



POST - ASSIGNMENT

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Promotion of Sustainable and Disaster Resilient Development Programs in Upcountry of Sri Lanka

Introduction

As a part of the ProSPER.Net Leadership Programme on Engineering Approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction and Management towards Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific Region, held on November 24-30, 2019 in the University of the Philippines Diliman, the assignment is submitted as a post training implementation plan. This assignment intend to apply the learning on Disaster Risk Reduction, Education for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals and Sendai Framework in to practical aspects of my work in Community Development.

Background

I have been working in Development Sector since 2006, and mainly involved in humanitarian and emergency response, rural development and advocacy programs. Currently, I'm working under a rural development project titled as "Assisting Communities in Creating Environmental and Nutritional Development (ACCEND)". The mandate of the project is to; increase access to safe-drinking water and sanitation facilities, and improve health and nutrition conditions in tea estate communities. The tea estates are located in mountainous areas of central part of Sri Lanka and the tea estate communities known to be one of the marginalised group and vulnerable to many natural and man-made disasters including landslides, floods, severe wind and house/structure fire.

Utilizing the learning from ProSPER.Net Leadership Programme on Engineering Approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction and Management towards Sustainable Development, and experience in community development - especially in infrastructure development, I strongly believe I can be a strong advocate to promote DRR and Sustainability in Development Programs that I will be part of in the near future.

Location

The locations of ACCEND project are situated in the NuwaraEliya district in the central highland of the country. The landscape of the area is ridge and valley type, and the land use is mainly dominated by tea plantations. However, small land area is used for vegetable and small house gardens. About 80% of the total population lives in estate line rooms with 4 - 10 units in one line room set. Rests of the families have individual houses built on small land plots. Majority of the population work in the tea estates from morning to evening throughout the year.

Key Disaster Related Problems in the project locations

Mountains and hilly nature of locations are naturally landslide prone because of their geological characteristics. High monsoonal and inter-monsoonal rainfall also induce increased incidence of landslides and flooding in some of the locations due to unplanned drainage structures and extensions in line rooms.

Reckless, unplanned land clearing for tea and other plantations by the British colonial administration permanently changed the drainage patterns and dramatically reduced forest cover, making far larger areas more vulnerable. Thousands of plantation workers throughout Sri Lanka still live in unsafe, dilapidated line-rooms owned by major plantation companies. According to investigations by the Ministry of Environment and regulatory bodies such as the Geological Survey and Mines Bureau, unplanned gem mining, urbanisation and intense small holder agriculture in the upper-watersheds have increased risks in the past decades.

Global climate change is also exacerbating the situation. A report by the Sri Lanka Climate Change Secretariat's 2nd National Communication notes that overall dry periods are now longer, while rainfall intensity during wet season has increased. These changes weaken hill slopes. The report partly attributes the increase of landslides in Sri Lanka—600 landslides were recorded between 2000 and 2010—to climate change. (Vijith Samarasinghe, 2015)

Action Plan for mainstream DRR and Sustainability

The project consists following activities which can induce or cause disasters such as landslides and floods after the implementation.

- I. Construction of Improved Gravity-Fed Water Supply Systems
- II. Construction of household latrines
- III. Establish Job-Site Rest Rooms in tea estates
- IV. Establish basic and common bathing facilities
- V. Restructure the drainage systems in tea estate communities

Considering the nature of activities and its implications on disaster, it is well noted that mainstream disaster risk reduction and ensure sustainability planning during the designing and implementation phases of these activities is very crucial. Community participation during the implementation process is vital in ensuring sustainability of project deliverables. The project has already established community based organizations (CBOs) to ensure community participation in the project implementation. So, these CBOs will be an opportunity and training them on DRR and Sustainable Development approaches which I learnt from ProSPER.Net program will be a small effort to mitigate disasters and ensure sustainability in the region.

Methodology

The CBOs play a critical role in identifying locations, need assessment, selection of beneficiaries and activity planning and designing etc. Their understanding and knowledge on DRR tools and sustainable development approaches is therefore very important in order to ensure sustainable development in their community. The community groups will be trained on several innovative approaches and DRR tools that will encourage their engagement and contribute towards a sustainable impact. So, I'll be closely working with these CBOs and youth groups to build their capacity on following aspects.

a) Disaster mapping

Disaster mapping exercise can be conducted with the support of government institutions. This exercise will give an opportunity for the CBOs to understand the potential disaster risks in their community and be prepared during an emergency. This exercise will also empower the relationship between local communities and government institutions, and this improved relationship will finally lead to a sustainable community development interventions.

b) Disaster mitigation and resilience

As part of CBO capacity building component in the project, developing a community resilience plan can be one activity. The community, especially the CBO members and youth will be encouraged to participate in this program and they will also be trained on early warning system and evacuation plan.

c) Multi-stake holder participation

The CBOs will be educated on the importance of multi-stakeholder participation for a sustainable development. The experience of People's Initiatives for Learning and Community Development (PILD) – (<https://www.slideshare.net/HannaatUNU/local-community-empowerment-and-multistakeholder-participation-in-drrm>) which I learned from the ProSPER.Net Leadership Program will be very much helpful for me in this exercise. Case studies of PILD can be presented to the CBOs to emphasize the efficiency of multi-stakeholder participation and community-driven development programs.

d) System Analysis and Lifecycle analysis

The CBOs will be introduced with these 2 innovative concepts in order to ensure their participation in these analysis. The analysis will be helpful to understand the local perceptions, best practices, social capitals, and potential structures, process and institutions for a better DRR planning.

Sendai Framework, Social and Environmental Impact Assessment, System and Lifecycle Analysis, Sustainable and resilient Energy for DRR and resilient structures are some new learning I acquired

from the ProSPER.Net leadership program. I will also promote some of these innovative DRR tools and approaches during my advocacy works with government, private and likeminded development agencies. Close coordination with the government institutions that are working on disaster management such as National Building Research Organization (NBRO) and local government units will be maintained and ensured a multi-stakeholder participation in my works. For example, NBRO will assist the project to locate areas that are low in risk to construct the above activities.

There will be more efforts put forward to study the disaster risks in the project locations and introduce some innovative practices to mitigate them. For example, unpredicted intense rain is one main cause of major landslides and floods in the region. Automated rain gauges programmed with SMS alert systems will be an innovative early warning system. So, I'll be actively advocating with my organization and other likeminded organizations to install these systems in identified landslide prone areas.

As we witnessed in the Marikina city, creating a public awareness on climate induced disasters and having a mitigation plan is very important to mitigate disasters. So, the CBOs and Youth groups will be trained to develop a community resilience plan, and the early warning systems and evacuation plan will be a part of it.

Updated knowledge and hands-on experience on innovative DRR approaches and tools will be necessary for an effective advocacy works. Although I have some experience working in Disaster Management and Sustainable development, I need to improve my knowledge and practical experience on innovative concepts. That was also one main reason for me attending the 2019 ProSPER.Net leadership program and I'll be continuing this skills development effort in the future in every possible ways. So, my present knowledge and skills will be a challenge to implement this post training plan. But, I'm very confident that I'll be able to get the support of my colleagues and my continuous skill development efforts will be supportive in this process.

Conclusion

A post training orientation was conducted to the project team and senior officials in my organizations. My participation in ProSPER.Net leadership program was well appreciated by them and they were very positive about my feedback and post training implementation plan.

As a participant to this one week training program on DRR and Sustainable Development, I understand the importance of these principles and I'm motivated to learn deeper on these areas. I have planned to do a higher study in any of these areas and focus my career in climate change mitigation, disaster management and sustainable development works.

References

1. ADPC,https://www.adpc.net/igo/category/ID204/doc/2013-rvm8Pc-ADPC-afer_Cities_5.pdf.
2. Samarasinghe, Vijith. 2015. "Growing Danger Of Landslides In Sri Lanka". Wsws.Org.
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