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Disaster Management Issues of Marginalized People in Flood Affected Areas in the City of Colombo and Its Surroundings: the Cases of Colombo and Gampaha Districts of Sri Lanka

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This Study investigates the major issues of communities who have settled in flood prone areas in Colombo city and surrounding rural periphery in Gampaha District. Around 302,000 people in 22 districts in Sri Lanka have been affected due to the torrential rain and floods, according to the latest situation report from the Disaster Management Centre of Sri Lanka. The number of families affected is close to 75,000 with 104 deaths, 31 injured, 99 missing and damage to property totalling over 5,000. There are 210 safe locations housing over 6,000 individuals and 21,484 families. Key findings in an assessment by the Ministry of Disaster Management in the Colombo, and Gampaha districts said the May 2016 floods have caused the highest displacements widespread damage to productive assets, loss to livelihoods and agricultural and livestock production. This paper examines the gap between neediness of victims and disaster management process in 2016 flood disaster in Sri Lanka.

to examining the issues to fulfil the neediness of victims in city and its periphery, 09 Grama Niladhari Divisions (GNDs), five from Gampaha district and four from Colombo District, have been selected as study areas. The study clarifies the issues, which are being faced by the flood victims in the study areas and attempts to disclose the weaknesses of post disaster management process to recover their livelihood. Qualitative approach is applied and focused group discussions, key informant interviews and field observations are the main data collecting methods. The study has done in month of August, two months after the severe flood event occurred in 2016. Most of the families got affected are living in geographically vulnerable areas such as low-lying lands, filled land, and brick quarries where inundation is possible after heavy rain. No relationship is been observed between the development and the geographical features of the area. Seems there was no city planning or rural planning whatsoever. This needs to be taken into consideration in longer term town development planning. Canal systems, waste water systems, swage systems were seems to be irregular.

Though there were many reports of community based disaster management systems, none of such systems were functioning during the floods. Survey participants clearly mentioned the gaps in disaster response mechanisms. They have observed the lack of coordination among respective organizations. As per the community improper functioning of waste management, sewage systems and management of water ways have found out to be the main reason for the increased impact. In most cases, especially in Kolonnawa DS division in Colombo this was a regular occurrence even before the flooding. People have not considered early warning from DMC seriously, although they are warned people were hesitant to evacuate because they didn't have previous experiences of a disaster of such a magnitude. This also has raised the point of having the capacity among people to interpret early warnings given by the Government and media and to respond accordingly. Lesson learned was that not only early warning technology, their impacts and anticipated responses need to be assessed.

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