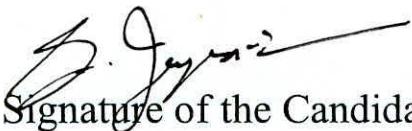


**Farmers' Survival Strategies in an Ethnic
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Vavuniya District of Sri Lanka**

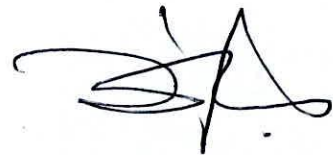
Jeyaseelan Gnanaseelan

Master of Science in Human Security
2004

“The work described in this dissertation was carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Krishan Deheragoda, Dept. of Geography, University of Sri Jayawardenepure and a report on this has not been submitted in whole or in part to any University for another Degree/Diploma.”


Signature of the Candidate

“I certify that the above statement made by the candidate is true and that this dissertation is suitable for submission to the University for the purpose of evaluation”

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a vertical stroke, positioned above the text 'Signature of the Supervisor'.

Signature of the Supervisor

**Farmers' Survival Strategies in an Ethnic Conflict
Situation in Two Villages in Vavuniya District of Sri
Lanka**

By

**Jeyaseelan Gnanaseelan
Reg.No.GS/SS/1478/2001**

**Dissertation submitted to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura
for the award of the degree of Master of Science in Human
Security**

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Acronyms

- AGA – Assistant Government Agent*
BICP- Before the Intensive Conflict Period
CARE – Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CBO – Community-based Organization
CFA – the Ceasefire Agreement
DICP- During the Intensive Conflict Period
D.S- the Divisional Secretariat
GSL – Government of Sri Lanka
GSO – Grama Sevaka Officer
HH - Household
HLS – Household Livelihood Security
HSZ- the High Security Zones
ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs – Internally Displaced Persons
INGO – International Non-governmental Organization
KKK- Kovilkunchukulam
LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MOU- the Memorandum of Understanding
MPCS – Multi Purpose Cooperative Society
MSF- Medicine sans Frontier
NECORD- the Northeast
NEIAP_ the Northeast Irrigation and Agriculture Project
NGO – Non-governmental Organization
PVK- Poovarasankulam
RDS – Rural Development Society
SLA – Sri Lankan Army
SLRC- Sri Lanka Red Cross
TCCS – Thrift and Credit Cooperative Society
TEEDO – Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organization
TRO – Tamil Rehabilitation Organization
UNDP- the United Nations Development Programs
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Farmers' Survival Strategies in an Ethnic Conflict Situation in Two Villages in Vavuniya District of Sri Lanka

Jeyaseelan Gnanaseelan

ABSTRACT

This research examines the survival strategies practiced by the farmers in the two villages of the Vavuniya District of Sri Lanka during the intensive conflict period (DICP means from 1990 onwards), which is compared and contrasted with the traditional livelihood systems of these farmers before the intensive conflict period (BICP means before 1990); it studies the causes of their survival strategies and relates them to the perceptions of the farmers and its consequence on their lives; it describes the prevalent livelihood systems such as housing trend and residential patterns, cultivation land ownership and utilization both paddy and highland, livestock rearing, use of agriculture implements and inputs, irrigation, credit and saving facilities and systems, owning and using durables, farming activities both Maha and Yala, highland cultivation, and home gardening, other sources of income generation, drinking water, food security and nutrition, and health care as they existed before and after 1990 and identifies the survival strategies and techniques adopted in each livelihood system mentioned above against the constraints from 1990 onwards; it characterizes the vulnerable groups and investigates the extent of vulnerability, marginalization, dispossession, accumulation, and unsustainability caused by the conflict

It illustrates the process of change in forming survival strategies by revealing the ways in which the farmers were engaged in negotiation, bargaining, and struggle which could alter their circumstances; it determines the current status of social networks and civil societies and CBOs and assesses the government, the forces, the militants, the NGOs and other civil societies 'interventions in farmers' livelihood and survival; it critically synthesizes the adoptable survival strategies primarily based on the practices and perceptions of the farmers in two villages of this district.

1. Introduction

Farmers' survival strategies in a conflict situation have been rarely touched in Sri Lankan studies in the past except some small surveys for institutional interventions by both international and local NGOs. Even in international literature so much importance has been given to the details of the impacts of the conflicts and of the conflicts themselves not the survival and coping strategies of the farmers specifically. In general terms, this study provides an overall picture of survival, livelihood and vulnerability of farming communities with regard to economic, food and other key human security aspects. The future institutional interventions can respond to the most critical needs of those communities. The study attempts to identify and describe groups of greatest vulnerability (e.g. farmers, women, IDPs) and analyzes causes contributing to their vulnerability and survival. In addition, assets, opportunities and institutional resources were identified and analyzed.

The purpose and objectives of this research lend themselves to both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, which covered the two village sites selected in much greater depth. This approach provided adequate information for a comprehensive understanding of the situation seen from different perspectives and the information were obtained in a participatory manner. A variety of research tools were employed during data collection including large and focus group discussions, historical profiles, key informant interviews, and household surveys. Numerical data were collected during household questionnaire and interviews to allow quantitative estimates to be made.

The communities included within the sampling frame were stratified based on major livelihood, agricultural potential, demographic situation, and district. This allowed a selection of sites representative of the vast majority of the overall study area within the Wanni region. Ultimately, low potential agricultural communities were selected in the Divisional Secretariat area of the Vavuniya district. Households were selected at random in each community on each livelihood category. The IDPs in the villages and in settlements attached to existing communities represent the most significant vulnerable group in the Wanni. Estimates were that more than 200,000 people were living in welfare centers, settlement schemes and mixed communities throughout the Wanni in 2000. The inadequacy of their monthly ration, combined with a lack of productive assets and shortage of wage labor opportunities make them highly food and income insecure.

The two village agricultural communities revealed that the low potential communities have lesser access to water for irrigation. While the farmers faced the same constraints, i.e. shortages and high prices of fertilizers and other inputs, poor access to markets, etc., Low potential farmers, however, were barely surviving and resorted frequently to coping mechanisms such as changes in diet and sale/mortgage of assets to get through difficult times. The conflict affected all groups in the Wanni (e.g. prices for basic commodities were generally 2-5 times higher here than in the South) but might have the greatest economic impacts on farming communities. Farmers were excluded from productive farming zones, could not transport their harvest to lucrative markets, must pay artificially high prices for inputs and fuel, and lived in communities that were