



WATER CONFLICT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES AMONG THE COMMUNITIES: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ADDALAICHENAI DIVISIONAL SECRETARIAT AREA IN AMPARA DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Water is an essential element for human safekeeping and sustainable development. From growing food and supporting economic growth to ensuring disease is kept at bay, water is a fundamental and irreplaceable resource in all societies. The competition of over all natural resources, including water, is often viewed as a driver of conflict that has emerged as an important component in many current and past conflicts. This study is mainly focused on the water conflict prevail in the agricultural sector and its impacts on communities. Further the study gives suggestions to mitigate the conflicts. Primary as well as secondary data were used in this study. Secondary data was collected from Divisional Secretariat, official records, journal articles, and other relevant documents. Primary data was collected through questionnaires survey from 400 selected farmers based on random sampling methods, 5 key informant interviews and 03 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs). The water conflict has affected the communities in and out in the concerned area. It increases the violence, death, physical injuries, mistrust, and environmental degradations. Displacement, poverty, and unemployment are some another set of impacts by water conflicts.

Key Words: Water Conflict, Environmental Degradation and Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Water conflict is a term describing a conflict between countries, states, or groups over an access to water resources. The United Nations recognizes that water disputes result from opposing interests of water users, public or private. However, water conflicts arise from several reasons, including territorial disputes, a fight for resources, and strategic advantage. These conflicts occur on both freshwater and saltwater in between, and within nations. However, the conflicts occur mostly over freshwater, because freshwater resources are necessary, but limited and they are the center of water disputes arising out of need for potable water and irrigation.

Objectives and Methodology

This study is mainly focused on the water conflict prevailing in the agricultural sector and its impacts on communities. Further this study gives suggestions to mitigate the conflicts. Primary as well as secondary data are used in this study. Secondary data are collected from Divisional Secretariat, official records, journal articles, and other relevant documents. Primary data was collected through questionnaire survey from 400 selected farmers based on random sampling methods, 5 key informant interviews and 03 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs).

Study Area

Addalaichenai divisional secretariat is located in the costal belt of Ampara district in the southeastern region of Sri Lanka. It includes four main villages such as; Addalaichenai, Palamunai, Oluvil, and Deegavapiya. The main occupation of these people are paddy cultivation, fishing and small industries. Muslims, Tamils, and Sinhalese are living in this area and the Muslims are domination.

Map of Study Area





Finding and Analysis

The farmers of this area are mainly involved in paddy cultivation, plant corn, peanuts, and sugar cane and vegetables like chilies, ladies fingers, brinjal, beans, snack coal, and pumpkin. Galoya reservoir, currently defined as 'Senanayaka Samudraya' is the main source of water for the paddy and other crop cultivation. The farmers get involved in conflict on sharing the water among them, because the water is not enough to fulfill their needs.

Conflict comes out as one way in which human society adjusts in the facade of meager resources. Conflicts are complex problems that get intermingled with other social, economic, environmental and political activities within a society. If not handled well, conflict can have a harmful impact on the environment and on the assets and capabilities of people. They want for their continued existence. The following table elaborates the adverse impacts of water conflict on the livelihood activities of farmers.

Table: The Details of Impacts by Water Conflict

Type of Impacts	Yes (%)	No (%)
Death of family members	15	85
Physical injuries	27	73
Loss of properties	70	30
Damaged infrastructure facilities	60	40
Displacement	31	69
Impacts on agriculture sector	80	20
Impacts on social relationship	64	36
Environmental degradation	48	52
Lack of employment and poverty	67	32

Source: Survey data, 2015

Death and Physical Injuries

Conflict impacts on human well-being, reducing quality of life, the capabilities of people to live the kinds of lives they value, and the real choices they have. It results in the loss of lives, livelihoods and opportunity, as well as of human dignity and fundamental human rights. The death is unavoidable when the conflict becomes violence in this area. 15 per cent of the farmers have lost their family members due to these conflicts over water and 27 per cent of them have got physically affected.

Loss of Property

The properties of farmers of this area had been destroyed fully in some areas and partly in some other areas by water conflict. Houses, vehicles, instruments used in the agriculture, shops, harvested paddies, and cattle are some kinds of properties that had been demolished by this conflict. 70 per cent of the farmers have lost their properties.

Damaged Infrastructure Facilities

The infrastructure facilities have got affected due to water disturbance. The areas where the conflict prevails, are comparatively backward in nature and have inadequate infrastructure facilities. The conflicts have got aggravated due to the short falls. The demolition of infrastructure not only affects the provision of necessary services, but directs to a collapse in communication, through the loss of roads and telecommunications. Health care facilities and water supply services are also found problematic in this area. So this situation keeps this area under developed. 60 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that water conflict has the impact on the infrastructure of this area.

Displacement

Now the people prefer to move from their settlements to other safety areas and they withdraw themselves from cultivating their land due to the fear of irrigation and water conflict. Psychologically, this has become an unhealthy condition and economically great loss to the people. 31 per cent of the respondents like to move from the area to another area for the cultivation.

Impacts on Agriculture Sector

Agriculture is the major occupation and main source of income of the people in this area. The water scarcity and water conflict had affected crop cultivation and destroying the final products. This situation keeps the farmers always below the poverty line, debt, and frustration. The main cultivation is paddy and the plantation of corn, peanuts and village vegetables



like chilies, ladies fingers, pumpkin, and snack coal. The 80 per cent of the farmers are in dilemma, whether they continue in farming or to shift to another occupation as the way of income.

Impacts on Social Relationship

Conflict contributes to the collapse of social cohesion and the distraction of social relationship; this in turn may effect in established safety nets that becomes unavailable. Conflict increases the mistrust, misinterpretation, false impression, and misunderstanding among the communities. This situation directly and indirectly affects the social networks of the respondents. 64 per cent of the farmers who actively participated in the social, cultural, and religious function such as wedding ceremony and funeral ceremony, have the mentality of reluctant and unwilling.

Environmental Degradations

The rise in social and economic vulnerability is the outcome of water conflict that triggers other new competitions and degradations over significant resources, such as land, wood, clay, gravel, and sand. 48 per cent of farmers are of the view that the water conflict has damaged the environment.

Unemployment and Poverty

Due to the water conflict, the farmers are not in a position to involve in the cultivating activities. This leads to the unemployment and poverty. The occurrence of poverty may boost, not only throughout the loss of livelihoods but also as a consequence of an increasing inability of people to cope with change. Therefore, war by growing the crack between food production and, exaggerates poverty and food shortage, and consequently encourages constant dependence on food relieve. The result shows that 67 of the respondents have the problem of unemployment and poverty.

Suggestions

In order to mitigate the prevailing conflicts in the study area the following suggestion can be made by the researcher

- Setting up an appropriate mechanism to share the water equally among the farmers.
- Making an arrangement to find out other water resources like tube well, pond, river, and rainwater.
- Providing training and techniques to the farmers to get more benefit by using less water.

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