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Perceptions of inhabitants of a settlement vulnerable to natural hazards

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Peradeniya is a town which is vulnerable to landslide hazards and the National Building Research Organization (NBRO) has been involved in landslide mitigation activities in the town centre since 2009. The town has evolved due to its strategic location at the intersection of a main road. Presently it provides services in three main areas, functioning as a creator of livelihood opportunities for the communities in surrounding localities, catering to the needs of a transit population and satisfying the needs of a large number of government institutions located in close proximity. Hence, the existence of the town center is important particularly with population growth in the area despite the threat of landslides. The finding of the socio economic survey conducted in the town area reveals that 92% of the building units are used only for the purpose of economic activities, while 8% of the building units are used for dwellings along with the economic activities. The majority of the businesses are groceries, cafeterias, textile shops, vegetable and fruit selling outlets due to the demand for consumable goods. People may be using the location for their day to day market needs. Customers are abundant throughout the year since due to the strategic location of town center. Goods and services for economic activities are mainly found within Peradeniya itself and in the surrounding localities which indicate that the town centre is well established. Hence, the business community in the area demands the continued existence of the present location for their business activities, emphasizing the need for upgrading the present town center. Improving the facilities such as banking, vehicle parking, pedestrian paths, shopping complex etc, while mitigating the risk of landslides, are also demands of the community. Despite the relocation option of the present town center proposed by Urban Development Authority (UDA), landslide risks to the town center have been significantly reduced with completion of the first phase of the landslide mitigation project undertaken by the NBRO. The entire town center will be liberated of landslide risk on completion of the second phase of the project. According to the perceptions of the community, it is highly desirable that the town is developed through an appropriate urban design plan that incorporates proper landslide mitigation principles, without losing a vital human settlement due to natural hazards.

Acknowledgement: Financial Assistant by NBRO research grant (No. 40/14058)