LIVING WITH DROUGHT: A STUDY IN THE NORTH CENTRAL PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA FROM 1955 TO 2014

Submitted by

L.M.A.P.Gunawardhana

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ABSTRACT

Drought is one of the environmental hazards occurred due to both natural and human activities. Drought can be identified as the socio-natural hazard and it can be transferred into a disaster. Millions of people throughout the world are affected by droughts. North Central Province (NCP) of Sri Lanka more vulnerable to drought because it was found that once every 2-3 years, there is a high potential for occurring severe drought in the NCP. Lack of rainfall within the expected period of time is the major reason for drought in the NCP. According to past 60-year monthly rainfall data from 1955 to 2014 covering nine meteorological stations, it was found that rainfall is not equally distributed in the NCP. Rainfall is decreasing towards the North West parts while rainfall is increasing towards the South East parts of the NCP. There are 1.2 millions of population in the NCP among them 73% of the household heads practice agriculture as the major livelihood. People in the NCP are suffering from impacts of drought frequently but they are living with drought using both on-farm and off-farm adaptation strategies. These adaptation strategies of the people have been changed with the passage of time. Farmers without agricultural assets are most vulnerable to drought. Animal husbandry of the NCP has been reduced drastically due to various reasons. Even at present, traditional knowledge system is being practiced by the old farmers to identify and forecast drought in the NCP. Village tank cascade system in the NCP has been playing a vast role to mitigate impacts of drought in the past and present to minimize negative impacts of drought. However, drought cannot be avoided but impacts can be minimized through the proactive approach than a reactive approach where national drought policy and Drought Mitigation Centre with responsible parties are essential components to reduce the impacts of drought in the NCP in the long term. Further, both on-farm and off-farm adaptation strategies should be promoted among the people particularly among farmers who depend on rain-fed agriculture to cope with drought impacts and achieve resilience.

Keywords: Hazard, Disaster, Drought, Impacts, Adaptation.