

# **Interim Report on the Tsunami devastation in Tamil Nadu dated: 2 January 2005**

Attention on the need to provide immediate, temporary housing as part of the relief and rehabilitation work

**Seva Bharati Tamilnadu  
(Public Charitable Trust)**

## **Background:**

Sewa Bharati Tamilnadu in association with the volunteers immediately entered the affected areas within hours of the Tsunami striking in the coastal areas. In fact in some areas the volunteers plunged into relief work even as the tidal waves were still devastating the people and their homes. Some of the daily reports of Sewa Bharati on the initial relief work undertaken are attached to this Interim Report.

The purpose of this Interim Report is to summarise the work done by Sewa Bharati and the work presently on and also the preliminary estimate of the devastation. This is to invite the attention of the Authorities, donors and well wishers to the immediate task of providing temporary housing by way of tented accommodation if the relief and restructuring is to proceed further.

## **Details of Sewa Bharati work so far in brief:**

The Sewa Bharati has assembled 1340 volunteers for the relief work in 14 main centres along the coastal line of Tamilnadu with over 50 satellite centres to assist and maintain the supply line for the relief work. There are 60 doctors assigned to the relief work. In Nagapattinam which is the worst affected place, Sewa Bharati also worked in co-ordination with the Red Cross infrastructure.

Sewa Bharati's own infrastructure included 5 ambulances and 40 other vehicles. Seeing that the immediate need was for protected water supply a 30000 litre per day mineral water plant was installed by Sewa Bharati at Nagapattinam on December 28, 2004, - the third day after the disaster struck. This was perhaps the main protected water supply for even Government Authorities and Special Task Force of the Tamilnadu Government apart from commercial sources.

Sewa Bharati volunteers have saved 113 lives and disposed of 2474 dead bodies till January 1, 2005. The village wise details of both are available.

Since lunch time on December 26, 2004, (that is within a couple of hours of the Tsunami strike) Sewa Bharati began providing food packets and maintained a daily supply of food to 30000 people for nearly a week and currently over to over 15000 people through the 15 main relief centres.

Sewa Bharati's relief work is being done in some manner in 168 of the 258 villages along the coastal line.

In different places, particularly in Nagapattinam and Kanniyakumari, Sewa Bharati's relief work was well co-ordinated with Government Agencies. The Authorities encouraged and assisted Sewa Bharati volunteers with their infrastructure in the relief work in all places and even directed other voluntary relief workers to work in Sewa Bharati relief centres.

**The fishing industry has been virtually wiped out. This is crux of the rehabilitation work ahead, post relief:**

The most critical and obvious aspect of the present disaster particularly in Tamilnadu and other southern states is that the mainly affected areas and peoples belong to fishing communities. So unlike in other disaster relief and rehabilitation work, in this disaster perhaps the most critical point to be borne in mind is the fact that this disaster has virtually wiped out a specific industry, namely the fishing industry. So the relief and rehabilitation should centre round this basic fact. Normally in a disaster a wide variety of people in a specific geography would be affected so that rehabilitation work would merely have to concentrate on resettling them in a particular geography. But here the story is different. A whole industry has been damaged. This makes the rehabilitation difficult and at the same focussed. So the rehabilitation will become focussed and even quick if this critical dimension is addressed in the planning. The fishing community is capable of immediate revival if the issues of housing, fishing nets and fishing boats are addressed almost in that order. Here the relief and rehabilitation work are divided by a very thin line. The relief itself is to make them reside in their industrial area forthwith and that will be the beginning of their rehabilitation also.

**The most critical need now: Shelter to the 72500 families in the worst affected villages.**

The most critical stage of the relief work preceding the hard rehabilitation work that awaits post-relief operations is thus the immediate need for shelter.

The preliminary survey and study by Sewa Bharati volunteers of the worst affected areas of the coastal line in Tamilnadu and of the details of devastation to the villages in terms of housing show that the total housing requirements will be of the order of 72500 in about 258 villages in the following districts:

Districts	Villages		Houses	
	Total	Affected	Total	Damaged
Tiruvallur	58	45	10600	8000
Chennai	44	44	15600	10000
Kancheepuram	44	35	6000	5000
Villupuram	19	10	3500	2000
Pondicherry	30	19	7000	4500
Cuddalore	49	49	9000	6000
Nagapattinam	42	42	18600	15000
Kanyakumari	28	14	54000	22000
<b>Total</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>124300</b>	<b>72500</b>

**The only practical and expedited way to address the housing problem: Temporary tented accommodation.**

The most critical need to bring the relief to a close and start the rehabilitation work is to immediately house the fishing communities, which constitutes over 90% of the affected needing relief and rehabilitation. The livelihood of fish traders whose business is forward integrated with the fishing and dependent on the fishermen's work are also affected even though their life as such is not affected. In many places we have reports of the fish trading communities demanding relief and even blocking the relief work to insist on relief to them. So unless the fishing industry is forthwith revived the length of the relief work will be long and also over a time fatigue will set in to the relief work.

So the most immediate task is to work out the relief and rehabilitation transition in the order of Housing as the first and priority phase, supply of fishing nets and reconstruction of damaged boats and kattaramans next phase and supply of new boats as the final phase. The most crucial thing is the immediate provision of temporary tented houses in the fishing communities' geography to re-commence their relation with the sea.

Housing has to be provided forthwith by make shift temporary tents. This work is needed to be accomplished on a massive scale. This can only be done by the army. So the authorities must immediately hand over this responsibility to the Indian army who have the necessary emergency skills and infrastructure to put up tents on a massive scale in a short span of time. The places where such tented accommodation is to be arranged are all available with different relief agencies including the government and Sewa Bharati has also collected the details which has been summarised above. These details may be corroborated with and by Government statistics.

**Sewa Bharati therefore appeals to the Authorities to second the Army to undertake this task forthwith on a war footing. If this task can be accomplished a fortnight which it can be then the real rehabilitation work will commence almost simultaneously, but not till then.**

**Tented Housing a must even to carry further the rehabilitation work:**

The need for temporary accommodation may be appreciated from the fact that the huge relief materials lying with different relief agencies including the government and pouring in from different donors are lying undistributed because the victims of the disaster cannot receive and house them. In fact Sewa Bharati itself has relief materials for running houses and kitchens for nearly 10000 families undistributed for want of space for the receivers to keep them. In fact Cuddalore district when Sewa Bharati volunteers distributed 400 kerosene stoves, the recipients deposited them in the local temple for safe custody as they did not have any place to keep them. So the rehabilitation work cannot proceed further unless the tented accommodation is provided forthwith.

Sewa Bharati requests the Authorities concerned to address this task forthwith. If this task is not addressed as suggested the work of relief as well as rehabilitation will stagnate and get delayed.

The tent materials are only a temporary need. They can be provided and taken back. All that the army should do is to post one army man to protect the materials in each village and collect

them and take them back after their need is over which may be at the maximum six months by which time the housing on permanent scale will come about.

**A final word:**

In most places the fishing communities feels shy of accepting food free of charge. They say that they provide food to others. They rue their fate. They want to get back to work. Some of them do not even want to accept free of cost anything for rehabilitation fishing nets or boats. Many relief workers and media men are surprised at their self pride.