

The Indian Ocean Tsunami and Aftermath

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Impact of the Tsunami

Tsunami, a word probably not known to many before 26th December 2004, is now the horrible reality, which along with the earthquake (that caused it) killed more than 250,000 people and changed the lives of many more.

The worst hit countries, in terms of job losses, were Indonesia and Sri Lanka according to the ILO. Around 600,000 people in the most affected regions in Indonesia (Aceh province and the island of Nias) may have lost their sole source of livelihood. The majority of job losses are in fishing, plantation agriculture and unregistered small businesses. In Sri Lanka, over 400,000 workers in the affected districts in the eastern, southern and western coasts have lost their jobs and sources of income. The majority of job losses in Sri Lanka have occurred in the fisheries, hotel and tourism industry (including eco-tourism, which was starting to expand) and the informal economy.

The waves devastated fishing boats, trawlers, nets in many coastal villages. Villagers' fish breeding baskets were swept away by the waves as well. This resulted in a drop in seafood supplies. Most fishermen lost their source of livelihood and seafood, a staple food of coastal areas became very expensive for local people.

The tsunami did not affect everyone alike, the marginalised in society like migrant workers, people of lower caste, the poor suffered more due to negligence of the governments following the disaster. Women despite not being a minority faced discrimination in aid disbursement. Stories of sexual harassment, violence against women, ignorance of women's special needs were oft repeated in many of the affected countries.

Migrant workers mainly from Burma working in the tourist destinations of Thailand: Phuket and PhangNa not only lost their livelihoods, but they did not receive timely and any financial

aid or medical aid. In the absence of papers indicating their legal status in Thailand, seeking medical aid meant being deported back to Burma as an illegal immigrant. Such action was not due to any imagined fear but because of the sudden crackdown on illegal immigrants, prompted by unfounded rumours in the local media of Burmese looters. It was reported that many Burmese workers did not go to the local morgues to identify bodies of loved ones for the fear of being deported.

According to The Guardian, the tsunami cost Aceh a generation and US\$ 4.4bn. A comprehensive study of the damage caused by the tsunami in Indonesia reveals a devastated society and a staggering number of children killed and orphaned. About 700,000 people are homeless, and farmers, fishermen and others with small businesses have lost their livelihoods and cannot rebuild because they have no income. The study done by The World Bank and the Indonesian Government estimates that 37%

of the casualties were under 18. recruiting underage fighters.

Up to 12,160 of those who died, about 13%, were infants. As many as 7,722 children lost both parents and 32,735 lost one parent (based on the total death figure on January 14 of 110,229). The Tsunami brought more devastation on a region already suffering the tyranny of the Indonesian army. Sources from the field in Aceh report killing of civilians by the army who are then posthumously labeled 'rebels'. Worse still, the Indonesian Government was using the military as its prime relief coordinator. Hence the military was in complete control of the region and activists in Aceh report an intensification of the crack down on the GAM (Free Aceh Movement). Being a conflict zone, the number of women headed households were quite high in Aceh and this figure has increased after the Tsunami and the earthquake.

It is sad that a natural disaster like the tsunami is being used by the armed groups (including the Indonesian and Sri Lankan armies and rebel groups) for their advantage. UNICEF reports that LTTE has been recruiting child soldiers from relief camps set up after December's tsunami. The LTTE refutes this claim and denies reports that they were