**SUMMARY REPORT**

**QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL INFORMANTS AND OFFICIALS LINKED TO LANDSLIDE RISK IN TEA ESTATES**

**Location: Meeriyabadda Tea Estate**

**May 2, 2021**

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# **Background**

1. **Location**

The Meeriyabadda tea estate is located in the Haldamulla Divisional Secretariat Division in the Badulla District which is in the Uva province of Sri Lanka (Figure 1)[[1]](#footnote-1). It is situated in the 6.7606130 Northern longitudes and 81.0171550 Eastern latitudes. The estimated terrain elevation is about 1010 m from above the mean sea level (MSL).

Map

Description automatically generated

Figure 1 Location map of Meeriyabadda tea estate and relocated location

1. **British history of the tea estate**

The tea plantations were commenced in 1880 by A. Gibson (1880- 19891). The estate was under the British administration till 1891 under the management of several managers: Boyd, E.W.M. (1885 - 1888); de Winton, E.H. (1885 - 1891); Thompson, C. (1880 - 1881); Brownhill, G.D. (1880 - 1881).

1. **Landslide vulnerability**

On the 29th of October 2014, a massive landslide occurred in the Haldummulla Divisional Secretary Division area of Badulla district. The affected area was an identified landslide-prone area and located in a tea estate known as Meeriyabedda Watta in Koslanda. The landslide was triggered by monsoon rains and was about 3 kilometers long. From that landslide, 37 people were found dead or missing. The landslide destroyed 70 houses completely, leaving over 275 individuals homeless. According to [National Building Research Organisation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Building_Research_Organisation), it had issued a warning of possible landslides on the day before the incident. The Government of Sri Lanka initiated a relocation program for the victims and constructed 75 housing units at Makaldeniya estate. However, still there are vulnerable communities at the Meeriyabadda division and nobody has taken any action to move those communities to a safer area. Hence, Meeriyabadda's existing community has high exposure to the next event.

# **Summary of Key Findings**

**a. Socio-Demographic Characteristics**

The five-selected respondents of this survey worked at the Meeriyabadda tea estate as a supervisor, a driver, and tea plucker who experienced the landslide and relocated later. Apart from the work at the Meeriyabada estate, they had several other income sources such as cultivations; animal husbandry (cattle, goat, and poultry farms); and small-scale businesses on building construction. None of the respondents are now working at the estate. Instead, they are engaging in several other kinds of jobs such as small-scale businesses (e.g. retail shops), work in other private companies as drivers, store keepers, labourers; and work in other cultivation sites (e.g. Fruit and vegetable farms). The main reason for changing their jobs was that they were relocated away from the estate that made them difficult to access to daily work. Also, a few of the respondents have migrated to Colombo for finding alternative employment. Most of the respondents were not in debt to anybody at the time of the landslide. They had a good income source while they were in the Meeriyabadda estate. However currently, few of them have taken loans for various purposes where they have to repay within the next couple of years.

1. **Working Arrangements**

Overall, the respondents are satisfied with their occupation done at the Meeriyabadda estate. The estate management had provided accommodation facilities and other basic infrastructure facilities for its workers. Moreover, they are satisfied with the living condition they lived at the Meeriyabada estate. However, they had the fear of landslide risk after receiving the relocation notice. Considering the current location, all have got the landownership of their new houses whereas the estate houses were belong to the plantation. However, the majority of the respondents are dissatisfied with the plot size of their current lands. Each relocated family was given a seven perch land with a house and they were dissatisfied with the space available to carry out other income-earning activities which they carried previously. Especially, they lack open space for animal husbandry. Therefore, the respondents experience economic difficulties due to the loss of harvest, live stocks, and other assets by the landslide as well as the relocation. This is mainly due to the reasons of distance to the previous workplace, lack of new employment opportunities in the new setting, and lack of skills and financial assets to start a self-employment activity. Water and electricity are available in the current location. However, the water is contaminated and most of the water-borne diseases have been reported because of low-quality water.

1. **Physical Health**

Respondents mentioned that the working conditions in the tea plantation did not lead to health problems for them or their fellow workers. If accidents occurred during working hours, the estate provided the necessary medical facilities for them. Further, the estate is equipped with medical facilities for workers such as an estate dispensary. If any worker suffers a serious illness, they were transformed into the Koslanda Hospital, operated by the government. Moreover, they have not suffered from any special disease after joining the tea plantation. However, they have a few problems related to bee and wasp attacks while working in the field.

1. **Environmental Hazards**

Landslides, thunderstorms, and strong winds are the natural hazards that had affected their work and living conditions in the tea plantation. They have experienced fallen trees on the roofs of the cattle sheds during heavy winds. However, no injuries were occurred apart from the property damages. Whenever damages to roofs were reported during disasters, the neighbors had supported them. Apart from that, the plantation administration had gives their attention to protect vulnerable properties by removing dangerous trees. Affected communities due to the landslide incident, were resettled to Poonagala and the respondents stated that their current location is safe from environmental hazards. Noteworthy, few people are still living in the Meeriyabadda estate and they have a high risk of another possible landslide. The risk of the Meeriyabadda estate area is very high when compared with the other areas of the country.

1. **Experience of Landslides**

The respondents observed several early warnings of landslides such as appearing of small cracks, the color of the water changed into brown the day before the landslide event. Even though they informed about those signs of a landslide, the plantation administration had not taken the necessary actions to evacuate people. In addition to that, the government has disseminated the landslide warnings to the community but they have not considered them. Even when they heard warnings multiple times, they misbelieved that a landslide won’t occur in their estate. Furthermore, they had not experienced any landslides near the Meeriyabadda estate before that incident. Approximately 37 people lost their lives due to the disaster. All of them were estate laborers and their properties (houses and farms) were destroyed. The disaster victims have received compensation from several sources. The government has provided a house with the land. The respondents are not satisfied regarding the plot size of their land. The respondents complained about the limited space of the land which prevents them from continuing cultivation or animal husbandry. Further, they pointed out that the significant distance from the settlement to the workplaces, lack of new employment opportunities in the new setting as the key issues of relocation. The plantation company has only provided relief including food for the victims when they lived in temporary camps. However, they did not provide any support thereafter. Additionally, the respondents complained about the ineffective ways of disseminating the donations among the victims during their recovery process.

1. For the purpose of administration, Sri Lanka is divided into 9 provinces. The Uva is one of those nine. Each Province is divided into several districts. Badulla is one such district in the Uva province. Each district is divided into Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSDs). Haldamulla is a DSD in Badulla district. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)