Rapid Drought Risk Assessment and Impact of Drought on Food Security,

Moneragala District
Sri Lanka

19th – 23rd October 2009
WFP VAM Unit
Rapid Drought Risk Assessment in Moneragala District

The World Food Programme (WFP) in collaboration with Ministry of Nation Building and Estate Infrastructure undertook a rapid drought risk assessment in Moneragala district from 19th October to 23rd October 2009. Representatives from National Disaster Relief Services Centre, Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Service and Disaster Management Centre of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, district/ divisional secretariats joined in the assessment.

The key objectives of this assessment were to assess the impact of prevailed severe drought on food security of the economically affected families and to determine the most appropriate interventions.

The assessment entailed a review of relevant background information, consultations with key government institutes as well as line agencies, focus group discussions and crucial observations. Six drought affected DS divisions were visited under the rapid assessment and some GN divisions under each of the DS division were randomly visited due to the available time.

According to district secretary’s information, nearly 62,000 families have been affected by the drought. The broad finding is that the vulnerability for food insecurity of economically affected communities is high mainly in six divisional secretariat divisions. The results have shown that the vulnerability to food insecurity is very high in Siyabandaluwa, Madulla, Thanamalvila, Buttala, Moneragala and Sevenagala DS divisions respectively.

According to the focus group discussions and field observations, it was evident that the drought impacts were comparatively lower in Badalkumbura, Katharagama, Bibile, Wellawaya and Medagama DS divisions.

The main source of livelihood of the drought affected families was farming. People cultivate paddy, field crops (maize, ground nuts, black gram, green gram, kurakkan) and vegetable. Chena cultivation is prominent among the most poor people those who do not have their own cultivable lands. Fifty percent (50%) of the families surveyed under the rapid assessment were practicing chena cultivations. Some farmers have migrated into casual labour as they cannot survive without an income until 2009/10 maha harvesting season. However, it was evident that those migrants have severely affected due to the limited casual work.

The findings have shown that all the rain fed paddy cultivation of yala season 2009 has been completely destroyed by the prevailed drought and the harvest of the irrigated crops were less due to the water insufficiency. Most of the major and minor irrigation schemes malfunctioned as reservoirs and minor tanks in Moneragala district were dried and drained. The total paddy cultivable area in Moneragala district is 88,488 acres.
including major, minor irrigated lands, rain fed paddy lands and upland paddy lands. The total extent of paddy in yala 2009 is 33,327 acres and nearly 29,124 acres of paddy lands were damaged by the drought. 22,866 farmers have affected by the prevailed drought. (Agrarian Services, Moneragala) Access to drinkable water and food were limited for the economically affected families as they have lost their all savings and assets to cope up. All most all economically affected farmers have lost their seed stocks as they have lost prior two consecutive cultivation seasons. (maha 2008/ 09 and yala 2009) The progress of the maha season 2009/10 is also very less (10%) as farmers are reluctant to start their cultivation without the assurance of north east monsoon rainfalls. People have lost their perennial cultivations (coconut, mango, areca etc.) and most of the spices crops. Nearly 350 acres of young coconut palms have been destroyed by the drought and in addition the matured trees also died in drought affected areas. (Coconut Cultivation Board, Moneragala) The export agriculture cultivations have also affected by the severe drought. The pepper, cinnamon and cocoa plantations in Madulla, Medagama, Bibile, Moneragala and Badalkumbura DS divisions have been destroyed. Approximately, 56% of total pepper (67 acres), 45% of total cinnamon (35 acres) and 53% of cocoa (45 acres) cultivation are destroyed in above mentioned DS divisions. The total population in Moneragala district is 429,803 and the there are 117,000 families. (Census, 2009) Fifty two percent (52%) of the total families have been identified as poor households whose income is below the poverty line. All these poor families are eligible for Samurdhi assistance. There are around 43,600 Samurdhi beneficiaries in Moneragala district and they are assisted under different coupon values. Most of the Samurdhi beneficiaries (30,000 beneficiaries) receive an Rs.375 or Rs.210 coupon which is not enough to cope up their livelihood without any other income source or supplementary. According to the focus group discussions had with drought affected families, they used to adopt negative coping strategies such as pawn, consumption of seed stocks, reducing the number of meals, reducing the expenditure on health and education and borrowing and selling of household articles (television, cassette, etc.) Moreover, it was evident that most of the pregnant women and children under five were not taking their daily demand of energy and protein. (MOH, Buttala) At present, rice was mainly purchased from shops as they have already consumed their rice stocks except the people who live in Nelliyaadda GN disivision in Madulla DS division who receive WFP food assistance as IDP’s. Other essential food commodities such as lentils, oil or meat consumption was very poor (maximum one day per seven days) among the drought affected poor families. These families used to consume leaves, vegetable and wheat flour products with rice to meet their calorie demand. People have given up inland fisheries as they cannot ride into water due to the lower water level. Fishermen who use hand nets manage to catch fish only for the consumption.
Recommendations for necessary interventions

a) Overall, it is very important to consider the possible food assistance for drought affected poor families. At least, the poor families who are least food secured should be provided food assistance up to three weeks expecting that the north east monsoon rain falls will continue from the last week of October 2009. The poor families should be identified under pre-defined criterion set by an independent selection committee appointed by relevant government agencies to target most affected people. According to the focus group discussions and results obtained in the assessment, following numbers of vulnerable families for food insecurity were indentified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>DS Division</th>
<th>No of Most Vulnerable Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Siyabalanduwa</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Madulla</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thanamalwila</td>
<td>8,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Butla</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Moneragala</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sevenagala</td>
<td>8,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Families</td>
<td>9,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The numbers were derived proportionately to the relative vulnerability among the DS divisions and also considering the total number of affected families. The data were collected through Grama Niladharies and compiled at the divisional secretariat offices. Finally the figures were standardized by using the indicators such as relative vulnerability to food insecurity in Moneragala district and the poverty level. According to the focus group discussions had with district policy makers and district officials, approximately, (in the absence of all village data) there are 10,000 families who need emergency food assistance to cope up their livelihood.

b) The rapid assessment has found out that the WFP beneficiaries who live in Nelliyadda GN division in Madulla also have been affected by the severe drought. All of the farmers in Nelliyadda have mentioned that they have 100% access to their cultivations now after the clearance of LTTE. Unfortunately, farmers could not cultivate the yala 2009 due to lack of water. None of the farmers in Nelliyadda GN had cultivated maha 2008/09 due to the very poor access to their crop lands. With the loss of two consecutive cultivation seasons, people manage the life with lot of difficulties and totally depend on WFP food assistance. Therefore, it is recommended to continue three-four weeks of food assistance for these particular beneficiaries.
c) Targeted livelihood assistance is recommended to accelerate the recovery process of affected farming families.

d) Soft Food for Work programmes are highly recommended to be implemented by the government or humanitarian organizations until the beginning of harvesting season of maha 2009/10 (nearly three months). Projects and activities under the drought mitigation and adaptation should be prioritized and should be included in the district regular plan.

e) Drought mitigation and adaptation projects should be implemented with proper coordination with district agricultural and water related institutes. Every year, Government has to provide disaster relief services due to the lack of preparedness and mitigation initiatives. District Disaster Management Coordination Unit has only a limited number of initiatives on drought mitigation and adaptation in Moneragala district. The district disaster management coordination Unit under the Disaster Management Centre should coordinate with all the relevant government line agencies in order to implement a proper drought management plan. It is obvious that Moneragala district faces two drought seasons every year. (April- August and December – February). Therefore, it is essential to take remedial measures on drought mitigation in order to minimize the impact on agriculture and livelihood of the poor people.

f) Specific cases like female headed households, disabled member households should be selectively addressed as they are extremely vulnerable to food insecurity.

g) Micro financing facilities should be developed in order to recover the livelihood of the people who have faced acute food insecurity situations due to the continuous drought hazard.

h) According to the key informant interviews, it was mentioned that the Impact of climate change is also severely affecting the agricultural production in Moneragala district. Agriculture Department, Agrarian Services and all other agricultural institutions should address the adaptation methods for climatic variations. The extension services should be intensified to educate farmers on impact of climate change. Annual crop calendar and specific climate change adaptation techniques should be proposed to farmers to avoid the negative impacts of climate change. Small scale farmers and poor home gardening communities have complained that the agricultural extension service of the village agricultural research assistants is poor. The heads of agricultural institutes on field services should manage to supervise on the delivery of services to the communities in order to ensure that the farmers are really benefitted.
i) Provision of infrastructure such as drinking water schemes, tube wells and water wells will reduce the drinking water scarcity in the drought affected DS divisions.

j) Since Moneragala district has over fifty percent population under poverty line, it is recommended to have long term interventions to protect further impacts on food insecurity of those population.

**Crucial Field Observations**

a) Food Consumption Pattern of drought affected poor families

The team witnessed that a mother was feeding her child rice only with manioc leaves. According to her, she has mentioned that they have no any resource to buy enough food and cope up with negative practices like reducing meal size and skipping some meals etc.

b) Delay of north east monsoon rainfalls resulting the water bodies to become dry
c) Field preparations for maha 2009/10 with the great hopes on north east monsoon rains

d) Focus group discussions and community level meetings

Annexure I

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