SDG 1 and Women's Work: Ignoring the Needs of Women and History—The Case of Sri Lanka

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we assess SDG 1 from the perspective of working women in post-war Sri Lanka. As the breadth of SDGs may help frame policy and offer the possibility to look at the interconnectedness of its multiple aspirational goals, we want to evaluate its effectiveness with regards to labour reform policies under consideration in the country. Yet, we argue that, as SDGs remain grounded in the expansion of market interests, uneven development trajectories are a recurrent feature. Hence, attempting to meet SDG 1 without acknowledging these structural facets of uneven development are unlikely to bring meaningful changes to communities that need it. Furthermore, we emphasize that each SDG cannot be viewed in isolation. For their successful implementation, the SDGs must be viewed as interconnected; as we highlight via linking SDG 1 to SDG 5, SDG 8 and SDG 10.

Historically, Sri Lanka has been a paradigmatic case of high social development despite low economic growth, holding an enviable place within development circles as a positive outlier in human and social development. By 1980, Sri Lanka's life expectancy was higher than that of South Korea, a nation five-fold richer in terms of per capita GNP (Sen 1983). Within this backdrop, Sri Lankan labour was also favourably placed—benefitting from strong labour legislation and labour struggles from the late colonial period (Jayawardena 1972; Candland 2002; Ruwanpura 2016). During this time, capital made concessions, such as union rights and ameliorating hazardous work conditions, to manage labour unrest (Kearney and Robert 1971; Jayawardena 1972). Yet, the advent of open market policies combined with ethnic divisions from 1977 saw the country become embattled in a three-decade war—violently ending in 2009 (Venugopal 2018). It is also within this epoch that labourers initially experienced the unravelling of relatively secure labour rights that they had previously enjoyed.

As Sri Lanka emerges from three decades of war and violence, its integration into the global economy has proceeded undeterred. Venugopal (2018) notes that the Sri Lankan polity since 1977—and despite changing governments of various political hues—remained firmly committed to an open economy. It is within this context that there is a current attempt at consolidating its multifarious labour laws via reforming labour legislation. Using the on-going initiatives at labour reforms as a point of departure, we aim to question its relationship to SDG 1 through considering the specificity of Sri Lanka. In particular, we focus upon gender and ethnicity to illustrate how vulnerable groups may be left behind by efforts by labour reform initiatives that are pro-market friendly as a means to achieving SDG 1.

Arunatilake (2013) observes that women are placed in vulnerable positions in the name of enhancing 'national competitiveness' because they are overrepresented in labour intensive, low-paid work. Not long after the turn of the century, women constituted four-fifths of the garment industry, serving to propel it to the second highest source of foreign exchange in 2007 (Attanapola 2003; Hancock et al. 2015). The introduction of economic liberalisation policies within Sri Lanka served to drastically restructure the nature of employment, and thus workers' lives. Arunatilake (2013) notes that confronted with global competition, workers were faced with increased job insecurity and a work environment, which sought to increase productivity but decrease costs. The structuring of the economy is what matters for the type and quality of labour force (Seneviratne 2019). In 2017, women made up 53.1% of the informal work force, although labour force participation rate for women is only 36.6%, in comparison to 74.4% for men (Department of Census and Statistics 2018). Hence, Hettige (2017) notes that it is the informal sector that provides women with a primary source of income, which is concerning because the nature of work has direct bearing upon social security. In particular, the high proportion of women within the informal sector indicates their vulnerability and potential job insecurity.

Whilst Sri Lanka's 2025 'Vision' policy document considers the problems of social protection for the informal sector, this is done in isolation from the discussion of improving women's labour participation or their conditions of work (Vision 2025 n.d.). This can, in part, be explained by the infusion between patriarchal structures and ethno-nationalist facets that underline Sri Lankan women's labour market experiences (Withers and Biyanwila 2014). The evidence seems to suggest that Sri Lanka's adoption of open market policies only coalesced together with previous colonial projections of women as holding subservient roles (De Mel 2007).

The arguments that we present here are based on a decade of fieldwork on the topic by Ruwanpura (2012, 2016, 2018). These are supplemented with more recent interviews conducted during July 2019 with three officials from the relevant state bodies—the international labour office in Colombo, union representatives, the National Employers Organisation and labour rights organisations. This recent empirical material is complemented by archival research done for this paper by Todd into pertinent policy document from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Sri Lankan Wages Board Ordinance, Office of the Cabinet of Ministers and various newspaper sources.

We start this chapter by providing further historical contextualisation of Sri Lanka's development trajectory. It will help us to appreciate how extreme poverty was reduced considerably, although relative inequality has either remained the same or worryingly exacerbated. For instance, studies estimate poverty level to be around 52% in 1970 (Visaria 1979). We will then consider the place of women workers and ethnic minorities in the labour force, and how the vector of social justice continues to evade them. After this, we will briefly account for Sri Lanka's proposed labour reforms and underline how it may risk reversing the benefits that Sri Lankan workers have collectively fought for since colonial times and continued, despite the advent of market reforms. Or, to say the same differently, aiming to achieve SDG 1 of ending extreme poverty by 2030 without recognizing the importance of gender inequality and decent work is unlikely to offer "sustainable" poverty reduction (Rai et al. 2019). Negating that women's work is segregated within the labour market, or often does not contribute to GDP growth within labour reforms, acts as a critical barrier to realizing poverty alleviation for minority groups. In our paper, we want to highlight that objectives of SDG 1 are also intricately connected to other goals—and so any policies that worked through need to be cognizant of these connections. These concerns will be looked at through the perspectives of women and ethnic groups within the garment sector before providing some concluding thoughts. Considering that the case of Sri Lanka specifically offers insight into the troubling trend of external influence—further forcing the question as to whether the achievement of SDG 1 is attainable.

2. SDG 1 and Sri Lanka's Development

Sri Lanka's history can be loosely categorised into colonialism, post-1948 independence; development and under development in the 1960s and 1970s; and 'ethnic conflict' from the 1980s onwards (Gamage 2009 cited in Venugopal (2018)). Rhetoric may have morphed through time, but the ideologies which hinder poverty alleviation and inequality have, in large, remained—including in more recent times, a violent ethnic war. We will explore how ethno-nationalist politics have not only shaped recent Sri Lankan history, but also threatens to "define the parameters of a post-war future" (Venugopal 2018, p. 2).

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has spanned nearly three decades in the country's political history, but it is impossible to separate this from uneven development processes, where divisions and social fractures are salient. The ascendance of the United National Party (UNP) in 1977, often composed of Western-oriented elite Sinhalese, catalysed the war between geographically concentrated ethnic divisions (Figure 1) (Venugopal 2018). In juxtaposition to the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), who were defeated during this election and promoted strong social welfare, subsidies and trade protective mechanisms between 1956 to 1977, the UNP introduced swift neoliberal market economic policies after their ascension to power (Gamage 2009 cited in Venugopal (2018)). This shift in economic policies also had social consequences. Gunasinghe (1984) has noted that the opening up of the economy brought quick benefits to the capitalist classes, most of whom tended to be Tamil—at a time when subsidies were being withdrawn to the populace, who were predominantly Sinhala. In his view, instead of class solidarity—because all low-income groups across the ethnic groups were affected—this escalated to anti-Tamil sentiment and led to the 1983 ethnic riots that killed ~3000 Tamils. For Dunham and Jayasuriya (2000), it had been readily assumed that the greater inequality inherent within market economies would be accepted by the country's undergoing transition; for them, the case of Sri Lanka illustrates the significant impacts of such inequality, compounded by people's own perceptions of inequality.

The variety of theories attempting to link liberalisation to the civil war are a mix between contradictory to complementary that miss tracing the complete chain of events (Moore (1990) cited in Venugopal (2018)). Venugopal (2018) investigates the political history of the UNP itself. He argues that the ruling party aggravated ethnic divides by failing to offer concessions during the early stages of the conflict due to re-electability struggles. In his view, "they found a way to render the narrow economic interests of a party of traditional elites electorally viable by fusing it with populist electoral appeal on issues, such as imperial fervour or religious bigotry" (ibid., p. 86). They appealed to the Sinhalese masses via appropriated Buddhist tropes, and gained new support from rural hinterlands with their core free-market economic reform policies enshrouded in socialist discourse.

Within the context of liberalisation, public sector jobs, which are generally perceived as more secure and stable, became scarce and were instead replaced by the increased creation of jobs within the free trade zones, in particular within the garment industry. It was women garment workers and other poorly paid service sector work that largely filled these new positions (Lynch 2007; Dunham and Jayasuriya 2000). Due to the civil war, from the 1990s onwards, the military absorbed employment creation for public sector jobs and, as of 2017, over 1.4 million people (out of the 8.2 million in the labour force) were employed in the public sector, compared to 1.03 million in 1977 (Venugopal 2018; ILO 2018). The military, along with garment sector work or informal sector employment, were the main job sources in Sri Lanka and accounted for ~15% of the labour force (ILO 2018; Department of Census and Statistics 2019).

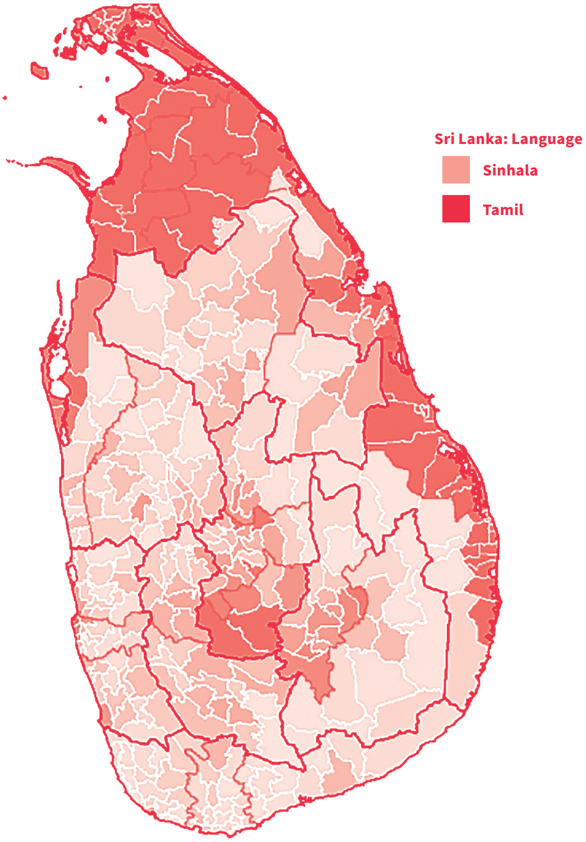

Figure 1. This map illustrates the highly geographic ethnic demographics of Sri Lanka (South Asia Blog 2014).

Sri Lanka is also a curious exception for continued war-time economic growth (Stewart and Fitzgerald 2001). Between 1983 to 1998, real GDP growth averaged 4.6% per annum and Sri Lanka's garment industry developed into a two billion dollar export industry (World Bank (2001) cited in Venugopal (2018)). The geographical separation of the conflict can be offered as one explanation of this unique situation;

the North and the South experienced the worst political violence and turmoil, forcing these regions to be on the economic periphery (De Mel 2007). However, Venugopal (2018) contests that rather than 'separate spheres', conflict and growth "co-evolved, finding sustenance in each other" (p. 104). According to him, military life not only occupied an important space in the Sri Lankan economy but, by the mid 1990s, served to cushion the impacts from market reforms similar to that of the expansion of social programmes. Crucially, then, militarisation remains closely threaded to society in post-war Sri Lanka and has played a role in structuring state–society relations, becoming a hallmark of the country's political economy (De Mel 2007; Jayasundara-Smits 2018; Ruwanpura 2018).

3. Vectors of Social Justice: Labour, Gender and Ethnicity

Informal work represents two-thirds of the labour force within Sri Lanka (ILO 2018). To aspire towards SDG 1, and, in particular, the aspiration for the equal rights to access economic resources as ascribed in Target 1.4, it is crucial to consider women as informal sector workers and the barriers to protections that they encounter. Even though there is a conventionally held belief that creating opportunities enables empowerment, we want to illustrate that this may not necessarily be the case. We do this via the study of Sri Lankan garment workers. Despite women workers having high education levels, combined with over forty years of open economic policy, the lives of everyday women have yet to improve in any tangible way (Gunawardana 2016). This is especially the case for women in the North and East of the country who have been affected by decades of ethnic conflict, mirroring inconsistencies of the participation rates of women within other emerging economies (Seneviratne 2019). In order for SDG 1, within its relative income and regional inequalities, to be eradicated, Sri Lankan labour reforms must consider the gendered and post-war context under which they are actioned.

Whilst striving for SDG 1, women's challenges are often not contextualised within SDG 5 or SDG 10, both of which speak to gender equality issues. It has previously been identified that SDG 8 falls short of its own ambition by failing to address gender equality because of its inability to realise the interconnected nature of the SDGs (Rai et al. 2019). As such, for SDG 1 to be realised, it is critical that this minority group be situated within their specific circumstances. Traditional modes of development can fail to recognise the precarious place of women in the labour workforce, because their voices are neglected. Within the garment sector, they are never socially uplifted, despite the economic upgrading that the sector has witnessed (see Selwyn 2013; Ruwanpura 2016).

Sri Lanka again presents itself as a peculiar case as it embarked upon value added production within the garment sector by capitalising upon Western concern for ethical codes of conduct within the supply chain. The 'Garments without Guilt' campaign, for instance, has been a crucial process in upscaling the Sri Lankan garment sector. This process is highly intertwined with the country's history of strong labour movements and laws (Jayawardena 1972; Ruwanpura and Wrigley 2011). Trade unions and political parties grew from the colonial context and influenced regulations to varying degrees of success in the immediate pre-independence years. Sri Lanka was thus well positioned to participate in the upscaling of its garment sector due to the history of reinforcing and monitoring labour rulings (Ruwanpura and Wrigley 2011). However, discourses purporting ethical superiority have tended to ignore how gender divisions of labour impact labour practices. Within Sri Lanka, it has been shown that inequality remains rife, raising questions surrounding the ability of ethical rhetoric to actually challenge the structural conditions that disempower women and workers more generally (Ruwanpura 2016). Lynch (2007), for instance, illustrates the negative social effects upon young rural women looking for work in urban factories. Nicknamed *juki girls*, after the Japanese-made sewing machines that they used, these women were viewed as less respectable due to living away from their villages (ibid. 2007). Regulations may enable these workers to access the shop floor, but they do nothing to challenge the socially held views of what women should do.

The inability of codes of conduct to adequately consider gender dimensions is further emphasised by Gunawardana (2016). Based upon ten years of ethnographic fieldwork, the author emphasizes the hardships encountered within the workplace via investigating the depletion that women encounter through the market economy. Depletion occurs "when there is a critical gap between the outflows—domestic, affective, and reproductive—and the inflows that sustain their health and wellbeing" (Rai et al. 2014, p. 86). So, Rai et al. (2014) are concerned that there is not enough acknowledgement of the physical and emotional depletion experienced by workers as they toil and labour. These processes also occur within the factory setting due to increasing competitive pressures from the global market. Stemming from a gendered recruitment process that situates women in the lower-paying and physically demanding jobs, the study emphasizes the conditions accumulating in the inability to work anymore and "highlight the processes that maintain inequality in the global economy" (Gunawardana 2016, p. 862). Labour laws have thus far failed to ensure that women's work is structured such that they can be a force of empowerment and greater equality. Specifically, worsening inequalities and uneven development clearly manifest in the failure to provide a living wage for garment workers, or this only being provided as a result of coercive overtime work; making moot the claim of 'garments without guilt' (Ruwanpura 2016; see also Gunawardana (2016)).

In the immediate post-war Sri Lankan context (circa 2009), the garment sector was offered incentives, such as tax holidays and fast-tracked development approvals, to bring branch factories in the war-torn North and East of the country. With poverty-ridden and unemployed youth abound in the region, they provided the surplus workers needed for an industry facing labour shortages (Goger and Ruwanpura 2014; Ruwanpura 2018). Yet, how women were affected in conflict-ridden regions is also important to understand.

Women-headed households are part of the social fabric in areas that faced severe conflict; though, matriarchal inheritance and households have predated the conflict, other factors, such as conflict-related deaths and disappearances together with male out-migration for work have precipitated the surge of women-headed households (Ruwanpura and Humphries 2004). For Eastern Sri Lanka, Ruwanpura and Humphries (2004) have documented how relations of dominance and inequality manifest within these household formations. Moreover, Thaheer et al. (2013) have recorded the considerable trauma and insecurity that affected communities went through. Alongside this, Sri Lanka's militarised landscape provided the support to expand the apparel sector (Goger and Ruwanpura 2014; Ruwanpura 2018). The creation of factory jobs had initially been aimed at young men to steer them away from involvement within political violence; contradictorily however, these positions attracted more women (Lynch 2007). In post-war Sri Lanka, given a greater awareness that women too were former para-military combatants, this contradiction became less pronounced and points to the continued military presence in the lives of women workers (Goger and Ruwanpura 2014). The post-war government then pursued their peace via development by getting industrial capital and the military to collude and, in doing so, ignored underlying tensions between war-torn communities and, in fact, may have potentially exacerbated these.

Post-war Sri Lanka's inability to acknowledge the need for political reconciliation and instead enact economic policies to redress political and ethnic grievances has meant human rights violations, in the form of interpersonal and structural violence, continue to be neglected (Thaheer et al. 2013). Examining the interaction between Sinhalese and Tamil women garment workers from various factories in the post-war region further illustrates how ethnicity, combined with the complex post-war context, impedes the realisation of social justice. This holds especially true as the entry of Tamil workers to the garment sector is primarily a post-war feature. A study conducted by the Women's Centre (2013) details the difficulties prevailing ethnic relations and tension caused amongst women workers. They emphasize how each group perceives the other and this leads to unbridgeable tensions. A crucial perception for Tamil workers is that they do not receive as much leave as the Sinhalese. They also thought that factory managers preferred the Tamils, as they are not able to demand work benefits due to their low position of power (see Table 1). Derogatory language, such as 'Tigers' and 'Mongols', were reportedly directed at Tamil workers, representing just one type of the ethnic discrimination that was reported by almost 50% of the sample. These differences alone illustrate the prevalent differences that Tamil and Sinhalese women face in the workplace.

Table 1. Examples of the forms of ethnic discrimination experienced by the 139 Tamil workers interviewed by the Women's Centre (2013).

Instances That Can Be Termed Areas of Ethnic Discrimination (as Mentioned in the Tamil Survey Questionnaire: Question Numbers 12.1 to 12.8)	Numbers of Respondents Who Identified That They Were Subjected to These in Instances and Areas (%)
Relatively reduced salary or benefits because of my ethnicity.	3
I have a different dress code in order to be identified ethnically	3
I do not receive leave when necessary unlike my Sinhalese counterparts.	13
I have been given a different type of treatment, facilities and food.	10
I have been cornered or isolated by other ethnic counterparts.	7
Other ethnic counterparts have joked and made fun of me because of my ethnicity.	10
Other ethnic counterparts have abused, threatened or intimidated me because o my ethnicity.	7
I am not as yet a member of a Trade Union, as my ethnic group is not currently welcomed to the Trade Unions.	8
Not answered	38
Total	100

The Women's Centre publication also reports that 38% of the women remained silent to questions related to ethnic discrimination, hinting at the fear underlying ethnic relations. It appears that ethnic tensions have been exacerbated by the arrival of

Tamil workers to garment factories considering Sinhalese responses: "We resent them because [. . .] they are willing to do limitless hours of overtime, we too are compelled to do so". This illustrates the cycle that fixes garment workers in a precarious position. Due to decades of ethnic conflict and discrimination this attitude continues in the factory setting, which negatively affects all workers, irrespective of ethnicity, to work collectively to champion their collective interests (see also Biyanwila (2011)).

It is evident, therefore, that gender and ethnicity have intersected with each other to cause clear challenges within the garment sector. Some problems exist within the garment industry as a whole, such as preconceived notions as to what women workers can do (Lynch 2007). However, it is evident that nuances exist within the Sri Lankan case. Whilst industrialists have successfully capitalized upon an increased concern for ethical supply chains, which are voluntarily governed, limits to corporate self-governance are revealed, as they have not necessarily protected women workers. The ethnic conflict and the legacies that remain have further added another layer to consider. It is within this context that we now examine Sri Lanka's proposed labour laws and their ability to contribute to SDG 1, especially with regard to Targets 1.3 and 1.4, given that they talk about providing greater economic security for workers.

4. Proposed Labour Law Reform in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a signatory to multiple ILO conventions, of which 43 have thus far been ratified, including the eight fundamental agreements in which the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) is a part. Tripartism is a central feature at the national level, with the National Labour Advisory Council being the primary platform that guides labour policy discussions and reforms. The ILO (2018) has, however, noted the importance of mechanisms being established for dispute resolution between workers and employers. The Ministry of Labour and Trade Union Relations joins with other ministries to guide labour governance, especially as unions within Sri Lanka are protected by the Constitution of Sri Lanka (1978) and the Trade Union Ordinance (1935). Whilst on paper establishing and joining trade unions is possible, the management has tended to react defensively to unionisation through harassment and/or ensuring loyalty through utilising worker's economic insecurity in much of South Asia (De Neve 2008; Hensman 2011; Ruwanpura 2015).

The Sri Lankan government provides several labour and social protections, such as determined holiday breaks, with these provisions accompanied by increasing reprimands for employers' lack of compliance, which are often viewed as superior to other low- and middle-income countries. Existing labour laws benefit those working in the formal sector, but the ILO (2016, p. xii) has viewed that "existing ordinances lack compliancy" with relevant conventions. In particular, minority groups, including women, are inadequately protected within such schemes, given contentious gender and ethnic politics in the country, which may partly explain their low participation rates in the labour market.

With a pro-market policy environment in Sri Lanka, which is particularly pronounced at the moment, addressing entrenched inequities within the labour market has meant that policy reforms have given precedence to economic and corporate concerns rather than the labour standpoint. It has resulted in the involvement of the USAID who say that the current labour policy represents a "rigid, fragmented and outdated labour regime" (Zezulin and Stanislaus 2017, p. 7). In their view, it is such onerous labour laws that hinder the country's growth and, as such, they have been fundamental in instigating and drafting the currently proposed labour reforms (2019). It is not just such bare external influence that is troubling in any post-colonial country, within Sri Lanka decades of ethnic war and violence add another inflection to this interference. Whilst the government claims to be focusing on a reconciliation process for the benefit of the country, the fact that it is USAID who have been instrumental in the drafting process begs questions as to the motivations behind this.

Taken at face value, the proposed policy change appears to benefit informal workers, especially women, as it aims to consolidate prevailing fragmented labour laws within a single act. The official discourse also purports to get the "inactive labour population" to contribute to the economy (Office of the Cabinet Ministers 2018). Such rhetoric aspires to offer informal sector women workers greater prominence and protection, and there is also explicit reference to sexual harassment within the draft bill (Government of Sri Lanka 2019). The rejection of both physical and verbal forms of sexual harassment is a welcome signal, given that this abuse has been reported within garment factories and there are no explicit laws on curbing sexual harassment (Hancock et al. 2015). Safeguards against excessive overtime are similarly applicable to the situation of garment workers, with Part IV of the draft bill detailing protections and the enforcement of this. An employer must provide workers with a 12 h break in-between shifts, and overtime pay is one and a half times the base hourly rate. The proposed laws, however, provide employers with the power to ensure that these principles are upheld. In expecting them to be the arbiters upholding the law, crucial oversight is removed from the state or unions—i.e., the core constituents of tripartite mechanisms. In other words, two core institutions that provide workers with protections can now be ignored by employers. Hence, while it may appear that substantial steps have been taken to provide informal workers with greater protections, by disconnecting other tripartite bodies that should be involved, workers' rights are to be wholly upheld by the employer—not the state or the unions.

Moreover, the draft act does not mention either the extent of external influence or the lack of ILO involvement—raising important questions on the impartiality of the process in preparing a draft act. Interviews from the ILO, unions, labour rights organizations and labour officials have all highlighted the ideological baggage attached to USAID's involvement. As summed up by one interviewee from the ILO, "the larger project is about to make Sri Lanka investor friendly". Such a perspective becomes clearer when realising that USAID did not want the involvement of the ILO or the unions or the relevant department of labour. The lack of ILO involvement runs deeper than just consultation, as one union respondent reasons, "they [the Sri Lankan government] have totally violated all" previously signed ILO agreements. It is thus necessary to consider the precedent this act may be setting, and future governments may have to sidestep ILO agreements, which are in place to protect the workers. Despite the emphasis upon tripartite values, in actuality, this draft agreement has not been created via a bottom-up process, but by vested external interests. The main focus, then, is to make Sri Lanka more accessible to foreign investors rather than improving labour rights, as evidenced by the emphasis placed upon removing the high costs employers have to bear due to Sri Lankan laws. Even an interviewee from the national employers' organization commented, "follow a normal process. Don't rush it"; thus, implicitly acknowledging that due process has been sidestepped.

Making Sri Lanka more accessible for foreign investment, however, neglects Sri Lanka's persistent inequality and the lack of living wages for the working classes. Within the Sri Lankan garment sector alone, workers toil under an uneven working landscape—some rights, such as no use of child labour or providing health and safety is upheld, while others, such as paying a living wage or upholding the rights of workers to unionize and collectively bargain, remain largely unmet. We have also traced how the movement of garment factories to the North and East of Sri Lanka, to ensure that the capital has a sustained labour force, has concealed ethnic tensions or discriminatory practices. To make employers the main arbiters within the context makes it questionable how this policy will manifest in terms of protection for workers or addressing post-war Sri Lanka's unresolved political grievances.

The proposed labour changes may have a flattening element to them but, as many of our respondents, including the ILO respondent records, it will "equalise downwards". Or, workers may be provided with equal rights, but such rights do not offer the same protections previously provided to formal workers. A recurring element found in the interviews was concern over the changes to how the minimum wage is set. The proposed changes detail the disbanding of the Wages Ordinance Board, with this also comes the disbanding of a collective function to set wages. Employers are then able to dictate their own minimum wage, as there is no fixed wage in the draft act. A scenario may be encountered whereby the minimum wage is set lower to counter the time and a half overtime pay. No mechanism has been provided to revise the wage in line with current economic conditions, nor are there set wages for each industry. It is thus unlikely that women garment workers would encounter a higher degree of economic or social security. Such insecurity is compounded by loose overtime protections; for instance, employers will no longer have to go to the Labour Department every six months to authorize overtime work.

Whilst purporting to focus upon the inactive labour market, it is questionable whether the structuring of such laws truly understands the everyday challenges women workers face. The inability to understand the position of women can be seen by the way the act discusses sexual harassment, which has been critiqued for using language that is too restrictive and could prevent persons from being adequately guarded. For instance, when discussing what may be classed as sexual harassment, the draft act consistently relates this to work threats, rather than accepting complex forms of sexual harassment. It is thus unlikely that women garment workers will be offered more protections; in this regard, SDG 1 will continue to be hindered. Alongside this, and as we and others have shown, poor labour conditions are prominent features effecting women garment sector workers (see also (Ruwanpura 2016; Mezzadri 2017; Prentice and de Neve 2017)). As such, SDG 5 and SDG 8 are interconnected with the ability to realise SDG 1; these goals must be aligned within policy to ensure a genuine move is made to alleviate the position of women in poverty (Rai et al. 2019). The case of Sri Lanka's women garment workers then, connects to the questions raised by Lay in chapter five—without an inclusive labour market that focuses on wider caveats than just poverty eradication, these women will be left behind.

5. Conclusions

Through considering Sri Lanka's proposed labour reforms, contextualised by prior labour experiences, it is evident that the ability to end poverty for women is hindered by enduring gender inequalities in the labour force and lack of social protection in the labour market. Whilst Sri Lanka has been celebrated for its progressive social development and poverty reduction, we have shown that this has followed an uneven trajectory. Protracted ethnic conflict served to accentuate the injustices, which hold a complex history, felt by specific groups. This manifested most evidently in geographic differences within the North and East of the country, with gender and ethnicity continuing to permeate socio-economic relations.

As a case study, we have investigated women garment workers and have shown the continued everyday barriers they face in realizing social and economic security. Ranging from innately held views, which place women in precarious work roles, to global demands which obligate unsafe work conditions, we have shown that social injustices remain rife. Ethnic discrimination adds another dimension for women garment workers, with perceived differences continuing to play a crucial role in workplaces and little attempt at resolving this by managers. We thus have shown that current labour laws are undermined by the proposed reforms without considering the context and differences that underline Sri Lankan society—especially as all oversight is to be placed on employers and not the unions or the state.

Taken at face value, the proposed labour reforms appear to consider gender and social protections for informal workers. As demonstrated, however, the reality of this act is balanced in the favour of the corporate sector and global investors due to the external influence of USAID and the pro-market emphasis of the proposed bill. The ability of the Sri Lankan government to ignore prior ILO conventions sets a troubling precedent for valuing market objectives over the lives of everyday people, contrary to the aims of SDG 1. Specifically, the ability of Sri Lanka to reduce their poverty levels by half (Target 1.2) and aim toward social protections for all (Target 1.3) is questioned in light of this analysis. If Sri Lanka is truly to make steps towards SDG 1, any proposed labour laws must recognize the contentious political terrain and long-lasting labour struggles which contextualize society.

Below we provide some policy recommendations to aid in the realisation of SDG 1:

1. Situate minority groups into their specific contexts. Understanding differing background will enable policy makers to realize the interconnections between the SDG goals, which are crucial for SDG 1 to be accomplished.
2. Structural conditions that hamper SDG 1 must be fully taken into consideration and it must be realized that people's and communities' experiences are not homogenous.
3. For women in labour intensive industries specifically, meaningful efforts must be made to prevent depletion, and, in turn, long-term deterioration of health and well-being.
4. In countries that have faced pronounced conflict, tensions and dichotomies between groups must be fully integrated into initiatives to enable long-term stability. For Sri Lanka, whilst hard policies (such as developing infrastructure)

have been pursued as a means of reconciliation, soft policies must be followed to invest in the welfare of people and communities, which may help alter harmful ethnic perceptions.

We now provide further recommendations specific to the case of Sri Lanka's labour reforms:

1. Ensuring compliance to labour and social protections together with provisions towards living wages may facilitate increased participation of women within labour markets.
2. The safeguarding of workers against, for instance, verbal or sexual harassment must be placed under the control of, primarily, the unions and state, rather than the employer. Disconnecting these tripartite institutions puts the upholding of these safeguards at risk.
3. The government must state its connection to USAID and other external bodies and shift towards the involvement of tripartite actors and the ILO office in the country to ensure due process is followed. Otherwise, the elected government continues to risk losing the trust of key constituents, including unions, state officers and international organizations, such as the ILO, where the country is a member state that has ratified core conventions.
4. Whilst USAID argues that the current system is "outdated", by removing organizations, such as the Wages Ordinance Board, there are less safety nets to protect workers from exploitation, both internal and external. Labour laws should not be streamlined for the sake of pro-market policies and easy governance that may expose working class communities to exploitative labour practices and feeding social inequality.
5. Critically, for SDG 1 to truly be achieved within Sri Lanka, people and communities' well-being must be placed at the heart of social development, before capital accumulation.

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