



SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF ROAD WIDENING PROJECT IN MULLAITHIVU DISTRICT

Sithamparanathan Uthayakumar
Suthesini Jeyakumar

Abstract

Disaster sociology is the study of the relationship between man, culture and surroundings. It is mainly a trend, related to Society and Environment. Therefore it is an essential need to develop the infrastructure of Mullaithivu district and an important activity in relation to the long term development. For that, Social Impact Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment are considered as important tasks. I collected the sample of Mullaithivu main road (A35) development programs. Here, two main roads are included. They are Mullaithivu-Mulliawallai Road and Mullaithivu- Puthukkudiyiruppu road. There are both main and secondary objectives in this study which can be listed as follows. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the social impact assessment and the secondary objective is to understand the positive and negative impacts on social, environmental and economic factors, due to the development of road particularly widening in the Mullaithivu District and to suggest some possible alternatives and to understand the challenges due to the widening of the road. This study is done within a short period, and the researchers have used the advanced data collection methods such as questionnaires and participation observation. It is better to follow the alternative methods to reduce the disadvantages of the project. This project is very important and policy makers should think that the project provides advantages rather than disadvantages. Therefore the project has to be welcomed by everyone who tries to develop the country through the development of the Northern Province.

Key words: Social Impact Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Social impacts, Disaster, Road development, Road infrastructure projects, Cost Benefit Analysis.

Introduction

Disaster sociology is the study of the relationship between man, culture and surroundings. It is mainly focused on the present and past conditions, problems and trends related to society and Environment. The aim of this study is to examine the past and future consequences of widening the road system in the Mullaithivu district in the post war situation. The number of tourists coming to Jaffna is increasing day by day and people are returning to their homes from the welfare centers to the resettlement area. Therefore, it is an essential need to develop the infrastructure of the

Mullaithivu district. Until the end of the war, there was an allegation that the LTTE is the group that denied the development process in the North. But now there is a rare chance to develop the country including the North. The widening of the roads in Mullaithivu is considered as a part of the development in the whole country. All the roads are damaged or are being damaged by the use of heavy vehicles. Therefore it is an important activity developing the road with the long term development and Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) are considered as important tasks.

Study area

This study covers the area of Mullaithivu Land Area (2516.9 sq.km). The study area is large. This area includes Six DS divisions. I collected the sample of Paranthan - Karachchi - Mullaithivu main road (A35) development program. The government handed over the responsibility to China to widen the roads. Under this plan, two main roads are included: Mullaithivu- Mulliawallai Road and Mullaithivu-Puthukkudiyiruppu road. In Mullaithivu, most of the people are Tamils and Hindus by religion. But Christians and a few Muslims are also there. Most of the people, (about 95%) are Tamil speaking people and the other 5% constitutes forces and police personnel. (Statistical Report 2017, Northern Provincial Council). The study area mostly concerns the public. (Mullaithivu area was heavily affected by the war). After the end of the civil war, it is going to be developed by the government with the assistance of China and India. China is responsible for the road development project in Mullaithivu. Under this project the infra structures of the Mullaithivu district will get developed.

Literature survey

There are only a few studies carried out on the transportation system in Sri Lanka and it is a very rare topic in relation to Jaffna district. Because the development scheme comes to Jaffna after about 35 years. As such, it is important to look at this development process with SIA and EIA. Since our task is about SIA, we are going to have concern on the Jaffna district. For this purpose we obtained information from some of the previous studies to carry out analysis of our data successfully.

The experience gained by the researchers through direct observation in the road widening projects in Jaffna after the end of the civil war was helpful, too. Additionally some newspapers and the previous studies also helped the researchers in dealing with such topic related to development of the road. In this way, following literature sources can be listed.

In the article, "Let us prevent air pollution caused by vehicles" by Central Environment Authority, (1998), Environmental Promotion Division has given a clear idea of air pollution and its impact to the environment as well as the society. And also they have come across with possible solutions to minimize air pollution caused by vehicles under the transportation system.

In the article by Nirali Shukla & H.J.Jani, (2018), Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is defined as an effect (both positive and negative) on a social issue resulting from infrastructure development projects (UNESCAP, 2001). Another study was carried out by Central Environment Authority, (1999) "Man and Environment". This book describes the relationship between man and Environment and the impact of human behavior on the environment. As such, this book gives us a clear picture on interrelationship between man and environment.

The article by Chandrasekhar, J.W, (1996), Transport and Environment illustrates the present condition of transportation system in Sri Lanka and also describes how transportation system impacts negatively on the environment (Noise pollution, Air pollution, Traffic congestion)

The article by Kumarage, A, (2002), entitled "Urban Traffic Congestion: The problem and its solution" has come up with the problems under the urban traffic congestion in Sri Lanka particularly in cities such as Colombo, Kandy and Gampaha. And also they commented long term and short term strategies as solution for the urban traffic congestion. These are the previous studies we used to come up with good descriptive analysis regarding social and environment problems in Kandy – Peradeniya transportation system. Furthermore, Newspaper articles, specially those from newspapers which were published in Jaffna as local newspapers such as Uthayan, Valampuri and Thinakkural were used.

Problem of the study

This study is conducted in order to evaluate the social impacts assessment in the project of road widening in the Mullaithivu district. It is carried out as a research in disaster sociology. The topic was selected with the idea that all the development process need social impact as well as disaster impact assessment.

But at the beginning of the project, there were so many criticisms from various groups of people in Mullaithivu . They are both negative and positive beneficiaries. If there is an argument regarding a development process that should be mentioned by the development team.

There are the problems that this project has direct and indirect impacts on the socio, cultural and disaster aspects. Thus the issues are increasing day by day as a result of the side effects of the project. Temples, hospitals, schools, private tuitions, homes and all the material social factors on both sides of the road have to be removed. These social changes can have an important effect on the cultural disorganization as well as social crimes. Therefore, it is important to avoid the strong negative impacts. This is the main problem of the study. This study covers the socio, economic, disaster, social and health problems. All these problems are interconnected to each other with the road development. That is, the positive

impacts can change to negative impacts or set backs in the future for example if the road is developed. Then, the transportation of the vehicles will also increase and it may produce Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere. This causes various environmental as well as social and health issues.

Significance of the study

Many social and environmental impacts under transport system have become a tremendous issue at present in our society. Therefore, we have to pay more attention to the following issues such as conflict between development and society, urban traffic congestion, air pollution, noise pollution, public condense which have been serious issues especially in urban cities such as Colombo, Kandy, Gampaha, Jaffna and Mullaithivu. Therefore, our study area has become one of the special area regarding the above issues. Due to the development of the Mullaithivu district after the post war era, there is a tendency of increasing the above issues. Considering transport issue, it was hard to find previous studies regarding transportation system in the above area. As such, this research focuses a close observational study on Paranthan – Puthukkudiyiruppu road which is on the progress of widening and development. Any development process definitely needs both social and disaster impact assessment. In this way, through identifying the social challenges, the study states the advantages and disadvantages of the objective. Therefore, the significance of the study is that finding solution for the disadvantage groups and providing the techniques for the development process to be efficient and sustainable.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study can be listed as follows. There are both main and secondary objectives in this study.

- Main objective

- To evaluate the social impact assessment

- Secondary objectives

- To understand the positive and negative impacts of social and Economic activities and disaster management, due to the development of road widening in the Mullaithivu District

- To understand the challenges due to the widening of the road and to suggest some possible alternatives

Methodology

Research methodology is listed below.

- Primary data collection method

- The primary data were collected through the following ways

- Focus group discussion

It was conducted with the undergraduate students who represent the Jaffna district and the study area.

- Direct observation

Observation and Consultation with organizations and institutions

Observation and Consultation with members of the public

- Secondary data collection methods

Literature review and study of background documents

local newspapers

Websites and

Statistics information from the Road Development Authority (RDA)

The information from the secondary sources is collected. In this way, the articles appeared in the newspapers and on the websites. The local newspapers such as UTHAYAN, VALAMPURY and YARL THINAKKURAL in the Northern Province were helpful in this regard. Additionally, the websites which published the information regarding the road development process in Mullaithivu were also consulted.

Introduction to SIA (What is Social Impact Assessment?)

Social impact assessment (SIA) is a sub-field of the Social Sciences that is developing a knowledge base to provide a systematic appraisal in advance of the impacts on the day-to-day quality of life of persons and communities whose environment is affected by a proposed project, plan or policy change.

Social impacts (also effects and consequences) refer to changes to individuals and communities due to a proposed action that alters the day-to-day conditions in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to meet their needs and generally cope as members of society.

Why is Social Impact Assessment important?

Social impact assessment is adopted to help individuals, communities, as well as government and private sector organizations to understand and be able to anticipate the possible social consequences on human populations and communities of proposed project development or policy changes.

When is Social Impact Assessment done?

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is done as part of the planning process and therefore

alerts the planner and the project proponent (through the social assessor) to the likelihood of social impacts. Like a biological, physical, or economic impact—social impacts have to be pointed out and measured in order to be understood and communicated to the impacted population and decision-makers. Social impact assessment provides a realistic appraisal of possible social ramifications and suggestions for project alternatives and possible mitigation measures.

What are the reasons for widening the roads?

It is a common question usually asked before doing a social impact assessment. The development of the road is considered as very important in the present context. When the situation is peaceful, usually the development activities also take place.

It is important to understand the benefits or the valid reasons for the widening of the roads in the Jaffna district. There are various reasons for the development activities. All these activities are considered quite important. Through analyzing the present conditions of the road, the following factors can be identified as the main reasons which lead to widen the roads.

- To reduce the accidents
- The population rapidly increased
- Transport vehicles increased
- It is easy to use the road route to export and import goods rather than using the sea route
- All the roads in Jaffna are bumpy
- No road development activities were done in the last 35 – 40 years due to the civil war
- It is said that the roads are the main cause for the accidents in Jaffna and the mistakes by the drivers
- Deaths and the disabling of people are due to the increasing accidents
- In case of emergency situation, it is difficult to rush to the spot since the roads are not properly constructed recently.
- Due to the ups and downs on roads, damages to vehicles are increasing.
- Tyres of the vehicles need to be renewed or changed often.
- Poor owners of the vehicles or the drivers spend more money for the repairs.
- Patients face difficulties while travelling.
- No check points, so drivers increase the speed to save time.
- Bus services from Jaffna to other parts of the country rapidly increased

It is an important thing to develop the roads and the drainage systems according to the neo urbanization. In the earlier period, there were small sized vehicles. But in the modern period, there are large vehicles and their uses are increasing. So the width of the roads should be changed according to the traffic problems of modern vehicles.

Advantages of the project

This report presents the findings and conclusions of the social impact assessment. This proposed road helps to reduce vehicular operation within the Mullaithivu district and reduces considerable travel time via the main roads which are going to be widened. Moreover, this project will also provide short term employment opportunity by engaging the rural poor people in the upgrading of the road. Such people based development efforts will reinstall economic activities in the area by creating long term employment and other opportunities. In the post war situation, the number of tourists coming to Mullaithivu is increasing day by day, people are returning to their homes from the welfare centers to the resettlement area. Therefore, it is an essential requirement to develop the infrastructure of Mullaithivu district. Until the end of the war, there was an argument that LTTE was the group that denied the development process in the north. But even now there are few chances to develop the country including the North. The widening of the road in Jaffna is considered as a part of the development in the whole country. The widening of the road doesn't solve only the transport crisis; there are various other advantages that can be identified. For example:

- Economic development
- Improvement of the quality of the life
- Communication and the infrastructure
- Development of the Commercial activities

Road route and the sea route

In the present situation, Mullaithivu roads are not in good condition. The government has to spend more money for the shipping to convey the goods. But it is said that using large containers is the easy way to reduce the expenditure of the transport. If Goods have to be transported by such large containers, it is essential to develop the roads in Mullaithivu.

Heavy vehicles and the road development

The containers can't move from the town to other local area. If the containers and other large vehicles have to move to other area, they have to face the "short bend road" very often. In this situation there is another issue, that is, because of these containers and the vehicles, overtaking of the vehicles from behind or giving way for other vehicles becomes very difficult. And there is another argument that the roads in Mullaithivu are not usable by large vehicles. All the roads are damaged or are

being damaged by using such heavy vehicles. Therefore, it is important to develop the roads for the long term development.

Saving times

When people build walls around the boundary of the land, they should be concerned about the future development; planting tree also have to be mentioned. If a tree is planted without long term consideration it may have to be cut down in future. First an appropriate place has to be selected to plant. If actions are taken such away negative effects of the development process will be reduced when the project of widening the road is implemented. If the people oppose the widening of the road, definitely the government will postpone the plan. Because when the government decided to widen the road with modern facilities in 1980 the people did not accept. As a result the government diverted the funds to another district. Therefore we have to be concerned on the development and the opportunity.

Development of the linkages infrastructure

When the roads are widened and developed there will be good transport service. Many institutions and firms will establish the buildings and develop their services in competition. As a result, the price of the land will increase in many folds. Therefore, the land owners can rent the land or sell the land at higher price than now. So the people can get benefits. Additionally the infrastructure will be improved automatically in a gradual manner. All these are the benefits for the people.

Income generation sources and pattern

Agriculture is the major income generation economic activity in Mullaithivu. Therefore, development of agricultural sector needs strengthening linkages to develop markets and it will substantially depend on the condition of the road network. A special social welfare program called "Samurdhi" has been operated and it covered all Grama Niladhari divisions in all DS Divisions. The Samurdhi beneficiaries are engaged in self-employment or self-income generation activities.

Role of Road Development Authority RDA

Even though the Road Development Authority (RDA) does not provide the compensation, they provide the materials for their construction activities. If they wish to follow the system of compensation, people have to give 15 to 20 feet land from both sides of the road. From the Centre of the road 50 feet becomes the property of the road development authority. If they continue with the compensation system, approximately 90% of the beneficiaries will have to lose their whole house with the land. Therefore, the RDA chief authority says that it is better not to follow the compensation system.

There were cottages in Singapore before development. When the government decided to develop the country the people opposed the plan. Because the people thought that their houses (cottages) would be destroyed. But the government did not give up the plan and continued the scheme. That is the reason for the development of Singapore. Therefore, the people have to understand the development process.

Disadvantages of the project

Due to the widening of the roads in Mullaitivu the reactions of the people can be both negative and positive. It is said that the cultural identities, the heritage properties and so many other important resources will be destroyed again after the civil war. In this way the SIA (Social Impact Assessment) is important in the project of the road development.

- Cutting trees and its effects in the society

A large number of trees which are many centuries old are cut down by the Road Development Authority. They do not consider the side effects of the activities. In this matter, as environmental sociologists the side effects have to be mentioned. On the sides of the Mullaitivu- Mulliyawalai road, so many trees are disappearing due to the road widening project under the construction scheme of India. It is said that, before cutting the trees which are on both sides of the roads, they have to evaluate the positive and negative impacts on society. That is carrying out social impact assessment is essential. When social impact assessment is considered environmental awareness should be mentioned also. In this context, cutting trees may produce negative impacts on people, animals and birds. They are not concerned about the bio diversity. Here the alternative ways should be considered. Nobody can say that these trees are not useful to the community or environment. In the evaluation following things should be mentioned by the development team which is responsible for the construction.

- Rapid negative social change

When the road widening and development projects are implemented rapid social changes will occur. It has been started with the starting point of the widening roads. When widening the roads, houses, walls, shops, supermarkets, temples, gardens, paddy fields, hospitals, schools, banks, fuel stations and so many institutions will undergo some kind of changes. But the activity of widening road must have certain planned social change. Therefore, before doing a development project, the development team has to consider these institutions and the people. Poor people can not rebuild their houses, walls, or even a small corner shop.

- Reactions of the people

As the development team and the labourers destroy the walls, buildings, statues, shops which are closer to the road. People refuse this development process. All the development processes have a policy on compensation. But here the owners of the houses or other properties are not provided with compensation for their properties lost.

- The role of compensation

This development project covers 4–5 feet on both sides of the roads. People have to donate the land to the road widening. But some people say that they are poor. There is no way to earn money. Only land was their property but now all are destroyed. They ask where they could go if they cut down their coconut trees and other usable trees. So here the compensation should be mentioned. People lose their land but for that they have to be paid. Unfortunately no compensation is provided for the affected beneficiaries.

- Economic conditions of the people due to the project

A poor woman says, “We don’t have any permanent occupation. We are poor, facing difficulties due to the economic hardship. We had a mini shop to earn something within our premises. Because our well is behind the house, and the kitchen and other main hall are near the road. If we have to give such amount of land, definitely we will have to move to another place. How can we go to another place? We are often pressed to sign on that agreement. Another case from Vattappalai says, “Our GS came to our home and said that if only you agree to give the land, we can give the resources to build a new wall behind 7m from the present place. Otherwise we cannot give any resources. But RDA will come and destroy your wall. After that we will never give the resources to build. So immediately we signed.” In this case, the situation of the negative beneficiary is to be mentioned. Here the RDA or the Government will not provide the compensation. According to the project, they are not going to give money for the difficulties. But they agree only to give materials such as stone, cement, and sand. It should be mentioned that people have to give the land without payment. They have to give the coolie (wage) for the workers to build their wall. The land is lost unreasonably and the people do not wish to have development.

- Potential behavior of the people

The agreement letter does not bear any other information in details regarding compensation. So people think that they are going to be deceived by the government. In that case it is sure that people will go against the government. And they may be engaged in unwanted activities. People think that these kinds of activities are not a proper step in the development process. Through this plan, a large number of the trees are going to be cut down. As a result, the Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) will increase in the future. Roads will be covered with dust from the vehicles because all the trees on both sides of the roads are cut down. As a result, the land becomes barren. The wind will bring a lot of dust to the roads and the houses which are near the roads.

- Development project in other parts of the country

Negative beneficiaries were provided with compensation in Colombo, Kandy and many other places in the country. As the people who lose their land are very poor, it is also important to note that the compensation is essential for the people.

But here an incident from the road widening project in “Kaaththaankudy” in Batticaloa can be mentioned. There was a road development project carried out

recently. The government did not provide compensation for the losers of the land. Instead of that, the government provided cement and other materials to build the wall and the damaged buildings. The government followed a strategy that first the wall of a UC member's house was destroyed. Then, the people agreed to donate their land for the development of the land. The contractor may use strategies like this in widening the roads in Mullaithivu.

Unidentified factors and the recommendations

According to this case, a development process does not have the positive way. Before doing this, the following things have to be considered. The residents of the area are the people who are going to undergo both positive and negative benefits of the project. Probably people do not like to get benefits by losing their important things such as land, house, shops etc. Therefore, the following things need to be identified in the project:

Volunteers and non-volunteers to give land, the needed land, numbers of the trees, family background of the people, amount of compensation, destroying bus stops, impacts on local labors, results of the ineffective planning, solid waste from construction materials and disposal of trash, extraction, transportation and storage of construction materials, impacts on local road net work, soil erosion, effect on water quality, natural flow paths and existing drainage reduce the impact.

All mitigation measures and environmental safeguards are specified in the EMP which is included in contract documentation in order to prepare the contractor's Environmental Management Action Plan (EMAP)): impacts on water resources, air quality, noise and vibration, impacts on flora and fauna, impacts due to traffic, personal safety, air quality and noise.

Conclusion

Any development process definitely needs both social and disaster impact assessment. The study was done to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the project. There are direct and indirect impacts on the socio, cultural and environmental aspects in this project. The issues are increasing day by day as a result of the side effects of the project. Temples, hospitals, schools, private tuition centers and homes on both sides of the road have to be removed. These social changes can have an important effects like cultural disintegration and lead to social crimes. Therefore, it is important to avoid the strong negative impacts.

The authority should mention the alternative ways in the widening of the roads in Mullaithivu. Due to the widening of the roads in Mullaithivu, the reactions of the people should be both negative and positive. It is said that the cultural identities, the heritage properties and so many other important resources will be destroyed again after the civil war. In this way the SIA (Social Impact Assessment) is important in the project of the road development.

Since the road widening and development projects are implemented rapid social changes will occur. They started with the widening of roads. When they widen the roads, houses, walls, shops, supermarkets, temples, gardens, paddy fields, hospitals, schools, banks, fuel stations and so many institutions have to face changes. But widening of roads must have certain planned social changes. Because before doing a development project, the development team has to consider these institutions and the people.

Finally, it is advisable to follow the alternative methods to reduce the disadvantages of the project. This project is very important. But policy makers should think that the project provides benefits rather than inconveniences. Therefore, the project has to be welcomed by everyone who tries to develop the country through the development of the North.

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