



Helping People to Cope with Changing Climates

Trincomalee district in eastern Sri Lanka was severely affected by the tsunami of 2004. Several years later, most people directly affected by the tsunami have been resettled. Yet many of them continue to face problems, one of which is a climate that is increasingly variable and extreme.



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The Jayanagar GS division in the Trincomalee district has a population of 278 families comprising almost 1300 people. The main source of income for most families is fishing and cattle breeding. People also engage in small businesses and manual labour. However, there is an important factor that directly affects their livelihoods and living conditions – the changing climate. People here have to face the challenge of both floods and droughts that are becoming increasingly prevalent and severe. Particularly worrying is the unpredictability of their occurrence.

Sri Lanka Red Cross Society's Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) Project began working with four communities in Trincomalee in 2007. In Jayanagar, as in all communities where the project was initiated, SLRCS helped the community conduct a Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment.

People in Jayanagar identified a series of hazards that they were compelled to live with: floods, drought, cyclones, wild elephants, and the possibility of another tsunami. The community then prioritized a series of activities, mainly around the incidence of floods and drought. SLRCS helped

set up and worked closely with Jayanagar's Village Disaster Management Committee (VDMC), linking them where necessary with other organizations and agencies. The CBDRM project helped people deal with recurrent flooding in their neighbourhoods and water shortages – both for drinking and irrigation – during drought periods. These activities are gradually improving people's lives, by strengthening their ability to cope with the changing climatic conditions.

One important initiative was a response to drought, which people linked not only with the drastic drops in income but also with a sharp rise in diseases like malaria. The VDMC recognized the fact that although there were longer dry spells, it rained harder than ever when it did rain. They decided to rebuild a disused water source, a large pond, into water reservoir.

We face severe drought here. We needed a reservoir for the water that becomes scarce. The VDMC got involved to provide the labour and the CBDRM project gave the machinery that was needed.

- Mohideen Jacob
Jayanagar VDMC Treasurer

The Jayanagar community would soon see the benefits of their hard work. One year since they completed the reservoir and after just two seasons of rain, the quality of the water in the wells close to it is showing signs of improvement. The salinity that had risen dramatically with the tsunami, has dropped.

The community wants to start inland fisheries in the tank, channelling part of the money they make to the VDMC's Emergency Fund. The VDMC also succeeded in building a 1500 litre dinking water tanks and two public toilets with SLRCS help.

And there's more to be done. People see a clear link between changing weather patterns and increase in the incidence of malaria. Unpredictable weather patterns like off-season rainfall and high temperatures appear to be enhancing mosquito breeding and survival.

The mosquito problem in this area is a serious one. It's something that the VDMC wants to address in a more long-term way. In the meanwhile, the committee talked to the Medical Officer of Health and obtained 210 mosquito nets. It's usually very good at getting things done.

- A.S.M.Sajith
Jayanagar Community Facilitator

Although not part of its initial plan of action, the CBDRM project in Trincomalee identified many aspects of long-term climate change that have already begun to show impacts at the community level. The SLRCS plans to work in the area of climate change adaptation not only in eastern Sri Lanka but in other parts of the country as well.



A.S.M Sajith and Mohideen Jacob



VDMC members getting prepared for a community awareness programme.



The newly restored tank is helping conserve water for the dry season.



Jayanagar community members want to keep a steady pace to reach their targets.