

Meeting on Habitat and Shelter in Tsunami Rehabilitation

*Summary and Recommendations of the Meeting held on the 16TH June 2005 at the Main
Conference Hall of the District Collectorate, Nagapattinam*

Background:

The NGO Coordination and Resource Centre (NCRC), Nagapattinam have been organizing a series of workshops and consultations on shelter and habitat wherein NGOs working on shelters, engineers, architects and planners participated. The resettlement of the communities has reached a critical phase as the government has started buying and or allocating land for the construction of houses. In a number of locations the land provided may be farther than 500m but low lying and prone to flooding. The government survey indicates that nearly 90% of the people in the affected communities point to the fact that the choice is being made based on the two-house theory. People role seems to be limited to choosing the location and little ease. Very little is being said about norms of settlement planning, common and public infrastructure, role and participation of the state. Many of the terms and conditions in the MOU still remain questionable. The stage seems appropriate for the concerned NGOs to come together, share views and experiences.

In the above context, a meeting of NGO representatives was organized on the 16th of June 20, 2005 at the District Collectorate Conference Hall. The proceedings of the meeting along with the key decisions taken are given below. List of participants attached.

Proceedings and Key Decisions:

Ms. Shantha Sheela Nair, I.A.S. who made opening remarks highlighted the following points on the design of the shelter (particularly on sanitation and roofing), and requested the NGOs to give serious consideration to them during implementing the shelter programs at the field level.

Sanitation:

1. Going by standard designs for the toilet will have difficulty in adoption.
2. The toilet should be separate from the building and there should be not be attached toilet considering the cultural aspects of the community.
3. Flat pans also will have difficulty in adoption. Fiberglass pans can be used as it is cheap and it is easy to replace when required. The pan should not be flat but a 45-degree to 50-degree pan.
4. Septic tank will not work as removing tank as cleaning involves use of machinery and is tedious and very costly.
5. Leech pit critical to functionality and sustainability of toilets and the leech pit of individual houses can be connected to a common bio gas plant and gas can be supplied to individual house hold.

Roofing:

6. Flat roof top with space for drying fish and there should be accessibility to the roof.
7. Provision of space around the house for repairing the nets.

Mr. Vivekanandan welcomed the gathering and provided a brief outline of the background of the meeting. Following this, four of the agencies working on shelter shared their field experiences (through presentations).

Presentation 1: Tata Relief Committee (TRC) by Capt. Rao

TRC shared their past experiences in shelter construction in other disaster rehab projects in India.

- Orissa cyclone – 3,000 shelters constructed in which about 20% was misused. Toilets were used as storehouses.
- Gujarat earthquake – 2,500 shelters and 2,000 classrooms. The houses had in- house toilets that were new to communities, and as a result the toilets were misused (about 30% in-house toilets were misused).
- Lathur earthquake – 3,000 permanent shelters. 40% new location houses unused and 30 % in-house toilets misused.

Following this, TRC shared their experiences and views about shelter program in Nagapattinam

Mr. Rao suggested that it would be better to create model houses first so that people can see and provide their inputs. The common aspirations of the people are:

- To hold the temporary shelters, their old houses and take possession of the new houses going to be allotted to them.
- Full restoration of livelihood
- Full development of village infrastructure
- Modern fishing and marketing means
- Universal schooling and higher education
- Alternate livelihood for women
- Worried of vacated land grab and encroached land acquisition
- Worried of deprivation of sea front
- Jealous of other village privileges
- Maintenance of new infrastructure

Mr. Rao then shared the plans of TRC on the permanent shelter program in Nagapattinam:

Based on the model house constructed with the suggestions of the people and TRC, about 2,500 houses will be built Tamil Nadu. TRC has also planned to build community cyclone shelter with facilities like community knowledge centre, Panchayat Office in I floor and open terrace to accommodate 2,000 people. A medical unit will be made available in case people have to be sheltered for more than 48 hours. The local Panchayat will be in charge of its maintenance. The building will have 8 ft foundation and 5 ft plinth height. This is arrived from the observations made form a temple in the locality that survived Tsunami because of its five feet depth foundation.

A desalination plant is being set up in Akkarapettai and 12 more will be set up in Nagapattinam District to provide safe drinking water to the people. The cost of a litre of water works out to 18 paise a litre if the capital cost is not considered. The consumer can be charged about 50 paise a litre. The women's group will be trained to operate and maintain these plants.

Presentation 2: Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI) – Dr. Karunakaran, Vice Chancellor

Dr. Karunakaran presented GRI's experience with low cost housing technology and community approach to building shelters.

Present situation in resettlement: Pazhaiyar has all components of the new habitations to come up. Location has to be made safe taking into consideration the point of the sea, the prawn farms and habitation conditions such as drinking water, marshy land. The problems of water, saline soil is very much there. Water has to be transported for construction.

House plan of GRI: A 325 sq. ft model with three rooms and backyard can be constructed for Rs. 32,000 to 34,000 with the full participation of the people.

Award for the best hazard resistant house was given and the two best models been selected. The models selected are those of Orissa group, Orissa Development Technology Forum and that of Auroville, Pondicherry.

The approach to construction adopted by GRI involves community at every stage. Smaller groups of communities are organized. Each group will contribute two people for construction. GRI will provide two well trained masons to work in the project. GRI will educate the owners how proper bonding mixing and curing is important.

GRI is conducting a contest for common utilities like cyclone shelter, Balwadis etc. He proposed the following responsibilities to the government:

- Freezing the cost of the materials.
- Quickening the land acquisition so as to contain the land cost.
- While designing the site energy requirements, safety aspects also need to be considered.

Presentation 3: South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS), Mr. Vivekanandan

Mr. Vivekanandan shared the approach and experiences of SIFFS in shelter construction.

SIFFS Approach to Shelter

- See settlement planning and individual housing as two distinct aspects
- Settlement planning is seen as more critical than individual housing
- Importance given to community ownership of construction process

The main concerns of settlement are

- Safety in view of current tsunami disaster and past history of recurring cyclones
- Key issues in safety: distance and elevation
- Tension between safety and livelihood requirements
- Past experiences of fishermen moving away from beaches has led to loss of beach space on many occasions. Already a forest department structure is coming up in Arkattuthurai within 200 m

He highlighted the main aspects of GO 172 and its implications:

- Does not compel fishermen to move out of beach space
- Provides incentive for community to move out
- Fishermen are caught in dilemma: sending mixed signals
- They have inclination to accept government offer with the hope that they can hold on to original private property on beach

Approach taken by SIFFS towards settlement planning

- Initial analysis of tsunami damages
- Sharing with community using visuals
- Contour mapping of original village and proposed location using “total station” survey equipment
- Detailed village survey by architecture students (Chinnangudi completed) indicating individual plots, etc.
- Mapping and analysing safety and vulnerability of old and new sites
- Analysis of contour map for Chinnangudi under progress
- Options will be developed for village community to decide upon
- SIFFS keen of promoting option of village re-planning: neither in-situ nor relocation
- Use safe areas of existing village and add safe areas adjoining to village to recreate the village.
- Dialogue to start with community in a week or two: keeping our fingers crossed

Settlement planning-other aspects

- Preliminary ideas on common facilities prepared
- Govt. land calculations based on use of 75% area for housing plots, only 25% for roads and common facilities
- 60% is perhaps better as quality of life will depend on roads and common facilities (Sri Lanka: 55%)
- Congested village is unsafe from tsunami and storm surges: “porosity”

House Design process

- Preliminary discussions with community on house designs
- Initial set of 10 designs shown and discussed
- Housing preferences and concepts studied through individual household study by architecture students

- Cultural aspects, functional aspects, etc., documented; Chinnangudi report in 2-3 days
- 4 model houses to be constructed in Tarangambadi and 2 in Chinnangudi based on initial designs
- Technology options, safety features, etc., to be demonstrated
- Socio economic survey including individual housing needs and preferences under way
- Design to be finalised only in July end or August beginning

Community Participation Process

- Initial consultations and awareness of settlement issues
- Dialogue with community to help it take final decision on settlement
- Housing designs to be finalised based on community feedback
- Scale model based feedback at Chinnangudi on 17th June
- Responsibilities being fixed in construction process for individual family, cluster committee (every 50 houses), village committee and SIFFS project team
- Community roles being discussed include role in material procurement, supervision and labour procurement and payment
- One site engineer to be made available to each cluster or two clusters
- Village volunteers already selected and trained for social processes
- Transit shelter to be provided on plot allotted to each family; will help in effective supervision
- Exposure visit to Bhuj for select community leaders in early June—exposure included following aspects:
 - Merits and demerits of owner driven housing, govt. housing and NGO housing
 - Advantages and disadvantages of relocation and in-situ construction
 - Alternative technologies including mud blocks, rammed earth construction, Dewats, etc.

He highlighted the following points that needs urgent consideration.

- Land allotted is low lying even though far away from the sea.
- Land development is not just a question of filling up low lying area
- Settlement plan with adequate safety and other considerations is crucial
- A lot of homework needs to be undertaken before the actual construction can start on the field
- One should not get pressurised by targets to start quickly. It is important to keep in mind the learning from the construction of temp shelters

Presentation 4: Mr. Nedumaran, Community Leader from Tarangampadi

Mr. Nedumaran shared his learning from the visit to Gujarat and Maharashtra. The following main points were highlighted in his presentation.

- Constructions with modern layouts and construction materials have their own drawbacks and are not finding utility to the communities.
- 700 houses constructed in Maharashtra in a low-lying area are not occupied.
- Houses constructed with government funds and NGOs support proves efficient.

Following these presentations, the house was open for discussions.

Fr. Antony Raj of TMSS made the following observations:

- In some villages two to three NGOs are allotted land. Some NGO get into construction without planning and any consideration of the common facilities and infrastructure. The governments stand on this need to be made clear. There should be uniformity and agreement between NGOs for common space.
- In many places low lying lands are allotted.
- How far the community participation needs to be and can be planned
- Due to delays in the land allotments, brokers have come in and have started bargaining. Community proposes their own lands or the lands they want to sell and jack up the prices. It would be useful if the government indicate the prices they will pay so that the NGOs can identify alternate plots.
- It is also important that government indicates which land under consideration will be allotted to which NGO.

Mr. Suratha of World Vision of India raised the following issues:

The land allotted includes the temporary shelter and 50 houses constructed by the government through the fishermen society in the village. Already people are living in these houses. Construction is difficult in these circumstances. Demolishing the existing building involves expenses that are not budgeted and finding source for funds is difficult.

Mr. Paul Raj of GGF raised the following concerns:

- In some villages there are only 30 to 50 families living. But the government list has many people including those who live in good houses.
- Constructing houses with different/ better facilities might lead to a situation difficult to convince the funding agency.

The other concerns as expressed by Dr. Karunakaran were:

- As the NGO and community do not know the HTL, there is urgency to remind the government to indicate the HTL
- If there is going to be sea protection wall there need no be higher investment in housing on protection from sea
- The people should be assured that the land relinquished by them will be available for their livelihood.

After deliberations on the key issues the workshop was concluded. There was an unanimous agreement on the usefulness of these sharing platforms and participants requested frequent workshops/ meetings of this kind to make these rehab program effective.

The Way Forward:

The following decisions were taken, which will be actioned in the coming weeks:

1. To have a dialogue with the government on the following issues:

- Asking the government to consult and provide information to concerned NGOs before purchasing of land.
- To highlight the point that hurrying up of activities will only lead to negative impacts and hence need for understanding of the effects by both the NGOs and government in their own interest.

To action this, Dr. Karunakaran of GRI was requested to lead a team comprising of Fr. Antony Raj of TMSS, Mr. Paul Raj of GGF, Capt. Rao of TRC, Mr. Vivekanandan of SIFFS any other who have interest to join the team.

2. Agreed to have a meeting once a fortnight among the NGOs working on the permanent shelter so that the experience sharing happens systematically. It was also agreed that the NGOs need to have a common understanding on the issues and the ways forward.

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