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Transitioning from Urban IDP Camps to Rural Life: Navigating the Loss of City Rights in Jaffna, Sri Lanka



Introduction

- The war in Sri Lanka ended in 2009. However, fifteen years later post-war recovery in Sri Lanka faces ongoing challenges.
- People in former war zone continue to face higher incidence of multi dimensional poverty and psychosocial issues.
- While the majority of those displaced due to the war have returned or relocated, some IDPs—especially those in welfare camp settings or those in rented accommodations in urban Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka—have so far not been able to make this transition from urban IDP settlements to ancestral rural villages.
- This poster aims to explore specific household or community-level challenges which make this difficult as well as urban complications/delays in public administration and public health which is in the backdrop of all of these challenges.
- It bridges two research projects on war affected communities in Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka:
 1. A completed academic study on gendered displacement in Jaffna, funded by the UK's GCRF.
 2. A new implementation project on psychosocial challenges for resettled IDPs in Jaffna and Kilinochchi, funded by the Swiss STJF.

Methodology

- The first study is based on a survey of 405 IDP households conducted in Jaffna to examine the gendered experiences of protracted displacement.
- The survey results were triangulated with 13 in-depth interviews with internally displaced and 3 key informant interviews (KIIs) with village and higher-level public officials.
- The results from the first project are directly connected to those from the second which is a collaboration between a research organisation (CMRD) and public health focussed international development organisation (FAIRMED) which is working in partnership with health and non-health government stakeholders.
- The ongoing study has so far included kick-off meetings with public officials and a 10-day field visit as part of the research process. Concurrently, the opening of 3 CSCs, and regular advisory and working group meeting have laid a strong foundation for the psychosocial intervention.
- The survey and interview data from the first project was analysed using mixed-method approaches while data from the second project was assessed using thematic qualitative approach.

Results

- Though IDPs are keen to be resettled back in their original homes in rural settings, there are notable differences between the old and the young in relation to this preference.
- The young are anxious about losing established networks, jobs and convenient access to better public services in urban Jaffna. While housing, water, sanitation, *etc.* in urban IDP camps were appalling, that location made public schools, hospitals, markets, *etc.* within their easy reach.
- There is also concerning evidence that traditionally urban problems such as drugs and alcoholism are rampant in rural resettlement because those areas are within easy access to the coast and thereby to contraband from India (e.g. Kerala Ganja).
- Moreover, there are enduring gender issues with female headed IDP families regularly reporting poor house completion in rural resettlement areas partially due to travelling difficulties from urban camps.

