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Community preparedness for a multi-hazard scenario amidst the pandemic: A simulation-based training in Jaffna district

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Introduction

A co current hazard on top of COVID-19 pandemic could create a devastating impact on the health and disaster response systems. The likelihood of such a multi hazard scenario in Jaffna district is high. Training of community members and grass root level public health workers on a multi hazard scenario would be a future investment. Objectives of this training include,

1. To introduce dynamics of different multi-hazard scenarios to grassroots level public health workers, community-based organizations, and members of the disaster-vulnerable communities in the Jaffna district
2. To prepare them for an effective response to multi-hazard scenarios through community-based preparedness plans developed through collaboration between all stakeholders.

Methods



A scenario-based training was prepared with inputs from a panel of experts, Sarvodaya community leaders and Medical Officers of Health (MOH) in disaster vulnerable MOH areas



Four multi hazard scenarios mimicking real life events including a co current outbreak of dengue, malaria, a seasonal flood and a tsunami amidst the pandemic were considered.



A template comprising of scope and purpose, narratives and list of events, role of participants, messages delivered during the simulation, expected outcomes and the facilitator's role was used as a guide. Sixty participants were divided into four working groups and each group was expected to draft a preparedness plan to a given scenario.

Results

1



All four preparedness plans identified risk assessment, early warning, intersectoral collaboration, community engagement and risk communication as key operational areas.

2



Inclusion of community representation in each key operational area was emphasized.

3



Proactive engagement and coordination between community members and grass root level health workers were represented in each plan.

4



Each plan appraised for appropriateness for the local context, timeliness, operability, intersectoral collaboration and community involvement.

5



Following the appraisal each plan was revised to meet the objectives of the training by the expert panel and the training group. Trainees are expected to introduce these plans to their communities for review and rehearse their implementation.



- 30 Community members (including youth, women and faith leaders)
- 15 Sarvodaya Suwodaya members
- 15 Public Health Inspectors

Conclusion

Inclusion of vulnerable communities and collaboration among different stakeholders at grass root level are the key to preparedness planning for a multi hazard scenario amidst the pandemic. A simulation training based on real life scenarios would enhance proactive participation, cohesive decision making and facilitate collaboration between a diverse group of participants for a productive training outcome