



Case Study

Inclusive Governance in Sri Lanka

Kirinda Division of the Hambantota District

This publication was supported by the Asia Pacific Gender Mainstreaming Programme (AGMP).

Towards Inclusive Governance

Promoting participation of disadvantaged groups in Asia-Pacific

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Foreward

Using the case of Kirinda as an example the paper presents and analyses the perceptions and practical experiences of the aid delivery process in one of the most poverty-stricken groups of tsunami victims located in the Hambantota District in southern Sri Lanka. The paper was carried out in consultation with the affected communities and the views expressed reflect the opinions of those persons who were consulted.

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Introduction

While many donors, development agencies, planners and policymakers have focused their attention in recent years on decentralized local governance as an essential means of improving access to resources and welfare of poorer people, the practical reality is that partnership-building between local actors and people for effective human development is often more challenging – especially in poverty-stricken and difficult to reach areas. The tsunami victims selected for this case study come from Kirinda area of Hambantota District in Sri Lanka. They have been rendered voiceless and powerless with little effort made to ensure their participation in deciding and managing tsunami entitlements or gain access to equal benefits.

With the advent of many actors and intermediaries between the tsunami affected and the donors/government, the process of aid delivery has been heavily influenced by political considerations, as well as financial gain. Local agents have emerged to capture the 'market' for aid distribution by claiming to speak on behalf of the affected populations. In this manner they have been able to leverage their position to control the distribution of aid in a manner that benefits them the most – excluding portions of the affected population who may not have the financial means or the political connections to access aid through the local agents.

The first section of this paper focuses on the process of aid delivery and the extent to which government and civil society made an effort to ensure participation in the recovery process. It explores the political considerations involved in the process of tsunami aid delivery and resulted in excluding certain groups. Based on focus group discussions with tsunami-affected groups from the area, the effectiveness of duty-bearers in carrying out their responsibilities in delivering aid will be examined, including the challenges created by local agents seeking to secure benefits for their own social networks.

Section two is devoted to exploring how vulnerabilities have been exacerbated in the post-tsunami situation due to the intervention of local agents. The situation of women, particularly women-headed households, has been undermined due to the lack of consideration of their particular needs. Social and cultural constraints may prevent women from being able to seek out aid and they are often overlooked by local agents nor adequately represented by the male heads of households. Secondly, after the tsunami ethnic tensions were exacerbated as aid delivery was conducted along ethnic lines.

The final section presents conclusions and recommendations on the main causes of exclusion and to identify how to ensure that both the government and the civil society aid delivery structure can be less exclusionary.

Methodology

Selection of the study site

An assessment was carried out to identify the most marginalized area in the Hambantota district. Information obtained from this assessment was presented to the divisional secretary who affirmed that the village of Kirinda should be the focus of the study by virtue of it being situated in the isolated tail end of the coastal belt of Hambantota and because of the extent of ethnic integration that exists there. Both Muslim and Sinhalese families have equal demographic representation and the focus groups selected for this study were composed of families from these two ethnic communities.¹

Having explained to the groups that the purpose of the discussion was to assess the effectiveness of the relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation process (RRR) in the area, the researchers proceeded to engage in discussion. The group discussions saw the participation of all parties and as such they were provided with an equal opportunity to voice their concerns. Initial discussions were held with group members collectively. This afforded them an opportunity to voice their concerns as a group. Discussions were also carried out with members individually in order to ascertain their individual concerns. Furthermore, the researchers visited each community during the course of the week, speaking to an average of ten families per day in order to ascertain their concerns.

The complaints and concerns raised during the initial round of discussion have been clarified and cross-checked during interviews with relevant local agents. Further clarifications were made through discussions held with local community leaders, field workers, activists of non governmental organizations, development officers of banks, microfinance Institutions, *Grama Niladaries*, divisional secretaries, teachers, office-bearers of local institutions and selected traders.² Some of the allegations leveled at certain officials by the focus group members were discussed in order to ascertain their views. Questions highlighted during focus group discussions were also raised in order to prompt officials to offer valid explanations. During this phase of the study, the researchers served as an intermediary between the group members and the aforementioned officials.

During the second phase researchers conducted a second round of discussion with focus groups. During this phase, information obtained by officials was presented to the focus groups. The round served as a means of offering explanations to some of the questions they asked, as well as giving them information on various policies. Researchers spoke to different people in order to assess the credibility of any claims.

¹ Selection of the two camps in Kirinda: The first was Shramabhimanya which had a total of 90 Muslim and nine Sinhalese families living there. 84 of these families were involved in small-scale fisheries. Discussions were held with 49 families, 47 of which were Sinhalese and two were Muslim.

² The researchers approached the following officials:

1. Principal of the kirinda muslim college;
2. GN Kirinda;
3. Samadhi official;
4. GN – Andaragasyaya division;
5. AGA;
6. People with connections to NGOs;
7. A few influential persons in the village; and
8. Members of the JVP / 'Rathu Tharu' organization.

Description of the study site: Hambantota District of Sri Lanka and Kirinda Division of local administration (Kirinda GN Division)

Hambantota is Sri Lanka's poorest coastal district. In the pre-tsunami era one third of the population in Hambantota District lived below the poverty line. Records showed that Kirinda had poverty levels that were glaringly above the district average. This has rendered victims in Kirinda particularly vulnerable to the economic impact caused by the tsunami.

Despite this vulnerability, a large number of the unaffected population have been able to strategically integrate themselves into the class of tsunami victims as they argued that they were indirectly affected by the tsunami and directly by abject poverty.³ The district accounts for 5.5 percent of the nation's fishing fleet and 12.9 percent of the total marine fish production.⁴ The average number of fishermen per family is higher in the area than the national average. Although the destruction caused by the tsunami in the district was relatively less important than in other areas, needs assessment studies have proved that the damage caused by way of loss of employment and indirect damage to agricultural activities have been estimated to be as high as eighty percent.

Local administration units known as *Grama Niladari* (GN) exist within each DS division. Tissamaharama DS Division recorded the lowest affected population out of the four affected divisional secretariat areas in Hambantota district. Kirinda and Andaragasyaya GN divisions of the Tissamaharama DS Division cover 90 percent of the affected area.

³ Discussions with various local authorities revealed that the thinking behind the equal distribution of aid was fuelled by the recognition of the difficulty in separating populations that tsunami-affected from poverty stricken populations. However, members in the focus groups expressed disgust at the reality that genuine victims have been denied access to resources, while a manipulative few secured these benefits.

⁴ International Water Management Institute (2005). *Bringing Hambantota back to normal: A post-tsunami livelihoods need assessment of Hambantota district.*

Section 1: Contextual Issues

Background

Unique features of the Kirinda case study groups

In the wake of the tsunami, the fishing community in the Kirinda Division was marginalized due to its geographical isolation, as well as social and political constraints. The destruction caused by the tsunami served to aggravate existent feelings of victimization. Despite fervent attempts at clearing debris, constructing temporary shelters and providing various forms of assistance to the communities, during the relief phase, it was evident that several troubling patterns had emerged during the reconstruction phase.⁵ It was vital that central and local government, civil society and the donor community address these issues to avoid exacerbating existing ethnic and political tensions as the failure to do so would risk the creation of long-term irreversible damage.

Muslim focus group of the study

During focus group discussions families representing Muslim groups were faced with a host of problems as a result of resettlement delays. The undue delay in the construction of their homes placed them in much hardship. They also expressed growing concerns with regard to the education of children and sanitation.

Singhalese focus group of the study

Although members of the Singhalese group were resettled in their new homes, they continue to voice concerns over the lack of alternative sources of income. The lack of resources, resulting in an inability to start deep sea fishing once again has left them feeling uncertain about the future.

Both groups have vented their frustration with regard to their unequal access to resources as well as the role of local agents in the management of aid delivery. They believe that local agents have manipulated aid delivery and resources have been channeled to wealthy and influential businessmen. Furthermore, the allegation that non-affected families were seeking benefits delivered on behalf of genuine victims was widespread not only within the groups but also among several NGOs, Institutions and civil society groups.

⁵ 'Assessment of tsunami recovery implementation in Hambantota District' – Multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral team report (USAID, Alliance Lanka, UNICEF, UNDP, TAFREN).

Political intervention and the complexity of local governance⁶

The focus of the aid delivery mechanism in the post-tsunami context can be broadly divided into four categories:

- (a) Local agents and Intermediaries that have undertaken to speak on behalf of the affected communities.
- (b) Hambantota and local political agents whose interest it seemed was to establish and strengthen their identity as the most popular political leaders among the tsunami victims.
- (c) The minority of genuine victims who were displaced and compelled to take refuge in camps or share facilities with non-affected families.
- (d) The majority of marginally affected or non-affected families who relied heavily on local agents to register them as victims for tsunami benefits.

Various local groups, community-based organizations and other institutions provided temporary shelter, food and clothing during the relief phase saw the collective efforts of; interventions by certain groups with political interests have also been noticed.

Hambantota is the President's hometown. As such, politics play a very sensitive role in the developmental aspects of the area. A left-wing political party, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna is also active in the area. In addition to the local and district level politics, the administrative structure under the political leadership of the then president of the country was also in operation.

Given the existent political presence, some believe that Hambantota provides an ideal ground for competing interests in reconstruction efforts. While the validity of these claims could not be confirmed, it was clear that various institutions in Hambantota bore the unique stamp of the respective political body that created it. 'Helping Hambantota' for instance had been created by the Prime Minister's office to act as the primary liaison between the Prime Minister, the District GA's office and donor organizations. This structure seems to have only a limited relationship to the nationwide coordinating body of TAFREN, which was created by the President's Office to fulfill the same function.⁷

Another such example would be the Tissamaharama Division where the JVP holds its only Pradeshiya Sabha (Divisional Council)⁸ in the country⁹. Although most of the

⁶ Since the introduction of a Provincial Council system in 1987, which was part of a decentralization package designed to solve the ethnic conflict, political representation in Sri Lanka involves three levels: the parliament, the directly elected provincial councils, and at the local level – the Pradeshiya Sabhas, town councils and municipal councils. The members of all these bodies are elected according to a proportional system of representation and a preferential system of voting. This election system creates a particularly strong incentive for the individual candidates to care for the interests of the voters in their district.

⁷ *Assessment of tsunami recovery implementation in Hambantota District*, op. cit.

⁸ Tissamaharama is situated in the extreme south of the Hambantota District in the Southern Province and administered by the Tissamaharamaya Pradeshiya Sabha (PS). While the Hambantota District has 11 administrative regions, two urban

revelations on political issues were based on perception, when questioned on the role of the political parties in the management of aid, the common belief was that the JVP requested donor agencies to channel funds in such a way that enabled them to deliver aid to the victims. However opinion is such that these donor organizations resisted dealings with the JVP.

Political interference with the administrative structure helped exclude the communities from meaningful participation in the system of governance.¹⁰ Although various government agents visited the communities to let them know their entitlements and learn about any concerns they may have had, it was evident as explained by the groups that the local administrative structure was subject to the control of the central Hambantota political order. Members of the groups claimed that as a result they were reluctant to voice their concerns. This perception of the communities poses grave concerns in relation to the transparency and accountability of the administrative structure. The realization that political influence would render their cause futile has discouraged the communities from taking proactive steps to ensure participation in the manner in which the aid is being delivered.

The pre-tsunami context saw Muslim and Sinhalese communities co-existing in a well-integrated environment. There was no separation based on ethnicity among the fishing community in the Kirinda area. However, the different cultural, religious and practical concerns of the two communities led the Muslim community to submit a request to be separated. Although this separation emerged as an immediate practical requirement it has negatively impacted the relationship between these two groups as the Sinhalese families have moved into separate camps. Furthermore, members of the Muslim group having insisted on being resettled in town led to resettlement delays.¹¹

The competing interests of the JVP further contributed to this complexity and many believe that the main opposition party, the United National Party (UNP), capitalized on this situation to flag the government's failure in addressing these needs. Numerous attempts have since been made by local agents of these political groups to recognize families affected directly and indirectly as beneficiaries. This they feel has often resulted in corrupt practices under the guise of eradicating poverty. The complexity caused by this system has led certain donor organizations and Ingo's to find alternative means of reaching out to the victims through their local representatives. Certain businessmen and traders seized the opportunity to establish relationships with the most influential groups.

Group members expressed their resentment with regard to the manner in which relief activities had been carried out by a number of NGOs. They believed that they had failed to take steps to make a change and their interventions were seen as a farce. The lack of accountability of such organizations also left them feeling resentful and bitter.

councils and nine Pradeshiya Sabhas, the largest of these is the Tissamaharama PS area. This covers an area of 3,242 square miles, 44 Grama Niladhari Divisions, 208 villages with 16,469 families and a total population of 68,835.

⁹ *Bringing Hambantota Back to Normal*, op. cit.)

¹⁰ While it is imperative that donor organizations actively engage with key stakeholders in providing support, the dangers of political patronage or bias must be borne in mind. Failure to develop this awareness could inadvertently nourish social tensions and result in de facto discrimination.

¹¹ The disparity in the dates of resettlement of the Sinhalese community and the Muslim community was due to the Sinhalese community's willingness to be relocated. The Muslims were resettled in town by an NGO.

Powerlessness and Marginalization

Failure to reach the poverty stricken groups of victims

The sense of victimization and marginalization felt by both Muslim and Sinhalese fishing communities worsened as a result of the social disparities and unequal access to resources arising from the post-tsunami relief operations. This vulnerability led to an unwarranted interference by local agents and other interest groups in the management of aid.

The role of local agents in the interface between poverty and power

Focus groups members define local agents as actors of local governance. They claim that such agents play a dual role. Firstly, their position and responsibilities as local representatives or leaders justify their presence in affected areas and their interventions in the delivery of aid. Secondly, by maintaining friendly relations with those marginally affected or unaffected persons, they succeed in manipulating the flow of aid and often register such persons as beneficiaries. They allege further that the criteria for prioritizing the beneficiaries depend on correlation rather than the rights of genuine victims.

The focus group members believed that the increase in the number of intermediaries¹² between the beneficiaries and the administration resulted in corrupt practices often benefiting their supporters.

Another drawback was the lack of recognition of 'collective bargaining' methods. While a mere handful of local administrative officials maintain registers and records of claim holders, they refrain from addressing the concerns of a group of victims. The reason for this gap lies in the fact that the procedure is designed to entertain issues on a case by case basis. The approach adopted is that of individual claims. This serves to exclude the people from participating in the design and implementation of measures affecting their lives, as well as disempowering the communities by striking down any attempts to ensure participation.

Manipulation of genuine victims was a common allegation throughout the discussions. Strong accusations were made that genuine victims complaining of violations of his right to benefits were penalized by way of delaying the release of the aid package, whereas those having political connections secured aid without delay. Although most allegations surfaced during group discussions, and much remains unsupported it must be noted that the common belief of the existence of such corrupt practices highlights the lack of accountability on the part of the officials and an erosion of faith.

Ethnic issues and unequal distribution of aid

¹² Leaders of ethnic groups, local traders, political agents, those involved in the production of forged documents on behalf of non-affected persons and contractors.

It was revealed during focus group discussions that Muslims, which represented nearly 40 percent of the total population in Kirinda Division,¹³ were perplexed as a result of being compelled to follow the instructions given by various leaders. They complained that they were unable to ascertain the most beneficial intervention.

It was revealed that although a Buddhist monk had assisted the Muslim community with accommodation, Muslim leaders in the locality requested them to be identified as a separate group of victims in order to attract Muslim donors. The existent tension between Muslims and Sinhalese was aggravated during this relief phase owing to distribution of aid based on ethnic considerations.¹⁴

It was a common allegation that leading Muslim businessmen from Colombo together with Muslim INGO's channeled the entire aid package exclusively via the local mosque. In response to this, Buddhist leaders prompted the Sinhalese group members to seek assistance from relevant authorities to ensure equal distribution of aid. The emerging disunity among the two ethnic groups caused a discord in the local level management of aid.

Political leaders in Hambantota visited the affected area immediately after the Tsunami in order to facilitate aid programmes through local political agents. The victims felt strongly that this was a means of gaining popularity rather than a genuine extension of assistance. They also considered that certain INGO's had made several unsuccessful attempts to deliver aid. In the absence of reliable local representatives, such aid resulted in benefiting a large number of unaffected persons. Those claiming to be genuine victims share the view that manipulation on the part of local representatives had left them with comparatively smaller shares of aid.

Furthermore discussions with these groups revealed that material aid such as boats, engines and nets received by the unaffected community were sold to local traders in order to purchase motorbikes, three-wheelers and other household equipment.

In response to the accusation by group members that a large portion of the resources intended to be distributed to genuine victims was delivered to non-affected persons, officials stated that the general opinion of the populace was such that all persons should receive aid. However, focus group members perceived this as a political plan whereby genuine victims were often marginalized.

Sajeegen, a 60 year old leader of the Muslim focus group expressing his views on the distribution of aid:

“Genuine tsunami victims are not the exclusive beneficiaries of aid. They create an easy opportunity for the stronger class of persons to create viable business opportunities by utilizing foreign aid. Although official records on aid delivery may seem impressive, this is not so in practice. Consequently the genuine victims remain powerless as they fail to gain access to their entitlements. The

¹³ Records of the Divisional Secretariat.

¹⁴ Discussions with the group and relevant authorities revealed that the Red Crescent Organization had arranged for the distribution of a large quantity of dates. The GS maintained that he was instructed to distribute this exclusively to Muslims. However, a small number of people within the Sinhalese community also received some supplies and this disparity created tensions among the two ethnic groups.

absence of collective negotiation capabilities places them in an even more vulnerable position”.

It can be ascertained from the views expressed by the focus group members that the entire aid delivery process revolves around the power structure created between affluent businessmen who accumulate most of the resources by maintaining effective links with local traders.

Thajudeen, a 51-year old Muslim leader illustrated how the distribution of aid/resources led to a social transformation

“Although I was an accepted leader of this Muslim community for several decades and helped resolve family and community problems in accordance with Muslim custom and religious principles, the tsunami has had a negative impact on the traditional values of the people. I am no longer able to control people as they do not value my leadership. Their sole intention is to maximize financial aid and other material aid by approaching external sources”.

Occupational disparities

An analysis of the professional activities of members of the focus group both before and after the tsunami indicates a decrease in the Kirinda fishing community.¹⁵ A careful analysis of the table in annexes 1-4 reveals that a large number of people tried to find employment as labourers because few other opportunities existed.

Resettlement in a new location resulted in a loss of additional income sources other than fishing. Those affected the worst were those that were marginally-affected/unaffected persons who had secured alternatives sources of income at an earlier stage.¹⁶

Given the political and financial influence of those wealthy traders/large boat owners, those persons owning small boats have found it hard to compete with them and found it more economical to seek employment with wealthy businessmen. It is the popular view that this trend will continue with more members of the groups joining the labour force.

A majority of the Muslim group members who anxiously awaited resettlement have been unable to find an alternate source of income and as a result sought employment as temporary laborers.

Although housing construction created employment opportunities for masons and carpenters, contractors from the outside refrained from employing local workers. And this has served to heighten the frustrations of the local community as their participation in reconstruction efforts has been curtailed. Community participation was further minimized by virtue of families not knowing what kind of house they would receive. And as such

¹⁵ See Annex 2 : Table

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there was no monitoring of the construction by the beneficiaries. The distance between the temporary shelter and the housing site made it impossible for beneficiaries to frequent the construction site.

Section 2: Gender-based Disparities

Women are the most marginalized in Sri Lankan fishing communities and the aid delivery mechanism only aggravated this situation because of inequalities based on gender. Access to aid was a recurrent concern among women in the groups as was their inability to seek employment. Having lost their pre-tsunami sources of income and unable to find alternative sources of income, they were placed in a vulnerable position.

During group discussions on the lack of progress, they described their plight as ‘pouring water into a leaking pot’. They emphasized the fact that any effort taken to develop the activities of men does not guarantee automatic transfer of such benefits to women and children. In the opinion of these women, the tsunami discriminated them further. Although education, health, and domestic activities were seen as the traditional role of women in this community they were denied access to financial benefits as a result of the aid being channeled into the hands of men. As such they had fallen prey to a procedure adopted by officials when dealing with the delivery of aid, which favoured a male-oriented system. Little or no recognition is given to the role of the woman. The recognition of the man as the head of the household has resulted in the family unit being registered under his name. Therefore, a woman’s right to access tsunami benefits was to a large extent curtailed. This left them virtually powerless and helpless. Constraints with regard to political influence reduce their chances of being consulted in the reconstruction process, thereby reducing the likelihood that their special needs would be taken into account. This mechanism which creates a state of dependency proves to be a great obstacle to the empowerment of women.¹⁷

Intra-household discrimination and the process of disempowerment

The majority of women shared common views on the impact of tsunami. They complained that household needs, such as lighting lamps, energy, study facilities for children and health were overlooked by men. The reason for this ignorance as seen by the women was that the men were involved in fishing activities during the night and also that they would while away their time during the day at a boutique or with friends. This routine continued in a somewhat altered form post tsunami. Their time during the day was devoted towards maximizing tsunami resources with the help of local agents or political groups. Entitlements both monetary and non-monetary being directed to men as the registered¹⁸ claim holders on behalf of the family, has led to women voicing their concerns over the money being squandered on alcohol and smoking.

Women in both groups strongly believe that such habits form part of the fishing culture as designed by men¹⁹. **Sheila**, a mother of three and a victim of domestic violence, expressed her frustration with the culture in which she is forced to raise her children.

¹⁷ See Annex 3

¹⁸ The tsunami aid delivery was directly connected to a receiving mechanism of male-headed households and a male dominated local network of distributing agents. Women in this structure of aid operation have been left out with no consideration as heads of households.

¹⁹ It is the popular belief among men that alcohol gives them ‘strength and energy’ to cope with the rigours of night-time deep sea fishing.

“For men, alcohol and smoking are part of fishing culture, and therefore can be continued without any social resistance or a legal measure, despite its harmful effects. The receipt of tsunami aid has aggravated this situation as I am forced to make do with the food package and other material assistance while the financial aid is spent on alcohol. I do not have any right or access to financial assistance as my husband is the registered recipient. Although aid delivery is said to have targeted those affected and marginalized the worst, this is not the case in reality and our plight is often misused to raise funds for themselves. I therefore strongly feel that my contribution and presence has been overlooked”.

The social isolation created by the tsunami had a huge impact on Muslim women, as well as intra-household inequalities in decision-making and sharing of resources. Firstly, Islamic customary and religious norms sanction women from being actively involved in any formal aid delivery mechanism managed by men. Aid delivery points that were placed at some distance from where they lived contributed to their lack of participation. Generating a source of income for the family is looked at as the primary responsibility of the man. The most striking feature of the women in this community is that they are forced to grapple with domestic issues while, at the same time, preserving Islamic cultural and religious beliefs.

Few Muslim women were engaged in income-generating activities prior to the tsunami.²⁰ Such micro-enterprises were established with the expansion of their dwellings and by gradual integration into neighbouring Sinhalese communities. Distancing created in the post-tsunami context has affected these relations, thereby rendering Muslim women financially and socially vulnerable as in the case of the Sinhalese community they were dependant on assistance derived by their husband.

The initial stage of the rescue operations saw the collective efforts of the Muslim group with minimal social and cultural problems as a result of limited outside intervention. The sudden influx of funds has resulted in the intervention of external agents, political groups and other intermediaries, thereby restricting the Muslim women to household activities. Women in the Muslim focus group felt victimized and that no one had come forward to put forward their case.

Fatima, a 34 year old Muslim widow and mother of two expressed hardship in accessing aid.

“In keeping with Muslim custom I was prohibited to leave the house for a mourning period of three months. As a result my request for assistance was delayed.”

The experience of other female-headed households demonstrates their vulnerability as opposed to the opportunities available to male-headed household units. A female headed household in a community, such as this is itself a sign of abject poverty. The added burden of seeking employment and attending to household work and nurturing

²⁰ See Annex 3.

children places them in a vulnerable position. Social and gender-based barriers to equal rights and access to benefits often undermine the courage and capabilities of female heads of households.

While establishing a good rapport with local aid agents is considered socially unacceptable, the formal aid delivery mechanism is designed in such a way that women cannot approach these officials collectively in order to obtain benefits.²¹ Although collective bargaining could be viewed as a means of eliminating bias, the reality is such that civil society remains disempowered in the face of inequality.

²¹ The formal system focuses on a case-by-case basis rather than a group of people and the focus is on individual problems, thereby making it difficult to eliminate bias.

Section 3: Inter-household Cooperation

Protecting rights and entitlements

In the opinion of the focus group members, the aid delivery mechanism in Kirinda is built on three pillars: the first is the formal administrative machinery controlled by Colombo and administered by a District Office and divisional and local units; the second is the network of International and local NGOs that establish direct links with local level representatives; and the third are the political parties engaged in delivering financial and material services with the support of wealthy party members. Although several channels have been established externally, the identification of genuine victims depends heavily on the accuracy and reliability of the local level information providers. The selection of beneficiaries and the distribution of financial and material assistance were areas that were subject to heavy criticism by the focus group members as they believe that inefficiency, corruption and mismanagement on the part of the local agents led to discrimination.²²

Housing construction they claim was beyond the supervision of beneficiaries. Hence, they were critical of the use of materials of inferior quality, faulty constructions and defective design. Although much criticism could have been avoided had the beneficiaries not been involved in the decision-making process, sadly this was not so. A clear and transparent process through which the procedures were communicated and individual opinions and concerns were addressed was a pressing need. And this has resulted in feeding into their existing feelings of victimization. It is interesting to note that the Muslim group was much more critical of housing construction owing to the fact that the long delay in construction had delayed their resettlement as opposed to the Sinhalese community that was resettled much earlier.²³ The lack of participation in the decision-making process had contributed to feelings of resentment.

Saleepa, a 45-year old Muslim woman, voiced her concerns with regard to housing and resettlement:

“Compulsory relocation is not a solution from the perspective of cultural and religious requirement of the Muslim women. We have been denied the right to make suggestions regarding the construction of our own houses”.

Women in the Sinhalese group expressed concern over the lack of income opportunities. They were unable to establish cottage industries and micro-businesses due to a lack of small trading establishments in the resettlement areas.

Renuka (23) stressed the need for collective bargaining to ensure progress:

²² The Muslim community complained about the *Grama Niladari*, who they believed was corrupt, but could not speak out against him due to fear of being stricken off the entitlements lists. The intermediary person, the school master was also accused of siphoning away aid, but again, this was not a formal accusation for fear of repercussions.

²³ The Sinhalese were resettled in May 2006 and the Muslims in August 2006.

'It is imperative that we have our own organization to negotiate, make demands and put pressure on service agencies if we are to progress. Facilities, such as health, education and finance cannot be provided on an individual basis. Therefore, it is imperative that we seek assistance collectively. The departure of donor agencies has inculcated feelings of helplessness in the affected communities and collective bargaining seems to be the effective solution.'

It was evident from group discussions that the Sinhalese community was gradually moving from dependency to self-sufficiency. And, as such were in a more mature stage of recovery whereas the Muslim community had yet to be resettled. During the initial stage of aid delivery, political influence and corruption contributed to the emergence of a battle for aid. While most accusations were based on rumor and hearsay, the communities now claim to have a better understanding of the post-tsunami recovery process as they have been resettled.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that external agencies failed to sustain the participation and collective spirit of the communities during the relief phase. In the absence of local community-based institutions, civil society groups and committed duty-bearers to ensure the participation of the communities, tsunami victims failed to articulate their interests, concerns and grievances. Discussions revealed that their rights as claimholders have had little or no meaning in the absence of a mechanism that holds duty-bearers to account for their actions.

Political interventions thwart the local administrative structure by frustrating the commitment of the duty-bearers towards the victims. And discrimination based on gender has instilled feelings of bitterness and frustration amongst women.

It is imperative that community participation be ensured throughout. Giving affected communities a choice would help mitigate the potential for tensions caused by the dismemberment of existing social structures. Accessibility and availability of duty-bearers is a must in order to afford the community an opportunity to participate meaningfully in the decision-making process. Measures taken without consulting the communities will no doubt result in disappointment.

The recognition of the role of women would help eliminate gender-based discrimination. Reluctance to do so will only feed into their existent feelings of victimization. The creation of a community-based woman's organization could be one of the ways their grievances could be taken into account. A mechanism should be introduced whereby those marginalized women could approach local administrative structures in order to bring about a positive change. Furthermore, steps should be taken to ensure equal rights to entitlements through cash-for-work programmes which guarantee equal pay.

The non-recognition of collective bargaining has proved to be a great hindrance to progress and development in this area. The strength of a collective movement has been undermined and several issues remain unaddressed. The modus-operandi of aid delivery must be extended to recognize collective bargaining as a means of promoting inclusive governance.

A data collection mechanism should be developed at the district level in order to track the needs of the affected individuals as well as the distribution and progress of aid. This innovation could serve to avoid duplication, corruption and delays associated with the ad-hoc nature of aid delivery.²⁴

In response to the changes reflected in employment patterns, effective monitoring of small-scale businesses is needed to determine their sustainability. The impact of past failures or successes should be assessed to ascertain if individuals rely on such work as a last resort rather than on their capacity or skills. New workforce entrants, especially women and youth, should have easy access to an employment counselor who could assist them in matters related to their wages, benefits as well as any other issues, thereby mitigating the risk of exploitation.

²⁴ Assessment of tsunami recovery implementation in Hambantota district, op. cit.

The need for a more transparent system of governance has been emphasized throughout the study. Government officials mandated to work for the benefit of the community should be held accountable to those who elected them. The people therefore should be empowered to monitor the activities of such officials in order to prevent excesses. A system of governance that constricts the rights of the community fails to live up to the ideals it is supposed to uphold in a democratic society.

Annex 1

Table 1: Distribution of affected areas of Hambantota District as a percentage of the total divisions

DS Divisions	Affected area as a % of total area	Number of affected GN divisions
Ambalantota	4.8	8
Hambantota	5.4	11
Tangalle	5.4	28
Tissamaharama	1.4	2

Annex 2

Table 2: Professional activity of the head of the household before and after the tsunami

Description	Singhalese		Muslim		Both	
	Before the tsunami	After the tsunami	Before the tsunami	After the tsunami	Before the tsunami	After the tsunami
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
Boat partner	2	3	8	6	10	9
Boat fish business	4	1	1	0	5	1
Fisherman	1	4	2	1	3	5
Fishing Labourer	8	3	3	4	11	7
Boutique	3	1	5	2	8	3
Security officer	1	0			1	0
Permanent job	1	1			1	1
Salon owner	1	1			1	1
Mason	6	1			6	1
Agriculture	2	0			2	0
Coir industry	4	1			4	1
Carpenter	2	1			2	1
Motor mechanic	1	0			1	0
Private sector employee	1	0			1	0
Labourer	4	10	9	7	13	17
Trade	1	0			1	0
Employed abroad	0	0	1		1	0
Three-wheel owner	0	0		1	0	1
Bicycle repair shop	2	0	1	1	1	1
Govt. service	0	0	2	2	2	2
Cattle farming	0	0	1		1	0
Poultry	0	0	2		2	0
Small businesses	3	1	3	2	6	3
TOTAL	45	28	38	26	83	54

Annex 3

Table 3: Professional activities of women in male-headed households before and after the tsunami

Description	Sinhalese		Muslim	
	Before	After	Before	After
Boutique employee	1	1	1	0
Labourer	2	0	0	0
Coir industry	3	0	0	0
Agriculture	0	0	0	0
Poultry	0	0	2	0
Small businesses	1	1	0	0
Food stalls	0	0	2	0
Other	1	0	0	0
Total	8	2	5	0
Total families	45	45	38	38

Table 4 : Professional activities of women in female headed households.

Description	Sinhalese		Muslim		Both	
	Before the tsunami	After the tsunami	Before the tsunami	After the tsunami	Before the tsunami	After the tsunami
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
Fish Drying			1		1	0
Boutique			2	1	2	1
Agriculture	1				1	0
Coir/twisting ropes	1	0			1	0
Labourer	1	2	1	2	2	4
Employed abroad			1		1	0
Pensioner				1	0	1
Small business	1				1	0

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