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# POST TSUNAMI TIMES

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## HUMANITARIAN AID TO COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

**Challenges and Post-Tsunami disaster Strategies**

*A Compilation of background materials by PHM / CHC*

For

A People's Health Movement Dialogue- Workshop

8-9 April 2005, Chennai



**People's Health Movement  
(Global Secretariat)**

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*Illustrations - Courtesy:  
www.Indiadisasters.org & www.indiatogether.org*

## **1. Responding to the Tsunami crisis - A People's Health Movement statement**

At the year-end, on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004, an earthquake, off the Sumatra coast in Indonesia (measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale) unleashed Tsunami waves that caused one of the biggest human tragedies in recent history in Southern Asia and in few parts of Africa. By 20<sup>th</sup> January 2005, the estimated toll of death was well past 228,000

A massive national and international response to this human disaster and its humanitarian challenges is underway after communities, nations and the international community recovered from the shock of the sheer immensity of the devastation.

The PHM Global Secretariat has been receiving messages of concern and solidarity from all over the world and offers of support. The PHM members in the affected countries supported by local efforts and International solidarity have been actively involved in responding to the disaster.

While encouraging all PHM members to respond in solidarity, and to work at all levels with people's organizations, local governments and state and international aid efforts, the PHM would also like to raise a few important issues and concerns, which might be kept in mind as we respond to this disaster.

- ▶ *All relief and rehabilitation efforts must be done in close collaboration and partnership with affected communities keeping their needs, ideas, and aspirations in mind.*
- ▶ *Relief and rehabilitation efforts must not become sub-servient to the political agendas of the state and national governments, nor to the pressures and priorities of aid giving agencies, either from developed countries or International funding agencies.*
- ▶ *The aid efforts - both relief and rehabilitation, must be sensitive to the social, economic, cultural situation of the affected communities and their human rights.*
- ▶ *The aid efforts must be gender sensitive and take into consideration the requirements of people with special needs including non-fisher folk, people with disabilities, and socially neglected groups like widows, elderly people and orphans.*
- ▶ *The programmes have to be holistic, responding to the basic needs, psycho-social, medical, livelihoods, and community organization and capacity building aspects of the challenge, and not be over medicalized or techno-centric or sub-servient to external agendas of any kind.*
- ▶ *The greatest challenge is to collaborate with communities, local civil society organizations and governments, to rebuild lives and livelihoods of people, strengthening their access to comprehensive and responsive Primary Health Care, education, social services and economic / livelihood support.*
- ▶ *Long-term rehabilitation has to be done, empowering affected communities as active participants and not passive beneficiaries. Care must also be taken to ensure that all those who were marginalized by the societal processes before the disaster, are not further marginalized by it. They must be organized and supported to ensure equity in relief and rehabilitation. The long term efforts*

*must also focus on disaster preparedness in the coastal villages and measures to the potential recurrent disaster.*

- ▶ *All relief and rehabilitation work and processes should adhere to internationally agreed codes of conduct as far as possible to ensure equity and dignity to the affected people. Government and other agencies must be supported to attain those standards.*
- ▶ *Aid is also being subjected to a series of external factors, which include donor agendas, media exploitation, global security policies, market economy and commodification. As we all respond to the current disaster, it is also time to scrutinize all these practices and the ongoing structural determinants of aid.*

While gearing up collectively in the new year to respond to the Asian tsunami disaster, let us also continue to build a strong solidarity against the ongoing 'tsunamis' of war and occupation; corporate led globalization; the unjust WTO and international agreements like TRIPS, GATS; and unsustainable development. This year needs our collective response in solidarity with all those who are facing these challenges.

Source :  
PHM Secretariat,  
Distributed at the IHF/WSF 2005  
January 21, 2005

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## 2. Genocide By Geology

26 December 2004. It was the day Geology committed Genocide.

For millions of people along the coastal regions of South and Southeast Asia the morning had begun like any other passing day, a step closer to the end of the old year and the beginning of a new one. Very soon though, both Earth and Ocean had conspired to take all of them to the very end of their world, initiating the greatest natural disaster in recent human history.

First came a great quake that made the entire globe tremble. Next, Tsunami waves several meters high, that destroyed everything in their path, leaving thousands upon thousands dead across half a dozen countries. Men, women, children- swept from their homes and swallowed by raging seawater. Homes, cars and even a train plucked and tossed about like toys before being smashed to pieces.

Most human societies cope with the loss of loved ones by drawing upon tradition and ritual to drown out their sorrows. The scale of the tragedy wrought by last Sunday's deadly duo of tremor and tsunamis was such it made all conventional mourning meaningless - for no one knows where to begin or where to end.

Even as I write now, from the southern Indian city of Chennai, which was also hit, the official estimate of the total numbers of dead people in India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand is touching 150,000. Over 500,000 have been injured and millions have lost everything they possessed and stand vulnerable to disease and stark poverty.

All these numbers are expected to go up further in the coming days as more and more bodies are found amidst the rubble and ruin of once functioning communities, settlements and even tourist resorts.

The killer waves ambushed and destroyed entire coastal communities, tore apart families, whimsically decimating a parent here, a child there, somebody's wife, husband or sibling somewhere. There are countless tales of babies slipping from the hands of desperate mothers, husbands watching their wives and children drown and children seeing parents washed away to their watery graves.

Many who were witness, victim or even in the vicinity of the disaster described the experience as apocalyptic. That it well and truly was. But the catchall term 'Apocalypse' does not really capture the real nature of the tragedy; one needs to look closely at the personal tales of loss, sorrow, shock and injury that are emerging. What occurred clearly, was not one but countless apocalypse -so many individual universes snuffed out- all at the same time.

Like all great natural disasters, this one too has been spectacularly secular, caring little for the religion, caste or color of its victims. Striking as it did on the morning of the day after Christmas, a Sunday and with the full moon out in the sky for good measure, the tsunamis snared praying Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists in the region all alike. The mythology of each of these religions has ancient tales of a great deluge wiping life off the Earth and it must have certainly seemed to many that fateful morning like the legend had come devastatingly true.

Neither did the wild dance of death and destruction respect any of the vain and arbitrary national boundaries we humans create on the surface of the planet. Starting off somewhere 250 kilometers southeast of Sumatra, Indonesia the tsunamis ravaged the shores of at least ten countries, traveling thousands of kilometers, including Kenya and Somalia in far off Africa. It was a perverse reminder from Mother Earth it is She who draws all the lines in our world and that too at humanly unfathomable depths.

The disaster maintained strict political neutrality too, killing Acehnese separatists in Indonesia and Tamil rebels in Sri Lanka along with members of the state security forces hunting for them. I will

never ever forget that small news item on the morning of the disaster that talked of the Indonesian army killing 19 Acehnese rebels the previous day. No one can go bankrupt overestimating the arrogance and ambition of the Indonesian military; compete as they do with quake and tsunami.

In terms of economic background, among those tragically killed were scores of Western travelers and even a grandson of the Thai monarch on the scenic beaches of the Thailand and the Maldives. An overwhelming majority of victims though were poor fisher folk and other villagers along the coasts of India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. As always in our unfair world those who had the least lost the most.

Was this immense loss of life preventable at all in any way? While the earthquake itself was obviously not predictable there could certainly have been some warning about the tsunamis that followed. This is particularly true for South Asia where the waves struck a full two hours after the great quake off the coast of Sumatra in Indonesia.

According to a Reuters report on December 28 from Los Angeles the wall of water set off by the earthquake was in fact tracked by U.S. seismologists who said they had no way to warn local governments of the danger. In this age of instant messaging, email, mobile phones, spy satellites and 24-hour television it is difficult to believe that claim.

The blame for not warning their people of impending danger does really lie with the national governments of Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India. True, tsunamis are extremely rare occurrences in this part of the world, but that morning any seismologist worth his salt would have surely noticed what was the largest quake in four decades and since it occurred under the sea deduced the consequences easily.

In fact that is precisely what government seismologists in Thailand did soon after they detected the quake on December 26, but failed to issue appropriate warning because they were afraid of scaring off tourists!! As an anonymous government official explained to a Bangkok newspaper, a day after disaster struck, "Six years ago a similar warning that turned out wrong brought great recrimination upon us". Well, that was a typical Thai/Asian 'Risk Ass but Save Face' hesitation that cost precious lives.

In countries like India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka of course the story was slightly different- none of them really had a clue as to what was happening. All three countries spend a large proportion of their national budgets on buying armaments and very little on technology that can help save the lives of their own countrymen.

For example, the tsunamis hit the Indian islands of Andaman and Nicobar, located just 150 kilometers from the northern tip of Sumatra, soon after the quake occurred at 6.30 AM (Indian Standard Time). Among many other settlements and facilities they destroyed a full base of the Indian Air Force. And yet nobody in the Indian capital New Delhi knew about this in time to alert people on the coast to watch out for the same killer waves that hit them only a couple of hours later. A mere phone call to a television news channel could have saved thousands of lives.

India, with a bulk of the world's poorest people, is run by an elite that takes great pride in sending rockets into space or exploding nuclear bombs while neglecting the basic needs of its population. The country does not have a tsunami warning system because 'well, no tsunami has hit the Indian coast since 1941 and the equipment is too expensive'. On the other hand it does not mind having even more expensive nuclear bombs despite no nuclear threat to its existence in 5000 years of recorded history!

Talking about things nuclear, last Sunday's tsunami ravaged the Kalpakkam nuclear reactor and its nearby employees residential compound outside Chennai killing 65 people and leaving grave doubts about the future of the facility itself. Despite official pronouncements that the reactor was shut down in time there are grounds to believe all is not well and God knows what disaster is cooking behind those secretive domes.

The question now before not just the affected countries but indeed the entire world is – what can be done to help the millions of affected people overcome their immediate trauma and get back on their feet again?

Immediately, the dead, strewn all over the region, need to be buried or cremated to prevent the outbreak of disease while survivors require urgent supplies of basic inputs like food, water, clothing, and shelter. Most of those hit by the tsunami also need urgent medical attention. Implementing such relief operations will require volunteers in large numbers particularly in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, where the devastation has been extreme.

The more challenging requirements are really long-term. Primarily there is the mammoth task of restoring employment and income to all those displaced by the disaster. The quake and tsunami hit regions also need well-designed projects to look after orphaned children, special programs to help those disabled and for dealing with post-trauma stress disorders among the general public.

All the affected countries also need to implement sound policies to deal with erosion of coastal ecologies, which are under pressure from the poor looking for a livelihood but even more from the bored rich seeking new playgrounds and resorts to while away their time. There is considerable evidence that coastal areas in the tsunami-affected countries with rich mangrove cover were spared from much damage.

As the United Nations has already indicated, the task of rehabilitating the victims of the December 26 catastrophe in Asia and Africa will require the largest relief operation in modern history given the numbers of people and countries involved. The response from ordinary citizens around the world in terms of donations and other assistance has so far been extraordinary.

But much more needs to be done, consistently and over long periods of time. Citizens everywhere will also have to force those who run their governments to change their usually skewed priorities and bring about a tectonic shift in the way our planet is run.

For example, the diversion of even a small portion of the funds spent every year on armaments and war globally could easily help rebuild the shattered lives of those who lost everything in Asia's quake and tsunami disaster. It is worth reflecting at this juncture that the only other calamity that has killed an equivalent number of innocent people in recent times is called the 'US Occupation of Iraq' - an incredibly expensive and entirely manmade tragedy.

As 2004 exits and a New Year begins, it is time for human beings to quit the business of dispensing Death in any form and instead focus all energies solely on the preservation of Life against all odds. That can be the only real and lasting tribute we can pay to all those who died last Sunday, so abruptly, so cruelly and without a real chance.

Source :  
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### 3. More than a million Hiroshimas

*Will Governments ever spend the modest sums required along the coast to protect the millions of poorer Indians dependent on the seas?*

THE EARTHQUAKE that produced the tsunami unleashed energy millions of times greater than the Hiroshima bomb. True, comparisons across different physical processes are not straightforward. Yet it is quite common to restate the magnitude of earthquakes in terms that are more familiar. Typically, this is done by asking how much of the common explosive Trinitrotoluene (TNT) would have to be detonated to obtain the same release of energy as the earthquake.

A table produced by the Nevada Seismological Laboratory suggests that a quake of 9.0 on the Richter scale has a seismic energy yield roughly equalling 32 billion tons of TNT.

Compare that with the bomb that decimated Hiroshima, whose yield was similar to that from exploding 15,000 tons of TNT. The Indonesian quake last week, like the Chilean quake of 1960, unleashed 2.13 million times more energy than the perversely named "Little Boy" did over Hiroshima.

As geophysicist and climatologist Ashwin Mahesh points out, "Such a look across different processes is tricky. This cannot be a straight comparison but simply a useful indicator of power that ordinary people can relate to. Also, Hiroshima was an 'atmospheric' blast, not on the ground. Then there is radiation damage, which additionally occurs with nukes. Not with quakes. Finally, there is the impact — nearly all the energy from an atomic bomb is released locally, but energy from an earthquake is distributed by seismic action and more widely dispersed. This is why something that happened in Indonesia still packs a punch thousands of miles away from the epicentre."

Dr. Mahesh is, of course, quite right. Yet, the comparative numbers do convey a sense of the sheer magnitude of the quake's power. And apart from the physical and character differences of the two processes, the quake in this case also triggered the devastation that spilt across 12 countries and two continents. It will be ages before we fully measure the damage.

There has been much agonising over "those vital three hours" (now spoken of as 90 minutes) in which the Government "could have done something." Sure, it is always useful to be forewarned of disaster. Every human life saved is worth the effort. Yet, there was little scope for a major response, even if India had been part of the tsunami warning system. (Of course this did not stop sections of the media from identifying the villains and the good guys within six hours of the event.)

Without a network of local alarm systems in place along the coast, membership in the warning system club would have meant little. Those networks would have to be of a kind that did not depend wholly on human agency. That is, they should not need someone to switch them on or off. The coastal disaster struck in the early hours of the morning, when all offices and institutions were closed.

'Local administration,' such as there was, was also crippled by the event. Policemen, municipal workers, clerks, low-level officials, engineers, medical personnel, and many others, also died in the disaster. Roads were inaccessible, vehicles washed away, electricity shut down. A highly-skilled, ready-round-the-clock entity like the Indian Air Force had a base wrecked (it took a beating during the Gujarat earthquake, too). Many of those we assume could have done a lot in those 90 minutes were themselves victims of the catastrophe.

The nuclear site at Kalpakkam was hampered by more than the direct impact. A design engineer employed by the facility was swept away by the waves while praying in Church. Other employees too died. The apocalyptic scale of disaster ensured a chaos on the ground that paralysed most systems.

The blame game unfolding within hours of the tragedy is mystifying given that few explain what they would have done in those 90 minutes had they got the warning. Warnings without practised, in-place response strategies and drills might have meant little. Certainly at that hour. (Incidentally, one channel announced that Besant Nagar in Chennai was "under water," leading to panic — outside that locality.) We may not have been able to do much in those 90 minutes. But every little thing we do now matters enormously. What is needed is urgency on the relief and rehabilitation front and a rational long-term response to disaster.

It is also a little mystifying that the India Meteorological Department is seen as having a major role in the present mess. Tsunami are not weather phenomena. If anything, monitoring events that might trigger them could be the task of the Geological Survey of India (GSI). But that is another story. Where indeed Governments

must be blasted is for the quality and tardiness of relief efforts. Not for failing to predict the impact of tsunami.

It is also another matter, as John Schwartz points out in *The New York Times*, that 75 per cent of tsunami warnings in 56 years have been wrong. He quotes a NASA website devoted to tsunami as saying "Three out of four tsunami warnings issued since 1948 have been false. And the cost of the false alarms can be high." Already, the panic over the "high wave alert" is an embarrassment for a defensive Government trying to cope with the media charge that it did not respond the last time.

The January 17, 1995, Kobe earthquake in Japan took 5,500 lives, injured 26,000 and inflicted damage in excess of \$ 200 billion. That in a country where seismic activity is massively monitored with advanced technologies. The quake lasted some 20 seconds and measured around 7.0 on the Richter scale. Structures designed for such seismic zones were torn apart like paper. Last week's quake measured 9.0. Which means it was, near Indonesia at least, 1,000 times more powerful than Kobe (The Richter scale is a logarithmic one, not a linear scale.)

The question is not so much whether India should have been a paid-up member of the tsunami warning system. Until last week, elite wisdom would have viewed that as so much money saved. The question is whether Governments in India today will ever spend the modest sums required along the coast to protect the millions of poorer Indians dependent on the seas. And whether we need a disaster this scale to rethink some of our priorities.

The surprise expressed by many (arriving from Delhi) over the poor medical facilities in these regions is misplaced. The capital city may have such facilities. But we have spent the better part of 12 years gutting public health care, privatising hospitals and charging user fees in Government ones from people who cannot pay. Fracturing an already inadequate and fragile system. Now, when there is a deadly danger of epidemics, there is little to fight them with. It is odd that we allow Governments to get away with atrocities against the poor. But sternly hold them to blame for an unprecedented natural disaster.

Hundreds of fishing villages have been squeezed into narrower, tighter settlements as 'development' Indian-style sets in. Many have moved into unsafe terrain, pushed by resorts, hotels, construction of highways. Mangrove forests that have always acted as a brake — however limited — against tidal waves, have increasingly vanished. So have another natural barrier — sand dunes, looted by the construction industry. We have put a lot of effort into making the coastline increasingly unsafe.

And not just the coastline. There seems to be no concern over the fact that the many small dams in the western part of the country might be responsible for what is known as 'reservoir-induced seismicity.' Our planners still aim to turn every river into a chain of lakes.

Growing seismic activity in Maharashtra has not led to a rethink on the ever-higher skyscrapers being planned there. Especially in Mumbai city. Nor has the harrowing experience of the Gujarat earthquake had any impact on Mumbai's mighty builder lobby. We could perhaps have done very little in "those crucial 90 minutes," but there is much we can do on other fronts, if we wish to, to make people safer.

It would not be too much of a challenge to India's much-celebrated IT and software genius to make the lives of traditional fishermen along India's coastline a lot better. A PCO type box, modified for at-sea use could do plenty. It could act as a weather alert and SOS mechanism. It could work as a GPS device. It could even be used to help fishermen in shoal tracking — a huge advantage that predatory big boats and trawlers have over them. All in all, it might be possible to install these in the vessels of traditional fishermen at maybe less than Rs.2,000 a boat. It is a small thing that may have little to do with tsunamis. But it could make a big difference in many life-threatening situations.

That it has never happened on a major scale means it is just not a priority. When advanced technological systems do come in, they will likely be installed with an eye on tourists rather than fisherfolk. The latter, right now, do not even have boats on which to install any safety device. Thousands of boats, catamarans and fishing nets were simply destroyed in the calamity.

Maybe we can never fully and correctly predict a tsunami or, more importantly, its likely impact. On the other hand, it is easy to predict that our priorities, our ways of thinking and living, render us vulnerable to disasters of our own making.

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P. Sainath,  
Source : The Hindu,  
1-1-2005

#### **4. A Social Movement in Progress!**

"Venkatesh is a poor daily wage coolie labor from Chidambaram. Right from the start he has been helping with dead body removal, debris clearance and relief distribution in the villages around our Killai center.

Every 2-3 days he gets a call from home "Come back! We have not eaten for 2 days."

Venkatesh's daily earnings decides whether his family will eat that day or not. When he gets this call, Venkatesh rushes back home - to work, to earn and to feed his family.

Two days later he is back at Killai - working on the relief efforts!

There are many DYFI volunteers like Venkatesh working in Killai and the other six centers in Cuddalore and Nagai. Extremely poor and extremely motivated volunteers. They are the backbone of our relief efforts there. They are the ones who cannot write reports, the ones who cannot discuss big ideas for long term planning. But they are the ones who went in first into the empty villages to dig out and clear and cremate dead bodies, to clean up the slush in the houses and to provide relief supplies. I would like to take this opportunity to salute these silent selfless volunteers and acknowledge their critical role.

At our Nagapatinam center a large number of "software" volunteers from Bangalore and Chennai landed up to help with the relief operations. At first, the local DYFI volunteers looked at them suspiciously "What can these well-dressed rich professionals do here in this village?" But they were in for a shock. The IT professionals promptly folded up their sleeves, put on gloves and boots and walked into the slush to lift and remove dead bodies. The local volunteers were first zapped. They had never seen software professionals doing this kind of manual labor! By the evening - at the end of a hard day's labor - a new human relationship had developed - volunteers from both groups were now great friends, sharing jokes and beedis!

Apart from a large number of individuals - "professionals who took leave from their offices" and landed up in our Chennai Office and from there to Cuddalore and Nagapatinam - helping in every way they could, we also had batches of volunteers from a number of companies like Hexaware, Ashok Leyland, TCS, Infosys, Colgate, Tirumalai Chemicals, HCL, etc. In the last 2 weeks, AID has mobilized more than 500 such volunteers who have spent varying amounts of time volunteering and helping in Cuddalore and Nagai - along with DYFI and PSF and TNSF's 500 volunteers.

The first day when I was planning with the core AID-India team and Senthil Babu of PSF and Ramesh and Kannan from DYFI about work allocation for these "software volunteers" - I had assumed these well-to-do volunteers that we were mobilizing in Chennai and Bangalore will only do things like surveys, relief distribution, etc - not manual labor. In the days that followed I was proved totally wrong - and very happily so!

We have today a social movement before us - something that has never happened before. New people from totally different backgrounds, in large numbers, breaking hierarchies and working together as equals."

(Extract from Tsunami Report by Balaji Sampath)

## **5. DISASTERS : An Orientation Module**

### *Health & Humanitarian Challenges*

#### A. Components

1. DISPLACEMENT / MIGRATION
2. SHELTER
3. SECURITY WITH DIGNITY
4. FOOD [COOKED / RATIONED]
5. WATER
6. SANITATION
7. MEDICAL SERVICES
  - . Emergency
  - . Primary care
  - . Home based Care
8. EPIDEMIC
  - Surveillance
  - Personal / community measures
9. RECREATION / GROUP ACTIVITY / SATSANG
10. WORK / INVOLVEMENT / PARTICIPATION
11. COMMUNITY INFORMATION / AWARENESS
12. HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES
13. RELEVANCE / ETHICS OF SUPPLIES
14. GENDER ISSUES
15. DISABILITY ISSUES
16. PSYCHO-SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

#### B. Policy Issues

1. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS POLICY
2. TEAMS AND SUPPLIES
3. PROTOCOLS / GUIDELINES
4. RESPONSE
  - Medical
  - Public Health
  - Psycho-social
5. MOBILITY
6. REFERAL SUPPORT
7. NETWORKING / COORDINATION
8. COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION / PARTNERSHIP
9. NEED ASSESSMENT / ADVOCACY / SURVEILLANCE
10. ACTION-REFLECTION -
11. PLANNING
12. DOCUMENTATION

- C. Community Mobilization Challenges
1. COMMUNITY AS PARTICIPANTS
  2. INVOLVEMENT IN SITUATION ANALYSIS
  3. INVOLVEMENT IN PROBLEM SOLVING
  4. YOUTH / WOMEN GROUPS
  5. LOCAL COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS
  6. CAPACITY BUILDING
  7. LEARNING FROM COMMUNITY
  8. UNDERSTANDING CULTURE / SOCIAL NORMS AND CONTEXT
  9. RELIEF TO REHABILITATION - SHIFT
  10. LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL PROBLEMS

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## **6. The Aceh Emergency**

The people of Aceh are suffering the gravest catastrophe in their history in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami, which struck on 26 December 2004.

The devastation and humanitarian crisis are unprecedented. The official death toll is currently 52,000 [now stands at 94,000]. The final figure could be as high as 100,000. Tens of thousands are homeless and facing the prospect of killer diseases.

The disaster has been compounded by chaotic mismanagement by the Indonesian authorities and the legacy of decades of violent conflict. A war has been raging in the territory since the 1970s between the Indonesian military and the separatist Free Aceh Movement, GAM.

The Indonesian government's response to the crisis has been slow, lacked coherence and demonstrated a reluctance, for political reasons associated with the conflict, to involve the international community. Currently just two helicopters have been deployed to assist with the immense relief and rehabilitation operation.

The government has severely restricted access to Aceh by international humanitarian organisations since the imposition of martial law in May 2003. Even now it is sending out mixed messages about the lifting of restrictions. Desperately-needed aid is being held up in Medan, North Sumatra.

Intimidation and violence against local NGOs by the security forces have incapacitated civil society and severely curtailed their ability to respond to the crisis.

It is essential that local and foreign organizations are allowed to operate freely in Aceh for an unlimited length of time. The role of the military must be restricted to humanitarian and reconstruction tasks. There must be no return to the oppressive military conditions which have caused so much suffering to the Acehnese and exacerbated the current crisis.

Rigorous steps must also be taken to ensure that corruption, which is an acknowledged problem in Aceh, is not allowed to dissipate the aid effort.

The needs of the Acehnese are now acute. Please do all you can to help them cope with this terrible tragedy.

Source:  
ACEH EMERGENCY - URGENT APPEAL (December 30, 2004)  
Tapol, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign  
111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8HW, UK.  
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## **7. Conceptual basis of a tsunami disaster response**

- “...We believe that the disaster victims have human rights to health and access to health care. Our approach will not be in the charity or welfare mode, but will help to fulfill these rights.
- Community organization will be strengthened or built and empowerment approaches will be used in our work with them so that they do not become passive beneficiaries but active participants in the process of improving their health and access to health care. They will be involved in decision-making regarding their health care through institutionalized mechanisms. We will focus on working with socially marginalized and excluded groups such as the dalits and adivasis, as there is evidence of inequality and discrimination in the relief phase already.
- There will be interaction and collaboration with local government agencies so that the primary health care system gets strengthened. This includes primary health centers and their subcentres, community health centers and the referral links with taluk, district and other secondary care institutions.
- In the post disaster situation focus on the basic determinants of health are all the more necessary. Our teams will need to network with government, other nongovernmental and donor agencies with regard to water, sanitation, shelter, livelihood and ecology issues. Our relief teams have already laid the foundations for this. The teams will necessarily be multidisciplinary.
- The psychosocial aspects of the post-disaster response will also receive adequate attention. We already have strong links with the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences and our relief teams have been oriented in this regard. Our own team also has some skills.
- There is an urgent need for better coordination, networking, communication and collaboration between many agencies involved. CHC will have to identify a role in this with specific regard to community health and public health. Our role and skills in bringing ideologically different groups together in public interest and for the common good could be useful in the current situation. Our role in training and perspective building with regard to community health and public health could also be used.
- CHC will need to be careful not to overstretch its team but to take on only what we can deliver. Accountability and transparency will be maintained. We will therefore focus on selected areas”....

Source :

Extracts from  
Draft concept note on post-tsunami disaster involvement,  
Thelma Narayan, CHC/SOCHARA, Bangalore

## **8. COMMUNITY-BASED PREPAREDNESS**

### **Foundation for Disaster Management**

Samiyarpettai village is a “living” example of how a community can survive the worst disaster if people are prepared and trained to deal with such crises. Providentially, in October 2004, barely a couple of months before the Tsunami struck on December 26, the villagers had been trained under the UNDP-GOI Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Programme with active support from the District Collector’s office. This one factor alone resulted in the saving of countless lives. Compared to many other neighboring worst affected villages, Samiyarpettai villagers lived to tell the tale.

The training given to the Samiyarpettai villagers specifically in the areas of search, rescue and prevention from drowning, resulted in keeping the death toll down to 24. In the adjoining village of Pudupettai , a little less than 2 km away, the death toll was as high as 92. If basic training could save 68 precious lives in one small area, one can imagine the benefits of training on a more extensive scale.

#### **The initiatives taken at the village level included:**

- Constitution of Village Disaster Committees,
- Elaboration of Village Disaster Management Plans,
- Training the teams on search and rescue and First Aid,
- Conducting mock drills
- Teaching them about higher safe spots and to prevent drowning using empty barrels and banana stems.

#### **Facts about DRM Programme :**

- Six multi hazard prone districts of Tamil Nadu ( Cuddalore, Nagapattinam, Kanchipuram, Kanya Kumari, Tiruvallur and Nilgiris) are covered by this programme; the six districts comprise a total of 64 Blocks, 2436 Gram Panchayats, 3397 villages and 12 Urban Local Bodies (UBLs).
- Samiyarpettai, in Cuddalore district had been chosen as a model village for the project as it was prone to floods, droughts and earthquakes.
- Almost all the other worst affected villages in Cuddalore district are to be covered by DRM programme by next year.
- The Tamil Nadu Fire Force trained local villagers in all aspects of emergency survival and disaster management while trainers from the Anna Institute of Management helped to hone their survival skills.
- Some volunteers from the village were formed to act as permanent specialized task forces with the capacity to constitute an elementary early warning system consisting of basic chains of communication, logistics support, search, rescue and first aid.

While building Early Warning Systems are essential to prevent and reduce massive damage, simple disaster preparedness at the local community level is the need of the hour. It spells the difference between death and disaster or life and hope.

#### **Note to Editors:**

Drawing on the UN System's experience in Orissa in the aftermath of the 1999 super cyclone and in Gujarat following the 2001 earthquake, the UN's contribution in Tamil Nadu and other tsunami affected States is to mobilize resources for the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases.

Working with the poor and marginalized communities, the focus of the UN is to facilitate the rapid recovery of the affected populations in a way that leads to the sustainable reduction of disaster risks and expands the opportunities for development. It also ensures the mainstreaming of issues pertaining to long-term vulnerability reduction, sustainability and environmental conservation.

*Source:*  
*UN National Recovery Team, India*  
Website : <http://www.un.org.in>  
March, 2005

## **9. Towards a post-tsunami watch**

**GOAL:** To empower the relief and rehabilitation process through appropriate information at the appropriate time for the first 12 months after the disaster.

### **INTRODUCTION / JUSTIFICATION:**

The tsunami left over 150,000 dead and millions devastated. While Indonesia has taken the major load of casualties, Sri Lanka and India are not too behind in casualties and devastation. The scene that is unfolding now is similar to past such situations. Past experience of post-disaster situations give the following observations.

- 1) Appropriate information at the appropriate time is a key tool in empowering devastated communities
- 2) Information blackout hampers relief and rehabilitation efforts. This gets amplified especially when media loses interest.
- 3) Institutional memory is short- there are no regular mechanisms to record it
- 4) No documentation to understand lessons learnt
- 5) Regular flow and targeted supply of information can facilitate informed debate and thus influence policies.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- 1) Disseminate information on tsunami-response to as wide an audience as possible, including through placement of stories in mainstream media outlets
- 2) Provide a voice to the survivors and families of victims of the tsunami. Very importantly, the aim is to give a face to the 'tsunami-affected' populations through the stories of individuals caught up in the disaster with the motto "We will not let anyone forget".
- 3) Provide accurate coverage of post-tsunami health, rehabilitation, social and economic issues well after the television cameras are switched off and the mainstream media go hunting for new disasters to cover.
- 4) Provide a reference database for understanding the official, NGO and public response to the tsunami's impact.

### **ACTIVITIES:**

To publish a web-based news site that will:

- 1) Disseminate information on tsunami-response issues to relevant organizations globally
- 2) Compile a database for reference on post-tsunami response
- 3) Provide a round-up of media coverage of post-tsunami issues in India, Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka
- 4) Provide profiles of individual tsunami survivors as well as families of victims
- 5) Provide analysis from the field by grassroots activists as well experts
- 6) To facilitate informed debates on policy issues
- 7) Work closely with citizen's groups taking up the cause of tsunami-affected populations.

#### AREAS OF FOCUS:

- 1) Human survival - stories of resilience and coping
- 2) Livelihood - what puts people back on their feet
- 3) Rehabilitation efforts - medium and long-term
- 4) Policy- finding a place for people's voices
- 5) Basic information on the impact and recovery of 'lifelines' –public health, water and sanitation, education, shelter
- 6) Ecology, politics
- 7) Lessons from the past- preparing for the future- Disaster preparedness/ vulnerability reduction

#### OUTPUTS:

- a) Website in English, updated daily
- b) A dynamic process that will engage different constituencies, including those with conflicting views and interests.
- c) Active dissemination through various channels, like the UN's Relief web and Reuter's AlterNet.
- d) Weekly electronic bulletin
- e) A report (50 pages) at the end of the project cycle. (soft copy)

#### Information Sources:

- a) Network of reporters, stringers
- b) Published documents
- c) Field workers
- d) Humanitarian agencies, people based movements
- e) Governments

*Source:  
Extracts from A Post-Tsunami Watch Proposal.  
Max Martin, Project Coordinator*

## 10. Gendered Tsunami

At a time when the main focus has shifted away from the tsunami-hit regions, it is fortuitous that a report has emerged looking specifically at the impact of disaster on women.



AFP

### **Vulnerable — women's specific needs have been overlooked.**

MONDAY night's earthquake off Sumatra, Indonesia brought back the terrifying memories of the December 26 earthquake and the devastation wreaked by the tsunami that followed which flattened coastal lands and drowned thousands of people from Indonesia to as far as the African continent. Yet, even though the prospect of more such tremors and tidal waves looms on the horizon, the full dimensions of the earlier disaster, its impact on the survivors and on the environment have yet to be assessed.

This most recent tremor has brought the focus back to the disaster-hit regions. It is fortuitous that just a week before this, the international charitable organisation Oxfam published a report looking specifically at the impact of the tsunami on women. Why, one might ask, is it necessary to do so given that earthquakes and tidal waves do not discriminate between men, women or children? But the story of almost every disaster is also a tale of the vulnerable and the excluded. Children and the elderly are obviously amongst the vulnerable. But women, even if they are physically vulnerable, are often excluded and overlooked.

The Oxfam report reveals that in three countries where the organisation conducted surveys — India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia — more women were killed than men. For instance, in the Aceh Besar district of Indonesia's Aceh province, the ratio of male to female survivors is 3:1. In four villages in North Aceh, researchers found that more than three fourths of the deaths were of women. In another village, of every male who died, four females had died. In Lampu'uk, located around 15 km from Banda Aceh, only 950 people survived out of a population of 6,000. Of these less than 200 were women. In one area, only four women were alive of whom three survived because they were out of town on that day.

### **In India**

The picture in India is not much better. Official figures from Tamil Nadu reveal that 2,406 women died as compared with 1,883 men. In Cuddalore, three times as many women as men were killed, states the report. In one village, Pachaankuppam, all the dead were women.

In Sri Lanka, although the government had not disaggregated the data along gender lines, Oxfam found the same pattern repeated itself.

Why did this happen? A common thread runs through the different regions that explains this. Women were at home on that Sunday morning while the men were either out in their boats at sea, and therefore escaped the waves, or were away from the shore doing other chores. Women stayed behind to help the children and the elderly when the waves struck. In Tamil Nadu, women were actually waiting on the shore for the fishing boats to return as they help to sort the catch and then sell it. In Batticaloa district in Sri Lanka, the tsunami hit at a time when women would usually go into the water to bathe.

Stories recounted by the survivors bring out another common factor. Women did not have the strength to hold on to a child and also hang on to a tree or something else to save themselves from being battered to death. They could not clamber up trees with the ease the men could. In all these places, it was evident that women lost precious minutes as they tried to gather all their children before attempting to escape the cascading waters.

What this means is that amongst the survivors, the majority are males. Given the dominant norms of socialisation, women are unlikely to push for their needs in a situation where even numerically they are the minority. As a result, only when someone asked them specifically, did their needs emerge. Oxfam found, for instance, that the location of the toilets and washrooms in the camps were one of the primary concerns of the women. They spoke of how fearful they were to go to toilets if they were some distance away. Some times, these areas were not adequately lit. In Sri Lanka, instances of rape and molestation have been reported in the camps from areas around the toilets.

### Issue of livelihood

By virtue of being a minority amongst the survivors, women's specific needs in the area of livelihoods also could be overlooked. Male occupations are known and are compensated. Thus fishermen will get their boats. But what about women? Apart from the jobs women do as part of fishing communities, they had other occupations that brought in money into the family. As these women are not an organised group, it would be easy to forget their livelihood needs.

In this context, I recall a visit to Ahmedabad in 1985, to look at the impact of a man-made disaster, a communal riot, on women. In the old city, many homes had been gutted and destroyed. But the factor that the government and the media failed to acknowledge, even as they added up the losses incurred by the organised sector because of the riots, was the impact of the disturbances on women's livelihoods. Thousands of women had lost the tools of their trades. These included sewing machines, knitting and crochet instruments and their supplies of cloth and thread. These supplies had been taken against a loan calculated on how much of the finished product they would deliver. The women sewed together fabric scraps discarded by the textile mills and converted these into usable items. So if the raw material and the tools were gone, how would they ever get out of the debt trap? Until the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) intervened, this aspect would not have been recognised.

Hence the importance of reports like the Oxfam report. Of course, apart from livelihood and the immediate needs in the camps, there are likely to be long-term consequences of the gender imbalance created by the tsunami. What about violence, both within the home and outside? There are reports of men wasting the compensation amounts by drinking and then turning on the women if they ask for the money. What about widows? Will they get a share of the compensation? There have been reports that widows have not been able to access benefits because all papers are in the names of their dead husbands. What about women-headed households? Will there be special programmes to meet their specific needs? And will mothers give in to the growing pressure to marry off their young daughters at an earlier age because they do not want to carry the burden of feeding them? What then happens to efforts to increase female literacy and encourage girls to go to school?

Many, many questions. Some answers are emerging. But such tragedies remind us yet again that while nature might not discriminate, society still does.

Women's invisibility remains a constant factor. Until that changes, Oxfam and many others will have to continue pushing the "gender" angle.

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Kalpana Sharma  
Source : The Hindu,  
3-4-2005

## **11. Statement by Government of India on Tsunami Relief Assistance**

During the past three weeks, the Government and the people of India have been engaged in an unprecedented effort to overcome the loss of life and devastation caused by the Tsunami. There has been an overwhelming response and demonstration of support by individuals and non-governmental organizations in India. Foreign governments and international agencies have also extended overwhelming sympathy and support. This has been an occasion for the display of national solidarity as also solidarity amongst the peoples of the world. The Prime Minister's Relief Fund has received and continues to receive substantial contributions from both within India and abroad, to assist in our relief efforts.

India takes pride in the fact that even while it has had to cope with the Tsunami disaster within its own shores, it has been able to extend modest assistance to friendly neighboring countries, who have suffered extensive damage from this natural disaster. We intend to continue our support, within the limitations of our own resources, in the new phase of rehabilitation and reconstruction in these countries.

In India too, we are currently clearing the decks for a massive programme of reconstruction of areas that have been destroyed by the Tsunami. This also involves an extensive programme for rehabilitation of the people rendered homeless and those who have also lost their means of livelihood. In this phase, we will continue to mobilize a major national effort in which major contributions will have to be made by Government agencies, NGOs as well as the efforts of individuals. During the relief phase, Government of India had stated that while it deeply appreciated the offers of assistance from foreign Governments and international agencies, it had the capabilities and resources to deal with the aftermath of the disaster through its own national effort. Taking into account the requirements that are now emerging in the new phase of rehabilitation and reconstruction, the Government of India has decided to approach international and multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations for assistance. Such assistance will be closely coordinated with our own national effort and will have, as its objective, the earliest possible return to normalcy in the areas affected by the Tsunami.

Funds from bilateral and other multilateral sources could also be channelised through these three agencies in order to ensure better coordination.

It may be noted that international NGOs in India are already working side by side with their Indian counterparts and Government agencies in extending valuable assistance to people in the Tsunami affected areas. We deeply appreciate their contribution and look forward to our continuing partnership with them.

While most Tsunami affected areas are open to the activities of foreign and international agencies and NGOs, there are only a few sensitive areas where the Government of India will be relying on its own resources to carry out rehabilitation and reconstruction.

**New Delhi  
January 21, 2005**

**Source:** <http://www.embindia.org/Indgov%20tsunami%20statement.htm>

## 12. Experience of a Young Community Health Fellow in Tsunami Relief Work

We organized a health clinic (OPD) in the villages, identified for our long term work. Even though most of the health problems were of regular ailments we understood the importance of having regular medical care to keep up the morale of the people and to win their confidence.

Dr.Ravi had stressed on the need to 'listen' to the people, as this act of giving time to people to speak their heart would help to heal their psychological wounds! As we made our appearance every day in the village people started coming out with many real medical problems. We were confronted with fractures, reproductive tract infections, anemia & many other health problems. However, it was difficult to identify psychological problems, at least not overt problems, as was expected.

We kept a strong vigilance for cases of diarrhoea, malaria & such other diseases that can develop into epidemics in the community. In *Keelamorkarai* village, when we found that cattle were sick & dying of diarrhoea very close to the camp, we brought the same to the attention of local authorities. They immediately arranged for the investigation of the same with a veterinary doctor & also arranged for the proper disposal of the bodies. Any medicine in short supply was procured with the help of local authorities. If it was not possible and the team deemed it as an essential need, the same were procured from our own resources.

More important than the OPD, the health work was carried out on field. Each day, one of us would go on a field inspection of the camp & used to note down the issues threatening the health of the community. This would then be taken up with the local authorities, communities themselves & the concerned people. Through this we not only kept the government authorities on their toes to maintain a healthy camp, we were also able to improve on some of the prevailing conditions in the camp. Some examples for our works in this area are as follows:

- Changing the source of water supply in *Keelamorkarai* camp. Even though the water was being supplied in tankers from surrounding villages, the water initially supplied was saline. Once we took this to the notice of IAS officer in charge of the village, he promptly asked the local officials to change the source of water to a place where water was potable.
- We brought the issue of poor sanitation and hygienic conditions in the camp housing more than 100 children in *Keelamarkarai* to the notice of the local authorities. We suggested them to take up the work of cleaning the surroundings, placement of dustbins for the litter to be collected, provision of a community soap to wash the hands of children before the food & provision to be made for construction of trench latrines. We were surprised the next day to find all our requests carried out!
- When the community leaders were made to realize the health risk posed to the community due to the proximity of the community kitchen to the toilets in Kottaimedu camp, they promptly shifted toilets to different location.
- Even though the timing of health education was thought to be inappropriate & also its effectiveness in the community was doubted, it was thought that at least some basic health education regarding personal hygiene, sanitation and ORS use during diarrhoea was deemed necessary. We prepared health education materials and translated it into Tamil. Later the local people prepared the charts. With the help of these charts an effort was made to give basic health education in the community, especially to the women community & children.
- Health education regarding the precautions to be taken while preparing & distributing food & also the necessity to maintain personal hygiene was imparted to the cooks of community kitchens.

Thus we practiced a sweet mix of clinical & preventive medicine. During all these works we worked in close collaboration with the government agencies. Whenever needed we offered our services to the local authorities & also demanded their cooperation when we deemed it to be necessary. At the same time a resource book regarding the details of all our contacts, demographic data & such others for the benefit of the teams following us was maintained. The roving team also collected data from 17 affected villages. Team meetings were held with great regularity! The daily proceedings were also reported to Dr.Thelma & Dr.Ravi Narayan and to Mr.Ajay on a regular basis. Also a set of recommendations was formulated to orient the team following us to the region.

It seemed such a short period when it was time for our team to leave the region. Most of us felt, in spite of the pathos around, a sense of satisfaction for having contributed our own small efforts in rebuilding the devastated community. We left the place with a heavy heart.

- Dr.Vinay, Community Health Fellow, CHC

### 13. Back to Basics

The Tsunami of 2004 wreaked incalculable havoc within minutes but the scars it has left behind will last very many years. While there has been a massive loss of life and property, the pattern of damage caused by the Tsunami to the coastal settlements has been varied. Some have escaped unscathed, while others have been wiped off the face of the land. Even within settlements, the extent and nature of damage has been determined by various factors including the local topography; settlement pattern; existing natural and manmade shore protection devices; quality and appropriateness of layout, orientation, engineering, masonry and construction material of the built infrastructure, both residential and public.

The Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZ) meant little or nothing to the fishing community for whom proximity to the ocean was the very breath of life. Now, if the rehabilitation of the fishing community, is executed without considering all the cultural, social and occupational nuances it might well rob them of the means of survival altogether. There is also a vital need for technical expertise in designing habitats that respect the pattern of the past settlements evolved over time and to integrate technically sound disaster mitigating measures.

Resettlement is no doubt a highly complicated issue, with varying hues of emotion, culture and the basic right to eke out a living. Depending on the damage and the view held on the Coastal Zone Regulation, inhabitants of the affected villages are either eager or completely reluctant to resettle in “safer” places away from the coast line which have been or are yet to be identified.

A team of shelter, livelihood and disaster management specialists from the UNDP interacted intensely and extensively with the communities and households in a few of the worst affected villages in Sirgazhi taluk of Nagapattinam district as part of an exercise for developing micro level model recovery plans through a participatory approach. The following issues emerged from this interaction:

- The need for a clear definition of the CRZ with the flexibility to take into consideration the fact that the relocated communities have adequate right to economically productive land. In this case, the rights of fishermen/women to the land where they have been living on the shore, workspace for their boats, fish processing equipment and nets.
- A natural follow up of the above would be to create awareness of a legal process for fishermen to retain right of the land on the shore for economic activities and temporary shelters.
- Address with sensitivity and grace the tangled issue of ownership. Some were legal owners of the homesteads that they have lost; others have been approved by the government to have usufruct rights, and others were simply squatting. What would be the status of their right over the properties that would be allotted to them in the sites they would be relocated? Will they be allocated homesteads commensurate with the ones they have lost? Do they have to relinquish the rights over the sites they are moving away from? Will they at least have individual or collective usufruct rights over their original habitations and the common property resources attached? Will others encroach upon the land they are vacating and how will the authorities prevent such eventualities?
- Awareness that the CRZ is highly relevant for other vital fields such as protecting the eco system, guarding against the far-reaching effects of pollution and environmental degradation.

- Ensure that there is a participatory approach between the stakeholders, all those involved in habitat reconstruction and the dwellers themselves.
- Face the fact that people and perceptions change. The fear of the Tsunami gradually gives way to picking up the threads of life and inching back nearer the sea. This creates a need for developing habitat plans that integrate water and sanitation measures, renewable energy technology, and construction of multi-hazard resistant and multi-purpose shelters.
- Need to offer technical guidance to reduce vulnerabilities of not only the habitat but also of the community infrastructure.
- Help to map available local resources – material, technology and expertise- and to upgrade and strengthen gaps in these areas.
- Construction of Technology Demonstration Units (TDU) to trigger effective transfer of appropriate multi-hazard resistant technologies in housing.

There are no simplistic, easy and uni-dimensional answers to this issue. A comprehensive solution will emerge only if all the stakeholders and the affected community have a constructive dialogue under the leadership of the government drawing largely upon the scientific, political, legal and social expertise of those who have faced and addressed these issues in a multi-dimensional way.

**Note to Editors:**

Drawing on the UN System's experience in Orissa in the aftermath of the 1999 super cyclone and in Gujarat following the 2001 earthquake, the UN's contribution in Tamil Nadu and other tsunami affected States is to mobilize resources for the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases.

Working with the poor and marginalized communities, the focus of the UN is to facilitate the rapid recovery of the affected populations in a way that leads to the sustainable reduction of disaster risks and expands the opportunities for development. It also ensures the mainstreaming of issues pertaining to long-term vulnerability reduction, sustainability and environmental conservation.

*UN Recovery Team,  
March 2005*

## 14. Psycho-social care and protection of Tsunami affected children

### *Guiding Principles*

#### **Introduction**

Exposure to natural disasters has a devastating impact on the psychological and social well-being of children, adults and adolescents. It is now widely accepted that early psychosocial interventions that help to mitigate the effect of trauma alleviating psychological distress, and strengthen resiliency must be an integral part of humanitarian assistance. In the case of children and adolescents, psychosocial interventions also aim to maintain or re-establish their normal development process. The broad framework for planning and implementing psychosocial programs is provided by a) the relevant Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and b) UNHCR Guidelines on Protection and Care of Refugee Children.

#### **What do we mean by “psychosocial”?**

For the purpose of this statement, “psychosocial” refers to the dynamic relationship that exists between psychological and social effects, each continually interacting with and influencing the other.

“Psychological effects” are those which affect different levels of functioning including cognitive (perceptions and memory as a basis for thoughts and learning), affective (emotions), and behavioural. “Social effects” pertain to altered relationships, family and community networks, and economic status.

The following principles based on a body of evidence should guide psychosocial programming

- ⚡ Nearly all children and adolescents who have experienced catastrophic situations will initially display symptoms of psychological distress, including intrusive flashbacks of the stress event, nightmares, withdrawal, inability to concentrate and others.
- ⚡ Most children and adolescents will regain normal functioning once basic survival needs are met, safety and security have returned and developmental opportunities are restored, within the social, family and community context.
- ⚡ Some children will require more specialized interventions to address their suffering and help restore their flow of development. Immediately after traumatic events, activities and opportunities which allow children to talk about or otherwise express painful experiences and feelings, such as physical and artistic expression, are most beneficial if facilitated by people the children know and trust, and have continued contact with.
- ⚡ However, “trauma counselling”, should never be the point of departure for psychosocial programming, because structured, normalizing, empowering activities within a safe environment will help the majority of the children recover over time.
- ⚡ Trauma counseling should never be provided unless an appropriate and sustained follow-up mechanism is guaranteed. Defense mechanisms exist for a reason and breaking them down before the child is ready and in a safe physical and emotional environment leaves him/her open and vulnerable to a re-traumatization. There are serious risks associated with trauma counseling carried out by nonprofessionals.
- ⚡ Dramatic consequences for a child’s life pathway can have more damaging consequences for the individual’s well-being than the traumatic event itself (an example would be a child’s loss of parents having to grow up as an orphan, or destruction of school system leaving children without education).
- ⚡ The psychosocial well-being of adults, particularly parents and caregivers has a direct impact on that of children, and should thus be addressed through concurrent parent-focused psychosocial interventions.
- ⚡ Children – and adults’ – participation in decisions which affect their lives has a positive effect on their mental health, empowers them and helps them to regain control over their own lives.
- ⚡ Grounding all psychosocial interventions in the culture, unless it is not in the best interests of the child, is both ethical and more likely to produce a sustained recovery.

#### Psychosocial interventions based on the above principles:

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>⚡ Reconnect children with family members, friends and neighbors</li><li>⚡ Foster social connections and interactions</li><li>⚡ Normalize daily life</li><li>⚡ Promote a sense of competence and restore a person's control over one's life</li><li>⚡ Allow for expressions of grief within a trusted environment, when the child is ready and follow-up is guaranteed</li></ul> |
|---|
- ⚡ Listen to children and adults before acting. Ensure that interventions are based on consultation with the affected communities, reflect what they need and take into consideration the age and stage of development of the children involved.
  - ⚡ Understand and respect the culture and religion of the affected population; give material and other support so that grieving and mourning practices and rites can take place.
  - ⚡ Help children, family members, friends and neighbours find out what happened to those who are missing, and find each other, and let them know that efforts are underway.
  - ⚡ Set up "child-friendly" spaces as soon as possible and activities that normalize the lives of children, give them a sense of safety, structure and predictability through drawing, puppet-making and playing, drama and songs, story-telling, sports, non-formal education, etc. These activities also allow for the release of any stored distress.
  - ⚡ Restore normal schooling as soon as possible.
  - ⚡ Encourage children to ask as many questions as they want, and be ready to answer them truthfully.
  - ⚡ Focus and build on interventions that strengthen the population's resiliency and resources, and current and traditional ways of coping when they are in the best interests of the child.
  - ⚡ Involve youth in organizing activities for younger children: undertakings that give an affected person a sense of accomplishment has a healing effect.
  - ⚡ Involve children, their families and communities in the psychosocial recovery process, discussing with them their perceptions, and how they see their needs.
  - ⚡ Set up support group discussions, as much as possible accompanied by involvement in concrete and meaningful activities that give a sense of accomplishment and control over one's life: recreational and non-formal education for children, common interest activities for young people, sewing, gardening, building, leading children's activities etc.
  - ⚡ Promote and support interventions which preserve and reinforce the cohesion of the family, and discourage any which risks separating children from their families.
  - ⚡ Promote activities and opportunities to allow children to express their experiences and feelings so that they may make meaning from and integrate them into their lives, as much as possible within a familiar environment and only if:
    - The child is ready for this expression – eliciting emotional material too early can cause more distress and potential harm to the child.
    - We can ensure further, on-going comfort and help.
  - ⚡ Identify referral services for the small number of children and adults who will need professional, medical assistance (some of these people may have had pre-existing psychiatric illnesses).
  - ⚡ Assess the need and provide support to adults caring for children for example provision of crèches or child focused activities (e.g. child friendly spaces) which allow adults some time to recover and re-energise them so that they can provide the support children need.
  - ⚡ Provide training to those caring/responsible for children so that they are comfortable dealing with children's natural distress and recognise children who may need more specialised support.

These principles represent the views of the following agencies: the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children UK (SCUK), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and World Vision International (WVI).

Organizations wishing to work on behalf of children are strongly encouraged to endorse these principles.

Source : IRC/SCUK/UNICEF/UNHCR/WVI

## 15. Making Things Better

The days spent as a part of the tsunami relief team were filled with activity and the entire experiences proved to be very enlightening. I went as a part of the team expecting that some medical help was required. In the briefing session, it was told no such medical need for required. However I was still keen to go on this trip as I wanted to know firsthand the situation of disaster and relief work.

What I learnt was entirely a new prospective of health, especially those that are completely forgotten in clinical medicine. I learnt that the practice of Community Medicine was so essential.

In the short period of stay I have got a new admiration for people who work among the community and for the enormous amount of dedicated work needed, to make community work possible.

The efficiency of the Government has also been very admirable. Being used to our tendency to blame the Government for all maladies, it is hard to admit the superb efficiency of the Government apparatus. It would be hard to imagine the results if all Governments worked so efficiently all through the year and not just during disasters.

The extraordinary resilience of the affected people is gladdening and also a lesson for us to emulate. I would like to make a few observations regarding role of CHC in long term participation in community development.

### Potential Areas of intervention

#### 1. Water and sanitation:-

At the time we went many NGOs/ Corporates were putting up temporary shelters as advised by the state government. There was hardly any supervision regarding the standards of construction, water supply and sanitation. It is highly likely that contamination of water sources and epidemics may occur as the new housings are crowded and alien to local culture.

Interestingly we met an expert, Dr. George Stubb who is working in association with Baptist Hospital. He is an expert in agricultural and water resources and was willing to help out. He gave the ideas of water testing and provision of water testing kits for monitoring of water sources. Such a move would give CHC a hold in a vital and neglected field and also a lasting presence could be established.

#### 2. Livelihood:-

This is very important as this is the felt need of villages. The community is fisheries-based and men especially know no work other than fishing. Hence boats and nets can be provided which can be paid back on installment basis. This is also an opportunity to open people, especially the youth to alternative trades. We met quite a few youth who were educated up to twelfth standard (10+2).

Although fishing will remain the predominant trade and a very viable one it is wise for the community to have wider array of professions in order to survive globalization. Occupational training will also provide a opportunity to backward and deprived classes eg. Fishermen, who don't own boats/ catamarans and work as coolies. The villages community will also be strengthened as it will become self reliant.

The fields where vocational training will be popular are:

1. **Boat repair/engine servicing:** With large scale damage and loss of boats, this is bound to be useful. Also, there is bound to be regular demand for regular servicing. Usually people give their boats to Kerala for this. If at least minor repairs / servicing could be done locally, it would save lots of expense and time. These may not be full-time jobs but may just be part-time.
2. **Local Banking/Insurance:** Although many people here are prosperous, very few have bank accounts or insurance policies. Many lost their savings which were kept at home.

Banking at local level will be in demand as people are seeking loans for rebuilding, and even compensation is being dispersed only through cheques. By training locals in banking, more jobs can be provided, process can be faster, peoples' awareness of finances will be more and there would be more trust, since known persons may be handling the money.

In view of the loss, people may look to insure valuables, boats, etc. Insurance is a blooming business, and this could be great opportunity to train people so that locals benefit from it.

3. **Masonry construction, etc.:** There will be tremendous demand for it as large scale rebuilding is anticipated. This is a financially viable option, however practical feasibility is doubtful as many persons we spoke to are not interested, as it far removed from their main trade.
4. **Counselling for the bereaved and children:** There is bound to be a severe long term psychological trauma to those affected due to the scale and unprecedented nature of the tragedy. Regular follow by psychologists or trained psycho-social workers will help in alleviating the morbidity and help people to recover.
5. **Preparedness for future disaster:** A lot is being spoken of early warning systems and preparedness. How much of it will be implemented and how effective it will be remains to be seen. But I think it is pointless to spend too much resource on untested systems when simple logical steps are lacking. India still does not have a dedicated disaster relief organization, banking only on the large armed forces for relief. Public awareness is severely lacking and there has been effort to educate the public on calamity survival and relief. The most important phase of disaster management is the planning part as that is only part we have control over.

So far as medical relief is concerned, I feel that a training module can be started in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> terms when a lot of free time is available. The present text books hardly mention any practical aspects of disaster relief.

The medical equipment and drugs that I saw in the villages were mostly costly but inappropriate for the present disaster. The medicines were being wasted and are posing a serious health hazard.

The relief should be better planned. The medicines should be packaged in small (25 kgs) boxes. Each unit should be easy to carry, easy to use (or sterilise) and should have compartments for waste disposal. Companies should be held responsible for the drugs they donate (expiry date, quality, etc.). The contents of the medical kit should be as per guidelines set up by a relevant authority. This will help preventing people from dumping medicines on the gullible public

### **Conclusion**

The disaster has brought great loss to the villages, however this can be great opportunity for us to make things even better. I would like to thank my other team members for their corporation.

By Ashwin Motha, Nagapattanam (CHC Third Team)

*(Ashwin is a young doctor from Bangalore, who has just completed his internship.)*

## **16. A Fragment of my experience at Tsunami relief under CHC**

At the palayar camp where the people were presently living in tsunami relief camp, latrines were locked, garbage was strewn around, defecation was an expression of freedom and the kids growing up thinking – obviously, this is how we live, how everyone lives and perhaps should live. Could we possibly intersect this thought process and by Love!. How do we do that? No people to dig up trench latrines, no keys to open the locks and no scavengers to clean the garbage. If we were sweet people, perhaps we would have just did medical check up, give drugs and leave the place complaining about the people, the system itself and eventual state of learned helplessness which as a matter of fact prevailed there outside and also here, inside us. Good sense sometimes prevails, I should say for our team reacted ‘slightly’ different.

As we broke open the locks, some of long held apparent virtues began to fade as the real virtue of supporting a human life began to drown. We found breaking things was not a crime, neither was it a shame to personally involve ourselves in cleaning the clogged latrines, for the people there were always ready to find the least reason to return back to their old styles of defecating in open free air. That was the beginning should I say, when the conscience began to prick when they found it by difficult to stand as a bystander when doctors who have travelled half a thousand kilometres are not scolding them, but are cleaning their toilets. But still, it was only a few youngsters who came to help us clear the area around the toilets but it was satisfactory, for it was obvious that it was just the end of the beginning.

A doctor and a scavenger sounds distant and distinct, but not this time, when the differences blurred and we became the first scavengers picking up plastic around the place and putting them into a ditch which we designated as the new dustbin. The health awareness which came this time wouldn’t stand mute either. Once in awhile we expressed anguish, but often it was blunt and authoritative. As they responded by calling immediately the corporation workers, we got the idea that the real dignity of the stethoscope which we wore around our necks was not in confining it to a 10 x 10 clinic but to use the authority it gives to get work done for the greater good of the manes.

Novelty and creativity was in the air and the children were divided into teams to win prizes but only that, the game was to collect the maximum plastic refuse and dump it! Strange as it sounds, but it worked; within minutes the area was clean and the kids were gleaming too! And the prize was to be given only after a practical demonstration of cleanliness in action. The kids were lined up and three at a time were made to follow the protocol for hand sanitization before taking food and again, the kids were excited! All we had to offer them later was just glucose powder but visibly, they found their efforts well compensated!

Relative risk, probability, ratio, standard deviation – these possibly have a value when explaining the disease prognosis – but we refused to buy the concept. Our message though statistically incorrect, superfluous, exaggerated, call what you may, but it was clear – if you are not clean, if you don’t have cleanliness in every thing you do, disease is just round the corner and a sure death for everyone is just a logical sequence! That seemed to do the magic, their minds were now receptive when given other aspects of health education and the humble ORS instruction.

When the health officials said they would look into matters, we were inconsiderate to their ‘busy schedule’ and ‘lack of time’. We were stubborn and were ready to do things, of which they would be having least doubt, especially after the garbage disposal ‘campaign’. Perhaps authorities felt intimidated, but it was something that we could definitely afford to, for, with it came the confidence that the transformation would continue and change was here to stay!

I shall always remember the endearing hospitality of the fishing folk when that old lady who had lost her house to the level of ground, stood there on it, offering food and tender coconuts to us, who had gone as a part of assessment team. To us, this was but a humbling experience, leaving us with a sense of satisfaction, that it was these special people, whom we ‘attempted’ to serve.

Dr. Raghavendra Charen MP, Srikali (Tamil Nadu)

## 17. Tsunami can't wash this away: hatred for Dalits

*In Ground Zero, Dalits thrown out of relief camps, cut out of food, water supplies, toilets, NGOs say they will start separate facilities*

**NAGAPATTINAM, JANUARY 6:** There's something even an earthquake measuring 9 on the Richter scale and a tsunami that kills over 1 lakh people can't crack: the walls between caste.

That's why at Ground Zero in Nagapattinam, Murugesan and his family of four have been living on the streets in Nambiarnagar. That's why like 31 other families, they have been thrown out of relief camps. That's why they are hounded out of schools they have sneaked into, they are pushed to the rear of food and water lines, given leftovers, not allowed to use toilets or even drink water provided by a UN agency. That's why some NGOs are setting up separate facilities for them. Because they are all Dalits.

They are survivors from 63 damaged villages—30 of them flattened—all marooned in their own islands, facing the brunt of a majority of fishermen who are from the Meenavar community—listed in official records as Most Backward Class (MBC)—for whom Dalits are still untouchable.

*The Indian Express* toured the camps to find an old story of caste hatred being replayed in camp after camp:

- In the GVR Marriage Hall Relief Camp, Dalits cannot drink water from tanks put up by UNICEF. The Meenavars say they "pollute" the water.
- In the Nallukadai Street Relief Camp, a Meenavar *Thalaivar*, or leader, grabbed all cartons of glucose biscuits delivered by a Coimbatore NGO. The Dalits were told: these are not for you.

At Puttur Relief Camp, the Meenavars have hoarded family relief kits, rice packets, new clothes and other relief material. When the Dalits asked for some, they paid a heavy price—they had to spend the night on the road.

- At the Neelayadatchi Temple Camp, Dalits are not allowed inside the temple, especially when rice and cash doles are being handed out.
- Dalits from three villages taking shelter at Ganapati cinema hall in Tharambagadi are thrown out every night because the Meenavar fisherwomen say they did not "feel safe" falling sleep with Dalits around.

So 32 ostracised Dalit families took shelter in the GRM girls' school in Thanjavur. But four days ago, even the school asked them to vacate saying it was due to re-open.

Those doing the discriminating brush all this aside. Says Chellayya, a Meenavar fisherman at a Tharambagadi camp: "These Dalits have been playing mischief, going back to the villages and looting houses. That's why we don't want them around here."

To which Dalit activist K Darpaya says: "What's left in the houses for Dalits to take? And where will they keep the loot even if we assume they have taken something? In the relief camps? On the road side?"

There's an irony here. For, the district administration and relief agencies have to depend on the strong network of Meenavar fishermen to disburse aid and relief. But so rampant has the discrimination become that relief in-charge for Nagapattinam district Shantasheela Nayar, Secretary, Rural Development, is deputing District Adi Dravidar Welfare Officers to relief camps.

“They will look into the problem and report back on what can be done to put an end to this. We certainly do not discriminate but if the fishermen themselves are doing it because of their local status, what can the government do?” says Nayar.

Talk to some of the victims and instead of bitterness and anger, there is grief and helplessness.

“In Nagapattinam, three relief camps we went to denied us shelter saying they had no space. At the Nataraja Damayanti high school, the watchman refused to let us in,” says Murugesan.

At first, the families did not understand why but as door after door slammed in their faces, it became clearer. They approached their local municipal councillor K Tilagar. “He assured us we would be given shelter soon but he disappeared,” says another survivor Anjamma.

In the neighbouring GVR camp, Dalit fishermen said they are being nudged out of relief and compensation queues. “We are inside the camp but kept in the far corner. Whenever officials and trucks come to give food, we are left out because nobody allows us to get near the trucks. Some men form a ring around us and prevent us from moving ahead in the queue,” says Saravanan, a Dalit survivor.

“The Meenavars are more privileged as they get to sleep inside the rooms and are first to receive food and water. We have to sleep outside in the verandahs or in the open ground,” says Jivanana.

Kesavan, a Dalit of Nambiarnagar, says he was prevented from drinking water from a plastic tank put up in the hamlet on Monday. “We are forced to bring water in plastic cans from outside the village. The Collector’s office has put up the tank here and provides clean water but it is not for us,” he says.

V Vanitha, a Class X Dalit student, says adolescent girls are prevented from using toilet areas at Tharambagadi. “Small children have no problem but it is an ordeal for us. There are no toilets here and they prevent us from going to the area which serves as an open toilet,” she says.

Says activist Darpaya: “Dalits are not allowed to drink water from tanks put up by UNICEF. Even in relief camps, Meenavars don’t want to sit with Dalits and have food. Some of them manage to get rice but other relief items coming in like biscuit packets, milk powder and family household kits are denied to Dalits.”

Says M Jayanthi, a coordinator of South Indian Fishworkers Society (SIFS): “Dalits are facing discrimination in all relief camps where they are present. But society does not want to raise the issue as it would complicate things further. Without making it public, we are opening separate facilities for Dalits exclusively,” she says.

Sevai, an NGO-based in Karaikal, Pondicherry, 20 kms from Nagapattinam, is the first organisation to address the issue.

Coordinator R Indrani says: “Since Dalits are not receiving sufficient food and water, we have started cooking for them in separate kitchens. They come from wherever they are taking shelter and we provide them whatever they want. We are also considering separate camps for them.”

Several NGOs which noticed the problem raised the issue during their meeting with District Collector M Veerashanmugha Moni. “But no one is willing to take up the matter at the field level as this could complicate things. We don’t want friction between the two castes by trying to address it during this crisis,” says the team leader of NGO Accord, which is working among Dalits.

[http://www.indianexpress.com/full\\_story.php?content\\_id=62212](http://www.indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=62212)

*Janyala Sreenivas*

## 18. Dalits Fight Tsunami Daily

This is in response to the expose in The Indian Express, “**Tsunami can’t wash this away: hatred for Dalits**” (IE January 7). Many justify their Hindu way of living while repeating various cliches like “Our living is simple and plain”, “Sare jahan se achha Hindustan hamara”, “We practice non-violence” and “are unlike people of materialistic society”. We are so hypocritical that we justify poverty, hunger, slavery in the name of culture and tradition.

The tsunami in Nagapattinam and other places has shattered many lives. What is even more shocking is the social catastrophe that has been revealed with Dalits not being given access to relief and rehabilitation. Caste continues to be a social catastrophe in India, no less than a tsunami for Dalits and, of course, for those also who are real patriots. The Indian Express reporter can be called a true patriot because he was moved by horrible, discriminatory situations when people are sought to be divided even at the doorstep of death. This is how India was enslaved. All invaders had smooth passage to the throne and the worst part is that it has not been realised till today.

The Nagapattinam district is worst affected in Tamil Nadu and tsunami-affected Dalits have been thrown out of relief camps. The Meenavar community, a backward caste, has unleashed terror and discrimination, and most of the Dalits have not been allowed to share the relief material like food, shelter, medicine, toilets and others. Dalits are forced to carry water in plastic bags and are not allowed to use the water from tanks put up by the UNICEF. “Relief is now being virtually dumped in some of the camps here. So even the kids carry a few stoves, mats, vessels and other relief material to sell in other villages,” quotes The Indian Express.

Tamil Nadu is known for a successful social movement under the leadership of Ramaswami Naicker ‘Periyar’. What does it suggest? Who can say that India has had truly transformative social movements? An American, namely Nancy Ricks, running the Dalit Freedom Network, emailed me and felt sorry that Dalits are being discriminated against in the time of calamity. Some of the NGOs are disappointed to carry out relief works, thinking that when the cause of humanity is itself at stake why is caste or creed important? Two human rights activists, John Dayal and Sunil Sardar, both Christians, carried out relief work in Nagapattinam for a week and brought back horrifying reports of rampant caste discrimination. Aid provided by NGOs, government and international organisations have all been grabbed by dominant castes.

What is more surprising is that the government initiated separate camps for Dalits and others. Is this in the spirit of the Constitution which says that the state will not practice any kind of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, sex and race. Human beings don’t just need to fill the belly, cover the body and have shelter. Human beings require respect, dignity, generosity too, and the absence of the latter reduces them to the level of animals. If humanity does not exist, how humanitarian is it to serve tsunami-affected people? Let them be like any other creatures of nature.

The real unaddressed question is how long will caste be ignored? A social category which damaged the country for millennia. The caste system enslaved the country. The caste system works against a principle held sacred in other countries, namely the dignity of labour. Those who worked in the fields, made houses, constructed roads, drainage, reared cattle became “untouchables” and inferiors. Parasites on the economy were given respect and jobs in the administration. Why should a sweeper sweep if it makes him inferior, why should a shoemaker engage in leather work? Why then should an Indian keep public places clean if it lowers his caste status to do so?

One hundred and two invaders from Kabul or any other part of the world could easily subjugate this vast country because society was divided into myriad groups. Caste hierarchies have eaten into the vitals of the nation. Because of caste, we could not develop agriculture, industries, infrastructure, science and technology. As long as caste exists, India’s polity is not going to be healthy whosoever tries, and whatever best efforts are done. Let us honestly handle caste tsunami which is perpetual besides this rare one.

By Udit Raj, 13 January, 2004, Indian Express  
The writer is national chairman of the  
All India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations and Indian Justice Party  
<http://www.countercurrents.org/dalit-uditraj130105.htm>

## 19. The unbearable lightness of seeing

*How agonised we are about how people die. How untroubled we are by how they live.*

NUMBER OF homes damaged by the tsunami in Nagapattinam: 30,300. Number of homes destroyed by the Congress-NCP Government in Mumbai: 84,000.

How agonised we are about how people die. How untroubled we are by how they live.

Maharashtra's Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, says every Chief Minister would like to leave behind a legacy. His own, he believes, will be that of the man who cleaned up Mumbai. Mr. Deshmukh, in short, wishes to be remembered.

He will be. His Government wiped out 6,300 homes on a single day. A record the Israeli army would be proud to match on a busy afternoon in the occupied territories. It is a figure their bulldozers, with tanks and air force support, have not quite notched up yet.

The Mumbai mass evictions — now in pause mode — demolished a lot more than slums. They reflected well an elite mindset towards the deprived that fully matured in the 1990s. It is a lot about how we see the poor today. About a view marked by contempt for the rights and suffering of ordinary people. Unless that suffering is certified as genuine by the rest of us.

Mr. Deshmukh now says the destruction of "some" houses was "an accident." Not intended. Which perhaps places his Government in the category of natural calamity. However, most of Mumbai's beautiful people, some of whom attended 'tsunami dinners' after expressing satisfaction over the city's mass demolitions, are firmly with their Chief Minister. No one from that fraternity has 'adopted' a demolished slum for adoring cameras. Nor organised relief operations for people, including many babies shivering without shelter, in one of the coldest winters.

Instead, Mumbai's elite now feels the need to carry the logic forward. Last year, 11 prominent Maharashtrians moved the Bombay High Court to bar slum dwellers from voting. This year, the city's Municipal Corporation itself asked the Chief Electoral Officer to drop residents of the demolished slums from the voters' lists. (A curious move in a society contemplating voting rights for NRIs and PIOs.) No one uses the real word — disenfranchisement. But it is what they mean. One way or the other, take away their vote. That should teach them they cannot live amongst us.

It would also blunt the one weapon ordinary Indians have and use. Unlike, say, their American counterparts, the Indian poor have the audacity to believe their votes can change things. They certainly did that right here. Mumbai's slum dwellers played a critical role in defeating the BJP-Shiv Sena in the 2004 Assembly polls. (Quite a few local leaders of the Congress know this well and are fearful of a backlash. What if slum folk attempt similar adventures the next time around?)

Of course, excluding large numbers from voting involves minor problems of constitutional rights. But the *avant garde* amongst the elite have found the answer to that one: criminalise them. That would be a good start. "Book them for trying to steal public property," is one bright idea. The Mumbai police have obligingly promised criminal trespass cases against dazed victims hanging around their razed homes. Satisfying, but annoyingly it would still leave them with the right to vote.

Maybe India will move towards — as on most other things — the American model. As a Human Rights Watch Sentencing Project report shows, 1.4 million African-American men — 13 per cent of their total number — are denied voting rights because of their criminal records. As many as 15 American States bar former felons from voting even after they have completed serving their sentences.

In Alabama and Florida, nearly one in every three African-American men is permanently disenfranchised. In six other States the ratio is one in four. All this in States with significant African-American minorities. As the report notes, no other democracy denies as many people the right to vote because of their criminal records. A feat that could be eclipsed in India if the current mindset towards the poor goes the distance. America has around two million human beings behind bars — more than any other nation in the world. Of these, 63 per cent are African-American and Hispanic. Consider that these two groups together form only 25 per cent of the population. You are far more likely to go to prison — and lose your vote — if you are African-American. Substitute poor for African-American and it is an idea much of India's and Mumbai's elite would go for.

Total disdain for even the foreseeable future is another element of this mindset. According to a UN Habitat report, one in every three human beings could live in a slum by 2030. Many of them Indians. Imagine how many voters we could do away with by criminalising slum dwellers. Just 'reform' the laws. Adopt the Mumbai idea nationwide — and India will be demolishing more homes than it has ever built.

"Many people will be inconvenienced and will have to make sacrifices if the city has to develop..." says the Chief Minister. The city's builder and real estate mafia will not be amongst those inconvenienced. The sacrifices are to be made by the poor. The power of those driving the process is immense. The protests and appeals of the slum folk themselves are simply dismissed. Those of some 28 slum dwellers organisations, housing rights and human rights bodies, political parties and trade unions are sought to be played down. It was anxiety over the fallout (at far higher levels of the Congress in New Delhi) that led to some slowing down of the demolitions. And to Mr. Deshmukh's admission of "accidental" evictions.

Class interests are asserting themselves across the major parties here. The Congress elite is far more in tune with Bal Thackeray on this issue than it is with its own panicking base. The Sena chief has praised the Government for the terror visited on the slum populace. This is also one issue that unites the otherwise bickering Nationalist Congress Party and Congress. Hopefully, the coalition of a large number of organisations protesting the action will create a basis for some relief and resistance.

A crucial part of the mindset is the idea that promises made to the poor have no meaning. It matters little that millions of such people in Mumbai helped the Congress win a State it would surely have lost. At the Centre too, that party came to power riding a wave of popular anger against the policies of the National Democratic Alliance Government. And then quickly buried its anti-'India Shining' campaign. Today, a Montek Singh Ahluwalia can signal moves towards the privatisation of water without batting an eyelid. All earlier assurances on not making life harder for the deprived mean nothing. That was an election. This is reality.

That is why the better off — anyway miniscule in numbers — hardly bother to vote. The rich run governments by other means. Not by electing them. When governments have reneged on their most fundamental promises in the past 15 years, the media have welcomed this as "pragmatic." It is pragmatic to lie to the poor. It is also pragmatic to break your commitment to the 1993 United Nations resolution which terms forced evictions "a gross violation of human rights."

A vivid symbol of the pragmatic new world was the Sensex soaring to a record peak — at the height of the tsunami damage. This phenomenon was repeated across most of the tsunami-hit nations as "markets sensed" a windfall in reconstruction spending.

The mindset is visible in our dealings with tsunami-hit citizens, too. We are now in the process of converting people's entitlements into our charity. Health care, access to clean water, sanitation, schools — all these might now happen because of our generosity. Not because human beings are entitled to them. You might get a house because we feel sorry half your family was washed away. Not by right of your citizenship of a decent nation and society.

There is one thing larger than Mr. Deshmukh's bulldozers: The process by which millions are uprooted from the countryside and forced to seek a living in the nearest city. What India is building is not an employment guarantee but an unemployment guarantee. As agriculture collapses and people vote with their feet, the Deshmukh Doctrine is the best we can think of. Mopping the floors with the taps all open and running.

The Indian elite wants a society geared up to deal with disasters that may or may not strike once in a hundred years but shows no urgency at all when it comes to ongoing misery not caused by nature. Towards the destruction of the livelihoods of millions by policy and human agency.

We want effective and advanced planning for events distant and hard to predict. But reject planning for the near future in favour of 'the market', which alone should be the one true guide. We want to build walls against the sea all along the coast after having done away with nature's own — the mangroves and sand dunes. Maybe we will build walls around Mumbai next to keep the plebeians out. Mr. Deshmukh's legacy would then be forever secure.

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By P. Sainath  
Source : The Hindu,  
1-1-2005

## 20. LIFELINE

### Tsunami Response Watch

**Thursday, March 10, 2005**

**International Labour Organization**

<http://www.iom.int/tsunami/news/main%5Fnews.htm>

*posted by LIFELINE at 4:42 PM 0 comments* \_

**Wednesday, January 12, 2005**

**Official websites**

Directory of Indian government websites

<http://goidirectory.nic.in/>

Gateway to government information

<http://indiaimage.nic.in/>

Prime Minister's Relief Fund

<http://pmindia.nic.in/relief.htm>

Andaman and Nicobar

<http://tsunamiandaman.tn.nic.in/>

Andhra Pradesh

<http://www.aponline.gov.in/apportal/index.asp>

Kerala

<http://www.kerala.nic.in/tsunami.htm>

Pondicherry

<http://pondicherry.nic.in/tsunami/tsunamimain.htm>

Tamil Nadu

<http://www.tn.gov.in/tsunami/default.htm>

Helplines, NGO contacts

<http://www.indianngos.com/tsunami/helplines.htm>

*posted by LIFELINE at 4:54 PM 0 comments* \_

**Tuesday, January 11, 2005**

**For more news and views**

Eldis News Monitor

<http://community.eldis.org/monitors/World%20News/?14@@!nopopup=1&cat=Tsunami>

IPS

[http://ipsnews.net/new\\_focus/tsunami/index.asp](http://ipsnews.net/new_focus/tsunami/index.asp)

Tsunami Web Log

<http://tsunamihelp.blogspot.com/>

*posted by LIFELINE at 11:32 PM 0 comments* \_

**Information Links**

Reliefweb

<http://www.reliefweb.int>

National Disaster Management Division, Government of India

<http://www.ndmindia.nic.in/>

National Institute of Disaster Management

<http://www.nidm.net/>

posted by *LIFELINE* at *11:30 PM* 0 comments \_

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[www.indiadisasters.org](http://www.indiadisasters.org)