Utilizing Digital Media for Diplomacy and Peace Building in Post Conflict Sri Lanka

Madhubhashini, R. Rathnayaka[1], De Silva, W. Indralal[2]

[1]Save the Children
[2]Department of Demography, University of Colombo

rmmrathnayake@yahoo.com

Digital diplomacy emerged in 2009 is considered a "smart power," alongside traditional hard power and soft power- which is also called "Twitter diplomacy" or "online diplomacy". Today youth, being the majority who use the online media platforms, are very eager in using them for purposes such as political activism, mobilization, citizen journalism challenging the existing national and international power hierarchy. The objective of this research is to find out strengths of Sri Lanka in using digital diplomacy for peace building in post war and development scenario. The study attempts to answers research question of how Sri Lanka has been using digital media in diplomacy?' and 'how Sri Lanka can use digital diplomacy in peace building?' This research used primary data abstracted from lectures and interviews, while secondary data was collected by referring books, websites, journals and newspaper articles. Observations were done on digital media usage in foreign affairs by USA and on Sri Lanka's digital media usage in foreign affairs and peace building.

The study has found that not only the engagement of professional diplomats, but also of public can see in digital diplomacy which has been even influencing government decisions. In Sri Lanka, digital diplomacy can be used as a tool to create mutual understanding among internal groups and for effective dialogues where public also can be engaged along with the relevant office bearers, politicians and leaders. Digital media found to be used internationally in promotion of the country's image, strengthening and strategically maintaining international relations; and to inform foreign investors. Sri Lanka had a cleaver initiative of having a website that updated the progress of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee. The online presence of Sri Lanka government's foreign missions does not have uniformity that hinders the identity. However Sri Lanka's Foreign Service has been

stepping into the world of digital media, though not ready to compete with the speed of world due to reasons such as rigid internal procedures which blocks quick/real time update of information, financial, technical and capacity barriers etc. Sri Lanka has been experiencing a trend which President of Sri Lanka, some politicians and top level government officials have opened online platforms such as Twitter for the public for discussions with them that can be developed further.