

Tamilnadu Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Committee
(TTRRC)

- A Concept Paper and a Proposal

The human tragedy set at work by the Tsunami waves of 26 December 2004 on the coastal communities of South and South East Asia is still unfolding. At the time of this report, about 1,25,000 persons have died and millions have been uprooted from their livelihoods.

In terms of numbers, the tragedy that has struck the coastal communities in Tamilnadu (the Southernmost State of India), may sound smaller compared to that faced by countries like Srilanka and Indonesia. But the tragedy has been equally devastating and widespread, along the 1000 kilometers-long Tamilnadu Coast, affecting coastal communities spread over 13 districts.

The “Facts”:

As of 01.01.2005, the official figures are as follows:

District	Dead	Villages/ Habitations Affected	Population Affected	Most Affected Villages/Areas
Nagapattinam	5525	77	176,184	Velankanni, Akkaraipettai, Keechankuppam, Nambiar Nagar, Tarangambadi, Poombuhar
Kanniyakumari	808	33	100,484	Colachel, Kottilpadu, Melmanakudi, Keelmanakudi,
Cuddalore	599	51	99,704	Cuddalore, Parangipettai
Chennai	206	10	30,000	Foreshore Estate, Srinivasapuram, Dumeenkuppam, Ennore, Royapuram, Nochikuppam
Kancheepuram	124	74	100,000	Kalpakkam, Mahabalipuram,
Villuppuram	47	33	36,240	
Tiruvallur	28	6	4,700	

Thanjavur	22	52	11,000	
Pudukottai	15	25	66,350	
Thiruvarur	10	-	-	
Tirunelveli	4	10	27,948	
Thoothukudi	3	23	18,343	
Ramanathapuram	6	6	1,500	
TOTAL	7397	396	672,453	

These figures are obviously approximations and the real tragedy is sure to be much bigger than the numbers suggested, going by the way that dead bodies are still being identified and submerged settlements are still being discovered and a big number still are missing.

Even as approximations, these figures as well as our own quick assessments reveal the following crucial realities:

- Tamilnadu accounts for the maximum number of dead among the States of India, reaching almost 70% of the total
- More than 6.7 lakh persons (constituting almost 10% of the State Population), more than 80% of them fisherfolk, have been affected in about 400 villages and habitations in the State.
- The tragedy has been most acute in the districts of Nagapattinam, Kanniyakumari, Cuddalore, Chennai and Kancheepuram districts
- Almost 40% of the victims are said to be children.
- About 6000 cattle and livestock have been lost
- More than 15,000 fishing boats, 5,700 catamarans, 7600 mechanised fishing vessels and over 95,000 fishing nets have been damaged or lost.

More than 4.54 lakh persons have been evacuated, of which 3 lakhs are in nearly 400 relief camps. Spontaneous responses by varied non-governmental (secular and religious) organisations and individuals as well as efforts by the Government machinery have made sure that initial relief by way of food, clothing, shelter and first-aid medical help has reached most of the affected communities, though regular protests and other reports reveal there are still interior pockets unreached by relief efforts.

The Challenges:

While initial relief works need to continue, the great challenges of rehabilitation of sustainable livelihoods remain. While undertaking any relief or rehabilitation work by any group, the following dimensions need to be kept in mind:

- Over the last decade or so, the coastal communities of Tamilnadu, as elsewhere, have been under siege by many forces, local and global, aimed at displacing these communities from their livelihoods - indiscriminate prawn farming... Chemical industries and nuclear plants that have made the whole area toxic beyond limits... holiday resorts, tourism and entertainment industry... mega developmental activities, highways and ports... the East Coast Road... all of them either pushing fisherfolk communities perilously close to the sea or displacing them and turning them into casual labour, in a massive way. The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Act, which stipulated that there should be no construction within 500 meters of the coast have been violated systematically, often with the connivance of the State. Coral reefs and mangroves, which are excellent buffer absorbants of storms and tsunamis have been massively destroyed. And now, these forces can easily use the excuse of the Tsunami to displace fisherfolk communities permanently away from the coast, in the name of protecting them, but opening our coasts to greater onslaught by these forces. This is not simply a fear. It has happened earlier in Orissa and Gujarat.
- Coastal communities have often been living in homogenous communities, often on religious lines. Hence any relief or developmental work among these communities easily becomes prey to communal and fundamental forces, intent on establishing their territorial controls.
- Traditionally, the coastal communities have not been powerful political forces, not even as vote banks and hence, to a large extent, ignored by the various governments at the State level.

- Local governments, both in the forum of traditional community panchayats and the elected panchayats, play strong roles in the lives of coastal communities. Any effort towards rehabilitation has to be geared towards strengthening these local bodies, rather than bypassing or cutting into their powers.
- Any effort towards relief or rehabilitation that is not linked to long terms livelihood sustainability of these communities or imposed from outside without participative control by these communities may not only be ineffective but might even prove counter-productive.
- Given the massive outpouring of good-will coupled with the usual politics of aid, relief and rehabilitation, any individual effort, unrelated to others would be a waste. Religious Congregations, Secular groups, funding agencies and citizens' groups... all need to work in tandem and in collaboration.
- Last but not least, there is also the crucial need to monitor Govt policy and programmes and to lobby for a long-term coastal communities-friendly public policy, planning and budgeting. Efforts to ensure that relief works are based on legal entitlements of the affected and based on community involvement.

Emerging Needs and Possible Programmes:

1. A community under shock, trauma and renewed threat of survival needs proper counselling and guidance, along with relief, towards building hope in a hopeless situation. Already teams of doctors and counsellors from NIMHANS, Bangalore and others have been involved at this level. There have been efforts, by local groups, using techniques like Playback theatre as therapy.
2. In a State notorious for its levels of malnutrition, especially among women and children, medical helps need to go beyond temporary help or treatment. With primary health centres in shambles, sustained medical attention becomes a crucial priority.

3. Temporary shelters have been provided but in the mid-term providing of materials like tents as well as nutritional food and water would be required. And of course, sustainable housing is becoming a major need. There is only a scanty idea of the magnitude in this field. Housing, that is disaster-proof but linked to their livelihoods and taken up by the communities themselves, is a massive need.
4. Livelihood materials like boats and nets, beside petty shops have been lost or damaged in a big way, to the estimates of almost Rs 3500 crores. Local groups have estimated the cost of a catamaran as Rs 40,000 -60,000, a mechanised boat as Rs 1 Lakh, and nets costing between Rs 8,000 – 1,00,000.
5. Effective caring of the most vulnerable sections among the affected – orphaned children, widows, aged and the disabled – has to be planned in the long-term. Ensuring that all children orphaned by the tragedy would be absorbed into educational institutions, through sponsorships of different types has to become a priority. And empowering single ad widowed women through alternate job opportunities etc needs to be emphasised too, given the experience of Gujarat and Oriissa where trafficking of such women easily follows.

Tamilnadu Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Committee (TTRRC)

It is in this context that the Tamilnadu Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Committee (TTRRC) has been set up by the Jesuits of Tamilnadu. Functioning under the chairmanship of the Madurai Provincial and coordinated by Manu Alphonse, Director, Social Watch – Tamilnadu, the Committee would include lay experts, researchers and development personnel.

The Jesuits have already been involved in immediate relief work, especially in the four districts of Nagpattinam, Kanniyakumari, Chennai and Kanchipuram. These relief teams have been involved in tasks such as identifying and burying dead bodies, distributing relief material and coordinating relief work, along with the local Diocesan, CRI and secular teams.

The Jesuits have also taken up leadership roles in mobilising and coordinating teams of the Catholic Religious of India (CRI – TN/Pondy) as well as playing animation roles in helping funding partners and civil societies reach the needed places. Placing needed medical teams has been one of the initial concerns.

Jesuit team have also been involved, along with CRI and NGO teams, in making quick assessment of the needs in different districts, identifying gaps of services as well as the most vulnerable sections among the affected communities.

TTRRC would attempt overall coordination of all the initiatives taken up by Jesuits in Tamilnadu. While a main office is being set up at Loyola College, Chennai (under the supervision of Manu Alphonse), 3 other nodal hubs are visualised: the first at Trichy (handled by Elias, Augustine and Xavier), the second at Madurai (handled by Paul Mike, Province Social Action Coordinator and IDEAS centre) and the third at Carmel School, Nagercoil (handled by Arulanandam)

TTRRC would attempt to maximise the involvement and energies of the students and staff our educational institutions (5 University colleges and 13 schools) and of our lay and secular colleagues as well as Government departments.

Based on the reports of the Quick assessment teams at work in different parts of the State as well as the experiences of our relief work, the Committee is meeting on the 7th January 2005, to give a concrete shape to its programmes. Specific budget proposals would be framed in the light of the above points and further discussions.

Meanwhile two accounts have been started in the name of TTRRC Fund: one at the Provincial Curia (TTRRC Fund, c/o Jesuit Madurai Province, Account No. 80/83, Catholic Syrian Bank, 27 Palani Road, Dindigul-624001, Tamilnadu) and the second at Loyola College (TTRRC fund, c/o Loyola College Society, FCRA No. 075820005; SB Account No. 2024, South India Bank, Mylapore, Chennai).

We sincerely hope that everything that we would do in solidarity would truly add to the process of empowerment of our coastal communities, already dispossessed and now shattered by the Tsunami tragedy.

For any information or further details, do contact us. We promise to keep you updated.

In solidarity,

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