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Converting Threats into Opportunities?

Ithikulam - Village Profile

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Preface

The IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 is a joint venture of the Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP), Sri Lanka and the Centre for Advanced Training in Agricultural and Rural Development (CATAD) from Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. The study is funded by IFSP with the financial assistance of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ) and is carried out by an interdisciplinary Sri Lankan-German team of young researchers and practitioners.

The IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 explores socio-economic coping strategies and changes in land use pattern of conflict-affected communities in Trincomalee District. The study follows the livelihood system approach developed by the Department for International Development (DFID), UK.

The preliminary results of the IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 are documented in then IFSP Working Papers 37 to 45. The different steps of knowledge generation along the consecutive research phases and the research results are presented for further discussion.

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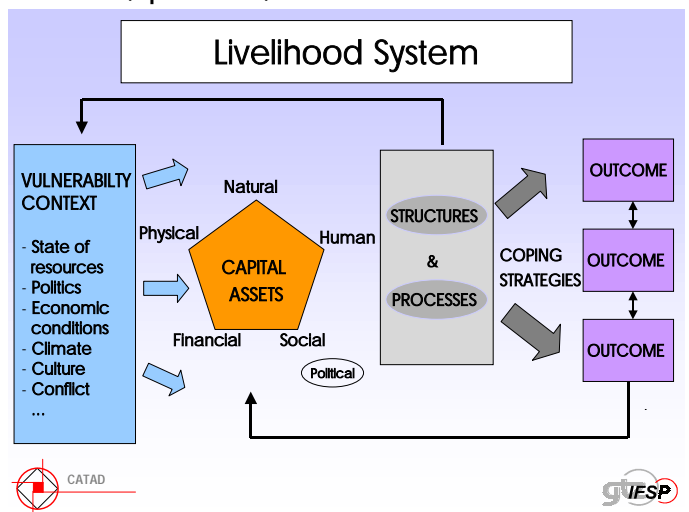
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The prevailing conflict and war in the Northeast Province (NEP) of Sri Lanka have resulted in an alarming degree of malnutrition and impoverishment. The most pervasive deprivation of people originates from the loss of lives, physical destruction and psychological trauma, internal displacement, the breakdown of community and institutional networks. The severely restricted local economy prevents individuals from approaching opportunities. The vulnerability of households that depend on fishing, small-scale labour, and of female-headed households in particular, is striking. How do people, especially vulnerable families, manage to survive in such a political, social and economic environment? Are livelihoods sufficient to sustain a living for people? It would be essential for the various actors and agencies in rehabilitation and development to gain a thorough understanding of how people cope with the prevailing conditions of a protracted war in order to derive appropriate interventions strategies.

The Livelihood System Approach (LSA) provides a framework of analysis to better understand the complexity of community life and behavioural pattern of people in a particular context. The LSA differentiates between three levels of analysis:

- (i) *Vulnerability Context*: what are the social, political, economic and natural trends and shocks and local cultural practices, which affect livelihoods? Villagers face these frame conditions without being able to change or influence them.
- (ii) *Capital Assets*: what are the resources a household can rely on. We distinguish six forms of capital: natural, social, human, physical, social and political capital.
- (iii) *Structures and Processes*: structures (organisations, laws, policies) and how these are performing (processes = rules of the game, (dis-)incentives) define people's livelihood options.
- (iv) *Coping Strategies*: How do people combine their capital assets while making use of existing structures and processes in order to carry out livelihood activities under the prevailing vulnerability context?
- (v) *Outcomes*: livelihood activities derive certain positive and negative outcomes for the household and its capital assets.
- (vi) *Feedback loops*: what are the effects of these outcomes on the capital assets of both the household carrying out the livelihood activities and those of other households or communities?



The present village profile of the Ithikulam village, Pallikuddiruppu G.S. divisions, uncleared area of Muthur D.S. division, follows the logic of the LSA and analyses behavioural pattern of villagers under the special vulnerability context of an agricultural village in uncleared area, which largely depends on highland cultivation.

1.2 Methodology and Research Methods

A research team comprising German and Sri Lankan scientists from multi-disciplinary backgrounds carried out the action- and decision-oriented research project in Ithikulam in the period of August to September 2001. The key research phase was in the week from 13th to 17th August. Existing knowledge gaps were further investigated in a second field phase in September. The team employed a wide range of qualitative research methods, namely in-depth interviews with individuals or families, observation, focused group discussions and semi-structured interviews with key resource persons. In addition, selected rapid rural appraisal (RRA) tools were applied where appropriate (e.g. village walks). The teams used unstructured interview guidelines, which were adapted according to the flow of conversation, newly erupting information or other local conditions. Thus, the investigation was largely explorative in nature. Informants in the villages were randomly selected for interviews focusing on different social groups in the community (widows, farmers, traders, village leaders, etc.). The team formed two thematic sub-groups one focusing more on socio-economic coping mechanisms and one on land use pattern.

The research team also co-operated closely with the field staff of IFSP, namely the respective community mobilisers of the area. For preparation, the team utilised existing secondary sources available at IFSP, viz. poverty profile (village data sheet), and other planning documents, and interviewed key field staff of IFSP. The Sri Lankan team members largely conducted the interviews in the villages and interpreted for the German team members. After each field day, the different sub-groups met to discuss the progress of research and key issues of the day in order to derive the focus of investigation for the consecutive days.

The research team explained the purpose of the study to the villagers in a general gathering together with the Grama Sevaka (G.S.) and the Samurdhi Development Officer (SDO) followed by focused group discussions with farmers, a women group and village-level officers. A general difficulty in conducting the field study was that basically all the men were gone for wage labour in paddy harvest. This was still the case during a refinement phase of two days in the second week of September.

2 VULNERABILITY CONTEXT

2.1 Basic Data

Ithikulam is a small village with 48 families¹ situated in uncleared area in Muthur division, Trincomalee district. The Pallikuddiruppu G.S. division to which Ithikulam belongs covers 6 villages with around 450 families. The villages are Pallikuddiruppu, Thangapuram, Sreenivasapuram, Sinnakulam, Marawatattaikulam and Ithikulam. The first three are ancient villages, found in the registry, the other three are recent settlements.

2.2 Historical Background

Chena cultivation in the highlands of Ithikulam started in the late 1960ies. But most people came to live there in 1985 when an army camp was put up in Sreenivasapuram. Resulting tensions in the area were responsible for the fact that people lost their belongings several times and finally fled to Ithikulam. Another wave of people arrived around 1990.

When the area of Ithikulam got under the control of the LTTE in 1985, Muslims who had already cleared and cultivated land close to Ithikulam (see on map) were displaced to Thoppur. Some of them still have their legal land documents and others try to apply for such documents. This land is not cultivated today and up to now, Ithikulam farmers do not seem to have applied for tenancy on this land.

Villagers told that in 1988 army asked them to reoccupy their houses in Sreenivasapuram. It seems that the army suspected that LTTE used these abandoned places as hiding places.

So only those people with very poor houses in Sreenivasapuram remained in Ithikulam, whereas the others went back temporarily.

It is common practice in the ancient village of Sreenivasapuram that parents give their cultivation land as dowry to their daughters.² The parents then move from Sreenivasapuram to Ithikulam while their children now cultivate the family land in the ancient village. On the other hand, some of the displaced villagers do not want to move back to the traditional village, either because they got married in Ithikulam or because of security reasons.

***Chena* and Highland Cultivation**

Chena cultivation refers to shifting cultivation on highland, which was a traditional form of land use in the dry zone. The land use practiced in Ithikulam is not *chena* cultivation in this narrow sense: farmers do not shift their cultivation area anymore. However, since local farmers mostly refer to *chena* cultivation for highland cultivation, we are also using this term in the present research report.

¹ The average size of family is five people.

² Generally land is not given to sons unless the parents have no daughters.

2.3 Security Situation

In Muthur-East 10 G.S. divisions fall under the category of uncleared area, which is controlled by LTTE.³ Transfer of goods and mobility of people is restricted and controlled by security forces based in camps at the entrances to uncleared area. At the present situation there are still occasional intrusions of the army that make people leave their houses and hide in the jungle. Compared to former times with more tension (5-6 years ago), villagers said that the presence of foreign NGOs has decreased the harassment by the army. Another change mentioned was the possibility to go out to cleared area and do paddy work close to the main road controlled by the army. ID-cards are appreciated for improving personal security. One month ago the security restrictions were relaxed, so people feel better at present time.

These security restrictions mainly impede the flow of goods from and to uncleared areas and thus marketing opportunities for farmers in uncleared areas. It also limits the possibility to utilise agricultural inputs for cultivation. Furthermore, close to the borderline, some paddy fields are not accessible for Muslim landowners, since these are not allowed to enter uncleared area. The use of jungle resources is restricted by the LTTE.

2.4 Culture

Pallikudiyiruppu G.S. division's six villages are of the same caste. Chenaiyoor and Ithikulam people equally say that they belong to a higher caste. In both Chenaiyoor and Pallikudiyiruppu G.S. divisions, people do farming which is a reputed occupation. But Chenaiyoor people are more educated and wealthier. Doing paddy cultivation or *chena* cultivation has no influence on the caste system, but nevertheless some relevance for social prestige. Paddy cultivation is more prestigious although it gives less income because it needs more investment and paddy cultivators are often employers. The neighbouring village of Paddalipuram is considered to be of lower caste people as they descend from Veddahs.

2.5 State of Natural Resources

In Ithikulam rainfed highland cultivation on fertile red soils close to the homesteads is possible between October and March. The paddy land fed by the waters of Ithikulam tank belongs to people in Chenaiyoor. Ithikulam is surrounded by shrub land forest that can be used for firewood collection but is also the home of wild animals like elephants and wild pigs, which threaten the fields of the farmers. Animals are rarely hunted apart from some wild pigs that are caught in traps along the fences. Some useful kinds of trees can also be mentioned as natural capital like mango trees and planted jackfruit trees. Others use wild trees for medical purposes.

³ According to the D.S. in Muthur, August 2001. The government uses the term 'uncleared area' to describe areas and locations of the Northeast Province, which are subject to dispute between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). These areas are not accessible without prior approval of the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

3 STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

3.1 Infrastructural Facilities

Ithikulam can only be reached by dirt roads, which are often in bad condition during rainy season. It is situated close to the Ithikulam tank that was rehabilitated for the first time in the early 70ies. Drinking water is supplied by only two wells and in *yala* people often have to face water scarcity. The houses are mainly made of mud and covered with *cajan* or tin roofing. Some families have put up toilets with the help of Oxfam. Electricity is not available. There are two small shops which supply the villagers with small amounts of the most necessary daily items, exceptionally also in advance without immediate payment. In the privately owned mill people can turn their paddy into rice.⁴ Bran is sold in the mill as cattle-food. For milling rice people can use the mill of Nalloor and Sinakulam. Sinakulam and Maravattaikulam also have their own mills. Concerning health matters, there is a indigenous doctor in the village who gives his services to people although it is not profitable for him. There are hospitals in Thoppur and Muthur, but the one in Thoppur is not functioning at present as the army has occupied it since some years. A traditional doctor can be found in Thangapuram and an ayurvedic general doctor in Sreenivasapuram. For school children have to go to the neighbouring village Pallikudiyiruppu or Sinnakulam. A nursery school is in the process of being built with the help of Oxfam.

3.2 Relations to Other Villages

Different forms of relations to the surrounding villages can be observed: working relations to Chenaiyoor, close family relations to Sreenivasapuram and business and kinship relations to Paddalipuram. Paddalipuram people also come to use the mill of Ithikulam. Some Ithikulam villagers nowadays build new houses in Sreenivasapuram where they still possess their homestead land. There seems to be no exchange of labour between the two villages.

There are some cases of marriages from Ithikulam to Paddalipuram. We assume that the fact that it is women who get married to men from Paddalipuram is due to economic reasons: Being from a lower caste, Paddalipuram people demand lower dowries. There is no preference for residence of the couples in either Ithikulam or Paddalipuram. Regarding market relations, Ithikulam villagers sell rice processed in the mill in Ithikulam to Paddalipuram villagers and also inform them of wage labour opportunities, for example in Chenaiyoor. Tenant cultivators in Chenaiyoor in turn said that they rely on a contact person in Ithikulam for assembling wage labourers together.

3.3 Support from the Government

The big size of the division makes it difficult for the G.S. to allocate enough time for all villages. According to the S.D.O. almost all families in the village get Samurdhi stamps. New families coming from other villages or newly married

⁴ During harvest times the daily income of the mill can rise up to Rs.500 per day.

couples starting an own family within the village are not eligible for stamps. One reason for this might be the fact that the S.D.O. has a quota of stamps for the area he is working at. He transfers stamps to poorer families only in case of death of the stamp holder or in case of a stamp holder finding government employment.

In order to find some criteria the S.D.O. claimed that a person is not eligible for stamps when working at a government office, buying land or machinery, having a big shop, a three wheeler, or enough money for a telephone connection, namely people who are comparatively richer than others. As the food stamps are a prerequisite for other allowances this might influence people's investment choices. Villagers claimed that they would not get other governmental support because they did not register in a refugee camp after being displaced. But it was found out that some villagers at least received a governmental subsidy for building houses.

3.4 Support from Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Presently Oxfam is the only NGO working in Ithikulam. Before that, NGO interventions had stopped for four years. People believe that this was because villagers defaulted to pay back loans provided by the EHED. Oxfam started with a loan scheme nine months ago and formed a special Oxfam society, which is presided by an area leader. First, Oxfam provided loans of Rs.5000 for goat rearing. After it had been paid within 6 months back the society's members were eligible for another loan for building toilets or buying tin roofing material. All families in Ithikulam took part in the goat loan scheme. The money was paid back throughout. According to the villagers, the LTTE had a big influence on this repayment and thereby intended to encourage NGOs to continue development work in the village. But without locally established community-based organisations (CBOs), the village has a small chance to attract NGOs, because these have no official body to address.

3.5 Village Organisations and Leadership

There is no visible leadership in this village (informal village leader or *vatta vithan*). Resource person for resolving disputes are the G.S. and the Samurधि Officer in charge as well as the president of the temple society, but many villagers said that basically all decisions would be taken and controlled by LTTE. This includes not only the construction of infrastructure like wells, schools and houses but also access to new land for highland cultivation and the payment of wage-labourers. Concerning the latter, the money is paid to the LTTE and then redistributed.

Village Life and LTTE

The LTTE influence village life in many aspects: people have to get permission from the local power holders for cutting firewood in the jungle, for brick making and for clearing the jungle for land preparation. LTTE restricts the use of jungle resources. The local power holders also involve in dispute resolution on village level and levy taxes. One person also mentioned that they would not allow early marriages.

The LTTE is also the main conflict resolution instance at least if it not solved within the family.

There is no CBO working exclusively for Ithikulam and it seems that Ithikulam is represented in CBOs working on the G.S. division level. A women society committee was formed by the head women society from Pallikudiyiruppu, but no performance has been observed yet. The temple society is a group of six people confine their activities to issues related to the temple and festivals. Instead of a funeral society, occasional informal money collections take place to support affected families. The parents-teachers society of Pallikudiyiruppu and Sreenivasapuram also covers Ithikulam and Sinnakulam.

3.6 Decision-Making in the Family

It seems that it is the wife, who generally manages all the money earned by the household. Basically she decides how to spend it on daily items, especially if she goes to the market herself. Women are also in charge of weighing and selling products to traders who come to the village. It was told that concerning bigger expenses the couple normally discusses decisions to be taken. The same would be the case for taking up additional activities of the wife if more money is needed. Normally the one who is involved in an activity also has a say on it. Family matters are decided together, e.g. investment in farming equipment is the domain of men, whereas farming activities can be decided upon together, e.g. the choice of crops. Where women's engagement is needed, they also take the decisions. This applies to plugging and weeding activities, goat and poultry rearing.

As the men are often away for some time, temporarily migrating to other areas for wage-labour, women often have to take all crucial decisions on their own. This, according to one villager, includes the selling of goats, sending children to school and even of taking loans. When the men come back they would have to accept all the decisions taken during their absence. After marriage the dowry belongs equally to wife and husband. It is given in the forms of goats, cows, draught oxen, carts or houses to all daughters equally. Therefore decisions on selling any animal would normally have to be taken together. In spite of the general rule that men hand over money to the wife in order to take care for all needs of the family, alcohol consumption by men shows that part of the money stays with them.

3.7 Loan Arrangements and Savings

Loans are normally given with 50% interest by *mudalalis*. But people not only take loans from traders but also from the mill owner and other people inside and outside of the village who are somewhat better off. Loans to be paid back monthly with 5% interest were mentioned. Sometimes the repayment is given in the form of firewood or vegetable at a low price. Pawning of jewellery is also practised in Ithikulam.

Traditional Saving: *Seetu*

Seetu is a form of group saving. Every member pays a monthly contribution in cash or kind and will therefore be eligible for a bigger amount of money or goods when it comes to his or her turn. Getting the monthly collection is done in an order arranged beforehand within the members. The turns between the members are attributed by raffling. Sometimes the members who are willing to wait longer for their turn get some percentages more than those who profit first. There is always one person who is mainly responsible for the monthly collection of the payments. He or she will also profit from this duty by getting a slightly bigger sum or amount.

Apart from these formal loan arrangements people have different forms of *seetu* groups (see box). Some women do rice-*seetu*. In this traditional system of savings, every person contributes a certain amount of rice per week or month, which can then be sold by the member in turn in order to have a bigger amount of money at one time. *Seetu* of women is sometimes done without the husband's knowledge in order to keep them from interfering. It was said that there is a cart-owner *seetu* as well as "ordinary" *seetu*-groups between people who have a fairly regular money income.

3.8 Trade Networks and Marketing Channels

For selling their *chena* products and firewood, Ithikulam villagers have access to market in Thoppur (4km) and Muthur (10km). The average frequency of going there is once or twice a week. Both towns are situated in cleared area and mainly inhabited by Muslims. The Ithikulam village economy is highly dependent on Muslim traders⁵ of these towns who have established an oligopoly and internally agree on common prices for *chena* products, which in turn depend on the prices they get in bigger towns. For settling their loans people have to sell their products back to these traders at a low price. Only small amounts of vegetables and rice can be sold in surrounding villages because people are also doing highland cultivation. Nevertheless it has to be mentioned that people selling products from highland cultivation are less dependent on traders than paddy sellers. This is because higher input is needed for paddy cultivation, which often goes along with getting credits from these traders. Some Tamil traders are coming to Ithikulam to buy manioc because of its high profit span.

⁵ Some people find means and ways to loosen this dependency, e.g. by telling traders, that their cart-load belongs to somebody else. Then they can sell it to somebody of their choice for a higher price.

3.9 Security Restrictions

The security forces impose several restrictions on the mobility of persons and goods into uncleared area. At present (August 2001), the restrictions on items concern the quantity of rice, flour, dhal, sugar, soap, kerosene, petrol and batteries. Every family in uncleared area has a card listing the quantity of items that the family is allowed to bring into uncleared area monthly. The G.S. certifies the list. Security restrictions generally alter over time and area. It also seems that at different access points to uncleared area different regulations are imposed. There is also a list of "banned items" which are totally banned in uncleared area, including farming machinery.

Private vehicles are not permitted into uncleared areas unless they have a security clearance from the Monkey Bridge Brigade office close to Trincomalee town. In general, public transport in the villages in uncleared area is limited.

4 COPING STRATEGIES

4.1 Overview

The typical feature of Ithikulam villagers' way of making a living is the diversification and combination of different sources of income without giving an ideological preference to one of them. This means that they flexibly go for *chena* vegetable cultivation, rainfed and tank irrigated paddy cultivation (*Menavari*), as well as wage labour in lowland paddy fields irrigated by the Mahaveli scheme. In addition to that they pursue other activities the most common of which is firewood collection, keeping cattle and goats.

The reasoning behind this combination of activities is to secure some self provision with paddy on the one hand and to earn cash on the other hand. It also means splitting the risk and supporting one activity with the income of the other. The rationale behind the diversification of income in money and kind is the minimisation of economic risk. On the one hand, farmers thus avoid loans, which are not necessary for highland cultivation due to the low investment. On the other hand different income sources secure their living. This major coping strategy is endorsed by the fact that even people who are better off diversify their income.

4.2 Capital Assets

The main capital asset is land. For their highland fields only very few people have legal documents.⁶ Nevertheless they feel that their land is secured as each neighbour knows who cleared which land at what time and can therefore stand as a witness in case of conflict. Land is informally split by dowry and selling fragments informally. People did not complain about insufficient land so far. Some

⁶ One year ago most of them were urged by the LDO to apply for a permit.

people mentioned the need to ask permission from LTTE in order to get another piece of land by cutting the jungle.

Apart from land, seeds are needed for any form of cultivation. Seed paddy is bought from those farmers who produced better seed paddy than others. Vegetable seed is stored from the previous season. Seeds can also be bought in Chenaiyoor. In general, the deficient supply with high quality seeds for paddy and vegetable is a serious constraint in whole Trinomial district.

The availability of family labour is another important asset for this diversification of income sources in Ithikulam. In *maha* season when pursuing both paddy wage labour and highland cultivation, most of the work in the highlands is done by women and children. Another human capital that is a precondition to pursue so many different activities at the same time is a good status of health. The doctor of the village emphasised that people of Ithikulam are generally very strong and serious illnesses rare.

4.3 Paddy Wage-labour

Close by paddy fields irrigated from the Ithikulam tank belong to farmers in Chenaiyoor. Ithikulam villagers work there as wage labourers. This is mainly seen as an additional activity, which takes account of the fact that highland cultivation (rainfed paddy and vegetable) cannot be done during both seasons. Tenancy for paddy cultivation, on the other hand, is very risky due to high investment costs for inputs. Wage-labour is to some extent taken up to mitigate the possible risk of tenant farming (see below). It is nevertheless seen as an unstable activity itself in the sense of not being assured throughout the year. Farmers stated that it is difficult to predict the profit from wage labouring.

Wage labour payment varies according to the activity. Seeding, weeding and harvesting are paid in money, whereas threshing in paddy. It can be stated as a rough rule that in uncleared area, paddy is the usual payment (apart from harvesting which is also paid in cash in uncleared), whereas in cleared area payment in cash is most common. A reason for this could be that the restriction of bringing paddy into uncleared area.

4.4 Tenancy

In 1995 Ithikulam, Nalloor, Paddalipuram and Veeramanagar villagers had used irrigated land under the Ullai tank, which belonged to Muslim farmers who had had to leave the area because a security camp had been built up close by. Some villagers gave tenancy payments to these Muslim farmers, others did not. Due to security restrictions (people had to leave their ID cards in the camp while going to these fields) this cultivation was abandoned in 1996. In 1999 the camp was removed but the LTTE told people not to encroach Muslim land any more.

Today, there are only ten tenant farmers in Ithikulam who are cultivating land in dispersed locations. The tenancy period is often only for one season, any extension depends on the agreement of the owner. As paddy fields irrigated by tanks as well as rainfed paddy fields in Ithikulam have a lower yield, they are rather cultivated by

the owners themselves. There is no chance for Ithikulam farmers to become a tenant in lowland Mahaweli-irrigation fields as these are situated in cleared area.

In the case of tenancy the owners of the land generally prefer to be paid in paddy although in some occasions, tenants also pay in cash. Tenancy is only profitable if no loans for the inputs are needed. Otherwise it is very risky⁷ and might only provide the household with subsistence paddy. As mentioned, taking loans can be avoided by cash income from wage labouring.

4.5 Highland Vegetable Cultivation

Highland vegetable cultivation in Ithikulams' fertile red soil is the main source of income. Each family cultivates 1-1,5 acres, starting with the first rain in October. The main crops are manioc, groundnut, and vegetables. Harvest starts in January (maize and groundnut) and ends in April (manioc) depending on the different growing periods of the cultivated plants. Maize and groundnuts with a cultivation period of only three month can be grown twice within one season and vegetable even more often. This supplies families with a continuous income (and self-provision!), which is the reason why they do not only cultivate manioc even though it is the most profitable crop. Highland cultivation requires low input of insecticide, weedicide and fertiliser (1/4 compared to paddy farming). People use artificial fertiliser as well as cow dung taken from cowsheds and, to a small extent, the ashes of burnt husk of paddy. Shifting or mixed cultivation is not practised.

Ploughing is done by oxen plough because even those who could afford machines are not allowed to take any into uncleared areas. Many farmers own their own draft-oxen (see paragraph on cattle below). Both plough and oxen can be rented or borrowed from neighbours. The rent is paid per acre.

Land preparation, planting, weeding and harvesting are done by family labour and labour exchange between neighbours who are also paid for helping out. Highland vegetable cultivation has many advantages. This human capital of family labour gives people a high flexibility. While women and children take care of this work the men can go for paddy wage labour. Distinct working peaks are less compared to paddy farming. The low input that is needed reduces possible losses as well as the necessity to take credits from traders. Fertiliser is bought for cash, sometimes through loan.

Apart from risk minimisation, highland cultivation allows farm families to use their family labour potential more flexibly, since women can also engage in fieldwork, which is traditionally not pursued in paddy cultivation. The profit earned by highland cultivation is high and partly supports the family in the off-season. It also provides capital for starting other activities and for investment in houses in Sreenivasapuram.

⁷ Villagers estimated the loss at total crop failure for tenant farming at Rs.40-50,000 compared to the rather small loss in *chena* cultivation (Rs. 2,000-3,000).

4.6 Highland Paddy Farming

Rainfed highland paddy farming is done in small scale up to the edges of the jungle as well as in Sinakulam and Paddalipuram. It mainly supports home consumption or is used to pay back loans taken for other purposes. Some families do not get loans and thus sell parts of the produce. The amount is often not sufficient to meet the household subsistence requirements. Both males and females get involved in this type of cultivation. This feature is untypical compared to the usual division of labour for irrigated paddy farming of Tamils. Boys join at the age of 12 to 13. When the plants reach a certain height, men take care of the fields in order to protect the field from the intrusion of wild animals like pigs and elephants during the night.

4.7 Firewood Collection

Another important sub-activity is the gathering of firewood from the surrounding jungle. It is transported with oxen cart or bicycle to Thoppur and Muthur and sold there. For collecting dead wood no permission from LTTE is needed. As soon as people go for fresh wood (which is needed for brick making ovens) or for timber, permission has to be obtained from LTTE. Concerning the area it is not done randomly but each village has its agreed upon portion of the jungle. Depending on the kind of wood, people receive different prices: One cart load would yield Rs.200 in Thoppur and Rs.400 in Muthur for one variety of wood, Rs.300 in Thoppur and Rs.500 in Muthur for another variety. As travelling to Muthur and coming back the same day is difficult, the wood is mostly sold in Thoppur. If somebody does not own a cart, he takes the wood by bike because hiring a cart would not be profitable. It was said that people in cleared area do not solely depend on firewood from uncleared area as they can use coconut wood when the supply from uncleared is interrupted (e.g. during times of tension). Normally, some parts of the wood load taken to cleared area remains at the checkpoints.

4.8 Animal Husbandry

Animal husbandry is another source of income and saving. Apart from draft-oxen, many villagers have cattle or goats, and chicken. The estimated number of cattle per family is 12-15. It is kept by unrelated people in Nalloor for Rs.500 per month because there is no grazing land around Ithikulam (lack of natural capital). This seems to be the only reason to keep the cattle there as Nalloor is facing the same threat of raids by the army as Ithikulam.⁸ Ithikulam people were not talking openly about their cattle in the beginning, probably because they intended to hide this economic fact in order to appear poorer and qualify for assistance.⁹ Having a pair of oxen and a cart or plough can provide people with additional income when renting it out. LTTE is taking tax for oxen carts though. In order to purchase a cart approximately Rs.30.000 have to be spent. The draft oxen cost around Rs.20.000.

⁸ If such raids happen, the cattle is left by itself if the whole family is fleeing to the jungle. If only the men flee, women and children attend the livestock.

⁹ It was therefore difficult to assess the exact numbers of people rearing livestock in the village.

Goat and chicken rearing is a popular supplementary income generating activity. Chicken houses are necessary to avoid that wild animals from the jungle come to catch them at night. For goats a shed has to be built to protect them from rain and following diseases in the rainy season. Rs.400 are needed for the *cajan*-leaves, the wooden sticks can freely be taken from the jungle. The extension officer complained that not enough villagers have built proper sheds whereas some women saw the problem in the lack of a veterinary service. The next veterinary doctor was said to be in Chenaiyoor. No measures could be formulated how to keep the goats healthy from the beginning.

4.9 Activities of Women

Women engage in various income-generating activities. Some widows produce illicit liquor as income source. Another one is processing paddy into rice. Some women get the paddy directly from their husbands when these get paid with paddy for wage-labour or when they do tenant cultivation. Others buy the paddy straight from the traders. Rice pounding can further increase their profit.

Overseas employment is of low relevance in Ithikulam. Villagers reported that only two women have done it yet but others are thinking of leaving for employment. It was said that people from Pallikudiyiruppu have the necessary links to agencies, which organise overseas employment. Women would take such a decision only with her husband's agreement though. Widows or women separated from the husband are more likely to go abroad for employment.

Widows also rely on wage-labour. At harvest times they are allowed to collect some left over paddy on the threshing site. Milling rice was said to be a typical activity of widows or female-headed households in the area, although not in Ithikulam. Widows with grown up children also make coir items (mats, boxes and huts) from coconut-leaves or brooms. The children collect the required raw-materials from the forest. However, raw materials are not available in Ithikluam, but in neighbouring villages, where more women involve in this activity.

4.10 Child Labour

Children are helping out in all sorts of activities and therefore add considerably to the household's human capital. They tend animals before leaving for school, take rice to the mill, fish in the tank and collect firewood. Because of the presence of both army and LTTE soldiers in the forest, they do so only for the family's needs without going far into the jungle. Children of widows are more likely to collect firewood for selling also. The main impact of children's work is probably their help in the *chena*-vegetable fields of their family and of other Ithikulam villagers. According to a young boy villagers in need of labour go through the village and call for help. At that time the children will join them with the permission of their parents. They do seeding and weeding for Rs.100 to Rs.150 per day (compared to Rs.250 earned by adults when helping out). The money contributes to the family income.

When we asked for girls being sent to Trincomalee as housemaids, people said that this is mainly done in other surrounding villages. Girls between 16 and 20 would go

to earn a monthly income¹⁰ and receive gifts for their families for special occasions like festival times. The host family would provide food and clothes to them. Villagers might be reluctant to admit that they have also sent children to town.

4.11 Consumption Patterns

People in Ithikulam consume mainly rice (bought from *Mudalalis* in Thoppur) and own *chena*-products. The diet is mostly vegetarian with few meals including pond or sea fish in between. Some people refrain from eating beef and pork completely. Other food items consumed are bread, rusk, sugar - which some women get from shops through handing in eggs -, milk and milk products like curd and *gii* which are very valued. Goat milk is not drunk. Cow milk is only consumed in small amounts. In addition people use some wild vegetables, e.g. bittergourd and some vegetable growing between the fences. A local doctor very much emphasised the nutritional value of these vegetables which town people would disgrade as poor people's food without knowing their medical advantages.

What is generally perceived as a problem is the hidden consumption of alcohol distilled in the village.¹¹ It is generally an important source of income especially for widows and female-headed households. Even though it is forbidden by LTTE, it is practised. The Samurdhi Officer has the right to stop welfare when he finds illegal alcohol production in a household, but it was said that he does not make use of it. As it is difficult to provide these women with other sources of income, the continuation of this business is tolerated.

The amount of food taken depends on seasonal changes directly influencing the availability of food items, the share of food within the family, festivals (when expenditure on food is generally bigger) and other religious practises like religious fasting which could even be observed for children and which is also common in other Hindu villages.

4.12 Coping with the Security Situation

Prior to the conflict both men and women used to work on *chena* fields but rather the men went to sell the products in town. When tension rose, only women dared to pass the checkpoints, so they took over the selling activities. When they go they exclusively sell to Muslim traders and thereby get less money than men who sometimes sell it directly in different non-Muslim villages. Women also have a smaller bargaining power with Muslim traders. Men of any age group stayed at home. The young men depended on their parents and worked in the *chena* fields of their parents whereas before the conflict they had not engaged in *chena* cultivation but supported their family with paddy farming and wage labouring. They used to live apart from their parents. Uniting the family can be observed as a coping strategy although a involuntary one. The fact that almost everybody is doing *chena*

¹⁰ It was mentioned that one woman of Ithikulam working as housemaid earned Rs.1500 per month.

¹¹ A main impact is increasing domestic violence against women. Even though women have the possibility to report about it at the women society, they do not do so because they feel it is something private that they cannot bring to public.

cultivation today can thus be seen as a residue of times of high conflict.

When the situation relaxed, elderly men were sent first to “open the gates” for younger ones. Nowadays, some men are still scared to go alone for selling the products. They either join their women or send them with a cart-driver. But going to town means additional work for the women. It seems that they prefer to let their husbands go again in times of peace. Therefore the underlying coping strategy is to handle gender roles flexibly according to the necessities imposed by external factors. Villagers believe that overseas employment of women might have a more substantial impact on a lasting change of gender roles.

When it was not possible to pass the borders to cleared area during times of tension, Ithikulam people depended on *chena*-cultivation throughout the year. They started to cultivate corn because this was the only *chena* crop that could be stocked for a whole year. Conservation methods for other food are not known in Ithikulam. After the situation had become less tense, corn was mostly replaced by cash crops like peanuts, manioc and vegetable. This adaptation of *chena*-products to the security situation can be seen as a special coping strategy.

The Pass System

People living in uncleared area need a pass to cross the borderline between cleared and uncleared area. Villagers obtain passes from the police station, however, the application procedure easily takes 10-15days.

Nowadays, the pass system is not as rigidly applied as a few months ago, since the security situation has eased. However, villagers fear that the system might again be tightened, as soon as the conflict worsens.

Staying in cleared area overnight requires another pass, however, villagers are reluctant to spend the night in town, since in case of an incidence, people and army will suspect them first.

Other coping strategies to supply food provision are smuggling food into uncleared area as well as keeping up secondary food markets. An example was given for wheat flour. Ten kg of flour (Rs.20 per kg) are permitted per family and month in uncleared area. If a family does not use it all, it can sell it to a bakery in Chenaiyoor, where it is sold for Rs.12,50 (compared to Rs.8,50 in Trincomalee). This bread is also brought to Ithikulam twice a day.

In times of heavy restriction people were not allowed to leave their village at all. Apart from relying on *chena*-products, for other necessities they then had to get along with the possible minimum, making use of what nature offers for hygiene and medicine and otherwise relying on the stocks of the small shops in the village. Thus, the vulnerability context occasionally forces people to scale down their living standard, which also has a detrimental effect on household food and nutrition security.

5 FEEDBACK LOOPS - IMPACT ON LIVELIHOODS

5.1 Turning Threats into Opportunities?

Ithikulam people have converted externally imposed threats into opportunities: They have used the natural capital for highland cultivation and achieve a reasonable income after fleeing from Sreenivasapuram. The combination of highland cultivation and wage labouring (for paddy and cash) enables villagers both, to ensure subsistence, and, on the other hand, to gradually increase their financial capital.

For the latter, we take as an indicator that some villagers build houses in their village of origin. Villagers did not openly talk about this fact, probably they intentionally hid it in order to further qualify for social welfare and project benefits. An incentive for house construction in Sreenivasapuram was a subsidy of Rs.25.000 offered by the government. People said that they take the risk in spite of the chance that the new houses might again be targeted by attacks and lost. They feel that tension has gradually eased in recent years and they hope for a further improvement of the situation. The motivation for building the houses is the availability of electricity in Sreenivasapuram, the difficult access to school and other services from Ithikulam during rainy season because of the bad road conditions, the need for dowry for daughters as well as the wish to be close to relatives. Sometimes the family is split between the two villages and Ithikulam mud houses are only used during the rainy season. These choices can be considered as personal risk minimisation through keeping social networks and giving value to education.

5.2 Social and Political Capital

The research team concludes that people in Ithikulam might be more prosperous than might appear from a first sight of their living conditions in the village (poor infrastructure, mud houses). This has created some dissent with people living in their village of origin: Since Ithikulam appears so poor, NGOs tend to start working in this village, while Sreenivasapuram, the ancient village, gives the impression of being a comparatively 'rich' and prospering village, where farmers have the means to build houses (which are, however, to a large extent built by farmers from Ithikulam). Some villagers from Sreenivasapuram blame people in Ithikulam for refraining agencies from investing in the former. The hidden relative 'prosperity' therefore could have detrimental effects on those villagers in Sreenivasapuram, who do not have family bonds with Ithikulam.

5.3 Purposely Weak Leadership?

The research study revealed that the performance of village-based organisation – if existing at all – is poor. The underlying coping strategy might be that as soon as there is an organisation the committee and to some extent also the members can possibly be made responsible for all kind of problems by either LTTE or security forces. Potential leaders avoid taking a prominent role in village life, since this might further expose them and make them more vulnerable. This could support a trend towards individualistic (viz. family-centred) coping strategies and could

discourage collective action. Development agencies will thus face difficulties in finding implementing partners for village projects, and might refrain from working in the village, which, in turn, reduces the community's access to service providers. On the other hand, some individual villager might use their personal links with the local power holders (LTTE) in order to get personal benefits and advantages granted.

5.4 Ecological Effects

Farming systems in Ithikulam are based on highland cultivation, but *chena* in the sense of shifting cultivation and crop rotation are not practised. In the long run, cultivating the similar crop in the same soil over years gradually depletes the soil fertility. Up to now, villagers could not yet observe any detrimental effect. On the other hand, the current security situation would also not allow slash-and-burn shifting cultivation, since the jungle area is largely 'limited access' land and such practices might be restricted, since the access to land is restricted and the overall land resources are limited.

5.5 Ithikulam Tank Rehabilitation: Who is the winner and who is the loser?

The Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP) is currently investigating the rehabilitation of Ithikulam tank. In a feasibility study, it would be essential to carefully examine the socio-economic implications of tank rehabilitation. The study revealed that landowners in the command area are not residing in Ithikulam, but in Chenaiyoor. The rehabilitation would therefore mainly benefit those farmers, while people in Ithikulam would bring the local contribution of labour under reduced wages of the food-for-work component. The concept of local ownership promoted by IFSP only applies if those contributing under food-for-work are also the users of the created asset. It would therefore be essential to investigate how landowners from Chenaiyoor could be incorporated into the rehabilitation work.

Furthermore, the tank at full water capacity would spread water and submerge some land, which is currently cultivated as rainfed paddy land (see Chapter 4). The rehabilitation of the tank would therefore cause some detrimental effects to villagers living in proximity of the tank. Economic benefits from the tank would mainly remain with outsiders, while the villagers from Ithikulam might benefit indirectly from increased labour opportunities in the paddy fields irrigated by the Ithikulam tank.

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ANNEX I: List of Abbreviations:

| | |
|--------|--|
| CBO | Community-based Organisation |
| D.S. | Divisional Secretary |
| EHED | Eastern Human and Economic Development |
| F.O. | Farmers Organisation |
| G.S. | Gramasevaka |
| IFSP | Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee |
| LTTE | Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam |
| NEP | Northeast Province |
| NGOs | Non-Governmental Organisations |
| Rs. | Sri Lankan Rupees |
| S.D.O. | Samurdhi Development Officer |

ANNEX II: Methods Applied

| method applied | subgroup | remarks |
|---|-------------------|--|
| <i>group interviews</i> | | |
| group of farmers | land use | introduction visit in the village |
| women group | coping | introduction visit in the village |
| small group of key informants like G.S. and Samurdhi Officer | land use | introduction visit in the village |
| women group | land use | starting to talk about goat rearing |
| F.O. president, G.S., vatta vithan and two land-owners in Chenaiyoor | coping + land use | |
| R.D.S. president, Paddalipuram and 20 villagers of Sreenivasapuram | land use | the 20 villagers joined the discussion spontaneously |
| <i>individual interviews</i> | | |
| with two tenant farmers from Pallikudiyiruppu | land use | |
| woman, later husband joined | land use | cart owning family |
| Muslim vegetable trader in Thoppur | land use | |
| livestock extension officer | coping + land use | |
| G.S. and Samurdhi Officer | land use | |
| C.O. in Kadatkarachenai | land use | responsible for Muthur division |
| shopkeeper | coping | |
| two women and a girl | coping | we met them twice |
| one of the two women with her husband | coping | |
| second woman | coping | we met her twice |
| husband of the above woman and herself | coping | |
| old man with his wife | coping | |
| old man with his son | land use | son is in charge of the village temple |
| former labourer in village mill | coping | |
| women society president in Sreenivasapuram | coping | Around 20 women were present and commented sometimes |
| third woman from Ithikulam | coping | |
| carpenter | coping | another man was present but silent |
| shopkeeper | land use | |
| temple president and farmer | land use | |
| forth woman | land use | |
| <i>informal talks</i> | | |
| cart owner working in paddy cultivation and as a watchman at a school | land use | |
| man coming to the village shrine | coping | |
| people building a fence | coping | |
| young boys | coping | several times |

ANNEX III: Division of Labour

| | highland paddy and vegetable cultivation (rainfed) | tenant paddy farming (irrigated) * |
|----------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| slashing and cutting | Men and women | Men |
| Ploughing | Men | Men |
| Seeding | Women | Men |
| Weeding | Women | Men |
| Harvesting | | |
| Cutting / plugging | Men and women ** | Men |
| Bundling | Men and women | Men |
| Transporting home | Men and women | Men |

* Women are only involved for bringing meals to the fields.

** plugging of manioc: men only