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Missing the Onion Boom

Kumpurupitty - 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 the 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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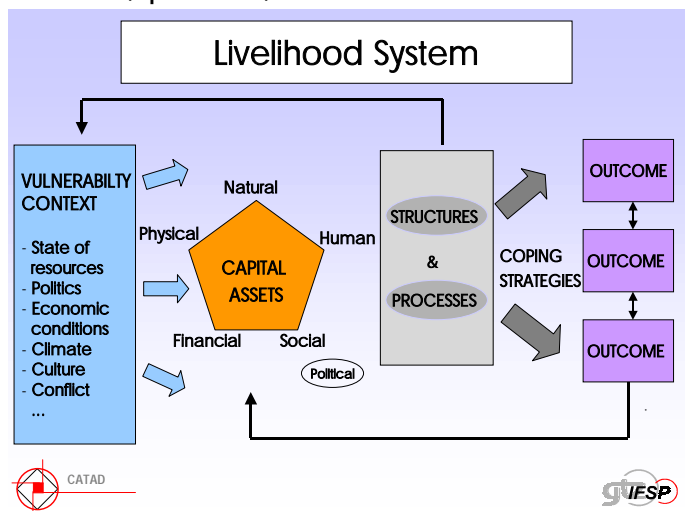
1 INTRODUCTION

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 three Kumpurupitty G.S. divisions, Kuchchaveli D.S. division, follows the logic of the LSA and analyses behavioural pattern of villagers under the special vulnerability context of a village in an un-stabilised area subject to repeated violence, displacement, and dramatic changes in land use.

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 Kumpurupitty in the period of August to September 2001. The key research phase was in the week from 13 to 17 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 patterns.

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), the PNA report 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.

2 VULNERABILITY CONTEXT

2.1 Geographical Location and Historical Background

Kumpurupitty is located in Trincomalee district in the Eastern Province north of Trincomalee town. It starts from Irrakakandy bridge, extends up to Salappaiyaru bridge and is surrounded by the sea in the East and with a lagoon in the West. Administratively, Kumpurupitty belongs to Kuchchaveli Secretariat Division and it comprises three Grama Sevaka Divisions, i.e. Kumpurupitty East, North and South. Originally each division (figures indicate the numbers of households)¹ consisted of a number of former villages, which are:

- Kumpurupitty East (137): Gandhinagar, Salappaigaru, Vilpulanantha (model village) and part of Navatcholai
- Kumpurupitty North (67): Navatcholai, Kilukilupaikadu, Sinnakaraiche
- Kumpurupitty South (92): Chekkadipilavu, Ward 6

The village is about 117 years old and is a traditional village. It started with a Tamil society who engaged in agriculture, mainly paddy cultivation. Before the conflict, people were also involved in livestock keeping.

Table 2-1: Major dates in village history

Year	Major events
1882	Village formed
1882-1981	Green period for village; all developments took place
1956-1978	Subsidiary food programme by government, permits given for 1 acre/person, though some influential persons got 2-3 acres
1983	Ethnic disturbances: Many Tamils move from hill country to Kumpurupitty East.
1989	Settlement of model village Kumpurupitty East (Gandhi Nagar)
1990	Displacement of the whole village. Destruction of many buildings including the school. Three Grama Sevaka divisions formed in the absence of many villagers.
1993	Some of the South and North people returned and resettled
1994	People continued returning back in stages; more restrictions on mobility, food items and non-food items
1996	New school was built, people resettled in East
1997	Displacement of Kumpurupitty East
2000	Cyclone disaster

¹ State of December 2000; Reported by DS

After 1983, villagers faced a situation of increased insecurity and were unable to access their paddy fields at the vicinity of the village. Hence paddy fields and the four tanks got abandoned, became jungle and are not accessible at present. As a result, paddy cultivation was given up in favour of onion highland cultivation. After the return from displacement in the 1990s, people shifted from the interior land (traditional village) towards the coastal side, closer to the main road.

Due to the displacement in 1990, villagers moved and searched for more secure places, especially in the Northern Province and India. Few of them found better opportunities than in Kumpurupitty and remained in those villages.

2.2 Socio-cultural Background

Villagers are predominantly Tamils except a few Sinhala families. The majority of the Tamils are Hindus while there is also a Christian minority. For these groups five Hindu temples and one church are available. Sinhalese follow Buddhism without having a temple. It was found that caste system exists but does not have the same strong influence as before the '90s. Most of the villagers belong to the Velalar caste (especially in Kumpurupitty North). Some fishermen are in Karayar caste and the rest declared themselves as lower caste (dominant in Kumpurupitty East). Normally villagers do not interact closely with each other except during ceremonies like weddings, funerals etc. During the displacement in 1990 the villagers got scattered over the whole island (Jaffna, Vanni, Mullaitivu etc.) and abroad (e.g. India). Many families of the presumably higher class did not return to Kumpurupitty and rather stayed elsewhere, for example in Trincomalee town. Now, in principle, villagers distinguish two strata, which dominate the social structure: In Kumpurupitty East, lower social strata and caste dominate, while the middle class strata dominates in Kumpurupitty North and South. The people who did not return and now stay away from village seem to be wealthier and in higher caste than those who returned.

2.3 Economic Trends

While the conflict has had many negative effects on village life, it has also indirectly provided a great opportunity for agro-economic activities in Kumpurupitty and adjacent areas. The disruption of transport from and to Jaffna during the 1990s has offered other areas with conducive natural assets the chance to step in to replace the onion production earlier coming from the Jaffna peninsula. Puttalam, partly Vavunyia (one season) and Nilaveli area incl. Kumpurupitty have the natural assets for onion cultivation, and thus, these two cultivation areas largely dominate the national markets at present.

2.4 Security Situation

The area of Kumpurupitty is officially claimed as cleared area, but is still not stabilised. Therefore it can be considered as “semi-cleared” or “grey zone”. In front of the bridge in Irrakakandy an army checkpoint including a barrier is situated. The close-by jungle offers manoeuvring space for the LTTE. Even though villagers did not mention the presence of LTTE in the village, it can be assumed that the area is subject to infiltration of both conflict parties and thus suffers from sporadic violence, fighting and security raids. This environment supports the spreading of a feeling of fear and intimidation among villagers.

For village life, this situation has mainly the following impacts: villagers are unable to access their traditional paddy fields close to the jungle. Furthermore, the security forces have imposed several security restrictions on the mobility of persons and goods, limiting the amount of certain goods to be transported into the area. In the night, people are reluctant to move due to the unclear security situation and unofficial curfew.

2.5 Agro-ecological Frame Conditions

2.5.1 Soils and Land Use

Four units of soils can be distinguished following a transect line from the interior land (West) to the coast (East):²

- rock and gravel with thick jungle and paddy fields
- clay soils with shrubs, coconut and palmyrah
- reddish brown earth soil under cultivation (onion, eggplant (brinjal), neem (margosa), tamarind)
- regosols under intensive cultivation (coconut, mango, onion, vegetables)

2.5.2 Hydrogeology

Hydrogeologically, the area is dominated by one aquifer unit located in regosol landscape. This covers about 90% of the region between Nilaveli and Kuchchaveli. Besides, there is a quartzite aquifer. The upper part of the aquifer is made up of recent coastal sand with a high infiltration rate, high porosity and high permeability. The aquifer is connected to the seaside and the lagoon and contains a saline-fresh water interface between this aquifer and builds up a fresh water lens in this coastal sand. Therefore, the aquifer recharges by water percolation mainly due to rainfalls and reacts highly sensitive if groundwater is increasingly used (Panabokke et al. 2001).

² See: Paramaguru et al. 1999, p.15

3 STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

The chapter on structures and processes in Kumpurupitty focuses on two main aspects: the role of village-level government and community-based institutions, and on the other hand, the security restrictions imposed by the armed forces. The chapter will also explain some of the important procedures of governmental support programmes. Institutional arrangements with regard to land use rights, tenancy and marketing will be dealt with in Chapter 4 under the relevant coping strategies.

3.1 Access to Infrastructural Facilities

Education facilities are limited and provide schooling only up to grade 9. For higher education students have to travel far away. The public transport is limited as busses run only few times a day between Trincomalee and Kuchchaveli (and vice versa) and thereby passing Kumpurupitty. More frequent transport is available after the bridge in Irrakakandy. The main road is in a very bad condition with numerous deep pot-holes. Few of the side roads are in good condition since they have been recently repaired. Electricity is not provided officially but tapped illegally by many villagers. As far as health services are concerned, the nearest clinic is in Nilaveli (7 miles away) while the next base hospital is in Trincomalee. In Kumpurupitty East, one mid wife is available.

3.2 Governmental Institutions at Village Level

According to the Divisional Secretary accessible governmental support targets mainly resettlers in order to ease their resettling and raise their living standard. It comprises four³ kinds of payments plus the so-called "dry ration". The following amounts can be obtained once per resettling household:

1. Rs 7,000 for building of temporary huts
2. Rs 1,000 for tools
3. Rs 2,000 as settling in allowance
4. Rs 4,000 as productivity and enterprising grant (PEG)

Among the villagers 1) and 2) are called resettling fund while 3) and 4) are named rehabilitation fund. In order to become eligible for the resettlement fund the displaced people have to proof the location and duration during their displacement through the GS of the relevant area where they stayed. Applications for both the resettlement fund and the rehabilitation fund have to be submitted to the GS who passes them to the DS. Villagers mentioned that procedures take a long time (up to one year) and that they suspect certain barriers on government side for quick approvals.

The above mentioned dry ration is a food subsidy in kind addition to the rehabilitation fund for the North-Eastern Province and its border villages. According to the number of family members the household gets cards worth a fixed amount of money (Rs 336 for one person up to Rs 1,260 per month for a maximum of 5

³ A fifth payment, the housing grant worth 25,000 Rs with a long procedure of application exists but nobody receives it.

members). The cards then can be exchanged into goods (rice, dhal, sugar etc.) at the Multi Purpose Co-operative Society (MCPS) shop. The eligibility to receive the dry ration ceases six months after PEG (4) has been paid. The DS reported the numbers of households presently receiving “dry rations” as follows (including the ratio of resettled households in the respective division):

- Kumpurupitty East: 36 (~ 39%)⁴
- Kumpurupitty North: 54 (~ 73%)⁴
- Kumpurupitty South: 49 (~ 37%)⁴

Another means of official support, the Samurdhi Food Stamps have not been issued to the villagers, although many villagers claimed that they had applied for them. However, one SDO is assigned for each division and is to implement one village project per year.

3.3 Activities of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Sewa Lanka Foundation (SLF) supported the villagers with loans in order to do cultivation before 1998. According to one informant in Kumpurupitty East, SLF had appointed the former village leader to head the SLF Society. Eventually the money was misused and could not be paid back after crop failure. The informant reported that SLF finally decided to withdraw from the village, since the credit fund had collapsed and loans could not be assured.

Oxfam implements multi-sectoral projects in Kumpurupitty East. It concentrates on revolving funds, which are used to construct infrastructure facilities (pre school building, wells, houses etc.) and to foster income generating activities. Therefore Oxfam founds a society and builds small groups of five people. One person is appointed to lead the society whereas another is responsible for loan procedures. The loans circulate among the group of five and are handed over to the next person after repayment. Initially the loans amounted to Rs 5,000 with monthly sums of Rs 1,000 and an interest of Rs 50. Now it is increased up to Rs 10,000 due to sufficient repayment.

3.4 Village Societies

The most important registered organisation at village level is the Rural Development Society (RDS). Each division has its own RDS but there is little co-operation and co-ordination between the three RDS. The exception is work at common places like temples and the cemetery. Different perceptions of the RDSs’ performance exist, RDS East being the weakest. Therefore, their acceptance among villagers varies. The representative functions are carried out voluntarily and suffer from the shortage of RDS’ savings and income as mentioned by the board members. However, the RDSs get involved in implementing village projects with the external support of funders, such as the Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP). Apart from that, they are not successful in attracting additional funds.

⁴ The balance of households is supposed to have received the rehabilitation fund before six months already.

The only other society in Kumpurupitty is the Oxfam society (see above). Formerly existing ones have stopped working. The reason might be twofold. Active board members have not returned after displacement and successors are not easy to find in order to re-establish the societies. People still live in an insecure environment without long-term prospects. Hence they are only interested in keeping the most necessary societies, which also ensure external support. Villagers provided differing views on why local leadership was not strong. Many respondents do not perceive anybody to have the leading capacity and trust of other villagers. RDS representatives even said that voluntary leadership was not fully acknowledged among villagers.

3.5 Family Bonds

Displacement and out-migration weakened social contacts and interchange. Family bonds are separated, with some households having relatives in Nilaveli and Sampalathivu. However, bonds are strongest within the immediate family circle but weaken the further one departs from the centre of family. In case of emergencies mutual assistance can be observed. The lack of societies contributes as well to the little social life. Labour exchange (e.g. neighbourhood help) was practised before 1990 but seems to be reduced nowadays as a result of the high proportion of wage labour/tenancy agreements. Social contact with other villages is based on trade and labour networks as well as the above mentioned family contacts.

3.6 Security Restrictions

Although Kumpurupitty is officially declared as a cleared area, the security forces (navy) impose security restrictions on mobility of persons and goods. These security barriers seriously affect people's mobility to leave Kumpurupitty. This limits economic activities in the field of transport and marketing considerably. The following restrictions were reported:

- Taking food items through checkpoint is restricted per day as follows:
 - 10 kg of rice
 - 5 kg of sugar
 - 5 kg of dhal
 - 3 packets (500g) of milk powder
 - 3 kg of coconut oil
- Taking non-food goods through checkpoint is restricted per day as follows:
 - 3 litres of kerosene for household consumption
 - 10 litres of kerosene for agriculture production
 - 3 soaps
 - 2 boxes of matches
 - no certain chemical fertiliser (Urea - high nitrogen condense)
- Fishing time and area is limited up to 10 miles from the seashore.

If there is any need for more food items for particular functions like a wedding, funeral etc., a special certification from the Divisional Secretariat Kuchchaveli through the Grama Sevaka is required. The certificate has to be produced at the Irrakakandy security camp in order to get the permission from the Officer-in-charge (OIC) to transport those items to this respective area

Furthermore it has been reported that an unofficial curfew after 6.30 pm till next morning is practised. If there is an emergency (illness) for getting out of the village during night, villagers have to get the permission from the OIC at Irrakakandy checkpoint.

4 COPING STRATEGIES OF HOUSEHOLDS

Chapter 4 will trace socio-economic coping strategies of people with an emphasis on land use patterns. The overriding farming pattern in Kumpurupitty is onion cultivation for the national market. The chapter will thus focus on the capital assets, which farmers utilise for cultivation. We will explain, which structures and processes they can make use of for farming and marketing. Furthermore, we elaborate upon complementary income sources and on how to deal with the particular security situation in the area.

The chapter proceeds as follows: Main emphasis is on the farming system of onion cultivation. Section 4.1 explains this in detail, focusing on various production factors, viz. land, financial capital, trade and marketing networks, etc. Section 4.2 focuses on complementary earning activities of households, i.e. fishing, livestock keeping and vegetable production. The final section explains how people cope with the specific security situation.

4.1 Onion Cultivation as Cash Crop

4.1.1 General Features

The main agricultural activity for income generation in Kumpurupitty is the cultivation of onions as cash crop. In Chapter 2, we referred already to island-wide economic trends, which provided marketing opportunities for onion cultivation in the research area, after the transport of onion production from Jaffna to national markets was interrupted by the ongoing conflict. The supply has been curbed, while the national demand for red onion remains high. Furthermore, the sandy soils with regosol allow high infiltration. The groundwater available from a fresh water lens is another important natural production factor for onion cultivation. Due to the dry weather conditions and the short growing period, farmers can cultivate up to two seasons per year⁵ and meet the high demand. High prices and potentially good yields promise a high profit margin especially compared to vegetable cultivation. For Kumpurupitty is a "semi-cleared" area and displacement has happened several times already, further displacements and negative impacts of conflict cannot be ruled out. Therefore, people "need" a crop, which has a short cultivation period in order not to lose the only harvest in case of crop failure or displacement. Last not least, the security restrictions do not allow people to access the paddy land behind the lagoon, which now has become a jungle area. Thus, only highland cultivation is possible. The security situation also restricts the personal mobility between Trincomalee and Colombo, since travelling is not felt to be safe. This has an impact on trading networks.

⁵ In other areas even three season per year are possible.

4.1.2 Access to Land

Before the displacement in 1990, villagers predominantly owned and cultivated paddy lands, but they currently do not have access to their paddy lands, which are located close to the jungle due to the security risk. We can classify this as a *dormant natural capital*, which is currently not accessible, but could be regained and utilised after the conflict situation eases. Three minor tanks providing irrigation water at earlier times are now dilapidated and unutilised.

Farmers nowadays have only access to highland. The size of their highland holdings varies between 1 up to 2 acres. In the G.S. divisions of Kumpurupitty North and South, 80% of the land titles can be considered deed land, while the remaining 20% are land with permits. In Kumpurupitty East, the settlers mainly possess Jayaboomi grants.

A landowner in Kumpurupitty mainly has two options how to utilise his highland resources:

- i.) To cultivate the land at his own risk.
- ii.) To get involved in sharecropping or to lease the land to tenants and become wage labourer.

Box 1: Tenancy Arrangements

Villagers in Kumpurupitty practice a variety of informal tenancy arrangements for highland (onion cultivation):

- (1) The land can be cultivated with the consent of the remote landowner. It is also tolerated that villagers cultivate the land without an agreement on tenancy with the original landowner. The required rent is kept by the tenant and is supposed to be paid when the landowner returns. GS and DS tolerate this practice.
- (2) Landowners in Kumpurupitty arrange tenancy contracts with farmers from Nilaveli and Irrakakandy. The tenant has to pay a fixed amount of land lease (Rs. 5,000 – 6,000 per acre per year). The tenant fully takes over investment for farming and keeps the full harvest. Mostly, a tenancy contract lasts for one year. Payment is scheduled at the beginning of the tenancy period. In many cases, landowners in Kumpurupitty lease out their land to tenants, while they work as wage labourers for the same tenant on their own field.
- (3) Both, tenant and landowner share inputs and yield equally. This tenancy arrangement of sharecropping seems less prominent.
- (4) One example was found that the tenant provides the water pump, the landowner the land, and both share the costs of inputs and the income from yield equally.

After the resettlement in 1996, many villagers got involved in tenancy agreements. Landowners lease out land to tenants for onion cultivation for a fixed land lease (Box 1: Tenancy arrangement No. 2). Most tenants originate from Nilaveli. In many cases, the landowner ensures the possibility to work as wage labourer for the tenant on his own field. However, it appears that tenancy agreements with the same tenant generally last only for one year. Thereby landowners avoid that the tenant becomes eligible to purchase the land. Besides, it is often arranged that the tenants have to provide the fencing which after the year stays at the landowner. The system implies that the investment for onion cultivation and also the profit remains with the tenant, and thus in the case of Kumpurupitty, with outsiders. Consequently, the tenant bears the full cultivation risk, but can also reap the high profit possible in onion cultivation. The landowner earns the land lease and has ensured periods of wage labouring during the cultivation season.

Box 2: Transfer of Land in Kumpurupitty

Legally, Jayaboomi land (the dominant land title in Kumpurupitty East) can only be transferred (sold) to other people under certain conditions: (i) the successor should be a blood relative (13 categories), and (ii) the income of the beneficiaries should not exceed Rs. 1,000. Transfer of Jayaboomi grant documents is only effective with the signature of the Sri Lankan president. The proof of ownership and relation has to be done through birth certificates. The transfer is possible when indicated as a gift or donation. Land under a Land Development Ordinance (LDO) permit can only be transferred with the permission of the DS.

Villagers (as well as responsible officers) commented that the understanding of blood relations is extended for the donation of permit land. Officially blood relatives include the close family. In the Kumpurupitty case blood relatives refer to cousins, nephew, uncles, aunts etc. Due to displacement birth certificates are lost in many cases. Therefore, the landowner has to nominate the successor as blood relative. However, acknowledged people from the village or the GS can witness the family status. It was openly commented that many "donations" are executed for money and the successor is actually neither a blood relative nor a family member.

Many landowners did not return to Kumpurupitty and reside temporarily or permanently in other locations, viz. in India, or in the districts of Trincomalee, Vanni, and partly Jaffna. A considerable amount of the highland is therefore currently abandoned (absentee landlords). Some villagers have encroached either these abandoned lands or crown land. Crown land encroachment takes place at the seashore side, close to the main road. The respective authorities (G.S., D.S.), in principle, tolerate encroachment. For abandoned land, annual deeds can be received informally.

Onion is a highly profitable crop under present conditions and land is scarce in Nilaveli. Some farmers from neighbouring villages with limited land resources, but sufficient financial capital show interest in purchasing land. It is not clear on how actively demand and supply for land contribute to a land market. The prices depend on the fertility of the soil and the location, hence the proximity to the main road. The closer the land is to the road the higher the price. The prices for deed land differ from Rs 100,000 per acre in Kumpurupitty East up to Rs 250,000 in Kumpurupitty South, while North is in the middle with approximately Rs 150,000 to 200,000.¹ Officially, only deed land can be disposed.

4.1.3 Wage Labouring

Onion cultivation is a labour-intensive farming system. Throughout the three months of cultivation, daily irrigation is to be ensured. During the three months of cultivation period, a cultivator has to be present every day on the field. Additional labour requirements are during planting and harvesting periods. Labour costs therefore pile up to a considerable part of the cultivation costs, in particular, if the cultivator employs labourers for the whole season in case he cannot cultivate his own holdings or only part of it. Daily wage rates are approx. Rs 250-300 for men and Rs 150-250 for women.

Wage labourers, in order to find employment, need networks and relations to tenants or landowners, who employ labourers. In many cases, leasing out land is connected to becoming a wage labourer at the same time, as many land owners work on their own land as labourers. As many tenants bring their own wage labourers from Nilaveli, Sampalththivu or Irrakakandy, it can be assumed, that competition for job opportunities is high. The observed high self esteem among villagers and the therefore mentioned unwillingness to travel for labour could raise the competition even more. Wage labour opportunities in onion cultivation are certainly limited to season times (January-March and June-August). Apart from the season, wage labour opportunities within Kumpurupitty are scarce. Nevertheless, in whole Kumpurupitty both men and women engaged in wage labour, although the tasks seem to differ. Women concentrate on light activities, e.g. weeding, while men carry out heavy tasks, such as land preparation.

4.1.4 Access to Financial Capital

Farmers require cash or loans in order to finance the inputs for onion cultivation, which is a high investment (up to Rs. 100,000 per acre) – high profit crop. Cultivation costs dispose of seed onions, water pump, labour costs, fertilizer and plant protection chemicals. In order to irrigate the fields farmers need water pumps (fuel, kerosene, or electric) including the hosepipes. Due to the cost of roughly Rs 35,000 many villagers do not own a pump themselves but depend on those of tenants. Electricity is only available illegally by tapping. Compared to kerosene driven pumps, electric pumps would reduce the production costs by around 3,000⁶ Rs per acre. Due to limited voltage they cannot be applied at all times. Tractors and

⁶ This figure was mentioned by one farmer.

disc ploughs are necessary to prepare the fields which nobody in the village has got either.

Box 3: Access to Loan Facilities

Loan facilities to villagers are six fold:

- (1) Villagers buy inputs for cultivation from the traders in Nilaveli and Irrakakandy on credit, settling them after the harvest.
- (2) Some villagers finance cultivation cost by pawning jewellery in banks (interest rate (i.r.): 3%/month) or with private people (i.r.: 10%/month).
- (3) "Seetu" is practiced as traditional institution of saving and credit.
- (4) Oxfam provides revolving funds to Kumpurupitty East.
- (5) Banks, such as the Hatton National Bank (HNB), provide loans, but demand certain requirements, viz. a loan taker should provide a deed for at least one acre of agricultural land and 0.5 acre of homestead land. This is a serious constraint to many farmers in Kumpurupitty. The research team could not detect any villager in Kumpurupitty, who received a loan from HNB. The field officer of HNB concentrates his work on Nilaveli area.
- (6) Additionally one farmer in Kumpurupitty South mentioned that he financed the purchase of his fuel-run water pump by payment in instalments.

Note: The Agrarian Development Department does not provide any loan facilities for onion cultivation.

However, most of the villagers stated that they do neither have enough cash and savings nor sufficient access to credit to afford onion cultivation on their own. Only very few manage to save and then to increase the cultivated area step by step. This could be the main reason, why landowners in Kumpurupitty largely lease out their land to outside tenants.

4.1.5 Trade Networks and Marketing Channels

Nine traders and lorry owners from Irrakakandy, Nilaveli and Trincomalee have established a marketing network with the national market institutions in Colombo and Dambulla. The lorry owners take over the transportation to onion brokers in Colombo and sell the produce on behalf of farmers. Employees of the traders distribute empty sacks before noon and collect the filled sacks in the early afternoon. This procedure allows them to leave the area early enough before darkness. It is common practice that the brokers pay the farmers within 5 days. Brokers and the wholesale traders in Colombo normally charge commission for their

services. Trade relationships are largely based on trust, viz. long-term networks both, between the farmers and the brokers as well as between the brokers and the wholesale traders. Farmers hardly have a possibility to control whether or not the broker states the correct sale price in Colombo. Farmers explained that many of them rely on one or two brokers, mainly from their own communal group, and try to establish a trustworthy relationship. Others negotiate the best price with different brokers and put up with possible cheating.

Market prices fluctuate considerably throughout the year, ranging from Rs. 20-25 up to Rs. 60-80 during specific Sinhala festival periods. Storage is possible only to a limited extent, since onions lose weight during storage and this reduces the profit from higher prices per kg in off-season periods.

Traders complained unilaterally that the checkpoint system would impose a constraint to their profitability, since the procedures for permission from the navy are time-consuming.

However, Muslim traders did not report any major difficulties while passing through the checkpoints. In 5-10% of travelling, the security forces might check the lorry's transport goods, which can delay the transport by 1-2 hours. Tamil traders complained more about constraints, delays and nepotism from the security forces and also pointed out that Muslim traders had a comparative advantage, since they could more easily access and deal with the navy forces in Nilaveli camp.

Box 4: Commissions in Onion Cultivation

One farmer in Irrakakandy reported the following commissions:

- (1) Rs. 100 per bag (kg) for transport
- (2) Rs. 1-2 per kg for the broker
- (3) 5% of sales price for wholesaler.

It seems common practice that the commission charges are not mentioned on the invoice, which is the base for tax declaration.

Box 5: Innovative Onion Cultivators in Irrakakandy

One innovative onion cultivator from Irrakakandy explained that he would advance his cultivation cycle by two months from December to October. He harvests in January, when onion prices are very high. However, he told that advancing cultivation would incline a high risk of water logging and can thus only be carried out on land with a good drainage. On the other hand, he saves irrigation, which especially reduces the labour costs, but utilises more pesticides. In the last 8 years, he was successful in seven times and experienced once a total crop failure. According to this farmer, approximately 20% of onion cultivators in Irrakakandy reverted to this practice, but he did not know any farmer in Kumpurupitty who would follow this farming system.

4.1.6 Underlying Rationales

Onion farming requires high investment and hence high risk, but offers prospects of high profits. Most landowners in Kumpurupitty are not themselves taking this cultivation risk as cultivating entrepreneurs, but outsource the cultivation risk to tenants. Investment costs into fixed and variable production factors, repaying the credits, marketing the yields at profitable prices and facing a crop failure are fully borne by the tenant, if the tenancy arrangement is based on fixed land leases.

Instead, many landowners in Kumpurupitty look for wage labour, which ensures the daily wage (in season time) and, on top, the amount for the lease (~ Rs. 6,000 per year). The research team finds three possible rationales for this risk minimisation strategy:

- (i) Landowners do not have an alternative to lease out their land, because they lack access to financial capital (loans), but want to satisfy their urgent household cash requirements. This forces them to lease out the land and to work as wage labourer on their own land.
- (ii) Many remaining villagers lack an entrepreneurial spirit. This could be a societal phenomenon (lack of education, social backwardness), but could also be borne by the uncertainty factor of the security situation. Hence, only few farmers invest into cultivation and gradually building up financial capital by taking the risk of cultivation.
- (iii) A third reason could be that villagers prefer to stay mobile, since people have experienced several times displacement and are afraid of having to flee, again leaving all resources behind. However, onion cultivation is confined to a limited period in the year and thus reduces the risk of having to leave exactly in the period of cultivation. As onion can be cultivated more than once a year, a harvest failure and thus an economic loss can be more easily compensated by a profitable cultivation in the same year.

Many poor households in Kumpurupitty prefer a mixed livelihood portfolio of income earning activities, instead of investing heavily in one major activity, such as onions. One common portfolio of combination consists of leasing out land (income from land lease), earning additional income as wage labourer (on own fields) and relying on welfare assistance from the government. This household livelihood portfolio assures subsistence, but does not offer prospects for economic advancement.

4.2 Complementary Income Earning

4.2.1 Livestock Keeping

Before villagers got displaced, livestock keeping played a major role in the village economy. During displacement, most cattle owners lost their livestock in the jungle, which is not accessible at present. Nowadays, only few villagers in Kumpurupitty rear cattle, some are involved in goat rearing. While households would have natural capital (grazing land) to raise cattle, they seem to lack the financial capital for investment. The cost of an animal purchase is too high for many to afford.

Some villagers, especially in Kumpurupitty East, rear goats, which are owned by people from Nilaveli on an informal agreement with the owner, according to which every second kid goat is provided to the labourer. Most of the families sell the goats, especially males, for slaughtering instead of investing themselves in goat rearing.

4.2.2 Fishing

Sea (fish) and lagoon resources (prawns, crabs, fish) in Kumpurupitty provide a high potential for fishing. However, the current conflict situation and the security restrictions imposed by the navy prevent people from making adequate use of these resources. The navy bans fishing behind the 10-miles zone. Furthermore, villagers are afraid to go to the lagoon, which borders to grey areas under control of LTTE.

The season for sea fishing is from February until October with the exception of June/July. For short distance fishing, permission is required from the security forces. Few Singhalese families in Kumpurupitty East have the permission for deep-sea fishing. These households hire wage labourers from Kumpurupitty and their home regions. Some families live permanently in Kumpurupitty, while others migrate from their places of origin in Puttalam to Kumpurupitty only during the fishing season. Singhalese traders from Trincomalee dominate the trading and marketing of fish. Deep-sea fishing is a main income source for a limited number of Singhalese families.

Lagoon fishing with nets is allowed without permission, but people are reluctant to use the lagoon resources, since navy soldiers are escorting this area, which is at the border to LTTE controlled jungle area. Seven to eight people involve in lagoon fishing and market the catch in Trincomalee through traders from Irrakakandy. Traders normally pay 50% of expected income on the spot, the balance latest two days after selling the catches. Lagoon fishing can provide complementary income: In days of good catches (between 2-5kg), a fisherman might work 3-4 hours and yield Rs 70-120 per kg of prawns. Average earning of 300 Rs/day were reported.

Box 6: Migrant Fishermen and women in Kumpurupitty

The navy forces in Nilaveli gave permission for deep-sea fishing to Sinhalese fishing families, but did not grant the similar rights to local fishermen. One fisherwomen from Puttalam Deep-sea stated that deep-sea fishing was a highly profitable business. However, initial investment costs for fishing equipment are very high (fishing net ~ Rs. 400,000). She employs Sinhalese fishing labourers. The arrangement is based on yield (income) sharing, i.e. half of the yield remains with the boat owner and half of the yield goes to the fishing labourers. This arrangement shares the risk equally between labourers and boat owner. Other boat owners also employ fishermen from Kumpurupitty as wage labourers.

In Kumpurupitty, villagers complain about unequal treatment of different communal groups and substantiate their grievances with a particular case: According to one fisherman, outsiders (from other communal groups) come with large nets and boats for fishing. If villagers complain at the respective authorities or the security forces, they fear harassment by the navy forces.

Fisheries extension services are hardly carried out. One reason could be that the officers in charge are afraid to travel to these semi-cleared areas, since he belongs to another communal group. However, one village-level officer confirmed that a fishermen society is currently being founded.

4.2.3 Kasippu Brewing

One household brews Kasippu illegally and sells it among villagers. Many people consider this illicit liquor production as a social problem in the village. It depletes scarce household cash resources and enhances violence within families. Villager said that it would be the task of either the GS or the DS to handle the problem, but neither has taken effective action in this regard up to now.

4.2.4 Vegetable Production and Crop Diversification

A few landowners in Kumpurupitty South practice crop diversification on their own fields and cultivate tomatoes, chilli, and manioc in rotation. Cultivation serves as an additional income source (can be marketed in Irrakakandy) and for home consumption. Farmers bought the seeds initially and now breed them themselves. Vegetable cultivation helps preserve the soil and does not require as much chemical input as onion cultivation requires, but it is much less profitable than the latter. Vegetable cultivation employs a long cultivation period (six months compared to 2-3 months for onions), and requires a high labour input for weeding etc.

In comparison with onion cultivation, vegetable production reduces the risk of economic loss, when it comes to crop failure, since the investment costs are comparatively low. However, the long cultivation period increases the risk of economic loss in the case of sudden displacement, since the probability is high, that vegetables are currently cultivated and unripe on the fields. From an ecological point of view, crop diversification and vegetable production is more environmentally sound, since it reduces the exploitation of soil fertility and the contamination of groundwater resources through pesticides.

4.2.5 Firewood Collection

Firewood collection is an activity where people use the jungle as natural asset. Firewood collection is a high-risk business, since access to the jungle in the hinterland is restricted by the army and also bears the risk of meeting the LTTE. The wood can be sold within Kumpurupitty and in adjacent villages to people who do not have access or are afraid to go to the jungle. Push-bicycles are the means of transporting in this case.

4.3 Coping with the Vulnerability Context

4.3.1 Passing of Army Checkpoints

The navy imposes certain restrictions on the mobility of goods and items (see Section 3.6). Local people have developed certain coping strategies to at least partly by-pass the regulations. Friends and relatives" support households and take items of people, who need to transport additional amounts of items, which would exceed their personal budget of allowed items. Some families therefore go shopping with friends, who then take part of the products into the area under their name. Furthermore, villagers carefully observe which officers are more friendly-minded and less strict. Once the people notice them when going to town, they know how many items they can bring when returning. While people satisfy the claims of the army as far as is necessary, they by-pass rules and laws wherever loopholes are detected.

4.3.2 Seeking More Secure Places Within the Village

To increase personal security, many families have moved their homesteads from the interior part of the village towards the main road. This could be observed, when people did return from displacement but chose not to stay in their former houses. Some households owned the land where they shifted their homestead to, others have encroached (abandoned) land after returning.

4.3.3 Investment Choices

Most villagers in Kumpurupitty still live in permanent huts, partly sheltered with tin sheets, and refrain from investing into rebuilding solid houses. Many houses are destroyed or carry the risk of collapse. The research team detected various rationales, which keeps people away from investing in houses:

- Lack of financial capital leaves people no other choice than staying in huts.
- Fear and feeling unsafe about future security situation prevents people from investing in houses, which might be destroyed again.
- There are traditional beliefs, which refrain people from reconstructing destroyed buildings.
- Living in huts allows people to hide their real income and economic status in order to be eligible for support from governmental and non-governmental organisations (dry rations, Samurdhi stamps).

4.3.4 Change of Gender Roles

Comparing gender roles now and before 1983, one village-level officer mentioned that women were mainly involved in paddy processing and animal husbandry before 1983. Nowadays, households do not pursue either of the two activities due to the restricted access to the paddy fields and the loss of cattle during the conflict. Women carried out these activities mainly at home. At present, women, especially from vulnerable households, work as wage labourers or engage in transport of goods, which implies that they become more involved in economic and social networks outside of the house.

As far as intra-household decision-making is concerned, villagers in most places stated, that men and women decide together on handling the money, schooling and other important issues. However, the money seems to be administered by women.

5 FEEDBACK LOOPS - IMPACTS ON LIVELIHOODS

Feedback loops look into the impact of coping strategies and their outcome on the livelihood. It focuses on how the five household capital assets are affected of both, those carrying out the coping strategy and of other households. Chapter 5 will focus on the impacts of onion cultivation as the dominating farming system in Kumpurupitty.

5.1 Impacts of Onion Cultivation

5.1.1 Degrading Social Status and Financial Capital Assets

Many landowners in Kumpurupitty degrade their social status, when they lease out their land to tenants and work themselves as wage labourers on their fields. The landowner becomes dependent on the tenant who employs him as a wage labourer. Profits solely flow to the tenant, who also determines the conditions of cultivation and marketing. The landowner cum wage labourer has a basic income from the land lease and from wage labouring during the cultivation period. This, however, does not seem to be sufficient to enable households to save and increase their financial capital. They are therefore neither able to invest from own resources, nor do they qualify for a bank loan, since they cannot fulfil the requirements of the bank. It was observed that people in Kumpurupitty remain poor, even though outsiders use their resources to gain high profits. The lack of entrepreneurial spirit and the limited access to financial capital are a serious constraint for development of the village economy. Villagers are able to satisfy their subsistence for food security, but unable to capture opportunities for economic growth and remain in a poverty trap. People in Kumpurupitty might feel particularly under stress due to the volatile vulnerability context, which might urge them to avoid taking risks and limit their interest in investment.

5.1.2 Harming the Environmental Resources

Onion cultivation heavily utilises land and water resources: Agro-well irrigation withdraws groundwater from a vulnerable hydrological aquifer system. A well survey conducted on behalf of IFSP (Panabokke et al. 2001) came up with alarming results concerning dropping water tables and increasing pollution and salinity of well water. Villagers themselves realise that groundwater resources become depleted, and react with digging wells even deeper. Farmers also stated that the area under onion cultivation will have to be reduced in future, since water resources will not be sufficient to supply all fields with irrigation water. The agro-climatic conditions, which on the one hand, favour onion cultivation, aggravate the problem of water scarcity: the low retaining capacity of the soil and the high evaporation rates affect the irrigation efficiency considerably, since post-conveying water losses within the farming system are substantial. Furthermore, the increased salinity of groundwater will have a detrimental effect on yields in the future.

The natural conditions also increase the impacts of over-fertilisation: nutrients and chemical fertiliser are washed out and trickle down to the groundwater. This urges farmers to apply even more fertiliser, increasing, on the one hand, cultivation costs, and on the other hand, ecologically harmful effects. Polluted well water utilised for home consumption can seriously harm the health status of the population, in particular that of young children. It is clear that onion cultivation is not an environmentally sound and sustainable farming system in the area, since it harmfully exploits the natural resources. The adverse impacts gradually undermine the resource base for onion cultivation, which might not be feasible anymore within a period. Thus, onion cultivation is both, environmentally unsustainable and economically unviable (in the long term).

An important issue is how tenancy arrangements in Kumpurupitty might contribute to environmentally unsustainable natural resource exploitation: Tenancy arrangements do normally not last more than one year, since landowners are afraid of claims from tenants for their lands. Land laws give tenants a right to buy the land they cultivate after a certain period of farming. As the duration of contracts is short, tenants are not interested in preservation and sustainable land utilisation. Their primary objective is to maximise the short-term profit, even at the cost of degradation of resources, which will harm the landowner and possibly a future tenant, but not himself. Although, in the short term, landowners might benefit from the tenants' investment in land (e.g. fencing), the long-term depletion of soil and water resources undermines the household's natural capital assets and might overcompensate the small financial gains from tenancy.

5.1.3 Increased Dependency on the Onion Market

The focus on onion as the single crop creates a severe dependency on the onion market conditions. Profits are dependent on the interruption of Jaffna supplies. In a post-conflict period, farmers from the area would have to compete again with the produce from Jaffna. It is not clear which production area will have the comparative advantages in production factors and access to markets. The higher supply will, in any case, considerably reduce sales prices, and consequently, profits. Onion cultivation relies on windfall profits due to new opportunities provided by the present conflict situation, but it is not an environmentally and economically sustainable farming system. Diversified vegetable production might be more viable, even with lower profits, but might not be practicable in the future, if natural resources are fully depleted through onion cultivation.

5.2 Rules of the Game - Aligning with Power Holders

The research team observed that the respective authorities tolerate encroachment of abandoned as well as crown land. Encroachment in abandoned land is informally confirmed through annual land permits. Procedures are not transparent and prone to patronage and nepotism, since it is the authorities in charge deciding in which case they are out-ruling formal law and granting informal arrangements. Especially encroachment on abandoned land is a sensitive issue, since it is not clear how claims of returning landowners are dealt with. This bears a high breed of potential land disputes in a post-conflict period. Furthermore, the insecurity of land tenure can reduce the willingness of current land cultivators for long-term investment in land resources, thus triggering unsustainable cultivation practices.

In the long run, the patronised system of granting informal land use rights could undermine the accountability of government institutions, and thus reduce public trust in governmental decisions and arrangements. Villagers might react and try to access political capital (networks with politicians, armed forces or administrators) for their individual benefits. In the long run, this could reduce social capital of a community, and harm collective action, since farmers seek individual alliances with power holders.

Political capital, viz. the ability of a household to access political, administrative or military power holders, largely determines the access to important economic resources, such as marketing networks, fishing grounds, etc. Political capital in the research area is heavily ethnicised, providing some communal groups with a comparative advantage with regard to accessing security forces and achieving relaxation of their regulations. This contributes to deepen ethnic grievances and fuels the grass-root causes of communal violence in the eastern province.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CO: Colonisation Officer

DS: Divisional Secretary

GS: Grama Sevaka

HNB: Hatton National Bank

i.r.: interest rate

LO: Land Officer

LDO: Land Development Ordinance

MPCS: Multi Purpose Co-operative Society

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

OIC: Officer In Charge

PEG: Productivity and Enterprising Grant

RDO: Rural Development Officer

SLF: Sewa Lanka Foundation

Field Research Kumpurupitty

	Informant	Method	Topic/Remark
North	Farmers (men and women),	Group discussion,	Onion business & cultivation, Security restrictions
North	GS North, SDOs	Group discussion,	Samurdhi procedures Dry ration Village History
North	3 Villagers, met accidentally	Transect walk with occasional chats	
North	3 households wage labourers and share croppers (= landowners)	Semi-structured interviews	Cost of cultivation Land transfers RDS Activities
North	Widow	Semi-structured interview	Health, children, Governmental support
North	Family, recently resettled	Semi-structured interview	Personal history, schooling, Relation to power holders income sources
North	Housewife	Semi-structured interview	Cultivation practices, personal history
South	Farmer, children	Semi-structured interview	Personal history, animal husbandry, dry ration
Nilaveli	DS, SSO	Semi-structured interviews,	Resettlement fund, land use rights
East, North, South	RDS and Samurdhi Task Force	Group discussion	RDS activities and problems, onion cultivation & trading
South	Share cropping farmer	Semi-structured interview	Tenancy arrangements, village history
South	Family, wage labourer, vegetable cultivation	Semi-structured interview	History, tenancy arrangements, cultivation
East	Farmer	Semi-structured interview	Goat rearing, onion cultivation
East	2 Fishermen	Semi-structured interview	Fishing business Liquor brewing
East	Housewife	Semi-structured interview	Dowry, Caste, governmental support
East	Family	Semi-structured interview	Onion cultivation
Irrakandan dy	Trader	Semi-structured interview	History of business
East	Housewife, fishermen	Semi-structured interviews	Fishing practices, goat rearing, security restrictions, caste, dowry

	Informant	Method	Topic/ Remark
Nilaveli	DS	Semi-structured interview	Land transfer, documents of land titles, rehabilitation and resettlement funds,
Nilaveli	RDO	Semi-structured interview	RDS activities,
Nilaveli	GS	Semi-structured interview	Gender roles, Fishing, etc.
Nilaveli	Tenant onion cultivator	Semi-structured interview	Onion cultivation, cost of cultivation
Nilaveli	Tamil trader	Semi-structured interview	Onion trade, onion cultivation, security situation
North	Housewife, Employee of trader	Semi-structured interviews	History, plans, decision making, onion trade; Trade business
North	Family (share cropping)	Semi-structured interview	Cultivation practices & costs
South	Farmer	Semi-structured interview	Vegetable cultivation
South	Women	Semi-structured interview	Tenancy arrangements
South	Farmer	Semi-structured interview	Vegetable cultivation, tenancies
East	Family	Semi-structured interview	Decision-making, Gender roles, NGO activities, ownership of land
East	Farmer	Semi-structured interview	NGO activities, village history