

Abstract

In the 1990's many people became casualties of unplanned development induced resettlement. A majority of such families live in the urban context and continue to face various types of impoverishments. They have no stable income and poverty is a main cause for urban environmental degradation. Settlements occupied by such communities are located throughout the City of Colombo but mainly in low lying lands in congested pockets. Land titling has not been done and basic urban infrastructure facilities such as water supply, waste water and storm water drainage facilities, sewer lines and space for solid waste disposal have been at a minimum. The local authorities are reluctant to support such communities due to high investment and most families continue to live in poverty, with such slum and shanties being notorious for high crime rates and environmental eye sores. Eventually making a big negative impact on the lives of urban middle class.

In 2001, the introduction of the National Involuntary Resettlement Policy (NIRP) in Sri Lanka, required that development induced resettlement projects use the policy as a guideline to ensure persons affected by the project would be either of a similar economic and social status or higher than before resettlement. Compensation payments were required to be at present market value and project implementation agencies were required to do extensive community development, mobilization and awareness so that those affected by the development would be eventual 'winners'. It was required to empower the project affected persons to ensure they were converted into real beneficiaries and ensure social, economic safeguards were in place.

The *Lunawa* Environmental Improvement and Community Development Project (LEI&CDP) was initiated in 2001 with a view to minimize the flood damage in the *Lunawa* catchment and improve the overall environment in the said areas. As the number of directly affected persons were over 100 families, the National Involuntary Resettlement Policy was used to develop resettlement guidelines and action plans for the Project area in the *Lunawa* catchment.

Thus commenced a carefully planned and formulated resettlement process where transparency, and active involvement of the affected communities were considered priority. For the first time in Sri Lanka a policy allowed for families who had no ownership to land to be eligible for a minimum 2 perch plot of land and Rs.424,000 as compensation to build their house. Unlike in previous resettlement projects implemented during the 1990s, there has been minimal public protest and objections towards the LEI&CDP, with improved status of middle class urban relocation areas developed in the *Lunawa* Catchment.

From the experience of implementing the LEI&CDP, 3 parameters were identified as being the main attributes to the success of this urban resettlement project. These were not only social and economic related but also include that concerning the environment and habitat.