

Consultation with NGOs on Habitat and Shelter 5 April 2005

Summary Report and Recommendations

A consultative workshop with NGOs intending to take up construction of shelters in the Tsunami affected areas of Nagapattinam was organized by the NGO Coordination Centre at the Conference Hall of the District Collectorate on 5th April 2005. The workshop was attended by over 30 persons representing various NGOs and some experts on habitat and shelter. (Participant list and presentations made by speakers attached). The District Collector attended the consultation and provided clarifications for various issues raised during the discussions.

The objectives of the meeting were:

- clarifying doubts about technical guidelines and GO 172 and suggestions to government for suitable modifications
- to share the outcomes of the expert consultation on habitat and shelter held on 22nd March 2005
- to decide on ways forward with respect to habitat and shelter construction

Main issues discussed, clarifications, suggestions:

- On distance of shelter sites from the sea, the District Collector clarified:
 - If the owners want to rebuild/repair their houses that are within 200 meters from the sea, the government assistance will not be possible.
 - If the shelter is between 200 and 500 meters distance from the sea, the government would assist them in rebuild/repair of the house there itself. If owners want to move beyond 500 m, the government would construct a new house for them, but the existing house and site would be relinquished to the government
 - Responding to a question raised by an NGO, whether NGOs can take up the repair within 200 meters, he assured to get back after discussions with the concerned officials in the government.
- The Collector expressed that communities are unable to understand GOs properly, and suggested that NGOs need to take steps to explain and convince them. He said that communities are of hoping that they can opt for a house beyond 500m and still hold on to their old house within 500m despite the condition of relinquishing their old house. *He made it clear that the condition of Government taking over the old house would be strictly implemented and the communities need to be made aware of this.*
- In addition, the Collector told that there are plenty of opportunities for the NGOs to undertake interventions but stressed that the fund ability and capacity to implement the program are the main areas. He appealed to the NGOs not to commit beyond their capacity as far as permanent shelter was considered as it could lead to serious unwanted problems.

- The government would be flexible in understanding each others' concerns before signing MOU or other technical guidelines, allocation of sites and villages.
- The District Collector suggested that the organisations need to be sensitive towards gender, caste and other discriminatory issues while planning shelters, and making commitments at the village level. He cautioned that not all the people residing in temporary shelters maybe beneficiaries for permanent shelters, and is important to identify the affected and needy ones.
- Most NGOs felt the need to start work immediately and wished to know about plans of the Government. The Collector clarified that Govt. will start one-to-one discussion processes with each NGO within two or three days for allocating villages. These discussions would be held between the District Collector/ Additional Collector and the NGO representative, and will focus on allocation of villages, number of houses, MoU, technical guidelines and the government order. NGOs would be called for discussion and allocation of villages would be mixed between large and small villages. The order in which the NGOs are called should not seen as an indicator of greater or lesser importance given to specific NGOs. The Collector offered that he will be ready to provide letters to NGOs, if they want to convince their donors regarding delay in starting the work
- The Collector visualised the following immediate steps for permanent shelter construction:
 - One to one meetings with the NGOs (as mentioned above)
 - Provisional allocation of villages to NGOs
 - Survey of village by team of NGO representative, Revenue official, Survey department staff and local village representatives. This is to assess the number of houses to be rebuilt based on options taken by individual householders on whether they stay put or move out of the 500m zone.
- The Collector informed that the land for construction would be provided by the government. In case of private lands, government will purchase from the owners and provide the land.
- Most NGOs opined that the government should consider paying insurance, but Collector clarified that as per the G.O. it was the responsibility of the agency constructing the houses. He added that government is planning to organize a meeting of insurance companies with regard to insurance for houses and boats. When it was pointed out that old houses which were not rebuilt would also be there and that it was better that the Government took on the responsibility of insuring all houses, he agreed to take up the matter with the Government.
- On the issue of whether the money for repairs would also be provided by the NGO reconstructing a village or whether it will be provided by the Government, the Collector said that it was his understanding that the Government will put up the money. For houses requiring higher amounts, the Government was not proposing to pay the entire amount and would give only a proportion of the repair costs. In such cases he said that he may have no objection if an NGO provided the extra amount.

- As far as assessment of value of repairs, the Collector said that a mechanism will be worked out and announced soon.
- NGOs opined that the prescribed standards in the guidelines for design of shelters were very high and likely to push up expenses. The Collector told that the government would consider these issues as far as possible, and these issues were discussed during the next expert consultation.
- It was pointed out by Auroville experts that there was no mention in the guideline on eco system restoration (mangroves, shelter belt, etc.) in the GO and would it not be the job of the NGO undertaking village reconstruction to take eco-restoration also. It was clarified by the Collector clarified that the Forest Department was working on the issue of eco restoration and bio-shield and a separate G.O would come out on this. It was also felt the the eco-restoration work need not be linked to permanent shelter construction as it is better done by organizations that specialize in such work.
- One of the NGOs opined that a Village Reconstruction Committee could be formed to assess the situation. The Collector clarified that such a committee already existed composed of Panchayat (constitutional body) representatives, caste Panchayat representatives, women's SHG representatives, etc. However, this body had its limitations and the NGOs will have to work closely with the traditional village community to be successful.
- Clarifications were sought on the cost of permanent shelter. The latest G.O mentions a sum of Rs.1.5 lakhs while the G.O 25 mentioned only Rs.50,000. The Collector clarified that the permanent shelter cost has been increased and the Rs.50,000 figure was no more valid. He however, clarified that if an NGO constructed a 300-325 sq.ft house following all the technical guidelines, the actual amount spent was not a matter of concern. If an NGO could do it in less than 1.5 lakhs no one is going to ask them to ask them to spend more.
- Once again the issue of G.O 25 came up in the context of common infrastructure. Now that the cost per house had escalated three fold, what is the status of the amount to be spent on common infrastructure in the village, was the query. It was made clear that the NGO still had the responsibility to put up common infrastructure in the village. However, what are the common facilities to be put up and what would be the cost needs to clarified. It was also decided that the NGOs could work out some common list of facilities that could be provided in every village and take it up with the administration.
- As far as NGOs who do not have the capacity to take up permanent shelter given that the costs have gone up, the Collector felt that they still can reconstruct public infrastructure like schools.
- NGOs requested for some space/ halls for storing construction materials at villages to which the Collector assured help through coordinating with concerned departments.
- Most NGOs felt that the cost of construction materials might go up due to the huge demand and requested the Collector to provide some help in this regard.

- NGOs expressed their views that minimum guidelines should be prepared and released by the District Administration on restoration of infrastructure facilities and permanent shelters to avoid any conflicts/ comparison between communities, which was agreed by the Collector. The following suggested guidelines were shared by NCRC at this juncture:
 - Ceiling on amount to be spent per shelter.
 - Use of local labour as far as possible; and not to subcontract to other agencies.
 - Agencies to cover entire village, rather than some parts alone, to ensure uniformity in design and construction.
 - The number of houses to be built in a habitat to be agreed upon between community, government and the concerned NGOs.
 - Will not try and change the name of the village for whatever reasons.
 - Ensuring minimum set of common facilities as far as possible, in consultation with communities
 - Ensuring community participation at all stages

Participants suggested the following points that could be added to these guidelines:

- Development of a mechanism for quality control in the construction. (The pros and cons of certification by architect/ engineers or by the community itself was discussed)
- Mechanism for periodic technical audit of the constructions by outside experts

Temporary Shelter

- There were discussions about the damages in temporary shelters due to recent heavy rains. The Collector stressed that though most agencies have done a good work in construction of temporary shelters, nature played again causing serious damages to the structures. He appealed to the NGOs to take up repair of these shelters, and also provide food grains to the communities. He suggested that wherever the temporary shelters were built on low-lying areas, they could be shifted to elevated areas. He also appealed to the NGOs to help the government to locate pump sets for pumping water from the water logged areas.
- The Collector informed that the District Administration could issue letters to donors or auditors of NGOs who take up these repair works and spend additional money for the same.
- Mr. Vivekanandan, (based on the request from the district administration) requested the NGOs to place at least one staff in each temporary shelter to assess the situation and provide need-based support.

Technical Presentations

- Mr. Benny Kuriakose, an architect experienced in designing and implementing habitat and shelters in disaster-struck areas shared his experience, views and ideas. The presentation highlighted some strategies to reduce future damages during natural disasters (such as space between buildings, maintain minimum elevation, combination of deep rooted trees and RCC barriers, etc.). He also shared his analysis on how damages took place during Tsunami. The need to have a multi-pronged approach including site selection, protection, material selection, design of layout, etc. was highlighted. Some designs of habitat and shelters used in other areas were shared with participants.
- Dr. Prashant from Auroville presented satellite images to show the inundation pattern for Nagapattinam district. He showed how in some areas of the coast the land near the coast had better elevation and was safer than land far away which was low lying. He stressed the need to undertake contour mapping of the land provided by the Government and ascertain its safety before start of construction. He also described the DEWATS (Decentralised waste water management system) that could be useful in coastal areas where water tables are high and conventional toilets would not be effective. He also stressed the importance of understanding coastal ecosystems while designing protection systems. He explained the scientific aspects of mangroves, sand dune eco system and tropical fringe forests.

Conclusions and Ways Forward

The Vice Chancellor of Gandhigram Rural University in his concluding remarks highlighted the importance of the following to ensure effective design and implementation of habitat and shelter interventions in the district:

- creating awareness among community regarding permanent shelter construction, issues involved in it
- organizing workshops, sharing experiences
- capacity building programs
- exposure visits for NGOs

Mr. Vivekanandan from NCRC delivered vote of thanks. He assured that NCRC would organize a two-day workshop in collaboration with the Gandhigram Rural University on sharing experiences of various NGOs and explore possibilities of mason training. He informed participants about the proposed expert consultation on 12th April 05 at Chennai and invited participants to attend this important workshop. The venue of the workshop would be informed to participants by NCRC.