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Building an understanding...

The recent withdrawal of a few of the NGOs from the construction of permanent shelters, kindled a process of serious deliberations and thinking on issues that plague construction of permanent shelters in Nagapattinam.

The urgency of the government to reach the targets, the sufferings of the community in temporary shelters, the concerns of the NGOs related to construction...all brought the issues of shelter back into the limelight. The government's need to ensure completion of targets in time so that the people have a safe abode before the monsoons is understandable. But the position of the NGOs too, on various issues related to construction, such as not having adequate or quality land, and shortages of material and labour, cannot be dismissed. For instance, it is estimated that 30 crores of bricks are needed to complete the houses that have been allotted by the government to the NGOs, and so many are not available. Availability and transportation of sand is becoming a key constraint. Since many of the houses are in same stage of construction, a particular kind of skilled labour is required but is in limited supply. This indicates the large gap in demand and supply. Given these limitations, the NGOs are trying their best to complete the houses in time. Mutual understanding of the compulsions and limitations between the NGOs and the government is required in a situation where neither party is profiteering.

The approach of the monsoons is likely to bring more miseries and travails to a community that, after being displaced by the Tsunami, has further suffered floods twice. Indulging in a blame game will only worsen the situation. A solution to the problems needs to be found through assessment of the ground reality, dialogue, and listening and understanding the concerns and limitations of all. Unless a win-win solution is evolved, the community will be the ultimate losers. ■

The lingering pain...

When Prakash was asked to put a name to faces showing different facial expressions – ranging from sober to extreme – he immediately placed his father’s name on a picture with the cruel face, and his mother’s, whom he lost to the tsunami, on a smiling face. The occasion was a children’s meet organized by NCRC and SNEHA in Tarangambadi for the orphan and semi-orphan children who lost their parents during the tsunami. In a focused group discussion, the orphans unveiled the tales of grief and despair.



Expressions at the children’s meet

Prakash and his brother Praveen have unpleasant thoughts about their father who left them soon after their mother’s death. Their father Anjappan, a fisherman hailing from Chinnamedu, walked out of his three children’s lives (the youngest one is a three year old girl) to marry a lady from Nagapattinam two weeks after the tsunami. Now their grandfather takes care of the children. When asked to describe his family Prakash burst out, “If our mother had been with us, we would not have been in this situation. Our father has been cruel to us”. His brother also wept bitterly.



Prashanthi, an inhabitant of Chandrapadi, lost her father Pichavaram in the tsunami. Her mother was disabled by the disaster. Prashanthi was studying in the 10th standard then and was forced to discontinue her studies. Her dreams are now getting strangled within the four walls of the house. Though she received training on alternative employment, conducted by some NGOs in the district, she has not yet been able to pursue any earning activity. The family is surviving on the tsunami death compensation which they got for her father’s death.

Sukanya’s story is rather different. She lost her mother in tsunami and within a year her father remarried. She and her siblings couldn’t withstand the ill-treatment meted out by their step mother and moved to their uncle’s place. Recently, they lost the support of their father when he died due to hysteria.

Other children also shed tears as they remembered their lost parents and spoke of their helplessness.

Though it is one and a half years since the tsunami hit the people along the coastal belt of Nagapattinam, the children who lost their parents are still in desolation. Government estimates shows that 600 children in the tsunami hit area of Nagapattinam come under the category of orphans and semi-orphans. A few children who lost their parents and loved ones were adopted by government orphanages, which come under the Social Welfare departments. The others are still with the family or relatives.

These children have lots to tell. The disaster brought considerable changes to their lives. Relief and rehabilitation support poured in. They received the assistance for their immediate needs. They received psycho-social support. But they also had to cope with the social and economic changes took place around them, of being moved into orphanages or with other family members.

The issue of children orphaned by the tsunami has emerged as a subject for debate. Days after the tsunami, the government’s immediate reaction was to call for people to come forward and adopt the orphaned children. There was a deluge of people and organizations from India and abroad coming forward to adopt these children. This option of adoption for orphaned children remained controversial. Trafficking in children for labour and sex in the guise of adoption were the main concerns.

The Tamil Nadu government addressed these concerns through various measures and directives including one that specified that no child was to be removed from the tsunami-affected district, and that all orphans without caretakers would be housed in government orphanages. Three orphanages were established in Cuddalore, Nagapattinam and Kanyakumari for ‘tsunami orphans’. A fixed deposit of Rs. 500,000 was created for each orphan to be used for studies and self-employment when the child becomes a major.

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Wrapping-up

RDT is in the process of phasing out its activities in Nagapattinam. In an interview with NCRC **Mr. Sahar, Project Coordinator for Rural Development Trust (RDT)** shares RDT's experience and views on working in Nagapattinam for tsunami relief and rehabilitation.

Timely help...

RDT was one among the many altruistic organizations that rushed in with relief work in Nagapattinam soon after the tsunami. RDT carried with them a wealth of experience gained by providing relief work during earlier disasters like the Kutch earthquake. This experience helped them to get ready resources and personnel and respond swiftly in the tsunami ravaged villages of Nagapattinam. In addition, the responses from the district administration and the local bodies were encouraging.

Mr. Sahar said that the village set up of Nagapattinam district especially that of the coastal community was remarkable, with the traditional Panchayat playing a major role in decision making. Although, common concerns were preferred over individual concerns, unity and cooperation of the entire villagers was ensured by the Panchayat while taking decisions. The people were hard working and proud of their heritage. The role of women from fisher households in post-catch activity was significant as they shared a part of the jobs related to livelihood. Devotion to deities was very high with festivals providing a reinforcement of belief as well as an opportunity for fun and recreation.

He felt that the works of NGOs contributed to the development of the community across the sectors. Even in the post tsunami situation the cooperation and support of the people as well as the panchayat members was appreciable in the process of their development.

While talking about permanent shelter construction, Mr. Sahar suggested that it would be worthwhile to note the experiences from three different stakeholders – the people, district administration and the NGOs.



Houses and a school built by RDT

Experience of working with the people

For every little aspect related to construction of permanent shelters RDT consulted the community and solicited their support and participation. For instance a problem related to water for construction was solved with the help of the village panchayat.

Experience with the District Administration

The district administration gave due support and encouragement at all times, in providing land, making layouts, solving the problems etc. Mr. Sahay noted that the support of the district administration was useful in enabling timely completion of its construction activities.

RDT was established in Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh by Fr. Vincent Ferrer and Mrs. Anne Ferrer in the year 1969.

It is a secular, social and voluntary organization that works for dalits, tribes, weaker sections and disabled. It carried out relief and rehabilitation activities in Kutch (Gujarat) and Nagapattinam soon after the natural disasters. In Nagapattinam and Karaikal, RDT has provided 575 FRP boats with nets, engines and ice boxes, 5 trawlers, 4 school buildings, a community hall, 51 cows with calves, relief kits, household and educational materials.

RDT constructed permanent houses for 411 families in Thazhampettai, Veppancherry, Chinnamedu and Vettaikara Veedu (Karaikal). Of the 411 houses, 201 in Thazhampettai and Veppancherry habitations were handed over in June and the remaining, in Chinnamedu and Vettaikara Veedu are will be handed over in July. RDT would stop their activities in Nagapattinam by the middle of August 2006.

Experience with NGOs

Most of the NGOs in Nagapattinam have done fairly well, noted Mr. Sahay. When it came to delivering the task, each NGO was independent. However, he felt, at times if NGOs came together to work it would have improved the performance. For instance, the budget for rehabilitation work had gone up due to increase in material cost. This affected most of the NGOs. Had there been an understanding among the NGOs in finalizing prices for local construction materials economies of scale could have been forged.

Focal point in the developmental phase

In the developmental phase, literacy and education should be the focus. In addition, the community, especially women should be included in any developmental activities. Mr Sahay noted that in RDT's experience women had been successful in group activities like SHGs. Yet, they never formed part of traditional systems of the community, or decision making bodies. RDT's Anantapur experience gave them the belief that it was possible to make women equal partners in the developmental process. Of course, it required lot of efforts and time. RDT used to share its dream of a Nagapattinam comprising 50% representation of women in the leadership of traditional Panchayat. Besides empowering women for leadership and participation, men should also be educated and motivated to support these initiatives. ■

P. Buruslin Mento

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The experiences shared by the children at the meet remind us to keep checking on the safety of these children. How are the institutions taking care of the orphans? Are the families accepting them? Are the grants afforded to the children being used for their welfare? Who is responsible to support or monitor these welfare mechanisms? What can the community do to co-ordinate these activities?

The children's meet organized by SNEHA and NCRC in Tarangambadi is a first step towards addressing the issues of orphans and semi-orphans. More meetings of this sort with the children in other taluks are on the anvil. ■

What ails permanent shelter construction

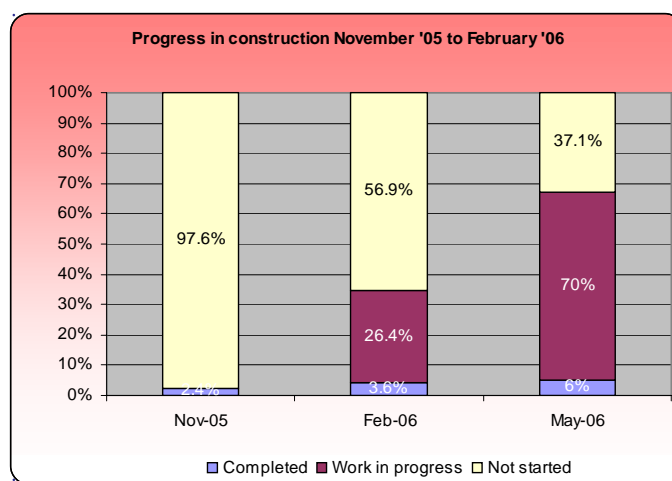
Permanent shelter construction in Nagapattinam district began in significant measure after November 2005. A majority of the land required for construction was acquired by the government and handed over to the NGOs.

In February 2006 there were 24.6% houses that were in progress. By May 2006, nearly a year and half after the tsunami only 6% of all the permanent construction was complete

What are the underlying problems behind this slow pace of construction? The NGOs have already started construction in most of the sites so what preventing its progress?

- Poor site, inappropriate terrain and land type make it difficult to plan and build
- Shortage of material and manpower
- Increase in material process – in some cases the material costs have doubled
- Lack of planning and foresight by agencies resulting in cash-flow problems
- Pressure from the government to complete work resulting in inadequate planning
- The labour-net initiative by NCRC getting delayed due to 'ownership' related issues. This initiative sought to maintain detailed information on human and material resources and coordinate these.

For a synergistic partnership between government and NGOs to work, these issues need to be discussed and solutions evolved.



Source: Government data on the progress of construction as on November 2005, February 2006 and May 2006 ■

NGO Profile - OfERR Organization for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation

OfERR, a non-profit, non political service organization, was founded in 1984, with the main objective of assisting and rendering relief to Tamil refugees who fled Ceylon due to the ethnic conflict and settled in India.

The December 2004 Tsunami which caused colossal loss to life and property to the inhabitants of **Nagapattinam, Kanniyakumary** and **Cuddalore** districts, uprooted them from their routine life and left a trail of profound human tragedy.

KEY ACTIVITIES

Psychosocial support

With the main objective of improving and sustaining the physical and mental health status of the 17,263 people in the 3 districts, OfERR started to provide psychosocial support to the community, from the acute phase, immediately after the disaster, extending for several months and beyond, until the community was rehabilitated both physically and psychologically.

Through family visits, OfERR's para-counselors hold community meetings and individual counseling to help the people to regain their self-esteem.

Women's empowerment

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are set up in villages to motivate women to engage in income generation programs such as tailoring, spirulina cultivation etc. OfERR also provides women's empowerment training and helps promote sales of their products.

Medical and healthcare

The health workers at the camps are trained in preventive healthcare. Handbills are given out and posters are put up in the villages to increase awareness on clean water sanitation and communicable diseases. First aid kits are periodically provided in these villages through the health workers.

Education program

The organization maintains close contact with principals and teachers and also conducts meetings with parents to ensure that students attend school

regularly. Students' associations at the school and village levels are formed to motivate and support one another. OfERR also conducts awareness programs, coaching & nursery classes, sports meets and distributes sports material to the children.



Offering shelter and psychosocial support

Capacity building

The Tamil refugees are also given training in computer knowledge, personality development, spoken English, home gardening etc.

Provision of basic facilities

With the assistance of **ECHO** (European Commission Humanitarian Aid Organization) and NGOs like **Christian Aid** and **Dan Church Aid**, OfERR has provided 3364 temporary shelters with proper water and sanitation facilities in 26 villages in 3 districts. Thatched roofs, kitchen extension with smokeless Chula, plinth work, tar sheet replacements, fire buckets to extinguish fire, shelves, fans, toilets and bathrooms were provided. Solar streetlights, earth fillings, channel drainage, syntex water tanks and roads were also

built. 53 community centers with solar lights and solar lamps were put up in the villages.

Despite various challenges to their services such as high expectations of the people, expectations of material help, duplication aspect of the intervention, etc., OfERR's experience with Tamil refugees in the past 21 years has enabled them to efficiently help those affected by the tsunami.

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Right to Information

“*Payanpaduthuvom payanpaduthuvom Thagaval Urimai Sathathai payanpaduthuvom*” (let’s utilize, let’s utilize the right to information) was one of the slogans used during a campaign to bring awareness on ‘Right to Information Act 2005. The campaign was organized in Kollidam block of Nagapattinam by the Village Information Centre of NCRC. A rally was held on 24 and 25 July 2006 with the help of 20 volunteers, which covered 13 villages over a distance of 38 kilometers and a time of 22 hours.

Meetings were organized at central places in the villages and pamphlets distributed. Traditional songs were sung to pull crowds to the rally.

The slogans used during the campaign were very catchy and simple and the messages were delivered in simple and interesting way. Some slogans used to beckon the crowds were “*Vellattum Vellattum Thagaval Urimai Sattam Vellattum* (triumph triumph, let the right to information triumph); “*Thagaval Ketpathu Ovovuruvarin Urimai Agum*” (to ask for information is everyone’s right); “*Thagaval Kodupathu Arasangathin kadamai agum*” (it is the duty of the government to give information).

The community was given guidance on the kind of information they could seek, how to write the applications for getting the information, whom to approach, etc. Their queries were also clarified. ■



Events roundup - July

248 houses handed over in Keechankuppam

6 July, 2006

Seva Bharathi handed over 248 houses to the tsunami affected community of Keechankuppam. At a function at Keechankuppam, Swamiji Gautamananda Swamikal, Ramakrishna Ashram Chennai, presented a model to PO-DRDA signifying the hand over. Mr. Mohan Bhagat, RSS National Coordinator, and Shankar Dhatwagi of Seva Bharathi were also present on the occasion.

Meeting on Agriculture with NGOs

4 and 8 July, 2006

NCRC organized two meetings on agriculture. The first meeting reviewed the current activities in agriculture sector and planned activities for the second season. Planning for the national workshop on disaster preparedness and for NGO exhibits at the workshop were also on the agenda. Responsibilities on collection of information were handed out.

The second meeting took stock of the status of exhibits and the modalities of information collection for the workshop. It was decided to hold a meeting on July 18, 2006 to consolidate the information.

Children Core Group Meeting

6 July, 2006

The Children core group met to discuss:

Teachers’ training programme

- Evaluation of workshop on Children Parliament
- Mobilizing fund towards education of 1000 poor students
- Bank account for children educational fund
- Appointment with District Collector
- Having children in the core group
- Handing accounts over to Finance Committee
- Meeting with MLAs
- Applications seeking help

14 representatives from 10 NGOs participated in the meeting.

Shelter construction progress review

7, 14, 21, 28 July, 2006

In the shelter review meetings the District Collector reviewed the progress of construction of permanent shelters in the district - NGO wise. He asked the NGOs to accelerate the construction progress taking into account of the impending monsoon. He also cited the fire accident in Thethi temporary shelter and said that the relocation of people to marriage halls could raise many social as well as livelihood issues in the

community. He said that in order to avoid further complications, the affected people need permanent shelters at least before the second anniversary of the tsunami. The quality of construction was emphasized upon. A total of 25 NGOs participated across all the meetings.

Expert consultations on shelter reconstruction survey

11 July, 2006

The Government of Tamilnadu, UNDP and Tamilnadu Tsunami Resource Centre (TNTRC) organized a meeting on consultation and dissemination on the post tsunami shelter reconstruction survey conducted by UNDP, NCRC and Hunnarshala. The meeting, held in Chennai, was attended by representatives from the UN, the government, NCRC and TNTRC. The meeting discussed the findings, identified gaps, suggested additions and clarifications. The study will be modified based on the deliberations at the meeting and disseminated to all concerned.

Addressing the grievances of fishermen

14 July, 2006

In a meeting called for by the District Collector, fishermen from around 15 villages shared their grievances. The District Collector responded to their problems by directing them to the concerned officials. The Tahsildar attending to tsunami related cases was directed to look in to the problems.

Issues put forward by the fishermen included:

- Distribution of ID card for fishermen
- Reinstalling separate bus service for women fish vendors
- Clearance of death compensation at the earliest
- Deposit of tsunami orphaned money to the account of the guardian
- Technical problems in en-cashing the cheques given by the government in the second phase ■

Book Review

Joint evaluation of the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami: Synthesis Report

By John Telford and John Cosgrave

Contributing author: Rachel Houghton

Published by the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC)

London, July 2006

This Synthesis Report is the outcome of an international collaborative process involving over 40 humanitarian and development cooperation agencies. Individuals involved have come primarily from the evaluation departments of UN agencies, multi- and bilateral donors, as well as non-governmental organizations, the Red Cross Movement and a number of research groups.

A week after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, a number of members of ALNAP – the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in humanitarian action – began to discuss how to coordinate evaluations of the tsunami response. A consultative interagency and donor meeting was subsequently convened in Geneva on 23 February 2005. Those present were interested in maximizing learning from the tsunami response through thematic joint evaluation. They identified five key areas for investigation: coordination; needs assessment; the impact of the international response on local and national capacities, links between relief, rehabilitation and longer term development (LRRD); and the funding response. Most of the agencies present at that meeting subsequently formed the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC), and management of each thematic area was set up with the evaluation departments of interested TEC agencies forming a series of Steering Committees that provided the necessary oversight for each of the studies.

This synthesis is based on these five thematic studies, each undertaken by one or more independent evaluation team/s. The evaluations involved in-depth country case-studies, beneficiary surveys and extensive consultations with stakeholders. The report also benefits from a wealth of secondary sources produced on the tsunami response.

For copies of this publication please contact:

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Book Review

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2006 UNICEF



The State of the World's Children 2006 report focuses on excluded and invisible children who lack access to essential services, protection and participation.

The report give a brief on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the broader aims of the Millennium Declaration and how this would transform the lives of millions of children, escape extreme poverty and malnutrition, gain access to safe water and decent sanitation facilities and complete primary schooling.

It observes that, though some regions and countries have fallen behind, the goals can still be met. The Member States of the United Nations are committed to meeting the MDGs and have coalesced around a set of key initiatives to accelerate progress. Putting these initiatives into practice will demand renewed commitment to the Millennium agenda and additional resources. It will also require a much stronger focus on reaching those children currently excluded from essential services and denied protection and participation. Unless many more of these children are reached, several of the MDGs – particularly the goal on universal primary education – will simply not be met on time or in full.

The report says that the children who are hardest to reach include those living in the poorest countries and most deprived communities; children facing discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability or membership of an indigenous group; children caught up in armed conflict or affected by HIV/AIDS; and children who lack a formal identity, who suffer child protection abuses or who are not treated as children. These children, the factors that exclude them and make them invisible, and the actions that those responsible for their well-being must take to safeguard and include them are the focus of *The State of the World's Children 2006*.

A companion CD-ROM with exclusive multimedia features is also available with the report. **The CD-ROM includes:**

- Eight profiles of excluded children from around the world with video, text, audio interviews and related information
- A selection of feature stories
- Downloadable maps, charts, graphs and photographs
- A photo essay
- Interviews with UNICEF experts
- Lucy and the world of invisible children– a children's story
- Statistical tables
- DevInfo, an easily accessible database of indicators for monitoring progress on global and national commitments to human development especially adapted for The State of the World's Children 2006
- Press materials
- The State of the World's Children 2006
- Abridged interactive version (HTML)
- Full text version (PDF)

For getting a copy of this book and CD please write to :

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