

# National Level Attitude Survey on Social Cohesion

## Summary Report

Report by:

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## **Director's Message,**

I am glad that the three studies conducted by the NEREC pertaining to; National Level Attitude Survey on Social Cohesion, Survey of Status of Second National Language Teaching and Learning in National colleges of Education, and, Remedial Education Programme for Quality Improvement in Teaching and Learning, have been completed and is now ready for dissemination. I hope the findings of these studies will reach the important stakeholders who will find the conclusions of the three studies very informative and useful for their further activities and, for policy formulation in the respective spheres, in education.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Ulf Metzger and his staff for their cooperation and assistance towards the success of these studies. If not for the generous grant provided by the GTZ, these studies would not have been possible.

It is also pertinent at this juncture to thank the three team leaders of the research studies namely, Prof. Swarna Wijetunge, Dr. M.E.S Perera, Dr. Manjula Vithanapathirana and, the team members, for their enormous contribution to make this venture a success.

Through their untiring work, Ms. K.A. Sandya Priyadarshani and Ms. Anuradha Senevirathne have contributed in significant ways to complete these studies and, I thank them for their assistance, in this respect. I also would like to thank all other members of the NEREC who were of assistance, in numerous capacities.

Mr. B.H.A. Kularathne, as administrative officer deserves a special thank you.

*Dr. M. Karunanithy*  
*Acting Director/NEREC*

## **Message from the Dean – Faculty of Education**

It is my pleasure and privilege to write the Dean's message to the three reports written on studies conducted by the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC) of the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo. NEREC is in its seventh year of operation, with a track record of many achievements; has undertaken six research and evaluation studies and thirteen national level studies, providing long needed evidence based findings for the education system. The present three research projects were entrusted to the NEREC in 2006 by the German Agency for Technical Corporation (GTZ) through the Ministry Education.

'The Survey of Second National Language Teaching and Learning (2NL) in the National Colleges of Education' was conducted to generate baseline data to enable systematic intervention for effective implementation of 2NL teaching and learning in the school system in Sri Lanka. This study provided opportunities for the Faculty staff to participate in NEREC research activities which helped the Faculty to develop its capacity. I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the Team Leader, Dr. Marie Perera, Head of the Department of Humanities Education, and to our young lecturers of the Faculty who assisted Marie to bring this study to a successful completion.

The findings of research studies, especially the national assessments carried out by the NEREC have shown clearly the need for diagnostic testing and remedial intervention at primary level. 'Remedial Education Programme for Quality Improvement in Teaching and Learning' was an action research project carried out with GTZ assistance under the leadership of Dr. Manjula Vithanapathirana, Senior Lecturer of the Department of

Educational Psychology. I thank Manjula for her efforts for the successful completion of this study.

'National Level Attitude Survey on Social Cohesion' is the third study completed under GTZ assistance. This project was headed by the former Director of NEREC, Prof. Swarna Wijetunge. I acknowledge with special gratitude the dual role played by her as the Team Leader and the Director.

I am grateful to the officials of the Ministry of Education, and NIE for their unstinted support in launching the various project activities. The contribution made by Presidents, lecturers, trainees of National Colleges of Education and Principals, teachers and students of the schools involved in these studies is acknowledged with gratitude, for their facilitation of the conduct of these studies.

All three projects were conducted with the assistance of the GTZ. I record my sincere appreciation of the contribution made by the GTZ especially, Dr. Ulf Metzger for his support given to fulfill this task. We look forward to future collaboration with GTZ.

*Prof. Raja Gunawardhane,  
Dean,  
Faculty of Education,  
University of Colombo  
07 May, 2007*

## Acknowledgements

I write in the capacity of the former Director, NEREC who initiated the three GTZ projects which are being disseminated today. I served as team leader of one of the Projects, the National survey of Attitudes on Social Cohesion. I have the privilege of thanking the vast number of people who contributed, in numerous and significant ways, to the satisfactory completion of the three projects.

My very special thanks go to Dr. Ulf Metzger who from the very beginning provided valued moral support and, timely interventions at critical junctures of these Projects, helping save my sanity. It was rewarding, to be given the academic freedom with complete faith, to design and conduct the research on Social cohesion. The sensitive understanding and caring on his part, got me over some very turbulent patches, in the conduct of the three projects. The GTZ staff deserves a special thank you for facilitating the work of this project.

I am grateful to Dr. Reiner Hampel of the Arnold Bergstraessen Institut (ABI), Germany, who introduced the instrument and facilitated its use in data collection, in the Survey on Social cohesion. This instrument has been used previously in a number of conflict affected countries such as Kosovo and Malaysia, to mention a few. He very graciously offered to analyze the data for us, but due to technical problems, this could not be arranged.

I thank the Dean, Faculty of Education, who contributed in numerous ways, to support these three projects. He was a co-researcher in one of the projects, the Action Research



Study on Remedial Teaching. He also helped in the training of researchers, in the study of Social cohesion, while the team leader was out of the island.

The collegueship and mutual support of the other two team leaders, Dr. Marie Perera and Dr. Manjula Vithanapathirana was very inspiring. The two of them were a tower of strength to me, during this period. I must also thank my co-researchers, Dr. M. Karunanidhi and Mr. S. Galagama for their contribution to the research effort.

The consultancy provided by Dr. N. Weerasekera, Head of the Dept. of Statistics, University of Colombo is acknowledged with thanks. He designed the sampling frame for the study on Social cohesion, ably assisted by the Dept. of Census and Statistics, which provided the necessary databases to get the sample for this study.

A big thank you goes to all the research assistants, numbering well over 100. Academic staff of the Faculty of Education, undergraduate and graduate students and, staff members of NEREC volunteered to serve as research assistants, in conducting this survey in all parts of the island. The lecturers and trainees of the National Colleges of Education, school teachers and students who participated as respondents, deserve a special thank you.

The contribution of Grama Niladaris of 206 Divisions and the respective Divisional Secretaries is acknowledged with gratitude, for without their facilitation, the data collection would have been difficult.

Mr. K. Upali Senaka, the statistical officer of NEREC who painstakingly managed the databases and was ever willing to analyze the data, in any way suggested, I say a big thank you.

The two young research assistants, Anuradha Sanjeewanie Senevirathne and K.A. Sandya Priyadarshani who bore the brunt of this work, from the very inception of the studies, through every phase - of data entry, analysis, report writing and publishing; deserve special commendation. If not for the two of them, projects of this magnitude could never have been completed, on time.

The entire staff of NEREC, from the National Research Coordinator, Mr. A.A. Navaratna and Administrative Officer, Mr. B.H.A. Kularatna, the Office Managers, Nayanie Gamaethige, Ganga Udeshika and Fathima Mahasanie, and all others put in their best effort to this project. Their support and commitment is acknowledged, with pride.

Finally, I thank most sincerely the GTZ for making available a generous grant that enabled NEREC make these important National Research Projects a reality.

*Snr. Prof. Swarna Wijetunge*  
*Former Director/NEREC*

## **Executive Summary**

The background and rationale of the national survey on social cohesion conducted, as detailed in the project proposal, is to fill an urgent need for systematically collected national level baseline data on attitudes toward social cohesion in Sri Lanka.

The situation analysis and baseline dataset generated it is envisaged, will inform policy formulation and interventions to promote social cohesion and civic education, in Sri Lanka.

This survey is more comprehensive in sampling and coverage, and more representative of the citizens of Sri Lanka, than the National Level Studies conducted in year 2000, the National Youth Survey (2000) and, the Civic Education in Sri Lanka (NEREC, 2003) study.

The main objective of the study is to conduct a situation analysis on the current state of the scene of social cohesion in Sri Lanka, drawing on an attitude survey of a nationally representative sample of adult citizens of Sri Lanka, and sub-samples of lecturers and trainees of the National College of Education (NCOEs) and, teachers and students in school system.

The instrument used in this attitude survey, was designed specifically for use in multi-cultural societies with high conflict potential and ethnic/religious tensions, by the Arnold Beigstraesser Institute (ABI) at the University of Freiburg, Germany and used previously in Kosovo, South Africa, Namibia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Israel and Chad.

The Sampling frame for the survey is a nationally representative population sample with the Grama Niladhari Division as the unit of sampling; 206 GNDs are represented, in this sample.

The data is presented and analyzed by selected variables; rural-urban location, gender, ethnicity, religion socio-economic status and occupation.

The demographic and other significant characteristics of the sample, which will provide meaning to the data analysis to follow, are highlighted.

The analysis of data for purposes of this summary report, are primarily by ethnicity and, is presented in nine clusters, namely Success in Life, The Public-Private ownership of Businesses, How Wealth is Distributed in Sri Lanka, Trust in Institutions, The Ethnic Divide, Governance and Democratic Rule, Social Affairs, Satisfaction with their Lot and, Country Specific Questions on Social Cohesion

In the section on *Success in life*, what is most important for achieving success in life is queried and, their attitudes on what their 'ideal' country is. The attitudes of respondents regarding overseas employment, completes this cluster of items.

Education, working hard for yourself and working with others and standing together as a group are the three most important factors (among others listed), for this group of respondents, with the order of preference varying by sub-samples. Sri Lanka as their 'ideal' country gets very low preference, with countries like Japan and India gaining high priority. The preferences for countries (listed and unlisted) for employment overseas are indicated, such as the USA for the Sinhalese ethnic community and Saudi

Arabia for the Muslim ethnic community. The option 'It would not be good' is selected, by a significant percentage of respondents.

In the second cluster, *Public-Private ownership of businesses*, there are questions on job preference, whether in general they preferred Public or Private ownership of businesses and, how they would spend the money, if they were lucky to win a lot of money.

The respondents were unanimous in their agreement that they would prefer the public sector to private sector employment, for themselves. But, the responses are mixed, when preferences are indicated, in general. The two ethnic communities Tamil and Muslim indicated a clear preference for the private sector and the Sinhalese community is of divided opinion, in their choice of public and private.

The third cluster, *How Wealth is distributed in Sri Lanka*, is measured by three statements. A direct question on whether in the last ten years, the difference between the rich and poor has increased, decreased or remained the same. Their own preferences for wealth or the group are solicited.

To the direct question, the responses of the Sinhalese ethnic group is clear; the gulf between the rich and poor has widened, over the last ten years. The Tamil and Muslim communities have responded to the contrary; 'A majority of people are at a middle level, with fewer people who are rich or poor'. All three ethnic groups prefer the group over wealth, except the three citizens groups.

The *trust in Institutions* cluster comprises of three items; those whom they trust and feel close to, 'getting a fair and just procedure' and, the influential groups of people who are considered 'very important and not very important' in Sri Lanka.

All three ethnic groups consider family, friends and neighbors the three most trusted groups they feel close to, with students in all three groups giving preference to 'People of my religion', over neighbors. It is noteworthy that 'People of my ethnic group' are given low preference, by all ethnic groups.

Courts and, University entrance examination can be expected to give a fair and just procedure, according to all ethnic groups. The Sinhalese ethnic community has very little faith in any of other institutions and procedures listed, whereas the two other ethnic communities have relatively more faith.

Military leaders, religious leaders and government members are the three most important groups in Sri Lanka, according to most respondents. The significant finding is that the Tamil community considers military leaders of least importance.

#### *The Ethnic Divide*

This cluster comprises questions on identity, what respondents consider is the biggest difference in Sri Lanka and, the possibility of peace and cooperation between the ethnic groups. The last Q in this cluster asks respondents to indicate their choice of candidates, for jobs in their own business, in the army and, in government service.

The finding on the identity of candidates indicate that on the average, the strongest citizenship identification is on the part of the Sinhalese ethnic community, with least emphasis on identification by ethnicity, language or religion. The identification by ethnicity is more pronounced, on the part of the two ethnic communities, the Tamils and Muslims, although these two communities also indicated their identification with citizenship.

The Sinhalese community is of the opinion the biggest difference in Sri Lanka is that between the rich and poor; on the contrary, the Tamil ethnic community thinks that the biggest difference is that between the Sinhalese and Tamils. The Muslim ethnic community is divided in their opinion, a section of the sub-samples choosing the same opinion as that of the Tamil ethnic community.

The responses of the three ethnic groups to the possibility of peace and cooperation between the three ethnic groups, is patterned similarly. The Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups take opposite views, with the Muslims taking a more moderate view.

In the choice of people for jobs, the Sinhalese ethnic community prefer qualifications above all else. The Tamil and Muslim communities also opt for qualifications, but tend to show a variety of other responses as well such as for members of family, the known and trusted and, for ethnic quotas.

The cluster in *Governance* contains within it, a sub cluster on *Democratic rule*. This large cluster contains items on the 'Most serious political problem confronting the country today, which the government should urgently address; a set of items soliciting respondents' opinions on the i) acceptability and ii) the best solution for our country, of a number of forms of governance, are presented. A number of methods governments can use are listed and the respondents' approval is sought, for these. The sub-cluster on *Democratic rule* asks respondents to give their opinion on various tenets of democratic rule. Finally, in the prevailing political context, they are to indicate agreement with a number of questions.

The respondents were all agreed on the most serious political problem confronting the country today; war and disunity among communities/ethnic conflict. The form of governance acceptable to all is very elusive, as shown by the responses on the acceptability and best option by a majority vote of all ethnic groups. To the most important thing that the government should achieve, the three ethnic groups respond, differently. On methods governments can use, some interesting responses are indicated, by the different ethnic groups, but there is high positive agreement on the part of all groups to seeking political solutions by negotiation. The listed tenets of democratic rule are by and large positively responded to, by all ethnic groups and, some voices of dissent, against the accepted tenets of democratic rule. Finally, the respondents' agreement with a number of statements, in the context the preventing political scenario reveals the status of democratic rule, in Sri Lanka today.

The *Social Affairs* cluster comprises a set of items, Q 7.1-7.12, and analyzed in four clusters. To the items in the first cluster, there is very high agreement of all groups, for they are statements of a generic nature. Controversial statements on ethnic relationships, in the second cluster are disagreed with, by many respondents. Generic statements in the third cluster on politics, destiny and, marriage out of religion got varied responses from the three ethnic groups. The last cluster contains negative statements and, the Tamil and Muslim communities showed very high agreement with some of these, whereas the Sinhalese respondents were less negative, in their responses.

#### *Satisfaction with their lot*

The satisfaction with their lot in general and, as members of their group is queried, by assorted sets of items from two Qs clustered together under this heading. Direct Qs. on their degree of satisfaction, as a group, with life in Sri Lanka, and how they would feel,



ten years' hence, were asked. They are also queried whether they are better or worse off, than ten years ago.

Generally, the Sinhalese ethnic community tends to be dissatisfied with their lot, than the two other ethnic groups. The uncertainty and fearfulness about the future is marked, on the part of the Tamil and Muslim ethnic groups. All groups say that they are better off today, than ten years' ago; the Tamil and Muslim ethnic groups' response is that they are 'about the same' than one year ago, whereas the Sinhalese say that they are 'better' off. All ethnic groups are very satisfied with life as it is with a few of the sub-samples dissenting. All groups are very hopeful that in ten years' time too, they will be satisfied with life as it is.

*The country specific questions on social cohesion* were specifically designed to gauge the attitudes of respondents on a number of issues pertaining to the Sri Lankan context. Should it be obligatory that all students in Sri Lanka study the second national language? A set of questions queried the respondents' opinions on the peace process, such as the likelihood that a solution may be reached, for the ethnic conflict by holding peace talks. Their attitudes on the role that civil society should play, in the peace process and how active and participatory they have been, in activities held on behalf of peace were queried. How they have been affected by 36 years of civil strife/war in the country is queried, such as the loss of life and limb, loss of property and, migrations. The disruptions of schooling over varying lengths of time, was also queried.

Respondents' attitudes toward all students in Sri Lanka studying the second language, was quite promising, in particular, the responses of the citizens groups. Some responses of the sub-samples like the students, teachers and lecturers in particular, of the Tamil and Muslim ethnic groups cause concern, for the teaching of 2NL in the school system.

How respondents have been affected, by the loss of life and limb of family members and relatives, in the categories of deaths, suicides, and disappearances and, war casualties show the magnitude of losses suffered, over time, by all communities. The Tamil and Muslim ethnic communities bore the brunt of these losses, as recorded in their responses.

The loss of property and dwellings in particular are reported by all ethnic groups, most of all by the Tamil and Muslim respondents.

The magnitude of civil strife and war related immigrations and, disruptions of schooling are recorded, with the Tamil and Muslim ethnic communities recording the most numbers. In general, it shows that no ethnic community in Sri Lanka has been spared the consequences of war, over time.