

FORCED MIGRATION

Special Issue
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review

Tsunami: learning from
the humanitarian response



Forced Migration Review: the world's most widely read
magazine on refugee and internal displacement issues

Forced Migration Review

provides a forum for the regular exchange of practical experience, information and ideas between researchers, refugees and internally displaced people, and those who work with them. It is published in English, Spanish, Arabic and French by the Refugee Studies Centre/University of Oxford in association with the Norwegian Refugee Council. The Spanish edition, *Revista de Migraciones Forzadas*, is produced by IDEI in Guatemala.

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from the editors

The tsunami which swept across the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004 prompted a humanitarian response of unparalleled scale. The sheer scale of the relief operation, the fact that the tsunami primarily ravaged countries already coping with conflict-induced displacement and the sad reality that the humanitarian community often leaps into action without heeding lessons from the past motivated our decision to publish this additional issue of our magazine.



Corinne Owen

Although the final death toll, estimated to be over 300,000, is of staggering proportions, it is, however, a fraction of the numbers who in recent years have died in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Sudan. The tsunami captured the world's attention and generated an unprecedented outpouring of compassion and global solidarity while the needs of less visible displaced people, many in even greater need, remain unaddressed.

We are pleased to have gathered a unique collection of articles, bringing together the views of local NGOs in tsunami-affected states and the reflections of some of the key leaders in post-tsunami relief and recovery operations. We are grateful to the donors listed opposite who have made this publication possible, to our colleague Eva-Lotta Hedman for editorial advice and to Simon Harris for coordinating production and distribution in Colombo.

This special issue of FMR is dedicated to the victims of the tsunami but looks to the future. We hope that you find the articles which follow to be relevant to your work and that their recommendations will assist the humanitarian community to respond more effectively to disaster-induced displacement.

This issue of Forced Migration Review (FMR) has been printed in and distributed from Sri Lanka and is being printed in English and, on this occasion, also in Bahasa Indonesia, Sinhala and Tamil. The full text of all the articles in the four language editions will be available at: www.fmreview.org.tsunami.htm. For further information, and to be included on our mailing lists, please contact us (see details on left).

Those of you reading FMR for the first time may be interested in receiving further issues in one of our four regular languages – English, Arabic, Spanish and French. FMR is published by the University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre, is distributed in 165 countries and is the world's most widely read publication on refugee and internal displacement issues.

The theme of the following issue of FMR will be prospects for peace in Sudan. It will be distributed in November together with a supplement, published in collaboration with the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which will look at the capacity of the international community to protect and assist internally displaced people (IDPs).

With best wishes

Marion Couldrey and Tim Morris

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Front cover photo: Painting by Sri Lankan child from Batticaloa district (see back cover).

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The politics of the tsunami response

by Eva-Lotta Hedman

The Asian tsunami of 26 December 2004 destroyed lives and entire Indian Ocean coastal communities. Within minutes of an earthquake measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale striking the west coast of northern Sumatra in Indonesia, the first large tsunami hit these shores to devastating effect, especially between Banda Aceh and Meulaboh in Aceh. A massive upward shift in the seabed also caused tsunamis to hit coastal communities in parts of western Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, eastern India and the Maldives before reaching the coast of Africa, with terrible damage to life and property. In the aftermath of this massive natural disaster, some 290,000 people were dead or missing, and more than one million displaced, across 12 affected countries.

As news of this natural disaster broke, it sparked an extraordinary mobilisation of resources for humanitarian relief and assistance by private citizens and corporations, NGOs and governments in the affected countries and beyond. An elaborate international machinery of expertise in the coordination and delivery of relief and assistance in complex humanitarian emergencies was revved up and deployed in affected areas. In places, the sheer scale of the destruction posed formidable logistical difficulties for the delivery of basic humanitarian relief to affected populations and in many cases national and/or foreign military forces were needed to enable access to affected populations. Another major challenge in the emergency relief phase stemmed from the fluidity of displaced populations. This was especially the case in Aceh, as survivors from affected areas sometimes moved between public or community spaces, host families, tent camps and other temporary shelters.

Mapping the situation and location of survivors was not easy. National governments, international donors and humanitarian organisations put much energy into establishing the nature and extent of the impact of the tsunamis – the destruction of homes, livestock and livelihoods;

loss of property, land titles and other important documents; and damage to public infrastructure. A proliferation of damage assessments, surveys and maps, drawing on an array of expert knowledge, provided guidelines to shape donor and national government's rehabilitation and reconstruction plans.

Beyond issues of coordination and expertise in complex humanitarian emergencies, it is important to refocus attention on the nature, direction and pace of relief and reconstruction efforts which remain embedded within complex relations of power shaped by national and local politics in the affected areas. The diverging responses to the unprecedented direct impact of this massive single disaster on 12 different countries, with their own distinctive political, economic and social dynamics, underscores the powerful effects of everyday politics upon humanitarian efforts, whether amateur or professional, local or international. To date, however, little systematic effort has been made to examine the role or significance of political dynamics and patterns affecting humanitarian relief and reconstruction across tsunami-affected areas.

Between and between the natural disaster and pre-existing complex humanitarian emergencies, many tsunami survivors have had to negotiate a range of constraints. In the case of Aceh, where conflict, violence and a massive counter-insurgency campaign against separatists has displaced over 300,000 people since 1999, the IDP 'identity' of tsunami survivors has become politically sensitive and contested. By definition the term 'IDP' includes those forced by natural disasters to leave their homes, yet Indonesian government officials and international humanitarian organisations have at times referred to them as 'homeless'. Such distinctions have critical implications for identifying the rights and guarantees to protection and assistance of affected populations, as well as the role and obligations of local and national government set out in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

In Thailand, with its punitive approach to containing a large refugee and migrant worker population from neighbouring Burma, there is evidence of *de facto* discrimination by local government authorities and Thai citizens against Burmese tsunami survivors in the affected southern provinces. As the Thai government declared a position of self-reliance in the coordination and delivery of post-tsunami emergency relief, thus affording an unrivalled opportunity for Premier Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai (Thai Loves Thai) political party to campaign for the 6 February 2005 elections, Burmese migrant workers were also comparatively isolated from alternative sources of assistance and support, including from their own military-led government. Burmese migrant workers have been excluded in the distribution of emergency relief and the implementation of Thai government aid programmes by local officials, as well as targeted for arrests by local police in post-tsunami crackdowns on 'illegal migrants', leading, in many cases, to eventual deportation back to Burma.

In the case of India, where the government also declined offers of a coordinated international humanitarian emergency response, there is evidence of discriminatory practices by local officials and populations alike against *dalits* (still commonly referred to as 'untouchables') in tsunami-affected areas. Trapped within a social structure of caste-based hierarchy and domination, *dalit* survivors were reportedly only reluctantly received in many temporary shelters and camps housing (higher caste) IDPs from coastal fishing communities; some *dalits* were driven away. There is also evidence of other IDPs preventing government officials, NGO staff and other civil society groups from distributing emergency relief to *dalits*.

Another crucial dimension of the tsunami emergency response stems from the primacy of military-strategic considerations in some of the worst affected areas, most notably Aceh, the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka and arguably,

the Nicobar Islands of India. Aceh has been massively militarised by the presence of 40,000 soldiers since a state of emergency was declared in May 2003. With forcible relocation into camps an integral part of recent counter-insurgency campaigns, the role of the Indonesian military in the post-tsunami distribution of emergency relief, as well as in the coordination of IDP relocation into controversial 'barracks', has seriously compromised the principles of humanitarian assistance in many cases. In the case of Sri Lanka, moreover, the coincidence of the tsunami's path of destruction with the so-called 'uncleared areas' along the coastal belt of zones controlled by the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has made for a sluggish relief operation as the government in Colombo has firmly opposed any mechanisms to bypass its central authority. The absence of a central government response is further highlighted by the Somalian case. Finally, in the Nicobar Islands, home to Indian strategic naval bases, there is evidence to suggest that tsunami

relief and rehabilitation efforts were military-led and that they bypassed affected indigenous communities and local civilian administration.

As many humanitarian actors involved in the tsunami relief and reconstruction begin to evaluate their responses it is to be hoped that assessments will offer critical comparative perspectives on the varying responses undertaken by those agencies which operated in two or more affected areas, thus facing distinct and distinctly political challenges. The long-standing presence of UNHCR and other UN bodies in Sri Lanka prior to the tsunami suggests an illuminating contrast with Aceh, for example, with far-reaching implications on the relief efforts that ensued.

Concerns about shortcomings in meeting the rights of disaster-induced IDPs to protection have drawn attention to relations of power and politics within which IDPs remain embedded. Authors in this special issue of FMR highlight a

range of protection concerns in the aftermath of the tsunami, including access to assistance, enforced relocation, sexual and gender-based violence, safe and voluntary return, loss of documentation and restitution of property. Such concerns must be tackled at an early stage as the protection of economic, social and cultural rights tends to deteriorate over time. As the media focuses on other news, large tsunami-affected populations remain in areas of enduring conflict. It is high time to focus more systematic and comparative analysis on discourses and dynamics of state security and everyday politics, how they have influenced this complex humanitarian emergency and their implications for IDP protection and assistance.

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Wreckage of beachfront homes in Banda Aceh, Indonesia.



UN assesses tsunami response

by Marion Couldrey and Tim Morris

A report to the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) identifies lessons learned from the humanitarian response. Recommendations stress the need for national ownership and leadership of disaster response and recovery, improved coordination, transparent use of resources, civil society engagement and greater emphasis on risk reduction.

In the 12 tsunami-affected countries approximately 240,000 people were killed, 50,000 are missing and feared dead and more than one million persons were displaced. Poor coastal communities were worst hit. In many affected areas, three times more women were killed than men. Children represented more than a third of the victims. In Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Somalia the disaster took place against the background of complex and protracted conflicts which had major implications for the organisation and delivery of humanitarian assistance.

In response to appeals for assistance from affected countries, UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams of personnel from 18 countries were rapidly deployed to five of the tsunami-affected countries. Sixteen UN agencies, 18 International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) response teams, more than 160 international NGOs and countless private companies and local civil society groups provided emergency food, water and medical services to the estimated five million people in need of assistance. Military forces from 35 countries assisted the relief effort. The UN Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC) established coordination centres in Indonesia and in Sri Lanka to provide logistical support and to assist in the coordination and use of military assets.

As a result of this timely response, no major outbreaks of disease or epidemics took place and around two million people received emergency medical assistance and food aid. Six months after the disaster, immediate needs have been met. Almost all those affected have access to sufficient and adequate water supplies, although in many camps sanitation facilities are below

internationally recognised minimum standards. In Sri Lanka some 30,000 provisional shelters have been built and in Indonesia 11,000 earthquake-resistant homes are under construction. However, it is clear that even as the recovery phase progresses, significant humanitarian needs – particularly among women, children, minorities, migrant workers and the internally displaced – will persist for many months. Over 9,000 Sri Lankan families, for example, are still living in tents.

With the exception of Somalia, the disaster affected countries with strong national governments, well-developed national institutions and functioning legal frameworks. This greatly contributed to the success of relief efforts. In many areas humanitarian operations benefited from committed involvement from central government ministries, armed forces and – where they were still intact – local government structures. Collaboration between international and national relief actors and governments facilitated relief distribution and simplified the hand-over of humanitarian and early recovery activities to government agencies.

Coordination

In the wake of the tsunami the UN was confronted by one of the greatest challenges it has ever faced. The timing and scale of the event led to a proliferation of relief actions and actors and high levels of public, private and governmental assistance. The outpouring of support was a testament to the generosity of the international community but at the same time put humanitarian actors under the spotlight as it significantly raised expectations of how well they would perform and how they would account for funds they spent.

In general, coordination went well. Pre-tsunami standby arrangements with donors and the private sector to provide staff, equipment, transport and other assistance significantly helped the timely response. However, coordination did have hiccups. Some communities were flooded with relief items and with actors who did not necessarily have capacity to assist them. Aid did not always match needs. The humanitarian 'traffic jam' at times led to miscommunication, *ad hoc* planning, assistance delays and duplication of effort.

The willingness of governments to ease bureaucratic requirements permitted the speedy arrival of the first humanitarian workers and relief supplies. However, in many cases entry procedures subsequently became complicated. This delayed deployment of many items necessary for operations support (such as computers, telecommunication equipment and vehicles). Some governments imposed restrictions on the use of satellite systems. These administrative bottlenecks slowed relief efforts and delivery of much-needed assistance.

The response suffered from gaps in shelter, water and sanitation owing to the sheer magnitude of the problem but also the inability of the humanitarian community to quickly field and maintain enough skilled and experienced staff. The response also suffered from high UN staff turnover and the delayed deployment of staff specialised in information management, communications and civil-military liaison. Civil-military coordination officers from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Humanitarian Information Centres were sent to the field through formal channels which took time. The mobilisation of telecommunications systems was thus difficult and data collection, analysis and dissemination suffered from a lack of agreed standards. In preparation for future crises it is clear that more must be done to invest in standby humanitarian response capacity by increasing and strengthening professional staffing and administration and by supporting strategic partnerships that tap into NGO capacity and lo-



A man carries donated relief supplies past a destroyed home with a tsunami-thrown fishing boat on its roof, Hambantota, Sri Lanka.

cally available expertise. A standing global response mechanism under the auspices of the UN, with immediate authority to launch the initial response and build on available local and regional capacities, would lead to prompter dispatch of relief teams and supplies.

Improved civil-military liaison is required to ensure a better match between needs and the use of available aircraft, vessels, vehicles, personnel and other military assets. Rapid and generous military responses provided access to many hard-to-reach populations but in some cases the activities of civilian and military actors overlapped. Relief goods were not always distributed in the right form and quantity where they were most needed and parallel relief pipelines developed. These problems were exacerbated by inadequate understanding of military command structures and poor information sharing between the humanitarian community and the military. The tsunami has set a precedent and it is now very likely that military forces will be significantly involved in future humanitarian operations. It is therefore important to establish better communication channels and coordination procedures between

military and humanitarian partners. In many cases, the UN's resident/humanitarian coordinator (RC/HC) lacked the staff resources to provide needed leadership. It is critical that the RC/HC be immediately supported with staff and capacity to provide critical coordination functions as well as the capacity to begin recovery activities from the outset.

The international community needs to clarify who is to coordinate disaster recovery. While disaster response is now shaped by clear and universally accepted coordination standards and tools, disaster recovery – which involves a wider range of actors – does not have any formal coordination structures. This is particularly true for international coordination at the country level and is made worse by the fact that resident coordinators do not have adequate support.

Displacement and protection challenges

In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, an estimated one million people were displaced. After the first few weeks, however, the large numbers of temporary displaced began to diminish as the situation stabilised and people started returning to

their home areas. The fluidity with which displaced populations moved (particularly in Aceh), the growing strain on host families and the destruction of livelihoods challenged the ability of national authorities and the international community to tailor responses to the different needs of various categories of tsunami-affected populations. Initiatives to temporarily relocate populations were further complicated by the political situation in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and by previous relocation initiatives in the Maldives.

It is vital that the particular needs of IDPs should be rapidly addressed. The humanitarian principle that efforts must be made to meet the life-saving needs of as many people as possible demands that attention be paid to the specific protection and assistance needs of IDPs. They need to be involved in relief planning from the outset to help ensure that aid is fairly distributed and does not reinforce pre-existing inequalities. Special measures for the assistance and protection of IDPs and host families should therefore be prioritised. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement¹ should be extended to natural disasters.

Donor generosity spawned funding challenges

The disaster generated an unprecedented outpouring of public and private compassion and resources. The UN estimates that a total of US\$6.8 billion has been pledged to the tsunami: US\$5.8 billion from government sources and US\$1 billion from corporate and private donations. Within 15 days of the disaster 60% of the US\$977 million in humanitarian and recovery assistance requested in the UN Flash Appeal had been committed or made available. OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS) estimates that by June 2005 US\$880 million had been contributed to the appeal and a further US\$162 million had been committed. Much of the tsunami funding has been contributed through non-UN channels, including international organisations such as the IFRC (which has reported receiving \$US2.2 billion) and large NGOs.

While the ready availability of massive resources allowed the humanitarian community to operate without focusing on fundraising, the high-stakes financial environment created by such generosity put pressure on humanitarian organisations to spend funds quickly. Driven by huge reserves of funds and donor pressure for quick results, many organisations launched simultaneous projects and executed them with large numbers of staff. In the rush for rapid action, many international actors were also perceived as neglecting their national and local counterparts.

In some cases organisations have received far more money than they are able to spend in the response phase. Many have had to rapidly reconsider their own planning procedures and quickly develop strategies for reporting and communicating the use of donated funds. In order to maintain public trust, humanitarian organisations – irrespective of how they choose to handle monies left over – must ensure they clearly communicate their intentions to their donors.

Clearer reporting and demonstrable accountability are needed to ensure that the new funders who have contributed to the tsunami response will continue to do so in future emergencies. The humanitarian community has well-established accountability mechanisms but the sheer volume of funds pledged or contributed for the tsunami, particularly from the private sector, has increased scrutiny over how they are spent. The international accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers has provided free assistance to help the UN with its immediate accounting and tracking of contributions raised under the tsunami flash appeal and also to assist expansion of existing UN financial tracking systems for emergency appeals.

Past experience – after Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and the December 2003 Bam earthquake in Iran – shows that funds that are easily forthcoming when the disaster hits the headlines soon dry up as attention wanes. Recognising that the

window of opportunity for disaster fundraising is narrow and short lived, the scope of the tsunami flash appeal was extended into the recovery phase. This flexibility has made it possible to raise resources for shelter, livelihoods development, micro-infrastructure and the environment and to allow speedy commencement of recovery plans and programmes. Such extension of flash appeals to cover recovery needs should become standard procedure after all disasters. The development of a common financial tracking database – which would include official aid, NGO funding and private sector contributions – in one comprehensive system would facilitate recovery planning and implementation.

Closing the gap between relief and development

Early national ownership of and participation in the design and implementation of recovery programmes are essential. Participation from local disaster management experts and technicians is vital to ensure that recovery programming considers the needs and capacities of affected populations.

The early attention to recovery in the relief phase of the emergency helped local populations get back on their feet. In Indonesia, rubble removal was implemented by means of cash-for-work schemes which injected cash into the local economy while providing a psychological boost to the 11,000 people who took part.

However, in many areas, early recovery was not possible as damage to roads posed a problem for the early transportation and delivery of reconstruction materials. Improved arrangements with private contractors and standby partners with advanced logistical capabilities and air transport services would assist in overcoming these recovery difficulties.

Street in the centre of Banda Aceh (some 4km from the coast).





Temporary shelters,
Sri Lanka.

The UN lacks system-wide mechanisms for incorporating risk reduction measures into post-disaster recovery efforts. There is a need to identify suitable assessment methodologies for identifying early recovery needs, to improve procedures for sending technical experts to support recovery programming and to ensure that funding for recovery and vulnerability reduction interventions is made available.

Civil society and local engagement

Civil society has made an immense contribution to relief and recovery efforts. Local Thai agencies were essential to organising recovery operations in cooperation with local governments and national authorities and they drew attention to those who might otherwise have been overlooked, such as Burmese migrant workers and the Moken, an ethnic minority who are among the last sea tribes to lead a traditional existence. In Indonesia the Aceh Recovery Forum provided support and advice to the government, the UN and the international financial institutions in the development of the government's Reconstruction Master Plan. Wide-ranging consultations with civil society in Aceh further enhanced the credibility of the planning process.

While it is widely understood that recovery programming must be based on the sound and participatory assessments of needs and capacities of the affected population, this has not always happened in practice. In several countries, concerns were raised

by the affected populations about their lack of involvement in recovery planning.

From the outset of the response international actors engaged with local government officials. Affected governments did not try to centralise authority during the relief effort but instead welcomed engagement and coordination at sub-national levels to facilitate response. However, the tsunami demonstrated that local government structures do not always have sufficient resources to perform coordination tasks. External agencies and local institutions need to work together to prepare pre-disaster plans and build the response capacity of local organisations.

The tsunami has highlighted the need to empower communities at risk to protect themselves and their property from the impact of disasters. Developing community-based disaster preparedness plans – from stockpiling food and medicine to building embankments in flood-prone areas, to including preparedness as part of teacher training and school curricula – would reduce disaster damage substantially. Local early warning systems, building of earthquake-resistant structures, identification of escape routes and agreed information and communication strategies are essential to ensure that appropriate action is taken when warnings are issued. Long-term support for sustainable economic development, resulting in strong civil societies as well as sound infrastructure, will help ensure that nations are prepared

to weather the shocks from natural hazards. The international community should invest in people-centred early warning systems. They should include risk assessments, awareness raising and preparedness measures so that communities know what to do and can act upon warnings.

Response and recovery programming must be based upon a reliable, participatory assessment of the needs and capacities of affected populations, so that local initiative, resources and capacities are fully understood and utilised. Consultation mechanisms and priority-setting activities contribute to building consensus around recovery priorities, roles, responsibilities and resources. Before the next disaster strikes the response community must not let miss the opportunity to document and disseminate the lessons learned from the tsunami.

This article has been prepared by the FMR editors and selectively draws on issues discussed in the ECOSOC report: 'Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, recovery and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster: Report of the UN Secretary-General', July 2005 (available at www.un.org/docs/ecosoc). Interpretation and emphasis given to aspects of the report are those of the FMR editors and not those of the United Nations.

1. www.brook.edu/fp/projects/idp/gp_page.htm

Natural disasters and IDPs' rights

by Walter Kälin

In the understandable rush to provide assistance to the survivors of the tsunami, insufficient attention has been devoted to protecting the human rights of those forcibly displaced by the disaster.

Protection concerns include access to assistance, discrimination in aid provision, enforced relocation, sexual and gender-based violence, recruitment of children into fighting forces, loss of documentation, safe and voluntary return or resettlement and issues of property restitution. The more the tsunami-affected countries move from relief to reconstruction, the greater the need to address human rights problems.

Experience from other natural disasters teaches us that there is a serious risk of human rights violations when the displaced cannot return to their homes or find new ones after some weeks or months. In the context of natural disasters, discrimination and violations of economic, social and cultural rights can become more entrenched the longer displacement lasts. Often, these violations are not consciously planned and instigated but result from inappropriate policies. They could, therefore, be easily avoided if the relevant human rights guarantees were taken into account from the outset.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement¹ provide the normative framework for addressing human rights challenges in situations of disaster-induced displacement. Recognising that persons forced to leave their homes share many common types of vulnerability regardless of the underlying reasons for their displacement, the Principles use a broad definition of 'internally displaced persons' as persons 'forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence' for reasons which include, besides conflict and civil strife, 'natural disaster'.

Typical post-natural disaster human rights challenges

Access to assistance: IDPs have the right to request and to receive pro-

tection and assistance from national authorities. States have in general been willing to respond quickly in providing humanitarian assistance to tsunami-affected populations, and those states needing assistance from abroad did so in collaboration with the international community. However, governments must not block access to those in need when they themselves are not in a position to provide adequate assistance. Restrictions on the delivery of aid, such as excessive delays to obtain the necessary permits to reach affected populations, should be avoided.

Non-discrimination: After natural disasters, discrimination may arise in the distribution of humanitarian and reintegration assistance and in decisions regarding relocation and resettlement. As affirmed in the Guiding Principles, assistance must be provided in accordance with the long-established principles of impartiality and neutrality, without discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or caste or privileging those uprooted by a natural disaster over those displaced by conflict. Inequities in aid distribution not only violate humanitarian principles but also risk creating tensions which can threaten the security of IDPs and complicate their integration as well as frustrate moves towards national reconciliation.

Protection of women and children: The Guiding Principles call for special attention to the needs of women and children. They experience increased vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, especially in camps, where they risk higher levels of domestic violence. When food is not delivered directly to women and when they are excluded from camp management and from the design of relief and reintegration plans, women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse increases dramatically. Women also have special needs as regards access to health services and

in the area of reproductive health. Children who have lost their homes and families are particularly at risk of military recruitment.

Trafficking: This is another serious risk that is heightened when people are displaced, families separated, children orphaned and livelihoods destroyed.

Access to education: Prompt return to school after a natural disaster is important to minimise disruption to the education to which displaced children are entitled and which is also critical for their psychosocial well-being. School attendance can reduce children's exposure to risks including trafficking and military recruitment. Access to education for non-displaced as well as IDP children will also be constrained where IDPs are sheltered in school buildings. Resettling IDPs to more appropriate temporary accommodation will open opportunities for educational access not only for IDPs but also for children from the broader community.

Loss of documentation: Lack of documents can lead to denial of access to health, education and other essential public services as well as to mechanisms to seek property restitution or compensation. Obtaining replacement documentation can be difficult and time-consuming but is something to which IDPs are entitled.

Participation of IDPs: IDPs can find themselves excluded from decision making, for instance, about the location and layout of camps and settlements, the manner in which aid is distributed, the type of food and other items supplied and other matters central to their daily lives. This can heighten the sense of helplessness inflicted by a natural disaster, undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and even put IDPs' physical security at risk, in particular that of women.

Voluntary return and resettlement: After the emergency stage of a disaster is over, displaced persons will usually require assistance to rebuild their lives. National authorities have

the primary duty and responsibility to facilitate this by establishing the conditions, as well as providing the means, for IDPs to return voluntarily, in safety and dignity to their places of origin or to resettle in another part of the country and to facilitate their reintegration. In addition to rebuilding homes and other infrastructure, this may include assistance to enable the displaced to re-establish previous livelihoods (e.g. rehabilitating damaged agricultural land, business assets and fishing boats) or providing the displaced with training and assistance for developing new sources of income.

recovery and reconstruction efforts in the tsunami-affected region must be informed by a human rights based approach

After a disaster, it may be that governments wish to designate certain areas as 'buffer zones' or 'exclusion zones' in which reconstruction is prohibited. Such decisions have implications for IDPs' freedom of movement and, in some instances, for property rights and their ability to make a living. Where the authorities determine that exclusion zones legitimately should be enforced, such decisions must be taken in close consultation with the displaced, who should receive compensation for property and land lost as a result as well as assistance in relocating and re-establishing their livelihoods and residence elsewhere. It is essential that such decisions do not discriminate against certain ethnic, religious or other groups or among persons displaced for different causes, such as in cases where natural disaster strikes areas with existing displaced populations as a result of armed conflict or civil strife.

On the other hand, IDPs may choose not to return to their original homes, particularly if their displacement is protracted and they have begun rebuilding their lives elsewhere. Authorities are sometimes anxious to promote return as a symbol of normalisation after the chaos brought on by a disaster. However, they should respect IDPs' right to choose whether to return to their place of origin or to resettle elsewhere, and in either case should assist them to reintegrate.

Property issues: Property issues may pose especially complex problems particularly where a natural disaster has wiped out landmarks used for demarcation and where residents may not have had formal evidence of land ownership in the first place or records have been destroyed. When regulations on registration and inheritance discriminate against women they find it hard to regain property, especially when their husbands have been killed. Experience has shown that the designation or establishment of a dedicated administrative body to handle property claims with a mandate for mediation, adjudication (subject to appeal to courts) and flexible types of remedies is the most effective way of handling such large-scale property

issues. Addressing the property issues resulting from displacement crises can also be an opportunity to address any long-standing inequities or inefficiencies in registration and cadastral schemes generally as well as to modify laws and policies to ensure that customary rights and non-traditional forms of ownership evidence are recognised.

Conclusion

When governments, international agencies and NGOs develop and implement programmes of reconstruction and reintegration for IDPs they must seek equitable solutions in accordance with applicable human rights requirements. It is no less important in the context of natural disasters than it is in cases of displacement by conflict to examine and address situations of displacement through a 'protection lens'. During my working visit to a number of tsunami-affected states there was a positive response concerning the need for a human rights based approach in developing and implementing a response to natural disasters.

It is important that:

- recovery and reconstruction efforts in the tsunami-affected region and in other disaster-affected parts of the world be informed by a human rights based approach

- when governments formulate national reconstruction and reintegration programmes the Guiding Principles should be taken into account; they provide guidance not only in situations of armed conflict but are equally applicable in situations of natural disasters.
- donors become more aware of their responsibility to provide assistance in ways that do not discriminate against people displaced due to prior conflicts or of different ethnic, religious or social groups, or on grounds of gender
- the displaced, particularly women, should be included in any decisions for the planning and management of relocation, distribution of humanitarian assistance and finding durable solutions to displacement
- national Human Rights Commissions be encouraged and supported to monitor the situation of IDPs and develop a common methodology for doing so
- the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) should jointly develop guidelines on human rights for situations of natural disasters in order to provide practical operational guidance to IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) members on the ground.

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In March 2005, Walter Kälin undertook a working visit to Asia, the report of which is available at: www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/fp/projects/idp/20050227_tsunami.pdf. For information on the Project see: www.brook.edu/fp/projects/idp/idp.htm or email: brookings-bern@brookings.edu

1. Available in English, Sinhala, Tamil and other languages at: www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/principles_lang.htm and in Bahasa Indonesia at: www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/idp_gp/idp-Indonesia

The public health response to the tsunami

by Manuel Carballo and Bryan Heal

At a meeting in the Maldives convened in April by the International Centre for Migration and Health, public health specialists from tsunami-affected states assessed lessons learned from the humanitarian response.

The tsunami was a tragic reminder that some people are always more vulnerable than others. The vast majority who lost their lives were people living in poverty, forced to live in inadequate housing along the shoreline. In the Maldives – which had only been removed from the UN's least developed country category six days before the disaster – it was the poor, who do not have bank accounts and so keep money at home, who lost the most. Damage to the island republic has been estimated at 62% of GDP and is expected to reduce the country's economic growth rate from the pre-tsunami forecast of 7.5% pa to only 1%.

In all affected states initial responses to the tsunami were shaped by fears that the accumulation of dead bodies would represent a major threat to public health. Human bodies are indeed a source of emotional stress and their collection is important from a psychosocial perspective. However, efforts to explain to people that corpses do not represent an immediate health threat were half-hearted. In the general rush to dispose of bodies many traditional ritual practices were set aside, leading to a lingering sense of guilt that will need to be addressed through counselling.

There was insufficient recognition that in the case of many tsunami-affected populations poverty was already linked to poor access to food. There have been reports of nutritional anaemia from the Maldives, parts of Sri Lanka and India. Food aid has often been insensitively provided. Donating wheat flour to rice-eating communities in Indonesia and Thailand, reports of elderly people being unable to chew nutritional biscuits given as part of emergency food aid packages and reports from Thailand that an influx of milk powder has led

to a decrease in breastfeeding show how quickly lessons from previous disasters can be forgotten.

Health systems were hard hit. Thirty per cent of midwives in the affected areas of Aceh died and one of every six health clinics in the province was destroyed. Throughout the region equipment and drug supplies were lost and health care staff – who, it is often forgotten, are just as subject to fear and stress as ordinary people – had to clean and repair severely damaged facilities and dig out and handle large numbers of corpses.

In communities in North Aceh and Sri Lanka female mortality was four times higher than that of males and in India female mortality was three times greater. This disproportional impact should be a wake-up call to ensure that emergency preparedness plans recognise the social and health vulnerability of women. The response to the tsunami was also testimony to the low priority traditionally given to reproductive health and the needs of pregnant women in disaster situations. Despite the fact that pregnant women have special requirements and that these are often exacerbated in times of crisis, many relief operations failed to take these into consideration. Provision of contraception in the aftermath of natural or man-made disasters remains a low priority for many agencies, in part because of the understandable reluctance of people to request them.

The importance of easy-to-use reproductive health and other emergency health kits was apparent everywhere. Without them it would not have been possible to respond in a timely fashion to many of the emergency health needs. More widespread pre-positioning of these kits is essential and should be accompanied by systematic training of national teams

in their use. Providing ready-made mother-child kits to people in need also proved immensely useful in the wake of the tsunami. These were often made up using locally procured materials and provided women with the essentials required to lead a dignified life.

In many cases people's immediate needs for water have been addressed by interventions which are not sustainable. Some desalination plants introduced by NGOs are already breaking down. The high level of salinity in ground wells is a major long-term problem which must be addressed. In Sri Lanka alone some 12,000 wells are affected by high salinity and in some areas the shallow aquifers that wells use as a source of water may have been permanently damaged by the intrusion of salt water. The fresh water to sea water balance will take time to re-equilibrate and it may take several rainy seasons to work through the problem. Highly sophisticated reverse-osmosis systems introduced by external agencies may be impractical if cost recovery is not possible and communities are unable to take responsibility for their maintenance.

The complexity of legal issues has not been sufficiently understood. The legal distinction in tsunami-affected states between those confirmed dead and those reported missing can have considerable implications for widows of missing husbands. In many countries the degree of destruction was so intense that not only are the foundations of houses unidentifiable but any documentation confirming their existence has been lost. In the Maldives the loss of educational certificates has been a major source of stress for young people.

Don't forget the hosts

Relief and reconstruction efforts following the tsunami gave priority, and rightly so, to the health and social needs of displaced people. There was insufficient recognition, however, of the needs of the tens of thousands of families who have been



Fatia, 15, is vaccinated against measles at an IDP camp, Banda Aceh.

providing shelter and support to IDPs. Particularly in the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Aceh, people whose houses were intact have taken great pride in offering shelter and hospitality to the displaced. Had this help not been forthcoming the plight of IDPs would have been considerably worse. The toll on host families continues to be considerable and it is hardly surprising that in many cases patience is wearing thin. They are sharing scarce household space, food and other resources, have lost privacy and seen their personal lives profoundly interrupted. Where resettlement of displaced people is likely to be delayed and where host families will have to continue supporting displaced people, more care must be taken to address the needs of hosts for they are vital to recovery.

Overcrowding in the houses of host families and in temporary shelters could lead to a number of health and social problems. To date many of these seem to have been averted but the longer these conditions last the more likely it is that problems will emerge. Resolving overcrowding by more rapid and massive construction of temporary housing is thus urgently called for, as is more attention to water and sanitation needs.

A key feature of natural disasters is their psychosocial impact on well-being in ways that are far-reaching and not immediately apparent. Understanding and responding to the short- and long-term psychosocial needs of people directly and indirectly affected by the tsunami are essential and will help determine their capacity to participate in social reconstruction. Given the low level of attention traditionally given to this aspect of public health and the small number of people previously trained in this area, a major push will have to be made to prepare primary health care workers and others to recognise and respond to post-disaster psychosocial issues.

Religious faith has been an integral part of the resilience shown by tsunami survivors. Religious leaders have provided not only solace but also practical information and a focus for community cooperation. Their role needs to be more widely recognised and supported by aid providers. On the other hand, there are reports of external relief agencies promoting their own religious agendas. This has created considerable confusion and anxiety in several countries and calls into question the role which proselytising religious

groups should be allowed to play in humanitarian work.

Recommendations

Key disaster planning issues highlighted by the symposium participants include:

- Foreign agencies must do more to strengthen, and not negate, local capacities and resilience.
- Government authorities and local communities must become more aware of the factors that place women at particular risk.
- Donors should do more to ensure that teams of emergency experts sent to the field have relevant skills - for this was not always the case - and are prepared to take instructions from national authorities.
- In disaster-affected regions previously characterised by conflict the capacity of military forces to be trusted by all would-be beneficiaries is limited: their dominant role can create dependency and prevent communities from working towards their own solutions.
- UN Flash Appeal funding should not have to be allocated and spent only on immediate projects: innovative procedures should be

found to enable it to be spent on long-term development projects to restore public services.

- Donors must ensure that medical supplies are relevant to identified needs, do more to track where they are going and provide detailed lists to beneficiary states.
- Donors seemed to be caught unprepared and were unaware of some of the multinational systems through which assistance could have been more efficiently delivered.
- Donors need to explain the intricacies of funding to beneficiary states: many governments wrongly thought that just because funds had been pledged they would arrive without delay.
- Planting of trees and dense vegetation and preservation of mangroves should be promoted to provide barriers against future waves.
- There is a need to recognise that although SPHERE standards are important their introduction into very poor communities can arouse unrealistic expectations beyond local or national capacities.

- More attention should be given to protecting and improving maternal care, breastfeeding, family planning, information on adolescent sexual health and strategic pre-positioning of reproductive health kits.
- Multi-purpose public buildings should be designated as safe areas and equipped.

The tsunami was a reminder not only of how the international community can forget lessons from previous disasters but also of how little attention is given by countries to preparing communities to deal with disasters. Even when plans are developed they are often not shared with all the people who would be in a position to make use of them when disasters strike. In the future much more attention will have to be given to structuring disaster preparedness and prevention initiatives in ways that make them an integral part of local health and social systems and understood by everyone who could be responsible for initiating such systems.

Before the tsunami is forgotten it is important to evaluate lessons learned in areas such as communicable disease control, reproductive health, psychosocial support, logistics and monitoring. Public health and disaster mitigation plans are only as useful as the number of people who know about them and have been involved in their preparation. From central governments to local communities, all stakeholders should be involved in regularly reviewing plans and rehearsing responses.

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YAKKUM
Emergency Unit's
Dr Sari Mutia
Timur with
patients, Indonesia.



The great land theft

by Scott Leckie

The tsunami has reminded us of the need for a rights-based approach to post-disaster reconstruction. If housing, land and property rights are put at the heart of a post-disaster plan – rather than cast aside as too complicated or expensive – the chances are that it will succeed. If these rights are ignored or, more ominously, systematically violated, not only will rights be abused but also reconstruction will fail.

Once again as post-tsunami aid poured in we heard the old refrain: “This time it’s going to be different; this time we will not fail the victims”. Six months on, it is time to ask just how different from other disasters has the massive recovery and reconstruction process really been. Has the post-disaster rebuilding effort achieved what was needed? Are the homeless already housed and able to move on with their lives? Have survivors been treated in accordance with their rights? Are the survivors in Aceh, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and India better off than those who survived earthquakes in Bam, Gujarat or Kobe or hurricanes in Central America or the Caribbean? Or have they become victims and their human rights sidelined as political actors used the pretext of disaster to achieve otherwise unachievable objectives?

Land lost and gained

In every disaster, lives and livelihoods are destroyed, economic hardship is ubiquitous and severe disruption of ordinary life is assured. But there is a common thread running through all disasters and one that holds the key to successful reconstruction, rebuilding and regeneration: land, housing and property (HLP) rights.

Beyond the human toll, the tsunami provided a pretext for evictions, land grabs, unjustifiable land-acquisition plans and other measures designed to prevent homeless residents from returning to their original homes and lands. Thailand, India and other affected countries have restricted the right to return but Sri Lanka stands out as the tsunami-affected country which has sought most dramatically to re-shape its residential landscape through the reconstruction process.

Government policies now prohibit new construction within 100 metres of the mean sea level (in some areas 200 metres). The overwhelming majority of the more than 500,000 people displaced lived within 100 metres of the coast when the tsunami struck. The government has promised to rehouse those affected by the construction regulations and has undertaken to build a house for every affected house owner. While privately owned land within the 100-metre zone will remain the property of the original owners – and the government states that it will not claim ownership to such property – the 100-metre rule will permanently prevent hundreds of thousands of people in fishing communities and others who lived and worked on or near the shore from returning to their former lands. Understandably, those affected are not happy.

This desire to protect the coastline and former residents from any future tsunami may appear entirely reasonable and consistent with human rights standards. However, these manoeuvres to change the demographics of the Sri Lankan coastline can be criticised on several fronts. First, the people themselves do not want to move and generally long to return to their former lands. Second, there has effectively been no consultation on the 100-metre rule in Sri Lanka. And third, the exceptions to the 100-metre rule now being allowed – for hotels, wealthy property developers and other privileged groups – raise serious concerns of favouritism.

Housing uncertainty

While the authorities in Aceh have significantly changed their policies on voluntary return to allow people to go home rather than face per-

manent relocation, new problems are facing Acehnese survivors. The re-building process has been painfully slow with almost no new homes yet constructed in the most severely affected areas. An important process of community mapping has taken place in Aceh, led by NGOs, but the local authorities are reluctant to accept such bottom-up initiatives. This is perhaps influenced by the World Bank-supported ‘rapid title registration programme’ in Aceh which, though financially well-endowed, is far too slow and prone to possible conflicts to assist in expediting the broader reconstruction process.

In Sri Lanka, hundreds of thousands of tsunami survivors continue to live in temporary shelters or tents some six months after the disaster. Reports indicate that the government has plans to build new housing four or five – in some cases even 14 – kilometres from traditional coastal villages. This will have a serious impact on peoples’ livelihoods, especially fishing families dependent on the sea and immediate access to it. When one visits temporary resettlement sites in Sri Lanka, it is not difficult to get the feeling that tsunami survivors are going to be waiting for many years before all of the housing that is needed is actually in place.

Failure to actively involve these communities in the re-building effort is causing additional frustration. Throughout the tsunami-affected countries, reconstruction efforts have generally been top-down initiatives, excluding many affected communities from decision making. Given the still huge housing backlog throughout the affected region, governments, communities and NGOs will have to make a special effort to work together to find housing solutions that are quick to achieve and acceptable to all affected individuals, families and communities. Governments and foreign agencies might consider the example of the government of Gujarat which, in the aftermath of the 2001 earthquake, allowed local communities and local NGOs to lead the reconstruction process; survivors there achieved a return to housing normalcy far more quickly than would have been the case had the state or private sectors led the re-housing effort.



Scott Leckie

Where houses stood, Sri Lanka.

Rights-based reconstruction

The human tragedy inherent in this natural disaster must not be exacerbated by violations of the human rights of survivors as they seek to reestablish their homes, livelihoods and communities. HLP rights are key elements of any post-disaster setting and need to be an integral part of any future recovery efforts. An HLP rights framework in relief and reconstruction efforts would go some way – in future disasters – to avoid some of the more callous policies pursued in response to the tsunami. A rights-based approach should focus on seven key areas:

1. **The right to voluntary return:** All survivors of disasters should be assured of the right to voluntarily return, without discrimination, to the land on which they originally lived. If homes are still intact or capable of repair, their rights to recover, repossess and re-inhabit these homes should be respected. Any unjustifiable restriction on return amounts to forced eviction, which is illegal under international law.
2. **The right to adequate housing and secure tenure:** Following all disasters, all affected families and individuals should be provided with access to adequate and affordable housing, in accordance with international human rights, in as expeditious a manner possible. Upon return or resettlement, security of tenure should be granted to affected individuals and communities, and this should be properly registered within official housing and

land registries. Nobody should become homeless as a result of the reconstruction process.

3. **The right to participation, consultation and non-discrimination:** Special efforts should be made to ensure the full participation of disaster-affected persons in the planning and management of their return, re-housing or resettlement. All affected communities should be consulted on any housing plans and encouraged to form community-based organisations to represent their own interests. Fully participatory, transparent and accountable systems must be developed to ensure that only former residents – and poorer residents in particular – benefit from the rebuilding of homes and related infrastructure. All reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts should take account of the needs of especially vulnerable or marginalised groups.
4. **The right to protection in temporary housing arrangements:** The setting up and running of temporary housing settlements following disasters should be in full conformity with international human rights standards. In addition to fulfilling camp residents' minimum rights to shelter, water, food, medical care and education, the camps should be managed in full consultation and cooperation with the displaced themselves. The provision or withholding of emergency assistance should not be used as a means of control or oppression. Within all temporary camps, physical and psychological security and

mental health – particularly of women and children – should be maintained and protected.

5. **Rights to livelihoods, social security, water, health and education:** Post-disaster aid efforts should not be disproportionately directed towards providing emergency assistance and establishing temporary camps. A significant amount of the resources available for reconstruction and rehabilitation should be devoted to building appropriate housing and to restoring lost livelihoods, assets for social security and health, education and community facilities.
6. **Equal rights to inheritance:** All inheritance and property-ownership laws or practices, whether formal or informal, that are discriminatory and may thus prevent the equitable transfer of property to survivors (particularly women and children) should be scrapped. Widows should be given legal title to land and housing in their own names, and married women should be recognised on the title deed along with their husband and children, if any.
7. **Women's rights:** Women have traditionally been at the forefront in ensuring the survival and welfare of their communities. Therefore, in addition to safeguarding the women's rights emphasised above, it is particularly important to support women in the relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation effort and to respect their rights to participation.

The Indian Ocean tsunami provides many lessons to policy makers entrusted with responding to the next massive natural or man-made disaster. It is to be hoped that the manipulation of the recovery process by governments in the region which we have witnessed will not be repeated when the next disaster strikes.

Scott Leckie, Executive Director of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE www.cohre.org), worked on housing, land and property rights issues in Sri Lanka and the Maldives in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami. Email: scott@cohre.org. COHRE recently established an office in Colombo (contact bret@cohre.org) to monitor human rights abuses in reconstruction programmes in all tsunami-affected countries.

Has the tsunami affected funding for other crises?

by Toby Lanzer

Many aid practitioners have expressed concerns that the tsunami has diverted funds away from other emergencies. Similar fears arise whenever there is a 'major emergency' but are they justified?

On 3 June 2005, at the time of writing this article, the UN's Financial Tracking Service (FTS)¹ reported that the UN's flash appeals and consolidated appeals, which outline the programmes of key UN agencies and NGOs, were 41% funded. When the Indian Ocean programme is taken out of the equation, however, funding dropped to a meagre 25%. At the same time last year, just before the world's attention was drawn to Darfur, flash appeals and consolidated appeals were 23% funded. At first glance then the situation this year seems to differ little from that of last year. And, better still, funding for other crises by some of the key donor countries such as Germany, Japan, Norway and the US is up on a year ago. Indeed, funding for other crises really does look like good news. Or does it?

Before concluding that the tsunami has not diverted funding away from other crises, we need to consider the amount of humanitarian financing available this year compared to 2004. Thanks to the tsunami much more money has been made available to aid agencies so far in 2005. However, even without considering tsunami funding there is still more money this year – \$847 million, compared to the \$697 available at the same time in 2004. Over half of this year's total is for Sudan, leaving only \$417 million for a range of increasingly neglected emergencies. The appeals for Central African Republic, Chad, Chechnya, Eritrea, Guinea, Somalia and West Africa received less money during the first five months of 2005 than during the same period last year. People there are, arguably, worse off than they were one year ago. Of the 21 appeals for 2005, average funding stands at only 25% and 11 of the appeals are less than 20% funded. While on average since 1992 such appeals have ended the year 67% funded, there is a serious

tsunami-related problem regarding the timing of funding.

This year is the second year of 'Good Humanitarian Donorship'², an initiative by key governments to adhere to principles and good practices. One of these suggests that money will be made available more quickly after appeals are issued. While the financial response to the tsunami was indeed very fast, funding for other crises has been as slow as usual. Donors have focused on the tsunami, and have lacked staff resources to attend to other crises. One result is that commitments – funding contracts based on proposals – for non-tsunami crises are taking place later than they would otherwise have done.

In some cases tsunami money, which was pledged as new and extra, was actually unavailable so some donors used the short-cut of allocating for the tsunami money that had been previously intended for other emergencies. In such cases, ministries of finance have promised to replenish funds but this can require legislative action which in turn takes time. Thus the tsunami has diverted some funds and caused delays to money reaching programmes in other crisis regions. Further increasing the tsunami effect is that some governments, such as Finland, have an established aid budget for this year and have stated that it will not increase. Money used for the tsunami means less money available for other crises.

After the tsunami, aid agencies came under intense internal and public pressure to act swiftly and generously. The number of trained staff available is limited and some UN agencies and NGOs have diverted resources from key field operations, and within headquarters, to address the tsunami. One consequence of this is that some organisations have submitted proposals for programmes in regions which are not the 'number 1' crisis later this year than they did last year. Indeed, one key donor has suggested that the number of proposals received for countries in Africa this year is down, compared to the same time last year.

Conclusion

The notion that the Indian Ocean disaster diverted funding from other crises suggests a zero-sum game, whereby money committed for the tsunami means less money for other crises. The situation is more complex than this: several donors, for example, have shown that tsunami funding is extra money and that their spending in other crises has actually increased when compared to last year.

Overall, the Indian Ocean disaster has affected the response of donors and aid agencies to other crises, at least temporarily. The situation is reversible and requires concerted action by the aid community. Calls for predictable, timely and needs-based funding are as valid as ever. Aid agencies must draw donors' attention to the consequences of under-funding and late funding. Facts and figures that describe the human consequences of delayed or abandoned programmes are required. Governments that have claimed that their tsunami money is new and that it will not have any bearing on other programmes must be asked to show this to be the case. Legislatures and finance ministries must act fast to replenish humanitarian budgets.

In emergency relief, timing is all-important. In late June 2005 the UN will host a meeting in Geneva to discuss the status of its appeals. The emphasis will be on where things stand for people who have been struck by disaster and conflict in some of the world's most disadvantaged places. They require the urgent attention of the humanitarian community.

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1. www.reliefweb.int/fts
2. www.reliefweb.int/ghd

DFID reviews tsunami response

by David Horobin

The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has now programmed approximately £68 million of relief assistance pledged in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Though the agency's Humanitarian Response Review is not yet completed, preliminary lessons have been learned.

DFID has led the British government response to the tsunami that hit the South East Asian region on 26 December. The lead staff member of the Operations Team of the Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department (CHAD OT) left London for Colombo on the evening of 26 December. After meeting DFID colleagues at the British High Commission and visiting the UN offices it was decided to travel immediately to Ampara, reportedly the worst hit area on the east coast, to take on the job of assessment for the UN and wider humanitarian community in support of the Sri Lankan government. On arrival a joint UN-USAID-DFID assessment team completed the first rapid, but comprehensive, impact and needs assessment within a few days of the disaster. Our staff subsequently worked with and guided UK military crew involved in relief assistance, spearheaded transitional shelter organisation with UNHCR and national authorities and developed programming recommendations to CHAD management prioritising shelter, protection, psychosocial support, education and livelihoods regeneration.

Ferrying relief supplies to Banda Aceh.

DFID organised the first relief flight to leave the UK. DFID contributed £10m to the Indian Ocean Flash Appeal launched by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). DFID has channelled £40 million of its support to relief and recovery through the UN. This has been a combination of grants to UN agencies and direct in-kind support. Five DFID-funded helicopters played vital roles delivering UN and other agency assistance to isolated communities along the devastated western coast of Sumatra. We have provided grants to assist the work of 25 NGOs, including several not based in the UK. £3.5 m was given to

the Red Cross/Crescent Movement. We paid for 26 flights of relief supplies organised by the UK's Disasters Emergencies Committee, an umbrella organisation representing 13 leading UK aid agencies.¹

During the emergency phase DFID identified a number of problems. Data was limited, especially concerning those affected on the west coast of Sumatra. Local emergency management structures were weak and there was confusion about which external agencies were taking the lead in particular sectors. The UN Flash Appeal was prepared too late and seemed unstructured. Agencies suffered from a lack of qualified and experienced personnel. Humanitarian Information Centres in Banda Aceh and Colombo, which DFID supported, were not established quickly enough.

Six months after the disaster DFID continues to oversee and track the programmes it funded. We are in the middle of monitoring missions to check on progress in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. We are aware there is still much to do, with people still to be permanently rehoused and properly serviced with essential water and sewage services, health care and education services and re-equipped with the wherewithal to rebuild lives, livelihoods and capacity to withstand future shocks.

DFID is conscious of its obligations under the Good Humanitar-

ian Donorship initiative to improve learning and coordination. We are currently undertaking a comprehensive Humanitarian Response Review of our tsunami response, the results of which will be shared with other donors. A meeting of donor operations managers is planned

Detailed recommendations will emerge but from a personal perspective I believe the tsunami has taught us the need for:

- a common logistics services across the UN system
- experienced UN Humanitarian Coordinators to have increased empowerment
- UN and EU standing disaster response to be improved
- the EU to develop mechanisms to promote greater UN coordination
- clear guidelines for cooperation between military and civilian humanitarian workers
- improved professional standards and qualification structures for humanitarian staff
- agreed common operational objectives amongst donors.

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This article is written in a personal capacity and does not necessarily represent the views of DFID or the UK government.

1. www.dec.org.uk



Accessing IDPs in post-tsunami Aceh

by Claudia Hudspeth

Half a million Acehnese – 12% of the province's population – became IDPs as a result of the tsunami. For humanitarian actors, gaining access was a major challenge. Important lessons can be drawn in order to improve access to IDPs in future emergencies.

Many of the displaced either left the province or were taken in by host families but a significant percentage, often the most vulnerable, lived in makeshift IDP camps in any available space – mosques, schools, stadiums, open fields, on the edges of destroyed villages or on higher ground in territory contested between the Indonesian authorities and the GAM separatist movement. While the international community was able to respond quickly and avoid preventable deaths, there were three main barriers to access in Aceh: physical, informational and 'social'. Overcoming these, while at the same time providing emergency relief to those populations who were more readily accessible, proved immensely difficult.

Physical barriers to access

From the outset it was clear that physical access to many IDPs would be problematic. First, the area of greatest impact – the 200km of coastline between Banda Aceh and immediately south of Meulaboh – was completely inaccessible. The tsunami had washed away roads and hundreds of bridges: a total of 26km of bridging capacity was required. The coastline itself had been transformed, with new sandbars and debris restricting the landing of larger sea vessels. As a result, access was only possible by helicopters and small boats. Ensuring access to IDPs on this coastline thus involved expensive logistical support, complemented by programming staff with solid field experience.

The tsunami response in Aceh led to an unprecedented level of interaction between the UN, NGOs and the military. Military support – helicopters, temporary harbours and specialised landing vessels – proved extremely valuable. However, this support could have been enhanced

with improved coordination mechanisms between militaries and the humanitarian community, as well as between the various militaries themselves – at the height of the response there were military units from 15 countries. Although a regional combined military task force was established in Thailand to coordinate military support throughout the tsunami-affected countries, this mechanism could have been complemented by a local military combined task force or early establishment of a civil-military liaison unit (CIMIC).

There was also room for improved liaison between the Indonesian military, which coordinated all military assets, and the international community with regard to information sharing and mapping coverage. In the first few weeks, military assets were largely utilised to airlift in-kind private donations into remote areas. Although this was coordinated by the Indonesian armed forces, there was no clear connection between this immediate response and the strategic information and planning done by the humanitarian sector coordination groups.

In addition, since the air logistics option was available and free of charge other options were not developed. Developing a system to make use of small local boats could have contributed enormously to the livelihood of local fishermen, a group that was particularly devastated by the tsunami. Despite the operation in pre-tsunami Aceh of a local system of ferries to transport people and goods down the coastline, this option was not explored until the imminent departure of the international military presence forced the humanitarian community to investigate other transport options. Re-building local transport systems would have contributed to the local economy and the livelihoods of vulnerable people, invigorated the

local transport sector and provided much-needed transport to affected communities. The use of military vessels and aircraft to perform humanitarian functions in conflict zones should always be an instrument of last resort.

Even with the use of helicopters, equitable access to IDPs was not guaranteed. The helicopters were limited to specific landing zones within agreed non-conflict areas, which ruled out access to IDP populations that had retreated to higher ground (often in insecure areas). Furthermore, due to security restrictions, the helicopters were not allowed to set down for extended periods. Ensuring equitable distribution of goods was therefore problematic and in many cases the Indonesian military was responsible for unloading the helicopters and disseminating the relief items. In the absence of a proper distribution system, those IDPs who had settled more than a few hundred metres from the landing zone were unlikely to receive their fair share. Security restrictions meant that UN staff were not permitted to stay overnight on the west coast except for a few restricted areas, thereby limiting their capacity to monitor the humanitarian response.

The devastation on the west coast and the availability of military transport diverted attention from larger and more accessible groups of IDPs elsewhere, particularly those on the northeast coast. A disproportionate amount of time and resources went into reaching the relatively small number of IDPs on the west coast.

Information barriers to access

Simply finding many of the IDPs in Aceh – where they were, and in what numbers – was difficult. Camps were peppered across the main towns of Banda Aceh and Meulaboh, and dotted along hundreds of kilometres of coastline and jungle. In total, there were more than 500 camps ranging from a few families to several hundred families, some in makeshift shelters, others in existing community structures.

There was no single comprehensive humanitarian needs assessment undertaken in the early days. An initial attempt was made to draw up a simple sheet of basic information for implementing partners to gather when out in IDP areas, including location, numbers, general situation and some basic sectoral information. However, this passive form of data collection had pitfalls. It relied on inputs from partners – who often considered information collection a third or fourth priority – and did not offer an overall picture of the situation. A wealth of information was available from accessible areas but very little from anywhere outside greater Banda Aceh.

Several sectoral assessments were undertaken, including one large-scale assessment operated from on board the US Navy warship *USS Lincoln* to gather information about the situation on the west coast, but there was an absence of multi-sectoral assessments. In addition, there were sensitivities about information, particularly regarding the politically-sensitive east coast, and to accessing information being gathered by the numerous humanitarian actors on board the initial military-supported helicopter missions as they conducted relief drops onto the largely inaccessible west coast.

The problem therefore, was not so much an absence of information but rather an absence of comprehensive, multi-sectoral information on the humanitarian situation across the province. Assessment information of many different kinds trickled into the OCHA Humanitarian Information Centre¹, which did its best to consolidate and release this information to organisations in a usable form. Yet it was not until several weeks into the crisis that agencies began to receive a complete picture of IDPs' locations, their condition and their needs. However, despite the absence of perfect information, UNICEF and other agencies put to use what was available, responding quickly and avoiding preventable deaths from emergency killers such as measles and cholera.

Social barriers to access

Many IDPs sought refuge in host families and their 'invisibility' made reaching them a challenge. Although this group did not for the most part require direct emergency assistance, they did require support in terms of getting children back to school,



psychosocial support and tracing programmes to reunite separated children and relatives. Furthermore, over time, IDPs became an added burden to many host families.

Although the international community made some progress in accessing this population, the Indonesian government took the lead role by providing an innovative solution through cash assistance to families who were hosting IDPs. The cash grant was allocated per person, and required IDPs to register with the local humanitarian community post. This programme served to register IDPs, thus facilitating their access to other programmes. It was also possible to gather information on the scale of the problem, and to encourage community support in addressing the thousands of displaced individuals and families. Lastly, the programme provided both a useful mechanism of direct support and a vital injection of cash into the local economy.

For UNICEF, a particular problem of access arose with respect to unaccompanied and separated children. One of UNICEF's major tasks in Aceh involved the registration of separated and unaccompanied children, the tracing of their families and, where possible, family reunification. Yet this was an especially difficult group to access since the majority of separated children were fostered. In contrast to other emergencies, there were few visible unaccompanied children. Given the tragic numbers of children who died in the tsunami – vastly more than any other demo-

graphic group – families were desperate to take in those children who remained. Relatives were nervous and reluctant to identify a separated child, fearing that the child might be taken away. While UNICEF fully supported fostering as a critical support mechanism, it was nevertheless extremely important to register all separated children, both to increase the chances of family reunification and to enable them to access programmes aimed at reducing the financial and care burden they might place on foster families.

Through building networks of local NGOs, UNICEF conducted an intensive campaign of advocacy and liaison with local communities. UNICEF supported local agencies to establish child-friendly spaces and registration centres with community outreach programmes. Local NGOs were more trusted and accepted by the community, and were willing to integrate within the camps to access community structures and local knowledge. Despite this success, however, it would have been possible to reach more children at an earlier stage through identifying and working directly with community structures that were revived within the camps, and through building partnerships with religious networks, including local mosques.

Lessons learned

The Aceh experience suggests ways of overcoming barriers to access in future emergencies. With respect to physical barriers, four key lessons emerge.

Injured woman being transported to Banda Aceh for medical treatment.

1. While the use of military assets can be crucial to an effective response, efforts should also be made to strengthen and utilise local transport means. This can improve logistical support based on local knowledge, bypass security restrictions and rebuild livelihoods.
2. Wherever possible, local distribution systems should be established as quickly as possible using established community structures or the Red Cross/Red Crescent. This will help ensure equitable distribution of relief items according to accepted humanitarian principles, while reducing opportunities for their diversion.
3. Equal consideration and assistance should be given to all IDPs based on strategic information and humanitarian need.
4. In rebuilding damaged infrastructure, efforts should be made to situate critical structures in areas less vulnerable to natural forces.

Experience with information barriers also presents a number of lessons:

- In an emergency with an unprecedented number of national and international NGOs (UNICEF had around 400 partners), the UN Humanitarian Information Centre was critical to information consolidation, analysis and dissemination: the establishment of an HIC should always be one of the first priorities in an emergency.
- Despite some hiccups, information sharing through sectoral working groups was generally good.
- Global Positioning System (GPS) handsets provided by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) were crucial to mapping and later accessing more remote and less visible IDP populations: OCHA should ensure GPS is made available in future emergencies.
- The many volunteers who poured into Aceh provided crucial eyes and ears on the ground for gathering information: these less traditional information systems should be used and supported as much as possible.
- *Ad hoc* approaches to assessments should be avoided: where possible a consolidated multi-agency and multi-sectoral humanitarian assessment should be prioritised and undertaken within the first few days to form the baseline for response.
- When military assets are at hand for humanitarian purposes, it is essential to ensure a CIMIC (civil-military coordination centre) is established in the first few days in order to enable access to military resources for assessment purposes and ensure that valuable military information on the humanitarian situation is accessible.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the response in Aceh made it clear that nothing replaces presence. Establishing field offices in more remote areas early on and staffing them with experienced field staff makes an enormous difference to the quality of response.

Accessing IDPs presents a major challenge to the humanitarian community in its efforts to ensure a timely and equitable humanitarian response. Yet as emergencies involving IDPs become more frequent, and the business of emergency response becomes more professionalised, our collective experience is growing. By drawing on this experience and incorporating the lessons learned, we can strengthen our response to future crises.

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1. www.humanitarianinfo.org/sumatra

UNICEF-supported children's centre, IDP camp, Banda Aceh.



IDPs confined to barracks in Aceh

by Lukman Age

The opening up of Aceh to the international community in the aftermath of the tsunami offered a glimmer of hope to the Acehnese. However, as rehabilitation and reconstruction plans start to be implemented, hopes for peace and development are being dashed by government insensitivity to local needs.

Before the disaster, many Acehnese had been living in difficult conditions due to the counter-insurgency campaign waged by the Indonesian military against the separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Hopes for a return to normality and a chance to build sustainable livelihoods have been dashed by the government's *relokasi pengungsi* (refugee relocation) programme. This top-down scheme is moving IDPs out of emergency camps to temporary barracks rather than focusing on rehabilitation and construction of permanent housing as requested by those displaced by the tsunami.

Supposedly built to conform to international standards, the 30-metre long wooden barracks are equipped with electricity and water supplies. Each barrack contains a dozen family rooms of 10m² in addition to a communal kitchen, two bathrooms and a hall for assembly, study and worship. The government plans to transfer 140,000 IDPs from emergency camps and to provide each IDP with a monthly grant of 90,000 rupiah (\$9). People living in the barracks are likely to be totally dependent on government handouts with no means of making a living and no work other than possible participation in food-for-work schemes

Many IDPs are forced to accept relocation as they lack resources to rent or rebuild on their own. They have not been helped by the fact that international humanitarian organisations have appeared to lend support to *relokasi pengungsi*. The Indonesian government, the UN and a number of NGOs joined forces in a rapid assessment of such relocation sites and the government's National Coordinating Agency for Natural Disaster and Refugees Relief (Bakornas) and the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

(OCHA) have jointly coordinated the Joint Relocation Centre Liaison Unit.¹

Critics argue that the Aceh relocation shows many of the same elements as the transmigration programmes of the 1980s and the forcible relocation of villagers following declaration of martial law in Aceh in May 2003. Human Rights Watch has drawn attention to the Indonesian military's record of housing Acehnese displaced by the conflict in camps where at times their freedom of movement has been restricted and where serious human rights violations have taken place.² The Minister of Social Welfare has acknowledged that barracks sites have been selected after receiving military approval. It is not known how much freedom of movement will be permitted in and out of the barracks. Though they will not be surrounded by barbed wire, there will be security patrols to prevent contact with GAM.

Uncertain futures for barracks residents

No proper attempt has been made to assess the psychological impact of forcing people to live in barracks for possibly as long as two years. Living together in big groups is uncommon in Aceh. People prefer to live in smaller groups clustered around a *meunasah* (small mosque) at the centre of a community. In rural areas the *meunasah* provides a key marker of belonging and community, a focal point for prayers, meetings or simply hanging out with friends. Many villages in Aceh indicate the importance of the *meunasah* in their name: Meunasah Jiem, Meunasah Tuha, Meunasah Blang. Membership of a particular *meunasah* entails a responsibility to care for one another and guard against external threats. Living in barracks with strangers will present a major challenge to many

rural Acehnese. Barracks do not offer privacy and are likely to result in stress, arguments and increased risk of sexual harassment.

Tsunami survivors worry that relocation away from their villages may lead to them losing their land. Many have lost legal certificates, and boundaries demarcating fields have in many cases been washed away by the tsunami. Villagers fear that others will occupy and seize their land unless they are able to make frequent visits.

Corruption is deeply embedded in Indonesia. IDPs worry that promises to provide food and other material assistance will not be honoured in the long term. There are reports that, instead of receiving the promised RP 150,000 per month, IDPs are being forced to accept goods, supposedly of equal value. Barracks contractors have not been selected by an open tendering process and it is reported that some have fraudulently received funds for non-existent barracks. The anti-corruption NGO, Peace for Aceh Without Corruption (*Aceh Damai Tanpa Korupsi* - ADTK), has demonstrated that several completed barracks are smaller than planned and that they fail to meet Sphere minimum standards.

Relocation into barracks will delay the process of social recovery if IDP communities come to expect continuous assistance in their capacity as victims, rather than survivors, of the tsunami. This is unfortunate as it runs contrary to the wishes of many Acehnese to be involved directly and actively in redeveloping Aceh after the disaster. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has worked with USAID on a major survey to assess attitudes to the relief and reconstruction process.³ Its main finding is that the priorities of almost all those affected by the tsunami are to return home, resume their jobs and re-establish their communities. Displaying an acute awareness of the potential for land tenure/property disputes, IDPs said they would agree to permanent relocation if they were assured of legal ownership of the occupied land and house. The majority of the IDPs

have indicated a strong preference to be relocated, either temporarily or permanently, to areas close to their home villages. They expressed a strong desire not to live in barracks. Acehnese are renowned for their self-reliance and a significant proportion of respondents said they wanted to receive construction materials such as wood and cement. They overwhelmingly asked for livelihoods support and only 4% of those interviewed said that they had received any assistance to help them re-start earning a living.

Families are bitterly opposed to the relocation plans

Families who have traditionally depended on fishing are bitterly opposed to the relocation plans and have refused to leave their villages. At public meetings fishermen's representatives have been joined by others in declaring their refusal to leave their land under any circumstances. Their defiance is unprecedented in a society which has hitherto meekly accepted official instructions. How-

ever, it will not be easy to continue resistance given the strength of the military and the government's determination to provide no assistance to those who refuse to evacuate their villages.

Government policy is top down and target-driven and allows no space for participation. Those in charge of the relocation programme must:

- locate barracks as close as possible to villages of origin and within range of likely employment opportunities
- introduce greater transparency into the process of barracks construction and management
- accept that the desire of IDPs to return to villages of origin as soon as possible is legitimate
- recognise that under the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement displaced persons can only be relocated with their full and informed consent
- do more to ensure the cohesiveness of established social units
- publicise and adhere to a schedule to restore basic services and

infrastructure and to facilitate return

- support comprehensive livelihood assistance activities which take into account changes in family structure caused by the tsunami
- provide public information and education which address people's concerns about a future natural disaster: resettled communities should be involved in developing locally-specific contingency plans for disaster preparedness and management.

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1. www.humanitarianinfo.org/sumatra/assessments/doc/GoL_UN-joint_assessment_report_on_relocation_sites.doc
2. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/02/07/indone10134.htm>
3. www.iom.int/tsunami/documents/indonesia_needs_assessment.pdf

Banda Aceh



Ensuring minimum standards in reproductive health care

by Sandra Krause

There is increased awareness that (RH) care is a life-saving necessity in the early stages of an emergency. An evaluation in Aceh has highlighted current shortcomings and the need for greater training and awareness raising.

Displaced women and girls face heightened health risks, including sexual violence, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, unwanted and high-risk pregnancies, and unsafe abortions. More than 150,000 pregnant women are estimated to have been affected by the tsunami. Fifteen per cent of them, as in all populations, will suffer from unforeseen complications of pregnancy and childbirth and require access to life-saving emergency obstetric care at a time when surviving health workers are likely to lack the most basic materials and supplies.

A decade ago, an inter-agency working group of UN agencies and other international organisations developed the Minimum Initial Services Package (MISP)¹, a set of reproductive health activities and services to prevent and manage the consequences of sexual violence, reduce HIV transmission, prevent excess neonatal and maternal illness and mortality and plan for the provision of comprehensive reproductive health services once a crisis situation stabilises.²

Priority MISP activities are:

- identification of lead agency and individuals to coordinate implementation of the MISP
- prevention of sexual violence by ensuring refugee women and girls' participation in emergency assistance provision and distribution, safe access to water, food, fuel and medical care and appropriate camp design
- medical care for all survivors of sexual violence
- prevention of HIV transmission by promoting knowledge about preventing the transmission of infections and ensuring a safe blood supply and condom availability

- reducing neonatal and maternal morbidity and mortality rates by providing clean delivery kits for use by mothers or birth attendants, midwife delivery kits for health centres and establishing a referral system to manage obstetric emergencies
- planning the provision of comprehensive RH services to be integrated into primary health care by collecting background RH data, ordering supplies, identifying service delivery sites and designing and implementing training programmes.

In late February 2005, the Women's Commission conducted an assessment of reproductive health care in Aceh. Within a week of the tsunami, UNFPA (the UN Population Fund) had mobilised technical staff and supplies and fielded RH focal points and essential reproductive health materials and supplies. By late February more than 35 representatives from international, local and national organisations were participating in the weekly meetings of the UNFPA-led RH working group.

The focus in the early days and weeks of emergencies should be on the exchange of information between community members and groups such as midwives, traditional birth attendants (TBAs), community leaders (female and male) and humanitarian actors. UNFPA and WHO had initiated background data collection on the numbers of women of reproductive age, pregnant women and expected deliveries per month and infant and maternal morbidity and mortality. Consultation

with women's groups indicated that displaced women were requesting contraceptives. In collaboration with the national family planning association and other agencies, UNFPA was able to quickly mobilise and distribute supplies.

However, UNFPA's implementing partners in Aceh province, although interested in providing RH services to the affected population, did not know the key objectives and priority activities of the MISP. Just over half the humanitarian staff interviewed had heard of the MISP but only a few could accurately describe its objectives and priority activities.

Shortcomings in MISP provision

Although reports of sexual violence were isolated and did not indicate a widespread problem, humanitarian actors and government staff were not knowledgeable about – or equipped to provide – medical care for survivors of sexual violence. While nearly all international agencies had a code of conduct, none were aware of a reporting mechanism for violations and most had

Woman receives mattress and baby clothes for her 6-month-old daughter, Indonesia.



not shared the code of conduct with local partners. Women and girls expressed unease about sharing accommodation, latrines and showers with strangers and men. There have been few reports of sexual violence but it is still a matter of concern that ministry of health (MOH) staff and humanitarian actors are largely unaware of national and international clinical protocols for rape survivors.

Ten per cent of the 5,500 midwives in Aceh died during the tsunami. To address the resulting gap, 120 midwives from Jakarta were seconded to health centres in Aceh for two- to three-week intervals. Most supplies to support the MISP, such as clean delivery kits and midwife kits for health centres, were available to international agencies within weeks of the emergency. However, some kits, such as the traditional birth attendant (TBA) kits, were not available and in some cases the available supplies had not been distributed from the agencies to pregnant women or TBAs at the field level. Even before the tsunami, community-based midwives reported having limited capacity to provide basic emergency obstetric care prior to transferring patients to the referral hospital for care.

Condoms were not visibly available to beneficiaries in the health centres visited, although one agency

had made a point to stock them. Many agencies do not make condoms freely available because they assume, rightly or wrongly, that this would not be tolerated by the Islamic culture and the Indonesian health authorities. Some agencies were not aware of the importance of condom provision. Others were open to the suggestion and were willing to consider making them available to staff as a first step.

Representatives of the MOH and WHO reported significant shortcomings prior to the tsunami in health workers' practice of basic health precautions, such as cleaning, disinfection and sterilisation of medical supplies to prevent the spread of infections, including HIV. Although safe blood transfusion is part of the national protocol, there were doubts expressed by individuals as to whether all blood was screened.

Conclusion

These findings demonstrate that the presence of a lead agency and designated RH focal points stimulates coordinated RH programming and availability of supplies. Humanitarian actors in Aceh have shown growing awareness of MISP principles and supply kits but few are knowledgeable about the priority RH services intended to prevent excess

morbidity and mortality in new emergency settings. The findings underscore the need to provide pre-emergency training on the MISP to humanitarian actors. The Women's Commission has initiated the development of a user-friendly distance learning module and is working to translate it into widely used international languages. It will be available in early September 2005 (email info@womenscommission.org).

The Women's Commission is also urging governments, donors and other humanitarian actors to ensure that the MISP is available to beneficiaries in all new emergency settings. A report, 'Reproductive Health Priorities in an Emergency: Assessment of the Minimum Initial Services Package in Tsunami-affected areas of Indonesia', is available on the Women's Commission's website.³

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1. www.womenscommission.org/projects/rh/misp%20index.shtml
2. The MISP is now included in the Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response: www.sphereproject.org
3. www.womenscommission.org/pdf/id_misp_eng.pdf



Humanitarian coordination in Indonesia: an NGO viewpoint

by Carsten Völz

Although the humanitarian community is aware of the value of coordination, field experience in Indonesia in the first few months after the tsunami provides some salutary lessons.

The UN made significant efforts to coordinate activities but the approach – which seemed based on the assumption that if enough resources are allocated to the field, coordination will necessarily happen – did not lead to effective coordination. At some levels there was too much coordination. With more than a dozen UN agencies in Banda Aceh competing for their turf, coordination went into overdrive, with 72 coordination meetings per week in Banda Aceh alone. Most NGOs did not have the resources to attend even a small fraction of these meetings which as a consequence were attended by between only 10-40 agencies – a small sample of the 400 international NGOs present. Many coordination meetings did not have clearly formulated objectives and failed to clarify the roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority of participants. It was often not clear if the purpose of meetings was to share information, build consensus or make operational or policy decisions. Senior staff often spent more time on coordination than implementation.

The multitude of meetings reflects the trend towards increased humanitarian specialisation and our inability to focus on our core business. Significant time was invested in discussing policies and approaches towards reconstruction and income generation while many disaster-affected settlements in Aceh still lacked access to basic sanitation two months after the disaster. The humanitarian community was too fragmented and left some critical issues unattended for too long.

There were too many layers of coordination. Similar UN-led coordination groups were working on the same issues in Jakarta, Medan, Banda Aceh and Meulaboh, with little communication between them. The result was

multiple guidelines and standards developed in isolation. Several UN agencies did both coordination and implementation, with the result that they sometimes seemed more focused on their own agendas in meetings with the Indonesian government rather than representing the shared interests of the humanitarian community. The UN established a Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC)¹ with a mandate to gather and disseminate information to enable humanitarian agencies to make informed programming decisions. The centre, however, was only fully operational after several weeks and, although it provided useful support after the first few difficult weeks, it had insufficient resources to fulfil all requirements. This was also true of the other two humanitarian common services established – the Joint Logistics Centre and the Humanitarian Air Service.

The role of the military

The fact that the Indonesian military coordinated the use of military assets provided by foreign governments contravenes accepted humanitarian good practice which requires that military contributions to humanitarian responses should be under civilian coordination. NGOs were often excluded from use of the assets for assessment and starting response operations. While NGOs were able to use airlift capacity to bring in cargo from other parts of Indonesia to Banda Aceh and Meulaboh, the use of ships and helicopters to access communities on the ravaged and inaccessible west coast of Sumatra was very restricted. In the critical first two weeks it was easier for journalists to travel on helicopters than NGO staff. The military operating in these areas did not systematically collect information about affected populations. What little information was collected was not made available to NGOs.

Only after continued complaints did this situation improve slightly. What could not be changed was the fact that humanitarian action was under the control of a party to the conflict in Aceh with serious implications for the perceived neutrality of the humanitarian community. More could have been done at the highest level to ensure a clear distinction between the roles of humanitarian actors and the Indonesian military.

Internal coordination between large INGOs

The quality of inter-agency coordination and collaboration was mixed. Initial squabbling over programming territory was unpleasant but short-lived. Several agencies had initially tried to ‘secure’ more territory than they could possibly take care of and other agencies accordingly felt pushed aside. To prevent such wrangling and to improve collaboration, the heads of most of the larger agencies decided to hold weekly informal meetings. This led to immediate improvements as, once key players had agreed what they would do and where, agencies could turn to exchanging information and logistical support.

CARE representatives in Aceh felt this informal collaboration did not go far enough and suggested a more formalised coordination structure. CARE and the Norwegian Refugee Council invited the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)² to facilitate creation of a formal NGO coordination mechanism. CARE, World Vision International OXFAM GB and Catholic Relief Services also held a two-day After Action Review to consolidate learning activities in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand.³

Large versus small INGOs

The massive size of the humanitarian community in Aceh is apparent from the fact that the contacts directory compiled by the Humanitarian Information Centre has 203 pages.⁴ In addition to the registered INGOs (who employed around 5,000 inter-



national staff at the height of the response) there were many smaller international initiatives which bypassed the registration process, 120 previously-established Acehese NGOs and many small Indonesian volunteer groups which arrived from other regions of the country.

Coordination mechanisms established by the international community did not reach out to local agencies, especially those working in remote locations. Meetings were all held in English, without translation into the language of the host country. Unable to understand what was going on, many local NGOs soon stopped attending. The predominance of English is illustrated by the experience of CARE national staff who prepared a database of IDP sites for use by HIC. As the content was in Bahasa Indonesia it took two weeks for HIC to process the data during which time and resources were wasted as other agencies sent staff to interview IDPs and collect information which was already known.

The Indonesian government, some UN agencies and even a few large INGOs questioned the presence of small agencies and initiatives, portraying them as under-qualified and under-resourced. While a disaster of this scale attracts some questionable actors – such as the proselytising religious organisations found on the HIC directory – many small agencies contributed significantly to the overall response, filling gaps that larger agencies could not address. They would have been an even more valuable support had they been included within effective coordination mechanisms. CARE and other large INGOs tried to reach working agreements with smaller players on the

local level. This worked reasonably well, where mandates permitted, in avoiding duplication and leading to modification of questionable programme approaches. There have been cases in the past (e.g. Kosovo) where the UN assigned Areas of Responsibility to key INGOs mandated to coordinate other agencies. This successful approach should have been used in Aceh.

Pressing coordination issues

Most would agree that coordination is important but there are differing perceptions of what is meant by coordination. It may, in its most minimalist form, comprise voluntary measures to avoid duplication or it may be a more profound attempt to harmonise responses. The latter can present significant problems for NGOs like CARE in instances where the coordinating body is perceived to be non-neutral – be it the UN or a ‘coalition of the willing’, for example – and where harmonisation efforts may constrain an NGO’s requirement to act impartially. There may also be significant difficulties where the coordinating body has joint responsibility for operations and coordination. In these circumstances there may be vested interests and lack of objective focus.

Coordination structures can appear to be sound but may flounder in practice if the coordinating body is not sufficiently – and appropriately – resourced and staffed. Where those coordinating are newly-arrived and/or inexperienced and where information-sharing structures are incomplete, it is difficult to create a conducive environment for participation, collaboration and cooperation.

Forward planning

The international humanitarian community needs to be more proactive in forward planning, especially in areas such as:

- determining information requirements
- communicating standardised assessment forms
- contextualising the SPHERE minimum standards in disaster response⁵
- delineating clear linkages between coordination structures at national, provincial, local and sectoral levels
- recognising competencies in advance and planning collaboratively for division of labour and resource allocation
- recognising the critical roles of national governments and the military and clarifying their roles and responsibilities
- pre-established INGO coordination structures with coherent systems for collaboration, representation and advocacy
- outreach to local and national civil society organisations
- capacity mapping in high risk regions.

Notwithstanding the criticisms made, the overall tsunami response has been effective and it is encouraging that it has triggered institutional learning. With better forward planning and a greater will to learn the lessons of the post-tsunami response, the international community may find itself better prepared and better equipped to coordinate effectively when the next disaster occurs.

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1. www.humanitarianinfo.org/sumatra
2. www.icva.ch
3. www.humanitarianinfo.org/srilanka/infocentre/reference/docs/Care_Evaluation.pdf. These INGOs – with Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee and Mercy Corps – also work together under the Emergency Capacity Building project which aims to: improve effectiveness in sourcing, developing and retaining quality staff; enhance agency accountability; improve impact measurement; increase capacity for risk reduction and emergency preparedness; and enhance ICT capacity.
4. www.humanitarianinfo.org/sumatra/products/contacts/index.asp
5. www.sphereproject.org

Indonesian military with relief supplies, Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

Post-tsunami protection concerns in Aceh

by Marion Couldrey and Tim Morris

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement clearly state that those forced to flee natural disasters are to be regarded as IDPs. However, some agencies in post-tsunami Aceh have been reluctant to use the term and to address protection issues.

In recent years the Bahasa Indonesia translation of the Guiding Principles has been widely circulated among government officials and conflict-affected communities. The Norwegian Refugee Council's Global IDP Project, the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) have worked with Indonesian government agencies and civil society organisations in locations across the Indonesian archipelago to disseminate the Guiding Principles.¹

It is therefore surprising that, in the aftermath of the tsunami, representatives attending coordination meetings convened by OCHA in Banda Aceh often referred to the 'homeless' or 'people who lost their homes because of the tsunami' instead of using the IDP label.

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) soon recognised that the tsunami had happened in a highly politicised context. Due to the conflict between the Indonesian government and the GAM separatist movement, the province of Aceh had been closed to the international community. The arrival of international agencies was only made possible by a mandate to respond to tsunami-related humanitarian needs. Indonesia's history of internal displacement was something that most of the international community and the local authorities did not recognise as having any relation to the humanitarian operation.

NRC is part of the Consortium for Assistance and Recovery toward Development in Indonesia (CARDI), a coalition of the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the International Rescue Committee and Stichting Vluchteling. NRC-CARDI shares the widespread

concern about the consequences of ignoring IDP status and the dangers of discriminating between the needs of Acehnese displaced by the conflict and those affected by the tsunami. NRC concluded that there is a need for more knowledge about protection of IDPs after the tsunami, including their legal rights and the obligations of various parties to enforce them. Humanitarian actors, including the internally displaced themselves, require an arena in which to discuss issues related to protection of IDPs during displacement and upon return, reintegration, relocation or resettlement.

NRC and the Global IDP Project started to plan two workshops on the Guiding Principles, one in Banda Aceh and one in Meulaboh on the west coast of Sumatra. The idea was welcomed by most of the national and international community as timely and appropriate. NRC wanted people relevant to the reconstruction of the province to participate as the official state of emergency in Aceh came to an end in March. The time-consuming task of identifying and inviting participants, finding co-presenters and tailoring training materials to the context of

Aceh began. A participants list was prepared which included a mix of national and provincial authorities, UN, donors, INGOs and NGOs from civil society as well as IDP leaders. The Indonesian Ministry of Social Welfare showed positive interest in the workshops and agreed to make presentations, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs agreed to assist in the collection of data and its disaggregation by gender, age and location.

Unfortunately, NRC learned that they were not permitted to hold the workshops due to a new regulation obliging all foreign humanitarian assistance providers to organise activities in conjunction with a government institution. There is therefore an opening to hold the workshops at a later stage, together with a relevant government institution and in accordance with present laws and regulations. Hopefully this will be an arena for discussing important issues. It is important that the international community work with the local authorities to find durable solutions in the protection and assistance of IDPs in Aceh.

The FMR Editors are grateful for input from Astrid Sofie Arne, former NRC Project Manager, Protection, in Banda Aceh. Email: astrid.arne@freewave.cc

1. www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/

A makeshift school in IDP camp in Banda Aceh.



Powerless victims or strong survivors

by Ingvild Solvang

Humanitarian agencies must find a balance between acknowledging people's abilities to help themselves and delivering appropriate assistance.

A week after the tsunami, a European aid worker visited the Jesuit Refugee Service office in Banda Aceh. He had been on his first assessment mission to an IDP community and wanted to share with us the conclusions he had drawn from the visit. The meeting with people who had lost their belongings, friends and families had made a deep impression on him. He kept referring to them as 'poor' and when describing how they had told him that they had bought cooking stoves for the camp kitchen, he expressed his disbelief that they had been able to do so.

Displaced people in makeshift shelters look poor but for a humanitarian worker to assume that they do not have any resources to help themselves shows a lack of respect for their dignity. This was brought home to me a few days later when I went to a school building where people had sought refuge. By the entrance, there was a pile of clothing. A man picked up a few pieces and showed them to me. "We would be ashamed to wear these clothes," he said. I had a closer look at the collection of torn and stained clothes. "Although we are in this situation", the man continued, "we still have our pride". Those at fault are not so much the individual donors as the agency that shipped the rags to Aceh, with quan-

tity rather than quality in mind, and without regard to the waste of scarce logistical resources. Agencies have overlooked the fact that many IDPs may prefer to buy stoves for doing their own cooking – and buy familiar food at markets – rather than eat pre-packed instant noodles provided by the government and humanitarian agencies.

The Acehnese have been moved by the world's response to the disaster. At the same time, some are sad that the tsunami is now all their beautiful region is famous for. Hours of terrible footage of the waves crushing everything in their path have led to record fundraising results in Indonesia and elsewhere. Donations have been triggered by the sight of people who have lost all they own, orphaned children, mothers' stories of infants being pulled out of their arms, desperate fathers carrying the pictures of lost sons and daughters. The Acehnese are the victims – and the foreign cameramen and humanitarian workers are presented as the heroes. Foreign media may find it easier to talk to foreigners rather than identifying local spokespersons. This may be a reason why Thailand received the most attention in Western countries; there were many Western tourists who could tell their story, again and again, at the expense of local voices raising local concerns.

To think that people are incapable of helping themselves leads one to conclude that people need help from

the outside but foreign assistance may not match actual needs. Many people outside of Aceh, for example, assumed that children who had lost their primary caregivers should be sent to orphanages or signed up for adoption in Java or abroad. In Aceh, this is culturally inappropriate and caused uproar as the Acehnese demanded that their children be left in the care of local communities rather than taken out of Aceh.

The Acehnese are known for their strength of character and their pride. In general they are embarrassed by admitting needing assistance and for this reason humanitarian agencies may not always be welcomed with open arms. Decades of conflict between government forces and the separatist group GAM have generally made local communities distrustful of people from the outside and taught them to be self-reliant. However, the needs in Aceh now are so large that improvements are hardly noticeable, and the Acehnese are getting impatient waiting for the reconstruction work to begin for real.

Meanwhile, many people are returning to their place of origin, clearing the rubble without any support from the government or the humanitarian community. Many IDPs in camps are determined to return to rebuild their homes. In the villages of Lhoh and Lampuyang on Pulo Aceh island, men took shifts in preparing the island for their community's return.

Within a month of the tsunami a tented camp had been set up and work to raise a *meunasah*, a public house for prayer and community meetings, had begun. From this central building a village can be rebuilt. "We will not wait for support from the government. We will return by ourselves if we have to." Humanitarian agencies need to support such initiatives, while acknowledging – and learning from – the local population's capacity.

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Business at the Meulaboh fish market, west coast of Sumatra, is slowly recovering after the tsunami.



Ethnic conflict, the Sri Lankan state and the tsunami

by Jayadeva Uyangoda

In a country with a de facto dual state structure, is it possible to build a conflict- and peace-sensitive recovery framework?

Since a cease-fire agreement in February 2002, the prolonged struggle of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to establish a Tamil ethnic state in Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern provinces has given way to an uneasy peace. The sheer magnitude of the tsunami's destructive impact may have averted the risk that front-line tensions between government soldiers and LTTE cadres could spark a return to war. In the space of twenty minutes the number of fatalities – around 35,000 – almost equalled the death toll from twenty years of civil war. The tsunami wiped out cities, villages and communities and made nearly a million people, most of them poor, homeless.

While the government views itself as the undisputed representative of the nation-state and the primary driver of post-tsunami recovery, the LTTE claims to be the 'sole representative' of the Tamil nation. The fact that people living in the coastal areas under LTTE control have suffered almost equally as in the areas under government control has added to the LTTE's claim that it should be treated as an equal partner in the reconstruction process. The Norwegian government, facilitators of the cease-fire agreement and peace talks, has been working with the government and the LTTE to try to reach agreement on the nature, powers and functions of a proposed joint mechanism to oversee reconstruction. After much bargaining and amidst much resistance, the government and the LTTE have now – after six months – reached a compromise to establish a joint administrative mechanism for post-tsunami reconstruction.

Against this backdrop, the massive international assistance pledged immediately after the tsunami has been slow to arrive. President Chandrika Kumaratunga claimed in late March that not even 'five cents' of promised official money had reached the Treasury. Sri Lanka's Foreign and Finance Ministry officials have appealed to

the international community to turn their pledges into cheques and cash. However, for many donors, disbursement appears to be contingent on the government and the LTTE working to establish the joint institutional mechanism. The international community views Sri Lanka's post-tsunami recovery process as integrally linked to the resumption of negotiations and re-launch of the peace process.

The largest share of destruction occurred in the Northern and Eastern provinces where the civil war had been concentrated for two decades and large numbers of IDPs were living in camps awaiting resettlement or relocation. The Eastern province is distinctive in that there are almost equal numbers of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Despite its mixed ethnic composition, the LTTE claims the province as the 'traditional Tamil homeland'. The tsunami caused severe destruction in the coastal belt of LTTE-held zones, the so-called 'uncleared areas' to which the Sri Lankan state had no access.

Prior to the tsunami, efforts were being made through an uneasy framework of cooperation between the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE and the international community to re-build these war-torn provinces. Due to the inability of the government and the LTTE to evolve an institutional framework, these efforts had met with little success. The LTTE proposed a mechanism for receiving international aid directly from foreign governments and international donors – a move the government viewed, however, as an attempt to bypass the authority of central government and institutionalise separatism by subterfuge.

In the weeks after the tsunami there was much speculation – fed by rumours of the reported death of the LTTE's supreme leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, and severe damage to the LTTE's Sea Tiger naval wing – that the disaster had altered the ex-

isting strategic equilibrium in favour of the state. Such speculation helped shape the framework for government-LTTE cooperation. The impetus for cooperation gained strength with reports that Sri Lankan soldiers and LTTE cadres had spontaneously joined forces on a voluntary basis to assist each other in rescue and relief work in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The challenge for the two sides was to transform this ground-level collaboration into a formal framework of cooperation.

By creating a centralised structure to manage the post-tsunami process, the government initially disregarded the institutions of local government. The tsunami has underlined the essentially centralising impulses of the country's political-bureaucratic elites and highlighted the incapacity of the centralised structure to provide immediate assistance to the affected communities. The bureaucracy in Colombo has seen devolution of power to provincial councils as resulting in the erosion of their power and authority and has successfully resisted strengthening of provincial councils.

A further policy failure has led to Muslim resentment. The Muslim communities in the Eastern Province suffered massive losses but state assistance has been minimal. This is due both to the inefficiency of state machinery and the weakness of the deeply divided Muslim political leadership. Muslims have begun to interpret state inaction as deliberate discrimination against the Muslim community. The fact that state agencies have provided assistance to Sinhalese communities and the LTTE's relief agencies have been working primarily with affected Tamil communities, together with the failure to include Muslim political leaders in negotiations for a government-LTTE joint mechanism, have exacerbated Muslim feelings of exclusion. Muslim political leaders have now come out openly against the government-LTTE joint mechanism on the grounds that Muslim interests will continue to be at risk.

Both the government and the LTTE are wedded to centralised decision making and humanitarian interven-



tion from above. This state-centric approach views the affected people as passive recipients of humanitarian assistance. This became evident when the government as well as the LTTE decided, without consulting the affected communities, to ban rebuilding houses within a coastal buffer zone. While the government declared this buffer zone to be 100 metres, the LTTE went several steps ahead with a 300-metre prohibition zone. Though well-intentioned, the buffer zone policy created panic and fear among people who had already lost their means of livelihoods. It was clear that neither the Sri Lankan government nor the emerging regional political entity of the Tamil community possessed a concept, mechanism or structure for popular consultation in policy making.

Civil society response shows up state incapacity

The LTTE responded to the emergency with military precision, mobilising cadres to support its humanitarian wing, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), but the response of the government was inefficient and delayed. While the government's administrative machinery remained almost dysfunctional, individual citizens, citizen groups and NGOs set to work within hours of the catastrophe, providing survivors with food, clothes and shelter, organising rescue operations, clearing debris, searching for survivors and the dead and even initiating international private philanthropic support. In the Western and Southern provinces, where the state should have responded directly and immediately to the needs of the affected people, the state machinery took in most instances five to seven days to reach

stricken communities. Local officials, when interviewed, revealed that they were extremely reluctant to take any initiative on their own, because of fear of making mistakes that would bring rebuke from central government.

Civil society decision making had a strong element of flexibility that the state sector lacked. NGOs could deploy staff and volunteers within a few hours without being constrained by the bureaucratic rules of the state sector. They could also easily tap individual voluntarism and private philanthropy. However, this flexibility left NGOs open to criticism from the government and those in the media who argued that individual and NGO action led to corruption and to uncoordinated and unplanned interventions. They alleged that civil society programmes endangered national security because of the suspicion that the LTTE could have transported military and war-related equipment in the guise of relief goods.

The responses to the tsunami disaster and the advancement of the stalled peace process are closely interwoven. Effective and sustainable responses to the tsunami disaster require consensus building across political and ethnic divides as well as reforms to make a reality of federalism and decentralisation.

Without reforms to ensure popular participation in the reconstruction process, there will be widespread resistance to 'reconstruction from above'. Affected communities have already begun to protest against official and bureaucratic ineffectiveness in the provision of relief. Post-tsunami reconstruction is not just about constructing buildings, roads

and economic infrastructure. It involves rebuilding communities, community lives and the livelihoods of nearly a million people who suddenly found themselves destitute. Unless the affected communities are active participants, the rebuilding process will be thoroughly undemocratic.

To unblock the impasse between the government and the LTTE, civil society groups had proposed a framework for cooperation between the government and the LTTE guided by the notion of 'conflict and peace sensitivity'. They highlighted the need to combine 'post-conflict' reconstruction and rebuilding with 'post-tsunami' recovery and rebuilding. This requires a formal framework negotiated between the two parties, because the cease-fire agreement – the only formal agreement defining the military relations between them – has been shown to be inadequate to govern the nature and trajectories of this cooperation.

Civil society groups argue that reconstruction and post-conflict reconciliation must be based on the following set of principles:

- The tsunami should not be viewed as a mere natural disaster: relief and reconstruction responses must consider the ethnic conflict and the peace process.
- All communities – Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim – should be treated equally and their participation encouraged.
- In view of the extent of damage and loss of life, the Northern and Eastern provinces should receive priority assistance.
- The government and the international community should not ignore the role of LTTE in the post-tsunami process but establish a partnership.

The government and the LTTE should use the post-tsunami space to begin a new process of political engagement. Reaching formal agreement on humanitarian engagement, parallel to the cease-fire agreement, is vital.

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Throughout war-torn Sri Lanka, the tsunami washed loose land mines that had been planted around government military bases and other areas.

Reflections on post-tsunami psychosocial work

by Ananda Galappatti

In Sri Lanka psychosocial interventions became a priority for emergency response largely led by the concerns of the international media and aid agencies. Interventions were quickly launched but coordination was poor and lessons learned from years of pre-tsunami conflict-related psychosocial programmes were not heeded.

For the first two weeks after the tsunami struck, humanitarian agencies, the Sri Lankan government, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), local and international emergency response teams and the public in the eastern city of Batticaloa focused on providing food, clothing, shelter and curative medical services. The need to address the 'trauma' of adults and children who had had terrifying experiences and suffered tremendous personal loss was soon raised by international reporters who interviewed local mental health workers.

Opinions diverged regarding the most appropriate psychosocial interventions. Local NGOs (primarily those with little prior involvement in psychosocial programming) and concerned groups from other areas of Sri Lanka were keen to provide counselling for tsunami survivors. Aside from the few counsellors already working locally, these services were provided by volunteers trained for a few days only, or by teams from elsewhere on the island. There was a widely held assumption that speaking about their experiences and feelings with 'counsellors' (even those with very limited training) would be emotionally beneficial for people who had faced the loss of families, houses and livelihoods and who found themselves in temporary camps.

This view resulted in small teams of 'counsellors' being deployed to camps within two weeks of the disaster to speak with displaced persons. Given the unstable camp conditions (fluid populations, poor management and delivery of relief supplies, threats of closure and overcrowding) such 'counsellors' often reported that their working sessions were usually with large

chaotic groups anxious to tell their stories. The sessions also presented few opportunities for in-depth support to individuals or for follow-up. These experiences often left the 'counsellors' feeling overwhelmed and frustrated.

An apparently opposite approach was advocated by those organisations and individuals who had implemented psychosocial interventions in this district within the context of the armed conflict that existed for many years before the tsunami. This perspective prioritised addressing the social and material needs of affected persons as the primary form of support provision in the acute phase following the disaster. Attempts to 'counsel' survivors were actively discouraged as an initial intervention, although supportive listening and 'befriending' of survivors were encouraged if they initiated conversations about their experiences or difficulties. This view was informed by prior experiences of service provision in the district, as well as by recognised national and international guidelines.

This approach was characterised by lack of conspicuously 'therapeutic' activities. For example, agencies working with separated children would make efforts to reunite children with family members or familiar caregivers. Some would respond to women's concerns about sexual harassment in camps by arranging safe spaces for women to sleep or bathe within camp premises. Others pressured government officials to issue clear written information related to mechanisms for receiving relief, compensation, shelter and other issues that caused displaced persons a great deal of worry and uncertainty. Most interventions with

children have been oriented towards providing structure to their daily lives through assisting them materially to restart school, or by offering facilitated play activities.

The need for coordination

As the psychosocial sector of the Batticaloa humanitarian response expanded exponentially, donors pressed agencies to scale up their interventions and new players entered the field. Conflicts and disagreements emerged as various implementing organisations began to trip over each other in their desire to work with particular populations – for instance, attempting to conduct play activities with children in a camp where another organisation had already initiated similar work. Trainers and support workers making flying visits from Colombo or abroad lacked adequate information about local conditions, capacities or requirements.

Hard-learned lessons from around Sri Lanka have been ignored.

The variety of theoretical and practical approaches to psychosocial work both globally and in Sri Lanka presents a challenge for the development of an integrated psychosocial sector in Batticaloa. The polemical nature of the debates in the field, both locally and globally, has made the accommodation of diverse perspectives and methodologies within a single framework difficult. Within the Batticaloa district, however, it appears that developing such an approach is essential if the broad coalition of psychosocial actors is to be strengthened, rather than be allowed to fragment.

At present, the conceptual framework put forward by the Psychosocial Working Group¹ is being used. Efforts are being made to avoid emphasising a dichotomy between community development and mental health approaches to service provision – as has often been the tendency both locally and globally. In the context of inadequate local



similar to the losses and trials experienced during the extended years of conflict. Perhaps something useful could be gleaned from examining the effectiveness of programmatic responses and folk measures for dealing with the latter.

The axiom of 'more haste, less speed' seems to be all too relevant in the case of providing appropriate and quality services to which tsunami-affected populations should be afforded access. It is crucial that the external commitment to intervene swiftly on behalf of persons affected by the tsunami is tempered and

guided by an awareness of the need of agencies to plan and coordinate with one another in the interests of providing consistent and coherent interventions to those who may need support. Even a few months after the disaster, it is apparent that initiatives that have taken a long-term (and patient) approach to intervention are already reaping benefits in terms of the effectiveness and sustainability of their services.

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A woman and her two sons light candles at the grave site of the boys' sister and grandmother who died in the tsunami, Piyadegama village, near Hikkaduwa.

resources, particularly for referral of individuals in extreme distress or crisis, there is a practical necessity to mobilise and strengthen all available services.

Examples of psychosocial interventions available within the district at present include the eliciting of experience narratives by volunteers, counselling sessions for individual clients, psychiatric interventions for the mentally ill, formation of tea groups for elderly persons, discussions on tsunami fears, practical information provision and home visits to families of the missing. As well as placement of separated children in temporary foster-care arrangements with kin of their choice, there are regular play activities for children displaced to camps and efforts to ensure consultation of women and children in the placement of water and sanitation facilities in order to alleviate the risks and fears of sexual harassment or violence.

There has also been a great deal of training offered to teachers, health workers, community-based workers and volunteers, although very little of this has been systematic or sustained. Both the support services and training initiatives vary considerably in quality and effectiveness. However, given the reality of an externally driven supply of psychosocial services that is only subject to self-regulation, there seems to

be little alternative but to engage constructively with those beginning to work within the district.

Professional and traditional approaches to healing and well-being are sometimes incompatible. There are real concerns about linking approaches that espouse wholly different values and frameworks. The tension between an imperative for professional intervention and a commitment to folk/indigenous perspectives has, in the case of this tsunami disaster, been resolved yet again in the favour of the former.

Hard-learned lessons from around Sri Lanka about the challenges of establishing and maintaining quality psychosocial services and identifying good examples of sustainable and socioculturally-relevant interventions have been ignored. Funding pressures, influx of personnel with little prior knowledge of psychosocial programming in Sri Lanka, local organisations' lack of documentation or institutional memory and a lack of commitment to setting up cross-cultural psychosocial services have all contributed to this neglect. However, it may also be the extraordinary nature of the tsunami disaster that has inhibited a realisation that many of the difficulties faced by affected populations (mass bereavement, repeated displacement, loss of livelihoods, disruption of social roles or separation of children) are

Livelihoods in post-tsunami Sri Lanka

by Simon Harris

Livelihoods in Sri Lanka have been affected not only by the initial devastation of the tsunami but also by the policies and practices of the government and the humanitarian aid community's post-disaster response.

The following stories offer a composite presentation of experiences related to the author by displaced people and aid workers some five months after the tsunami. They convey some of the key livelihood issues in post-tsunami Sri Lanka, in particular the impact of competitive multiple-agency humanitarian interventions, the reconstruction industry, the coastal no-build zone and delays in receiving state compensation.

The fisherman

You're a fisherman whose boat was damaged in the tsunami. It was a small catamaran that helped yield a modest catch: not enough to make you rich but, nevertheless, a decent living. The government has offered to replace your boat but you have been waiting for months and nothing has materialised. However, after the tsunami the international humanitarian aid agencies came. Some offered community consultation and participation and wanted to know how your needs could be best met, whilst others just seemed to want to disperse their funds as quickly as possible. They wanted to offer you a loan, a grant or perhaps a share in a cooperative. One NGO was willing to provide you with a replacement catamaran. Another was giving larger single-keel boats, whilst yet another was offering outboard motors. And that's just the choice for fishing. You could retrain as a carpenter or a mason, learn to use a computer or start another local NGO to compete with the hundreds that have proliferated since the international aid money started arriving.

What do you do? Your boat was damaged but not that badly. Your friends are asking for big boats with motors. They will be able to fish further and catch more. Some people are saying that the seas are already over-fished

anyway and that these boats will only exacerbate the depletion of existing stocks. But that's in the future. You need to make a living today. You need to be competitive.

The trader

You were a small trader before the tsunami. Not poor but doing quite well. You lost your house and they won't let you rebuild because your land lies within the 100-metre coastal construction exclusion zone that the government declared within days of the disaster. Your business has collapsed. It was a cash-in-hand type of enterprise and you had borrowed heavily to support it, using your property as collateral. Now that your house has gone, the bank has foreclosed on your loans. You haven't been able to claim compensation because your title deeds were washed away in the tsunami and re-establishing ownership is a lengthy and complicated process. Like everyone else you know, you had no insurance. Even if you had been able to rebuild you wouldn't have been able to afford it because since the tsunami the cost of local materials has soared and construction worker salaries have trebled. Anyway, the government says the land was not really yours because the Coast Conservation Act had prohibited building in that area since 1981, even if they had chosen not to enforce these regulations for over 20 years.

Now you are living in a tent with your family in the grounds of a school, awaiting transfer to a transitional shelter a few kilometres inland on the edge of a swamp where they have to bring in water every day because of the saline water in the wells. The camp is near the temporary shelters occupied by those displaced by conflict for the past 15 years. You are getting food rations and a small amount of money each month from

the local government administration. It's enough to survive. If you move elsewhere you might be able to use your market savvy to start something new. But if you go, you will be on your own – no government aid, nothing. A local NGO says it will start a revolving loan scheme or provide grants so that people can start small business initiatives. They are talking about a few thousand rupees to rear goats and chickens. You used to have a daily turnover of 50,000 rupees (c\$500) and employ five workers.

The semi-skilled labourer

You are a semi-skilled construction worker. Before the tsunami things were lean. You had to travel to the city for work and sometimes couldn't find any. Since the tsunami there has been a building boom, providing temporary dwellings, transitional shelters and permanent homes. There are new schools to be constructed, roads to be repaired and bridges to be built. Wages have shot up and there is no shortage of work. The tsunami is the best thing that ever happened to you. Sometimes you wonder, though, what will happen after all the houses are built? How will you go back to 250 rupees a day (\$2.50) after earning 750 for tsunami-related construction? And what will be the impact on the local employment market of all the masons and carpenters that the vocational training NGOs are now producing? Will the post-disaster reconstruction industry stimulate long-term development or will it all suddenly go bust when the humanitarian aid agencies go home?

Regarded by many as a reactive top-down response, the government's decision to enforce the 1981 Coast Conservation Act, which prohibits construction within 100 metres of the mean high tide mark, has effectively deprived hundreds of thousands of tsunami-displaced people of the opportunity to rebuild their original homes. Although this policy is informed by sound ecological arguments (encouraging mangroves and sand dunes to regenerate) and emergency preparedness argu-



A fisherman inspects his net at Point Pedro, a village in the far north of Sri Lanka, near Jaffna.

ments (reducing vulnerabilities by establishing a physical buffer zone against future hazards), the inter-relation between property ownership and livelihoods appears to have been largely overlooked. Given the questionable legality of coastal tenures and the problem of making claims in the absence of title documentation, securing state compensation for lost property is likely to be a lengthy and complex process during which time livelihoods are effectively put on hold.

The fishing community was one of the sectors worst affected by the tsunami. Although the government has promised to restore lost livelihoods for fisher-folk, the lack of capacity within the state bureaucracy to cope with these claims has resulted in serious delays over compensation. Humanitarian aid organisations have stepped in to try to plug this gap. However, due to the enormous amounts of funding being mobilised by the local and international NGO community, this has become an extremely competitive environment. As the case of the fishing boats reveals, aid organisations are competing for a space in which to

help by offering a diverse array of appealing livelihood assets. In the short term such practices may have a benefit on livelihoods as fisher-folk can immediately restart their trade. In the longer term, however, the implications for sustainable livelihoods may be disastrous. Providing *ad hoc* assets without community consultation and participation in analysing the potential impact on local relationships, market capacity and the environment could result in rapid degradation of available fish stocks. This would undermine livelihoods in the longer term and increase the likelihood of inter-communal tensions in an already ethnically charged conflict-affected environment.

There are of course both winners and losers in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. As the semi-skilled labourer's case shows, the construction industry is experiencing an unprecedented boom. New markets have also emerged in accommodation and transport for the hundreds of new international humanitarian aid programmes. Unfortunately, these new opportunities are something of a double-edged sword, bringing

temporary prosperity for some but rendering goods and services unaffordable for others.

Post-tsunami livelihoods have become inextricably intertwined with government policy and administration, the shift in labour needs, market priorities and demands, and the proliferation of international and local humanitarian aid organisations operating in affected areas. Urgent action needs to be taken to address the issue of livelihoods in a timely, coherent, strategic and equitable manner, ensuring that policies and practices integrate local participation, decision making and environmental protection, and reduce disaster-related vulnerabilities. Otherwise, the long-term prospects for sustainable livelihoods may be bleak for those most affected by the tsunami.

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Six months on: facing fears

by Lyndon Jeffels

Since 1987 UNHCR has provided protection and assistance to those displaced by the twenty-year-long civil war in Sri Lanka. UNHCR has extended its role to assist in the post-tsunami humanitarian crisis.

It was 9.30am on 26 December 2004 when Mary Theresa Rajeswaran heard what she thought was an approaching military vehicle. Cooking in her kitchen, Mary only became concerned when shouts and screams accompanied the roaring noise outside. Taking her daughter Nanthani by the hand, they went to see what was causing the commotion.

Outside, a crowd of people were running towards a hastily receding ocean. Moments later, Mary saw a fifteen foot wave thundering towards her. Protected from the initial impact by a building in front of her house, Mary grabbed Nanthani and ran inland. Finding herself at a dead-end, Mary turned to escape but the first wave had already caught up with her, throwing her and two-year-old Nanthani onto barbed wire fencing. Grabbing at the spikes with one hand and holding her daughter with the other, Mary was half-conscious, realising only that the wave was quickly retreating.

Ampara, Sri Lanka.

Injured and tired, Mary took Nanthani to safety and began looking for her six-year-old son. However, as she started to walk over to the place where she had last seen him, the second wave threw her back onto the barbed wire fencing. "I felt not a single sensation in my body," she says. "I felt nothing but the pain of having lost my son." Dragged by the current for nearly an hour, Mary recalls the ashy hue and warmth of the enveloping sea. Above her she describes the sky as "dark and brooding", with rain persistently hurtling down.

Found by her family sometime later, Mary refused to go to the hospital for treatment. "My son's safety was the most important thing for me. I couldn't leave without knowing he was safe," she explains. It was not until later the same afternoon that Mary's son returned home, having taken sanctuary in his school throughout the tsunami. A relieved Mary was then taken to Point Pedro Hospital. With heavy bruising, twisted limbs and cuts, Mary required seven stitches.

"My husband is not working at present as his boat is broken," Mary declares. "Since the tsunami, we have all been too scared to return to living by the sea. We are now 750 metres inland, safe from any future tsunamis." The dilemma for Mary's family and many others like them is whether or not they should return to the ocean on which their livelihoods have depended for generations or stay away from the shore, safe but without access to a reliable income and the place they used to call home.

UNHCR's response

In the aftermath of the tsunami, UNHCR has distributed nearly 500,000 non-food relief items to more than 160,000 people. These included plastic sheets, tents, mosquito nets, cooking equipment and utensils, towels, soap, buckets, clothing and other basic items. We have also taken a lead role in supporting the Sri Lankan government's efforts to coordinate the transitional shelter sector. We have worked with partners to bridge the gap between emergency shelter and reconstruction and build temporary houses before the onset of monsoon rains.

UNHCR has developed a variety of guidance documents and checklists

relating to transitional shelter which have been developed in conjunction with beneficiaries, the Sri Lankan authorities and other humanitarian agencies. The UNHCR-convened Shelter and Settlement Forum ensures that gender, environmental and other considerations will be taken into account during construction of transitional and permanent housing for those displaced by the tsunami.

In addition to coordinating this sector, UNHCR is also building around 3,000 temporary shelters in Jaffna and Ampara Districts. Designs vary between locations due to differing climatic, social and local resource factors. 1,408 shelters in Jaffna will





Distribution of supplies by UNHCR, Point Pedro district, Sri Lanka.

be completed in June 2005, with 2,442 transitional shelters in Ampara scheduled to be built by September 2005. The transitional shelters in Ampara (measuring 3 x 4 metres) comprise two partitioned rooms, are built within a galvanised iron frame and are compliant with the internationally-recognised SPHERE standards for a family of five. The brick foundation provides a firm impregnable base, with upper walls of plywood. The shelters can be disassembled and reassembled in another location if necessary. The roofs are made of zinc aluminium. Though more expensive than tin, it does not conduct as much heat, ensuring greater comfort for those living inside. The need to keep occupants cool is also recognised through the inclusion of a gap between the top of the outside walls and the zinc aluminium roof.

Those completed in Jaffna will provide safe, dignified and durable shelter for Mary and the rest of her community in Kallady, Point Pedro. Among the others benefiting will be her brother, Thamilagan, who

tragically lost his wife, twin babies, mother-in-law, brother and sister-in-law and their daughter during the tsunami disaster.

Displaced three times by the conflict, Thamilagan, 30, is from Matharankerny in Jaffna. Situated just 50 metres from the coast, his village lost 189 people to the tsunami. Thamilagan describes the sound of “fire crackers and a heavy popping noise” outdoors on the day of the tsunami. The cracks around his front door and windows started to let in water. “Before I knew what was happening, the walls caved in and a rush of water washed away everything in sight,” he says. “My father-in-law grabbed the twins but could not hold onto them as the force of the water was too strong.”

Floating nearly 1km from his home, Thamilagan eventually tried to make his way back but his foot had been crushed by falling bricks and he could not walk. Found later in the afternoon by the police, Thamilagan was taken to Jaffna Teaching Hospital where he remained for

three days without word as to the whereabouts of his family, before a relative delivered the terrible news. Now severely scarred, crippled with grief and suffering from depression and survivor’s guilt, Thamaligan asks: “Why am I the only one alive?” Having earned his living as a fisherman, Thamilagan has a usable boat and work is currently underway to clear the mass of debris blocking the harbour. But the painful memories linger and returning to the sea “will only remind me of those I lost”.

This dilemma is echoed throughout all the island’s tsunami-affected communities. For now, organisations like UNHCR can only listen and assist those whose lives have been shattered by an ocean which sustained them for so long.

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Logistical challenges

by Steve Matthews

The impact of the Asian tsunami was unprecedented and the logistical challenges of meeting the needs of those affected were enormous. Had the tsunami happened even five years ago, World Vision would not have been able to respond nearly as effectively as it did.

In the late 1990s, with growing numbers of humanitarian emergencies and rapidly evolving complexity of relief aid, World Vision changed the way it responded to major disasters. Instead of borrowing development staff at the onset of an emergency, and losing days of response time in the process, World Vision created a full-time division – its Global Rapid Response Team – dedicated to predicting, preparing for and responding to large-scale emergencies.

The tsunami was to test its capacity to the limit. “We mounted thirty-two airlifts to Aceh and Sri Lanka in the first thirty days,” said George Fenton, World Vision’s Director of Global Pre-positioning. “We’ve never done anything that big before.” And it wasn’t easy. The red tape of bureaucracy proved a major obstacle in some cases. Although most items could rapidly be off-loaded and distributed, certain non-food items such as vehicles and radios, which are more likely to be considered a potential security risk in conflict-affected countries, became immediately entangled in red tape and required considerable staff time before they could be moved on.

World Vision India and Thailand – with bigger staff capacity – were able to play their part in the response with little outside assistance, leaving the bulk of the international effort to focus on Sri Lanka and Indonesia. World Vision’s response in Sri Lanka was launched just hours after the giant waves hit the country, thanks to the creativity and passion of the local staff who immediately started distributing food, water, clothing, sleeping mats and hygiene products. Their rapid response led the way in what became the biggest shipment of aid in the shortest period of time in World Vision’s fifty-five-year history.

World Vision has pre-stocked warehouses in Denver, Hanover, Brindisi and Dubai. Those facilities were immediately accessed and other pre-planned stock arrangements with suppliers and transport companies in Kenya, Canada, India, Pakistan, Thailand and Australia filled most of the remaining gaps. This ability to activate pre-planned stocks of relief supplies proved vital.

The involvement of experienced staff was also an important factor. Following the death of a World Vision relief

worker in Mosul and in light of the constant deterioration in security in Iraq, World Vision had closed its Iraq programme in October 2004. That meant there was a number of highly experienced relief workers ready to take on a new assignment. Experienced people bring with them existing relationships with other relief professionals and agencies; in the chaotic early days of the emergency, the ability to quickly establish good working relationships with NGOs and UN agencies greatly facilitated the effective delivery of aid.

What of the future?

World Vision expects its tsunami programmes to continue for a minimum of five years, covering a broad range of projects such as micro-enterprise development for small businesses, reconstruction of homes, businesses, roads and bridges, new water and sanitation systems in coastal areas and enhanced child protection in schools and villages.

Some lessons learned from previous disasters proved helpful in the tsunami response.¹ As a result of child protection protocols developed in the previous two years, child-friendly spaces were established in Sri Lanka, Aceh and India. Decentralised decision making at the national office level allowed for a quicker response, especially in India and Sri Lanka. But despite the effectiveness of most aspects of the relief operation, there is concern for the future. What if there is another major disaster in the near future? The tsunami response has drawn deeply from the well of capacity of all agencies. If there is another large-scale rapid onset emergency soon, many agencies – even the large ones – will be hard pressed to mount an appropriate response.

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1. See After Action Review (involving World Vision International, CARE, OXFAM GB and Catholic Relief Services) at www.humanitarianinfo.org/srilanka/infocentre/reference/docs/Care_Evaluation.pdf



Small fish trampled in post-tsunami stampede

by Irene Fraser

In Sri Lanka, the values of participation and decentralisation were undermined by many international agencies in the post-tsunami rush.

From the first day of the emergency, international and national agencies in Batticaloa pulled together. Short and effective meetings were held by people who already knew each other. Camaraderie between Sri Lankan and expatriate colleagues grew from the personal dangers we had all faced and our willingness to share resources – vehicles, relief items and staff – across agencies as dictated by immediate needs.

On 30 December, due to high water levels, Inginiyagala Dam in Ampara was opened and fast flowing water made its way to the coast causing yet another tide of affected people to

move into camps. I was distributing food aid to a school that had been turned into a camp for displaced families. As water turned against us for the second time in less than a week people climbed in panic onto tables. I watched as the flame that cooked the boiling rice went out and we were plunged into darkness. There was nowhere we could run to. We were thigh deep in water and fearful that the dam would burst and further water would carry us away. As the rain tumbled down that night my heart bled. We were fortunate in that our office was on the first floor of an NGO building; we had mats to lie on while countless others were out in the open, under trees or in

flooded and overcrowded camps. Staff joked that only a cyclone could make things worse than they were.

However, the next shock came not from nature but from our employer. Out of the blue I was told that our Sri Lankan emergency team co-ordinator was to be relieved of her duties and was required to pack up and proceed to Colombo immediately. Without consultation, management had condemned her for ‘inappropriate’ use of agency vehicles as she had allowed licensed staff who were not agency employees to ferry people to the safety of higher ground. We were also informed that we had violated human resource policy by allowing a volunteer (who had substantial international emergency experience) to join our team. We were informed that a team of emergency ‘experts’ was on its way.

Outside a refugee camp near Palattadichchenai, Sri Lanka, people begin to return home.



Five days into an unprecedented emergency operation and having put in 20-hour working days to provide food and medical aid to 30,000 people, we were told to suspend operations and await instructions from the incoming experts.

A question of trust

NGOs talk of their work being shaped by a vision of participation and of the value of decentralisation but what clearer evidence could there be that a large humanitarian agency had no trust in local staff, local knowledge and local people's capacities? When the emergency experts arrived I wanted to ask them many questions. Are you aware there has been an armed conflict going on here for two decades? Have you ever been displaced, lost loved ones to conflict or been deprived of your land and possessions? It soon became clear they knew little of Sri Lanka and its people, their social structures, the background to the conflict and the resilience and coping strategies of those caught up in it. Their terms of reference made no mention of understanding what those affected by the tsunami had already been through.

As more and more emergency experts arrived, post-tsunami life seemed like a corporate take over. Small fish were being swallowed up

by big fish. Community and organisational structures were undermined as the new agencies poached staff to kick-start their own operations. Rents soared in the local housing market and wads of foreign cash distorted the employment market. Within days agencies talked as if they had worked in Sri Lanka for ages and assured us that after their rapid initial assessments they would soon know what needed to be done. Their confidence was breathtaking. One INGO claimed that it would rehabilitate everything in the district within three months.

Relief items were distributed fast and furiously and sometimes dumped in order to artificially raise the number of beneficiaries the agencies could boast about on their websites and press releases. Nobody cared whether the second-hand clothes were culturally inappropriate or of good enough quality. The presence of high-heeled shoes and female swimming costumes in some relief packs went unquestioned. While those IDPs sheltering with relatives were ignored, agencies fell over themselves to provide multiple assistance to those in camps. Nobody likes to say no to handouts and some families ended up with more non-food relief items than they had place to store. Conflict between families was heightened by the arbitrary distribution. Some children proudly

sported their new bags and books while others who had received nothing were sullen. Plentiful supplies of donated medicines, labelled in a variety of foreign languages, arrived. People overdosed as they met doctors from different teams prescribing different medicines.

In the rush to spend cash and distribute supplies there was no time to sit down with the local people, to console children and families in their time of need or to help them to confront and overcome their fear of the sea. Instead, people were continually assaulted by false alarms – whether of the risk of new tsunamis or government plans – that deepened fear and added to stress. It was unclear whether the coastal buffer zone – on which nobody was to be allowed to live – would be 100 or 300 metres wide. Fishermen who have always lived by the sea now face the prospect of commuting to work and having to hire security guards to watch over their boats and nets. The role of outsiders in cleaning up the debris from coastal areas, in tearing down the remains of peoples' houses without their presence or consent, has added to fears that developers are planning to build luxury hotels where people once lived and worked.

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Humanitarian response towards Burmese migrant workers

by Pia Oberoi

The human rights imperative that should underpin all humanitarian response was denied to large numbers of people in the tsunami crisis in South and South-East Asia.

Across the globe 'irregular' or 'undocumented' migrants can be found working as domestic servants, farm labourers or street cleaners, doing jobs commonly viewed as dirty, demeaning or dangerous. Prior to the tsunami, Burmese migrant workers in the coastal areas of Thailand were employed in various low-skilled sectors, including construction, fisheries

and tourism. In practice, and to a certain extent in policy, the response of the Thai authorities towards the Burmese migrant workers affected by the tsunami was discriminatory and violated their fundamental human rights.

Estimates of the numbers of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand killed as a result of the tsunami

range from 700 to 2,500, out of a total estimated population of over 120,000 Burmese working in four southern Thai provinces most affected by the devastation. Accurate figures for the numbers of injured or missing Burmese are also elusive, with some reports putting the numbers of missing as high as 4,000. A joint assessment mission carried out by International Organization for Migration (IOM), the World Bank and UN agencies in January concluded that at least 7,000 Burmese migrant workers and their dependants were affected by the tsunami in Thailand. The confusion is mainly due to the

fact that many thousands of the migrant workers living and working in Thailand are unregistered and therefore excluded from official statistics. In addition many identity documents and work permits were washed out to sea.

Discrimination in assistance provision

In the chaotic aftermath of the tsunami, many Burmese migrant workers found that they were last in the queue to receive emergency humanitarian aid – if they were eligible at all. Announcements were made by the Thai authorities that only those migrant workers who were able to prove that they were regularly present in the country would be eligible to receive humanitarian aid. NGOs reported in January 2005 that whole communities of irregular migrants were hiding in the hills, many of them injured and weak from hunger. Irregular migrants were unable to access even emergency health care through the Thai public health system and most had to rely on the charity of local NGOs for food and other assistance.

Hundreds and possibly thousands of Burmese migrants were forcibly returned by the authorities to Burma

Humanitarian response is premised on the imperative of meeting human needs and restoring human dignity within a framework of non-discrimination. The response to the needs of the Burmese migrant workers neither met their needs nor restored their dignity. International human rights law establishes the principle that all human beings, regardless of their legal status, are entitled to respect for their fundamental rights, including economic and social rights. In relation to the ability of Burmese migrants to access emergency healthcare following the tsunami, for instance, Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹, of which Thailand is a State Party, recognises the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

In addition to being denied humanitarian aid, Burmese migrant workers faced other forms of discrimination

and abuse in the aftermath of the tsunami. With industry devastated in the coastal areas, many migrant workers were simply abandoned by their employers, making it difficult for them to replace work permits lost to the wave. Media reports of criminal activity allegedly perpetrated by migrants led the Thai authorities to arrest and detain, often arbitrarily, several hundred Burmese migrants. Hundreds and possibly thousands of Burmese migrants were forcibly returned by the authorities to Burma, where some may be at risk of serious human rights violations. Their irregular status means that few, if any, migrant workers would dare to report abuses suffered at the hands either of employers or local law enforcement authorities.

The fact remains that, while it is the sovereign prerogative of Thailand to control its borders, even migrant workers who lack the legal right to remain in their country of employment are entitled to respect for their fundamental rights. Arbitrary arrest and detention, and detention in inadequate conditions, are in violation of Articles 9(1) and 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights², to which Thailand is also a State Party. Equally fundamentally, the Thai government

is obliged under customary international law not to return any person to a situation where they would be likely to suffer serious human rights violations including torture.

Protecting the human rights of all migrants

The tsunami crisis brought to the public eye some endemic problems faced by migrant workers in Thailand, such as their abusive treatment by local authorities and employers. It also raised questions of how the humanitarian response was conducted by national and local authorities in the region as a whole. From Sri Lanka to Indonesia via Thailand and India, reports have emerged of discrimination in the delivery of humanitarian aid to vulnerable groups in great need.³

Migrant workers' vulnerability is compounded when migrants are in an irregular situation, and even

further still when these irregular migrants are women, children, elderly or ill. Yet countries around the world regularly operate discriminatory policies towards irregular migrants. Very few countries have legislative requirements, or even administrative policies, that provide protection to migrants who are in an irregular situation on their territory.

In particular it should be mentioned that only 29 countries in the world are party to the one international human rights instrument that is specifically dedicated to protecting the fundamental human rights of migrants, regardless of their migratory status. This is the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICMW), which came into force in July 2003.⁴

The ICMW and other core human rights treaties that apply equally to migrants are important tools for the protection of the rights of migrants, not least because they act as a counterbalance to the emphasis on control and containment that has, to date, characterised much of the debate on migration. Recognition that all migrants are human beings with inherent human rights is key to ensuring that in the context of a humanitarian response they will not be forgotten, discriminated against or subjected to abuse.

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TAG (Tsunami Action Group) is a group of NGOs and community-based organisations concerned for the situation of Burmese migrant workers affected by the tsunami. See: www.saydanatsunami.org or email: tagmigrants@yahoo.com

1. www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ceschr.htm
 2. www.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm
 3. See for example Human Rights Watch, 'End caste bias in tsunami relief', 14 January 2005 <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/14/india10019.htm>; Amnesty International, 'Indonesia – Human rights are paramount in the relief and reconstruction effort', 18 January 2005 <http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGASA210032005>
 4. www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/recomm/instr/un_9.htm

Indian symposium reviews tsunami response

report by Paula Banerjee and Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury

A symposium of academics and human rights activists organised by the Calcutta Research Group assessed the extent to which relief and rehabilitation initiatives in Tamil Nadu and the Andaman and Nicobar islands have recognised the rights of those affected to receive aid without discrimination based on caste, religion or gender.

Tamil Nadu

Speakers at the symposium¹ noted that the first response from the Government of India and the Tamil Nadu state government to the needs of the 2.73 million people affected by the giant waves was hesitant. As initial rescue and relief efforts were led by civil society organisations, government-directed relief efforts failed to recognise that the situation of some groups was worse than others. State programmes were shaped by preconceived notions of relief and rehabilitation needs. Amidst the urgent need to provide food to the most vulnerable, aid agencies were left grappling with confusion created by inconsistent government policies. The needs of many tsunami-affected women, children and aged people and members of the *dalit* (so-called

'untouchables') and other discriminated-against minorities have still not been met.

Although fishing communities have received disproportionately more help than other victims, fewer than a third of fishermen in Tamil Nadu have resumed fishing. Rehabilitation of the fishing communities is being considered from a short-term perspective. Four-fifths of aid to fishing communities has been in the form of loans. Fishermen fear they will not be able to repay them as they have lost most of their belongings. Mining companies involved in sand collection are acting as if no displacement has taken place in the region and their activities are insufficiently regulated. Some families claim their land could have been saved if mining companies had not been allowed to

continue removing sand. Destruction of mangroves has worsened soil erosion.

While there has been no shortage of funds, accountability has been poor. The Asian Development Bank made substantial resources available to the state government, and the Prime Minister's Relief Fund and the Chief Minister's Relief Fund are well-endowed. There is growing demand for greater transparency about the use of available funds both by the government agencies and by NGOs.

Relief operations were often insensitive:

- Wagon-loads of quilts arrived from northern India but were of no use to tsunami-victims in hot and humid Tamil Nadu.
- Donations of poor-quality second-hand clothes were angrily rejected by fishing communities.
- Both district administrators and local *panchayats* (village councils) marginalised women: female civil servants were not deployed to assist in relief operations and male officials were insensitive to the needs of women and chil-

Temporary housing on the beach, Ininthakarai, India.



dren: women, for example, were given sarees but no undergarments.

- Relief money was given to male heads of household – and compensation for lost relatives given to men – without any effort to ensure it was not misspent.
- Photographers jostled each other to get snaps of helpless destitute women.
- Chapattis were provided to people whose staple diet is rice.

Many local and international NGOs with substantial remaining funds are finding it difficult to disburse them as the Government of India's desire to enforce pre-tsunami coastal area regulations prevents the construction of houses for tsunami victims or providing them with livelihood-related assets. The decision to relocate people 200 metres from the shoreline is controversial. There is a lack of transparency about enforcement of the coastal regulations. Many question the legality of the ban and fear that forcible relocation opens the way for multinational corporations to gain control of coastal areas.

There has been no coordination among government departments and no comprehensive rehabilitation policy. The burden of providing proof of entitlement to support has now fallen to the victims. Both political parties and women's organisations have tended to overlook the issue of discrimination against women in tsunami relief operations. The role played by Muslim organisations in relief operations has not been acknowledged. While the government listens to civil society organisations it does not always accept their recommendations.

Government officials seem primarily motivated by the need to maintain their image and avoid critical press coverage. A number of NGOs seem mainly interested in courting favourable media publicity. One participant noted that three sets of people have benefited from the disaster: hotel owners, car rental companies and unscrupulous local NGOs who have earned money from acting as disaster tour guides.

The state still determines who will provide aid and who will not. The role of civil society institutions may be expanding, and the Indian middle classes and non-resident Indians have provided significant resources, but it is still the state which scrutinises civil society, not the other way round.

Continental mindset shapes Andaman and Nicobar assistance

The remote Andaman and Nicobar islands are a series of islands in the Bay of Bengal – stretching over an area of more than 700km from north to south – which lie 1,200 km east of the Indian mainland. Being closer to Sumatra, the Nicobars – entry to which is strictly controlled by the Indian authorities – were worse affected by the tsunami and at least 3,000 people from aboriginal tribes are estimated to have died. The islands lack local democratic governance and legislative structures, and have long been subject to inappropriate development schemes imposed by 'mainlanders'. The damage done by these to the fragile coastal environment had been exacerbated by violations of the coastal no-build zone regulations by members of the local elite and the Indian Air Force.

In the absence of political organisation and civil society, a bureaucratic response to relief requirements was inevitable. The Indian government did not welcome UN or other international assistance in assessing loss and damage. India refused to accept foreign funding for relief operations but encouraged Indian NGOs to transfer money to the local administration. UNICEF was the only international organisation allowed to operate across the archipelago. The International Red Cross complained that its supplies were seized on arrival at Port Blair. Foreign journalists and aid workers were confined to Port Blair and not permitted to travel to any of the outlying islands.

In the absence of any consultation with local communities and the effective sidelining of the civilian administration, relief and rehabilitation operations have been led by the Indian military. It is vital, however, that the views and needs of local people be considered and their indigenous knowledge respected. Nicobarese fishermen, for example, refused to accept the mainland-manufactured fishing equipment provided in the post-tsunami period as it was inappropriate for their needs.

As a result of the disaster, fishing communities in the islands are likely to be affected, mangrove forest to be denuded and corals to be damaged. There is also a risk of major ethnic strife between tribal communities – now only 12% of the population of the islands – and outsiders.

Lessons learned

The tsunami has highlighted the urgent need to rethink the role of the state vis-à-vis civil society and communities in the context of relief operations. Key policy recommendations emerging from the symposium are that:

- There should be greater coordination among relief agencies and sharing of information about disaster impacts and victims' needs.
- Relief should be driven by the needs of affected communities, not supply-driven.
- Tsunami-affected communities should decide what kind of relief is suitable for them: *panchayats* should have a greater role in preparing for, and responding to, disasters.
- Women's voices should be given priority in all aspects of relief and rehabilitation.
- Discrimination in relief provision – on the basis of caste, gender and economic status – must be tackled.
- The special character of the Andaman and Nicobar islands must be considered.
- Government agencies should be more transparent about how they spend post-disaster resources.
- Rehabilitation planners should monitor government land policies and their effects on rural economies.

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A full report of the symposium is online at: www.mcrg.ac.in/tsunami.htm

1. The speakers at the symposium were: Dr. Louis (People's Watch, Tamil Nadu www.pwtn.org); Bimla Chandrasekhar (Ekta Resource Centre for Women, Tamil Nadu www.ektaonline.org); K.M. Parivelan (humanitarian activist, also working at the UNHCR office at Chennai, Tamil Nadu); Partha Guha (Child in Need Institute, Kolkata www.cini-india.org); Samir Acharya (Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology www.andaman.org/book/Sane/sanetext.htm) and Subir Bhowmick (CRG member, and BBC employee).

A voice for vulnerable groups in Tamil Nadu

by Max Martin

Many vulnerable people in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu lost homes, livelihoods and access to schooling in the tsunami. Assistance to these already marginalised groups must be more sensitive to their particular needs.

When the tsunami inundated the small village in which she lives, Mariammal lost her catamaran and fishing nets. Her village – inhabited mostly by Irula tribal people – is on a small strip of land between Pulicat lagoon (60 km north of the state capital, Chennai) and the Bay of Bengal. Nobody from the *adivasi* (tribal) or *dalit* (so-called ‘untouchable’) communities nearby is allowed into the sea – the traditional preserve of the non-tribal fishermen. When two years ago some Irula men challenged the ban and went fishing the ensuing clashes claimed two lives. “Our people had to give an undertaking to the district authorities that we will not fish in the sea,” Mariammal said. The women traditionally fish in the backwaters to catch prawns, lagoon crabs, mullets and catfish, oyster and clams. In her village, there were about 40 catamarans, 28 of them owned by women. Almost all the boats were lost or damaged in the tsunami.

Although Mariammal now lives on charity from a local church, she is the secretary of a savings and credit group organised by a local NGO and wishes that there would be similar initiatives to help restore the villagers’ livelihoods. She also hopes that NGOs and others offering assistance would address the women’s needs; fishing craft and equipment are usually supplied to men only. Across the backwaters, NGOs are moving in to assist fishing communities but they do not cross over to this tribal hamlet or the nearby *dalit* community.

Men and women from certain castes are denied access to the sea all along the coast of Tamil Nadu. The role of *dalits* and tribal people in fishing communities tends to be supportive; they clean and maintain fishing equipment, load, transport and sell fish, build, thatch and clean fishermen’s huts. NGO assistance in restoring their livelihoods is still determined by the menial roles tra-

ditionally assigned to them. Women like Mariammal who are engaged in fishing face double discrimination – being a woman and belonging to a marginal group.

Living on the streets

The pavement of the road leading to Chennai’s scenic Marina beach came alive at sunset everyday. One could see young Krishnamurthy spreading out his schoolbooks on the pavement in his family’s open-air ‘home’ between two lampposts. At Pattanapakam, over 500 families displaced by the tsunami lived without shelter beside the busy road for over two months. The rubble of their houses can be

seen by the shore. Poles and ropes demarcate boundaries in case an official arrives to assess the damage. When around half of those living on the pavement moved to temporary shelters 12km away Krishnamurthy’s family preferred to stay put. “It is difficult but we make sure that he gets some time to study,” said Bhanu, Krishnamurthy’s mother. They hope that they will be provided with a shelter nearby – and, later, a permanent house. Rehabilitation programmes are not addressing displaced children’s educational needs. Remedial schooling and places to study for those who are not in formal settlements are only now being discussed.

After two months on the street almost all the families were shifted to the temporary shelters far away. At the time of writing in early June they live there in hot, humid sheds, with little water and very bad sanitation facilities. The camp was flooded during the summer rain. In a month there will be monsoon rains and more floods. The government and NGOs are planning to shift them again – to a better camp.

In search of a cool place

In Muttam village in Kanniyakumari district at India’s southernmost tip, Mary, a mother of four, has one of 24 temporary shelters built by a local NGO. As the summer grows hotter and more humid, the shelter has become too hot to be comfortable. Mary spends most of her time outside. “We all – men, women and children – sleep at night out in the open,” said Mary. “I have left my youngest child, a two-year-old, at a neighbour’s house, as it is too hot to spend the afternoon in this shelter.”

Mary is not happy spending the day out in the open especially when men – with no work to go to – hang around. She tries not to complain but the lack of privacy is a major concern. She is embarrassed by having to take her child to the neighbour on a daily basis. Worst of all, they

Questions of minimum standards have been ignored

have to sleep outside in public space when the nights get too warm and humid. The tar-coated shelters retain heat and are poorly ventilated. The black plastic wrapped over the roof to prevent the light roof sheets from flying off make the shelters even hotter. Because of the heat women are obliged to cook either in the open air or in shared kitchens. Questions of minimum standards of comfort and privacy – which impact particularly on women – have been ignored in the rush to build temporary shelters. Several NGOs promised to provide fans for the shelters but, in closed structures like these, fans will only serve to circulate the hot air.

NGOs are starting to realise that they were wrong to follow the example of some of the government contractors when choosing building materials. “We did what they said,” said a programme officer from the NGO ActionAid India. “We need to correct it.”

“We had to go as far as Ernakulam in Kerala [six hours by road] to get these light roof sheets,” said Cleatus Ubald, director of the local NGO

Social Education and Development (SED). “We could have made thatched huts with local material, like coconut or palm leaves, and generated some local employment.” NGO representatives said that district officials prevented them from building traditional thatched structures, as memories of a major fire a couple of years ago that killed many children in a thatched school shed were still fresh in people’s minds.

Indiadisasters.org¹ has reported on the “oven-like” temporary shelters. Inter Press Service (IPS)² has also documented the problem of “sauna-like” temporary shelters. While technological solutions – such as a heat-resistant shields, better ventilation or air ducts – are becoming available, the issue of women’s space in shelters has yet to be addressed effectively. Only the more

experienced agencies are providing separate spaces for cooking, washing and bathing. Oxfam provides cooler, thatched huts in Cuddalore, with space allocated for such activities. Some Cordaid-supported shelters include a room specifically for adolescent girls. To be acceptable and appropriate, shelters must be constructed with at least a minimum degree of planning and consideration of comfort and privacy requirements.

Conclusion

Social, cultural and biological factors make women and children, especially girls, more vulnerable to adverse health effects and violence in the aftermath of a disaster. Lack of adequate shelter makes them all the more vulnerable. Women in traditional South Asian communities may

be unable to access assistance safely and to make their needs known. Denying education to children will make the next generation still more vulnerable. To address all these concerns, any approach to disaster response should be gendered and sensitive to the particular needs of women and children. Those involved in provision of assistance need to have a clear understanding of the local environment and appreciate the particular needs of all sectors of the community.

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1. www.indiadisasters.org

2. www.ips.org/

Temporary shelter in Kanniyakumari district at India’s southernmost tip.



Response effectiveness: views of the affected population

by Anisya Thomas and Vimala Ramalingam

While relief organisations are now reviewing their post-tsunami operations, few evaluations include multiple organisations. Rarer still is an assessment of the views of those at the receiving end of rescue and relief services – the ‘beneficiaries’.

A recent survey by Fritz Institute in the tsunami-affected areas of India and Sri Lanka probed beneficiary perceptions of the effectiveness of aid. Preliminary results indicate that affected populations in India tend to have a more positive perception of the aid they have received than their Sri Lankan counterparts.

India and Sri Lanka had different aid scenarios. India ‘officially’ closed its doors to international humanitarian agencies which did not already have a presence or partners in the country. The provision of relief by the Government of India, state governments, NGOs, international organisations, private corporations and the military was coordinated by the state. In Sri Lanka, international, regional and local NGOs were given relatively free access to tsunami-affected people (except in the politically sensitive Northern and Eastern provinces). Despite the participation of many large and experienced NGOs, the perception was that the aid offered to people in Sri Lanka was less satisfactory. Probing the possible reasons behind such differing perceptions raises questions regarding differential effectiveness of aid in two different scenarios – one with a centrally coordinated system as in India, and the other with a more ‘informal’, loose one as in Sri Lanka.

Respondents in the survey were adult members of families affected by the tsunami who had lost family members and/or received post-tsunami assistance. They comprised a representative sample from the population affected by the disaster: in India, 800 people from 100

villages in 12 districts; in Sri Lanka, 600 people from 97 villages. The dominant occupation represented was fishing – 93% in India and 58% in Sri Lanka.

In each affected family, an adult member was the key respondent and others were encouraged to contribute. In both India and Sri Lanka the majority of key respondents were women. Data was collected via interviews in the local language by teams of trained interviewers using open-ended questions.

The first 48 hours

The interviewers first asked about recollections and perceptions during the first 48 hours after the tsunami. Only 48% of respondents in India said they received rescue assistance. The rate was still lower (31%) in Sri Lanka. “No one came to search for the people here... all of us were too shocked to react or even help each other,” said a fisherwoman in India. Efficacy of the rescue effort was questionable too. “Individuals came running from other villages but they could not do much,” said another respondent. Reports and field interviews suggest that it was neighbours and untrained local volunteers who contributed the most in rescue efforts and who provided immediate relief.

Responses with regard to the types of help received within the first 48 hours show a significant difference between India and Sri Lanka. For all of the 11 types of help mentioned in the survey – including rescue, identification/burial of dead, clearing debris, medical services and relocation – significantly higher numbers

of people in India said that they had received this help compared to those in Sri Lanka. 49% in India were helped to make some kind of arrangement for relocation within the first two days but in Sri Lanka – a worse affected country – the number was only about 3%. 85% in India benefited from help with provision of water supplies compared to only 15% in Sri Lanka. 66% of respondents in India had access to emergency medical services; in Sri Lanka the number was 33%.

There was discrepancy in speed of provision for different types of assistance. Only 15% of people in India



and 8% in Sri Lanka could say that clearing of debris was undertaken in the first 48 hours (to facilitate search operations). By contrast, food reached 90% of the people in India and 78% in Sri Lanka in those first 48 hours. In fact there was too much of it at times. “All kinds of cooked food reached us and it was in excess,” said an Indian respondent.

There was a dramatic difference in the profile of the initial providers. According to the respondents, in India the local government provided some form of assistance to approximately 86% of the respondents in the first 48 hours. In Sri Lanka, the equivalent number was 4%. In India, reports suggest, the local administration went into overdrive, especially in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. As one of the survivors commented: “We did not sleep, nor did the officials from the Collectorate [district administration].” About half the respondents in India said

they were assisted by NGOs and community organisations and 12% by the armed forces. In Sri Lanka, the armed forces provided assistance to 39% of respondents, with NGOs and international organisations being acknowledged by 37% of respondents. The Sri Lankan government was only acknowledged by 4% of the respondents. A typical comment of a survivor: “Where was the government when all this happened? Everything was chaotic.”

Longer-term assistance

We additionally asked questions to elicit impressions of the relief operations during the first 60 days. In both India and Sri Lanka more than half those interviewed felt that the food distribution was of above average quality but approximately 40% felt humiliated by the need to receive food and by the distribution methods used. “Sometimes we felt like beggars the way it was distrib-

uted and coordinated,” said one respondent. In India the government took the lead in almost all aspects of relief while in Sri Lanka it was international NGOs that led the way. In India the private sector seems to have played an unusually prominent role.

The preliminary results presented here raise more questions than they answer. They do, however, highlight the need to include affected populations in assessments of aid effectiveness and the development of lessons learned.

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The tsunami swept away all thatched houses and severely damaged those made of bricks or concrete. Ininthakarai, India



Lost innocence: the tsunami in the Maldives

by Heidi Brown

The December 2004 tsunami thrust the Republic of Maldives into the public eye, changing its image overnight from idyllic honeymoon destination to disaster zone.

This archipelago of some 1,200 coral islands has the lowest high point of any country in the world at just 2.4 metres. While the number of casualties was remarkably low, the waves caused massive devastation nationwide:

- 108 people are dead or missing.
- Thirteen of the 199 inhabited islands have been completely evacuated.
- Precious topsoil has been washed out to sea.
- More than 100 islands have lost core education, health, transport and/or communications infrastructure.
- Ten per cent of the housing stock was destroyed and much more was damaged.
- Between 15,000 and 30,000 people (5-10% of the population) were initially displaced.
- One third of the population had their lives or livelihoods severely disrupted by the disaster.

By mid-March the government's Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Unit estimated that there were at least 12,000 long-term IDPs in the country. However, there is very limited information about the true number as this population is quite mobile and many have sought shelter with extended family.

Unlike many of the other countries affected by the tsunami, the Maldives has no recent experience of natural disasters or armed conflict and so was unprepared to deal with an emergency on this scale. The challenge was made greater because the country had a limited UN presence prior to the disaster (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO had small offices). The UK charity Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) was the only international NGO based in-country and the local NGO sector was small. As the services of the international community were in demand in so many

countries and in the absence of a national plan for dealing with IDPs, the Maldivian government faced a steep learning curve in the early stages of the disaster.

In the emergency relief phase, transport was the most significant factor limiting the distribution of water, food and medical supplies, restoration of electrical power and information gathering. The geography of the Maldives is challenging at the best of times, with the 199 inhabited islands dispersed in a strip running 850km north to south. However, much of the transport infrastructure was lost to the tsunami, with damage to airports, harbours and jetties and destruction of many boats. An entire atoll (Laamu Atoll) was out of telephone contact for several days.

Challenges and solutions

Given these circumstances, the relief response was remarkably effective. In particular, the rapid distribution of water and food supplies and creation of sanitation facilities meant that there were no major outbreaks of infectious disease and no deaths beyond those directly caused by the tsunami. However, in the longer term, the country faces huge challenges. In addition to repairing the physical, psychosocial and economic damage inflicted by the waves and restoring pre-tsunami standards of living, there is a massive amount of work to be done to reduce the vulnerability of these tiny islands to future natural disasters, especially given predicted rises in sea level due to global climate change. The issue of IDPs clearly illustrates the delicate balancing act involved in responding to the post-tsunami needs of families and communities whilst addressing the long-term development goals of the country as a whole.

As befits a nation where each island has a unique character and strong

community identity, different solutions have evolved for the provision of temporary housing. Dormitory-style shelters were at first erected on a few islands, offering large shared sleeping areas and toilet facilities, with all meals produced by a central canteen. However, according to Mauroof Jameel of the National Disaster Management Centre¹, many IDPs were unhappy sharing facilities with other families and also wished to be able to cook their own meals. This only enhanced the lack of independence felt by displaced communities who have lost access to income-generating activities, such as fishing, fish processing and tourism. As a result, this approach has been superseded by three-room units, with one family to each room and individual cooking and toilet facilities.

On other islands, host families willingly accepted displaced people into their homes. However, as it has become increasingly clear that this situation may persist for months or even years, this is likely to place an unacceptable burden on the host families. As Tracey Larman, VSO Child Protection Advisor at the Government's Unit for the Rights of Children, says: "The long-term pressure of overcrowding, lack of privacy, stress and anxiety is likely to cause problems for both host families and IDPs and has serious implications for child protection." UNFPA Maldives has warned that lack of privacy in host houses and temporary shelters poses increased risks of violence and sexual abuse against women and adolescent girls. One solution, devised for Maamigili island by Alif Dhaal, Atoll Chief, has been to construct additional rooms in the compounds of households hosting IDPs, thereby relieving overcrowding in the short term and providing a lasting benefit to the host family in return for their generosity. The government is also providing basic food supplies to host families.

In early March, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) led a mission to the Maldives to assess conditions for the IDPs. Their preliminary report

concluded that an impressive amount of temporary housing has been constructed. However, because of a national lack of awareness of international guidelines, capacity fails to meet Sphere standards², so construction of temporary housing is continuing in order to meet this shortfall.

The OCHA report also highlighted anxiety among IDPs due to the lack of information concerning their future. In its National Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, published in March 2005³, the Government of Maldives has committed to community consultation in long-term planning. Mauroof Jameel predicts that they will be dealing with very specific requirements from different displaced islands communities when addressing the thorny issue of relocation.

In 1998 the government introduced the Population and Development Consolidation Policy to encourage voluntary internal migration in order to reduce the number of inhabited islands. The reasons underlying this strategy include:

- The fact that historical needs for dispersal, including proximity to fishing grounds, no longer exist due to the availability of motorised transport, refrigeration and on-board fish processing.

- Duplicating infrastructure and public services on 199 islands, 59 % of which have populations below 1,000 people, spreads government resources and manpower very thinly.
- Consolidation would allow the population improved access to specialised higher-level services.

Due to strong island identities, it has previously proven difficult to persuade people to move. By displacing entire communities and destroying infrastructure on many islands, the tsunami has swept this issue to the forefront of the long-term reconstruction planning debate. Should the government rebuild islands which have been inhabited for centuries but are clearly highly vulnerable? Or should they target reconstruction funds and efforts towards relocating communities to islands with better services and enhanced environmental protection?

As part of the National Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, the government has selected five islands to be developed to host relocated populations. Priority for resettlement will be given to communities from islands with major housing damage but relocation will also be available on request to other small and vulnerable island populations. To encourage people to relocate, host islands will be developed to provide:

- residential and community facilities
- full range of public services
- diversity of economic sectors
- good transport links with other islands
- infrastructure that can accommodate further growth.

They will also be among the first islands targeted for the development of protective sand banks to reduce the impact of future tsunamis and multi-storey buildings to act as safe havens in the event of future tsunamis – strategies that will eventually be applied nationwide.

The National Recovery and Reconstruction Plan states that: ‘Resettlement and relocation of populations is totally demand-driven and voluntary.’ However, for evacuated communities, relocation will be an all-or-nothing event. If the majority of the island’s population want to move, it will be unfeasible for the remaining few to return home and reconstruct their destroyed infrastructure. Even those who move willingly will have to make huge adjustments to adapt to their new home, in addition to the trauma they experienced during the original disaster. So there will be an ongoing need for comprehensive psychosocial support.

Maldives



Aishath Shahula Ahmed is Counseling Coordinator at a local NGO, Society for Health Education (SHE), and Acting Coordinator of the Psychosocial Support Unit (PSU) at the National Disaster Management Centre. She described the huge challenges involved in providing psychosocial support for the many thousands of traumatised people in a country with very few trained counsellors and only one psychiatrist. The response began immediately after the event, with local professional counsellors volunteering their time. Since then the Indian Red Cross, with support from UNFPA, has conducted 'Psychological First Aid' training and Maldivian teams have visited more than 70 islands to provide basic 'ventilation' (active listening) and to spot severe

psychological trauma cases requiring referral. With assistance from UNICEF, they have also used play- and art-based therapy very effectively to help young children to come to terms with their experiences – often difficult when parents are focusing on day-to-day survival.

It is likely that the PSU will soon become a formalised section of a government ministry. Along with many other previously unfamiliar features of the disaster response, psychosocial support will become part of the everyday language of both the government and civil society in the Maldives. It will be impossible to plan for the future without referring to the tumultuous events of the recent past. Hopefully the Maldives

will be better prepared to deal with whatever nature chooses to throw at it in years to come.

Heidi Brown is a volunteer with VSO (www.vso.org) working with the Ministry of Health, Maldives. Email: heids_on_tour@yahoo.com. This article is written in a personal capacity.⁴

1. www.tsunami-maldives.mv
2. www.sphereproject.org
3. www.undp.org/bcpr/dsred/documents/tsunami-maldives/md_nrrp.pdf
4. The author thanks Emma Fulu of UNFPA Maldives, Tracey Larman of the Unit for the Rights of Children, Aishath Shahula Ahmed of SHE, Mauroof Jameel of the National Disaster Management Centre, Mark Evans of Oxfam GB, Shiva Aryal of VSO Maldives, Unni Silkoset of UNICEF Maldives and Dr. Aishath Shiham of the Maldives IDP Unit for useful discussions.

An African perspective on the tsunami

by Bahame Tom Nyanduga

The tsunami reminded us that the world is a global village with common vulnerabilities but also that the needs of Africa often take second place.

While the international community's attention was focused on the damage caused to the countries in South Asia, little attention was paid to the tsunami effect on the western side of the Indian Ocean, about six thousand kilometres from the epicentre. Tanzania reported 10 people dead and 2 in Kenya but it was Somalia, lacking a central government and reeling from the effects of 14 years of war and drought [see article by OCHA Somalia page 51] which suffered the most – 290 fatalities and about 54,000 displaced. Six hundred fishing boats, which provided income for 75% of the coastal population, were destroyed. The lives of people in communities along a 650-km stretch between Hafun and Garacad in the north east to as far south as the lower Juba area, south of Mogadishu, were affected. Damage was greatest in Puntland, a self-declared autonomous region. Infrastructure in the town of Hafun was almost totally destroyed. The fact that Somalia does not have a government to advocate for assistance makes it dependent

on the UN to do so. UNICEF and the World Food Program have achieved a lot with limited resources but donors have been unresponsive to the country's needs. At the beginning of April only 3% of the funding requested in the UN's 2005 Consolidated Appeal for Somalia had been pledged.

Two people died in the Indian Ocean state of the Seychelles and some 900 families lost their homes. The waves caused severe flooding and considerable damage to transport infrastructure including ports, road network, bridges, public utilities, houses, and private property on Mahe and Praslin islands. The government has estimated the cost of repairing damage at \$30m. However, the international community has been slow to respond. At the beginning of May the Seychelles had received only \$4.4 of the \$11.5 million budgeted for under the UN's Indian Ocean Flash Appeal and commencement of planned rehabilitation projects has had to be delayed.

Kenya and Tanzania were the last two countries to be hit by the

tsunami. Tourists were evacuated from beaches in tourist resorts but the news did not reach those who died. Mechanisms did not exist to enable authorities to pass on information from other countries about the devastating potential of the killer waves. The tsunami has demonstrated the need for civil defence preparedness and disaster mitigation programmes in Africa. In recognition of this the Chinese Red Cross Society and the Chinese government have made donations to the Tanzania Red Cross Society to build disaster response capacity.

The international community can do more to assist the people, communities and states badly affected by the tsunami in Africa. All responses to this and future natural disasters in Africa must be shaped by recognition of the relevance of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

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Tsunami worsens existing vulnerability in Somalia

by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Somalia

The tsunami compounded an already dire humanitarian situation, the result of persistent drought, unexpected freezing rains, cyclones, outbreaks of violence and periodic floods.

The tsunami struck just as the drought was coming to an end and livelihoods were beginning to recover from these multiple shocks. It affected large parts of the coast, particularly a stretch of 650 kilometres of coastline in the Puntland region, from Hafun in the north to Garacad further south. The impact of the tsunami resulted in loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, contamination of water sources and loss of livelihood assets. Around 44,000 people (roughly 7,300 households) required emergency humanitarian assistance, including drinking water, food and medication as well as support for the construction and/or rehabilitation of houses and shelter. The livelihoods of many people residing in coastal villages were also devastated.

Substantial numbers of Somalis migrate to the coast during the peak fishing season (October to February) to catch, process or market fish. The population density along the coastline was therefore unusually high at the time that the tsunami struck, resulting in the death and/or disappearance of 289 fishermen. The damage caused to the fishing industry, which is the main income-generating activity of coastal communities, was significant.

In pastoralist communities, it is common for some family members to migrate with the livestock for long periods of time every year in search of water and pasture, while the rest of the family remains in areas where they have access to basic services. Many pastoralists who had become destitute as a result of four consecutive years of persistent drought that decimated their herds had also moved to the coast in search of alternative livelihoods. Their few remaining resources were lost in the tsunami. For many pastoralists the

tsunami has been the final straw leading to the breakdown of traditional coping strategies.

The international community was quick to respond to the tsunami and provide relief to the affected communities, despite severe access problems, general insecurity, isolation and poor road infrastructure. In February 2005, an inter-agency, multi-sectoral assessment mission ascertained that the critical humanitarian needs of the affected population had been met largely due to pre-positioned relief stocks as well as additional stocks purchased with funds received through the Indian Ocean Flash Appeal. The mission recommended that while at least 40% of the affected population should continue to receive assistance and livelihood support until the next fishing season in October 2005, response plans should shift from emergency to recovery and rehabilitation activities

Currently, the Somalia UN Country Team is in the process of finalising an integrated development project for the tsunami-affected area. This will allow for additional tsunami-related responses to be integrated into the wider context of the serious humanitarian situation in Somalia. It will also ensure that the tsunami response is proportionate to and takes into consideration other humanitarian needs.

Apart from the tsunami-affected region, food and livelihood insecurity and overall vulnerability persist in various parts of Somalia. In its post *deyr* (short rains) assessment released in early 2005, the Food Security Analysis Unit of FAO highlighted the fact that more than 500,000 people continue to require urgent humanitarian assistance as a result of the underlying problem of environmental degradation, extended effects of droughts, floods, civil strife and ongoing barriers to trade. In addition, approximately 370,000 IDPs live in very poor and difficult conditions with minimum access to basic services and income-generating opportunities. In areas suffering from local conflicts and emerging from drought, high malnutrition rates of more than 20% have been recorded, particularly in some parts of Juba and Gedo regions.

For many pastoralists the tsunami has been the final straw leading to the breakdown of traditional coping strategies.

As the response to the tsunami has largely met the emergency needs of the affected populations, focus must now switch to these other vulnerable groups. With attention diverted toward the tsunami, other life-saving projects aimed at other equally if not more vulnerable groups risk being jeopardised. The need for equity and proportionality in resource allocation was echoed by a destitute pastoralist, who complained after seeing assistance go toward the tsunami-affected coast that “the only thing we eat is the dust left behind by your trucks.”

This article was written by staff of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Somalia. For more information, email: dilorenzo@un.org or nduta@un.org

For more information see www.reliefweb.int: click on ‘Somalia’ under ‘Countries & emergencies’.

“the only thing we eat is the dust left behind by your trucks”

These images are from a collection of 62 paintings by children living in the Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka. Children, aged from five to 16, painted to help erase painful memories of the tsunami. They are to be exhibited at the National Gallery of Wales and in December 2005 will be auctioned online to raise funds for an orphanage in the village of Kathiraveli (where many of them live, together with those orphaned by the two-decade long conflict) and the Living Heritage Trust, a local organisation which,

with the support of volunteers from across the globe, is working to support tsunami survivors rebuild their lives.



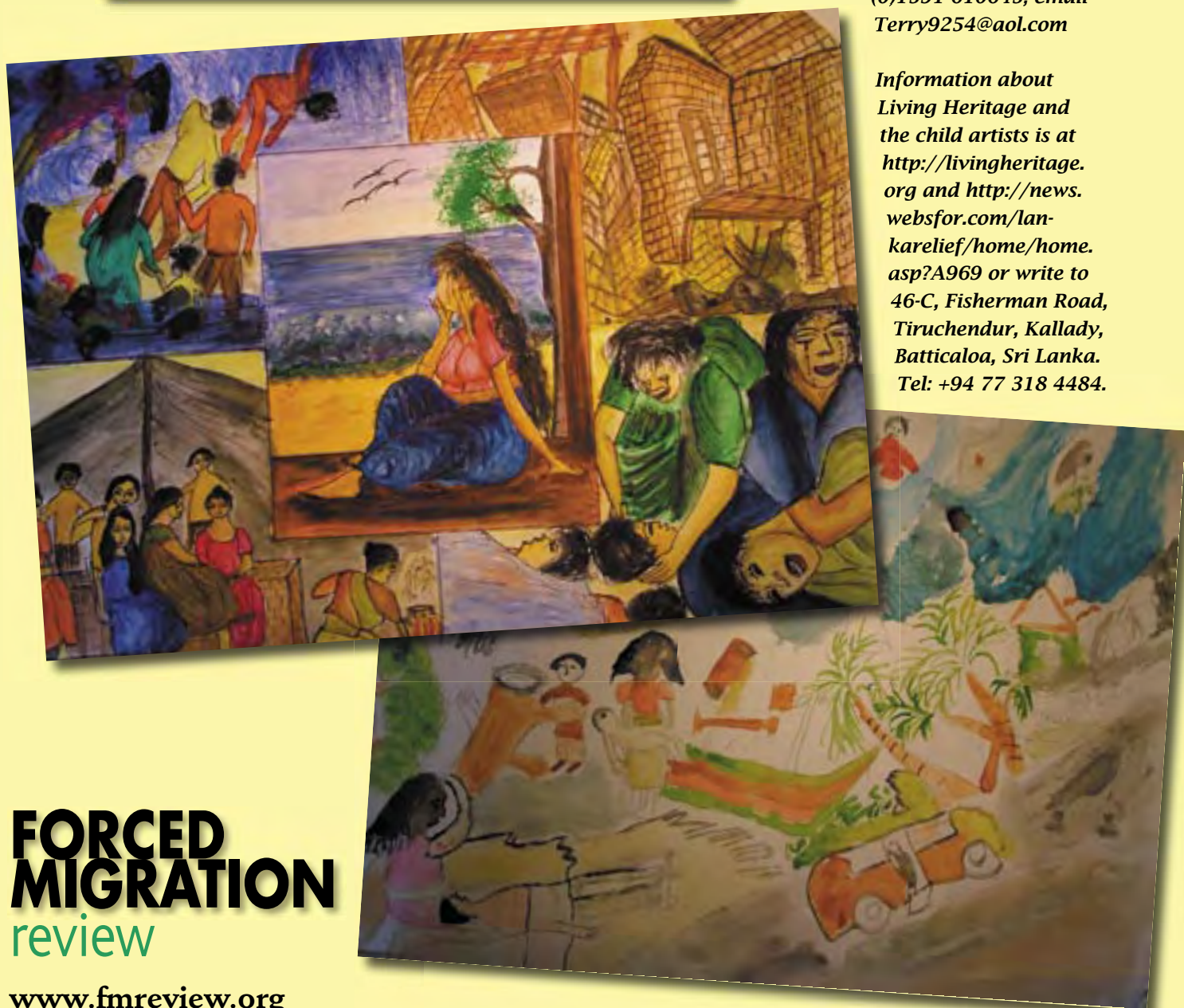
FMR readers may like to consider participating in the auction and, in the meantime, to send donations to:

Llanwrtyd Wells Tsunami Appeal, HSBC, 35 High Street, Builth Wells, Powys LD2 3DL, Wales, UK. Account number 41390856. Sort code 40-15-14

For further information about the artwork and the auction contact Gwyneth Keeble: tel + 44

(0)1591 610645; email Terry9254@aol.com

Information about Living Heritage and the child artists is at <http://livingheritage.org> and <http://news.websfor.com/lan-karelief/home/home.asp?A969> or write to 46-C, Fisherman Road, Tiruchendur, Kallady, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. Tel: +94 77 318 4484.



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