

**Landslides – A national threat**  
**A socio-economic study of landslide survivors of**  
**the Nuwara Eliya district of Sri Lanka**

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The entire world is becoming increasingly vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters, causing vast destruction to every aspect of human life. Landslides are one of the most common natural disasters in many countries around the world. Heavy rains, storms, earthquakes, wildfires, and various human activities are major factors resulting in widespread slope instability, the main cause of landslides.

Sri Lanka is no exception, and landslides are now becoming the most severe natural threat in many parts of central hill country. During the last four decades, several major landslides caused severe property damage and casualties. Relative to other recent major natural disasters, including the 2004 tsunami, very little attention is being given by the government and non-governmental organizations to landslide disasters, particularly in the recovery and mitigation stages, which create economic and social problems in affected communities.

The main focus of this study was the 2007 landslides in Hanguranketha and Walapone divisional secretariats in the Nuwara Eliya District. The investigation centered on the present economic and social situation of the people who were displaced from their home villages and moved to new villages constructed by the government. Most of the victims lived in temporary shelters for more than a year with minimum facilities. The research team studied how government and non-governmental organizations responded during the recovery, rehabilitation, and mitigation stages. Using interviews, the team spoke with survivors living in resettled villages about their socio-economic conditions during the pre- and post disaster periods.

Infrastructure facilities of these new settlements are in poor condition and remain unfinished. Most of the displaced people have lost their livelihoods, primarily their agricultural lands, and are now facing grave economic and social problems. The results indicate that the affected people continue to live under very poor conditions in terms of housing, occupation, income, health, infrastructure, and other physical and socio-cultural facilities. Geography of the area, poor planning, and lack of funds for proper recovery and mitigation strategies are the major barriers for improving the living conditions of people affected by these landslides.