

Disaster Risk Management through Community Participation: A Case Study of Ampara Coastal Area, Sri Lanka

M. S. M. Razik
Department of Geography, University of Peradeniya
razikmsm@gmail.com

Many large and small scale disasters such as landslides, floods, droughts, cyclones, epidemics, etc., have caused thousands of human deaths, displaced millions of people and caused devastating impacts to the socio-economy and environment of Sri Lanka in the past and will probably do so in the future. Historically, disasters have been supposed as isolated events and responded with ‘emergency relief’ as the standard remedy after a disaster. Although, there were some disaster management initiatives earlier, they were mostly reactive emphasizing relief and recovery rather than proactive with damage prevention or minimization strategies. Community participation in disaster risk management efforts were not regarded as essential before, until 2004 tsunami disaster. Therefore, this research study endeavors to analyze the community participation in disaster risk management efforts in Ampara coastal region before and after the 2004 December tsunami. The data and information for the research study was collected through primary and secondary data collection methods and primary data collection includes open-ended questionnaires and interviews. Qualitative data collection method was mainly employed to achieve the objectives of the present study.

Many disaster risk management efforts and strategies came into Ampara coastal areas immediately after the devastating impacts of 2004 December tsunami as this region became the hardest hit region of the country. Most of these programmes were initiated mainly with the participation of the local and vulnerable communities and community groups like school children, elders, women, fishermen, security forces, religious leaders, journalists, etc., with the involvement of other stakeholders like governmental organizations, grass-root organizations and INGOs. Disaster risk management through sports, religion, school drama, exhibition, disaster mapping, mock drills and evacuation programmes were some of the main programmes that were intimated by both governmental organizations and INGOs in the area.

The study shows that community participation in disaster risk management and resilience programmes was very high immediately after the 2004 tsunami disaster.

However, there has been a decreasing trend in the community participation afterwards due to several reasons. Further, study reveals that local people had been used and practiced their own traditional knowledge and methods in disaster risk management in the past. However, they have received a proper knowledge and training especially after 2004 tsunami disaster.

Key words: *Disaster, Risk, Participation, Vulnerable and resilience*