EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HUMANITARIAN AID OFFICE (ECHO)

MISSION REPORT

Subject: Monitoring mission – SRI LANKA

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Date: 28 – 29 September 2016

Participants:

- ECHO: Tapan, ECHO New Delhi, Luc, ECHO Islamabad
- Partner: Oxfam

Places visited & Interlocutors:

Biyagama & Biyagama Divisional Secretary (DS)

Kegalle district

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY / HIGHLIGHTS

Very good, impressive, well organized support by the Sri Lankan government with army involvement – long term relocation needed will take a long time, 1 to 2 years at least.

Very good adequate and appropriate work by Oxfam and Sri Lanka Red Cross (SLRC).

The **situation will probably get more difficult during the coming months with the resumption of heavy rains**.

2. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Monitoring WASH visit after May 2016 landslides and floods where water submerged everything and stagnated for 2 to 3 weeks.

Heavy traffic on narrow roads making circulation long and slow.

3. ISSUES DISCUSSED, COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Meeting with EU Delegation Libuse Soukupova, First Secretary, Head of Cooperation, and Fabrizio Senesi, Programme Manager International Cooperation & Development.

The EUD is very long term: they are talking about something now and it will not come out until 2019. Immediate needs should be looked at out of MIP; timing and location do not match immediate needs. Present calls will respond to previous floods of 2014.

No hope for the EUD to address humanitarian immediate needs.

Visit of Yabaraluwa North GN (Grama Niladhari) division, Biyagama DS division, Gampaha district (administratively, Sri Lanka is divided into 9 provinces, 25 districts, 256 divisional secretariats, and approximately 14 008 Grama Niladhari divisions).

The village is located by the Kelani River, one of the main catchment basins in Sri Lanka. The villagers told us that the river level began to rise on 16 May and they had to flee that day. The water rose by meters and flooded everything, stagnating for 2 to 3 weeks.

Looking at a map, the flood appears surprising as the Ocean is less than 20 km away but the area is quite flat, with little slope and only little above sea level; on the other hand, it collected huge volumes of water flowing from its large upstream catchment basin.

SLRC did water trucking and **cleaned wells** – those are the main water source and most households have their own well; they are mostly equipped with an electrical surface pump that pumps water into an elevated reservoir feeding a household or two by gravity - + distributed house cleaning material + disinfectant.

In spite of correct and thorough cleaning, (dewatering, wall cleaning, chlorination) x 2 up to a number of times like 10, water from wells remains highly turbid; that is a reality for some 1000 families. People heat water and filter with clothes. People, and especially children, have suffered of stomach problems like diarrhea.

Samples of highly turbid water from a few wells

Latrine pits got filled and overflowed; same, contamination also happened with oil from garages – car stations.

On the other hand, almost paradoxically, water level is particularly low in wells this year, probably because it rained less; fortunately, the next rainy season is about to start.

Few households have domestic filters, which cost in the range of 4000 SLR # US$ 28. Crocodiles have appeared in the river.

When asked about needs, people mentioned electricity, which is missing during flood, it is needed for displacement centers + canoes for rescue. Regarding water turbidity, people cite central treatment – SLRC carries out such projects, using a good well to pump water into an elevated reservoir distributing by gravity. That may be good long term solutions or connect to neighbor nearby networks. Unfortunately, **proper water analysis** was not done – on our request, it will be done soon; it can help to advocate and support requests. Although tough, the immediate recommendation is to **clean wells again** and the situation should improve with time, as it did elsewhere.

Meeting with Divisional Secretary (DS) - Biyagama, Mrs W.H.V. Pushpamala.

She confirmed that the most affected locations were selected. She told us that this year saw the greatest impact of flood and the greatest relief from institutions, including private sector and government. 10 000 SLR, # US$ 69, were given the affected households and assistance will be given for housing. Land is an issue that will require time to resettle households living close to the river who are more vulnerable.

She thanked Oxfam and SLRC to assist and complement the government.

The government does not have any immediate plan to improve the situation of Yabaraluwa problematic village regarding its turbid water. Such complaints are normally addressed to water boards.

The DS told us the problem of rivers polluted by companies throwing their waste and effluents into rivers. The government takes action against those industries like Coca Cola to compensate and take remedial actions.

In Ussapitiya, Aranayake DS division, Kegalle district, a mobile treatment unit – classical flocculation, sedimentation, filtration, disinfection -, owned by German NGO Navis, is run by German Björn Steiger Stiftung / Foundation, supplying some 12.5 m3 of potable water per day, 500 m3 for the last month, to serve some 1000 people in 4 camps. The raw water is pumped from a nearby river; treated water is availed to the water board that trucks it to the camps and has it distributed. The initial plan was for 2 months; the government requested a 3-month extension until end of October and a new one that remains with no answer. The cost to run the water treatment unit is # 200 000 SLR # US$ 1389 per month, 6 operators / workers + running costs. If nothing else, the treatment unit is planned to go back to Germany after end of October.

Our recommended action: contact the German foundation to support the government request. In the worst case, Oxfam program manager Riyas said that Oxfam could install a treatment unit of theirs.

Meeting with SLRC in their Kegalle office (that was built with the support of the Danish Red Cross, with which they remain in good regular contact). Main concentration in most

affected Kegalle district. Main challenge: relocation and permanent housing - total requirement is around 1900; so far, only 94 houses committed; land is an issue.

Oxfam secured funding to assist needy people until June 2017.

After experiencing landslide, people are afraid when it rains significantly.

Another issue is tents and their duration because those will not last long and conditions will be bad when it rains heavily, regarding flooring + they are usually put up in floodable areas.

Visit of 2 camps, Halmessa, Gurullawala GN division, Aranayake DS division, and Deyanewela, Deyanewela GN Division, Kegalle district. Camps appear quite similar and people are happy with the WASH situation and with Oxfam and SLRC activities.

People spent first 2 months in an evacuation center. Their initial village is 15 km away. Men go for daily labor, mainly to a 10 km distant town. They used to have tea plant that they cultivated. Children go to their previous school, some 13 km away, by bus for some 60 SLR / d # US$ 0.4. A hospital is 15 km away. People expect in the future a house with a plot of land to cultivate, hopefully in 6 months to a year. An officer from the DS passed but no information was given.

People are happy with the WASH situation, the public health situation is normal; cash for work, # 2 d / month for about 6 women, is highly appreciated.

All places visited were very clean, well kept, maintained, including the sanitary facilities.

Some technical problems were found out, shared, discussed, with all concerned parties, including in the final debriefing in Colombo, as follows.

Pumping setup

In Deyanewela, the pumping was interrupted during our visit on 29 September 2016, we were told, because of air in the piped pumping system; then, air should be chased out by repriming, which may be difficult and is time consuming. To help to mitigate that problem, ideally an air-release valve/s should be installed in the low points of the pipeline, or taps can do the job + a pipe vertical extension by reservoirs. Additionally, a non-return valve/s could / should be added on the suction pipe at the possible lowest elevation, to keep water in the pipe so that repriming is not needed, even if a foot valve already exists in place as it can leak.

Latrine pits

Latrines are connected to simple, non-sealed bottom pits, whose capacity is about 2.4m3.

Some pits were observed to fill up while other ones were empty because the latrines closer to the inhabited area are more used.

The total capacity was calculated fine with more than 50 l/cap, theoretically enabling not to have to desludge / empty the pits.

Necessary improvement / correction: **have all pits connected as possible**, at the possible greatest depth, so that pits balance and fill up the same way, hopefully without getting full. That will be possible and implemented for all new latrines; for the existing ones, connections will be added, as deep as feasible.

Drainage

Stagnant water was observed in some locations, like around hand washing spots: make sure that **drainage** is well taken care of.

Corrugated galvanized iron sheets

Corrugated galvanized iron sheets (CGIS) are used for most constructions, kitchens, bathing areas, latrines. Unfortunately, the sheets used were observed gauge 34 (G34), very thin, fragile, very low quality, they will necessarily not last long, up to 3 months maybe. It is now known camps will last for more than a year. Then, better **quality CGIS**, at least gauge 32 or, better, less, **have to be used**, and partners promised that will be the case. In case G34 CGIS were already purchased and are already in stock, try to exchange them; if that is not possible, double them.

2 latrine blocks with soak pits and a hand washing point

Anchoring

Various taps and pipes were observed loose, needing to be better, stronger, more reinforced, properly soundly anchored.

PVC pipe

PVC pipe was observed laid on the ground whereas it needs to be protected from ultraviolet (UV) radiation so that it does not become brittle in little time – a few months instead of a normal life duration greater than 50 years -: have it buried or covered somehow, possibly with leaves, cloth or paint.

Meeting with Divisional Secretary (DS) – Aranayake, Z.A.M. Faizal

Again, he thanked and appraised Oxfam and SLRC for their good work and approach.

The DS seemed to know his division and its needs very well.

A thorough study was conducted by the National Building Research Organisation to assess risk regarding flood and landslide: where it is high, relocation will happen; where it is moderate, mitigation measures will be applied.

The greatest concern is relocation, which is addressed. The cost of material for a new house is 1 to 1.2 M SLR # US$ 6944 to 8333. Various institutions, Chinese, Habitat for Humanity, local donors, Dialog, have committed but gaps are remaining, including for current immediate shelter; the Sri Lanka army will provide manpower for the construction of houses like they did to setup camps. Physical land plots / blocks were also being identified but they also are a challenge. Physical construction will mainly be suspended during coming rainy season and will not resume until after it, next year after January – February.

On the day of our visit, 29 September 2016, dry rations and solar lights were being distributed.

4. FOLLOW UP

Our partners should / will have to look at IDP sites that are likely to get flooded – many sites are in troughs –, follow them and take care as much as possible.

Likewise, the shelter / tent situation should / will need to be followed.

Support continuation of Björn Steiger Foundation run mobile water treatment unit in Ussapitiya.

Technical points – our partner Oxfam assured us those will be taken into account, all the more as we are still at an early stage of the implementation of the project due to run till mid-January 2017

1 – Water for drinking is to be systematically analyzed – tested, at least biologically.

2 – Loose taps and pipes are to be better, stronger, more reinforced and anchored.

3 – All PVC pipes need to be protected from UV radiation.

4 – Place the right hydraulic accessories - non-return valves, taps - at the right locations to facilitate a smooth water flowing.

5 - Connect latrine pits to have their capacity maximized.

6 – Have stagnant water drained.

7 – Use good quality CGIS, at least gauge 32 or, better, less.