

## **Flood in Sri Lanka (January 12, 2011) Disaster Challenges**

While the Tamil population in the north is limping towards normalcy after a bloody war, Sri Lanka is once again affected by a natural disaster. Just a fortnight after the dawn of 2011, heavy rains abated and lashed the northern, eastern and central part of the island and more than 350000 peoples have been displaced and the total affected population is estimated to be around a million.

Different parts of Sri Lanka are affected in the Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara districts in the east, Mullaitivu; Killinochi in the north and Anuradhapura, Matara, Ratnapura, Nuwara Eliya, Kandy in the center. The worst affected are in the Batticaloa district.

Torrential rains abated the north, east and the centre creating massive floods and landslides, resulting in the loss of assets and belongings. The highest number of IDP are now in Batticaloa. The victims are gathered in camps and in some places rising flood water inundated the camps sites creating further complication for the victims.

In the north around 250000 people are in need of food assistance. These victims were already victims of the war and now they are victims of the natural disaster, lost in an ocean of misery and sufferings.

The North and the East were just recovering from the effects of the ethnic war and normalcy was yet to return and this new disaster has once again made them victims and everything has to start once again. Feeding the victims and ensuring supply of clean water are the main aim of the aid agencies which are trying their best to distribute food. Church Based Organisations like Caritas have started to help the victims in their villages.

The major challenge for the government is to maintain the food price especially the essential commodities which may skyrocket if no

stringent measures are taken by the government to control the prices. Another

challenge will be the early crop recovery. These floods happen at a time when the farmers are getting ready to harvest their rice crop. The replanting for the April-May crop is not yet undertaken and will depend on the capacity of the farmers and the weather conditions. Everything will depend on the extent to which the standing crops have been destroyed.

In a country where agricultural production represents around 13%, and there is serious global hunger problem and undernourishment is about 21%, the difficult crop recovery is certainly going to create problems of food security and once again the most vulnerable are the ones to be highly affected. Although the government is confident that it can manage the situation, yet everything will depend on the hazards created by these extreme environment and the consequent loss.

This disaster is also going to slow down the limping post war rehabilitation process in the north making life harder for the war victims who have been living in dire conditions for the past two decades. The effects of the floods will also have an effect on the house construction in some areas in the Vanni, due to the land mines being carried away by the flood water current.

Once again the phenomenon of extreme environments creates disasters and the worst affected are the most vulnerable and in the case of the floods in Sri Lanka, the most vulnerable have been subject to multiple disaster in the last eighteen months. Responding to the needs of these most vulnerable Tamil minority is also a question of justice to the poorest and the way the government is going to handle this disaster will also reveal its commitment for establishing long lasting and sustainable peace in Sri Lanka

Aloysius John  
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