

STRUGGLE CONTINUES: Current Natural Disaster Situation in Sri Lanka and Response Mechanisms



**DISASTER MANAGEMENT & INFORMATION PROGRAMME
GREEN MOVEMENT OF SRI LANKA**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Disaster Management & Information Programme (DMIP) of the Green Movement of Sri Lanka (GMSL) continues its disaster risk reduction activities in collaboration with communities and Green Network members around the country.

On September 03, 04 and 05, 2005 there were heavy rains and wind in many parts of Sri Lanka. Puttalam, Kalutara, Rathnapura and Galle are four districts that experienced level of devastation due to this situation.

Two teams of the DMIP of GMSL went to North Western and Sabaragamuwa Provinces on September 05, 2005 to assess the level of destruction and to understand what communities need. Also, the DMIP co-ordinators in Rathnapura and Galle districts conducted small scale information gathering in their respective districts.

This is not just an assessment report, but this is a document that encourages the reader to think about disaster risk reduction in Sri Lanka through research, education, mitigation and response.

The Disaster Management & Information Programme (DMIP) is a joint collaboration between the Green Movement of Sri Lanka and the Trauma & Development Component of the Disaster & Development Centre at Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.

DMIP aims at establishing a national process of research, educational, mitigation and response to deal with natural and human made disasters in Sri Lanka.

The Disaster Management and Information Programme (DMIP) firmly understand that every one has drunk from other people's wells and has been nourished by other people's ideas, and therefore is happy to feed the hunger or satisfy the thirst of people they may or may not ever encounter.

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Disaster Management and Information Programme

Green Movement of Sri Lanka

09, 01st Lane, Wanatha Road

Gangodawila

Nugegoda

Sri Lanka

E-mail: dmip@greensl.net

OPENING TILT

Many types of natural disasters affect Sri Lanka every year. Until the Tsunami divested the coastal areas of the country on 26th December 2004, floods, landslides, drought and coastal erosion are the major disasters that affect country both physically and economically.

The rural population largely depends on agriculture-based livelihood whereas the urban population mainly depends on secondary and tertiary sector jobs. When this population density is considered, natural disasters affect the community in different aspects. Here in this case, it is important to address the problems faced by urban community due to the following reasons,

- Numbers of people affected are high due to concentration of population.
- Damages to infrastructure are higher than that in rural areas.
- Difficulty in allocation of alternative land as in urban areas always there is a land scarcity.
- Disaster in an urban area cause more direct and indirect losses (lost of property values, employment, access to work place, harvest, food storage, etc.)
- Disasters in urban areas lead to high environment pollution (septic tanks, chemical storage, etc.)



Map of Sri Lanka

Source: Government of Sri Lanka (2005)

Background

During last two days (September 03 and 04, 2005) there were heavy rains and winds around Sri Lanka, which caused much damage to the human use system and natural environment. There are landslides, floods and sea erosion situations reported from many areas in Sri Lanka during last 48 hours.

Among the natural disasters discussed above, Landslide is the most pressing environmental problems of the hill country areas in Sri Lanka. Every year, a great economic loss is reported due to economic impact in the urban and semi urban environment projects, infrastructure and more importantly to lives. In case of occurrences of landslides in Sri Lanka, ten districts have been identified as landslide prone areas that are Badulla, Nuwara-eliya, Rathnapura, Kegalle, Kandy, Matale, Kalutara, Galle, Matara & Hambantota. Nearly 20 000 Km² of highly prone area to landslides spread over these districts.

Major landslides occurred during the past two decades have caused loss of thousands of lives and about 175,000 people became homeless. Damages to life and properties due to frequent occurrences of landslide increase with run-out velocity and hence people who are living within the vulnerable area and along the run-out track of the slide have no time to escape. Adequate mitigatory measures, such as stabilization procedures, early warning systems are yet to be commenced up.

Floods occur when there is excessive rainfall within a short period and when the run off cannot be accommodated in the natural surface water systems. Floods become a severe problem when it affects the populated areas where damages to life, property and infrastructure become high in both number and value.

In Sri Lanka, all major rivers start from the central hills. When the mountainous receives intensive rainfall, all flat areas that are surrounded by this hilly region become flooded within a short period of time. As a result, every year, during the rainy seasons, people who are living in the downstream areas are severely affected by flood. However, unfortunately, there is still no early warning system established to issue warning to people to escape from the incidence. Currently, number of government bodies involves in the field of disaster management but flood mitigation, disaster response and evacuation procedures are not yet finalized.

CURRENT SITUATION

According to media reports (Sri Lanka Government Television, Swarnawahini and Sirasa TV; 8.00 pm) by September 05, 2005 at least five people were killed – 04 in Balangoda and 01 in Hatton (140 km southeast of the capital). Only in Rathnapura District; about 6,000 families are experiencing difficulties in 07 divisional secretariats. In Marawila and Katuneriya (60 km north of the capital) 03 houses are damaged. In Kalutara District 250 families are displaced and many Acres of paddy lands are destroyed. The meteorological department has predicted more rain over the next 24 hours.



Land Slide in Kalawana
Source: DMIP (2005)



North Western Province: Puttalama, Halawatha, Katuneriya and MarawilaGovernment Officers and Members:

1. Naththandiya Divisional Secretary
2. Private Secretary of the Hon. Minister of Ports and Aviation
3. Pahala Katuneriya Grama Sewaka (Village Government Officer)
4. Puttalama, Halawatha and Marawila Police Stations
5. Pradeshiya Sabha (Divisional Council) Member – Naththandiya

Community

1. Catholic Priest – Pahala Katuneriya
2. Community members – 70 (45 – female / 25 – male)

Loss Type	Community and property damage	Numbers	Estimated economic loss (LKR)	Environmental impact (Scale: 1 to 5, where 1 is no damages and 5 is completely destroyed)
Direct	Residential	03	500,000 (approximate)	04
	Commercial	-	-	-
	Public assets and infrastructure	02	25,000 (approximately)	04
	Agriculture (Coconut trees)	60	600,000 (approximately)	02
	Other assets and infrastructure	-	-	-
Indirect	Business (Fisher folks)	50	-	-
	Transport	-	-	-
	Agriculture	50	100,000 (approximately)	05
	Tourism	-	-	-
	Other	-	-	-
Intangible	Memorabilia	-	-	-
	Death and injury	-	-	-
	Health impacts	-	-	-
	Loss of quality of life	65	2,000,000 (approximately)	04

Notes	<p>In Pahala Katuneriya 02 houses are damaged and one house is completely destroyed. After communicating with the Puttalam, Halawatha and Marawila Police Stations the DMIP team learned that the Pahala Katuneriya is the worse affected area by the wind, rain and sea erosion. Approximately about 65 families are under the threat of sea erosion, rain and wind. They all take refuge in the nearby Catholic Church in nights. According to observations the environmental damage (sea erosion and bio-diversity) is quite high – level 04 in the scale of 1 – 5. The DMIP was told by the community that the safety check dam (wall) has been stopped by a business man in September 2004 in the area and that made this situation worse. According to the Divisional Secretary this project was funded by the Asian Development Bank and they will start the project again when the sea becomes calm. Anankalliya (Gembrandy) Lagoon has been filled with sand after the tsunami and still not been cleaned. Due to this situation about 2,000 families are under threat. According to the community members this water level of the Lagoon increases in May, November and December months.</p>
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Destruction and Devastation in Pahala Katuneriya
Source: DMIP (2005)

Western and Sabaragamuwa Province: Baduraliya and KalawanaGovernment Officers and Members:

1. Baduraliya Police Station
2. Palinda Nuwara Divisional Secretary
3. Palanda Grama Sewaka (Village Government Officer)

Community

1. Community members – 05

Loss Type	Community and property damage	Numbers	Estimated economic loss (LKR)	Environmental impact (Scale: 1 to 5, where 1 is no damages and 5 is completely destroyed)
Direct	Residential	01	350,000 (approximately)	03
	Commercial (tea and rubber plantations)	70	4,000,000 (approximately)	03
	Public assets and infrastructure	-	-	-
	Agriculture (paddy fields)	41	1,000,000 (approximately)	03
	Other assets and infrastructure	-	-	-
Indirect	Business (tea leave bags)	640	624,000 (approximately)	03
	Transport (road systems)	03	700,000 (approximately)	03
	Agriculture (paddy fields)	41	20,000,000 (approximately)	03
	Tourism	-	-	-
	Other (tea and rubber plantations)	70	50,000,000 (approximately)	03
Intangible	Memorabilia	-	-	-
	Death and injury	-	-	-
	Health impacts	02	25,000,000 (approximately)	03
	Loss of quality of life	-	-	-

Notes	In Kalawana DS division – Meepagama GS division one house has been destroyed due to land slides. There are no serious damage to life, assets and properties. Tea and rubber plantations and paddy fields are being filled with water. Even after a small rain these areas get flooded and the community request is to build a safety road system. If rain continues 285 families in the Meepagama GS division may get floods. Also, about 200 families in Palinda Nuwara – Maragahadeniya, Kolepala Road are under threat of floods if it continues to rain.
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Beliattawila Road in Kukulegama
Source: DMIP (2005)

Western and Sabaragamuwa Province: Rathnapura

Government Officers

1. District Secretariat

Community

1. Community members

Notes

According to the DMIP Co-ordinator in Rathnapura district the following areas are been flooded and experienced land slides:

- Kahangama
- Dewalegama
- Mudduwa Gama
- Mudduwa East
- Batugedara
- Rathnapura Town
- Thiriwanakatiya
- Muwagama
- Agamma

There are government and Non-governmental agency relief workers that are helping people who are affected. It seems that the water level is going down, but the flood risk is still there.

Southern Province: Galle

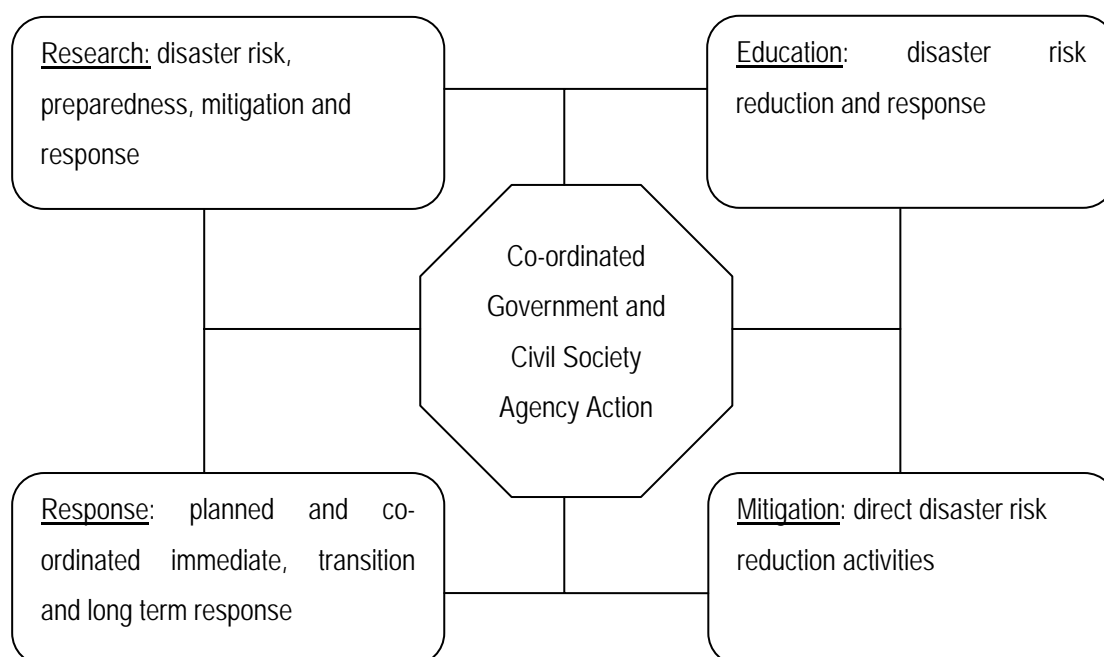
According to the DMIP Co-ordinator in the Galle District 17 houses were burned due to a house fire in Thelwatta, Hikkaduwa Divisional Secretariat. These houses are temporary shelters of 20 tsunami affected families. Eighty one people are affected by the fire including 26 women and 22 children. They have lost all their assets and money due to this fire.

CONTINUING THE STRUGGLE

Not only the Tsunami, but also flood, sea erosion and landslides have caused a remarkable increase of death and damages in Sri Lanka. This is not a new idea not only with regard to disaster mitigation and management but also relief and rehabilitation. During the implementation of appropriate mitigation procedures, following problems are generally encountered:

1. Lack of resources and government co-ordination
2. Unplanned land use practices
3. Urbanisation
4. Unplanned developmental activities
5. Community negligence
6. Lack of early warning systems
7. Lack of disaster response mechanisms owned by communities

Looking at these problems the Disaster Management & Information Programme of the Green Movement of Sri Lanka suggests a disaster risk reduction approach with a link of academic and practice:



However, even if this procedure is used, disaster risk reduction process should be formulated in the basis of consultation and participation of communities and transparency of the process.

CONCLUSION

It may appear that the severity and frequency of the natural disasters in Sri Lanka is increasing. In order to implement a disaster risk reduction process that linked with sustainable development in Sri Lanka, the following are the major task to be achieved with immediate effect.

- Research on disaster risk reduction
- Training and education on disaster risk reduction
- Community based disaster risk reduction initiatives

It is useful to notice that, legislation is not the only solution to disaster risk reduction since disaster will occur whether we like it or not but environment gives us pre-signs before the occurrence of any disaster. Therefore, it must be noted that sensitive relationship with the surrounding environment is necessary to avoid the damages.

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