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COVID 19: Impact, Mitigation, Opportunities and Building Resilience

From Adversity to Serendipity

*Perspectives of global relevance based on
research, experience and successes in
combating COVID-19 in Sri Lanka*

Volume 01

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(edited by)

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Settling the ripples: An examination of Sri Lanka's approach to addressing cascading impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka has not only posed a severe threat to human health and longevity but also cascaded into a large scale economic downturn and bleak social effects signifying the systemic nature of risks. This study examines the major economic and social effects caused by the first wave of COVID-19 in the country and the manner in which these effects have been addressed with the aim of providing policy implications for systemic risk governance. This chapter is based on a number of secondary sources and primary data gathered from interviews conducted with key informants at both national and sub-national levels. Findings show that the pandemic has caused severe socio-economic impacts across the country which have been addressed with the main dominant involvement of the Presidential Task Forces, NGOs and INGOs at national level and Disaster Management and Public Health authorities at sub-national level. Effective collaboration among multiple-stakeholders and the emulation of a decentralised approach have been identified as the main strengths of Sri Lanka's approach to overcoming the cascading effects of the pandemic. However, response to these effects has been hampered due to inefficiencies caused with the establishment of new structures instead of leveraging the existing structures, difficulties faced in accurately identifying beneficiaries of relief services, inadequate allocations for stimulus packages and lack of focus on resilience building. Findings further demonstrate that effective and efficient mitigation of the cascading effects of hazards such as pandemics, calls for a shift in focus from short term response to building both economic and societal resilience.

Key words: Cascading effects, Systemic Risks, COVID-19, Sri Lanka

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

As of 31st December 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has recorded over 1.8 million deaths and exceeding 83 million confirmed cases worldwide (Worldometer, 2020). By November 2020, many countries in Europe and other

parts of the world have begun to experience the second wave of Coronavirus, with more cases being reported on a daily basis than during the first wave (Pollet, 2020; Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Jayasena & Chinthaka, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly showcased the systemic nature of risks thus, calling for a paradigm shift

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in the approaches adopted for risk governance (UNDRR, 2020).

The term 'risk' describes a situation or an event that has damaging consequences but the outcome of which is uncertain (Rosa, 2008; Society for Risk Analysis Glossary, 2018). 'Risk' in the context of disasters indicate "the potential loss of life, injury or destroyed or damaged assets which could occur to a system, society or a community in a specific period of time, determined probabilistically as a function of hazard, exposure, vulnerability and capacity" (UNDRR, 2020). The concept of systemic risk seeks to elucidate the properties of risk from a systems perspective considering the fact that elements of a system are connected together and therefore a failure in one part may cause cascading effects on other parts of the system, which leads to the failure of the entire system (Kaufmann and Scott, 2003; Schwarcz, 2008). Systemic risks are highly complex, trans-boundary in nature and are characterised by stochastic and non-linear relationships (Schweizer and Renn, 2019).

Conforming to the description of 'systemic risks' stated above, the COVID-19 pandemic which started as a public health crisis soon transformed into a disaster causing grave and complex economic and social disruptions that extend beyond national boundaries (UNDRR, 2020). Considering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank (2020) has estimated a 5.2% contraction in global GDP and expects the severity of the pandemic to push tens of millions of people into extreme poverty across the world. According to World Bank records, advanced economies have contracted by 7% while developing economies have shrunk by approximately 2.5% (The World Bank, 2020). International and global food supply chains have been hampered owing to trade restrictions, confinement measures and border closures thereby posing a significant threat to food security (ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO, 2020). Similarly, the psycho-social wellbeing of people is at stake as lockdowns and other containment measures imposed have caused separation from loved ones, feeling of helplessness, anxiety and uncertainty about

their future and loss of freedom (Cao et al., 2020; Li and Wang, 2020; Saladino et al., 2020).

The complexity and magnitude of systemic risks are often underestimated in public policy arenas due to uncertainties of point of occurrence and the extent of damage caused (Schweizer and Renn, 2019). Nevertheless, effects of systemic risks associated with COVID-19 have spanned across almost all sectors and levels of the society, simultaneously exposing gaps in existing risk governance approaches. In Sri Lanka, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported on 27th January 2020, i.e. almost a month after the outbreak was reported for the first time in Wuhan City in Hubei Province of China (Amaratunga et al., 2020). COVID-19 has caused disproportionate impacts on countries with existing vulnerabilities and risk factors (UNDRR, 2020; Alwazir, 2020). Sri Lankan economy relies heavily on the tourism industry and the country's foreign exchange earnings are largely dependent on its migrant labourers which has exposed the country to high vulnerability of COVID-19 (World Bank, 2020). The pandemic has also added to existing vulnerabilities caused by factors such as climatic shocks, poverty and the predominance of informality in the labour market (Hadad-Zervos, 2020; ADB, 2020; Michael, 2018). At the time of writing, Sri Lanka is combatting the 2nd wave of COVID-19 and as at 31st December 2020, 43,123 confirmed cases and 199 deaths have been reported (Health Promotion Bureau, 2020). In Sri Lanka the pandemic has not only posed a severe threat to human health and longevity but also cascaded into a massive economic downturn and bleak social effects. This study examines Sri Lanka's approach in addressing the cascading effects of the first wave of the pandemic under four sub-objectives : 1) To identify the major economic and social effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country; 2) To identify the main stakeholders and the roles played by them in addressing these cascading effects; 3) To identify the main strengths of the country's approach in addressing the cascading impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic situation and 4) To identify the main shortcomings of the country's approach in addressing the cascading

effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so this paper aims to provide policy implications for effective governance of systemic risks in Sri Lanka.

1.2. Systemic risk governance in addressing the cascading effects of COVID-19

The increasingly evident systemic nature of risk has called for significant improvements in risk governance approaches. The tendency of systemic risks such as COVID-19 to span beyond a single sector and cause cascading effects on a multitude of other sectors, eventually leading to the failure of the entire system invites multi-sectoral collaboration and coordination to manage and reduce disaster risks. It is necessary to create a platform where solutions are geared towards disaster risk management which are generated collectively and co-designed with the involvement of multiple stakeholders including [but are not limited to] public authorities, media, private sector and civil society (Kaufmann and Scott, 2003; UNDRR, 2020). Therefore, effective governance of systemic risks is built on inclusivity and participation of diverse stakeholders, transparency and collective accountability (UNDRR, 2020).

Furthermore, effectively responding to the cascading effects of COVID-19 requires a long-term approach that extends beyond the provision of short term relief to building whole of society 'resilience' (UNDRR, 2020). Moreover, the pandemic has posed disproportionate effects on certain population groups such as the poor, the elderly and informal sector workers, thus, exposing economic and social inequalities and highlighting gaps in social protection systems and lack of resilience (UNDP, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2020). Investing in building resilience is conducive to saving lives and reducing the social and economic losses of disasters cum ensuring effective post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation. An inclination to strengthen whole of society resilience to disasters over the execution of emergency relief measures is crucial for protecting development gains from the complex and trans- boundary

cascading impacts of disasters (UNDRR, 2020; Mitchell and Harris, 2012). Similarly, investing in building resilience is more cost effective than emergency relief and response (Combaz, 2014). Illustrating this, a UK funded study has shown that in Kenya, every US \$1 spent on resilience could gain benefits worth US \$2.9 over a period of 20 years (DFID, 2012) and in Southern Ethiopia every US \$ 1 invested in resilience could result in a US \$ 2.8 gain as benefits. On the contrary, a humanitarian response would cost billions exceeding the cost of resilience building over a period of 20 years (DFID, 2012).

Strengthening disaster responsive social protection is paramount in an attempt to build whole of society resilience to disasters, whether natural, biological or technological (Kosec & Mo, 2017; Kuriakose et al., 2013; Singhe, 2014; Davies et al., 2012; Ulrichs, 2019; UNDRR, 2020). Referring to climate related shocks, Kuriakose et al. (2013) portrays how different social protection schemes contribute to long-term climate adaptation and building a society's resilience against such shocks. The authors claim that social protection instruments such as social insurance, social transfers and asset diversification reduce the vulnerability of households by enhancing their coping capacities in turn mitigating the impacts of climate related shocks (Kuriakose et al., 2013). Further, social protection measures that are aimed at the provision of relief [Eg: cash transfers and social pensions] facilitate improved coping among households immediately following a disaster (Kuriakose et al., 2013). On the other hand, measures such as support for diversification of livelihoods, facilitation of labour mobility and provision of micro-credit for livelihood promotion address underlying vulnerabilities of households and reduce a community's sensitivity to risk in the long run (Kuriakose et al., 2013). Complementing the arguments of Kuriakose et al. (2013), a recent study sources evidence from 2010 floods in Pakistan which depicts disaster responsive social protection schemes can attenuate the negative effects that shocks pose on the aspirations of people (Kosec & Mo, 2017).

Further, paying specific attention to COVID-19, Gerard et al. (2020) argue that effective recovery from the economic challenges posed by the pandemic, particularly in low and middle income countries require an emergency safety net with more extensive coverage accompanied by broader and more creative solutions. On 28th May 2020, a virtual webinar organised by UNESCAP, UNDRR and FAO examined how countries in the Asia Pacific had utilised social protection measures to manage and recover from the adverse effects of COVID-19 (UNDRR Asia-Pacific, 2020). This webinar also highlighted several policy recommendations on leveraging social protection schemes to reduce disaster related vulnerability and build whole of community resilience. Some of these recommendations call for investing in social protection before a disaster; promoting universal social protection while adopting a human rights based approach (UNDRR Asia-Pacific, 2020).

Furthermore, the risks posed by disasters on the private sector, particularly business enterprises, cannot be overlooked in an attempt to strengthen whole of society resilience given that the private sector makes a pivotal contribution to development in terms of generating employment opportunities, stimulating innovation and boosting economic growth (UNDRR, 2015; UNDRR, 2020; Sarmiento et al., 2014; Haraguchi et al., 2016). Moreover, private sector business enterprises operate in a networked society which has increased both the speed and the breath of chain failure during a disruptive event which further justifies the need for building private sector resilience to catastrophes (Haraguchi et al., 2016). Business continuity planning and disaster recovery planning are two of the most commonly used mechanisms for building resilience of a business against external shocks (Sahebjamnia et al., 2014). While business continuity planning entails the development of appropriate plans at the pre-disaster stage with the aim of resuming businesses operations to minimum acceptable level immediately following a disruptive event, disaster recovery planning is aimed at facilitating full recovery of disrupted operations to their original state

during the post-disaster stage (Sahebjamnia et al., 2014). Apart from the above mentioned mechanisms, planning to seize post disaster opportunities, fostering employee resilience to have healthy levels of adaptive capacity cum building confidence during a disaster event and identification and designation of crisis leaders, have been considered as crucial for building business resilience to face disasters (Hatton et al., 2018).

1.3. Legal and institutional framework of addressing cascading effects of disasters in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka Disaster Management Act No.13 of 2005 constitutes the legal framework for Disaster Management in Sri Lanka. The National Council for Disaster Management [NCDM] chaired by H.E. the President constitutes the supreme governing body for Disaster Management in the country and the Disaster Management Centre [DMC] functions as its executing agency (Amaratunga et al., 2020; Ministry of Disaster Management, 2013; Disaster Management Centre, 2020). All decisions pertaining to Disaster Management [DM] are taken by the Ministry of Disaster Management while decisions are implemented by the DMC which is the responsible authority for coordinating disaster risk management activities at national level (Disaster Management Centre, 2014; Amaratunga et al., 2020). Disaster management activities in Sri Lanka are carried out adopting a de-concentrated approach while at the sub-national level such activities are coordinated by the District Disaster Management Coordinating Units [DDMCUs]. Each DDMCU is manned by a District DM Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator and over 20 DM Assistants who report to the District Secretary and the DMC (Disaster Management Centre, 2014). Provincial, district, divisional and Grama Niladhari [GN] level DM committees also play a pivotal role in coordination and resource mobilisation in the event of a disaster (Disaster Management Centre, 2006). Disaster Management structures at national and sub-national levels have been outlined in Figure 1.

Sri Lanka's National Policy on Disaster Management accords high priority to (i) response, relief and immediate recover of essential services and (ii) medium and longer term reconstruction and rehabilitation to an improved standard than prior to the occurrence of a disaster(Disaster Management Centre, 2014). The National Disaster Relief Services Centre [NDRSC], which functions under the purview of the Ministry of Disaster Management, is the main institution responsible in providing immediate relief services for displaced persons in affected areas and making necessary arrangements for recovery. The NDRSC has a ware house established in 2005 under the Ministry of Social Services which maintains a readily available stock of emergency relief items. These items include dry rations, water, shelters/ tents, hygiene kits, health equipment, kitchen utensils, boat engines, clothes, water pumps, water tanks and water purification apparatus. These emergency relief items are distributed in the event of a disaster through the relevant

District and Divisional Secretariats in the affected communities(NDRSC, 2020).

As mentioned prior, DM activities in Sri Lanka are carried out emulating a de-concentrated approach that corresponds with the administrative system in the country. Accordingly, while the NDRSC has been legally mandated to facilitate the provision of disaster relief services at national level, the authority to provide such services has been delegated to sub-national level administrative bodies, particularly the District Secretary at the district level, the Divisional Secretary at local level and the GN officer at community level. For instance, sanctioning the NDRSC to collaborate with sub-national level administrative bodies, the Sri Lanka Disaster Management (Amendment) Act No. 13 of 2005 vests the Divisional Secretary with the authority to provide disaster relief services as follows:

23A. During the period of a disaster, the Divisional Secretary of the Division having

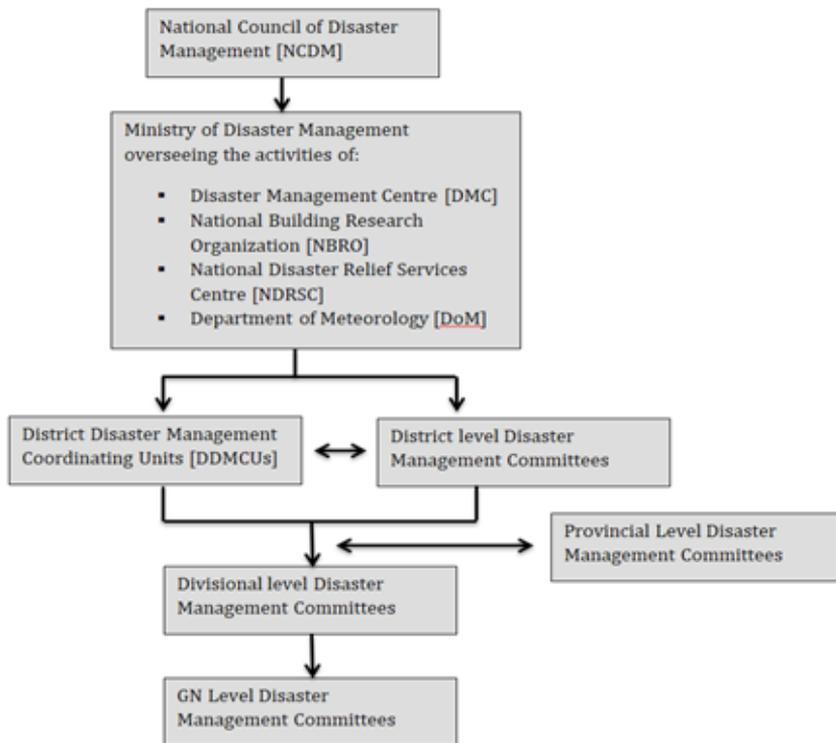


Figure 1. De-concentrated Approach to disaster management in Sri Lanka

Source: Adopted from Amaratunga et al. (2020)

jurisdiction over the affected area shall provide emergency relief in accordance with disaster management plans.

Similarly, the National Disaster Management Plan identifies District, Divisional and GN administrations as the “the main line of authority for disaster relief and other related aspects in post disaster situations” (Disaster Management Centre, 2014, p. 8). Accordingly, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a circular based on a Cabinet decision made on 11th July 2017 to transfer powers to District Secretaries to respond immediately on emergency disaster situations. The circular was referred to both District Secretaries and Divisional Secretaries in August 2017 and it confers power on District Secretaries to carry out the following functions during a disaster situation:

1. Independent decision making with respect to emergency rescue operations and providing relief services.
2. In the event of a disaster, executing disaster management activities by obtaining the assistance of Divisional Secretariats and the officers of other Ministries attached to Divisional Secretariats.
3. On occurrences of disasters, transfer of powers to relevant Divisional Secretariats enabling them to make decisions and to organise necessary matters while declaring relevant disaster situations with the knowledge of the District Secretary in a way that the life of the community will be protected.
4. In case of an emergency disaster situation, obtaining information about voluntary rescue groups within the district for saving, rescuing and providing relief measures and obtaining their service in such situations.
5. In case of an emergency disaster situation, performing necessary activities for the purchase of essential items as may be necessary.

Therefore, it is evident that sub-national level administrative bodies, specifically District Secretaries and Divisional Secretaries have been given legal approval to take autonomous decisions and actions pertaining to the provision of disaster relief and mobilising search and rescue operations in the event of a disaster.

With regard to medium and long term reconstruction and rehabilitation following a disaster, the DMC coordinates with various responsible ministries and agencies including the Ministry of Economic Development and National Housing Development Authority while funding for such activities is provided by donors such as NGOs and INGOs (Disaster Management Centre, 2014). Further, various government agencies including [but are not limited to] the Central Environmental Authority [CEA], Department of Agriculture, Land Use Policy Planning Division, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Resettlement and the Social Services Department provide advisory support for reconstruction and rehabilitation activities. Accordingly, medium and long term plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction are prepared following a disaster in addition to which business entrepreneurs are encouraged to formulate business continuity plans (Disaster Management Centre, 2014).

In an evaluation of the current disaster response mechanisms in Sri Lanka, Bulancea (2018) points out that the Government of Sri Lanka [GoSL] is predominantly focused on the provision of short-term relief and assistance for immediate recovery in the form of cooked food; dry rations; non-food items; emergency cash grants; short-term house rental allowances and compensation for damaged property. However, attention paid to building households' resilience and long term post disaster assistance is minimal (Bulancea, 2018). Elaborating on this, Sri Lanka has an extensive social protection system which encompasses 36 welfare programs which can be broadly classified into: 1) social insurance; 2) social assistance and 3) active labour market programs. These programs are implemented by various government agencies at both the

national and sub-national levels (Institute of Policy Studies, 2018). Although disaster responsive social protection is paramount for strengthening the resilience of households, the effectiveness of social protection programmes in Sri Lanka is negated due to certain identified gaps such as (a) exclusion and inclusion targeting errors in entitlements where certain deserving households have not gained any benefits while some less deserving households have benefited; (b) inadequacy of benefits to meet a household's minimum requirements under normal conditions; (c) insufficient coverage of informal sector workers; (d) overlaps and duplications due to lack of institutional coordination and (e) lack of flexibility and scalability for inclusion of disaster affected non-beneficiary households and new requirements that arise following a disaster (Institute of Policy Studies, 2018).

This chapter outlines the cascading socio-economic impacts of the first wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka and examines how the Government of Sri Lanka [GoSL] responded to these impacts against the described legal and institutional framework. The chapter further highlights the strengths and limitations of GoSL's approach to addressing these cascading effects with the aim of providing policy recommendations on the governance of systemic risks.

2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the findings of a larger study conducted on the integration of preparedness planning for biological hazards into Disaster Risk Reduction in Sri Lanka. It draws on a thorough review of secondary literature including scholarly articles, internet sources and reports published by national and international organisations pertaining to disaster management, public health and the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country. Further, it has cited details from a case study conducted in the Polonnaruwa district, Thamankaduwa Divisional Secretariat Division. This particular study was based on in-depth interviews conducted with the District Secretary of the Polonnaruwa District,

Divisional Secretary of the Thamankaduwa DSD and the Medical Officer of Health [MOH] of the Thamankaduwa DSD. In examining the cascading effects of the first wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka, the Polonnaruwa district is significant owing to two reasons. On one hand, the district of Polonnaruwa is a major rice producing area in Sri Lanka. Production and distribution of rice were categorised as essential services which thus, had to be uninterruptedly continued despite the pandemic situation in the country. On the other hand, the Kandakadu quarantine centre, one of the main quarantine centres established during the first wave of the pandemic was located in the same district.

Qualitative data was also gathered through in-depth interviews carried out with Assistant Directors of the DDMCUs in the Ratnapura, Badulla, Trincomalee and Kilinochchi districts. The districts of Ratnapura and Badulla stand significant in an analysis of COVID-19 as a systemic risk as with the advent of the Southwest monsoon said districts were faced with the risk of hazards such as floods and landslides occurring in parallel with the pandemic situation. The majority of the population in the district of Trincomalee constitutes of Muslims and Tamils, which are the largest ethnic minority groups in Sri Lanka. Hence these two districts were selected with the objective of obtaining a fair representation of all ethnic groups in the country. The questions posed during the interviews were aimed at capturing the role played by the sub-national level DM and health authorities in responding to the social and economic impacts of the first wave of COVID-19 and also the challenges faced by said authorities in this process.

Further, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews conducted with key informants including representatives from World Vision Lanka and Ceylon Chamber of Commerce in order to gain insights into the effects of the first wave of COVID-19 on the private sector and the role played by international organisations and the private sector in responding to cascading effects of the pandemic. Data was analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis technique

where the data was coded and subsequently organised under the main and sub themes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the chapter explains the findings of the study under two main themes: 1) the social and economic impact of the first wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka and 2) main stakeholders involved and the roles played by them in addressing the cascading effects of COVID-19. The latter has been subdivided into three sub-themes as follows: (a) national level stakeholders; (b) sub-national level stakeholders and (c) the strengths and limitations of Sri Lanka's approach to addressing the cascading effects of COVID-19.

3.1. The social and economic impact of the first wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka

The COVID-19 pandemic in the country called for the imposition of lockdown restrictions which in turn resulted in the closure of both government and private sector establishments. This posed a detrimental impact on Sri Lanka's key industrial sectors namely tourism, apparels, manufacturing and services. For instance, arrival of tourists in the country decreased by 71% in March 2020 and in the months following from April 2020 to June 2020 tourist arrivals were nil (Vithanage, 2020). Similarly, the Purchasing Manager's Index [PMI] of the manufacturing sector which was recorded at 54 in January, 2020 declined to 24.2 in April, 2020. This decline has been attributable to a fall in new orders, production and employment in the said sector (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). In addition to this, private remittances sent by migrant workers which contribute to around 63% of total export earnings in the country, decreased by 32% in April 2020 in turn posing a negative impact on Sri Lanka's foreign exchange earnings (International Labour Organization, 2020; Vithanage, 2020). This macro-economic downturn has inflicted economic suffering on individuals at a micro level causing loss of employment income. For instance, a recent labour market survey conducted among

2764 companies revealed that 1084 of these companies did not have the financial capacity to pay salaries to their employees due to the economic slump caused by the pandemic situation in the country (Wimalaweera, 2020).

It was emphasized by most key informants that Small and Medium Enterprises [SMEs] and the daily wage earners employed in the informal sector were the most vulnerable during and possibly as a resultant of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country (Key informant interviews, 2020). Confirming this statement, a recent survey conducted by UNDP and UNICEF (2020) among 2116 households in Sri Lanka, portrays the coping strategies employed by daily wage workers in the face of challenges posed by the first wave of COVID-19. The results indicated that out of the total number of daily wage earners who participated in the survey, 42% borrowed money, 35% pawned and 51% sold their belongs to cope with the financial strains imposed by the pandemic (UNDP and UNICEF, 2020).

Apart from these adverse economic impacts, the pandemic situation in Sri Lanka created some bleak social implications as well. Lockdown restrictions accompanied by other social distancing measures disrupted the face to face educational services. In response, the Government of Sri Lanka encouraged educational services to be provided uninterruptedly via online (Kadrigamar & Thiruvarangan, 2020). This has widened inequalities in free access to education and fuelled social unrest (Kadrigamar & Thiruvarangan, 2020; Key informant interviews, 2020). Elaborating on this, a representative from the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce asserted that,

“Education was disrupted for almost four months. The government took actions to continue the education uninterruptedly. See the social impact there. There are low income generating families who don't have access to computers and tabs and at the same time who don't have access to internet connections. Even if you have, who is going to pay for that cost? Only about 50% of the students participated. Later, in those places

student unions are strong. So later on they have started a campaign boycotting lectures because some of their colleagues can't participate"

Further, certain social implications have stemmed from the adverse economic impacts itself. Such implications include anxiety caused by job losses or job insecurity and stress experienced by household heads as a result of not being able to adequately provide for the family (Key informant interviews, 2020).

3.2. Main stakeholders involved and the roles played by them in addressing the cascading effects of COVID-19

3.2.1. National level stakeholders

As mentioned earlier, NDRSC is the responsible authority for coordinating the provision of disaster relief in the country. Regardless of the capacity to utilise the services of the NDRSC in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic in Sri Lanka, a Presidential Task Force was established on the 26th of March 2020 by way of Gazette Extraordinary No. 2168/8. The Task Force was established to 'direct, coordinate and monitor the delivery of continuous services for the sustenance of overall community life, including the food provisions produced in rural areas being distributed to consumers giving priority to the Districts of Colombo, Kalutara, Gampaha, Puttlam, Jaffna, Mannar, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu which had greater vulnerability in the eradication of Coronavirus in Sri Lanka' (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2020). With respect to the provision of disaster relief, the appointed Task Force was instructed to provide a grant of LKR 5000 to low income families and economically vulnerable populations such as daily wage earners as a single payment, for the purpose of easing their financial burden. Some of the economically vulnerable population groups entitled to this grant included teachers, private bus drivers and conductors, Ayurveda doctors not in government service but registered with the Ayurveda Medicine Council, handicraftsmen, women receiving maintenance, small scale tea estate owners and provincial reporters (The Department of

Government Information, 2020). In addition to this, two other task forces were appointed namely, to foster economic revival and poverty alleviation and another to ensure the continuity of educational services during the pandemic (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2020).

Considering the adverse effects posed by the pandemic situation on private enterprises, the GoSL introduced a stimulus package for SMEs for which the government allocated a fund of LKR 150 billion (Vithanage, 2020). The financial burden on SMEs was further lifted as the payment of income tax arrears was partially waived off (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Furthermore, the GoSL introduced a debt repayment moratorium which included a six month moratorium on interest payments of bank loans on tourism, garments, plantation and IT sectors and SMEs (International Monetary Fund, 2020).

In addition to this, INGOs such as World Vision Lanka played a crucial role in responding to the adverse economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Sri Lanka. For instance, it was revealed during the key informant interviews (2020) that World Vision Lanka targeted its emergency relief activities at families with children and households headed by females in sixteen (16) districts. The organisation identified suitable beneficiary households with the support of sub-national level authorities such as Divisional Secretaries and dry rations were provided to ensure food security. Apart from relief activities, the organisation was also committed in encouraging the families in these identified 16 districts to overcome the pandemic concerns via the execution of a livelihood development programme (Key informant interviews, 2020).

3.2.2. Sub-national level stakeholders

Activation of sub-national level Disaster Management Committees and DDMCUs

At sub-national level, the DDMCUs along with sub-national level Disaster Management committees including the district level, divisional level and Grama Niladhari level

committees played an important role in immediate response to the country's social and economic impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The activities carried out by these sub-national level disaster management authorities have predominantly involved coordination and resource mobilisation.

In certain districts such as the districts of Badulla and Trincomalee, special District DM Committee meetings were held to discuss, as to how to organise programmes to respond to the pandemic situation at district level (Key informant interviews, 2020). The meetings were convened by the Assistant Director of the respective DDMCU and were attended by the Regional Director of Health Services [RDHS] of the relevant district who in turn briefed all other attendees on the current pandemic situation [i.e. the number of cases, the gravity of the risk, behavioural guidelines to be followed and actions to be taken] (Key informant interviews, 2020). In Trincomalee, the meetings were used to devise a joint action plan addressing the pandemic with the support of the health authorities. Informed by these discussions, the officials of DDMCUs coordinated with the relevant district level officers and mobilised personnel [eg: the police and tri-forces] and other resources [eg: financial support from NGOs and INGOs] to perform various activities such as the provision of relief services [particularly the LKR 5000 allowance] to vulnerable groups, provision of food supplies to families who were self-quarantined, ensuring uninterrupted supply of vegetable production and distribution to markets and also ensuring that curfew or lockdown regulations and behavioural guidelines [eg: maintaining one metre distance and refraining from organising large gatherings] were followed. These activities were carried out in accordance with the specifications outlined in circulars that were referred to the District Secretary (Key informant interviews, 2020).

Establishment of separate committees to respond to the pandemic

In certain other districts such as the districts of Ratnapura and Polonnaruwa,

separate committees were established to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, instead of activating the Disaster Management committees. These committees were chaired by the District Secretaries of the respective districts and played a crucial role in the provision of emergency relief and short term response to the socio-economic effects of the first wave of COVID-19. The decisions taken at these committees were implemented at the divisional and Grama Niladhari levels. For instance in the district of Ratnapura, district level committee meetings were held every two (2) days and these meetings were represented by the public health authorities such as the Provincial Director of Health Services, Regional Epidemiologist, Deputy Provincial Health Director, Regional Director of Health Services and the Director of District General Hospital (Key informant interviews, 2020). The decisions taken at the district level committee meetings in consultation with the aforementioned health authorities were implemented by coordinating with relevant district level officers and other local and community level officers such as the Divisional Secretaries, Medical Officers of Health in collaboration with Public Health Inspectors [PHIs], Grama Niladhari [GN] officers and Public Health Midwives (Key informant interviews, 2020).

In the district of Polonnaruwa, the District level COVID-19 committee was represented by the Divisional Secretaries of the seven (7) Divisional Secretariat Divisions in the Polonnaruwa district. The committee met daily and at times twice a day, to discuss the progress of planned activities. The District Secretary who chaired the District committee played a significant role in ensuring that the quarantine centre established in the Kandakadu in the Polonnaruwa district had access to basic services such as water and other sanitation facilities (Key informant interviews, 2020). Furthermore, the District Secretary collaborated and coordinated with the seven (7) Divisional Secretaries to provide needed assistance in carrying out relief and surveillance activities at the divisional level. These activities involved coordinating with sub national level stakeholders [eg: GN officers, Development

officers, Samurdhi Development officers] in distributing the allowance of LKR 5000 among identified, economically vulnerable families in the division; ensuring that households which were isolated had access to essential services such as food; facilitating continuous supply of food to villages in the division and distributing dry rations to low income families and other vulnerable groups such as temples, children's orphanages and elders' homes (Key informant interview, 2020). Similarly, the Divisional Secretary had to ensure that necessary arrangements were made to pay the pension amounts to pension holders on due dates and the fuel stations were kept open while adhering to proper guidelines. The division has a garment factory which, stitched and provided masks to the public during the pandemic period and the Divisional Secretariat had to ensure that the factory continued to function during the lockdown period whilst adhering to proper health guidelines (Key informant interviews, 2020).

3.2.3. Sri Lanka's approach to addressing cascading effects: An analysis of strengths and limitations

In alignment with the recommendation of Kaufmann and Scott (2003) and UNDRR (2020) to emulate a multi-sectoral approach for effective governance of systemic risks, it is evident that there has been effective collaboration among various stakeholders ranging from DM authorities, health authorities, and private sector to international organisations in providing emergency relief services to affected groups during the first wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka. The DMC at the national level and the DDMCUs together with DM committees at the sub-national level have played a key role in facilitating such multi-sectoral collaboration which helped to improve both the efficiency and capacity of providing assistance and relief services. Another strength that was identified is the emulation of a decentralised approach where District and Divisional Secretaries have been able to make independent decisions pertaining to the provision of relief to impacted areas. This approach has enabled the cascading after

effects to be addressed in a contextualised manner by resolving problems and also by leveraging resources which are localised to a particular area.

However, inefficiencies have been caused by the establishment of new structures where existing structures such as the NDRSC could have been utilised in providing relief services. For instance, the grant of LKR 5000 distributed during the COVID-19 pandemic situation by the newly established Presidential Task Force was a new system of relief introduced to address the economic concerns of the affected communities. Given the newness of this system, there were considerable delays in providing the grant which in turn disrupted the efficiency of relief services and aggravated the vulnerability of certain population groups. Illustrating this, an officer from DDMCU, Ratnapura said,

“Under the Ministry of Disaster Management, when people are faced with a disaster and they are in relief camps or in the safety of their relatives'/friends' homes, we provide them with food. We provide them with food parcels if they are in camps or dry rations if they are in a relative's house. However, this procedure that is carried out under the purview of the Ministry of Disaster Management was not able to be carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. We proposed that this procedure be carried out at the committee meetings so that food supplies and dry rations can be provided to people who were self-quarantined. But this procedure was substituted by a LKR 5000 allowance that was given to vulnerable families. In our procedure, food supplies and dry rations are provided immediately following a disaster. However, in the provision of LKR 5000 there was a delay. So certain households that were self-quarantined may have been penalised during this time lapse” (Key informant interviews, 2020).

Further, lack of updated information about the village population at local level posed a challenge in accurately identifying the “real” beneficiaries for the provision of the LKR 5000 allowance at sub-national level. The lists that were available with relevant GN officers [eg: lists of Samurdi beneficiaries,

people with chronic kidney disease and people with disabilities in the respective GN divisions] were neither up-to date nor inclusive of other economically vulnerable groups such as the daily wage earners in the informal sector who may have lost their means of income during the pandemic period. According to the key informants, the issue was aggravated due to the fact that, the GN officers appointed to relevant GN divisions were not from the same village and thus they were less familiar with the households of the particular community.

Additionally, there was lack of consistency in the circulars issued at national level with regard to the distribution of LKR 5000 grant. It was revealed during the key informant interviews that several revisions were made to the original circular issued to sub-national level authorities, particularly Divisional Secretaries, on the distribution of the LKR 5000 allowance among economically vulnerable population. This created confusion when defining the target beneficiaries. In addition, when addressing the cascading effects of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka, emphasis has been placed on the provision of emergency relief rather than building resilience, which is contrary to UNDRR's (2020) proposals of building whole of society resilience with a long term focus towards managing systemic risks. It is possible that, at this point some of the shortcomings discussed, particularly, lack of up-to date information regarding

vulnerable population groups, inconsistency in circulars issued on deserving beneficiaries and inadequate focus on resilience building stem from certain deficiencies within Sri Lanka's social protection system such as targeting errors, inadequate coverage of informal sector workers, lack of institutional coordination and lack of scalability and flexibility to include disaster affected non-beneficiary households.

Apart from the limitations outlined, it was pointed out during the interviews that the stimulus packages offered for the SMEs were inadequate. Clarifying this, a representative from the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce stated:

“We analysed stimulus packages provided by 18 other countries. Some countries have even allocated 8-10% of the GDP for their stimulus packages. On an average it is about 3.5% of the GDP in most countries. But if you take into consideration the LKR 50 billion initially allocated, it is less than 0.5% of our GDP. So, it is something we can appreciate but it is not enough”.

In light of the quoted statement, it is plausible to state that inadequacy of benefits provided to the private sector may slow down the overall economic recovery and hamper the resilience of the private sector to external shocks. The strengths and limitations discussed have been summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Sri Lanka's approach, strengths and limitations in addressing the cascading effects of COVID-19

Stakeholders	Strengths	Limitations
National level stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective collaboration across sectors and levels • Emulation of a decentralised approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inefficiencies caused by the establishment of new structures where existing structures could have been used • Lack of updated information on village level population • Inconsistency in the circulars issued at national level • Inadequate focus on resilience building • Benefits provided being inadequate [eg: stimulus packages]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) • Presidential Task Forces • NGOs and INGOs 		
Sub-national level stakeholders		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District Disaster Management Coordinating Units (DDMCUs) • District Secretaries • Divisional Secretaries • Grama Niladhari Officers • Sub national level health authorities (eg: Medical Officers of Health [MoHs]; Regional Directors of Health Services [RDHS]; Public Health Inspectors [PHIs]) 		

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that pandemic situations are not mere health issues but hazards that create grave social and economic implications causing sustained vulnerabilities. However, mere response measures such as provision of emergency relief only offer short term solutions to persistent problems. Therefore, it is important to shift the focus from short term response to building economic and societal resilience with the aim of minimising the adverse economic and social implications arising due to disasters such as epidemics and pandemics. Adequate focus on building resilience coupled with an orientation for collective accountability is the cornerstone of effective and systemic governance of systemic risk. A resilience building approach calls for various policy initiatives such as the establishment of a systematic and an inclusive social protection system which is scalable and flexible in providing adequate assistance to non-beneficiaries affected by crises; strengthening the social protection of the informal sector; enhancing “state-citizen” interactivity at GN level to enhance the effectiveness of disaster recovery and resilience building programmes and establishing private-public partnerships to foster resilience of the private sector.

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