

***Impact of cultural education on Social Cohesion after a sudden disaster:  
With reference to two flood affected locations in Colombo District-Sri Lanka***

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**Abstract**

Natural disasters that strike without prior warning bring torment events. Unexpected disasters may destruct people's day-to-day routine and they may lose their physical assets. Disasters can affect both short-term and long-term physical and psychological life of victimized people. Recent history about disasters occurred in Sri Lanka shows that non-victims of disasters tend to sense that such stressful situations as 'our' problem rather than 'their' problem. In order to create such shared collective feeling cultural teaching also play noticeable role which will lead for a social cohesion within catastrophic situations. During May 2016 Sri Lanka went through severe flooding condition affected 172,000 people in Colombo district. Six to ten feet flood water were observed in some households and people had to stay in. Throughout this flood, majority of affected people had no choice but to leave their houses and stay in flood shelters. Mainly religious places, schools and community centers within near affected area used as flood shelters. Various random people all over country, other organizations and government with tri-forces united in an overwhelming sense to help these victimized people. People offered food and other essential items for affected people.

This research based on understanding how cultural education influence on building social cohesion after a sudden disaster. The main objective of this study was to identify how social cohesion emerge after a sudden disaster and cultural impact of it. Other objectives are to find out the ways of informal education of cultural norms and how cultural norms and valued effect the process of recovery.

Two highly flood affected areas, namely Ambathale in Kolonnawa Divisional Secretariat and Egodawatte in Athurugiriya Divisional Secretariat were selected using purposive sampling method. Affected people randomly selected from each Grama Niladhari registration list, religious leaders, and community leaders of flood shelters were interviewed for the study. Also both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Observation method was used to observe the various types of goods collected by different groups of people and civil organizations.

Outcome of the study reveals cultural education plays considerable role in creating social integration that emerged after a sudden disaster. It showed that throughout disaster period religious leaders contributed to inspire people by notifying people importance of helping affected people through informal methods: media and social media. This moral guidance had played significant role in non-victims' decisions and attitudes towards affected people.

Keywords: Social Cohesion, Cultural education, Affected People, Flood, Moral guidance

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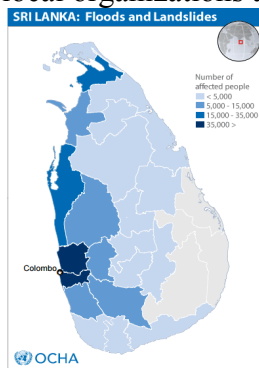
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## Introduction

Natural disasters that strike without prior warning bring torment events. A disaster can be define as an occurrence either natural or man-made, that causes human suffering and create new needs that victims cannot alleviate without assistance' – American Red Cross (ARC), 2010. According to World Health Organization (2012) disaster is an occurrence disrupting the normal conditions of existence and causing a level of suffering that exceeds the capacity of adjustment of the affected community. Such Unexpected disasters may destruct people's day-to-day routine and they may lose their physical assets. Disasters can affect both short-term and long-term physical and psychological life of victimized people. Disaster can affect the quality of life of affected people. That can lead to stress and anxiety among victims. Other than that disaster can damage the bonds in the relationship that exit between a person and their community. There for the victims coping strategies are important in emergence of stress and PTSD after a disaster.

Education can be divided in to two categories mainly, formal education and non-formal education. Most of the time research are focus on is formal education and its scope. Yet in this study researchers attempt was to understand how informal education in a society helps to build a social cohesion after a sudden disaster.

During May 2016 Sri Lanka went through severe flooding condition. Gampaha and Colombo areas were worst affected (See map 1). 172,000 people in Colombo district were affected due to that. Six to ten feet flood water were observed in some households and people had to stay in. Six to ten feet flood water were observed in some households and people had to stay in. Throughout this flood, majority of affected people had no choice but to leave their houses and stay in flood shelters. These shelters were basically public schools, common centers and religious institutions. Destruction of physical properties, loss of income for longer period and ever to go through communicable diseases made their life more vulnerable. Apart from the tri force and government organization various faith groups, random groups, local organizations are actively involved in the provision of aid.



Source: United Nation Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

## Literature review

Recovery may be of as an attempt to bring a post disaster situation to a level of acceptability (Quarantelli, 1999). However according to Chang et al (2010) it is not a linear process. The ability to cope and recover from loss is determined by a collection of factors (Gottlieb, 1997), in pre-disaster, within-disaster, and post-disaster periods (Eyer, 2006). Personal strength, religious belief and faith, and external support appear

to play key roles in coping after a massive disaster or major life events cause that will make people stronger knowing that they have someone or some place to lean on.

Non –formal education is an integral part of a lifelong learning concept that ensures that young people and adults acquire and maintain the skills, abilities and dispositions needed to adapt to a continuously changing environment. It can be acquired on the personal initiative of each individual through different learning activities taking place outside the formal educational system (Committee on Culture and Education, 1999). Culture, family, peer groups and media etc. provide such informal education to people. In order to do that Danis Saleebay’s strength Perspective. Saleebey (1992) suggests that individuals and groups “have vast, often untapped and frequently unappreciated reservoirs of physical, emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, social, and spiritual energies, resources and competencies”. And Saleebey further highlight that the people we work with have ‘*Taken steps, summoned up resources, and coped. We need to know what they have done, how they have done it, what they have learned from doing it, who was involved in doing it, what resources (inner and outer) were available in their struggle to surmount their troubles*’ (p. 172).

Thus it should be understand how this non-formal education can be use in a case of emergency.

## Method

Two highly flood affected areas, namely Ambatale in Kolonnawa Divisional Secretarial and Egodawaththa in Athurugiriya Divisional Secretarial were selected using purposive sampling method. Affected People were randomly selected using Grama Niladhari (the lowest administrative unit in Sri Lanka, usually comprising two to three villages) registration list. Two temporary shelters were also selected using random sampling method.

Location	Shelter
Ambatale	Galwana Rajamaha Viharaya (Buddhist Temple)
Egodawaththa	Kothalawala Rajamaha Viharaya (Buddhist Temple)

*Figure 1. Selected Shelters.*

*Source; Field Research, 2016*

Out of total number of people that stayed in the both temporary shelters, 1/3 of total number, 84 were selected as the sample. These 84 people were belong to 28 families.

	Galwana Rajamaha Viharaya (Buddhist Temple)	Kothalawala Rajamaha Viharaya (Buddhist Temple)
Total population in the Shelters	194	158

Sample	64	52
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Figure 2. Selection of respondents

Source; Field Research, 2016

Field worked were conducted in a two Stages, **1<sup>st</sup> Stage:** Within soon after the disaster happened after a week, data were collected from the affected people.**2<sup>nd</sup> Stage:** Data was collected from selected 21 families after 2 months when people return back to their places.

Questionnaires and In-depth Interviews were carried out to collect primary data while structured interview method was used to gather data form selected key informants, Such as:

- 1 Religious leaders who worked in relief distribution
- 2 Individuals who donate things to effected people
- 3 Media behavior

In-depth interviews were carried out in participants houses, in that they were interviewed about key topics including experiences related to flooding, any losses, responses and coping mechanism, and the extent of available external support (government and non-government). Interviewed were carried in Sinhala and recorded with the permission of the respondents.

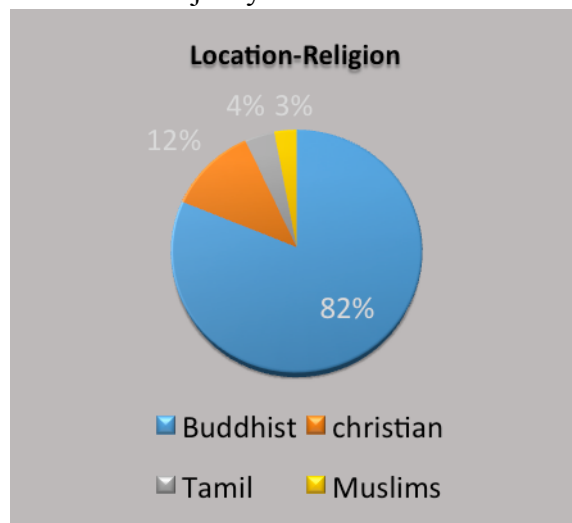
## Results

Various components of culture describe above influence how certain societies communicate, perceive the world and respond to disaster and emergencies (Jogin et al. 2014).

Soon after the flooding occurred in May 2016, various agencies non-governmental organizations, hundred of volunteers and faith based groups stepped in offering diverse assistance to affected people. Study was carried out in order to understand strength which informal education system brought up especially, through culture and media, throughout the disaster and recovery period.

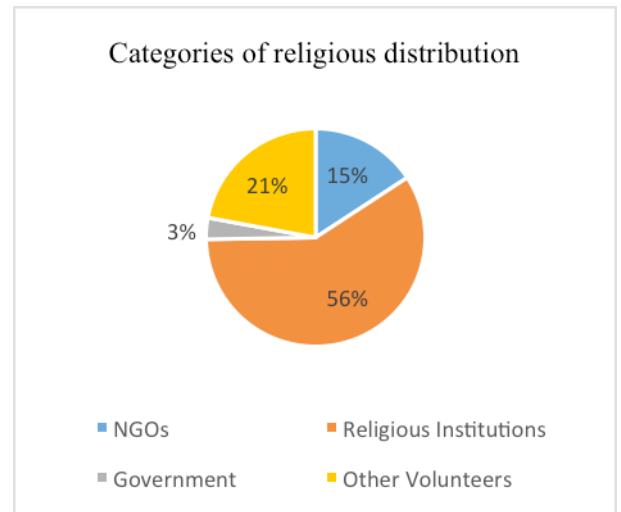
Out of the total respondents 82% were Sinhala, Buddhist while, 12% were Christians, 4% were Tamils and 3% were Muslims (figure 1).

Since the majority of the research location were Sinhala Buddhist, according to



research information gathered showed that most of the religious leaders who engage in the disaster relief services in the selected area were Buddhist monks (see figure 2). Here religious leaders act as kind of communication agents building contacts with various organizations and affected people and encouraging other faith based organization to provide help to people. In their words monk acted as a 'father' to all of them.

Figure 1.  
Respondents according to religion



Within the disaster period Buddhist temple turned in to a something beyond the mere sacred religious place, it transit in to a common residence where Buddhist monk worked as the head person. Providing all kind of goods including foods, shelter and any other thing they wanted.

Throughout the disaster period Media acted as an agent of socialization rather than provider of information. What should be noted is Media adopted moral teaching of Buddhism such as ‘Dhanaya’- donation, ‘Metta’= compassion also influence non-affected people decision of providing assistance to affected people.

where they asked people to bring two lunch packets and donate one packet for displaced people. Especially social media such as Facebook and twitter, people were continuously interact with outer world, which again pave the way to immediate responses from non-affected people.

Out of the interviewed faith based group members and individual volunteers who actively engaged in donating and distributing goods, 33.1% mentioned that they were influenced by religious institutions, while 14.2% point out that they were engaged in such activities because of their own thoughts, while 50.4% mentioned that they were informed and encouraged by the media coverage during the disaster period.

## Conclusion

This study try to understand the influence of informal education on people’s life after a sudden disaster. Two socialization agents; culture and media were taken to understand how it provide informal education within such catastrophic event.

Within the study it emphasized that importance of social cohesion. And it often mentioned that media and religious leaders made that bridge between affected people and non-affected people to create that social cohesion or in other words help them to find the strength that they already have in their own community.

Study revealed that religious leaders tend to act as responsible actors by providing various assistance, thus it showed that religious leaders can play important role in an emergency situation specially providing not only physical assistance but also psychological comfort that affected people wanted. Other than that moral teaching of Buddhism such as ‘Dhanaya’- donation, ‘Metta’ –compassion also influence non-affected people decision of providing assistance to affected people.

In a society where people are linked through different technology related methods, such technology can be used as a positive method of helping those who need help. Study results showed that social media appeared not only as an agent of providing information but also as an agent who create social integration. Also it showed that throughout disaster period religious leaders contributed to inspire people by notifying people importance of helping affected people through informal methods: media and social media.

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