri Lanka was engaged in a civil war that lasted for nearly three decades. The ethnic conflict began as an outcome of a post-colonial state formation and became a full-fledged war in the early 1980s (Stokke, 1998; Uyangoda, 2010). The war came to an end in May 2009, with the government of Sri Lanka as the victor after annihilating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The end of the war had two distinctive features. First, the military victory of the Sri Lankan state brought peace in the form of victor's peace. Its viewing of the issues determines its politics and implementation. Ten years have passed since the war ended, and ground realities vastly differ from textbook-style post-conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding. It was expected that Sri Lanka would adopt an inclusive development approach to enhance reconciliation among communities and heal the wounds of the war. But the actions of the Sri Lankan state have made national minorities feel cornered and disappointed, which has led to a state narrative of "simultaneously being a victor and victim".

The Sri Lankan state with its Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarian hegemonic ambitions feels like a victim of the ethnic conflict in that the prolonged conflict has undermined the development of the country. The post-war development initiatives need to be understood in this setting. The conduct of post-war Sri Lankan society in general and of the Sri Lankan state in particular could be more clearly understood in terms of the victor-cum-victim articulation. Successive Sri Lankan governments have adopted this argument, describing themselves as the victim while celebrating victory. These political overtones convey the military success over the LTTE in several ways, the most problematic one being seeing victory as a triumph of Sinhalese against Tamils, a minority that challenged the authority of the majority (Wickramasinghe, 2014; Stone, 2014; Seoighe, 2016).

Second, the post-conflict literature argues that post-conflict states are generally weak and fragile (Ohlson and Kovacs, 2009). On the contrary, by the end of the war, Sri Lanka became a "strong state" and softly authoritarian, through undermining and weakening of democratic institutions of governance (De Votta, 2014). The Sri Lankan style of soft authoritarianism had three key features: majoritarian nationalism, developmental economic populism and militarised national security patriotism.

These three features guided the trajectory of the post-war Sri Lankan state and became the "new normal" for Sri Lankans. A short-lived good governance regime in place from 2015 to 2019 was seen as "abnormal". The deep-rooted nature of these three features underlined the post-war state-society nexus and undermined democratic principles.

Energy challenges

Energy is a key priority area for Sri Lanka in its post-war developmental planning (World Bank, 2019). Sri Lanka aspires to move towards renewable and sustainable energy amid rising energy demand, alongside destabilisation of hydropower production due to climate change, plus limited public finance and private sector reluctance curtailing new ventures. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka is also on the lookout for cheap energy. Hence, Sri Lanka's ambitions of transitioning to clean energy are politically and socially challenging.

Firstly, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Power and Renewable Energy has forecast that demand for electricity will grow annually by 7–8% (ADB, 2015; World Bank, 2019). Meeting this growing demand with low cost and reliable as well as sustainable energy is a big challenge.

Secondly, hydropower, the leading renewable source of electric power, has experienced climate anomalies in the past decade leading to reduced output (World Bank, 2007). To reduce its heavy reliance on polluting fossil fuel, Sri Lanka needs to find renewable energy options besides hydropower.

Thirdly, Sri Lanka has limited public financial resources and needs to engage with the private sector (ADB, 2015; Chen et al., 2018). Government policy and practice impacts on the diffusion of innovations, and vice versa. There is a need for clear cohesive policy towards the business environment, with appropriate subsidies and tax concessions to attract investment. Entrepreneurs generally see an opportunity for innovation and often can mobilise the resources needed for effective and sustainable operation. In other words, despite sound goals, innovation may fail to materialise if entrepreneurs do not adopt it. Lack of consumer finance and market infrastructure seem the main barriers to expanding renewable energy in Sri Lanka.

Fourthly, Sri Lanka has historically sought the least expensive option to generate power to keep down costs to the consumer (ADB and UNDPm, 2017; PEC, 2019). The cost of renewables is still high in most cases, and coal being the cheapest option has been preferred despite adverse implications to the environment and human health.

The above factors stand alongside Sri Lanka's commitment to the Paris climate declaration and its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). It pledged at the 22nd UNFCCC Conference of Parties in Marrakech, Morocco, as part of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, to use only renewable energy resources by 2050.

Over the past decade, Sri Lanka's energy challenges can be summarised as a battle between coal and renewables. Sri Lanka's energy policy promotes coal, while wanting renewables in the energy mix to fulfil its international commitments. As discussed below, this duality presented an opportunity for renewable energy, where actors who were willing to invest in solar and wind projects were considered positively as post-war state Sri Lanka's energy concerns included energy security and environmental sustainability.

Three key factors

Energy projects, specifically renewable energy projects, thus became part of the post-war development paradigm in Sri Lanka. This has played out in several

interesting ways: a discourse about renewable energy in former war zones; the spatial politics of who controls renewable energy spaces; and how energy economy produces political outcomes. Renewable energy initiatives in the former war zones produced two opposing narratives in the public sphere: state-centric majoritarian and ethnic-centric minoritarian.

The government and its institutions argue that Sri Lanka's development needs the sites for wind and solar parks to cater to national requirements. The areas formerly controlled by the rebels are now fully controlled by the government. Therefore, the government is convinced that it has the right to decide on its own regarding land use. Almost all the government officials at the policy level in the capital Colombo echoed these views during the interviews. The views expressed by the officials can be understood through two different sets of thinking. First is a majoritarian nationalistic viewpoint: there is no need to ask or think about minorities or their concerns. The second is state-centric: it is the right of the state to do what it deems necessary. Both fail to acknowledge or understand the concerns of the local people. Whereas during the interviews and focus group discussions with people in the former war zones, they expressed dismay over the renewable projects and felt that they were being imposed on them without consultation, let alone consent. The sentiment shared by many during private conversations is that it gives them a feeling of a "defeated community", and the action of the government is seen as "insult based on ethnic identity" – according to a group of affected women. The low level of trust between the people and the authorities persists in former war zones. The opposing narratives that are in play clearly raise the questions of equity, justice and democracy.

The civil war was waged for the control of territory, which was the dominant arena for legitimisation and delegitimisation of the conflict (Stokke, 2006). When renewable energy projects started to occupy land (both public and private) in the former war zones, it became conflictual. As Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith (2009) argued, spaces are always contested rather than fixed; political, economic and social forces shape them. Identity, agency and democracy are all closely connected with the control of space. In a post-war environment, control of space enables the state to downplay the military aspect and showcase the civilian nature of the state to propagate normalcy. Controlling spaces helps the state to control social processes. The communities, on the contrary, through creating new social spaces, try to win over the spaces. Bridge et al. (2013) discuss a geographical perspective on energy transition, attuned to spatial variation and argue that the low-carbon energy transition will generate new patterns of uneven development.

Post-war development projects are seen as an opportunity for multilateral, bilateral and local elites and the business community. It can be termed a "political marketplace", a system of governance based on transactions in which political services and allegiances are exchanged for material reward in a competitive manner (De Waal, 2016). Renewable energy attracts interest since it is (at least where given subsidies and incentives) profitable and it is less controversial. Investing in post-war renewable energy projects offers profit, patronage and a "feel good story". Especially for multilateral and bilateral donors, renewable energy projects in the former war zones

tick all the boxes – development, private sector involvement, public-private partnership, economic reconstruction, peacebuilding. Hence, they become popular.

Method

We now turn to the concrete research studies in Sri Lanka. This section outlines the research design, the approach to data collection and how the data is analysed. This is followed by a brief background introduction to the study sites to help understand the nature and selection of the sites.

Research design, data collection and analysis

The fieldwork was conducted in 2018 and 2019. It focused on renewable energy projects implemented in the Northern Province, specifically in former war zones, addressing issues with those projects from a perspective at different levels. The primary data was collected through 42 semi-structured interviews, 14 focus group discussions, and participant observation. The secondary data was collected through documents, communications, reports and newspaper articles. The initial interviews were conducted in the capital Colombo with the policymakers and bureaucrats. This data was used during the interviews at the case sites with the communities and the local administrators. Then the outputs from the case sites were further explored by again interviewing the policymakers and bureaucrats in the capital. This process helped to understand the gaps in knowledge and communication flaws. It facilitated understanding the different narratives in play regarding each of the field sites. The interviews were conducted in both the local languages, Tamil and Sinhala. The quotes used in this paper are translated by the author.

Background of the study sites

Territories have certain features in terms of social and political power (Brenner et al., 2003). The field sites manifest the power relations and the discourses attached. The selection of the field sites was determined by the following: it should be located in a former war zone; it should have a renewable energy project which began after the end of the war; and it should have faced protest and resistance by the local communities. Two field sites were identified that fulfilled the desired categorisation and also had differences. One was a solar farm and the other was a wind farm; one is completed and in operation, and the other is in the construction phase.

Both field sites are situated in the Northern part of Sri Lanka and in former war zones. The solar farm is located in the district of Vavuniya, the wind farm is located in the district of Mannar. In both districts, ethnic Tamils are the majority and comprise more than 80% of the population demographically. These were pioneering renewable energy projects in the district. Understanding the socio-political dynamics and the political economy of these projects will shed light on the operationalisation of renewable energy projects in a post-war setting.

Case studies

Through two tales from the former war zones, this section maps out the contested constellations of the energy transition projects. Both cases illustrate the dynamics in play at renewable energy sites, where opposing narratives shape and reshape the renewable energy futures in the former war zones in particular and the country in general.

Solar farm in Vavuniya

After the end of the war, in its attempt to encourage private investment in solar energy, the government called for proposals for solar parks in former conflict areas. It allowed the private sector to invest in solar facilities. The first solar farm, with 35,000 PV modules and 10 MW peak output capacity, located on an area of 21.85 ha (54 acres), was commissioned in 2016 and became operational in late 2017. The Vavuniya District is in a multicultural region, known as the gateway to the North. It is a kind of “border region” where the national majority Sinhalese are a minority, and the national minority Tamils are the majority. The site is partly on state land and partly on private land with the state land leased to the company, which has in addition bought the private land. On one side of the solar farm is a Tamil village and on the other is a Sinhalese village.

The area itself had some geographical contestation over the years. Traditionally the Tamils were the inhabitants of the area and in the mid-1980s – in the aftermath of the 1983 anti-Tamil-pogrom – Sinhala Buddhists were colonised into Tamil areas, and Vavuniya was one of those areas (Peebles, 1990). Therefore, any state-sponsored activity, which is termed “development” in the district, creates suspicion already. The solar farm was no different. The site attracted attention when the people in the Tamil village staged a protest in March 2018 against the solar farm. They complained that the heat emitted by the panels made life painful for the families living next to the farm. The protest was mainly on the grounds of health hazards; but there were also politics attached.

A villager of ethnic Tamil origin who took part in the demonstration explained it in the following manner:

When the solar plant became operational, the heat it produced was too much for the people living close by. We were worried, we were asking for an explanation, we were asking for help. No one cared. We are poor people, who have felt the brunt of the war and have returned from the IDP camps empty-handed. Solar was alien to our area. We even heard that solar radiation might cause cancer.

(Interview with the villager, 12 December 2018)

The villagers were concerned; they were very open about their concerns with the authorities. The initial reaction of the authorities was that the Tamil ethnic

minority was opposing the private venture undertaken by a company because it was owned by a member of the Sinhala ethnic majority. There was no communication between the communities and the authorities. The villages complain that both authorities – administrative and political – were hostile towards them. It created conflicting reactions from the local communities. The protest became political.

Initially there were no media attention to the protest, but later we got some media attention. We were determined to continue the protest until government gives us a solution. Later we heard from the local politicians that the company was donating a community hall for us. We were asking for a solution, not a community hall. Why they are not consulting with the concerned communities. Why are they using proxies? It means they are not genuine.

(Interview with the local activist, 18 December 2018)

The solar farm became the subject of post-war confrontation between the state and the protesting community. Weeks later, following discussion with the local authorities, the private company that owns the solar farm agreed to build a community hall for the village as a goodwill gesture. This move raised suspicion among those protesting against the solar farm. They questioned the motive of the company in building a community hall. They argued that the company's refusal to talk to the villagers is a matter of concern and that the company was using the local authorities and the central government to protect their interests.

The central discourse on this issue was thus initially on ethnic lines. But then in June 2018, the people living on the other side of the solar park – the Sinhalese villagers – also staged a protest against the solar farm, citing the heat emitted as a health issue. This protest put to rest the ethnic aspect and emphasised the overarching equity and justice aspect of post-war development.

Both Sinhalese and Tamil villagers complained during the focus group discussion conducted in December 2018 that they were not informed about the solar farm and that their main concern was the lack of public consultation and that neither the authorities (local and central) nor the company spoke to them regarding the initiative. The Tamil villagers also protested that the solar farm is feeding electricity into the national grid. At the same time, they do not have electricity in their village and questioned the purpose of having a solar farm in the village when the village itself was in the dark. Sinhalese villagers acknowledged during the interviews the need for a solar farm and saw it as a positive developmental initiative, but shared concerns about the health issues and lack of consultation.

This solar farm demonstrates how renewable energy projects can be undermined by both the state and by the communities if democratic principles are not adhered to, and equity and justice questions are not addressed. State and private sector together see renewable energy projects as initiatives for clean and green energy which ensures energy security. The communities in the post-war societies

see this as projects imposed on them by the state without consultation. A common thread among policymakers, administrators and the private sector is the following argumentation:

This is a government authorised project; the private company has bought the land; it is selling electricity to the government; so, there is no issue. The country needs electricity, and we must be happy that it is produced through renewable means rather than using fossil fuels.

(Interview with the policymaker, 15 November 2019)

This ethos at the centre remains the core of the problem, which needs to be understood through the narratives of the post-war state. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the decision-makers and implementors recognise renewable energy projects as clean and green post-conflict development projects to establish energy security. This undermines local concerns, needs and complexities.

The interviews in the field showed that awareness about renewable energy projects among the local-level politicians and the local-level administrators (from village officer to district secretariat) is very low. The general impression is that renewable energy infrastructures are like a traditional development project, which should bring economic and livelihood benefits to the communities. This misconception also played its part in local communities' resistance.

Such initiatives involve several institutions at the local and central levels, with most of the local authorities working under instructions from the central government without a comprehensive picture of the situation. This itself is a problem and the communication gap between sections of the authorities and the general reluctance to take responsibility points to the deficiencies in planning, policymaking and implementation.

Wind farm in Mannar

In 2014, the government decided to build a wind farm facility of 100 MW on Mannar Island in the Northern Province with the financial support of the Asian Development Bank. The project is owned and administered by the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), the state-run power supplier. The 132-hectare land earmarked for the wind farm was private land owned by several individuals and was acquired using an old colonial land acquisition Act, which is still in practice in Sri Lanka. The Act confers powers on the Minister of Land to acquire private land for "a public purpose" by merely declaring through a gazette notification that the private property is required for a "public purpose" and that he/she is exercising power vested in him/her to acquire it.

In the process, the government took over the land needed for the wind power project and then informed the landowners about it. Discussions with the landowners began only after the land was acquired. The land acquisition process inherently disadvantaged the landowners as the state has the power to acquire any piece

of land it deems necessary. The only option for the landowners was litigation. Most of the landowners are the people who were badly affected and displaced by the conflict and returned to their places of origin a few years after the end of the war. They are economically and politically marginalised.

Our options are limited, and it is an inherited land from my parents, and my brothers also have a say on this. I do not want to give this piece of land away, but my brothers feel otherwise. All are happening because we are vulnerable people. We are not against development or producing electricity, but why our lands are being confiscated. We are a lost community, government is not bothered about us and they do not need to. Because we are minorities.

(Interview with a landowner who lost land, 26 November 2019)

The above was a comment made by one of the landowners who has lost the land for the project. She feels that the post-war setting makes it easy for the state and the authorities to function to their liking without consulting the concerned community. It shows that the decisions are acted upon as top-down imposition, and it makes the marginalised powerless and vulnerable. It questions the notion of democracy and its applicability in the post-war context.

Sri Lanka is a free country now. The state can undertake any project anywhere to its liking without any consultation. We need to move forward with development, and we need more energy. Wind farms are environmentally friendly. Some people are opposing it for political reasons.

(Interview with the policymaker, 14 November 2019)

This is how a policymaker from the capital Colombo, who works on renewable electrification, views the project. The wind power project in the former war zone is seen as a “national requirement” by the state and its agencies.

Local-level bureaucrats were mostly positive to this initiative from the beginning, but they too feel let down by how the things are being done. One of the senior local administrators said,

When this was initiated, we supported it wholeheartedly. We were promised that the district would be developed and the people will get jobs, and the economic situation of the district will improve. Nevertheless, over the last five years, nothing has happened. It is disappointing; we see a tendency where war-affected areas are looked upon as places for profit-making.

(Interview with an official at the district secretariat, 28 November 2019)

The general public of the area and the district – most of whom were initially not aware of the project – became unhappy with the way the project was initiated. Over time, mixing the district priorities, mistrust, misinformation and political

overtones made people wary of the project. The feeling of the local public can be summarised as:

We can't discern why this wind power project is taking precedence over other development priorities. We are a community that is distressed by war and displacement. We are still finding our feet with our basic livelihood issues. The government has failed us miserably, but now they are venturing this to their needs. We are talking about putting food into our plates, not about having electricity to watch a movie.

(Interview with the local activist, 30 November 2019)

This case demonstrates the multifaced nature of equity and justice concerns. The project is a top-down project owned by the government. The way in which the land is reclaimed by the state has brought out three issues. First, the law that made this possible itself is draconian and violates fundamental principles of democracy. (Expropriation laws exist in other countries but are seldom applied except for extremely urgent or national security purposes.)

Second, in a post-war setting where ethnic sensitivities are alive, there needs to be careful consideration when it comes to operationalising development projects. Primary local development needs to be implemented first before going ahead with projects which are of national significance. The sequencing is vital; otherwise, it will jeopardise equity issues. Thirdly, the state both deciding on the project, and taking the land from the landowners without at least prior consultation, if possible voluntary settlement, and compensation, involves injustice. It ticks the “renewable kilowatt-hours” box but goes against the fundamental principle of Agenda 21 that, in order to be sustainable, any development must have the understanding and engagement of those involved.

Discussion and conclusions

Both the case studies outline the multifaceted democracy, justice and equity quandary in the renewable energy projects in the post-war society. Intertwining post-war development and renewable energy uptake creates opportunities as well as challenges. The challenges are mainly faced by those who are at the bottom of the power structure, and it goes unnoticed and rarely gets attention unless they make their protest visible. The case studies point out that from the outset there are competing non-compatible discourses on both the sites, one from the victor and the other from the victim.

The solar project illustrates several of the topics introduced above; such as how the goals of affordable, clean energy for all are conflicted by national and/or international goals. It also shows how post-war sensibilities and ethnicity were ignored and played a role. And equally evident are the broader energy transition issues related to equity and democracy, where peripheries are typically marginalised in relation to the centre.

Ironically, the fact that the two ethnic communities in the solar farm case found a common enemy in “big brother” in Colombo might conceivably contribute towards reducing the residual ethnic conflict tensions. The issue of power and cultural context is perhaps typical of authoritarian states, post-conflict or not, such as monarchies or colonies that have little tradition of local participation and democracy. Ensuring equitable energy transitions will be more challenging in such environments.

Conventional post-war development discourse runs risks of failing if it neglects underlying or residual causes of conflict. This becomes even more likely if the ensuing state has a “victor” mentality toward certain regions or groups. Inclusivity is a keyword especially in (residually) conflictual situations. The international commitments on climate can tend to skew priorities in a direction that further leads to inequitable energy solutions.

The competing discourses stem from the political economy of renewable energy. Post-war Sri Lanka – achieved through military victory – looks to consolidate itself economically and politically where the government tries to please its electoral constituencies. Awarding contracts to private entities to engage in renewable energy ticks most of the boxes the government envisions. It enhances government-private sector relations, renewables become part of the energy mix without government spending, it fulfils the global commitments, strengthens energy security and sends a message to the ethnic minorities about who is in control.

These sites also have become a battleground for spatial control, and due to the fluid nature of the long-lasting and still underlying conflict, renewable energy projects are looked upon as “land grabbing from traditional minority areas”, where renewable energy is acting as a pretext. Land is a contentious issue in post-conflict settings (Pritchard, 2016; Van Leeuwen and Van der Haar, 2016; Unruh and Williams, 2013) and it is not new in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict has its origins in land grabbing through settlement colonisation in the name of development. In the post-war setting, renewable energy projects are also seen in this vein, and the conduct of the government and private sector raises more questions than answers. Further, the justice and equity issues countenance the concerns of the local communities. The democratic deficit in the post-war state makes these entanglements possible.

Much of the current research on energy addresses technical issues concerning innovations that are cheap to mass-produce as well as ensure lower emissions, while there is also interest in matters relating to energy security and venturing towards renewables from fossil fuels. The questions of equity and justice have remained peripheral for policymakers and administrators. Democratising energy is fundamental in any energy transition, and it is even more important in the countries which are coming out of conflict and in the post-war state. Post-war societies need energy, there is urgency, but the matter of the fact is that equity and justice should not be compromised to have a sustainable transition.

The chapter argues that even though renewable energy projects are seen in a favourable light, putting them into practice in post-war settings is bound to pose

profound socio-political and economic challenges that could create equity and justice questions. The starting point for any energy transitions in the post-war environment should be the understanding that energy injustice is being produced historically, geographically and materially. In other words, energy inequity, injustice and vulnerability are more than matters of prices and income and involves structural differences that have evolved over time and space.

Actors involved in the energy transitions should be sensitive to equity and justice issues when dealing with energy transitions in post-war societies as shown in the case of Sri Lanka where renewable energy can give rise to societal inequality, questions on justice and democracy deficit, which can lead to ethnic suspicions and can reopen the old wounds of civil war. To make energy transitions sustainable and inclusive in the post-war contexts, considerations of equity and justice are more important than those of technology and economy. Addressing questions of equity and justice will play a key role in energy transition pathways to achieve energy democracy.

References

- ADB (2015). *Assessment of Power Sector Reforms in Sri Lanka, Country Report* [online] Philippines: Asian Development Bank. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/173762/sri-power-sector-reforms.pdf> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2020].
- ADB and UNDP (2017). *100% Electricity Generation through Renewable Energy by 2050: Assessment of Sri Lanka's Power Sector* [online] ADB & World Bank. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/publications/electricity-generation-renewable-energy-2050-sri-lanka> [Accessed 12 Feb. 2020].
- Aneez, S. (2019). Sri Lanka's 2019 growth to hit 18-year low after Easter bombings: Reuters poll. Reuters. [online] 10 May. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-economy-growth-idUSKCN1SG0R8> [Accessed 15 Mar. 2020].
- Bender, G. (2011). Post conflict reconstruction in Africa. *Insight on Africa*, 3(1), pp.71–90.
- Brenner, N. (2003). *State/space: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Bridge, G., Bouzarovski, S., Bradshaw, M. and Eyre, N. (2013). Geographies of energy transition: Space, place and the low-carbon economy. *Energy Policy*, 53, pp.331–340.
- Bulkeley, H. and Fuller, S. (2012). *Low Carbon Communities and Social Justice* [online] Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/low-carbon-communities-and-social-justice> [Accessed 19 Feb. 2020].
- Call, C.T. and Wyeth, V. (2008). *Building States to Build Peace*. London: Lynne Rienner.
- Chen, H., Yu, Y., Shi, X. and Wen, F. (2018). Development of variable renewable energy policy in developing countries: A case study of Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Public Policy*, 14(1/2), p.10.
- De Waal, A. (2016). *Introduction to the Political Marketplace for Policymakers* [online] London: London School of Economics and Political Science. Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/JSRP/downloads/JSRP-Brief-1.pdf> [Accessed 24 Feb. 2020].
- DeVotta, N. (2014). Parties, political decay, and democratic regression in Sri Lanka. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 52(1), pp.139–165.
- Edward Flores, T. and Nooruddin, I. (2008). Democracy under the gun understanding postconflict economic recovery. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53(1), pp.3–29.

- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), pp.167–191.
- Golubchikov, O. and O’Sullivan, K. (2020). Energy periphery: Uneven development and the precarious geographies of low-carbon transition. *Energy and Buildings*, 211, pp.1–11.
- Gonzalez-Salazar, M.A., Venturini, M., Pogonietz, W.-R., Finkenrath, M. and Leal, M.R.L. (2017). Combining an accelerated deployment of bioenergy and land use strategies: Review and insights for a post-conflict scenario in Colombia. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 73, pp.159–177.
- Gunningham, N. (2013). Managing the energy trilemma: The case of Indonesia. *Energy Policy*, 54, pp.184–193.
- Healy, N. and Barry, J. (2017). Politicizing energy justice and energy system transitions: Fossil fuel divestment and a “just transition.” *Energy Policy*, 108, pp.451–459.
- Jarstad, A. and Sisk, T.D. (2008). *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klem, B. (2018). The problem of peace and the meaning of ‘post-war.’ *Conflict, Security & Development*, 18(3), pp.233–255.
- Langer, A. and Brown, G.K. (2016). *Building Sustainable Peace: Timing and Sequencing of Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Peacebuilding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lappe-Osthege, T. and Andreas, J.-J. (2017). Energy justice and the legacy of conflict: Assessing the Kosovo C thermal power plant project. *Energy Policy*, 107, pp.600–606.
- Lefebvre, H. and Nicholson-Smith, D. (2009). *The Production of Space*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell.
- Licklider, R.E. (1993). *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End*. New York: New York University Press.
- Luttwak, E.N. (1999). Give war a chance. *Foreign Affairs*, 78(4), pp.36–44.
- MacGinty, R. (2016). *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacGinty, R. and Hamieh, C.S. (2010). Made in Lebanon: Local participation and indigenous responses to development and post-war reconstruction. *Civil Wars*, 12(1–2), pp.47–64.
- MacGinty, R. and Sanghera, G. (2012). Hybridity in peacebuilding and development: An introduction. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 7(2), pp.3–8.
- Mulligan, S. (2010). Energy, environment, and security: Critical links in a post-peak world. *Global Environmental Politics*, 10(4), pp.79–100.
- Munro, F.R. (2019). Renewable energy and transition-periphery dynamics in Scotland. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 31, pp.273–281.
- Ohlson, T. and Kovacs, M.S. (2009). Peace through democracy? the challenges of post-war democratization in weak and war-torn states. In: A. Swain, R. Amer and J. Öjendal, eds., *The Democratization Project: Opportunities and Challenges*. New York: Anthem Press, pp.165–182.
- Paris, R., Newman, E. and Richmond, O.P. (2009). *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Paris, R. and Sisk, T. (2009). *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*. London: Routledge.
- PEC (2019). *Report on Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path* [online] Available at: <http://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Final-v2.4-Typeset-MM-v12F-Cov3.pdf> [Accessed 10 Feb. 2020].
- Peebles, P. (1990). Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 49(1), pp.30–55.

- Potocnik, J. (2007). Renewable Energy Sources and the Realities of Setting an Energy Agenda. *Science*, 315(5813), pp.810–811.
- Pritchard, M.F. (2016). Contesting land rights in a post-conflict environment: Tenure reform and dispute resolution in the centre-West region of Côte d'Ivoire. *Land Use Policy*, 54, pp.264–275.
- Rocha Menocal, A. (2011). State building for peace: A new paradigm for international engagement in post-conflict fragile states? *Third World Quarterly*, 32(10), pp.1715–1736.
- Seoighe, R. (2016). Inscribing the victor's land: Nationalistic authorship in Sri Lanka's post-war Northeast. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 16(5), pp.443–471.
- Sovacool, B.K. (2014). What are we doing here? Analyzing fifteen years of energy scholarship and proposing a social science research agenda. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 1, pp.1–29.
- Sovacool, B.K. (2017). Contestation, contingency, and justice in the Nordic low-carbon energy transition. *Energy Policy*, 102, pp.569–582.
- Stokke, K. (1998). Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism as post-colonial political projects from 'above', 1948–1983. *Political Geography*, 17(1), pp.83–113.
- Stokke, K. (2006). Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging state institutions and forms of governance in LTTE-controlled areas in Sri Lanka. *Third World Quarterly*, 27(6), pp.1021–1040.
- Stokke, K. (2009). Crafting liberal peace? international peace promotion and the contextual politics of peace in Sri Lanka. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 99(5), pp.932–939.
- Stokke, K. and Uyangoda, J. (2011). *Liberal Peace in Question: Politics of State and Market Reform in Sri Lanka*. London; New York: Anthem Press.
- Stone, J.G. (2014). Sri Lanka's Postwar Descent. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(2), pp.146–157.
- Toft, M.D. (2010). *Securing the Peace: The Durable Settlement of Civil Wars*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Tsygankov, A. (2015). *A Strong State: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* [online] Available at: https://valdaiclub.com/a/valdai-papers/valdai_paper_15_a_strong_state_theory_and_practice_in_the_21st_century/ [Accessed 5 Mar. 2020].
- Unruh, Jon and Williams, R. (2013). *Land and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Uyangoda, J. (2010). Sri Lanka in 2009: From civil war to political uncertainties. *Asian Survey*, 50(1), pp.104–111.
- Van Leeuwen, M. and Van Der Haar, G. (2016). Theorizing the land-violent conflict nexus. *World Development*, 78, pp.94–104.
- Walter, B. F. (2004). Does conflict beget conflict? Explaining recurring civil war. *Journal of Peace Research*, 41(3), pp.371–388.
- Wickramasinghe, N. (2014). Sri Lanka in 2013: Post-war oppressive stability. *Asian Survey*, 54(1), pp.199–205.
- World Bank (2007). *Estimating Global Climate Change Impacts on Hydropower Projects: Applications in India, Sri Lanka and Vietnam* [online] Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/959321468308635333/pdf/wps4344.pdf> [Accessed 28 Feb. 2020].
- World Bank (2019). *Sri Lanka Energy InfraSAP: Final Report*. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/843901561438840086/pdf/Sri-Lanka-Energy-Infrastructure-Sector-Assessment-Program-Executive-Summary.pdf> [Accessed 17 Feb. 2020].