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Making Cities Resilient: My City is Getting Ready!

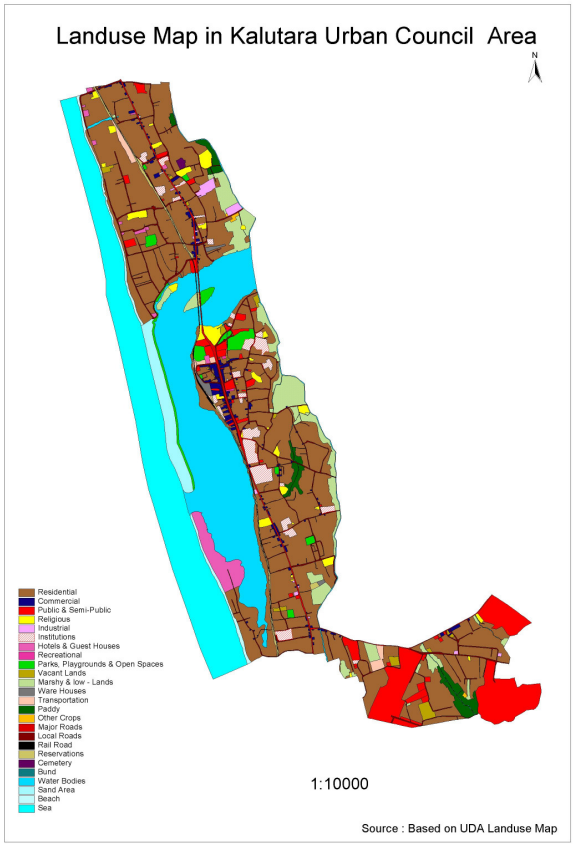
World Disaster Reduction Campaign 2010-2011

Kalutara is getting ready!

Kalutara, Sri Lanka

Population: 37,081 (2001)

Type of Hazard(s): Floods, Tsunami, high winds



Kalutara is situated in the Western Province of Sri Lanka on the coastline towards the south. The city is 42 km from the capital of Colombo; its land extent is 7.64 km^2, with residential area covers 45% of land, open spaces covers 24.4%, public buildings cover 11% and others 19.6%. At one time, the city was a seaport goods transported to and fro the interior via the 100 km-long Kalu river.

The Kalu River Basin lies entirely in the wet zone of Sri Lanka. The basin's average annual rainfall is around 4000 mm, ranging from 6000 mm in the mountainous areas and 2000 mm in the plains. The river has six major tributaries, and one of these, the Kuda River, has an 80 Mw hydropower dam. Kalutara city is prone to floods from the Kalu river and the occasional dam water release during heavy rains.

Kalutara was also hit by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.

Disaster Risk Reduction Activities

Kalutara city has commenced its disaster risk reduction activities since 2006, focusing on the community resilience approach.

Risk assessment. With stakeholder participation from a majority of the high-risk communities, participatory risk assessments were prepared for all 16 wards of the city, mapping the hazards of the area, vulnerability and the level of exposure, potential risks, and risk levels, resource availability and capacity for DRR. After digitizing the city hazard map, it was overlaid with the city land use plan to serve as an information base for development planning.

Risk-centered development. A set of prioritised drainage improvement proposals is in place as a result of cluster meetings held to identify grassroots level problems and proposals on drainage services. These meetings were followed by a city consultation workshop to validate the results and integrate the proposals within the city's urban development plans. Estimates for the top five activities under short, medium and long term implementation were prepared, and as of July 2010 some of the activities were completed by the city council.

Flood early warning. A flood model was developed through the University of Peradeniya, and after consulting the Irrigation Department, eight flood gauges were installed at the upstream of Kalu river. Selected members from the houses adjacent to the gauges were trained on monitoring the flood levels, decoding the data, and disseminating the appropriate warning to their community.

Community disaster preparedness. The high-risk communities underwent capacity building in community-based disaster risk management. The training facilitated their participation in the community flood risk assessment exercises. In addition, volunteers from the community were trained in a five-day course on emergency response and first aid.

Selected teams from schools were trained on disaster identification, disaster prevention methods, and disaster preparedness methods. Rain gauges were provided for those schools and students were trained to read and monitor during heavy rainy seasons and give the early warning information to the community through the Head Masters/ Mistresses.

Urban emergency preparedness. To strengthen the city's capacity for emergency response, the fire service department of the city is now well equipped with modern fire fighting equipment and trained firemen.

"The response to disasters by Kalutara Urban Council has taken a new paradigm shift. A body that was limited to serve its legal mandates, has changed to respond the peoples needs, particularly when they are in need the support of some organisations at their distress."

Al Haj M S M Mubarak,
Mayor of Kalutara