

CRISIS MANAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM THE PAST: A CASE STUDY OF THE DROUGHT SITUATION IN HAMBANTOTA DISTRICT, YEAR 2000

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In the year 2000, drought became the worst natural phenomenon in the Hambantota district. This district experienced one of the most severe droughts in the recent history of Sri Lanka. It affected very large areas of the district. The people of the area changed their life style, including food behavior, water consumption, daily work schedules, and management patterns of natural resources.

The objective of the study was to identify crisis management practices associated with drought hazards in selected villages in the Hambantota area and their impact on human behavior. Badagiriya, Udamattala and Gonnoruwa (Thammenna wewa) were the villages selected for the study. The main research method used to collect data consisted focus group discussions and formal and informal interviews.

The findings of the study reveal that there were five consecutive years of severe drought due to the failure of the North East monsoon and inter-monsoon rains. Cultivation became impossible and otherwise that caused serious damage to crop production. Furthermore, in one village, at least 400-500 water buffaloes and neat cattle died. Forest production and chena cultivation were destroyed by the shortage of water.

An analysis of the results of the study reveals:

- (a) The drought period food habits and their effectiveness to the study.
- (b) Change in the income generation pattern among villagers.
- (c) The water consumption pattern and water-borne diseases during the drought period.
- (d) Changes of natural resources management practices.
- (e) Drought associated temporary out migration pattern in the area.
- (f) Adaptation to the drought condition in the area.

The study clearly shows that the drought, which occurred in the year 2000, has had a devastating and lasting effect on the rural economy of poor families in the Hambantota district.