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Title : Socio-Economic Aspects of Landslides in Walapane Area
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Background and study objectives:

Increased population pressure on unstable hill slopes has increased the risks of landslides. Walapane in Nuwara Eliya district has been an area frequently subjected to landslides. This study focuses on the socio-economic consequences of the recently-occurred landslides in this area.

Research Methodology:

The study was conducted in three villages, namely Mahawewa, Ritiella and Narangaskandura of the Kambalgamuwa Gama Niladhari division which was badly hit by landslides. Information was collected by administering a questionnaire to a sample of 50 households selected randomly, and by conducting a social mapping exercise from January to July 2008. The sample consisted of people living in refugee camps, Suriyagahapathan new settlement, Kurulugama temple and their villages.

Research Findings:

It was found that the majority of people in the refugee camp were farmers who cultivated tea, banana, vegetables, etc. Landslides have badly affected their occupation. Males have migrated out in search for employment since there were no avenues of income in the area. In the original village, they had better social conditions. The people living in the new settlement also had good living conditions in their original villages before the landslides. After landslides, each family has been given a 20-perch block. People go outside for finding employment. More than half of the families like the new settlement due to better climate and infrastructure facilities available for living. But agriculture being the mainstay of most of the people, they are unhappy about the holding size, since 20-perch land is insufficient for farming for income. The people living in Kurulugama temple has also been given land in Suriyagahapathan new settlement, but they are not happy about the facilities there. The living in their villages have not been affected directly by landslides, but their lives have been affected to some extent due to risk of landslides for cultivations and due to damages caused to roads and other infra-structure in the area.

Social map of the Narangaskandura area indicated that more than 75% of the area has been totally destroyed by landslides. Water in the two tanks, namely Mahawewa and Kuda wewa, has disappeared after landslides. People are living in fear in the houses which have not been damaged due to the risk of landslides.

Discussion:

It is necessary to take action to refrain from building houses and commercial buildings in landslide-prone areas to prevent adverse effects on the people. Legal enforcements must be undertaken to prevent construction and any other activities which could make this area more prone to landslides.