GOVERNMENT – NGOO COLLABORATION FOR
DISASTER REDUCTION AND RESPONSE

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Abstract

People of Sri Lanka are adversely affected and suffered greater difficulties due to hazardous natural disasters, plunging affected people to great and tremendous hardships, despite man made disasters such as civil conflicts have caused imminent damages to people and property, disrupting their livelihood. During the last two decades, the country experienced 30 severe natural disasters and 9.6 million people have been affected and such disasters have lost more than 184 lives beside civil conflict has claimed 64,000 lives and about 2 million people have been directly affected. It is estimated that 354,015 families consisting 1.57 million people were adversely affected and suffered greater difficulties due to severe 2001 drought. The Government of Sri Lanka allocates substantial amount of funds to meet emergency relief measures to worst affected people while NGOO and International organizations provide materials and financial assistance to feed victims and to reduce risk and vulnerability. Though, the country makes inevitable measures to provide relief and rehabilitation assistance to victims of disasters, the current disaster situation emphasizes the need for better coping mechanism to mitigate impact of disasters. Due to lack of financial and skilled and trained human resources, the Govt. is now not in position by itself to concentrate institutional arrangements to meet needs of pre and post disaster activities. As a result, Government and NGOO collaboration is vital and invaluable at disaster reduction and response. The prime objective of this paper is to review collaboration of the Government with NGOO for disaster reduction and response through the experiences of 2001- Drought in Sri Lanka.

Significance of Govt. and NGOO Collaboration in Disaster Reduction and Response

Non-Governmental Organizations play a vital role for disaster reduction and response and provide a strong of committed volunteers often with experience and training in disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. They have strength in their man power, the informality in their operations and their flexibility, allowing them to respond immediately to changing needs. Unlike in the Government agencies, they have a free hand to spend money in time when the need arises.

However, the Government may and usually does, invite assistance from NGOO, the private sector, general public and in many cases from international allies. This being so, the Government organizations with resources necessarily have to bare the brunt of counter disaster action. The involved government agencies in these instances will inevitably have to function under pressure. In order to cope successfully with disasters, it
is necessary for the Government and NGOO to work together adopting a coordinated approach.

NGOO can be assigned specific roles to play in various phases of disaster management. As witnessed in the past, not only NGOO, but also the community based organizations get together with others when a disaster strikes in their neighborhood. These organizations should work in close co-ordination with government and maintain the standards of services, information exchange and reporting requirements to ensure decision makers to have a complete picture and to avoid repetition of activities.

2001 Drought in Sri Lanka

Drought is also a frequent occurrence in Sri Lanka and every year, for short duration droughts which are of local significance are experienced by the people in some parts of the country. Despite droughts of regional significance occur once in every 3 to 4 years, the people and economy have been hit by severe drought of national significance once in 10 –15 years consequently. Least rainfall, deforestations, improper land use and unplanned cultivation patterns are the main causes for the drought in some parts of the country, such as north central, south eastern, north western and eastern regions. Hazardous droughts occurred during the periods of 1953-56, 1975-76, 1981-83, 1995-96 and 2001, (up to October) causing substantial damage to the economy and plagued development efforts in Sri Lanka. During the 1981-1983 drought, 925,666 persons were affected and the Govt. allocated Rs. 427 million for relief measures. In 1995- 1996, 775,000 persons were affected and the expenditure on relief amounted to Rs. 425 million.

Drought conditions in 2001 persisted in 7 Districts within the dry-zone area of Sri Lanka, out of these, three districts in the marginal areas in dry zone were worst affected to the drought. It was estimated that over 354,015 families comprising approximately 1.57 million people have been affected within the 7 drought-affected Districts. Not only has agricultural production been adversely affected but the very livelihood of vulnerable populations has been jeopardized.

Experiences on Govt.-NGOO Collaboration - Drought in 2001

The Government of Sri Lanka had the primary mandate for assisting drought affected population, though, the civil conflict that has gripped the North and Eastern parts of the country over the last 20 years has drained national resources. However, the initial ad-hoc assistance of an essential food basket and some cash Rs. 400 per family, the Govt. put forward a food package valued at Rs. 1200. The monthly cost for 354,015 families was in the range of Rs. 438 million. There were a number of private donations from both private business circles and citizens. These however, were ad-hoc and were distributed in very small quantities.

In May 2001, an assessment was conducted by the Government in collaboration with international organizations and NGOO for implementing relief and rehabilitation assistance programs. The assessment team held extensive discussions with affected
communities, grass root level administrative officers, Divisional Secretaries, Government Agents, Health Officials and Volunteers at the local level. The assessment found that food and portable drinking water requirements of the affected people were very urgent and not an outbreak of water born diseases. It further revealed to be constituted long term permanent solutions by the Government in association with international agencies and NGOO to mitigate impact of prolonged drought.

During the period of last drought, several assessments revealed that people received just one third of their energy and protein requirements as per the sphere standards. Health officials had confirmed that the average birth weight has fallen and that school attendance levels have dropped significantly as the drought has progressed. In a move to ensure greater relief distribution coverage, the Govt. requested the International and NGOO support their food distribution and water provision programmes. In response to this request, NGOO such as CARE, Sri Lanka Red Cross, OXFAM, and World Vision distributed food based on the sphere minimum nutritional standards. Each distribution was sufficient for an average family of six persons for three months.

Due to prolonged drought, people walked, on average, 6km to water storage reservoirs where water was available. The Government and local authorities have been bringing drinking water to villagers in water tanks, however financial pressures had put strains on this service. As a result, the water supply for the affected population was inadequate and irregular. Tube wells were not a feasible solution due to the salinity of water in the region. Word Vision, Seva Lanka Foundation and local NGOO made arrangements to distribute water tanks and containers to store portable water. And also many schools were provided with 20,000 liter underground tanks, hand pumps and rainwater collecting systems.

Beside, the Health authorities of the Govt. conducted massive health programmes to prevent disease and improve health condition of the drought stricken people, local level NGOO organized meetings with assistance of the government’s health authorities in the most vulnerable areas, targeting particularly female to disseminate information on nutrition and sanitation, and to discuss possible community based programmes in these areas. Meanwhile, NORAD funded the establishment of low flash latrines for poor families.

Coordination with the government’s agencies and International agencies/NGOO continued to share the lessons learnt from previous drought operations. The aim of this coordination was to use this other experiences to develop ideas for national interagency supported Disaster Preparedness Plan. Discussions and meetings were held between Government agencies and NGOO to avoid repetition of the relief programs and to build up long-term cooperative plan to mitigate impact of future droughts.
Govt.-NGOO Collaboration in Drought Mitigation & Rehabilitation Programme

In early 2002, the Government commenced an Food for Work (FFW) Assistance Programme with assistance from local NGOO for 25,952 families consisting of 129,710 members severely affected in 09 Divisional Secretariats in the three Districts. Food Aid was provided by the WFP for the implementation of this project and each beneficiary is entitled to a ration of 50 kgs. Of Rice, 10 kgs of Pulses and 3 kgs of Sugar to the value of Rs. 2500 for one month. Distribution of food commodities is carried out through the outlets of Multi Purpose Co-operative Societies and it is supervised and monitored by NGOO in the area. The estimated cost of the project was US$ 12.7 million. In addition, NGOO contributed their skills and resources in gaining higher performance.

The programme is aimed at assisting drought affected families to community focused Food for Work schemes. The development activities were identified based on a survey conducted by local level NGOO and the Dept. of Social Services in collaboration with Divisional Secretaries of relevant areas. It was expected to achieve the following objectives through this programme.

I. To uplift the living conditions of the low-income families whose income is below the sustainable level in the areas affected by drought during last year.

II. To improve the basic infrastructure facilities connected especially with agriculture in the drought affected areas.

III. To appraise the affected people of a coping up mechanism to mitigate the impact of drought in future.

IV. To change the mentality of dependency of people on relief and create an atmosphere of sustainable development through self-reliance.

This programme was not a relief programme. The beneficiaries who become eligible to receive assistance under the programme should contribute to a development programme selected in a priority basis in the area. Therefore every beneficiary family was expected to contribute through labor to development projects selected in the area 20 days at 5 hours a week. The Department of Social Services with the contribution of the NGOO completed the Food for Work project in June/July 2002. Following were the main areas of activity undertaken under this programme.

I. Reconstruction of Small Tanks
II. Repairing canals and Bunds
III. Construction of Agricultural roads
IV. Completion of any other activity connected with agriculture that can be done by utilizing labor
V. Small scale forestry projects
VI. Community based small scale Development Projects selected from the area
Under this project 25,952 drought affected families consisting of 129,710 members benefited out of these activities and 227 projects were identified and completed. The gross value added to development by completing these projects is Rs. 71.3 million.

Table 1  
Summary of Projects Completed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No. Of Selected Projects</th>
<th>No. Of Beneficiary Families</th>
<th>Gross Value of Work Completed (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hambantota</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>11,054</td>
<td>31,978,850.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaragala</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>9,898</td>
<td>21,312,165.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratnapura</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>18,092,308.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>227</strong></td>
<td><strong>25,952</strong></td>
<td><strong>71,383,323.50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The special feature of this project is to get participation of people, who were depending on assistance only, in development activities to receive food assistance. The District and Divisional officers with NGOO are quite pleased with the result so far achieved out of the Food for Work mode used for this programme. They claim that it is better than ‘free hand out’ that people understand and appreciate the concept and that some viable assets have been created with minimal input.

**Failures and Obstacles of Govt.-NGOO collaboration - Disaster Reduction and Response**

In the context of Government and NGOO collaboration in Sri Lanka, it is revealed that lack of coordination with Govts. agencies and NGGO is a main obstacle at disaster reduction and response. During the period of last drought, some NGOO worked and implemented relief assistance programme alone without informing at least grass root and divisional level administrative officers. The officers of NGOO were also reluctant to work together with govt. officers even at rescue operations of sudden onset disasters owing to least mutual understandings among them. As a consequence, the affected people due to disasters are suffering great hardships such as non-availability of relief assistance in time, repetitions of relief work and delay of providing essential services.

In South Asian countries, the administrative system is bureaucratic and very hieratical in that it is rather difficult to create environment to linking Govt.- NGOO collaboration even at disasters. If such countries experiment participatory methods to substitute so called top bottom decision-making methods, higher officers of the Government still are reluctant to approach joint venture programmes between govt and NGOO due to the legacy of colonial administrative systems. Further, the centralized decision making system of the country also is a burden to make interlink between govt. and NGOO at disasters.

The success or failure of the disaster reduction and response efforts either by government or by NGOO hardly gets documented and memory of the problems faced and actions taken is lost. The government uses the administrative machinery manned by government officers to undertake reduction and response efforts and these officers do not plan a long-term commitment or involvement in disaster management. The NGOO or most of the
relief organizations are structured so that in the event of disasters size of the staff could be increased to meet the need for short period by employing volunteers and specialists. Neither volunteers or specialists of NGOO who have no long-term commitment to disaster management often commit their experience in writing. As a result, there is no accrued experience and there is no chance to incorporate the lessons learnt in the future programs.

There is variety of internal social structures in Sri Lanka that helps individuals and families at disasters. These are known as coping mechanisms. In a disaster, they become instruments for organizations and action on behalf of disaster victims. Examples of coping mechanisms are: Social units, Religious Institutions and Political Organizations. .

A major problem confronting the disaster related agencies at previous drought and other disasters are how to identify the coping mechanism that exist in the society and how to relate them into disaster response systems. Furthermore, outside assistance must be provided in such a way as to encourage the collective response using these mechanisms. Failure to do so can create a large number of problems that may ultimately damage or destroy the mechanisms. Interventions can do this in any one of the following ways. Firstly it can undermine the authority and prestige of local leaders and can become a disincentive to self-help. Secondly intervention can wipe out the development efforts of indigenous organizations almost instantly.

Presently donor countries and agencies channel a good portion of their assistance to developing countries through the international NGOO. It is appropriate that these international agencies must work through local NGOO wherever possible. But many agencies still prefer to implement their own projects directly, even through competent local NGOO may exist. A key responsibility of the agencies is to build local capacity where it does. In the same way the NGOO must seek to build greater levels of community participation in order to avoid creating dependence. Agencies must build local NGOO capacity, establishing their own role as an international support and help coping mechanisms to be strengthened.

Mostly assistance of the NGOO is seen as humanitarian assistance and not as part of an investment strategy through which nation’s capacities could be enhanced. Development is defined as “the process by which a nation’s capacities are increased and it’s vulnerability is reduced.” This definition makes explicit the link between development and disasters. But intervention of the NGOO for sustainable development is rather weak or is negligible in Sri Lanka.

At previous drought, Sri Lanka find it extremely difficult to provide required funds for drought reduction and response activities. The country therefore look up to friendly developed countries, International NGOO and UN agencies for assistance. The magnitude and frequency of natural and man made disasters of developing countries particulrly in Asian region have increased the global demand for such assistance. The donor countries and agencies are channeling vast resources through the NGOO for disaster reduction and response activities. It has been observed that the disaster programs while designed to help the victims, tend in fact to reflect the needs of the donors. This is
result of attempts by agencies especially NGOO to placate their donors as well as lack of accountability of NGOO and donors to the victims. Sometimes decision making of relief programs takes place at the headquarters of NGOO. The distances, communication and transportation difficulties as well as cultural factors often inhabit effective humanitarian assistance.

Lack of adequate training for workers of NGOO and Govts. has been identified as major challenge in Sri Lanka. Technical training required for emergency response and recovery, training and education for disaster managers and planners at different levels. Lack of trained personnel invariably leads to dependence on untrained persons to undertake disaster activities.

Disaster programs specially relief programmes conducted by NGOO including government are hardly ever evaluated. If evaluations are done at all, they are conducted to satisfy the requirements of agencies and donors concerned, and hardly ever focused on the victims concerned or the impact of the aid programme. Failure to evaluate programmes lead to repetition of the same mistake over and over again and disaster managers are thus denied of the benefit of lessons of experience.

**Recommendations to strengthen Collaboration of Govt.-NGOO at Disasters**

NGOO can respond at short notice to an emergency situation since they do not have to work through bureaucratic channels. They can bring its expertise from outside whenever necessary at very short notice. Their budgets are fairly flexible. Whereas, it is emphasized that there should be sound coordination with Government if the NGOO are to play key role and effective part for disaster reduction and response.

At the Disaster, disseminations and accumulations of information is very essential. NGOO can help in the designing and production information material to the public at disaster reduction and response. An effective mechanism and efforts will be created to provide information through their channels to each others such as Government and NGOO.

Key role players for disaster reduction and response system are the Government and NGOO. The success of the system depends on the definition of the role of each of these players and others. Well defined working relationship established and understood is the key to the successful mobilization and proper channeling of resources to the disaster affected areas.

Timely assistance is vital for effective disaster reduction and response when victims loose their assets and become destitute. It is revealed that there is a need for conserving systematic effort by Government and NGOO to provide assistance and services to victims timely to adjust and re-enter their normal life pattern.

The NGOO should seek to build grater levels of community participation in order to avoid creating dependence. NGOO must build community based organizations capacity,
establishing their own role as help coping mechanism to be strengthened. It is essential that Govt. and NGOO should work out to mobilize assistance of the local coping mechanisms, in Sri Lanka Rural Development Societies, Smurdi Movement, Community Development Organizations and other Community based organizations, and popular participation in formulating and implementing disaster related programmes depending on the peculiarities of the area, people and environment.

Disaster preparedness plans or emergency plans should include a matrix of NGOO capabilities and responsibilities as agreed upon with the organizations. The matrix should present information including:

- Names, addresses, phone numbers of organization with contact person
- Principal activities of the organization
- Nature of help that can be provided during disasters
- Resources available for the type of help
- Co-ordination and/or help required from Government agencies and other disaster related institutions

The matrix helps to create mechanism to strengthen services provided NGOO at all stages of disasters and to ensure effective coordination between the Government and other agencies.