

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) conducted a high-level coordination meeting of Ministerial-level representatives from the tsunami-affected countries and their development partners on 18 March 2005 at ADB Headquarters in Manila. The purpose of the meeting was to provide a forum for regional coordination and information sharing to ensure that recovery efforts are effective and to avoid wasteful duplication and overlap during the medium term. Gregory Placid, Director, SAHAYI, was invited to participate in the meeting taking into consideration the commendable work undertaken by SAHAYI in tsunami relief and reconstruction activities in various parts of Kerala. He presented a paper and participated in discussions. The meeting took stock of the recovery efforts. It was the first regional overview of the rehabilitation and reconstruction effort, and provided a comprehensive understanding of the overall situation. The meeting identified the types of information that could be exchanged among tsunami-affected countries and their development partners over the medium term and how the information could be organized and regularly updated. The meeting also explored possible areas of joint work, partnership, coordination, and harmonization. This article is reprinted from "Voluntary Action. Newsletter of Sahayi Center for Collective Learning and Action", Special Issue, Volume 7, No. 1, January – March 2005.

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Participatory Intervention for Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation: Sahayi's Experience

I am grateful to the organisers of the seminar for this opportunity to share with you the experience of a small NGO in Kerala, India, which made an Intervention in tsunami relief and rehabilitation, adopting the participatory approach and involving the tsunami-affected communities in their relief and rehabilitation.

Sahayi – Centre for Collective Learning and Action – is an NGO based in Kerala, committed to the principle of participatory development. It has been involved in capacity building and empowerment programmes, including training and organisation development consultancy, for other NGOs, women's organisations and self-help groups. With the introduction of decentralised planning and programme implementation in India through the Panchayat Raj (local self governance) institutions in the mid 1990s, Sahayi has been empowering people, their elected representatives and grass-root voluntary development organisations to participate effectively in local self governance, through awareness building, participatory training, consultations and networking. As part of this local self governance empowerment intervention, the Sahayi team had an involvement at Alappad Panchayat when the Asian tsunami disaster hit this coastal area, killing the fisher folk and destroying their homes and livelihood assets. The tsunami disaster was a call for action and Sahayi changed its role – from empowerment to relief and rehabilitation.

Disaster on the Kerala Coast

The Indian Ocean Tsunami that hit the southern coast of India on 26th December morning devastated the coastal areas of Tamilnadu, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh and parts of Kerala. The official data on the death toll in India as of 28th December was 11500.

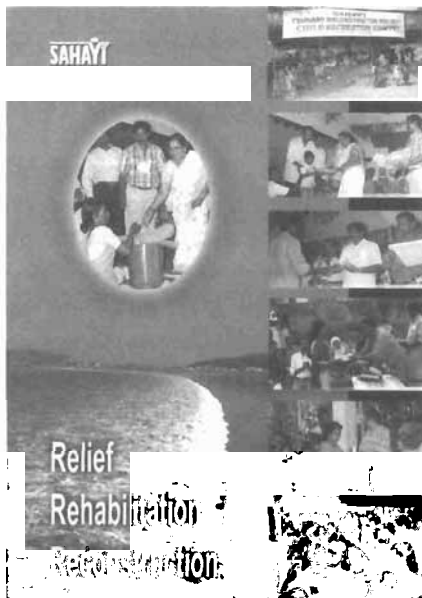
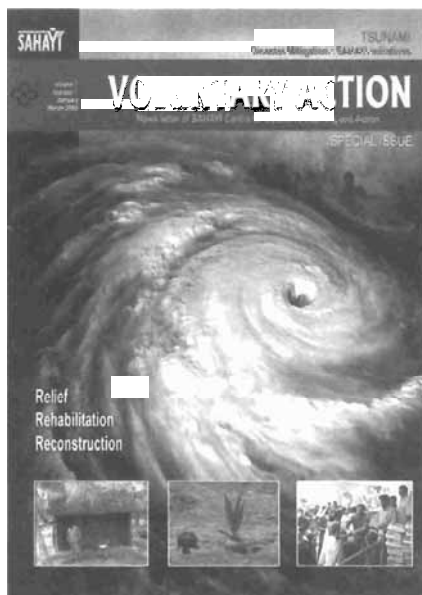
While the media have covered the devastation in Tamilnadu, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and other parts of India, the devastation caused by the killer waves on the Kerala coast has remained more or less unreported. The death toll in Kerala was officially reported as 196 persons. The Alappad village in Kollam District had the maximum death toll and devastation in the state, with official figures reporting 148 lives lost in the village, 2194 houses completely destroyed and around 3000 houses seriously damaged. The fishing community lost all its household possessions and livelihood assets, including fishing craft and nets in the surging waves.

Over 35,000 people from Alappad village were initially accommodated in relief camps organized in 28 locations. Many of the affected families are still in relief camps. The government has provided temporary shelters to around 300 families in the village and sheds for more families are under construction. Livelihood support for the affected families is yet to commence.

Sahayi, with its prior involvement with the community for capacity building to strengthen local self governance, made its crisis response intervention for Tsunami relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction in the Alappad Panchayat within two days of the global tragedy. Immediately after the calamity, members of the Sahayi team rushed to the spot, assessed the nature and extent of damage and got involved in the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction work, in consultation with the district administration and the local self government institution called the Panchayat. Considering its limited resources, Sahayi decided to limit its intervention to this area that had the maximum tsunami devastation in the state.

The State versus NGOs in Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation

In the tsunami relief and rehabilitation efforts in Kerala, India, the state govern-



ment has been playing the lead role. The relief camps are organised and managed by the government. The government takes the primary responsibility for providing permanent and temporary shelters for the families who have lost their houses. Restoring livelihood assets for the families who lost them in the tsunami waves is also the declared responsibility of the state government.

The NGOs have been given a supportive role. For example, the government identifies the beneficiaries who should be given permanent houses, prepares the building plans and estimates and allots to interested NGOs a certain number of houses to be constructed. Direct NGO interventions with independent programmes for relief and rehabilitation are not encouraged.

Legal Restrictions

Disaster relief has traditionally remained a government function in India, with little involvement for non-governmental organisations. There is therefore a regulatory system in force that defines the organisational system for disaster response and this system typically does not provide for community participation or involvement of stakeholders other than the government in disaster relief and rehabilitation.

Disaster relief operations of the state government are governed by certain regulatory restrictions. The Chief Minister's Relief Fund provides the resource for disaster relief and the use of these funds is governed by the provisions relating to the Discretionary Grant of the Financial Code of the state government. According to the relevant legal provisions, the use of the relief fund should be entrusted to the officials of the Revenue Department. These legal provisions restrict the involvement of other relevant government departments or non-governmental agencies in disaster relief operations. Such a crisis response system has perhaps served the purpose in normal disaster situations such as floods, landslides and droughts. However, major natural calamities such as the earthquake in Gujarat and the Asian

tsunami call into question the efficacy of the disaster response system in force.

Community Participation and NGO Involvement

The strict regulatory regime that has characterised the tsunami relief operations in Kerala has not sufficiently encouraged or motivated the NGOs and other civil society organisations to fully commit themselves to the tsunami relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The administrative restrictions have constrained the involvement of the local self governance institutions such as the Panchayat. Even the elected representatives of the people in the local self governance institutions have not been involved in the need assessment or beneficiary selection. Community participation in the state-sponsored relief programmes has been absent. The tsunami-affected families, the real stakeholders, are not involved in the need assessment, programme formulation or selection of beneficiaries. This has led to problems in planning and implementation of the relief and rehabilitation programmes. The benevolent state administration has been facing criticism, opposition and sometimes violent revolts from the tsunami-affected people. This has led to delay in the dispensation of the state-sponsored relief and reconstruction programmes.

The state government has realised the limitation and has announced that a new legislation for disaster relief will be brought in.

Sahayi Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Strategy

Sahayi defined its role and formulated its programmes, taking into consideration the constraints on NGO intervention in tsunami relief in the state. The scope of intervention was limited. At best the organisation could supplement the functions and services of the government; for example, by identifying those needs of the tsunami-affected people that are not met by the programmes.

The strategy is to ensure community involvement in relief and reconstruction programmes to the extent possible. This is based on four factors that emerge from our analysis of the community's response to the tsunami relief programmes and activities.

- The self-respect of the tsunami affected people needs to be restored through community participation in relief and rehabilitation. They don't want to be treated as beggars. The people wish that their dignity and self-respect be acknowledged during this time of distress. The tsunami-affected communities need to be actively involved in the decision-making for and implementation of relief and reconstruction activities, including decisions about rebuilding and relocation of housing, and other services.
- The communities are clear in their desire to have a say in the utilization of resources and to regain control over their own lives. They desire transparency and accountability in the projects undertaken by various agencies, including government.
- Dependency needs to be reduced. While relief and charity are important in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, they should be replaced as soon as possible with assistance to people in regaining their livelihoods and control over their lives.
- There should be an effective role for the local self governance institutions and grass-root NGOs, other civil society organisations and the media in the programme planning and implementation, and effective linkages among these agencies.