

Building dreams?

Inside this issue

Of houses and home.....	1
Studying construction	2
Working with Dalits	2
Labournet - A construction network	3
What about WATSAN?	4
Children's parliament - promises for the future	5
NGO profile: Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI)	6
Events round-up	7
Resources update	8

Of houses and homes

"All I want is a room somewhere, far away from the cold night air...."

Ask any adult anywhere and this would be one of the most common refrains you would hear. But, to possess and then to have lost, due to no fault of one's own, would have to be one of the most devastating experiences in one's life. In their darkest moments of grief and misery came in the NGOs, with promises to help them rebuild their lives and, more important, their homes – not just to replace the ones they had lost but better ones – safer, and more secure to protect them from the furies of nature – be it the land or the wind or the sea. They need never live in fear again.

The initial hazy days of sympathy generated euphoria slowly gave way to the unforgiving clarity of everyday realities – the realities of costs and labor, of the impossible standards expected in the technical guidelines and the rising difficulties and snags experienced in accessing materials. So much so that some donors are facing difficulty in finding NGOs to take on construction activities.

Spend some time with any NGO in the construction field now and you will hear about their difficulties. How the land allotted is low-lying and needs to be filled, escalating their costs beyond what was originally proposal. And how they are thereby compelled to build fewer number of houses, which in turn is showing them in a bad light in front of the donors who think they have mismanaged the funds. And how the material costs have shot up again affecting their budget. And how, and how, and how...

In the midst of all this flurry of "hows" and "whys", the well meaning promises of building a dream home seems to have lost its charm. Now it's just a chore that needs to be fulfilled before the office closed down. The needs of those who are looking forward to calling this their home seem to pale in comparison to the larger issues of the approvals sought and thwarted. What does it matter whether the main door is facing east or west, as long as you get a house with a door in it? Can't you see that we are struggling even to get you that house and you are worried about its size and position- seems to be the response of the genuinely baffled NGO.

And through all this, patiently the man and the lady of the house wait...not knowing which house is theirs, only that it is one of these. Not really finding the kitchen conveniently placed, after all who has heard of the toilet door opening into or facing the kitchen, but silently accepting it. Not really sure if the westward facing front door will bring ill luck or it is pure balderdash – after all these learned English speaking Saars and Madams must know better than us. Not really happy with the tiny little rooms that look like cells but, like they said, it is free and they are doing so much for us that it would be churlish to ask them for anything more or different... and so they wait...patiently, for the generous ones to finish what they have started and to give them this structure that would be their home, and yet...not their home. ■

Studying Construction

On shelter front, the problem of identifying land in certain areas, inadequacy of land, topography of the land, distance from the existing dwelling site are some of the problems retarding achievement of targets in construction.

Distance from existing dwelling site is a major consideration as it will adversely affect the livelihoods of a community that depends totally on fishing and fisheries related livelihoods. On the other hand, if encouraged to build within the protected zone, threat to their very lives is an indisputable factor that all of us working in construction have to take cognizance of. Are the structures that we are repairing safeguarded against cyclones and flooding? Is the community aware of the dangers that exist from the common dangers of flooding? Are the safety standards met? Repairs may be an easy way out but we, the construction experts, need to go the extra mile to ensure they are also safe.

What about the soil conditions? Have we ensured that the foundation that we are putting up is the most suitable for the soil tested? Whatever be the strength and the safety of the superstructure, if the foundation is weak, it's only as good as the proverbial "house built on sand".

"Low-lying land conditions" is a reality that we are forced to live with. Are we taking the natural gradient of the land into account while planning the drainage? Are we factoring this in while doing land filling? Are our houses above the normal flooding levels normally experienced in that area? Granted that we may not have the necessary funds to do a total land filling - but can we not, at the very least, raise the foundation of the individual house to either the prescribed or the safe limits based on the experiential memories of the people who will be facing these dangers?

Considering all these issues NCRC has commissioned a study with the approval of district administration, on contour mapping based on a total stations survey. This is being done with the involvement of NGOs in shelter construction. The study will help advocating the desired modifications on the existing constructions and future planning. The initial phase, for which the

team and instruments have been in place will cover the low lying construction sites and the subsequent phase will cover the rest of the construction sites. The initial phase will be completed by mid February and the second phase by the end of June 2006.

The planned study will cover the following:

Issues regarding land:

- Appropriateness – elevation of the land and soil quality
- Adequacy of the land for construction

Issues regarding construction

- Soil survey
- Land filling
- Contour mapping

The study findings will be made available to the NGOs and the administration for further planning. If any NGO/pinhead is interested in knowing more about the total stations survey or availing of this service, they may contact NCRC, Nagapattinam.

However, even if you do not access it, make sure that the above questions are answered to your satisfaction before valuable time, effort and money is invested into building something that may not stand the test of time and the vagaries of nature. The Tsunami affected communities have already faced one disaster – let this not be another. ■

Working with Dalits

Traditionally, in coastal Nagapattinam, *dalits* have been dependant on fishermen community for their livelihoods, engaging in fishing related jobs. Their minority status and less visible habitations inside the hamlets make them an excluded community. In addition, the higher bargaining capacity of the fishermen has increased their marginalization, because of which lesser attention has been focused on these groups from the NGOs too. In order to bring the *dalits* into the focus, NCRC decided to facilitate dialogues with the NGOs having programmes for the *dalits* in these areas. Accordingly HRFDL- Human Rights Federation for *Dalit* Livelihoods, working in Nagapattinam through

LabourNet - A construction network

the Marutham Network (a network of 14 NGOs working in Nagapattinam for the cause of *dalits*) was contacted.

NCRC works closely with the identified *dalits* networks and capacitate them with information collection tools like PRA and PLA to identify issues regarding loss of livelihood, avenues for creation of other livelihood opportunities or even for resumption of pre-Tsunami livelihoods with some form of value addition through skill or technology upgradation. A task force of 9 members representing these NGOs has been constituted. Issues and requirements of *dalits* are discussed, area wise, during the task force meetings.

Till now nine panchayats in the five affected blocks have been studied by representatives of these Dalit groups. An assessment on pre and post tsunami livelihoods has been conducted using participatory techniques. A matrix ranking on potential sustainable livelihoods has been completed. These groups, with the help of a consultant identified by NCRC, evolved business development plans for the identified livelihoods. The marketing plan, including costing, developing markets, cash-flow etc. are being worked out by a business development consultant. NCRC will be assisting them in identifying interested funding agencies. ■



Dalit core group meeting

In Nagapattinam construction workers are scattered throughout the district. The workforce needs support to network and better their livelihood opportunities. Since construction work on permanent shelters has begun and there is an increasing need for workers and other allied services. Based on this, the idea of a Labournet emerged, a service which would link the sources of demand and supply.



Networking construction labourers

Initially, an exposure visit was arranged for the NGOs involved in construction in Nagapattinam, to Mayaorganics in Bangalore, where a labournet initiative is successfully running. Based on this experience a study was done among a cross section of population involved in construction related labour in Nagapattinam. The study highlighted the existing supply and demand in the construction sector and the potential demand in the coming years. It also took stock of the need for related skills and services, and migration patterns. Based on the study findings, Labournet, as a second phase, will now explore ways and means of instituting a mechanism to improve the livelihood of the construction workers and other related trades.

Based on the preliminary understandings of Labournet NCRC, in collaboration with American India Foundation, and Action Aid India will undertake an action research. The purpose of the study is to create an institutional base to explore and implement livelihood options to the informal sector workforce and communities along the Tsunami affected coastline ■

What about WATSAN?

Access to safe water for consumption and domestic use is everyone's right. Water is essential for maintaining health and human dignity; however, in extreme situations there may not be sufficient water available to meet the basic needs, putting the people at multiple risks.

Sanitation refers to excreta disposal, proper disposal of solid and liquid waste, to ensure vector control, reducing transmission of diseases through direct and indirect routes. Thus it becomes imperative to ensure that people have the necessary information, knowledge and understanding to prevent water and sanitation related diseases and mobilize their involvement in the design and maintenance of those facilities.

The WATSAN (Water and Sanitation) programme aims at promoting personal and environmental hygiene in order to protect health. People's knowledge, practices and resources, are all critical to hygiene promotion.

Post-Tsunami the shelter situation has brought these issues on water and sanitation to the fore. Even though the NGOs ensured water and sanitation facilities in the beginning, in due course of time, the situation deteriorated owing to floods, the temporary nature of mechanisms and the practices of the people. However, in the permanent shelters, proper care on providing water and sanitation was needed to protect the community from the risks of unsafe water and unhygienic surroundings. Towards this, the Government of Tamilnadu issued orders related to habitation, which enunciates the need to have proper water supply, drainage, and health facilities. The toilets should be located, designed, constructed and maintained taking into account the needs of individuals – especially the women and the old – in addition to the geographical

features of the area. While the onus of building in facilities like water, electricity and drainage systems within the habitation lies with the agencies who are constructing the houses, ensuring connectivity of these facilities to the larger network lies with the government.

Unfortunately, we do not seem to be using all our experience and learnings in the field of water and sanitation. Given the low-lying nature of the land, its gradient, the porosity of the soil and the high

water table, it would take great ingenuity to design an efficient sanitation and drainage system that can be easily maintained. Add to this the lack of space and the need to dovetail the system to the larger system being designed by the administration and we have a mismatch just waiting to happen unless handled carefully.



Unsanitary conditions at shelters

Have we actually done a detailed study of the slope of the land prior to designing the drainage and sewage systems? Have we ascertained the inflow and outflow points planned by the administration and designed our system to match with those? Are our soak pits, septic tanks and drainage tanks easily accessible for the vehicles that may be used for clearing up these tanks

periodically?

Have we looked at all alternatives in sewage systems to select the one most appropriate for our plot of land? Have we explored the possibility of decentralized water (dewat) sanitation?

These are all issues that will not disappear just because we have chosen to turn a blind eye to them. They are as important or more so than the houses that we are building with such diligence and effort. Let us not be responsible for the creation of urban slums. Let us put in that extra bit of effort to design a home that will not only keep the inhabitants safe but will also protect their health, dignity and quality of life. ■

Children's Parliament - promises for the future

By now, almost all citizens of our country must be aware of the 'customary scenes' that goes on in the Parliamentary sessions: noise and quarrels and fashionable 'walk-outs'. Any one with a little love for the mother country would be fed up and desperate for a change of both proceedings and the system.

It is, perhaps, time for revival. There is something emerging in our towns, mostly from rural areas. It gives the future citizens of India, wings to be on top of social understanding of systems and concerns and creates an environment to inculcate qualities of good leadership which India has nearly run out. This promising occurrence is the swiftly popularising **Children's Parliament**.

Children's Parliament is a forum that ensures participation, opinion and discussion of children in issues concerning their lives. It comprises of the children, for the children and by the children. It gives them a forum to come together, think together, discuss and analyze socio-political issues and, if need be, take a decision and act with guidance from their elders. At the micro level, it can concentrate on the problems of the local village and try to find a solution.

The values of Children's Parliament are manifold. It gives children an opportunity to understand political structure and discharge their democratic duties, make them aware of the issues of local and national concerns, trains them to respect the opposition and answer the questions with responsibility and patience and take up leadership and make a qualitative difference in the future.

Post-tsunami, in Nagapattinam, many NGOs started interventions among the children that helped the little ones to get rid of the harrowing experiences of the tsunami and look forward towards a brighter future. Though NCRC played a limited role in this sector in the beginning, later it started playing a pro-active role; organizing a children's meet involving NGOs working with the affected children in Nagapattinam. The steering committee formed as a precursor to the children's meet has now been broad based and is being used as a platform to review and plan the activities for children. Learning from the experiences of SNEHA in running the children's parliament in

selected villages, NCRC will now advocate for the formation of a children's parliament with other NGOs too, ensuring that each village would have a children's parliament. Some of the issues the children's parliament can take up are, the right to live, education, food, health, protection, equal right for the semi orphaned, and so on and so forth.

And come to think of it, if we can generate more and more clusters of 'brighter' children, the democracy is sure to unfold more unforeseen progresses. The change is only a stone's throw away. It only needs some hands to initiate and guide the children *en route* to a greater realization. ■

**'Not only to be ruled,
but also to rule'**



Children in governance

NGO Profile: Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI)

The society of Daughters of Mary Immaculate and collaborators [DMI] is a society of voluntary organization, whose activities in India are spread over to 50 social service centers in 5 states, namely, Bihar, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and the Andamans. The activities are focused on education, health and community development with the special emphasis on development of women and children. Besides this, DMI also operates other service intuitions such as orphanages, rehabilitation centers for physically challenged, old age home, inter – faith centers, schools, hospital, dispensaries, ecnical institutions and colleges. DMI engages the expertise of various professionals and volunteers over a thousand in numbers.

Response to Relief work:

DMI was one of the NGOs who had involved in the immediate Tsunami relief work in Chennai, Karaikal, Kanyakumari and Nagapattinam Districts. More than 1000 volunteers were mobilized by DMI to assist the victims in the affected coastal areas.

The relief work included:

- Distributing cooked food
- Distributed new and used cloths
- Medical camps
- Burying the dead bodies
- Cleaning the debris
- Providing temporary shelter
- Distributing home appliances
- Psycho – social support in the relief camps

Rehabilitation services:

Counselling

10990 persons in 53 villages were counseled to manage difficult situations. Their confidence of a bright future was built. School children were also helped to refresh their mind and bodies helping them concentrate on their studies

Medical camp

The medical team provides services to the Tsunami affected in their shelter areas. The mobile team reaches out the un-reached addressing the health needs of the affected. Ambulance services are also being provided to take patients to hospitals in Thanjavur and Chennai. The medical team has covered 53 villages so far, benefiting 26, 576 patients.

Child Development:

DMI works with the Tsunami affected children for their future development. Health camps, counseling, moral education, personality building programmes, extra curricular activities like drawing, singing, dancing etc are being carried out.



DMI - Relief work



DMI - Skill Training

Skill training programme for the youth:

Need based skill training is being imparted to the youth which help them stand on their on feet. The following units/centers are established to impart the training:

- Tailoring unit
- Driving school
- Computer centers
- Boat engine mechanism learning unit

Women development:

SHGs have been formed with women and the members were trained to take up

income generating activities. Training was given on making masala powders, flour, vermi compost, washing powder, vermicelli semia, jute bag, sandals. The products made by these SHG groups are sold in the markets in the brand name "Alai makal".

DMI can be contacted at:

Cecilia Bhavan, No. 4/44

Shivashakthi Nagar,

South Palpannaichery

Nagai-611 001

Phone/fax: 04365-252651

Email: dminagapattinam@yahoo.com ■

Events round up

Permanent shelter review – 3 January 2006

A review meeting on shelter construction was organized by NCRC at the Main Conference Hall in the Collectorate, Nagapattinam. The meeting was chaired by Dr. J. Radhakrishnan, District Collector, Nagapattinam. 26 NGOs involved in shelter construction attended the review meeting. Appreciating the work done by the NGOs the Collector said that it was necessary to maintain the tempo in rehabilitation work to maintain the national and international eminence gained by the district.

Agriculture review meeting – 6 January 2006

A review meeting was organized by NCRC at the Main Conference Hall, Collectorate, Nagapattinam. The meeting reviewed the following:

- Long term activities – wet & dry land
- Immediate/ short term activities, especially in dry land
- Common works

The meeting also invited views on research oriented implementation for agricultural development and conducting workshops.

Role of NGOs in harvesting of paddy, planning for implementation and capacity building (in the forthcoming second season) and other issues related to implementation were also discussed.

Children core group meeting – 6 January 2006

A core group meeting to discuss on children related issues was organized by NCRC at the front office of NCRC in the Collectorate, Nagapattinam

The members of the core group, formed during Children's Day Celebrations (CDC), discussed the following:

- Setting up a joint bank account for addressing children's issues
- Planning on future activities for the children
- Improving the coordination among the NGOs working with the Children.
- Setting up a three- tire forum to review the plans and activities.

Workshop on Child Rights and Child Protection – 24 January 2006

NGO Coordination and Resource Centre (NCRC) facilitated a full day workshop on child right's and child protection at Hotel VPN, Nagapattinam, for the NGOs working with Children in tsunami affected areas of Nagapattinam district. Mr. Suresh Dharma of Center for Child Rights and Development (CCRD), Chennai was the resource person of the day.

The participants shared their experience of handling children affected by the huge disaster and the issues identified by them with regard to child abuse, child marriages, child trafficking, etc. A documentary prepared by SPEECH on child labour (*Muthurasu*) was filmed in the workshop. The group also discussed on the issues they have encountered, how they handled it and how they are struggling to solve few others. Mr. Mathialagan and Mr. Kalidasan from People's watch, Madurai, advocates by profession working with Tsunami Legal Action Committee (TLAC) shared true instances and important cases handled by them and the legal proceedings thereof. Towards the end of the session, the participants planned out the method to go about for strict implementation of the PM's Child Assistance scheme and PM's Scholarship for Tsunami affected children.

ICSF Delegate's visit to Nagapattinam – 21 and 22 January 2006

About 30 delegates from Sri Lanka, Indonesia and other tsunami affected areas, who are participating in the ICSF Conference being held at Chennai, visited Nagapattinam and NCRC.

One the first day, following a presentation by the District Collector at the Collectorate in the morning, the delegates visited Akkarapettai and some SHGs, met NGOs at Vizhundamavadi and later in the evening had a debriefing at NCRC.

On the second day the team visited the fish landing centres and fish marketing society in Tarangambadi. Following this, SIFFS gave an overview on their Shelter construction and subsequently the team visited some shelter sites of SIFFS. ■

Resources update



“Our coast our right”

A film in Tamil explaining the coastal regulation zone and the economics and politics of its implementation

Produced by: Centre for Education and Documentation, Bangalore.

The contents of the CD are also available in printed form “Namathu Kadarkarai Namathu Urimai”

Both are available free of cost, write to CED, No.7, 8th Main, 3rd Phase, Domlur 2nd stage, Bangalore - 560071, Ph: 080 25353397

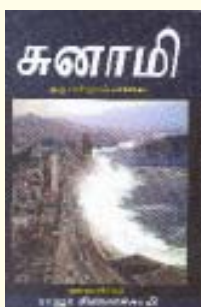


The State and Civil Society in Disaster Response

An Analysis of the Tamil Nadu Tsunami Experience

Published by: Tata Institute of Social Sciences

This report is essentially a macro analysis of the state and civil society response in Tamil Nadu to the Tsunami. The report incorporates an overview of state and civil society Tsunami response interventions and discusses issues related to vulnerability and exclusion. It brings together the experiences of affected people and a range of actors involved in tsunami response to arrive at an understanding of institutional factors that influence effectiveness and reach of the relief and rehabilitation processes. These analyses are undertaken with the objective of identifying lessons that can be taken forward and provide direction



Tsunami – A multidirectional vision

Language: Tamil

Author: Mr. Raja Chinnasamy

Price: Rs. 150

Reference copy available at: NCRC

This book is a consolidation of all events, details, news, facts and information related to the Tsunami. It paved way for the author to pour out his feelings on the lives lost and destruction faced due to the huge disaster. He has compiled stories from newspapers and other media sources, briefed on the relief and rehabilitation work done by Government and NGOs and highlighted the future plans like public awareness on disaster preparedness, building biological mechanisms to protect coastal communities from future disasters in all the tsunami affected districts in Tamil Nadu, namely Kanyakumari, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore and Chennai.

The author intends to make this as a source book to know about the Tsunami for the generations to come. This publication will also be very useful to students, research scholars doing studies on coastal life and its history, geologists and many others in present and future.

For latest articles on Tsunami rehabilitation log on to:

<http://www.indiadisasters.org/tsunami/>

Tsunami Response Watch is a one-stop humanitarian website that pools together information on tsunami response efforts in India. It is a voluntary effort by a small group of professionals from media, humanitarian emergency work and software industry.

www.indiadisasters.org

This site is about people who live with disasters even when they are torn apart by them. It is about the science, politics and sociology of disasters. It is a tool for those who would like to do something about the disasters and their devastating impact

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