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Pilot projects to develop Batticaloa district

By Anuradha KODAGODA



Deputy Mayor - A. Goerge Pillai

It is a well known fact that most of the cities in the country face at least one repercussion from the impacts of climate change. According to analysis of 40-year records of daily temperature data, Batticaloa has revealed a strong trend of temperature increase of 0.4-0.5 Centigrade during the past two decades in comparison to the previous two decades. In addition, rainfall analysis has revealed a strong trend of monsoon rainfall increase (28% in Batticaloa Municipal Council) and correspondent increase of occurrence of minor floods. BMC has experienced the largest flood during the past 100 years during December 2009-January 2010.

"This flood resulted in the loss of life and property while significantly damaging the emerging coastal tourism industry. 15%-20% of the total population in the Batticaloa Municipal Council will be vulnerable to sea level rise in 2040.

Frequently increasing storm surges have also resulted in significant losses to livelihoods in these areas," talking to the Sunday Observer Dr. Fahmy Ismail, National Technical Advisor, UN habitat said.

"This information follows the findings of the Cities and Climate Change Initiatives Pilot Project implemented by the University of Moratuwa and UN-HABITAT as the first initiative to address the City Level Climate Change impacts in Sri Lanka.

As many other coastal cities have experienced devastating climate related impacts during the recent years, this Project focuses on the most urgent and immediate needs of the Sri Lankan coastal cities in adapting to climate change, and mitigating risks and the severity of impacts through Disaster Risk Management (DRM)," he further added.

This project will support key stakeholders in the BMC to develop and implement the activities such as, multi-purpose green belt in BMC coast established to protect the lagoon and coastal areas, restore mangrove eco-systems and coastal biodiversity; GIS-based Rapid Response System (RRS) and Knowledge Management centre for climate exacerbated disasters established at BMC and NMC with training (one month for 50 selected participants) and equipment (i.e. building, software, computers, GPS, printers, scanners, broadband facilities); disaster resilient, energy efficient, low-cost shelter adaptation training will be provided and supported by local resource based-livelihood diversifications options for 100 participants living in vulnerable areas.



UN Habitat funded house

70% of Sri Lanka's urban population and 80% of its economic infrastructure networks are concentrated in coastal cities which are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts such as sea-level rise, flooding, salination of water resources, storm surges, cyclones and droughts. These impacts disproportionately affect urban poor communities, who are forced to live in the most vulnerable areas. Recognising this challenge, BMC conducted vulnerability/adaptation and Green House Gas assessments in 2010, prioritising strategic response areas through broad-based stakeholder City Consultations.



Women's bank weekly meeting

The project will document the implementation experiences and share these through a series of provincial and national consultations. Supported by the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils and the Urban Development Authority, the process and lessons learned will be replicated in other cities while climate resilient approaches will be included in urban planning and budgetary frameworks.

"The Cities without Slums, is another novel project implemented by UN Habitat and through that our main intention is to upgrade the living conditions of the people those who are mainly live in slums areas. To implement this we selected four cities including Batticaloa. With the help of the Batticaloa Municipal Council, we selected the areas and the families of those who need to facilitate through this project. Also, the support given by the University of Moratuwa is tremendous to do the survey and collect the exact data.

Through the gathered information we have identified 48 GN divisions which are with slums and out of this 48 GN divisions we have come across 10 GN divisions whose majority live in slums. Therefore as the first step we hope to upgrade the living conditions in terms of sanitary needs, water and shelter facilities which are the most important aspects that we see as to upgrade the living standards of people. This is not a project which grants money but grant loans for them considering their income levels and they can use the money to modify their houses and improve relevant facilities. The main idea behind granting loans for them is due to their poor livelihood conditions, as none of the banks are willing to offer loans.

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Therefore, with this initiative they get the opportunity to apply for a loan. However, the other important factor is that we help them form small groups and we grant them funding to roll up within that group while they are influenced to save money every week, This will operate as a small bank which they have created on their own. With time their savings become larger and therefore, they can apply for loans according to their requirements in day-to-day lives. That was the concept that we adopted one year back and there's quite a good response from the communities. Today there is a large number of women groups who obtain money from the women's bank and it is becoming larger day by day," he said.

Kalawadhi, is the treasurer of the women's bank for the slum upgrading project in Kuda East which is a primary branch in Batticaloa. "With this slum upgrading project which was initiated by the UN Habitat, our lives have changed significantly. Earlier, none of the State or private banks provided us any loans even for very small amounts since we failed to submit any required documents. However, with this new concept we too could find a solution within ourselves and our communities to solve our financial issues," a happy Kalawadhi said.

Re-design of the multi-purpose green belt had been another important project on 'Climate resilient action plans for Coastal urban areas in Sri Lanka' (CCSL) conducted by UN Habitat. This project is aimed to develop five Climate Resilient Adaptation strategies and supporting Action Plans (CRASSAP) in BMC areas.

"It was understood that the presence of green network can significantly reduce the vulnerabilities of the local communities to the impacts of the natural disasters exacerbated by climate change. The project concept and the need of green network for Batticaloa were evolved by the opinion of local stakeholder during a previous project titled 'City Development Strategies to respond climate change in coastal urban areas of Sri Lanka', undertaken by UN-Habitat, Sri Lanka in partnership with University of Moratuwa in 2010. Owing to the importance of the coastal areas, it was decided to re-design the green belt of the 12km coastal belt. After reviewing the present vegetation pattern in the area, the re-design of the multipurpose green belt action plan initiates its activities adhering to the design considerations of resilience to multi-disaster situations, facilitate the community activities through spatial re-arrangements, enhance the biodiversity of coastal eco-systems, protect the coastal beaches and other geomorphological forms from sudden wind and wave processes, strengthen the economic benefit transfers to local community.

Re-design of the multi-purpose green belt, CRASSAP is based on a series of rapid assessments including Plant inventory of coastal belt, Land cover mapping, activity survey and a comprehensive local stakeholder consultation process. As per the findings of baseline studies, the coastal belt of the area is predominated by planted green belts.

There were some stretches without green belts while some other stretches were with recently disturbed vegetation after tsunami (2004) and flood (2010/11). Need of re-designing of the green belt was well recognised by local stakeholders, and in order to initiate five sites at the 12 km stretch were selected to undertake pilot projects. The project has prepared five action plans with detailed designing of the green belt for Poonachchimunai, Kallady, Thiruchchendur, Dutch Bar and Navallady areas," Dr. Fahmy said.

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