

- Harmonizing Development with Environment -

Resettlement of Low Income Communities under the Greater Colombo Flood Control and Environment Improvement Project in Sri Lanka

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1. Project Digest

A large scale resettlement of low income communities called Shanty in Sri Lanka, which is a public area illegally resided by urban poor group, were successfully implemented under the captioned project as digested below. This presentation paper is prepared focusing on the activities of the consultants which assisted the implementation agency in implementing the shanty relocation and upgrading.

- (1) Project Title: The Greater Colombo Flood Control and Environment Improvement Project (GCFCEIP)
- (2) Location: Greater Colombo Area, Sri Lanka
- (3) Project Period: Design 1990 - 1991, (Different project name during the design stage.)
Canal Rehabilitation Oct.1993 - Mar.1998,
Resettlement Work Dec.1990 - Dec.1997
- (4) Implementing Agency: Sri Lanka Land Reclamation and Development Corporation (SLLRDC)
- (5) Objective of the Project:

The objective of the Project is to alleviate flood damages frequently being occurred in the Greater Colombo area through improvement of existing major canals, thereafter resulting in upgrading and creation of environmentally sustainable way of lives in the local communities.

- (6) Scope of the Project:

In order to accomplish the above project objective, the following components were planned and implemented.

- i) Improvement of existing canals (total length 44km) running in the flood-prone area within the Colombo Municipal Council and the suburban areas, including creation of some new canals (total length 9.6 km).
- ii) On-site upgrading (1,573 houses on actual basis) and off-site relocation (2,792 houses on actual basis) of shanties located alongside of the above canals
- iii) Provision of resettlement sites with basic infrastructures including storm water drainage, house foundation, water supply and electricity for those who were relocated off-site

2. Project Background

Colombo city was developed in the south of the Kelani Ganga by filling up the marshy lands and hence the flooding in and around the city area had been occurring for many years and caused considerable economic disruption, social adversity to a high proportion of the population. Particularly flooding in low-lying areas such as canal banks was one of the major problems for the

shanty dwellers. In addition they were affected by the critical hygiene condition such as inundated floor, garbage dumping, rampant water-borne disease, polluted water, etc. due to poor drainage of the canal system. Therefore, necessity of urgent implementation of the canal system rehabilitation project to improve the above critical living environment was recognized.

It was, however, obvious that a large number of houses in shanty communities located widely alongside of the canals were bound to be affected by any attempt to implement the such “environment improvement” project, and the relocation of shanty dwellers were considered as a crucial issue to the project implementation. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka Government had been undertaking relocation/upgrading of low income communities since 1970’s and the Government took up the shanty communities as the first target of large scale relocation/upgrading attempt. Through this process, a project which is composed of the two targets, that is the canal system rehabilitation and the relocation/upgrading of shanty communities, was formulated as GCFCEIP in 1992.

3. Shanty Relocation and Upgrading

3.1 Involvement of NHDA

As stated in the Project Digest, the project implementation agency of the Government is SLLRDC and the overall project management including the canal rehabilitation component and the shanty relocation/upgrading component was executed by SLLRDC. However, in proceeding substantial actions for the shanty relocation/upgrading in the project, involvement of National Housing Development Authority (NHDA) was indispensable.

NHDA and its predecessors, have a successful history of housing upgrading projects. Many of its officers have a great deal of experience in upgrading and relocating Low Income Communities (LICs) and in dealing with all the activities related to such projects. However, this GCFCEIP differed in two important ways from the previous projects which NHDA has had dealt with. First, this was the largest single project they have had to tackle to date. It covered the largest number of families, housing units, people and communities, and cost more to implement. Secondary, the timing was crucial to the success of the overall project whereas in previous projects it was possible to progress at the pace chosen by the community. In case of the GCFCEIP, however, it was crucial that work was started and completed on time and that NHDA planned the whole project to fit in with SLLRDC’s time scale for the canal rehabilitation work.

It may be, therefore, concluded that the consultant’s role was to assist NHDA in implementation of the relocation/upgrading of LICs applying its procedures and skills for the project which they have not experienced before in terms of the project scale and the time constraints, as mentioned above.

3.2 Role of Consultant (Technical Assistance)

(1) Basic Concept in the Consultant Inputs

Technical Assistance from the aspect of social planning was made by the consultant to assist NHDA in implementing the shanty relocation/upgrading under the GCFCEIP. In the consultant’s activity, it was accepted that the methods used reflect local customs and practices and the Social Planners of the consultant ensured that any changes they recommended to NHDA procedures were appropriate to the local stimulation and reflected the policies of NHDA and the Government of Sri Lanka.

(2) Objectives of Technical Assistance

The objectives of the social planning technical assistance are summarized as follows:

- Assistance to NHDA for implementation of the LIC upgrading and relocation programme, stimulating progress to meet proposed canal rehabilitation programme requirements.

- Assistance to NHDA to maintain the importance of considering the social impact of the canal rehabilitation works.
- Support NHDA officers to negotiate with the communities, explaining the needs of the project and the effect on particular communities.
- Support NHDA officers to assist the communities to upgrade and relocate in accordance with the implementation guidelines of the urban housing programme and the needs of the canal rehabilitation construction programme.

(3) Consultant's Task

In order to achieve the objectives in relocation of a large numbers of people from the canal working width in a socially acceptable manner, the consultant identified and prioritized the tasks that were required to ensure the relocation/upgrading programme as shown below.

Task A Update Information on LICs

The consultant visited all 76 LICs alongside of the canals together with NHDA officers and recorded the activities of NHDA in the LICs since the 1988 survey and produced an updated profile of each community.

Task B Assessment of Upgrading Work Carried out to Date

The upgrading activities for some communities all over Greater Colombo area had already been commenced by NHDA/SLLRDC before the project. The consultant conducted the assessment on the upgrading status taking into account requirements of canal rehabilitation, canal maintenance and community upgrading.

Task C Rapid Reconnaissance

Rapid reconnaissance of the LICs was done for the purpose of identifying trouble spots and giving the resolution of conflicts to take place.

Task D Enhancement of NHDA Upgrading Programme

Initial investigation of the consultant revealed that NHDA was capable of conducting the necessary work given sufficient assistance and manpower resources, however there are some observations on the upgrading process which had been given further attention, such as lack of fund and delay of infrastructure element on relocation sites, insufficient implementation of community development and employment, slow process in granting housing loan on individual basis and delay on the granting of land title. The consultant made many recommendations to enhance these situations.

Task E Investigation of Opportunities for Employment Generation

The use of LIC labor in relation to the canal works and LIC upgrading have an enormous impact on the benefit which those on low incomes receive from the project. It also has the added advantage that these extra benefits are likely to enhance LIC co-operation with the scheme and the speed of its implementation. It was considered that there were some opportunities for involvement of LIC such as in upgrading their own communities at relocation/upgrading sites, in the canal construction work and in maintenance work of canal banks. In this project, bank protection with gabion was applied for the significant length of the bank. This construction method was an effective way to involve LIC dwellers. The consultant advised to NHDA that this community involvement could be an opportunity for setting up community partnership in the project implementation as well as creation of income source for the LIC people.

Task F Design of Implementation Structure

The Government was prepared to release funds for the LIC relocation/upgrading work. The consultant endeavored to assess the adequacy of resources to carry out the work, and monitor the disbursement of these resources according to the agreed project budget. Draft estimates of the funding required to relocate/upgrade all 76 LICs identified alongside of the canal system were made based on the NHDA survey results and current relocation plants. These estimates were continuously updated to reflect actual expenditure, while a social planner of the consultant was on site.

Task I Monitoring Procedures

It is essential on a project of this size that management and planners have a clear idea of what needs to be done and are able to monitor progress towards the achievement of these goals. The consultant introduced the idea of setting targets and scheduling activities. The initial approach was to break tasks into easily achievable sub-tasks and then to build the sub-tasks together. This was an attempt to change the idea of open ended planning to a more time oriented planning. The consultant developed a set of monitoring procedures which provide a structure for the information required and trained NHDA Core Team staff in the use of these procedures and incorporating into Core Team Practice.

4. Social Planning Outputs in Shanty Relocation and Upgrading

4.1 Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of the project fall into two groups, those who benefited directly or indirectly from the project as a whole and those who benefited from the social planning input. While the social planner of the consultant did have inputs into many aspects of the overall project the main task was to assist NHDA and SLLRDC with shanty relocation and upgrading programme. As such the main beneficiaries of the social input are those shanty dwellers living along or relocated from the canal banks. NHDA and SLLRDC both benefited from the effects of technology transfer particularly in the areas of computing and project management.

4.2 Benefits to Low Income Communities

The major benefits achieved eventually for the shanty communities are as summarized below.

- Provision of basic infrastructures including piped water supply, drains, communal toilets, internal roads and footpaths in the relocation sites and asphalted access road for canal maintenance at on-site upgrading sites.
- Provision of electricity to all communities eventually. Street lighting was installed where necessary and assistance was given for householders to obtain individual connections.
- House foundation was built as an added inducement or compensation for those householders prepared to move to a location outside the Colombo city boundary.
- Improvement of solid waste management including provision of garbage containers and garbage collection services by the local authorities.
- The majority of householders affected by the project were entitled to housing loans of between Rs20, 000 and Rs25, 000. Some householders, who may not be able to repay a loan, given of about Rs8, 000.

4.3 Access to Services

An important part of the shanty programme has been to give the inhabitants of low income communities a feeling of security. This has been achieved by giving each householder a plot of land

and the leasehold title. This process is called regularization. As a result of being given security of tenure, low income families have improved access to the banking/mortgage system as they are now in a position to offer security for loans. It is essential, therefore, that householders were given the necessary documents to show their status as leaseholders. Meanwhile, assessment number was given to each housing unit by the local authority, this made the householder liable for local taxes, which tend to be low, or nonexistence for poor families, but also made the house holder eligible for access to various services by the local authority.

4.4 Better Living Environment

As a result of the benefits received by the canal bank dwellers and improvements to the canals, those still living alongside canals are enjoying the benefits of a better environment. Similarly those who were relocated from the canal banks benefit from the conditions on the relocation sites. In all cases the incidence of flooding is reported to decrease as the civil works were completed. The incidence of diseases is also reported to decrease because of improved water quality in the canals, better sanitation, and the results of community education and health care programs.

5. Recommendation for Future Development Project

(1) Community Development Activities

It should be perceived that a successful resettlement of LICs is eventually associated with an effective community development programme which encourages the inhabitants to maintain and improve continuously their community and the living conditions for themselves. Community development outputs were limited in this project due to the necessary emphasis on relocation/upgrading programme and infrastructure. However, there is the need for a definite programme for strengthen the capacity of community which receives or seeks various inputs and supports from the Government and/or other organizations. Training of community leaders in all aspects of community development, including basic management skills, should be an important component.

(2) Collaboration with Local NGOs

Each community has its own personality and therefore its own development path. This means a different approach to identify and implementing projects and the resources is required. Local NGOs are better placed to deal with the varied approach required than a big Corporation or Government Department or Agency. This does not mean that the Corporation is abdicating its responsibility rather it is ensuring that the communities involved receive the best possible support at the time they need it from the most appropriate sources.