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Emergence of Social Cohesion after a disaster.
(With reference to two flood affected locations in Colombo District-Sri Lanka)

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Abstract

Natural disasters that strike without prior warning bring drastic situations. Unexpected disasters may destruct people's daily routine and they may lose their physical assets. Thus aftermaths of disasters can also affect both short-term and long-term physical and psychological life of affected people. Recent history about disasters occurred in Sri Lanka shows that non-victims of disaster tend to sense that such stressful situations as 'our' problem rather than 'their' problem. Such shared collective feeling will create a social cohesion within catastrophic situations. During May 2016 Sri Lanka went through severe flooding condition, it affected 172,000 people in Colombo district. Throughout this flood, various random people all over country, other organizations and government with tri-forces united in an overwhelming sense to help these victimized people. The aim of this study was to understand how social cohesion emerges after a sudden disaster and how social cohesion is helpful to rebuild affected people's life.

Two highly flooded areas, namely Ambathale in Kolonnawa Divisional Secretariat and Egodawatte in Athurugiriya Divisional Secretariat were selected as the sample location. Using each area's GramaNiladhari Officers registration out of the total population 15% selected using simple random sampling method and both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Study was conducted in two stages, first half of the study was conducted in two months after those affected people returned to their places and next part of the study conducted after five months.

Outcome of the study reveals that social integration can be emerged as a latent function of a disaster and it also played important role in recovery process of victims. It showed that receiving helping hands or in other words experiencing collective behaviour for continuously more than three months from non-victims lessen the psycho- social tension which might have arose in affected people. Other than that study also showed cultural values played a significant role

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in non-victims' decisions and attitudes towards affected people.

1. Introduction.

Natural disasters that strike without prior warning bring disturbance. A disaster can be define as an occurrence either natural or man-made , that causes human suffering and creates new needs that victims cannot alleviate without assistance' (American Red Cross, 2010)[1]. According to World Health Organization (2012)[2] disaster is an occurrence disrupting the normal conditions of existence and causing a level of suffering that exceeds the capacity of adjustment of the affected community. Such Unexpected disasters may destruct people's daily routine and they may lose their physical assets.

Disasters can affect both short-term and long-term physical and psychological life of victimized people. A Disaster can affect the quality of life of affected people. That can lead to stress and anxiety among victims. Other than that disaster can damage the relationships that exit between a person and their community. Therefore community strength in a disaster is important to rebuild affected lives. In order to re-established such strengths external people- people outside the community, various organizations, institutions and media can play significant part.

During May 2016 Sri Lanka went through severe flooding condition. Gampaha and Colombo areas were the worst affected (See map 1). 172,000 people in Colombo district were affected due to that. Six to ten feet flood water were observed in some households and people had to stay in. Throughout this flood, majority of affected people had no choice but to leave their houses and stay in flood shelters. These shelters were basically public schools, common centres and religious institutions. Destruction of physical properties, loss of income for longer period and ever (even?) to go through communicable diseases made their life more vulnerable. Apart from the tri force and government organization various faith groups, random groups, local organizations are actively involved in the provision of aid.
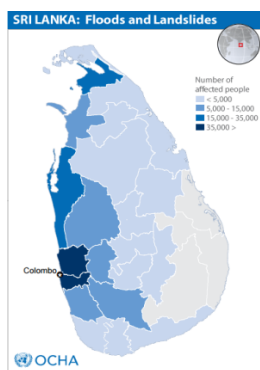
Source: United Nation Office for the coordination ofHumantarian Affairs

1.2 Literature Review

Recovery can define as an attempt to bring a post disaster situation to a level of acceptability (Quarantelli, 1999)[3]. However according to Chang et al (2010)[4] it is not a linear process. The ability to cope and recover from loss is determined by a collection of factors (Gottlieb, 1997)[5], in pre-disaster, within-disaster, and post-disaster periods (Eyer, 2006)[6]. Personal strength, religious belief and faith, and external support appear to play key roles in coping after a massive disaster or major life events cause that will make people stronger, knowing that they have someone or some place to lean on. Thus it can be mentioned that community's primary resource is its pre-disaster social organizations (Dynes and Quarantelli, 1980)[7].

Convergence behavior is one thing that can be emerged with a disaster situation. Fitz and Mathewson (1957)[8] define convergence behavior "movement or inclination and approach toward a particular point: the movement toward the disaster-struck area from the outside--external convergence-and movement toward specific points within a given disaster-related area or zone-internal convergence". They discuss about three forms of convergence behaviors those are: 1) Personal convergence- The actual physical movement of persons on foot by or other vehicle, 1) Informal convergence- The movement or transmission of messages. 3). Material convergence- The Physical movement of supplies and equipment. With such external support and strengths within the community helps affected people to build back their lives again. Seelbay (1992)[9] highlight as 'often untapped and frequently unappreciated reservoirs of physical, emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, social, and spiritual energies, resources and competencies' affected people might be able to cope up and build social cohesion, here Maxwell (1996)[10] defines social cohesion as "building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community". As Haldenwang (2008)[11] states there isn't universal measurement to measure social cohesion within a community, however European Union in 2005 announced 21 indicators to measure social cohesion.

1.3 Method

Two highly flood affected areas, namely Ambatale in Kolonnawa Divisional Secretarial and Egodawaththa in Athurugiriya Divisional Secretarial were selected using purposive sampling method. Affected People were randomly selected using GramaNiladhari (the lowest administrative unit in Sri Lanka, usually comprising two to three villages) registration list. Two temporary shelters were also selected using random sampling method.

Location	Shelter
Ambatale	GalwanaRajamahaViharaya (Buddhist Temple)
Egodatawaththa	KothalawalaRajamahaViharaya (Buddhist Temple)

Table 1. Selected Shelters.
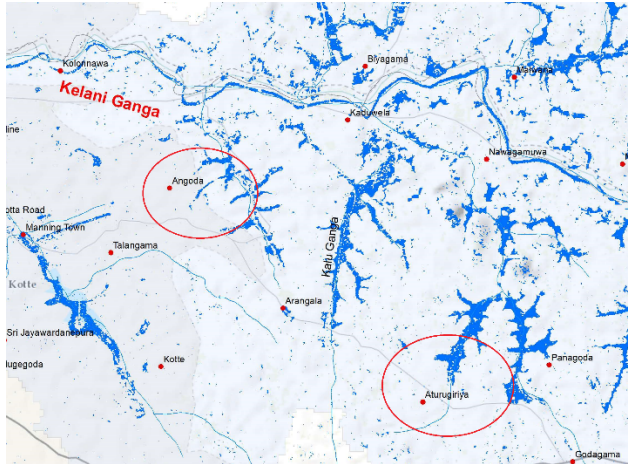*Source; Field Research, 2016*

Figure 1:Selected two locations

Out of total number of people that stayed in the both temporary shelters, 1/3 of total number, 84 were selected as the sample. These 84 people were belong to 28 families.

	GalwanaRajamahaViharaya (Buddhist Temple)	KothalawalaRajamahaViharaya (Buddhist Temple)
Total population in the Shelters	194	158
Sample	64	52

Table 2. Selection of respondents
Source; Field Research, 2016

Field worked (field work) were conducted in a two Stages, **1st Stage:** Within a week soon after the disaster happened, data were collected from the affected people.**2nd Stage;** Data were collected from selected 21 families after 2 months when people return back to their places.

Questionnaires and In-depth Interviews were carried out to collect primary data while structured interview method was used to gather data form selected key informants, Such as:

1 Religious leaders who worked in relief distribution.

2 Individuals who donate things to effected people.

3 Media behaviour.

In-depth interviews were carried out in participants' houses, in that they were interviewed about key topics including experiences related to flooding, any losses, responses and coping mechanism, and the extent of available external support (government and non-government). Interviewed were carried in Sinhala and recorded with the permission of the respondents.

1.4 Results

Soon after the flooding occurred in May 2016, various agencies non-governmental organizations, hundreds of volunteers and faith based groups stepped in offering diverse assistance to affected people. Study was carried out in order to understand strengths which informal education system brought up especially, through culture and media, throughout the disaster and recovery period.
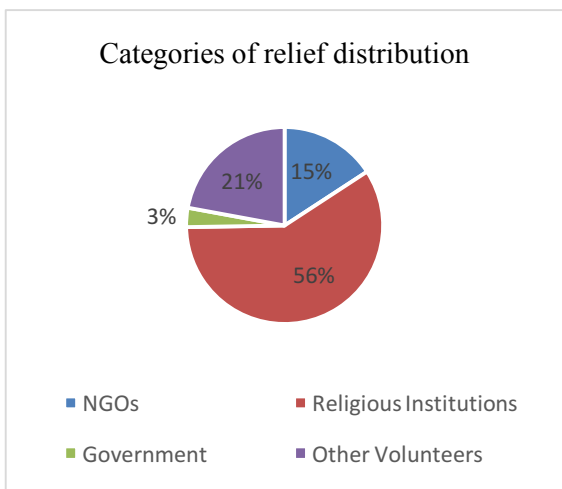
Out of the total respondents who participated for the research, 82% were Sinhala, Buddhist while, 12% were Christians, 4% were Tamils and 3% were Muslims (figure 1). According to the respondents after about three weeks when water started to drain from their houses, they have returned their houses. They mentioned that as soon as they returned they had to face many problems such as scarcity of drinking water, hygiene problems and electric services. . Since most of the houses were under the water for about 2-3weeks, majority of the houses needed to be repaired. However they said that when comes to repairing houses each other in community and many volunteers helped them.

Figure 2.
Respondents according to religion
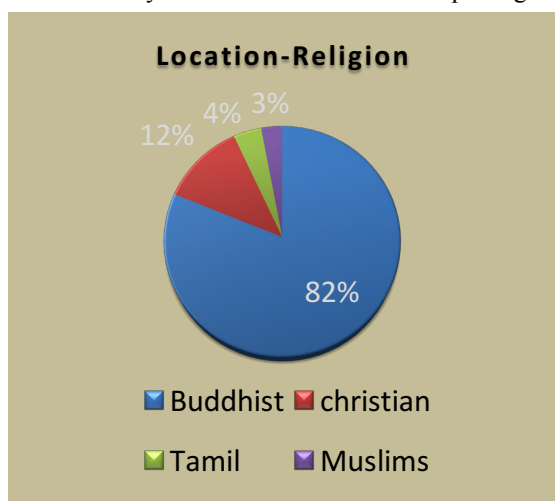
Other than that it was highlighted that even after settling in the houses, religious institutions organized various programs and they have received things like mattresses and bed sheet from those programs. Since the majority of the research location were Sinhala Buddhist, according to research information gathered showed that most of the religious leaders who engage in the disaster relief services in the selected area were Buddhist monks (see figure 2). Here religious leaders act as kind of communication agents building contacts with various organizations and affected people and encouraging other faith based organization to provide help to people. In their words monk acted as a 'father' to all of them.

Figure 3
Relief distribution

Within the disaster period Buddhist temple turned in to a something beyond the mere sacred religious place, it transit in to a common residence where Buddhist monk worked as the head person. Providing all kind of goods including foods, shelter and any other thing they wanted.

Respondents also state that though majority of people came there to provide assistance to them, some people also were there to just to observe this disaster. To experience this new situation. This convergence behaviour within a disaster can arise uncomfortable feelings for affected people. As respondents mentioned they have felt that they become exhibits to some people. This shows convergence behaviour can also bring negative consequences too.

Throughout the disaster period Media acted as an agent of socialization rather than provider of information. What should be noted is Media adopted moral teaching of Buddhism such as 'Dhanaya'- donation, 'Metta'= compassion in order to influence non-affected people's decision of providing assistance to affected people. They asked people to bring two lunch packets and donate

one packet for displaced people. Engaged in collecting goods and distributing it to affected people.

Other than that especially through social media such as Facebook and twitter, people were continuously interact with outer world, which again paved the way to immediate responses from non-affected people. As one of the respondent mentioned they received assistant from random people who came after reading their messages through social media. On the other hand interviewed relief-donation organizer mentioned that various posts in Facebook assisted them to find out people who actually trapped and needed help.

Out of the interviewed faith based group members and individual volunteers who actively engaged in donating and distributing goods, 33.1% mentioned that they were influenced by religious institutions, while 14.2% point out that they were engaged in such activities because of their own thoughts, while 50.4% mentioned that they were informed and encouraged by the media coverage during the disaster period.

Above results shows that even though Saleebay discussed strength of community within a scientific background, this study emphasize that strength of community emerge in a more humanistic perspective. Thus it shows that strength that rooted in the Sri Lankan society as religious teaching, norms and customs are utilize to assist affected people in case of emergency, it shows that such strength are awaken by religious leaders, faith based groups and media.

1.5 Conclusion

This study try to understand how social cohesion emerge after a sudden disaster and how social cohesion helps to rebuild affected people's life. Two socialization agents; culture and media were taken to understand how it provide help to build social cohesion during such catastrophic event.

Throughout the study it emphasized that importance of social cohesion after a disaster. It often mentioned that media and religious leaders briged affected people and non-affected people to create that social cohesion or in other words help them to find the strength that they already have in their own community and other social networks around them. Study revealed that religious leaders tend to act as responsible actors by providing various assistance, thus it showed that religious leaders can play important role in an emergency situation specially providing not only physical assistance but also psychological comfort that affected people wanted. Other than that moral teaching of Buddhism such as 'Dhanaya'- donation, 'Metta' –compassion also influence non-affected people decision of providing assistance to affected people. Which showed that different social capitals such as social networks and interpersonal trust allow individual and groups to build mutual trust among them, which create a new bond between people.

In a society where people are linked through different technology related methods, such technology can be used as a positive method of helping those who need help. Study results showed that social media appeared not only as an agent of providing information but also as an agent who create social integration. Also it showed that throughout disaster period religious leaders contributed to inspire people by notifying people importance of helping affected people through informal methods: media and social media. Especially social media acted to create 'our people' feeling through sharing various sensitive post and vital information related to disaster. Through those even non-affected people regularly updated about affected people's situation.

Even though convergence created by all above methods results showed that while some people actually went affected areas to provide assistance some have gone just because of the curiosity. Due to that those who actually involve in the process of assistance also have faced many difficulties. Thus it emphasizes that even social convergence can create negative impact on disaster.

Overall results of the research continuously emphasize that modern technology and religious influence have a considerable influence on creating social cohesion in case of sudden disaster.

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