RELOCATION HOUSING SCHEMES AS A POST-DISASTER RECONSTRUCTION INTERVENTION AND ITS IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY COHESION: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE SELECTED RELOCATED COMMUNITIES IN EASTERN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

When people are displaced due to disasters, there are two strategies to deal with displaced people of disaster-affected communities; resettlement and relocation. Resettlement has less difficulties in refurbishing the social fabric of the affected community members as the returnees resume their way of life in their familiar physical and social environments. This study is concerned with recovery interventions related to the relocation process and its impacts on refurbishing community cohesion and related social issues in the relocated communities. This study examines whether disaster-stricken communities' reconstruction efforts addressed members' needs and impacted conflict situations in the affected regions. The study's overall objective is to evaluate the impacts of reconstruction projects on community cohesion and community formation in selected relocated communities. The study is based on the descriptive qualitative method. Key Informant interviews, personal interviews, and focus group discussions were used to collect primary data collection. The study found that to newly develop their community structure and refurbish the social fabric in relocated areas, people's physical and socio-economic needs have to be satisfied; therefore, reconstruction interventions in post-disaster recovery processes should accommodate the needs of the target communities. People's consultation is thus essentially required in planning reconstruction works. Partiality in beneficiary selection, ownership issues, and issues in boundary demarcation cause inter-household disputes. When a community is heterogonous on a caste or communal basis, such issues lead to severe and enduring social cleavages. When prejudiced political interests and the interests of community members affiliated with this type of politics are incorporated into reconstruction efforts, reconstruction interventions become a factor in worsening or causing new social conflict.

Keywords: *community cohesion, reconstruction, relocated schemes, social fabric*

Introduction

Social order is most likely to be perturbed when infrastructural components of a community are destroyed since physical infrastructure lays the foundation for the social construction of community relationships and sets the base for mutual social existence. (Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004: 06-07, Vickneswaran, 2017). Therefore, restructuring community life accentuates the requirement to reconstruct the physical infrastructure in disaster-affected communities; thus, reconstruction is a vital activity in post-disaster recovery. Recovery is almost a challenging task there has to be proper planning and coordination of activities at the community level to reinstate the social fabric. Reconstructing the Physical infrastructure of a community has certain effects in refurbishing social relationships among

the affected community members since disasters bring about breakages not only in the physical construction of a community but also in the social construction of it. This research focuses on the link between physical and social infrastructures in communities. It experimentally focuses on the effects of post-disaster reconstruction implementations on restoring social bonds among the impacted community members and resolving communal conflicts.

The study is entirely based on relocation housing schemes as its research universe. There are two strategies to deal with displaced people of disaster-affected communities; resettlement- settling them again in their habitats and relocation- settling them in new locations. Resettlement has less difficulties in refurbishing the social fabric of the affected community members as the returnees resume their way of life in their familiar physical and social environments. However, relocated areas pose significant challenges to the settlers in adapting to the new environments. What is widely noticed is that relocated social environments are not conducive enough to bring about community cohesion among newly settled dwellers. The social organizations of those communities are yet to be established to build reciprocal social relationships among the settlers and resolve the social issues prevailing in the relocated communities. This study is concerned with recovery interventions related to the relocation process and its impacts on refurbishing community cohesion and related social problems in the relocated communities.

Statement of the problem

People who disasters have personally impacted acquire a strong desire to assist in the recovery of their community. Civil society actors can make major contributions to recovery programs despite being confronted with harsh realities and enormous problems. Their abilities may aid in the re-establishment of their social lives. The nature of the destruction in the post-disaster recovery period is the most convincing reason for civil society's participation in recovery efforts. Not only did the disasters kill community members, but they also destroyed their infrastructure and institutional framework, leaving survivors fighting for survival. Individuals, families, and the community have a right to a disorderly situation once more. As a result of being directly impacted by a disaster, people strongly desire to help others restore their social lives. They have a larger need and higher potential to participate in recovery projects now that we are in a recovery phase, alongside the aid actors. (Jeong, 2006:120).

Any entity engaging in rehabilitation efforts must have a thorough understanding of the community's traditional makeup. One of the criteria for actors involved in rehabilitation efforts to complete their jobs properly is familiarity with the social structure, particularly norms and values. (Borgh, 2006: 14). This will also aid players involved in recovery efforts in identifying difficulties, recognizing priority regions, and becoming more focused on the goal activities. This study examines whether disaster-stricken

communities' reconstruction efforts addressed members' needs and impacted conflict situations in the affected regions.

Objectives of the study

The study's overall objective is to evaluate the impacts of reconstruction projects on community cohesion and community formation in selected relocated communities. The specific objectives of the study are;

- to elucidate whether the reconstruction interventions address the needs of community members; basic and socio-economic needs.
- to elucidate the effectiveness of reconstruction interventions on the social fabric in relocated communities
- to evaluate the impacts of reconstruction projects on the community structure of relocated communities.

Methodology

This descriptive study is based on the qualitative method. Individual and group interviews and case studies were used to gather qualitative data for this descriptive study. Therefore, the primary information of this study prominently relies on ethnographical data sources. Primary data was collected using the following tools; Key informant interviews focused group discussions, and case histories. Grama Niladhari, other field-level government officers, and community leaders were involved in the key informant interviews. Members of Community-Based Organizations and beneficiaries of the reconstruction projects were brought into separate groups and each of them was involved in the focus group discussions. 05 to 06 respondents were selected for key informant interviews from each village. In addition to this, there were 02 group discussions conducted to collect information regarding general issues of the communities. Men and women community members and youths were involved in group interviews. Each and every group interview was directed towards getting information about changes in their lifestyle after the resettlement or relocation and their perceptions and experiences of post-Tsunami reconstruction interventions. In the case of sampling, locations were selected through a purposive sampling basis. A certain percentage (10%-20%) of the total population of each affected community was selected for the focused group discussions. Purposive and random sample methods were also used for the selection of respondents for the interviews, personal and group interviews, from the villages.

A brief outlook of Communities

Field data collection was confined to selected Tsunami affected Tamil and Muslim communities, specifically relocated ones, in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Ampara districts of Eastern Sri Lanka. The study locations were selected based on the purposive sampling method.

Sudaikudah housing scheme is a relocated housing settlement situated in Kunitivu GN division, Muthur DSD, Trincomalee district. Tamils from Kunitivu coastal area entirely occupy it, and prior to the disaster, occupants were living in the same community. Therefore, they share a homogenous communal culture. Naduvuththu village is situated in Kinniya DSD, Trincomalee district. It is a relocated housing scheme for Tsunami affected families, established in 2006. People from several coastal villages in Kinnaiya division were brought to Naduvuththu for settlement. Occupants of the entire housing scheme are Muslims.

Palamunai is a relocated housing scheme in Palamunai village of Arayampathy divisional secretariat, Batticaloa district. The settlement is entirely occupied by Muslims and they were relocated within the same village territory. Indeed, Palamunai village is predominantly occupied by the Muslim community people. Tsunami-affected families within the buffer zone of Palamunai coastal area were relocated to the interior part of the land in the village. Onthachchimadam housing scheme is located in Kaluwanchikudy DSD, Batticaloa district. It is a relocated housing scheme constructed by ICRC. There are 18 one-story housing blocks, bifurcated into two and allocated for two households. Altogether 36 families have been dwelling in the scheme. As Tamils entirely occupy the Kaluwanchikudy division, Onthachimadam ICRC housing scheme is inhabited by the Tamil community people. However, they belong to a particular caste, Gold Smiths, a notable minority in the division. Families in the housing scheme were from the same village, but their location fell under the buffer zone. Therefore, they were relocated to the government land of the same village. Thereby, though they were relocated, their socio-cultural environment did not change and they are still homogenous like earlier. The tsunami-affected people in Pasikudah and Kalkudah coastal villages were relocated in the interior part of Kalkudah village. This relocated settlement is situated in Valachenai DSD of Batticaloa district. There are 121 families relocated in the housing scheme. Occupants of the housing scheme are Tamils and entirely belong to the fishing community.

Mandanai is a relocated housing scheme situated in Thirukovil Divisional Secretariat of Ampara district. The housing scheme was established in 2007 and the Tsunami affected people from some coastal villages of Thirukovil and Thambiluvil areas who were relocated here. 127 families were accommodated in these relocated housing units. The occupants of the houses are Tamil and mostly Hindus. However, they came from different villages and belong to different caste categories. Therefore, community relationship is not much reciprocal among them. The bolivarian housing scheme is a relocated housing scheme located in Sainthamaruthu village in Sainthamaruthu division of the Ampara district. The tsunami affected the people of Sainthamaruthu village whose house location came under the buffer zone and were relocated to the western part of the village. The housing scheme was constructed with the Bolivian government's financial support, which is why the relocation area is called the "Bolivarian housing scheme". There are 145 houses constructed under the project and Muslim

families occupy the entire housing scheme. Maruthamunai village is situated in the Kalmunai divisional secretariat of the Ampara district. Muslims predominantly occupy the village, but the adjacent villages are occupied by Tamil communities. Since the coastal area of the Maruthamunai village was densely populated, many families lost their members during the Tidal disaster.

Theoretical Background

The meaning of social order is not merely limited to the notion of control but also indicates mutuality and consensus among individuals (Cohen, 1979: 18-19). Theories suggest that consensual relationship among the components of society is a functional necessity for the survival of social order since such consensus serves to fulfill the needs of people in a society (Marshall, 1998: 67, Nanda, 1980: 29, Outhwhite and Bottomore, 1999: 236). Thus, serving the needs of the people is inevitable to maintain the cohesiveness of individuals in a society. A community is a specific form of social relationship. This relationship is based on locality (MacIver and Page, 1950:09). In the community, people establish a social network that is associated with a sense of belonging.

To a certain extent, community relations are essential to fulfill individual needs, since members of a community share common interests. Mutual dependency in relationships among community members is determined by the necessity of achieving the goals of their community life. When people in a locality establish a social relationship, they display cohesiveness among themselves. Cohesion is not a matter of reciprocal relations of individuals, but it is a sharing of common goals and interests. Therefore, a community reflects the belongingness of common relations (Freidkin, 2004: 73). Infrastructure becomes an essential aspect of socio-economic activities of a community. It determines the quality of life of the community members. From a functional perspective, infrastructure plays a vital part to the functions of social institutions; family, economy, religion, and education, in serving the needs of the community members. When a community's needs-related and service-oriented infrastructure is damaged, the economic and social functions of the community are severely affected. And unsatisfied needs of people lead to many social issues associated with unsatisfied needs, prominently conflicts among community members. (Oliver-Smith, 1990: 07-09).

Reconstructing infrastructure is one of the best ways to rebuild community integration and restore community life in disaster-affected communities as if the reconstruction work restores or establishes mechanisms to serve community people's needs. Nonetheless, when the reconstruction interventions fail to address the needs of community people this led to exacerbating existing social issues. When the designs of reconstruction projects are not matched with communities' interests or when the implementations of such projects fail to accommodate people's concerns, these reconstruction initiatives generate new conflicts within or between communities. (Majd & Andalib, 2013: 40-43).

Findings

Appalling conditions of Community-based Organizations (CBOs)

Partial representation of Interests

While CBOs are theoretically anticipated to serve a prominent role in articulating community concerns, in project areas, CBOs have special weaknesses in this regard since they are fractured along communal lines of class, family, and gender. It has been determined that CBOs can only form broad consensus on issues that are irrelevant or insignificant to the rebuilding of social structures and that they have, to some extent, played a role in ignoring principal participation with other organizations engaged in recovery projects in their areas. Along with these demeanors, CBOs in project areas were eventually relegated to a supporting function. Government officers who engaged in reconstruction programs in the relocated schemes perceived the actions of members of CBOs as partial in obtaining benefits for their relatives. Thus, the COBs did not represent the generalized interests of the settlers in the relocated communities. CBOs represented the interests of a certain segment of the communities, which is dominant in power relations, and ignored the voices of marginalized segments. Interviews with minority segments of class and caste groups of the communities revealed that the officers and the aid workers never consulted their opinions as they were not allowed to be part of the need assessment discussions.

Some CBO leaders who were appointed as project representatives failed to serve the interests of the entire community and acted with partiality and nepotism. Those leaders have been identified as engaged in granting forged information, looting, and corruption. When people pointed out their fingers at CSO representatives alleging them for their discriminative activities, CBO representatives put all allegations on the heads of the project coordinators. These CBO leaders or representatives have deliberately sophisticated matters and cases to obscure their forged activities and justify their false allegations against project coordinators.   This created a gap in making the reciprocal relationship between community members and project coordinators.

Issues in equal participation and disputes

It is said that getting equal participation from members of various community categories has been difficult in project regions. In the area of contribution and participation in recovery tasks, vulnerable and powerless populations were marginalized. Such kinds of marginalization occurred along with the unequal layers of gender, class, and caste. In Mandanai, for instance, women's participation was high in the involvement of the projects, but the case is vice versa in Sainthamaruthu and Maruthamunai where women were ignored in contributing to these projects.

In project areas, lower-status groups like members of lower castes and families under the poverty line have been found subservient to higher-status members. Their contribution in generating central interests was almost lost regarding the projects.

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Feuds between CBO members frequently resulted in tit-for-tat reprisal, exacerbating the already contradictory nature of these project areas. Some community-based organizations (CBOs) neglected to address the competing nature of community members at the commencement of programs. They seemed to conceal the conflicting nature between members to project coordinators as leaders of CBOs were in a position not to degrade their community in any way and try to show them as having harmonious relationships among them. Apart from this trend, CBOs of some project areas caused to make new conflicts or exacerbated existing hostility. This further burdened project coordinators as they had to cope with these conflicts.

Coordination problems

To ensure the success of recovery efforts, a CBO must establish a continuous discussion and consensus-building framework. Otherwise, a slew of new players arises, often outpacing existing players in terms of available resources. This research found that fragmented relationships and contradictive nature at individual and institutional levels inevitably led to competition among community-based groups and organizations. Those groups and organizations were competitive to get influenced in recovery activities. If one got engaged in one recovery project, the other one tried to trespass it or refrain from the particular project activity. Therefore, these project coordinators faced problems coordinating with community-based organizations of both project areas. For instance, Rural Development Society (RDS) was not happy with the Women Rural Development Society (WRDS) 's participation in this project, ignored their support for it, and worked with other organizations.

Effectiveness of reconstruction outputs in Meeting People's Needs

The study discovered that many building initiatives intended to meet recipients' physical and social demands were unable to do so due to their structure and quality. Most of the reconstruction projects had not addressed the needs of the grassroots of the communities and many projects are planned and designed without the concerns of the community people. Housing schemes in resettlement areas are in question whether they adequately provide facilities to beneficiaries. The space of the house is not sufficient to accommodate families with more than 05 members. Even in house owner-driven projects, funds are not enough to complete their homes. They were only capable enough to build a portion of their houses. The relocated housing schemes are not situated near the sea, causing difficulties in livelihood for fishing communities. The Mandanai community people highly criticize the quality of the Houses. According to the people, the Mandanai housing scheme was built by persons unfamiliar with the construction works.

However, community buildings, newly established or renovated, are efficiently used by the community people for their multi-purpose gatherings. Fisheries Association, RDS, WRDS, and other CBOs effectively use the buildings. These buildings have been under the maintenance of one of the

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communities' CBOs that help them earn income by renting the building to NGOs and even to private persons for their private and common purposes.

Interior roads, both renovated and newly built, are not good in quality and dilapidated due to floods and monsoon torrential. Some essential interior roads which were temporarily reconstructed under cash for work projects remain damaged and difficult to use heavy vehicles and hinder the business activities of fishing communities. In Marutamunai, the coastal road which was important for the transportation of fisheries goods is still not appropriately reconstructed. However, under the community awakening and reconstruction programs, by the government and NGOs, concrete roads were paved in these villages. But, to the people's perception, this concrete road construction was not specifically targeted at livelihood-based transportation since construction initiatives were not consulted with the community people.

Discussions

Refurbishing the Social Fabric with Efficiency

The study wanted to see if construction modifications helped people rebuild their social relationships after the tsunami. Public facilities for fisheries and other specific associations are more effective in serving community people by allowing them to contact frequently or regularly through association meetings and other types of gatherings. Partiality in selecting beneficiaries for housing schemes and biased-political and administrative patronage in allocating construction benefits to the community people generated conflicts among community members and still caused disputes between affected people and authorities in the tsunami-affected areas.

Problems in ownership of houses, boundary demarcations, and buffer zone further exacerbate the conflict among the community members and between local people and administrative authorities. The people see relocated houses as creating a social cleavage among them since it sets apart a portion of community members from the village communities. In Mandanai, the settlement was formed by relocating three coastal communities and people of those migrated communities were often confronted with common decision-making processes and still maintain their earlier community attachment. Indeed, those community people belong to different caste categories; mainly Cultivators and Fishers. And therefore, the situation is still anomalous for the Mandanai relocated people to build a consensus in day-to-day interactions.

Consequences on Community Structure

The study looked into whether the reconstruction projects had any impact on community structure or relationship patterns. According to affected community members, conflicts and livelihood changes due to post-Tsunami reconstruction interventions have resulted in individualistic tendencies among Tamil

community members, as well as a decreased tendency in reciprocal cooperation among community members in public ceremonies and rituals.

However, a situation of this nature is rarely observable in Muslim communities. They still maintain communal ties among themselves and their mosque trustee plays a major role in integrating community members. And the study found that livelihood-based associations among village members are quite effective in maintaining mutual relationships in Muslim communities and ensuring the members' physical and social security. But this cooperation among these members has been existing since the pre-Tsunami period. Most of the projects failed to incorporate the contribution of civil society organizations in the study areas. Disaster-affected community is generally characterized by weak institutional and community organizing. And it is considered that, in such a weak institutional setup, civil society can facilitate the social interaction between the community members (Jeong, 2006:120).

Community Organizing and related issues

In this study, it was discovered that in-depth engagement in community organizing is required to overcome the aforementioned hurdles. Moving from a traditional paradigm of community organizing to a new one necessitates promoting community organizing. Community organising generally refers to a method or process for motivating individuals to work together toward a common purpose or target. The conventional community organising model is based on this fundamental premise, and it aims to persuade individuals and institutions to fight for and obtain resources.

Working with this narrow scope will not be worth overcoming those challenges arising in implementing recovery activities, since it can create more competitive social relationships within civil society members and complicated situations to be handled for project actors. A new community-organisation model is proposing a broad scope, which could be the appropriate one to cope with those issues in recovery activities. (Routhman, 1972: 21-22). According to the new model, community organizing motivates people to act as a group toward development goals or objectives. Capacity building is also essential to make social arrangements compatible with recovery activities. It should be taken at the outset of this project. Capacity building is a critical concern in managing the transition from the relief period to the recovery period since the pace of transition to recovery varies from community to community. This is an early need for strengthening civil capabilities to carry out recovery tasks smoothly. As the early concern of recovery is the reconstruction of the community, it is necessary to promote the capacity of the community to support recovery activities. Civil society should be strengthened as to respond spontaneously and rapidly to unmet recovery needs. (Bauer, Bigdon & Korf, 2003: 188). As community-based groups have also been essential for organizing recovery operations in cooperation with NGOs, local government, and national authorities, the capacities of community

members in relation to recovery tasks can be enhanced through awareness programmes, training seminars, and workshops.

Conclusion

People who have been personally impacted by natural catastrophes acquire a strong desire to assist in the recovery of their community. Civil society actors can make major contributions to recovery programs despite being confronted with harsh realities and enormous problems. Their capacities may help to create the conditions for rebuilding their social life. The nature of destruction in the post-disaster recovery period provides the most compelling argument for the participation of civil society in recovery processes. To newly develop their community structure and refurbish the social fabric in relocated areas, people's physical and socio-economic needs have to be satisfied; therefore, reconstruction interventions in post-disaster recovery processes should accommodate the needs of the target communities. People's consultation is thus essentially required in planning reconstruction works. Partiality in beneficiary selection, ownership issues, and issues in boundary demarcation cause inter-household disputes. When a community is heterogonous on a caste or communal basis, such issues lead to severe and enduring social cleavages.

In the east of Sri Lanka, there is a growing divide between elites' interests and grassroots ambitions. As a result, grassroots people cannot explain their primary concerns or reflect their viewpoints on community projects. Community projects, producing economic opportunities and mutually benefitting all segments of a community, are effective in bringing groups of people with divisive social interests to a common interacting social situation as they find compatibility in interests through economic means. When prejudiced political interests and the interests of community members affiliated with this type of politics are incorporated into reconstruction efforts, reconstruction interventions become a factor in worsening or causing new social conflict.

Relocation housing schemes are dilapidated social environments as there are basic needs of the people left unsatisfied. Thus, it leads to conflict over satisfying needs among the settlers. As they settled in various villages, community members of relocated schemes lack mutuality in social relationships. Therefore, dominant segments of the community control the community-based groups and reflect their own interests so as to obtain recovery benefits. The community structure's heterogeneity exerts influence the incompatibility of interests among the members settled in the new location. Strategies are to be developed to set up reconstruction interventions conducive to refurbishing the social fabric among the members of relocated housing schemes.

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