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PAPER

The Effect of the Tropical Storm of November 2011 on the Coastal Fishing Population of Weligama District Secretariat Division

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The tropical storm that hit the southern district of Matara on 25.11.2011 affected the coastal areas of these districts severely, particularly the fishing population. There was widespread feeling in the island that this disaster could have been averted and lives and property saved if early warning had been issued by the responsible Government departments of the impending meteorological disaster like in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, India. The Joint Typhoon Warning Centre predicted a medium chance of the storm forming into a tropical cyclone that would affect southern Sri Lanka on 24.11.2011.

The main objective was to study the effect of the tropical storm on the fishing population of the most affected Grama Niladhari divisions of Weligama DSD (District Secretariat Division). Other objectives were to identify the other disasters that affected the area in the collective memory of the DSD, whether an early warning had been issued, the nature of self protection methods used by the affected population during the storm, nature of aid received by the affected people and the after-effects of the storm on their immediate environment. The study area consisted of the five most affected Grama Niladhari divisions of the Weligama DSD. They are Pelena north and south, Kapparatota north and south and Mirissa south.

The methodology used was a questionnaire survey of the affected fishing population. 104 questionnaires using random sampling techniques based on the list of affected families provided by the Grama Niladharis were used. Other supplementary methods used were interviews with Government department officials, and group discussions. Simple statistical methods such as percentages were used to analyze the data.

Results indicate that there were 09 deaths. 53.9% said the most serious damage were to their houses. The affected population identified the most severe disaster affecting their area as storms (next to the Tsunami). 100.0% of the sample population said there were no warnings issued on the disastrous weather situation. As self protection methods 43.0% had stayed inside the house as awareness programs have never been conducted to educate them. 30.8 % said they saw trees being uprooted by the storm. 72.0 % said that they had received Government aid after the damage caused by the tropical storm.