

Matara Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment Report for Talalla Central Grama Niladari, Devinuwara DS, Matara District

Location: Talalla Central, Grama Niladari, Devinuwara Division

Date: 22-30 September, 2006

Sector focus: Multi-hazard vulnerability and capacity assessment

Spatial focus: Neighborhood

Bibliographical reference

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Matara Vulnerability Capacity Assessment (VCA) Report Talalla Central GNs, Devinuwara DS, Matara District* IFRC, Geneva, Switzerland (2006).

Abstract

This report presents the findings of the nine-day, September 2006 Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) undertaken by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) in the community of Talalla Central in Devinuwara DS of Matara District, Sri Lanka. VCA is an assessment method that the IFRC uses to contribute to a greater understanding of the nature and level of risks that vulnerable people face; where these risks come from; who will be the worst affected; and what initiatives can be undertaken to address their vulnerability. The VCA process is about collecting, analyzing and systematizing information in a structured and meaningful way, which can then be used to diagnose the risks a community faces, the capacities they have, and what activities can be taken to reduce people's vulnerability and increase their capacities.

This report was published with input from the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and is divided into 4 main sections: background on the VCA, an outline of the process and methods used, the main findings of the assessment, and conclusions. The fieldwork was conducted using participatory tools such as: social mapping, well being ranking, matrix ranking, seasonal calendars, Venn diagrams, mobility mapping, initial market assessment, semi-structured interviews, observations, flash cards, and focus group discussions. There were 217 community members present at an initial community meeting which also included community based organizations (CBOs) and local authorities out of a total population of 1,440 people or 360 households.

This community was deeply affected by the Asian Tsunami of 2004 and subsequent development and humanitarian aid has contributed to some tensions within the community. In order to not focus on individuals, household surveys were not conducted but rather the assessment focussed on the

community as a whole. The assessment uses the IFRC sustainable livelihoods framework although does not define it within this report, it represents the social, physical, natural, financial and human resources that exist within a community. All of these aspects are covered in this report. Hazards and risks are not considered exclusively to natural hazards but rather encompass risks to livelihoods in general.

No particular end users are specified, however it would be useful for **branch and volunteers of the Red Cross, community development workers, local government and NGOs** who are looking for applied examples of the VCA process.

Technical description

Hazard/risk type: tsunami, lack of diversified industry for employment opportunities, economic hardship, and lack of vocational training for those outside the formal education system.

Type of assessment: Vulnerability Capacity Assessment

CRA process

Methods used: social mapping, well being ranking, matrix ranking, seasonal calendars, Venn diagrams, mobility mapping, initial market assessment, semi-structured interviews, observations, flash cards, and focus group discussions. Community members were selected during the initial community meeting by community members according to participation criteria. Many of the SLRCS volunteers came from the community; a fact which increased the community interest and engagement with the assessment process. There was balanced representation of men and women, adults, youth and the elderly. No children were involved in this assessment.

Was livelihood analysis used? Yes. The approach and participatory methodologies used in the VCA were based on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. This is defined as the human, natural, financial, physical and social capital that exists within the community. Areas for consideration were income/expenditure, coping with crisis, issues related to employment, and assets. A diagrammatic simplified form of the sustainable livelihoods framework was used to guide sessions that proved particularly useful when brainstorming major priorities and capacities.

There is limited exploration of the interaction between local and national government with the community however it is anticipated that this will come following the VCA and the establishment of a CBO responsible to implement the VCA activities.

Was external specialist knowledge introduced? Yes, the Field Officer from SEI, the Livelihoods Delegate, the WATSAN Officer, and three Community Development Officers of the IFRC were present and contributed their knowledge on their areas of international expertise. The multi-disciplinary team contributed expertise in disaster management, livelihoods, water and sanitation, environmental issues and community development and ensured that programming was integrated from the beginning.

Vulnerability analysis

Although disaster management delegates were present, other than tidal surges that affect coastal households, the community did not identify natural hazards as their primary concern. Instead priority concerns were day-to-day vulnerabilities such as improving income opportunities.

Based on the tools and data collected, analysis led to vulnerability being perceived as social and cultural divisions between the existing and the newly shifted households, lack of technical education for certain groups in the community, lack of job opportunities in the district, particularly for youth, people living with disabilities, and the aged.

Capacity analysis

Resources available: *Human capacity:* labour, skills and knowledge; particularly in fishing, masonry and mining; and sense of community unity. *Community resources:* strength and number (19) of community based organizations and the effective coordination between the Temple, other NGOs, CBOs, and local authorities.

Limitations to capacity: social and cultural divisions within the community, lack of finances, diversified employment base, and education within the community.

Action planning and implementation

What actions were actually planned?

1. Introduction of new job opportunities
2. Introduction of vocational trainings and conduct career guidance activities for those outside of the formal education system
3. Assist the community through providing seed capital for business start up and development
4. Linking people up to or introducing low interest credit and loan schemes
5. Introduction of industrial/trade center in the village
6. Introduction of new buyers and markets for their production
7. Provision of an equipment hall for fishermen and proper signal light system
8. Rehabilitation of the coir pits [work-pits where the fibre of coconut husks are spun into ropes]
9. An appropriate method to manage the threat posed by monkeys and wild pigs in collaboration with relevant authorities

What actions were actually carried out?

Following the VCA, tool outputs such as the social mapping exercise were given back to the community along with a translated copy of the executive summary to ensure that the community's information remained with them and was available to them and any other stakeholders who have an interest in the community both now and in the future. A SWOT analysis of CBOs in the community showed that there were no CBOs present that considered the overall needs of the community. A committee was elected to represent Talalla and follow up the results of the VCA and work as representatives for the IFRC/SLRCS.

The IFRC supported the elected committee to become a legally registered CBO in August 2007 by drawing up their constitution and negotiating their terms and requirements for membership. The CBO is called Diriya Shakthi Development Society (DSDS) and has the objective to "build peace and harmony among the community of Talalla Central by leading, organising and guiding the development of the community and providing assistance to the vulnerable, disabled and low income families."

DSDS developed a 12-month work plan partly based on the VCA outcomes. This covered the following activities:

- ◆ expansion of CBO membership;
- ◆ provision of sanitation facilities;
- ◆ assistance for income-generations activities;
- ◆ rehabilitation of the sports ground and certain key village roads;;
- ◆ assistance for disabled households and children of low income families;
- ◆ construction of a community centre;
- ◆ construction of houses for vulnerable households and provision of water to one sub-village location.

The IFRC and the Livelihoods Programme supported the CBO to develop its own workplan taking the VCA findings into consideration. The IFRC was clear with DSDS that this plan was for the development of their own village and therefore the Programme would not provide funding and support for all the areas. That said, the IFRC/ SLRCS did provide funding for the following activities that were carried out: the establishment of a communal library, a cash-for-work programme to

rehabilitate the sports ground, funding the construction 14 owner-driven sanitation facilities and skills training in account and book keeping, planning and report writing, and community mobilization and participation.

Have these actions turned out to be sustainable?

Membership in DSDS has increased to 221 households out of a total of 360 households in Talalla and continues to rise on a monthly basis. The library is completely managed by DSDS and they are now earning income from both the library and their own membership drive. The communal library membership stands at 210 households with 155 coming from the Talalla Central and the remainder from the surrounding communities. The sports ground is also be maintained and managed by DSDS on behalf of the community. Links with the local authorities (e.g. government hygiene promotion activities) will help to ensure sustainability of the activities over time.

Were there any unanticipated additional benefits of the actions?

The programme intended to use existing CBOs however there were no viable partners. The Diriya Shakthi Development Society was created to fill this gap and has evolved to be an extremely dynamic CBO with community development objectives that has considerable community support. DSDS is able to implement activities and serve the wider needs of their own community.

Were there any unanticipated negative consequences of the actions? None to date.

Limitations on action/sustainability of actions: None.

Indicators

The 12 months workplan proposed for action planning does not have specified indicators, but rather lists activities over time. That said, the overall community-based livelihoods programme of IFRC/SLRCS has the following indicators:

Overall

-At least 30% of tsunami host and housing beneficiary households show improvement in well-being across the life of the project

Specific objectives:

1. To build community cohesion and solidarity thereby reducing any existing or potential tensions by providing communal benefits. Indicators:
2. To improve the economic security of the most vulnerable within the new community (relocated families and the host families), based on criteria defined and agreed upon by all community members.

Outputs:

1. Promotion of community cohesion and solidarity between resettled and host communities.
2. Strengthening and diversification of existing livelihoods of vulnerable households.
3. Communal strengthening of assets.
4. Community level mobilization and capacity building in cash and debt management and improved access and benefits from savings and micro-credit organizations.

Contextual notes

Existence/role of prior or contemporaneous conflict? Since the early 1980's there has been intermittent civil war between the government and separatist militant organization the Tamil Tigers. Although the communities are politicised, there are no noted security issues or threats other than from wild animals such as monkeys and pigs.

Role of displacement/relocation. In the 1970's, government village expansion programs saw people moving into the Kurunduwatta area which led to small land holdings. Although people are

politicised to the existence of the Tamil Tigers, they do not have any impact on the security of the Southern Province.

The Talalla Central hosts the IFRC donor driven relocation-housing site of Kanakke Watta and the World Vision site: Gamage Watta. Many of the 18 households that have been relocated rely on fishing for their income however this is no longer possible inland. This fact, combined with several private land sales leading to a number of new-settlers to the area, means low social cohesion and people feeling that they do not know their neighbors.

As livelihoods are directly linked to the well-being of the whole community and the livelihoods of the new settlers will impact on the livelihoods of the host community and vice versa, the IFRC/SLRCS programme will look at the livelihoods of the whole community. For the host community, they had been indirectly affected by the tsunami and in some cases have been made more vulnerable due to the politicized post tsunami recovery response, uneven assistance and changing humanitarian context post tsunami.

Role of prior disaster & prior recovery attempts? On 24 December, 2005 the Asian Tsunami destroyed much of the livelihoods of Sri Lanka people and many lives were lost. A great deal of financial and human capital investment has gone into re-building the communities, and tsunamis remain the primary natural disaster hazard for this area of the VCA project. Community members consulted through the VCA noted that they had been made to feel welcome by the host communities when they arrived, but the IFRC/SLRCS programme addresses the need to ensure any potential tensions between those who have directly benefited from the tsunami and those who may have been comparatively disaffected are mitigated.

Significant historical, geographic, economic, political, or cultural issues that influenced this instance of CRA and its consequences? In the 1970's there was a political decision to redraw and split the boundaries of what are today; East Talalla, Talalla Central and Talalla North has lead to division and has negatively impacted on community cohesion. The entry point for the VCA was therefore through the livelihoods program and trying to look at activities that would benefit the community as a whole rather than individually.

Strategic notes

How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at the national level?

Sri Lanka's Reconstruction and Development Agency (RADA) developed Divisional Livelihoods Development Plans for Tsunami Affected Divisions (DLDP). This highlighted the importance of participatory assessment and project management and even notes the needs for livelihoods support to those families that have been relocated to new housing and the existing host community. The IFRC fully coordinates with the national and local authorities in this regard and all VCA reports are shared with the local stakeholders and authorities.

How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at local level? No policy or practise changes have yet occurred however the IFRC and the community are advocating for transformation. For example, the IFRC advocated with the community on rejuvenation of the lagoon, the fishing harbor, and access for road lighting. The IFRC is also working closely with Oxfam who have formed a Coir Steering Committee for the Devinuwara DS division to avoid duplication and harmonization of efforts.

How has this practice of CRA influenced the level of organization and solidarity in the locality where it was carried out? The VCA process and its emphasis on communal level activities in Talalla Central has build solidarity in the community as people get to know each other and learn more about their common capacities and goals. A CBO was created following the VCA with the aim to follow up on the outcomes and findings of the assessment. The high level of membership in this CBO shows that there is a renewed energy in the community to work on their own development. Communal activities such as cash for work and various voluntary campaigns that use the community development principle of uniting people for a common goal increase the level of organization and solidarity.

The IFRC/SLRCS livelihoods program aims to actively reduce divisions and promote connectors in the community, in essence: the principle of 'do no harm'.

Less divided along class, gender, age, ethnic lines? Since some of the VCA practitioners came from the community where the assessment was taking place, there was more effective participation of youth over other locations in Sri Lanka. Based on lesson learned from previous VCAs in Sri Lanka, particular effort was made through this VCA to have more distributed gender balance including the voices of the young, old, male, and female. However, there were no children involved in this assessment.

Similar to many other intervening agencies after the tsunami, the IFRC/SLRCS used elder women as an entry point into working with the community. During the focus group discussion with young men, it was observed that they did not feel comfortable sharing their reflections in plenary. Adapting the tool to be used individually allowed the young men to have their voices heard and their concerns were quite different from the elderly women. Young men have largely been relatively overlooked by the tsunami response to date and this exclusion could have resulted in increased vulnerability particularly due to their aspirations to move away from more traditional industries such as coir and fishing which are seen as bringing little profit for the level of inputs and as youth want to increasingly engage in more 'modern' business industries.

It was noted that a strength of the community was the observed unity that existed. That said, the unity exists amongst those who have been there for a long time mainly in coastal areas but inland there has been a lot of movement of people as noted above and the host community expressed fear that their traditional values and ways of living could be threatened by the new comers.

More divided along these lines? None observed.

Are the people living in this area more able to speak out on issues that concern them? Yes

Have new civil society organizations been created directly or indirectly because of this practice of CRA? Yes, following the VCA, the community elected a committee and the SLRCS supported them in the process to becoming a legally registered CBO. A 12 month work plan has been developed and the various CBOs in the community are defining their roles and responsibilities in relation to the work plan. They also provide a further voice for the community to advocate for services from the local authorities e.g. communal infrastructure such as roads, road lighting, and fishing signals.

Lessons learned

- ◆ The VCA has to be adaptable to social and cultural traditions that can differ from one village to another. Having a multi-disciplinary team and community members is essential to getting a solid foundation from which to run integrated and community based programmes. Timings of meetings and interviews were crucial in order to get a good cross section of the community.
- ◆ According to the report, there was too much focus on the problems that people experienced and not enough on positive experiences and solutions. This was probably the result of the questions asked by the facilitators. However this could also be that the community is conditioned to list problems and needs, having been 'over assessed' since the tsunami. Engaging the community in forward looking, planning and reflecting on their own capacity proved to be a challenge. Since this type of engagement during recovery phase takes time, it is critical to have realistic timeframes with appropriate phasing of livelihoods interventions.
- ◆ Participatory development and livelihoods programming require particular expertise and most importantly a shift from a traditional relief mentality. This can be challenging for some parts of the RC Movement.
- ◆ In any VCA, it is critical to look at dividers and connectors in the community. In the Southern Sri Lankan context levels of vulnerability are comparatively lower than in the North and East of the country. However, conflict prevention and mitigation activities are still necessary to

prevent the creation of new tensions and exacerbating existing ones through programming interventions in such a politicised environment.

- ◆ The outputs and initial findings of the process need to be quickly converted to some action on the ground to show that the Red Cross is serious about working with these communities and that it took on board the views of the communities as to what was important.

Keywords

Tsunami, sustainable livelihoods framework, community based organizations (CBOs)

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