

# Textbooks & Respect for Diversity SRI LANKA



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# Context: conflict

- Sri Lanka: Sinhalese-Tamil-Muslim-+
- Tamils privileged under Brit colonial rule
- post-independence Sinhalese nationalisms
- language & education policy reinforcing Sinhala-Tamil divisions (1956 Sinhala Only Bill, 1971 Uni admissions Standardisation policy)
- 20 year civil war, 1983-2002
- fragile peace (influence of Japan/WB/ADB)

# Context: textbooks

- previously, a single textbook per subject per grade
- books mainly written by Sinhalese teams, then translated into Tamil (problems of quality and content)
- WB supporting textbook reforms (Multiple Textbook Option under GEP2)
- DFID co-financing, with particular focus on peacebuilding & social cohesion
- opportunity to address diversity issues on back of large textbook reform package, within writing, selection & review processes

# Problem

- distortion of facts and history (History / Social Studies)
- dominance of Sinhalese Buddhist culture
- offensive / inappropriate content (not deliberate)
- monopoly crystallised one point of view [history as fact or interpretation?]
- no promotion of multi-culturalism
- errors in Tamil texts (but also in Sinhala)
- major source of grievance in north-east

# Response from MOE

- errors removed from secondary textbooks
- Subject Specialist Panels (selection; ‘Sensitivity’ criteria in textbook selection under MBO)
- Diversity Review Panel (post-selection; respected academics and religious leaders)
- some training for writers, editors, publishers
- choice (MBO breaking the monopoly on texts and authors)
- schools rating ‘sensitivity’ in textbook selection
- policy commitments (PRSP, ‘RRR’ framework)

# How and why could change occur?

- domestic pressure (Tamil Teacher Union, NGOs)
- external support & pressure deriving legitimacy through operations / financing (WB / DFID)
- objective technical analysis (studies by Sinhalese & Tamil academics)
- GoSL support (Ministers & President)
- operational mechanism (GEP2 and the Multiple Textbook Option; consultant)