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Community Responses at Environmental Injustice: A case of Sedawattha, Kelani River Reservation, Sri Lanka

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Researchers in the field of environmental justice are widely focused on policy studies on mainstreaming environmental rights of vulnerable communities and their social movements. This research is placed in the Sri Lankan context where very limited research studies were undertaken to address the environmental rights of vulnerable populations and their responses. The research so far contends the notion that recognizes these people as passive recipients of environmental injustice who were compelled to be silent as they represent the bottom layer of social power pyramids. Instead, this study emphasizes such community groups as active respondents who react continuously to get-rid-of their vulnerability.

This study has built on the empirical evidence of two community groups which reside inside an annual flood prone area and adjacent to a solid waste disposal site, respectively. The empirical evidence was collected through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and direct observations.

Findings of the study revealed that many of these residents are not capable of avoiding the occurrence of floods and pollution but they make strong attempts to save their lives, assets and livelihoods from being affected. Many such responses are small interventions, which do not significantly change events but are continuous efforts. Further, though this community is relatively weak in power yet there are many powerful actors involved with them who either suppress or praise the community actions. It is important to understand the level of ability to respond and the way of responding of these communities in order to empower them in urban planning practices. This research finding partially answers the failure of resettlement schemes made by planners for vulnerable urban groups as they all know that they are vulnerable, yet settle down in these locations by choice and attempt to cope with whatever comes their way.