

Review of Permanent Shelter Meeting with the Collector

Dated: 20.07.05

Venue: Mini Conference Hall

The main agenda for this meeting was the introduction of the decentralized facilitation teams being set up by the administration for weekly review and coordination of regional level construction activities. While waiting for the officials, the NGOs discussed the implications of the latest Government Guidelines on Housing Environmental Check List, which should be adhered to for the construction of the permanent shelter. Taking into account the fact that the land was being allotted by the administration and they were also approving the plans, the NGOs strongly felt that these guidelines should be a joint responsibility of both the NGOs and the administration, with the administration taking on some of the onus for attaining the necessary approvals.

Based on the discussions of the issues faced by the NGOs in the construction activities, the following recommendations were put forth to the administration:

- a) The setting up of a “single window” system for the various approvals/permissions from the panchayaths, municipalities or departments concerned.
- b) The NGOs were not in favour of taking on the responsibility of the recommendation of the formation of a trust or a society for the future upkeep of the housing area. While reaffirming the continued moral responsibility of the NGOs, it was generally felt that formation and sustainability of such societies or trusts could be better managed by the local administration rather than the NGOs who were not going to be here after the completion of the rehabilitation activities.
- c) Withdrawal of the deposit system for obtaining power supply. Huge deposits, to the tune of Rs. 60,000 per site, were being demanded for the provision of power supply and this was escalating the costs of the NGOs. Considering the fact that these construction activities are on a service motive rather than a commercial motive, the NGOs felt that the rules that normally applied to contractors should not be made applicable for those involved in Tsunami rehabilitation activities
- d) The provision of power supply to be at domestic rates rather than the commercial rates presently enforced by the EB.
- e) Non- availability of fresh water in close vicinity for construction activities was also emerging as a matter of concern. The transportation of large quantities of fresh water from distant places was infeasible in terms of both practicality and costs. As stated in the MoU, the administration should ensure adequate supply of water in the construction areas.
- f) The Central Government has not issued central Excise Duty Exemption so far like in the cases of other disasters. Adequate follow- up by the District and State administration in this regard was imperative
- g) NGOs also expressed their disinclination for retrofitting damaged houses.
- h) Lack of written proof of site, land and work allocation from the administration was constraining the NGOs from taking up construction activities in some of the locations. The administration was requested to provide the same at the earliest.

- i) Similarly, demolition of houses for in- situ construction was proving to be an issue with legal implications. The NGOs requested a written authority from the administration for the same.
- j) Lack of involvement of the elected panchayaths in the earlier discussions and later planning was posing a threat to the starting up of construction activities. The administration was requested to ensure that these gaps did not result in unnecessary delays.
- k) Well defined and mutually accepted roles and responsibilities of both the administration and the NGOs to be drawn up to avoid delays and improve coordination

The Collector, Addl. Collector and the other officials later joined the meeting for common review and discussion. The Collector was concerned about the non-attendance of some NGOs and hoped that this would not be a repeating phenomenon. After being appraised of the discussions and recommendations of the NGOs, the Collector responded with the following:

- a) He informed the participants on the progress and problems in land identification and allotment. Private acquisition of land needed to be viewed not only in terms of safety and availability, but also in terms of equity and suitability in terms of livelihood as well as technical requirements and standards. Inequity in providing highly suitable but prime expensive land to some would result in social unrest. There was an increasing tendency among private owners to offload land, which has legal problems, tenancy problems or technical problems like the presence of high-tension cables going above the land making it unsuitable for construction purposes.
- b) The need for closer coordination between the NGOs and the administration in the construction phase was emphasized. Weekly meetings at the district level were not fulfilling these needs leading to avoidable delays. This felt need led to the formation of decentralized coordination and monitoring teams at a cluster level, comprising of B.D.Os, the Municipal Commissioners and other officials. These teams were envisaged to act as liaison /bridge between the District Administration and the NGOs at the field level.
- c) With the formation of these teams, he hoped that the problems of approvals and information gaps with the panchayaths would be solved
- d) To the request for a written directive for demolition, he responded with the alternative of starting construction with the households that have no problem. Based on the experience of TRC and Matha Amrithanadamayi Foundation, he recommended that the construction be undertaken at the behest of the beneficiary with a written request from the beneficiary and their active participation in the demolition of the old structure.
- e) The Collector was also emphatic that in the case of relocation, the old house would have to be relinquished and that continuing ownership of the old as well as the new house would be treated as a crime.
- f) The Collector stated the decision of the administration to carry out repairs for all the temporary structures. While NGO participation was welcome, the

administration was also making alternate arrangements with the BDOs concerned for immediate action.

The Collector then reviewed the progress on the construction activities. He again urged to NGOs to have 20- 30% of the houses completed before the end of the year. While he was not unduly concerned about the delay in locations where the community processes were ongoing and the community was comfortable with the time frame, he was extremely concerned about the locations where the community had serious apprehensions on ever being provided with a permanent shelter either by the NGO or by the Govt.

The meeting came to a close with the Collector introducing the decentralized teams to the NGOs and urging a closer and more frequent coordination between these teams and the NGOs.