A Livelihood-centered Approach to Disaster Management: Lessons from Community Livelihood Actions Program Network (CLAPNET) in Sri Lanka

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1. Introduction

Disaster risk is on the rise throughout the world. Rising losses and associated increases in expenditure on post-disaster reconstruction have forced the issue of disaster management up the global policy agenda. A paradigm shift has now taken place at the disaster management policy from relief centric approach to vulnerability analysis and risk management. One approach to doing this includes a sustainable livelihood framework. This study therefore aims to explore an experience of CLAPNET, a network of local NGOs involved in integrating livelihood-centered approach to post-tsunami reconstruction in Sri Lanka. First, paper gives a brief introduction to paradigm shift in disaster management, follows by a discussion on linkages between the sustainable livelihoods framework with reducing disaster vulnerabilities. Then, it analyses in detail the strategies, tools and approaches developed and adopted by the CLAPNET aiming to identify the vulnerability of the tsunami affected people, and building their existing assets and capacities to rebuild livelihoods to cope with threats to future disasters. Finally the paper concludes by discussing the possibilities and constraints in mainstreaming livelihood-centered approach to disaster management. The paper provides both general experience and case study evidence.

2. Paradigm Shifts – From Relief and Response to Disaster Risk Management

Till a few decades ago, disaster management approach has been reactive and more relief centric. Disasters were viewed as one-off events and responded by governments and relief agencies without taking into account the social and economic implications and causes of these events[1]. During the United Nations International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (UN/DNDR, 1990-99), however, a paradigm shift was observed from top-down post-disaster relief and response approach to a more inter-sectoral risk management approach. The Hyogo Framework of Action (2005-2015) adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) held in Kobe, Japan in January 2005 showcased some of the best developments towards this end. The Hyogo Framework of Action has recognized the importance in integrating disaster management into the development agendas.

This evolution of approaches from relief and response to risk management has begun to influence the way disaster management programs are now being planned and financed. There are initiatives aimed at reducing social and economic vulnerability and investing in long-term mitigation activities. The approach to disaster mitigation is becoming more and more community-based, and much more effort has been put into empower the local governments, and involvement of the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Societies in the decision making process[2]. This is also in consonance with the paradigm shift in the mainstream development practice, which is now characterized by emphasis on good governance, accountability and greater focus on bottom-up approaches.
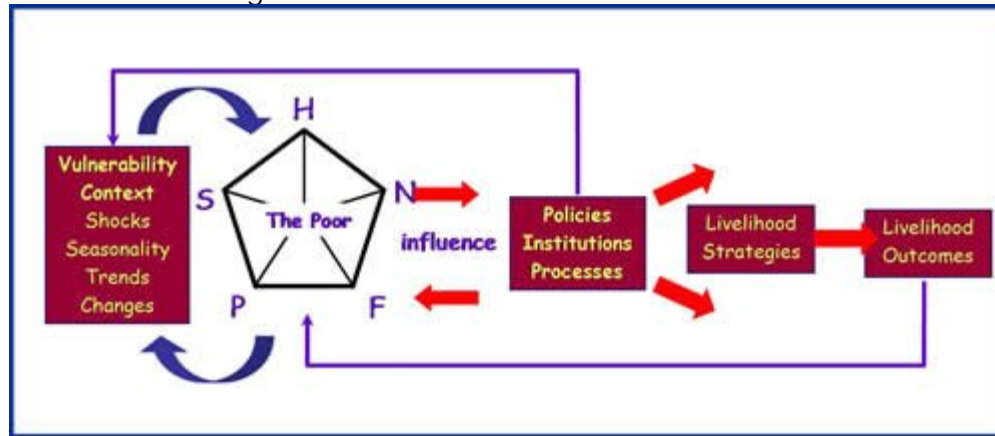
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3. Linking the Sustainable Livelihood Approach with Reducing Disaster Vulnerability

Over the last few years a more holistic framework has emerged to assess the sustainability of livelihood strategies adopted by poor people. The work of Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Advisory Committee of the Department for International Development (DFID) in this area is a good example here. The Committee has designed a livelihood framework, which recognizes 5 distinct elements, interactions which determine the extent of sustainability of livelihood strategies of a particular community. These 5 elements are; vulnerability context of poor people, their livelihood assets (human, social, physical, natural and financial capital), transforming structures (government, private sector) and processes (laws, institutions), livelihood strategies, and livelihood outcomes[3].

Figure 1: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

Source: DFID, 1999

As seen in Figure 1, the vulnerability context frames the external environment including trends (population trends, resource trends), shocks (natural hazards, disease outbreak), and seasonality (market prices, employment opportunities). This approach captures the dynamic, complex nature of people's vulnerability. While trends capture the temporal continuum of vulnerability in positive or negative directions, shocks capture largely external, unexpected events such as natural disasters. More importantly this framework does not look at the vulnerability context in isolation, but links it with transforming structures and processes. Practical application of such a framework means that it not only describes the different aspects of people's vulnerability but also points to social, political and economic structures and processes, transformations which would help reduce vulnerability and thus helps insure sustainable livelihood for the poor.

4. Applying Sustainable Livelihood Approach to Post Tsunami Rehabilitation - A Case Study of CLAPNET

CLAPNET is established by a group of local NGOs[4] with assistance from their regional network partner called ACHR[5] aiming to mobilize tsunami affected communities to find out their own strategies to rebuild their communities and livelihoods without waiting for government supports. The Sumatra Offshore Tsunami of 26th of December 2004 devastated over two thirds of Sri Lanka's coastline, affecting about one million people, with 38,000 registered fatalities and 21,411 injured persons, furthermore displacing nearly 600,000 people in 13 districts. It was estimated that the overall damaged to be around US$ 1 billion (4.5% of GDP). Many coastal fishermen, small scale farmers and the informal sector workers lost their livelihoods falling further into poverty in what were already poor areas[6].

Though there was a large amount of money came to country as a foreign donation, both central and local governments have showed their little experience to deal with crises of this scale, and inability to guiding for sustainable, long-term rehabilitation programme. The

post tsunami policies and practical instructions coming down from the centre have been confused, hasty and in some cases disastrous creating unbalanced power structures which enriched few and improvised and marginalized more from their traditional home lands and livelihoods.

CLAPNET's approach in post tsunami reconstruction work is based on the following principles; integrating disaster management with development, relief and development assistance must reach affected people and communities right away, rehabilitation support should be linked to all affected communities, regardless of their legal tenure status, people must be centrally involved in planning the rehabilitation of their own communities in close collaboration with other stakeholders, and rehabilitation process must be comprehensive.

CLAPNET's disaster management approach consists of the following activities:

4.1. Community Identification

CLAPNET select communities for their livelihood improvement programmes either respond to requests coming from vulnerable communities (in some cases, few community members or an organization in the community approaches the CLAPNET for looking their assistance) or identify vulnerable communities where least served by the government and/or international relief agencies, considering possibility of replication or spread effects of the program to neighbouring communities, presence of existing development projects or community partners. There were community-to-community sharing on how to get started and implement community-based disaster management programme.

4.2. Community Profiling

Community profiling involves building up a picture of the community with the active participation of the community. It is an important preliminary step in planning process, and usually involves building rapport/ trust with the community through interaction and gathering basic information or the surfacing of the general community profile. It leads to an understanding of the community's development position and the context upon which disasters were impact. Basic elements of a community profile was include the following: social groups, cultural arrangements, economic activities, spatial characteristics, vulnerable households and groups

4.3. Community Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis

Recognising the vulnerabilities and capacities of the affected population is essential for designing and implementing an effective disaster response programme. Through the process of capacity and vulnerability analysis, the community comes to a common understanding of its vulnerable situation (identifies what elements are at risk and why they are at risk, unsafe conditions resulting from dynamic pressures which are consequences of root or underlying causes) and capacities (identifies the people's coping strategies; resources available for preparedness, mitigation and emergency response; who has access to and control over these resources).

Community Livelihood Action Planning Methodology is used as a core strategy to facilitate the community participation in capacity and vulnerability analysis. A capacity and vulnerability analysis examine three aspects of information: Physical factors (what productive resources, skills and hazards (e.g. land, environment, health, skills and labour, infrastructure, food, housing, capital and technologies) are available); Social organization (what are the relationships among and organization of the communities (e.g. formal political structures and informal systems such as decision making, establishing leadership or organizing various socio-economic activities) When prejudice or conflict is present in a community, social and organizational vulnerabilities are inevitable); and Attitude (how does the community view its ability to adapt to changes? Strengths and weaknesses can make a significant difference in the communities' ability to rebuild and improve their material base and social institutions. A community is psychologically more vulnerable when its people feel victimised, fatalistic and dependent).

4.4 Formulation of disaster Risk Reduction and development Plan for community

Vision mapping of the communities is used to facilitate integration of disaster management into holistic community building process, and also used to develop links

between communities and other stakeholders. After the vision mapping has been finalised, community workshops are organized to prepare a community livelihood improvement plan for action identifying the responsibilities, timetable, resources within and outside the community needed to turn the intent of the plan into reality.

4.5. Implementation and Monitoring

The formation and/or strengthening of community-led machinery are usually helpful in the implementation of the risk reduction plan. The CLAPNET identified savings and credit groups are more effective organizational arrangements in implementation of the development plan. Savings and credit groups link poor people together on a regular and continuous basis, offers opportunities to members to develop their strengthens gradually to handle simple basic credit needs to managing more complex development activities through making collective decisions, and provides the community with the capacity and confidence needed for a comprehensive self-development process. When the community savings and credit groups became larger and stronger they are linked together and formed branches and federations. The emergence of community federations brought immense change to community-cantered post tsunami development process. These federations involves in development planning and policy dialogues with local and central levels.

The role of CLAPNET is to assist the community in the following areas: community capability building through training and education activities and materials (livelihood training and capacity building, community learning through exchange visits), resource mobilization to supplement the community's efforts to generate resources to realize the risk reduction plan (Community Livelihood Action Fund available for housing, community infrastructure, income generation, training and capacity building and any other community development work), facilitate linkages with concerned government agencies and NGOs to access information, resources, etc.

5. Conclusion

The sustainable livelihoods framework allows practitioners and policy makers to approach disaster management in a holistic and dynamic manner. It looks at disasters as a question of people's vulnerability, recognizes people's existing capacities and aims to strengthen those contributed to addressing the roots of people's vulnerability, considers people's participation essential to disaster management.

Notes and References

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[2] Maskrey, A. (1989): Disaster Mitigation—A community based approach, Oxfam, London
[3] DFID website http://www.dfid.gov.uk
[4] Network partners are Sevanatha-Urban Resource Centre, Sri Lanka Women's Development Services Cooperative Society (Women's Bank), HELP-o, and the Eastern Tsunami Group
[5] Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) is a regional network of grassroots community organizations, NGOs, and professionals actively involved with urban poor development process in Asian cities.
[6] ADB/JBIC/World Bank (2005): Sri Lanka 2005-Post Tsunami Recovery Programme: Preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment, Colombo

CLAPNET – STRUCTURE and PROCESS

External Support

Interest Earning

CLAPNET STEERING COMMITTTE

Secretariat

CLAFNET FUND (National)

Grant Capital

Pay Monthly Interest

Loan Capital @ 5%

Pay Monthly Interest

Women's Bank HQ

CWRGP Matara & Moratuwa

Grant Capital

Pay Monthly Interest

Loan Capital @ 12%

Pay Monthly Interest

Branches City Fund

Jayasakhi Matara

Loan Capital @ %

Pay Monthly Interest

Loan Capital @ %

Pay Monthly Interest

Com. Fund

Com. Fund

Pay Capital & Monthly Interest

Pay Capital & Monthly Interest

Loan Capital @ 24%

Loan Capital @ 24%

Group

Group

Group

Group

Group

Group

Members

Members