

A Partnership Fostering Better Preparedness



Sri Lanka preparedness partnership (SLPP) : project socialization workshop

The Initiative. “We never expected such a commitment by so many civil society organisations for a common cause” said Chairman /Executive Director Asia Lanka Social Development Cooperation(ALSDC), Mr. S.H.Hewage. He was elaborating on the achievements in bringing together civil society organisations as seen in the work of ALSDC, the focal local NGO agency in the Kalutara district of the Sri Lanka Preparedness Partnership(SLPP).



The SLPP endeavours to strengthen for the first time in Sri Lanka the disaster preparedness capacity for effective Emergency response by Govt, Private sector, and the Local Non-Government Organizations(LNGOs). The SLPP which commenced its activities in 2017, comprises the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) as the lead agency for the government, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce for the Private sector and for the LNGO Sector, Janathakshan (Gte) Ltd.

being the focal agency. The SLPP foresees the building of a strong and systematic partnership in close coordination and collaboration amongst the three sectors for strengthening Disaster Preparedness for Effective Emergency Response through capacity building, coordination and knowledge management and dissemination.

It was formed under the program of “Strengthening the preparedness capacity of government, private sector and LNGOs for effective emergency response in Sri Lanka” . Supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), implemented by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), The regional chapter of this initiative is established as the Asian Preparedness Partnership (APP), which includes six countries in South and South-East Asia to better prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters, aiming to

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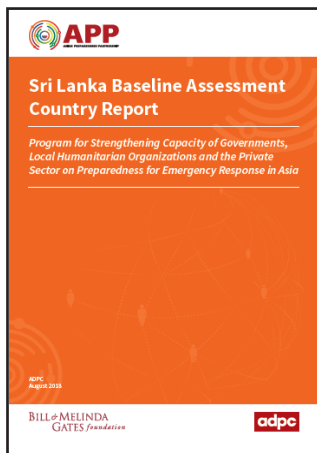
strengthening the local humanitarian systems. Extensive consultations have been a path breaking aspect of this SLPP programme, where equitability and consensus has been a notable feature of such a partnership approach for the first time in Sri Lanka. In order to better understand the country context prior to project implementation, a baseline survey was undertaken, encompassing most of the institutions engaged in Disaster Risk Management.

The findings of the survey have been utilised for the planning of the project and a collaborative process has been adopted by the sector partners, whilst addressing the sectoral priorities in disaster preparedness.

LNGO recognition.

Often Civil society organisations (CSOs) have a limited platform to operate in disaster situations since there is a tendency of the more powerful actors to play a dominant as they work directly with government. However, in the villages, it is the CSOs that are the first respondents in the community, in times of disaster and who in fact know the community best. Mindful of the importance of the role of CSOs in disaster preparedness for emergency response, the SLPP engaged in several divisional, district and national level initiatives, fostering an open dialogue on the role of local CSOs in providing a better response in disaster preparedness.

Thus far, ten Divisional level dialogues have been held in the two disaster prone districts of Kalutara and Ratnapura with the participation of LNGOs, where approximately 25 LNGO members were active in the meetings at the divisional level. While the significance of CSO roles in disaster preparedness for emergency response was highlighted, the dearth of opportunities to engage and interact at a local level in emergency response was constantly emphasised by District



Secretaries in the two Districts together with District Disaster Management units.

This is the first time in Disaster preparedness in Sri Lanka that such a pooling of resources in a cohesive manner was undertaken. Most importantly, A database is being compiled whereby govt officers will now be able to identify available human resources, whenever there is a paucity of such essential information. This information will also be shared with the Chamber of Commerce, as well as the NGOs and INGOs. Capacity Building and continuous engagement is very important for these Civil Society Organisations for their sustainability especially in times of disaster. Thirty persons from each of the five divisions have been trained in First Aid, Camp Management and Leadership.

“This is a new programme and a new experience for us. For the first time in Sri Lanka we worked in collaboration with all sectors-government, corporate and the Non- Governmental Organisations” said Mr. Ranga Pallawala, CEO of Janathakshan Gte Ltd, commenting on the SLPP programme.

“What is unique and most important in this experience is that it is a growing equal partnership rather than the traditional top-heavy donor - respondent scenario” stressed the Janathakshan CEO. “For disaster preparedness and response, as there had been no specifically established local NGO network in the country, Janathakshan Gte Ltd, as the lead LNGO focussed on the coordination of the LNGO sector and bringing other actors on board, towards a collaborative effort. To create or strengthen that kind of network, we believe it is no short-term task, but a phenomenon that must happen gradually.”



The culmination of the divisional and district level consultation was a national level consultation workshop held to discuss the role of CSO on disaster preparedness for emergency response in July 2019 in Colombo. Sixty-eight CSOs representing the entire Island, including the

North and the East, participated. Organized by Janthakshan Gte Ltd in collaboration with ADPC, the wide engagement of CSOs from different geographical areas augmented the workshop, focussing on the need to prioritize local level disaster preparedness needs.



National level CSO consultation workshop

The dominant theme of the series of consultations was the vital role of CSOs in disaster preparedness for emergency response scenarios. What these local CSOs required was support and impetus to seal their gaps in terms of human, financial, knowledge, and technical acumen. There was unanimous agreement on the need for networking and the support rendered by SLPP was most welcome. The positive feedback and the encouragement of the relevant divisional, district and higher level government authorities have endorsed the need, and aspiration and need for continuation of this unique initiative in Sri Lanka.

Government engagement. The government component was led by the Disaster Management Center (DMC) together with National Disaster

Relief Services Center (NDRSC). As the government is mandated for its key role in disaster preparedness, SLPP will foster the partnership between government and other two components for effective emergency response.

Developing a Comprehensive Preparedness Planning model (CPP) for selected DS Divisions, was one of the key activities of the government sector.



Preliminary national stakeholder consultation on developing comprehensive disaster preparedness plan

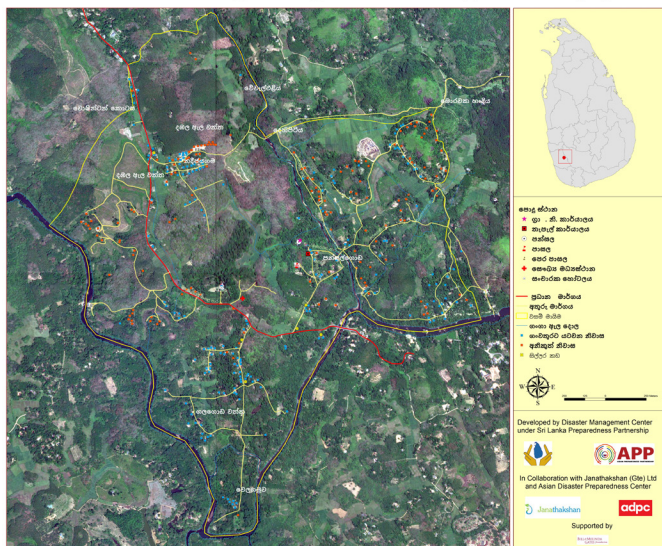
The purpose of the CPP is to bring all stakeholders together to prepare communities at - risk focussing at the divisional level. This will facilitate more collaborative and systematic approaches avoiding duplications of interventions, roles, and responsibilities as well as maximum utilization of available resources. The project team carried out several consultation meetings and selected the Paragoda West GN Division in the Bulathsinhala DS Division of Kalutara District to carry out a pilot project for CPP. Through community consultations and the leadership of the Bulathsinahala Divisional Secretary, key activities have been identified.



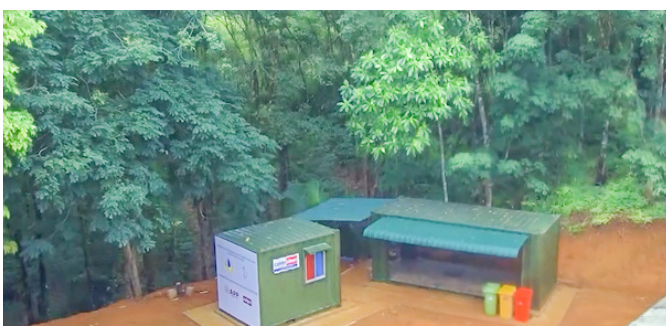
Divisional level stakeholder consultation meeting divisional secretariat -Bulathsinhala

An Excel database has been developed with high-resolution satellite imagery whereby all the houses and roads of the village are visible. The database with detailed mapping can be utilised before, during and after disaster. A household survey was undertaken wherein all data pertaining to inhabitants in the village, incomes levels, health information have all been incorporated. Inundation levels for the past 20 years have been mapped.

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So at a glance, it is possible to discern which area will go under water first, as well as expedient evacuation routes, locations of electricity pylons, telegraph poles which are submerged during rescue missions, et al. The camp was upgraded for the villagers for the community to first assemble and take refuge until rescue teams arrive.



Upgraded Camp Site at Kithulegioda Primery School, Patragoda West

For the GIS database, the entire village was surveyed and the information therein can be utilised by the GA, DS Divisions, and local

NGOs, not only in times of disaster but also for any ongoing or potential development activity. Training was also provided at the Kalutara district office for the Database users who now in turn can replicate the same in other vulnerable areas, if needed.

“ It is a new working modality for ensuring a more cohesive approach to effective disaster preparedness disaster in the country and we see much potential in this approach,” observed



the Director Preparedness of the DMC, Mr.J.M.S. Jayaweera.

“ It provides a very good opportunity for better collaboration with our SLPP partners.”



Private sector engagement.

Mr. Chandraratne D. Vithanage, Senior Assistant Secretary General, Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC) welcoming the SLPP programmes observes that “we feel strongly

that the private sector can respond to disasters in a much more organized manner, if there is stronger coordination among the public and private sectors, and civil society. While the safeguarding of the business interests of the private sector is the main focus of the CCC, the almost total lack of preparedness in times of disaster of the business community, especially amongst the SMEs has been a strong impediment.... They expect the govt always to bail them out with compensation whenever a disaster occurs.” In this context, for the first-



Training on Business continuity Management Ehaliyagoda



time Business Continuity Planning (BCP) and Business Continuity Management (BCM) are now being introduced to the private sector, under the SLPP programme, thereby making these entities more resilient in times of disaster, thanks to the three-year project supported by the ADPC.”

The BCP Project for SMEs is being implemented in Ratnapura, Kalutara, Kegalle and Batticaloa, where more than 300 SMEs, impacted by disasters have participated. It is interesting to note that a specialised BCM training was conducted for 40 hoteliers in Negombo, in the aftermath of the Easter church bombings in July 2019. As BCM and BCP is a new concept in Sri Lanka, the ADPC’s BCP regional training material have been reviewed, translated and contextualised for use in Sri Lanka. Further, a local resource group has been identified to develop the training at the local level.

The ADPC also conducted a Training of Trainers programme, where 33 representatives from the corporate sector, government and INGO/NGOs participated. SME development organisations in the country such as IDB, NEDA and non-governmental SME training providers, also participated as well as the banks lending to the SMEs. Leading private sector companies such as Dialog, John Keels who work with a large number of SMEs in their value chain, were also engaged in the training so they too could impart their knowledge and expertise. “This is a very important partnership as we face so many disasters, like the 2017 floods which affected the private sector in an enormous manner” Mr. Vithanage explained.

And how do the stakeholders see the partnership? Mr. Vithanage of the Chamber of Commerce states that while the need for such a partnership has been understood, it

must be expanded more on the national level. It took quite a while to convince people of the importance of the specifics such as the BCP.” The partnership is already working but we have a long way to go. As the government plays its lead role, the private sector will provide its best support. “

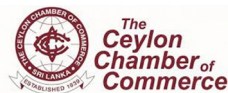
The CEO of Janathakshan says “it is a partnership and partnerships develop with time and interactions. We are just one year along the time line. To make the partnership work, it must be continued as interaction will identify the loopholes. The process has begun and the future will enable it to become a true partnership.”

Regarding the pilot project of GIS mapping of Paragoda west village, DMC’s Director Preparedness pointed out that that while the concept is most welcome continuity and sustainability is very important thus prioritising the most vulnerable GN divisions is key.”

“In a partnership project like this, sustainability is important, where capacity building must be a continuous process. The more training, we do for disaster preparedness, the greater the cooperation we can expect”, pointed out the ALSDC chairman.



SLPP lessons sharing workshop



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