

Villagers being evacuated

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Water, water, everywhere...

Call it a case of adding insult to injury. Apart from being the worst hit in the Tsunami, Nagapattinam also has had to face flooding in its northern blocks of Sirkali and Kollidam due to the rising of water levels in Mettur, as well as the heavy rains that lashed the coast in the last couple of weeks. The administration and the NGOs handled the situation with great efficiency, but how much more can this community take before it breaks, is the question. There were days when about 1.5 lakhs of food packets were being distributed to the flood-hit and more than 70,000 people were relocated to relief camps in safer areas.

It was fortunate that the threatened cyclone dissipated into a mild depression. Despite the reduction of the anticipated ferocity, areas like Puliyanthurai were totally submerged and more than 500 families left homeless. Cut off from the main land by a tributary and fenced in by the sea, they stood no chance when the waters rose beyond their chest levels. Their houses, made of mud walls, just crumbled leaving behind a canopy of a thatch roof. They had only one manually operated ferry to bring them to the safety of the mainland. The older people were left atop the roof of one of the few RCC houses to fend for themselves for more than 24 hours as they would not be able to make it to the mainland in these conditions. The octogenarian's wide toothless smile at having survived this ordeal and living to tell the tale is a wondrous sight to behold.

They are just agricultural labourers with no bank balances and no hopes of ever being able to rebuild their houses. With the extensive damages in the agricultural areas in this region, they have no hopes of a job also in the near future. Bleak eyes looking out at an equally bleak future and stoically waiting for whatever else nature has in store for them.

What do the gurus of "disaster preparedness" have to say that will mitigate their worries of how to pay for the books that were lost, the exam fees that are just round the corner, the household articles that are required to cook their next meal or even about the wherewithal for this next meal?

It's time that we, in Nagapattinam, took stock of our vulnerabilities. With World Bank and ADB coming in with funds and expertise and a large presence of committed NGOs, we should be able to do a vulnerability mapping of the entire district. We should be able to assure each vulnerable locality at least one "safe and dry community structure" that is accessible to all. We should be able to operationalise the decentralized disaster management task forces that have been set up so that people do not have to depend on the goodwill and risk bearing capacity of their neighbours to protect them. We need to seriously look at our drainage mechanisms and invest in a good town planner. But, above all, we need to build up the coping capacity of our people and this is certainly more challenging than just setting up a few structures. This is a developmental issue and cannot be wished away or corrected with "band-aid" solutions like skill building in tailoring or computer classes. We need to invest time and energy in identifying and developing enterprises that will provide a stable income.

What we need is the expertise, the will, the motivationany takers? ■

Hearing the unheard voices: Community radio in Nagapattinam

“People talking without speaking, people hearing without listening...” goes the line of a popular song of the seventies. The tsunami relief and rehabilitation interventions have also followed on similar lines. An influx of implementers, donors and do-gooders; a host of ideas and a pocket full of money that needs to be spent. Where does the twain of the Nagapattinam community’s needs and sustainable developmental requirements match the framework, policies and the experiential learning gleaned from other disasters, and from implementers? A common platform, which allows the community to *speak* and the implementers to *listen*, is the need of the hour.

Nagapattinam, with UNDP, is hosting the closest to what can replicate this platform - a **community radio service** that gives an opportunity for the community to air their views, needs and aspirations. This is designed on the lines of “Namma Dhwani” in Karnataka and “Kunjai Panchchi Kutchj” in Bhuj.



Photo from New Indian Express, Trivandrum Edition

Although All India Radio has been providing yeoman service for decades in airing relevant information to the people in the remotest parts of the country, this has to be supplemented by a strong localised community radio movement to ensure greater involvement of the communities in the developmental process. The Community Radio has proven to be a versatile and low-cost medium that protects and promotes the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the land, while supporting and encouraging social changes through ensuring genuine participation among the people. In 2002, the government of India announced a policy for granting community radio licenses to educational institutions. The first community radio station has been operational since February 2004 at Anna University, Chennai. Later, this was replicated at Karnataka and Bhuj to ensure people-centric development processes. Now, we, at Nagapattinam are also joining this movement to ensure that those hitherto unheard voices heard in the right places.

Community radio would:

- Set up a credible and legitimate platform for information sharing between all the stakeholders: government, NGOs and the community
- Provide stakeholders with a better understanding of ground level realities, which, in turn, would enable them to develop and disseminate appropriate responses.
- Help develop and enable community based networks, in a phased manner, to actively participate in the relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness process.

The communication structure would be two tiered and conforming to a hub-spoke model. The communications hub would initially take on the function of a production and dissemination centre, with provisions to function as a cable radio/audio station as well as a community radio station. The use of cable could also develop into a cable video centre in Nagapattinam.

Complementing the cable audio initiative would be a loud speaker narrowcast using the existing loudspeaker infrastructure.

The communications hub would be developed along the lines of a community media centre. The Namma Dhwani Community Media Centre, partnered by VOICES and MYRADA and supported by UNESCO would be used as a prototype model to take this forward.

The hub would be housed in the NGO Coordination and Resource Centre (NCRC) which has high band internet connectivity as well as strong infrastructural support. It would have a professional and full-fledged audio production studio as well as a computer centre. An important feature of the centre would be web browsing whereby relevant material would be downloaded from the net and then appropriately packaged in audio formats and disseminated. Production material developed at the hub, as well as independent communication material would be disseminated through the spokes component of the model.

The centre would build up a database of audio files on relevant issue pertaining to that area. Main areas of programming would be:

- Health
- Disaster Management
- Psychological and psychiatric counseling for tsunami victims
- Phone in programs for relief and related information
- Radio browsing programs about tsunami, weather pattern, entertainment, prices of sea food in nearby markets for fishermen etc.
- Programs on governance, identity and culture
- Programs on gender empowerment
- Programs on access to government schemes, legal issues, self help groups etc.
- Programs on folk and devotional music.

The programming structure would comprise of three segments as per the following details:

- **Indigenous Programming:** The content and format of this segment will be entirely developed by a select team from within the community, identified and trained by Anna University, and shall reflect the immediate concerns of the locals.
- **Information Centered Programming:** This slot shall keep the inhabitants updated on authentic details regarding status of sea, fish catch, weather fluctuations and market related information.
- **RN Channel Downlink:** With permission from All India Radio, the RN Channel downlink facility will be utilized to stream programmes relevant to the islanders.
- **Disaster Warning:** In the event of any catastrophe, as and when it is decided to issue an emergency message from the Disaster Warning Centre at Delhi, it gets top priority and shall override every other signal.

The centre would independently generate content on a daily basis, edit this content and disseminate it using a variety of media. The personnel working in this centre would also collect feedback regularly to see if the programming is rooted in the community. Periodic research would be carried out in this area to see if this intervention is addressing the expressed and unexpressed needs of the people and also for advocacy and highlighting best practices. The research outcomes would dovetail with programming ensuring relevance of the programmes. ■

Building livelihoods

S. Hairulnisha Begam lost her house and all her possessions in the Tsunami. She, her husband Shahul, an auto driver and her two children now live in a temporary shelter, Silladi. Through the self-help group she got assistance to start a STD Booth at Silladi. As per the SHG credit guidelines she was given a loan of Rs. 5000 by CARE–Avvai. With her own contribution of Rs. 2000 she purchased a phone billing machine and got a connection from Reliance. Now she earns Rs.150 per days. Her enterprise has also enabled people from the temporary shelter to have easy access to phone facilities. ■

By Avvai Village Welfare Society



Moments of Joy...Children's Meet

The NGO's working for the Tsunami affected people of Nagapattinam and NCRC organized a children's day Celebration for all Tsunami affected children of Nagapattinam District, on 26th November 2005 from 7 am to 4 p.m. at the district sports stadium, Nagapattinam.

The event, a starter to the one year Tsunami anniversary solidarity programme, helped the children put aside the traumatic experiences that they had gone through during the days following the Tsunami; brought in reminiscences of the people who left their footprints behind and new hopes to those who survived.

The event brought together around 4500 children representing 58 temporary shelters across Nagapattinam. They were accompanied by their family members, a 1000 volunteers and organizers. This is surely a historic event, not only by means of the large representation but by the synergy created by the NGOs working for the cause of women and children.

The cloudy weather did not dampen the spirit of the children or the organizers and providence kept the rains at bay. The day started with a Marathon race that began from the railway station Nagapattinam, flagged off by the Navy Captain Kakkar; children holding the torch, lighted by the Municipal Commissioner of Nagapattinam, ran all the way to the stadium, piloted by volunteers and navy people riding bikes. People lined the roads to cheer the marathon runners.

Hoisting the special flag for the event and releasing 58 balloons representing 58 temporary shelters, Capt. Kakkar announced the event open. The children also took an oath and observed one minute silence in reverence to all those who had left them.



This was followed by group games, the groups being categorized by age. The games happened simultaneously for all the groups at different locations in the stadium. Games like balloon bursting, balloon blowing, save your friend, finding your pair, tug of war, throw ball etc., added to their excitement and fervor. Sweets were distributed to both the winners and losers.

A colorful dance performance by the children in the evening as a part of cultural event aroused lot of cheer and excitement. 28 groups with each group having 6 members simultaneously dancing to the tune of "made in India" was a memorable event.



The closing ceremony was attended by chief guests Mrs. Radhakrishnan, wife of District Collector and 83 year old social activist Padmasri Krishnammal Jayakrishnan. The flag was brought down by Jr. Radhakrishnan.



The event, which saw more than 4000 children affected by a disaster, coming together, etched a landmark in the history of Nagapattinam. The synergetic partnership emerged among the NGOs to make the event a grand success accentuated the saying "united we stand". Above all, the

event gave the affected children sweet memories to cherish and new hopes towards the future. ■

Involving the community in quality monitoring of construction

NCRC held an orientation programme on “quality in construction work” for the area coordinators of SNEHA and Social team of SIFFS in the month of November. The need to have a monitoring mechanism by the community to ensure quality in construction of their own houses emerged as a point for further deliberations. The basic concepts and the technical guidelines for undertaking constructing without compromising on minimum quality in building materials were discussed. The involvement of community and the need to have non-negotiable minimum standards of construction was emphasized.

The pros and cons of involving the community in quality monitoring is an issue of debate. On the one hand the individual’s right of information needs to be respected, while on the other the risk of having incomplete and incorrect knowledge exists. Considering these pros and cons, NCRC plans to facilitate further discussions to evolve at some sort of solution to engage the community at a certain level of quality monitoring.

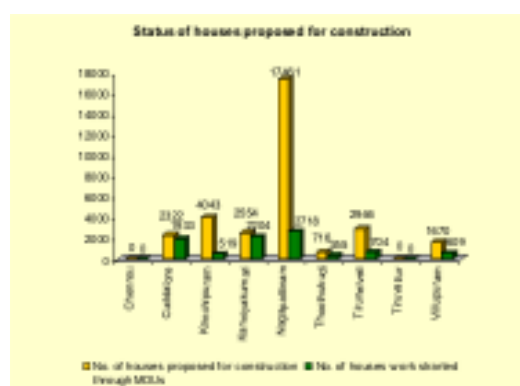
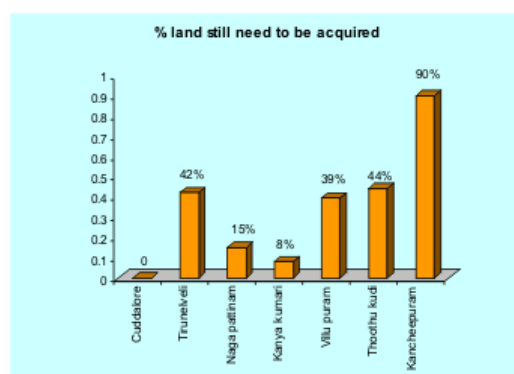
Based on the inputs gained by NCRC in a workshop held by Auroville, Pondichery on ‘developing indicators on quality’ NCRC is planning to organize series of training programme starting January 2006 for the coordinators, the community representatives, and the NGOs working on permanent shelter in Nagapattinam enabling them to keep a tab on construction quality. The steering committee set up with representatives from NCRC, basin SA, Nittin, Sket, Swiss Red Cross and Caritas Srilanka during the workshop at Pondichery would serve as a broader platform to discuss and suggest solutions to issues related to this. ■



Photo courtesy Rural Development Trust

Govt. updates on permanent shelter as on Nov 18, 2005

Tamil Nadu



The information has been sourced from Tamilnadu government website www.tn.gov.in/tsunami

Nagapattinam District

Out of 89 locations identified for shelter construction in Nagai District, land has been acquired in 79 locations; for 10 more locations land acquisition is still in progress. The government has spent Rs. 20 crores on acquiring the lands.

Work has been completed in one tenth of the total units where work started and almost in the final stages of completion in another 10% of units.

Hope foundation handed over 10 houses for the beneficiaries in Vanagiri village while around 300 houses being built by Matha Amrithanantha Maye Math have been completed and awaiting handing over. ■



NGO Profile: Avvai Village Welfare Society

Avvai Village Welfare Society, works in the areas of education, health, women empowerment and community development in Thiruvavur and Nagapattinam districts of Tamilnadu since 1976. The organisation is guided by Gandhian principles of empowering the depressed, neglected and marginalised section of the society to achieve self-actualisation and self-reliance.

Avvai's main focus has been primarily on three groups: children, women and the aged. Towards their welfare Avvai runs a child adoption centre, crèche, imparts primary education and supplementary education for children; awareness generation programmes, family counseling centre, self help groups, short stay home, and vocational training programme for women; and income generation programmes, day care centre, adopt-a-granny programme and a home for senior citizens for the aged.

Through its adopt-a-granny programme Avvai has been providing basic needs support for 55 senior citizens. Technical and financial support is provided by Help-Age International at Kilvelur Block.

Apart from this Avvai implements de-addiction cum rehabilitation programmes, AIDS intervention programmes and Reproductive Child Health programmes.

Avvai networks with government departments and like minded NGOs for promoting education programmes in Nagapattinam district. It is also an active member of various committees – WATSAN committee, district level review committee, district level orphanage committee, anti liquor committee, child labour squad, to name a few.

Avvai is covering 52 villages under Tsunami rehabilitation programme in Nagapattinam through a range of activities aimed at restoring livelihoods like:

- Agriculture - land reclamation
- Micro Credit & Micro Enterprises - loan assistance
- Shelter construction – temporary and permanent
- Other Livelihoods – income generation programmes, loan assistance, provision of materials like nets, engine, etc free of cost,

vocational training for women, formation of special interest groups, SHGs

- Education – renovating school building, provision of education materials, child activity centre, child centered space, construction of ICDS centre,
- Health- medical camp for children and elders,
- Child centered activities - training for children groups, formation of child protection committee



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Regaining soil fertility through bio-mass generation

NCRC facilitated a workshop on “Bio-mass tree generation and vermi-composting” in which 37 NGOs in Nagapattinam participated. They analysed the problems existing in Tsunami affected areas vis a vis agriculture and agreed that soil fertility (soil organic carbon status) was the core problem. Discussions revolved around the importance of bio-mass today, the numbers required per unit area, the species available/to be procured for bio-mass production. At the end of the training programme all the participants decided that 150 bio-mass trees per acre should be planted in consultation with the farmers and species that would be of use for manure, fodder and fuel would be selected. It was also decided to plant the trees before the monsoon season ends.

Another highlight of the workshop was an orientation by Anthoniammal (a woman farmer practising vermi-composting for more than a decade) on the methods (tank and heap) and stages of vermi-composting. The various steps on vermi-composting were discussed right from raw material preparation through introduction of earth worms up to storage of vermi-castings. ■



Guidelines for organising commemorations one year on

Given the interest of many humanitarian, development and other organisations to hold commemorative events or undertake building of memorials on or around the 1st Anniversary of the Tsunami Disaster of 26th December 2004, many people in Batticaloa have been reflecting on what would constitute respectful and psychosocially sensitive ways for organisations to assist families that have endured losses due to the disaster. As members of The Mangrove: Psychosocial Support and Coordination Network – representatives of 25 organisations – met to discuss these issues and evolved guidelines for organisations on commemorating the 1st anniversary of the Tsunami disaster. They are offering assistance to organisations and personnel in their own deliberations and choices about the best ways to support the individuals and communities they work with.

The guidelines highlight the appropriateness of conducting commemorative activities after the 26th of December since the families that have endured losses will often have planned to undertake certain activities, according to their religious or family customs. They stress on the appropriateness of families and communities taking a lead in every aspect of the process and investing in these themselves in whatever way they can. They say that it is best to organise or support commemorative events with small numbers of participants that already know each other (ie. a few families that are neighbours; members of a fishing cooperative). The suitability of building memorials that can function as public utilities like public halls, bus-stands, children’s parks, new buildings or renovations to village temples or churches in the names of the deceased has also been mentioned. The importance of recognising the work done by emergency workers and volunteers; avoiding using emotionally charged or exploitative material; and the need to protect families and individuals from intrusion by media and documentation officers were also stressed.

If you wish to make comments on these guidelines, or wish to receive more information, please contact The Mangrove (Tel: +94-65-2227018; Email: agalaps@eureka.lk) or members of the network. www.themangrove.blogspot.com ■

Another step towards education

Nineteen-year-old Aruna lives with her mother and two sisters in Melamuvarkarai, Sirkali Taluk. After the untimely death of her husband, Aruna's mother began to earn a living by selling fishes. But the meagre income could hardly meet the daily expenses of the household. Despite this she managed to put Aruna through school. Aruna was studying in class 12 when the Tsunami swept through their lives. The family lost many of their possessions and their home was damaged. They became dependent on the Government's relief and compensation.

Even under these circumstances, Aruna successfully passed her final exams. But due to financial constraints she was unable to seek admission into any college.

Aruna's village, Melamuvarkarai, was covered by the Thiruvengadu Village Information Centre (VIC). The VICs, established by NGO Coordination and Resource Centre, engaged in information generation and exchange between the community, NGOs, government and other stakeholders. The coordinator of the VIC met Aruna, who shared her desire to study further. He approached Care Plan, an NGO involved in relief and rehabilitation in the locality and put her case to them. Luck was in Aruna's favour as Care Plan had an exclusive scheme to support the education of fatherless children.

With their support Aruna applied and secured a seat for a Bachelor of Commerce in Poempuhar College of Arts, Melayur. Care Plan paid her admission and tuition fee for the entire academic year. Now, Aruna goes to college, attends her classes and is faring well. As fishing has been resumed in the region, her mother is also back to the shore selling fishes and earning a living.

"After completing my degree, I want to get into a good job so that my mother can take rest. She has sacrificed much to send me to school, now it's my turn to repay," says Aruna. She also expresses her sincere gratitude to the VIC Coordinator who helped her get into the college. Whenever time permits, she visits the VIC to update him on the progress in her college life. ■

V. Y. Sangeetha

Contribute to Kalangarai Vilakkam

This newsletter is a forum for sharing and exchanging information on tsunami rehabilitation efforts and information in Nagapattinam. We invite all stakeholders to contribute to the newsletter. You can submit NGO profiles, case-studies, contribute news items, photographs, good practice in interventions, book reviews, list of publications or any other article of interest.

Please send your contributions to:

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