

Internship Report

Socio-economic and health study in Sri Lanka



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Summary

During the month of July I first met the staff of the Italian National Institute of Health (Istituto Superiore di Sanità – ISS) who was working at the project “Health and Social Conditions in the Districts of Galle, Matara, Kalutara and Trincomalee, Sri Lanka”. The External Relations office of ISS is composed by researchers Rita Ferrelli, Alfonso Mazzaccara, Alice Fauci and Manila Bonciani, it is involved in all the activities concerning international agreements of technical-scientific cooperation connected to issues that are relevant for the public health. My involvement in this phase concerned the review of literature on the web, the elaboration of the first draft of the socio-economic questionnaire used in the survey and the preparation of the Research Proposal. During this month I approached the project and its main components that I briefly report hereafter:

A) socio-sanitary study – it describes the socio-economic and environmental conditions of people living in four districts hit by 26th December 2004 tsunami, the need of health and the response of the Health System in these areas, the tools that will be used are a questionnaire for the quantitative data and focus group discussions and narrative-based interviews for the qualitative ones

B) clinical-diagnostic survey – it aims to validate the morbidity reported by the socio-sanitary study in relation with selected pathologies of chronic-degenerative nature

C) public health laboratory – it foresees the analysis of water samples from wells for the survey and characterization of environmental risk factors and the food hygiene analysis that is referred to food selling and preservation activities in order to evaluate their potential as source of infection

At the end of August I left Italy to follow the activities directly in Sri Lanka where ISS office in Colombo is implementing two projects: the first one is the socio-economic and health study, the other one is a capacity building project on management of disasters and complex emergencies.

This project will provide the expertise necessary for the immediate handling of disasters through training addressed to health personnel at different level (division, district, local), the sharing of knowledge among the people involved will be achieved through a cascade process: the medical officers at division level will be trainers for those ones at district level, who will spread at their turn the expertise at local level.

During the two months that I spent in Colombo I followed all the start up phase of these projects, supporting ISS staff in different activities which I'll try to classify in the following way:

- Activities directly related to the survey: translation, validation, pre-testing and final review of the socio-economic and health questionnaire, market analysis for the procurement of scientific equipment
- Budget procedures: support to the elaboration of narrative and financial reports to the Department of Civil Protection according to ECHO standards, purchasing and visibility procedures
- Relations with counterparts: I mean all kind of relationships that have been kept at institutional and non-institutional level

Several activities, especially those related to logistics (i.e. selection of local personnel and purchase of office equipment), have been carried out in common for both projects, while all the above mentioned refer specifically to the socio-economic and health study.

I left Colombo on October 29th 2005, completing my internship at the beginning of the research activities. I keep on contact with ISS staff and with the project coordinators in Colombo, I'm still following the research activities.

Starting the internship – Activities in Rome

Review of literature

As a consequence of December 26th 2004 tsunami wave, many districts of Sri Lanka reported extended damages to infrastructures and restrictions in the supply of basic services exacerbating the recovery of social and economic activities. This situation is the object of study of the research, which aims to evaluate the socio-economic and health situation in the districts of the Italian Civil Protection competence (Galle, Matara, Kalutara and Trincomalee). The questionnaire is intended to be the main tool for data collecting in order to support the strategic decision of Sri Lanka's Health System, its structure and contents have been determined after a literature review on the web which has been carried out in the month of July.

The aim of the literature review is to find all the available data on certain topics in order to exclude them from the field research, therefore it is a necessary step before the elaboration of the questionnaire, which is the main toll for data collecting.

When I start to work on this task I used as frame for my search a grid containing all the information to find out. The criterion used to organize data was represented by a three levels (columns) structure, each of them with an increased degree of definition, beginning from *dimension* (e.g. demographic profile) and following with *information* (e.g. age distribution) and *indicator* (e.g. 0-14 %). The fourth level (column) corresponded to the *source* containing the requested data, that was the information to find out. I will mention just the main topics of this grid which correspond to the first level of information (column *dimension*), they are: demographic profile, epidemiological profile, nutritional profile, social profile, economic profile, environmental profile, social services, sanitary assistance, country health profile (see annex A.3 for the complete grid). A database has been created using all the sources identified in this phase, while the grid has been used to allocate the punctual information related to a certain topic.

Getting to the heart of this review, I noted a lack of information regarding the sanitary and health dimensions, all data which refer to hospitals and infrastructures were not up dated and dated back to 2001 at best, while only generalized information was available on the following items: areas covered, medical staff, expenditure. This was a clear indication for the making of the questionnaire, which has an entire section referred to health dimension.

Two important sources were represented by the Department of Census and Statistics and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, a large part of the information about the economic and social dimensions comes from these institutions, as they have a central role in the collection of data in the country. It must be noted that the Department of Census and Statistics has been directly involved in the activities of the project during the start-up phase.

Other sources included in the grid come from international organisations reporting activities (reports from UNDP, WFP, WHO, IOM etc.) or from Srilankan web pages concerning post-tsunami relief (one for all the web site of Recoverlanka).

I found this activity very useful as it let me better understand the context in which the project is implemented, the search of data implies always a selection of different sources and this process needs a comprehension of all the documents and reports collected, with an increased awareness of a certain matter. For this reason it is a necessary, but also time consuming, activity.

I care to report my personal contribution in this phase that is the introduction in the grid of an additional information related to the dimension "economic profile". I noted in this section the

absence of any indicator referred to the income distribution therefore I proposed to insert in the grid this information and the Gini index as indicator. This activity gave me the opportunity to find immediately a link with the subjects of the master as I could take advantage of the lectures on development economics and on economic indicators.

First draft of the questionnaire

The most interesting activity that I followed in Rome has probably been the elaboration of the questionnaire in its rough form. I got involved in the draft of several profiles (demographic, social and economic) working in team with researchers Alice Fauci and Manila Bonciani (and with my master course colleague Alessandra Torsello).

The questionnaire has been structured as follows:

- Three main sections:
 - Social and economic characteristics
 - Environmental risk factors
 - Health status
- Every section is made up of subsections referring to different profiles (with regard to the section “Social and economic characteristics”, that was the one in which I got involved, it is made up of six subsections: Socio-demographic profile, Income, Expenditure, Social capital, Housing, Tsunami and other disaster related issues)
- Closed questions structure

Once identified the topics and the information to gather with the questionnaire, the next step was to formulate the proper questions in order to satisfy two fundamental conditions: to collect the exact needed data and to make the questions understandable for the interviewee. The second condition is less obvious than it may appear as the cultural and social differences play a key role, therefore some questions may not have a meaning (or at least not the same one) or they may not be convenient when they are transposed in a different context.

What made really interesting to face with this problem was the fact that Sri Lanka is a multicultural country, it has six main ethnic groups and four main religious groups, furthermore it is a country where it is still alive the caste system. The formulation of the questions which were referred to social and economic profiles had to consider this particular context.

Another problem concerned the fact that while the interviewee is one (the head of the household¹), the information that he gives refers to all the members of the household, therefore he must be able to provide data related to other persons who live with him with sufficient accuracy. On the other hand the question must be formulated with a proper degree of detail. We faced this problem in particular with the migration history of the household and with the occupations of the household members.

When we began to work on the economic profile we had to solve a problem connected with the classification of household members jobs. A particular job can be considered in fact under different points of view, such as the kind of contract, the specific activity executed or the wider sector of which this activity is part. Several international classifications helped us to allocate each job in these different perspectives.

¹ the household is the sampling unit, defined as "group of people living together and eating at least one meal daily "

In the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) of all economic activities, edited by United Nations, every economic sector is listed with the correspondent activities (e.g. the sector “manufacturing” contains the activities “manufacture of food”, “manufacture of textiles” etc.). Another classification (1988 International Standard Classification Codes) helped us to find a criterion to classify each job according to its belonging to a certain occupational category (e.g. Q. who are office clerks ? A. secretaries, numerical clerks, library clerks etc.). Finally the International Classification of Status of Employment has been used to classify each job according to its status (e.g. employees, employers, own-account workers etc.). The result is a three dimensions description of the household members jobs: according to the employment status, the occupational category and the type of economic activity.

The thing that I most appreciated during this activity has been certainly the possibility to join in team working with ISS researchers playing an active role in the elaboration of the questionnaire, especially for the economic profile where I could take advantage from my economic background and from some master lectures.

Preparation of the research proposal

Towards the end of July ISS staff was involved in the preparation of the Research Proposal (see annex A.1) that would be submitted for approval to the Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka and to the Ethical Committee (an organism separated from the Ministry of Health with competence on ethical questions). In this phase the design of the tools that would be used in the survey was sufficiently defined and this document gave a description of them and of the methods used for data collecting.

My contribution in this activity has been the writing of the background and justification of the study. I briefly reported an overview of the country under different points of view, catching up the categories used in the literature review. In this way I took advantage of the work previously done as I just had to write down the country situation for each profile (the demographic one, the epidemiological one etc.), but having all the sources already selected and classified in the database.

I found this activity less interesting than the others, but I have to recognize that thanks to it I could consolidate my comprehension of the context in which the project is implemented because it forced me to examine dozens of reports and documents concerning different profiles of the country.

Office in Colombo – Start up activities

Logistics

At the end of August ISS office in Colombo had been just activated, but it was not fully operational since no local employee had been engaged, part of the office equipment was still missing and just one rented vehicle was available for the staff.

The office has to follow the implementation of two projects: the socio-economic and health study and the capacity building project on disasters management, therefore this structure must be able to support the activities of both of them. The composition of the office is not fixed, but variable according to missions alternation, when I joined in it the staff was composed by:

- Lucia Falchetti – resident local coordinator for the socio-economic and health study
- Franco Macera – resident local coordinator for the capacity building project
- Alice Fauci – ISS researcher
- Manila Bonciani – ISS researcher
- Alessandra Torsello – my master course colleague

The first activity that I followed has been the procurement of the equipment still missing (stationery, office furniture, laptops) and the activation of internet connection and of local area network.

After few days we started the selection of local personnel placing on the main local newspaper two vacancies advertisements. The profiles we needed were: a secretary to support all the activities of the office and two local coordinators (one for each project). The screening of curricula has been assigned to me and Alessandra.

Using as parameter the required qualifications inserted in the vacancies advertisements, we started to select the curricula, trying to find out a minimum number of eligible candidates. After this first screening we built up a short list using as frame a grid containing personal information of eligible applicants, with a note about the salient characteristics of their profiles and the accomplishment of the main required qualifications (see annex B.1). It took several days to complete this work as the number of curricula reached the threshold of 100 in few time, furthermore we tried to identify the profiles of the local coordinators in order to satisfy the different needs of each project.

The selection process continued with several interviews, but the engagement of local coordinators has been deferred to the beginning of the research activities.

This activity has been undoubtedly the most important in the area of logistics in terms of care and amount of job hours, but I think it has been also very interesting since through the screening of curricula we had an inside view of the school training in Sri Lanka and an idea of the kind of job experiences most common among the applicants.

Finally the last activity that I followed in this area has been the purchasing of a four wheels drive vehicle, the main employment of this car will be the transport of the research team during the implementation of the clinical-diagnostic survey, as it foresees the examination of selected household members.

I think that the procurement of goods related to the projects (vehicle, office and scientific equipment) are interesting for those aspects linked with purchasing procedures, therefore I will come back on these activities in the section of this report referred to the budget procedures.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire has been structured in three main sections, as I showed in the previous pages, but during its revision we divided it in two parts: the first one composed by sections 1 and 2 (“Social and economic characteristics” and “Environmental risk factors”), the second one by section 3 (“Health status”). Due to its length the questionnaire could not be read in one time, therefore it has been necessary to distribute its contents in two parts in order to make the interviews tolerable for the household members who got involved. Moreover it must be added that differently from sections 1 and 2, the “Health Status” section has not been written by ISS staff, but it comes from a questionnaire elaborated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) with appropriate corrections.

The first step that I followed in the revision process has been the translation of the first part (that I will call the socio-economic one) in Sinhalese and Tamil languages, at that time some adjustments have already been done, especially in the format of the questionnaire (placement of answer codes, arrangement of tables etc.).

The translation of the socio-economic part took almost a couple of weeks involving personnel of the Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka who contributed in the definition of questions. The passage from the English version to the Sinhalese and Tamil ones has been an interesting moment. It has been not simply a translation since the meaning of each question must be compared with the context to whom it referred, for this reason the contribution of Mr. Sumanawera and Mr. Kesavar from the Ministry of Health has been fundamental.

After the translation of the socio-economic part, the next step was its validation. In this phase we adopted a method based on two distinct tools: the back-translation of the questionnaire and its pre-testing. The first one consists in the translation of Sinhalese and Tamil versions back to the English one, in this way it is possible to check all the differences deriving from the passage from a language to another one and verify that the main content of the questions has remained the same.

The pre-test is the first experiment on the field and thanks to it we could have an idea about the reaction of the interviewees and the effectiveness of the questionnaire structure.

This has been probably the most important experience of my internship and the only activity on the field that I followed. We had two days for testing the questionnaire, the team was composed by me and my master course colleague Alessandra, ISS researcher Alice Fauci, Dr. Eeshara from the Ministry of Health in the first day and Mr. Sumanawera and Mr. Kesavar in the second day.

The first test we made has been carried out in a Sinhalese household, to whom we arrived thanks to a medical officer working in the district we selected for the interview. Dr. Eeshara had the role of the interviewer (in Sinhalese language) supported by the rest of the team.

The reaction of the head of the household (the interviewee) and of the other members assisting the interview has been very good, their participation has been fully, showing a willingness that perhaps we did not expect to find, especially considering the span of time (one hour and half) we were asking for. After this first experiment the team spent the rest of the day discussing the results achieved, each of us reporting his/her own impressions and conclusions. It has been really an absorbing activity, but also stressful for the climatic conditions in which we worked.

The second day we proceeded in a different way, dividing ourselves in two teams each of them led by a representative of the Ministry of Health with the role of interviewer (Mr. Sumanawera for the Sinhalese language and Mr. Kesavar for the Tamil one). In this way we could interview four heads of household, collecting important data and impressions that would be used in the final review of the questionnaire.

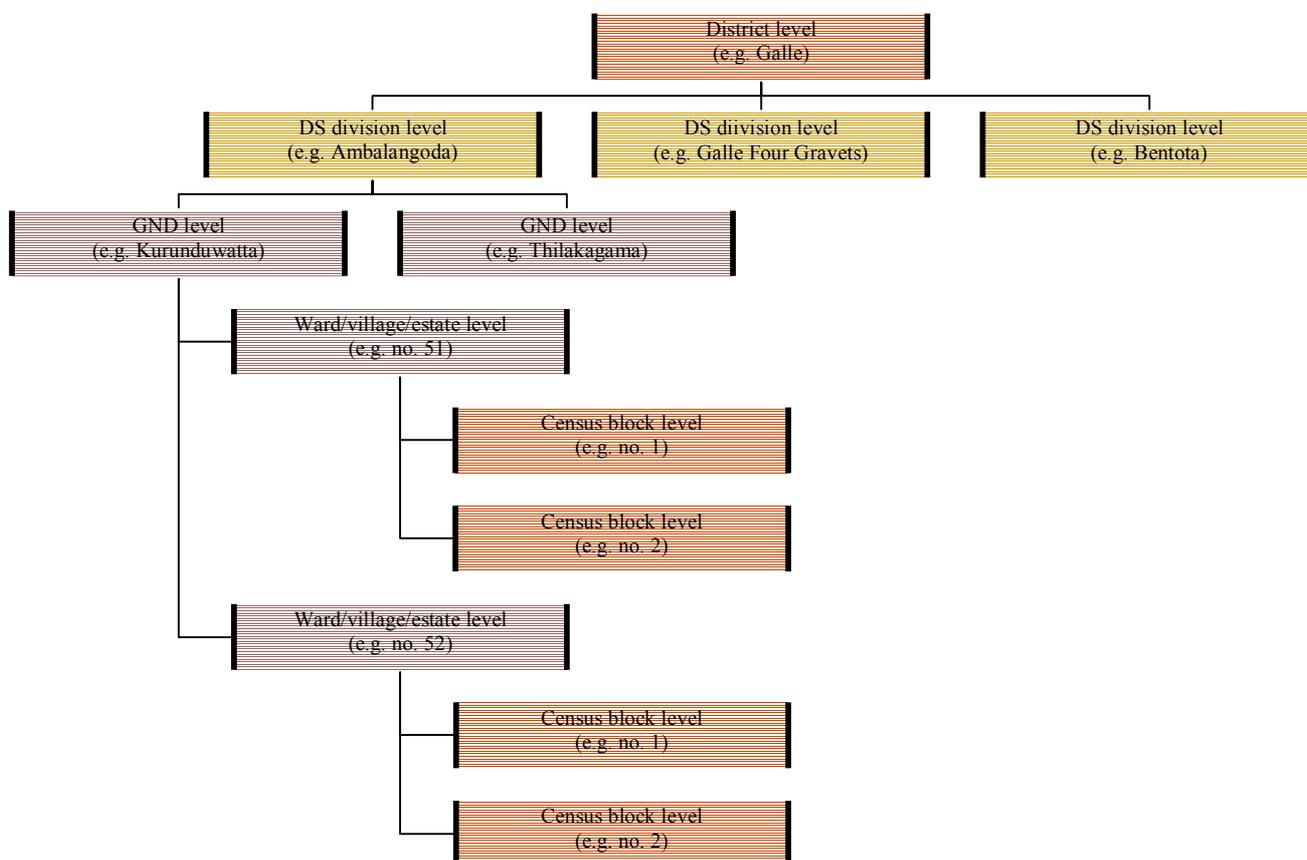
The validation of the socio-economic part was completed during the first half of October, while the “Health status” section (translated by Dr. Usha and Mr. Dhuvarahan from the Ministry of Health) has been validated only through the back-translation being an instrument already tested by WHO.

During the final review of the socio-economic part we faced two main issues: the length of the questionnaire and its format. We agreed to make the questionnaire more compact than it was in the first version in order to take up a span of time of about one hour, furthermore we tried to improve its legibility for the interviewer. I followed with particular attention this second issue looking for a way to insert the answer codes in the main text of the questionnaire rather than putting them in a separate paper.

I appreciated the work done on the questionnaire, I followed the development of this tool from its first draft until the final review, I could also have the opportunity to see directly its application on the field and notice how the efforts we made in the previous months in making it an effective tool lead us to a good result. I liked to work in team with the personnel of the Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka and a large part of the memories of my internship are linked to this activity, for these reasons I consider it the most important experience that I have done in the project.

Up-date of Census lists

The socio-economic and health study will be implemented in four districts hit by tsunami (Galle, Matara, Kalutara, Trincomalee), each district is structured as follows:



This is the partition used by the Department of Census and Statistics in order to map the whole country. The sample unit (i.e. the household) is retraceable through the lists of population of each selected Census block, but after selecting the households it is necessary to up-date the lists of population because it is possible that some of the people living in a certain block moved to another one and the enumerators (interviewers) cannot find them.

Before proceeding in the description of this activity I think it is useful to give some details about the sampling techniques of the study. The sampling is stratified by GND affected and GND not affected (by tsunami), within each strata, the clusters are selected from the GND list by using the probability proportional to size (PPS) technique. Within each cluster, 30 households are selected by simple random sampling. The size of the sample is 845 households in each district.

The up-date of the Census lists is not made by ISS staff, nor by the Department of Census personnel. Both the interviews and the up-date of these lists in fact are a task of the consulting company we selected in Sri Lanka, while ISS staff will be responsible for the training of the enumerators.

Nevertheless to get these lists of population we started the contacts with the Department of Census and Statistics as soon as we arrive in Colombo. This activity took about two months which have been necessary to give information about the project and to explain our needs to Census personnel, to copy the lists excluding the information not required from them and to correct some inevitable mistakes. It has been a slow process but finally we got the lists.

I followed personally the last part of this process keeping in contact with Census personnel to correct several mistakes in the copying of the lists. I found this activity boring but also useful to understand the functioning of the sampling techniques, moreover it gave me the opportunity to have an inside view of Srilankan bureaucracy.

Budget procedures

Narrative and financial reports

The socio-economic and health study is a project funded by the Italian Civil Protection, differently from the other one implemented by ISS which is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a consequence these projects have to follow different budget procedures. The Department of the Civil Protection chose in fact to adopt ECHO procedures as they are exposed in the *Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with humanitarian organisations* of the European Commission. These procedures are also exhaustively explained in the guidelines edited by Forum SOLINT with the name “ECHO-train”.

In the first week of September the Department of the Civil Protection organized in Colombo two meetings with the Italian non governmental organisations (ngo) working in Sri Lanka in order to clarify any doubt linked to the application of “ECHO-train” on the running projects, with a view on the deadline for the sending of intermediate financial and narrative reports of September 15th. We took part in the meetings in order to be better prepared for the elaboration of these reports, considering also as a chance the opportunity to meet representatives of our donor and the community of Italian ngos working in the country.

This activity has been the first one that I followed in the area of budget, the two days spent in these meetings have been important to approach ECHO procedures but of course they have not been enough to handle them with confidence. I deepened the knowledge of these procedures on my own using the guidelines “ECHO-train” and supporting project coordinator Lucia Falchetti in the elaboration of the narrative and financial reports.

The narrative report is a descriptive document in which the implementing organisation gives information about the progress of the project activities. In the month of September the socio-economic and health study was in start-up phase, but several activities have been already conducted especially in the definition of tools and methods of the survey and in the identification of local contacts. I have been involved in the description of these activities with regard to the first and second component of the study (socio-sanitary study and clinical-diagnostic survey) as I took part in the design of the questionnaire and in the search of suppliers for the scientific equipment of the project.

I found the elaboration of the financial report more interesting than the other activity although we had to face a problem connected to the nature of the project. ECHO procedures are thought for humanitarian organisations working with emergencies, evidence of this fact comes from the budget items foreseen by FPA, for this reason we found some difficulties in making our expenditure items compatible with those ones of the financial report since the ISS project is a research.

The degree of detail of budget items is expressed, with ECHO terminology, in terms of digit, two digit is the lowest degree of detail and corresponds to macro voices. The intermediate financial report must be elaborated at level six digit which is a degree of detail sufficient to represent a constraint for the future handling of the budget, this fact may explain how it is important in this phase to have a good level of definition of the project activities.

The elaboration of the narrative and financial report represented an important and interesting moment as it led to a general overview on the status of project activities in terms of progress and

level of definition, it has been also a team working activity since it needed the involvement of the whole staff working in the office.

Purchasing procedures

A large part of start-up activities is represented by the purchase of goods and services, I preferred to deal with this matter in this section rather than in the previous one as I consider the budget perspective more interesting than the scrupulous description of buying actions.

Before proceeding it is necessary a preliminary remark, ISS in fact is part of the Public Administration and it has its own regulations to purchase goods and services. This circumstance determined problems of compatibility with ECHO procedures as they are addressed to ngos and for this reason they assume that the implementing organisation is working under the private law.

ISS has obtained a derogation from the Department of Civil Protection that allows it to apply its own procedures in order to overcome the problems of compatibility with ECHO rules, therefore all the activities related to the purchasing of goods and services followed this regulations.

The buying actions executed in the start-up phase referred to the following items:

- office equipment
- vehicle
- engagement of a consulting company
- gadgets
- scientific equipment

For each of them we applied this procedure:

- 1) market analysis – it is a survey in which we collect data about all the available suppliers and quotations referred to the goods or services we need
- 2) identification of the supplier – it happens after the selection of different quotations and the evaluation of the reliability of the company
- 3) insertion of the supplier in the ISS roster – it is an administrative requirement of ISS
- 4) definition of the terms of the agreement – this is the phase in which ISS and the supplier commit themselves to respect the terms they agreed
- 5) issue of a formal invoice – documents for accounting

The first steps are certainly the most important, the availability of data and quotations is fundamental for a good selection of the suppliers, but it may take a considerable span of time since the suppliers reaction time may vary from several days to several weeks.

This is the case of many contacts started for the procurement of the scientific equipment which have been often unsatisfactory for the slowness of companies in giving information about the equipment we need and its availability. In such cases there is not a true selection as it may happen that only one or two companies satisfy a minimum standard of reliability (it is usual that the organisations which implement projects often deal with the same companies).

It is important to stress that the delays linked to the procurement of goods and services may have a considerable influence on the running of the project since it is often impossible to start an activity without the availability of the proper equipment, moreover the delay in one activity may have

consequences on other actions which are coordinated with it. A personal remark on this aspect is the consideration of “local times” (intended as local habits in business) in the planning of the project as it may be really hard to adjust the schedule of the activities once the project is started.

Visibility

During the elaboration of the financial report I followed with particular interest the determination of the budget item referred to “Visibility and communication programmes”. The Department of the Civil Protection spread specific guidelines for visibility actions in the projects implemented in Sri Lanka which are derived from ECHO procedures.

More than the content of these guidelines I think it is interesting the determination of the correspondent budget item as it had a direct effect on the definition of the activities related to the survey.

It is usual in a survey to give a small gift to the people involved in the interviews to thank them for their patience, but until the elaboration of the intermediate financial report there was no idea about the kind of gift. The determination of the budget item related to the visibility actions gave us the opportunity to better define this aspect.

We thought to use the amount fixed in the budget to buy some kind of gadget that would be given as a present to the households selected for the interviews. The gadget should report the logos foreseen by the guidelines in order to satisfy visibility requirements, so it should be an object with a proper surface, but at the same time it should be something useful for the household members. The search of the right gadget has been undoubtedly the lightest activity in this area as we went through a list of possible objects such as t-shirts, caps, umbrellas, shop bags etc.

Once we had an idea of the possible gadget we had to choose the right supplier so, according to the procedure that I showed, we selected one company and respecting the amount fixed in the budget we explored the different possibilities of buying.

I think that this a good example of how the budget may directly influence the definition of the activities and it is interesting to note that usually should be the budget items to be determined by the activities, clearly there is an interaction between them and a mutual influence, so it is possible, as in this case, that both of them turn toward a common solution.

Relations with counterparts – Contacts

The preparatory phase of the socio-economic and health study has been conducted by ISS office starting numerous contacts with local authorities. I report hereafter the local partners of ISS:

- Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka: it is the main local partner (Memorandum of Understanding with ISS)
- National Institute of Health Sciences (NIHS): it is a technical partner for the activities related to the Public Health Laboratory
- National Water Supply & Drainage Board (NWSDB): it is a technical partner with relevance for the water analysis

One of the first activities of the office in Colombo has been the constitution of a Research Team responsible for the management and supervision of the survey. The Research Team is composed by representatives of local partners of ISS and by representatives of other institutions that accepted to collaborate to the project (WHO and Department of Census and Statistics), the person responsible for the scientific activities (principal investigator) is Director of Health Information of the Ministry of Health Dr. Sunil Senanayake.

Many of the contacts we had with Dr. Senanayake referred to the submission of the Research Proposal to the Ethical Committee for approval. In the previous pages I gave a brief explanation of this procedure, I will report just that after the approval of the study by the Ministry of Health it was necessary to obtain that one of the Ethical Committee, therefore our relations with Dr. Senanayake concerned mainly the adjustment of the Research Proposal in order to achieve this result.

A large part of the relations we kept with Ministry of Health personnel referred to the activities directly linked to the survey (translation and validation of the questionnaire), I already mentioned Dr. Eeshara, Mr. Sumanawera, Mr. Kesavar, Dr. Usha, and Mr. Dhuvarahan who are the persons with whom I got involved more frequently. I really enjoyed the opportunity to work in team with all these people as I could learn how to face with different job methods and how to reach the maximum results from team working.

With regard to relations with representatives of other local partners of ISS, I will report just one contact that I had with Chief of laboratory services of NIHS Mr. Padmasiri. I had the opportunity to get involved in the meeting with Mr. Padmasiri and Mr. Kulkarni from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). ISS is starting a coordination with IAEA for the activities related to water analysis, during the meeting we had in the second half of October Mr. Padmasiri introduced us Mr. Kulkarni for a preliminary description of ISS activities, in order to explore possibilities of co-operation. It has been a good chance as I actively participated to the meeting supporting project coordinator Lucia Falchetti in the description of the project.

Remaining in the area of the relations at institutional level which have been kept by ISS office, it is necessary to mention the involvement of Department of Census and Statistics personnel. We had numerous contacts with them as the access to the lists of population took about two months. It has been probably the longest activity conducted by the office and I have been directly engaged in the last meetings we had with the Director of the Department, Mr. Gunasekera. As I have already reported, I found this activity boring and the meetings I had with Mr. Gunasekera have always been very short and tightly focused on the matter of the lists.

A different kind of contacts refers to the relations among ISS office and the Italian embassy in Colombo. Once a week the Embassy organizes a meeting with all the Italian ngos working in Sri Lanka to face with the problems connected to the implementation of the projects and to analyze the political context in which these projects will work. These meetings are thematic so each time it is possible to deepen a certain issue with the invited expert.

We participated to several meetings and I had the chance to be introduced to the Coordinator of Italian Cooperation Office in Sri Lanka, Paolo Bononi. I had two occasions to talk with him, the first time at the Embassy for a meeting, the second one during a monitoring mission to whom I take part with the project coordinator Franco Macera. It has been an occasion to talk about post-tsunami relief in Sri Lanka and to analyze the difficulties the ngos working in this country have to face.

Directly linked to the project activities, but at non-institutional level, have been many contacts with ISS suppliers, in particular with the consulting company we chose for the implementation of the research activities. Because of the relevance of the job this company is in charge of it has been necessary to organize frequent meetings to deepen the knowledge of the project and of the ISS requirements.

I participated to several meetings with the suppliers supporting project coordinator Lucia Falchetti in explaining ISS requirements and purchasing procedures.

Conclusions

In the month of July 2005 I started my internship at ISS External Relations office, I felt from the beginning a complete commitment of the staff to the job they were pursuing and I have been immediately involved in that climate taking part to the design of the project.

My relations with ISS staff in Rome, as well in Colombo, have always been very good and this is the reason why I'm really satisfied of this experience. I have been engaged in all the activities of the start up phase and I could give my contribution in each of them.

I had the opportunity to be involved in the implementation of two projects even if my contribution in the ISS capacity building programme has been occasional. Nevertheless I followed a really interesting activity related to this project taking part to a monitoring mission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (donor) aimed at verifying the progress of activities.

During the second half of October I supported the work of the project coordinators in numerous activities since my master course colleague Alessandra and ISS researchers left Colombo and the engagement of local personnel was deferred to the beginning of the research activities.

However the reason why I consider highly satisfactory my internship is certainly the fact that being involved in the start up phase of a project means carrying out a wide range of activities and this is what happened from the beginning.

My only regret concerns the few activities on the field that we followed during the preparatory phase of the project. As I wrote in the previous pages, the most important experience that I followed in my internship has probably been the participation to the pre-testing of the questionnaire. I really enjoyed this opportunity as it made me feel the sense of the work we were doing since July.

Moreover I'm sorry of missing the starting of the research activities and the training of the enumerators (interviewers) as I 'd really liked to follow also these activities in Colombo.

A final remark concerns the political context in which the project will be implemented. Sri Lanka is a country in transition both at political and economical level, it ranks 99 in the Human Development Index and nearly 7% of population lives below the poverty line (1 US\$ a day). After facing with the tsunami disaster the country is once more committed in ending the two-decade old civil conflict among the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The increasing tension of the last months determined a worrying climate for the Presidential elections that will be kept on November 15th 2005.

Although the project is completely extraneous to the political events of Sri Lanka, one of the districts in which the activities will be implemented is located in the North-East of the country, that is the area in which LTTE finds the greatest support. This circumstance determined different problems. On one hand the availability of data related to this district, since the weak Government control on these areas is reflected in the scarcity of information about the resident people. On the other hand the objective difficulties of carrying out a survey in safety conditions which are not at optimal level.

These considerations have been discussed with the representatives of the local partners of ISS and have had an impact on the definition of the project activities. In the internship perspective I think that they contributed to enrich my experience, giving to me a further opportunity to have an inside view of this country.

ANNEXES

See attached files for Annexes:

- A.1 Research Proposal
- A.2 Summaries
- A.3 Literature review grid
- B.1 Selection of local personnel grid
- B.2 Socio-economic questionnaire
- C ToRs

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