

Community driven tsunami rehabilitation



The following is a slightly-edited transcript of the ACHR-sponsored networking event on “*Community-driven tsunami rehabilitation*”, which was held on June 20, 2006, as part of the World Urban Forum, in Vancouver, Canada. The idea of organizing this workshop in the big Vancouver meeting was not only to bring out the people-driven tsunami rehabilitation processes that have been going on in four affected countries, but to emphasize that making communities the key actors should be an important principle in all kinds of development work which involve the poor – not only disasters.

The World Urban Forum brought together a great number of high-ranking, high-flying and highly-educated professionals, policy makers and practitioners from government, non-profit, bilateral and activist backgrounds. For five days, they were busy sharing their views about the world’s pressing problems of poverty and housing. But too often, the group which plays the most vital and primary role in working out lasting solutions to these problems – the poor themselves - are absent from these kinds of discussions. The absence of this most central voice in the change-making process continues to skew the quality of our understanding and undermine the sustainability of planning and policy making.

So this tsunami workshop was an attempt to bring the people – who are the real development workers – to present their experiences and their ideas. Many of the people who came from their Asian coastal slums and villages to attend this meeting may not get many chances to speak their minds at such big international meetings. But when an opportunity was created for poor tsunami survivors to speak, as here, out came ample evidence of their wisdom, their understanding, their ability and their resourcefulness. You’ll see. As Fitriya, whose Acehese village was erased by the tsunami, says towards the end of the seminar, “We now know that each of us has a potential that we didn’t realize before. It is the tsunami that gave us the opportunity to know that we had this potential.”

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This report was prepared by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) in July 2006. For the support given to make this workshop possible, we have very special thanks to give to our good friends at Misereor (Germany), Development and Peace (Canada), Homeless International (UK), the Selavip Foundation (Belgium), and to UN-Habitat for making space available for this workshop.



Key participants in the discussion :



Besides our own core team of community participants, we got a good crowd for the meeting – about 150 people eventually crammed themselves into that hot little room, to listen to some poor tsunami survivors talk about their struggles!

From Sri Lanka :

- **Ms. Anoma Lalani Jayasinghe** (Women's Bank, tsunami-affected community leader)
- **Ms. Walawe Marambage Sanoja Nilanthi** (Women's Bank, tsunami community leader)
- **Ms. Jayasuriya Liyanage Irin Ethal Silva** (Women's Bank, tsunami community leader)
- **Mr. Jagath Siriwardane** (Translator, from Women's Bank's Administrative staff)

From Indonesia :

- **Ms. Elly Millia Rahmat** (tsunami-affected community leader from Lam Isek Village, Aceh)
- **Ms. Fitriya** (tsunami-affected community leader from Lam Gurun Village, Aceh)
- **Mr. Ridwan Husen** (tsunami-affected community leader from Lam Rukam Village, Aceh)
- **Mr. Lukman** (tsunami-affected community leader from Lam Jame Village, Aceh)
- **Mr. Muhammad Nawir** (tsunami-affected community leader from Lam Rukam Village, Aceh)
- **Ms. Wardah Hafidz** (Coordinator, UPC/Uplink NGO tsunami support team in Aceh)
- **Mr. Ari Ujjianto** (Uplink NGO tsunami support team, Jakarta)
- **Mr. Doddy Sudradjat** (Architect, Uplink NGO network, tsunami technical team)
- **Mr. R. Yuli Kusworo** (Architect, Uplink NGO network, tsunami technical team)
- **Mr. Andrea Fitrianto** (Architect, Uplink NGO network, tsunami technical team)

From Thailand :

- **Ms. Ratri Khongwatmai** (tsunami-affected community leader, Laem Pom Village, Phangnga Province)
- **Mr. Somchai Muda** (tsunami-affected community leader, Ban Hualaam, Lanta Island, Krabi Province)
- **Mr. Maitree Jongkrajug** (tsunami-affected community leader, Ban Naam Khem, Phangnga Province)
- **Ms. Preeda Kongpaen** (Thai Community Foundation, NGO, Thailand)
- **Ms. Tipparat Nopladarom** (Community Organizations Development Institute, CODI, Thailand)
- **Ms. Panthip Petchmak** (Community Organizations Development Institute, CODI, Thailand)

From India :

- **Mr. Joseph Simon** (South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies - SIFFS)
- **Ms. Annie George** (Nagapattinum NGO Coordination and Resource Center)
- **Mr. Vivek Raval** (Abhiyan, earthquake-relief NGO based in Kutch, Gujarat State)
- **Mr. Hirji Siju Hariyan** (Hunnarshala Foundation, earthquake-relief NGO based in Kutch, Gujarat State)

From Nepal :

- **Ms. Bina Buddacharya** (Community leader from the Women's Savings Federation)
- **Ms. Sama Vajra Uprety** (Lumanti, NGO)
- **Mr. Upendra Shakya** (Lumanti, NGO)
- **Mr. Mahendra Shakya** (Lumanti, NGO)

From ACHR in Thailand :

- **Ms. Somsook Boonyabancha** (Secretary General of ACHR, Director of the Community Organizations Development Institute – CODI in Thailand)
- **Mr. Thomas Kerr** (Publications coordinator, ACHR)
- **Mr. Pakorn Chalitanon** (Administrative coordinator, ACHR)

Tsunami supporters from donor and development agencies :

- **Mr. Gregor Meerpohl** (from the German funding agency MISEREOR)
- **Father Norberto Carcellar** (from the NGO Philippine Action for Community-led Shelter Initiatives – PACSI, the NGO supporter for the *Philippines Homeless People's Federation*)
- **Mr. Jan Meeuwissen** (From UN-Habitat office in Fukuoka, Japan)
- **Mr. David Satterthwaite** (From the International Institute for Environment and Development, in UK)
- **Mr. Kirtee Shah** (from the Ahmedabad-based NGO ASAG, and Habitat International Coalition – HIC)

Transcript of the discussion :

Somsook (Thailand) : Welcome everybody to this *down to earth* discussion. Today we will have a discussion on community-driven rehabilitation after the Asian tsunami. Today's meeting is going to be a little different from most of the sessions that are being organized in this World Urban Forum. Different how? The discussions and presentations here will be made mainly by community people from the four tsunami-affected countries - Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India. So people who experienced the tsunami first-hand will speak out. They will be the key actors in telling the stories, from problems to solutions.

I would like to make this a very brief introduction, but before we begin the discussion, we will show a short video which will give you the overall picture, beginning with the problems caused by the tsunami and touching some of the ways different countries are trying to cope and to rehabilitate the people affected by the tsunami, using the force of people, and the force of networks of affected people.

I hope that you will all agree with me by the end of this meeting that this tsunami rehabilitation experience is something very significant, which sends a message of a new development agenda, in which people themselves are the key actors. We see this very clearly throughout the tsunami rehabilitation process. We will use the same principle in our discussion today, by trying to find a way that the people are the key actors here also, and people are the main presenters. Then, those of us who come from the side of professional supporters can add to and support what the people will present.



After showing the video, we'll ask each team to introduce themselves very briefly. And then we'll start the discussion. If there is no objection, we'll go accordingly. I'm Somsook Boonyabancha from ACHR, and I'll be playing the role of moderator. Sorry for my English, which may not sound highly proper! My friend here, Wardah Hafidz, from the Urban Poor Consortium in Indonesia, will also help in the moderator role. If I go too far off the track, she will pull things back. And many of our friends who are sitting here can also help moderate, if you feel a need for any additions.

An ACHR tsunami video is shown :

A 23-minute video produced by ACHR is now shown, entitled **"Tsunami Survivors Dialogues: People centered recovery."** The video shows very briefly the relief and rehabilitation process in three countries – Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia – and how the people themselves are trying to solve the problems after tsunami by going back, by building houses, by organizing themselves. The way these groups of people are doing this may differ from place to place, but the clear message from the video is that :

- People need to be central in handling both the short-term relief and the long-term rebuilding.
- People need to do this rebuilding of their lives and settlements together, with the strength of communities and the strength of their togetherness - not alone, as individuals.
- People need to go back to their ruined villages as soon as possible and use their physical occupation of that land to strengthen their negotiations to secure their rights and remain on that land.
- With the right kind of support, a disaster like the tsunami can create new opportunities for rebuilding communities, with greater strength than before the disaster.



Somsook : So as you can see, life is not that easy. We have a lot of people from different sectors gathered here, as well as a lot of people from development agencies who support the people. So I think it's important for all the actors - especially the community people - to say what are the real issues behind the tsunami: *what are the real things behind the scenes that people in the World Urban Forum should learn from this process of tsunami rehabilitation?* So from the video, we have a brief, overall picture, from problems to solutions. Now let's come back and try to analyze, shot by shot, what are the serious problems behind the disaster, and why solutions could be worked out like that.

I think we will try to organize the discussion by posing a series of simple questions and ask the community people from the four countries to speak out from their various experiences. Those of us from development agencies may have to develop our listening skills, to better understand how people themselves are thinking and why they are doing what they are doing. Then, our friends who have been assisting the tsunami-hit communities in different ways can add to that.

1.

QUESTION : What problems are you facing since the tsunami?

The first question we would like to ask the community groups is this: *What kind of problems are you facing after the tsunami? Millions and millions of dollars in tsunami aid have been pouring into the affected countries, where there are so many problems and so many organizations working. But even with all this money and manpower and time, the problems still aren't getting solved. Why not?*

(Sorry that we don't have any translators in the box! So we are going to use simultaneous translation for all the community groups, so all the different languages represented here shouldn't be a problem. If you can't hear very clearly, please raise your hand. We are going to have a relaxed discussion here, in a not-so-relaxed room, because it's so packed with people! Anyway, we will manage. Some of you who are standing at the back should come up here and sit with us on the stage – there's a lot more room up here.)

Wardah (Indonesia) : There are a whole lot of NGOs and development agencies coming and trying to help, with millions of dollars. The problem is there is no coordination between these groups, and they don't trust the people. Mostly they go to the government, and the government doesn't trust the people either. So there is a gap here, which results in a whole lot of problems.



Fitria (Aceh) : My name is Fitria. I come from Aceh. When outsiders come to Aceh, they don't really try to understand the local structures, the local wisdom. One example is when they introduced the cash-for-work program. Usually what we do is we work together to clean up our villages after the destruction, clearing the rubble and things. We do this together, and without money. But then lots of agencies come and they offer money, and that jeopardizes the whole togetherness of the people. Now whenever they talk about any job, people ask, *How much? Where is the money?* So this is long-term damage that's been done.

Somsook : Would any group like to add to this point, that development agencies are not understanding the people and their culture? When so many groups are coming and undermining the existing culture and the way people are doing, and cause problems for the communities.

Annie George (India) : I'm Annie George and I come from Nagapattinum District, in Tamil Nadu, in India. One of the places worst-affected by the tsunami in India was Nagapattinum. I fully endorse whatever my sister from Aceh said. Another example would be the way that outsiders come in and fail to understand the dynamics in the affected villages. We have different communities who were affected in the same area: we have the fisher folk, then we have the support groups to the fisher folk who can be from other vulnerable communities, we have agriculturalists within the same place, all of whom live in different habitations within the same village. When outsiders come, they do not realize the different habitations and the different kinds of organic linkages between these habitations. So when support comes in, you either link with only one community and forget about the others. Or you create some sort of problem between the communities by saying that this aid is only for the fisher folk community, who were the most affected, not for the other communities.

Another thing which creates a long list of problems were the traditional governance systems within the fisher folk's community. We have very strong traditional governance structures over there. And then when the NGOs came in, because of the lack of knowledge about the kind of governance systems they have over there, they looked for educated youngsters to link with, which actually eroded the traditional governance systems, the power was eroded. A lot of these things had long-standing implications.

Maitree (Thailand) : I am the chairman of the network of communities affected by the tsunami in Thailand. At the beginning, right after the waves, we organized ourselves to a certain extent, in order to help each other. But there were so many organizations wanting to come and give support to the communities. And these organizations wanted the communities to do this or do that – and that created a lot of conflict between the affected communities. Actually, the organizations should play support role, and let the communities manage things themselves.

Nilanti (Sri Lanka) : We wanted to take over control of our own relief and rehabilitation, but we had no space, we had no opportunities to contribute to the discussion about what we should do. It was as though we were not there! Sometimes outsiders, donors and government agencies come to help materially, but the mental and psychological aspects of our trauma they cannot understand. Actually they don't want to understand, in a sense. That's a big problem.

Sonia Fadrigo (Philippines – Sonia is one of the national leaders of the Philippines Homeless People's Federation and a board member of Slum Dwellers International) : Actually we didn't have the tsunami, but we recently had a disaster that was like the tsunami, in which entire villages were buried in a mud slide in St. Bernard, Laite. So we in the Philippines Homeless People's Federation went to help these people who were covered by land-slides – 450 hectares covered one total area. Many people there are still buried in the ground, they could not be rescued. So the question was why, with all this help from outsiders and donors, the problems haven't been solved. Even here, millions of dollars of aid money was announced on the TV and the radio. As a national federation, we went there immediately and became involved in the relief.



That is the “No Trespassing” sign-board which a private company put up on Rattree’s village land in Thailand, right after the tsunami destroyed all the houses and killed almost half the villagers.

In the mud-slide area, we saw many problems in how the channeling of help was organized, and how the affected people were not included. Because these donors coming in – they compete with each other. The housing rehabilitation programs that they offered reflected this: one donor said *we will pledge 100,000 houses*, then another donor would say, *only 100,000 houses? We will pledge 200,000 houses!* And in the end, they compete with each other and the affected people are left behind. And there were also problems with the local government, especially at the province level, which has a lot of internal political dynamics. So the local and national governments help each other, but the local people don’t receive their help.

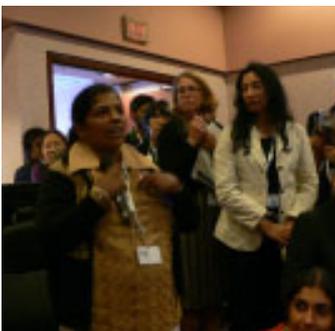
Rattree Kongwatmai (Thailand): (*translator adds: Rattree is a big fighter on the issue of land, because her village is still facing eviction.*) My name is Rattree, and I come from the village of Ban Laem Pom, in the worst-affected area of Ban Nam Khem, in Phangnga province. The people in my village stay on land that has been involved in a tenure conflict [with a private company owned by a powerful national politician, which is claiming to own the entire village land] even before the tsunami. There wouldn’t be a problem if the government would help negotiate with the affected people to find a compromise solution – a solution in which both the government and the people could both benefit. But we cannot accept that there is no help being given to us by the government in our struggle to keep our village land, after we lost everything in the tsunami. That is the main problem.

Celine d’Cruz (India - Celine works with the Mumbai-based NGO SPARC, which is the support NGO to the National Slum Dwellers Federation and Mahila Milan women’s savings collectives. Celine is also one of the key coordinators within the Slum Dwellers International network):

“I think the situation doesn’t change much whether they are man-made problems like an eviction or god-made problems like a tsunami. The kind of resources and capacity that communities have to build for themselves are the same. And I don’t think funders are going to change in this life time - I don’t know when they are going to change. And I think that we as NGOs are the same – we still want to control and dominate the communities we work with and tell them what’s good for them. And these relationships are basically political relationships, and they have to change at all levels, whether it’s government or funders or NGOs - or whoever. And communities have to now wake up and realize that unless they build their own capacities you they do their own homework, other people from the outside will all keep coming and dancing on their heads.” (*laughter!*)

2.

QUESTION : What kind of problems have you been facing around the role of governments in the tsunami relief and rehabilitation process?



Woman from the audience : Hi, my name is Elizabeth Choder, with the American Jewish World Service. We are a small grants funder that supports grassroots community-based organizations in 38 countries in the developing world, and we also supported local grassroots organizations after the tsunami. One of our partners is the *Save the Andaman Network (SAN)* that was shown in the film in Thailand.

Government trying to get people to move away from their coastal villages, to free up that land for commercial development : One of the problems they’ve shown us was not an NGO-created problem or an international NGO-created problem, but a problem created by the Thai government, which has been trying to get coastal fishing communities to “trade” their land - asking them to abandon their coastal villages and accept compensation land farther inland. This was especially affecting the sea-gypsy communities. This was because the government is very cash-oriented and doesn’t want traditional sea-fishing communities to keep using this valuable coastal property.

Anoma (Sri Lanka) : Three problems related to the government’s role in dealing with the tsunami :

- **The government came in too late :** One problem is that the government was too late in getting involved in the emergency relief and rescue operations. Before the government ever came, some NGOs, civil society groups and ordinary citizens came forward to help. The government was always too late. Because of that, people couldn’t come to any agreement or come forward with any suggestions.
- **The government did not resolve the land-tenure situation to speed up rebuilding, even when it could have :** Many donor agencies and private people wanted to help tsunami victims rebuild their damaged houses, but the land problem was in the way. The majority of people living in the affected areas did not have legal title or formal occupancy rights to the land they had occupied before the waves hit. It was the government’s responsibility to solve that problem, but so far, it has not been able to solve the problem of land. In Sri Lanka, most of the land affected by the tsunami is technically government land, so the government could have easily solved the land problem and set a clear policy of allowing people to rebuild on their sites of their former houses. For that reason, people around the country have not been able to replace their lost houses even now, more than a year after the tsunami.
- **The government imposed a 100-meter no-build zone along the coast, but for all the wrong reasons :** We all know that after the tsunami, the Sri Lankan government imposed a 100 meter buffer zone around the entire country’s coastline, and forbade anyone from rebuilding within that zone. We understand that buffer zone like this: actually the government wanted to make us of this opportunity to chase away the people from the coast so that they can start their own projects - particularly tourism. It was a kind of hidden agenda.

Woman from the audience : My name is Shivani and I'm from Delhi, but I travel extensively along the coast of Tamil Nadu, India and Sri Lanka, as well as the Andaman and Nicobar Island off the southeast coast of India, which was very badly affected by the tsunami, since they were so close to the epicenter of the earthquake. So our main findings in India have been that :

The “embedded relationship” between government and NGOs in the rehabilitation work : after the tsunami, the government and the NGOs have had what I call an “embedded relationship.” Normally, the NGOs are very critical of the government. But in the tsunami, they really did just exactly what the government wanted. We can see this right after the tsunami, when the state government of Tamil Nadu passed a government order for temporary shelters and said that by 14 January, everyone must be in a temporary shelter. But they recommended a material called “tar sheeting” which is like cardboard dipped in tar – it is very non-durable, it's extremely hot, it traps heat – and no NGOs questioned the use of this material. There was a total failure of any mechanism to hold NGOs accountable, or the government, which set the rules. Again in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the government stipulated tin sheets for temporary housing, and again, the NGOs went ahead and built those tin-sheet sheds, without using any human rights standards in the housing for the people. The problem is that when you go to the government, they say *we didn't construct the houses, the NGO's constructed them!* And when you go to the NGOs, they say *well we built them according to the government's design.* There's a complete failure of any accountability, and a real failure of governance in managing this.

Foreign aid money which goes through the government gets stuck : And in most cases we found that the government is holding on to the money, because a lot of foreign funding that came in through the government gets stuck, and nothing is happening.



Lukman (Indonesia) : Makes two points about problems from government :

Problem of government requiring contractors and not villagers to build houses : One problem is the government's requirement that contractors build the houses instead of community people, when government funds are involved. The way that system works is that about 25% of the aid budget for rebuilding houses goes into the contractors' pockets.

The government doesn't follow its own rules about seismic-resistant house rebuilding: For “safety purposes”, the Indonesian government has developed an extensive building code for all rebuilding in tsunami-affected areas. This building code includes lots of special rules about seismic-resistant structural construction details and techniques, for this highly earthquake-prone area. But when the government builds the houses, using their contractors, they don't follow that building code at all! Most of the government-built houses going up all over Aceh have no seismic-resistant features at all. If we have another bad earthquake, it's very likely that many of these houses will kill all the people living inside.

Nilanti (Sri Lanka) : Sometimes the authorities find unexpected reasons *not* to support people. Some communities in Sri Lanka, for example, were affected by flooding rivers, not directly by the waves from the sea. Those rivers floods were caused by the tsunami, but the government wouldn't assist those communities. The authorities claimed these people were affected by *river water*, not *sea water*, and the government's clear mandate was to assist communities affected by *sea water!*

Somsook : There will be many problems of government rules and regulations – both good rules which are not followed, and bad rules which are.

Man in the audience : I am representing a (*non-local NGO?*) in Sri Lanka. We are working in partnership with people to develop permanent shelters for tsunami victims. This project is funded by the United Arab Emirates. We signed an agreement one year ago with the UAE, UN-Habitat and the Government of Sri Lanka to build these houses, with a budget of 550,000 Rupees. But the cost of building materials in Sri Lanka is escalating like nothing. Sand prices have gone up by 200 – 300%, cement prices by 30% - all the materials have gone up. Now we are not in a position to actually build these houses, which we are building through community-based organizations, not using contractors. So we are having some difficulties now. I think this is one point we have to recommend to the government – that at least they should keep the prices of building materials in a stable position.

Wardah : In the case of Indonesia, the government set up a relief agency, and this agency performs at least two different and conflicting roles. One is the coordinating role, the other is the implementing role. They also build houses, and what they do is they go to communities where NGOs have already built houses, they offer the same thing, and this causes conflict in the community, and also duplication.

Somchai (Thailand) : The government in Thailand has a problem because they want to move the affected people from their original place by the sea, and relocate them to new land farther inland. That is a problem. But because of the role of the development agencies and NGOs in supporting the people process, almost all of these villagers have been able to return to their original land.





Bina (Nepal) : My name is Bina. I come from the Nepal Women's Savings Federation in Kathmandu. Even after watching this brief movie, we can feel the terrible pain people who went through the tsunami must have experienced. Now it's time for community groups like ours to bring the NGOs and the government to work for us - we need to guide the government in their work, so the relief process meets our real needs, not the other way around.

Man from audience (from Vancouver) : There may soon be an earthquake and a tsunami right off our own west coast, all the way down to San Francisco. So we have to be concerned too. What we are trying to do is to be prepared. You in Asia had some warning of this - there were some earlier shocks showing there might be something coming. Your government had a role to do something about that in preparing the people to be prepared for how to react when those situations came. These tsunamis are predictable, and you can take action to get out of the way, if you move at an early enough time. You can't wait, like they did in New Orleans, until it's too late to move. You have to leave the danger area at an earlier time.

3.

QUESTION : What about the problems of land?

Somsook : We'd like to move to the land question now, because there are serious land problems in these countries. The tsunami chased so many people out of their land, and they are struggling now to go come back. How are people dealing with this serious land issue?

Maitree (Thailand) : Actually, most of the relief and rehabilitation work the government does is provided in the style of welfare, with the assumption that people are helpless victims, instead of allowing all the problems to be managed by the affected communities themselves. Also, in most of the cases where there have been land conflicts after the tsunami, the government has mostly supported its own friends in the real estate and tourism sectors, and not given much support to the fishing villages and vulnerable coastal communities who find their traditional land being grabbed by these powerful commercial interest groups.

Somsook : And that's why there have been so many evictions after the tsunami. Because land along the coast is prime land, so after the tsunami, village people suddenly find themselves being visited by outsiders with papers supposedly showing they own the land on which these villagers have lived for a hundred years. So this causes eviction, this is the problem.

Nilanti (Sri Lanka) : Most of the people affected by the tsunami are poor people. They do not have land titles. Most of them were living in rented houses, in coastal settlements with unclear land tenure status – or on land which clearly belongs to the government. But in order to receive government assistance to get temporary housing or to rebuild their damaged houses, the authorities always ask for proof of land-ownership – for land titles. And so because they don't have land titles to their land, they cannot get that support. They were neglected.

Jayasuriya (Sri Lanka) : After the tsunami, the government of Sri Lanka announced a law to forbid building within a 300 meter buffer zone along the country's coastline. But in the face of strong protests, they reduced the buffer zone to only 100 meters. But most of the affected villages and poor communities were still within this 100-meter buffer zone. So again, there were strong protests around the country, and again they changed the law, allowing people to rebuild. In the case of fishermen, they have to live in places close to the shore. Most of the government officials do not show much concern for the people.



4.

QUESTION : How are communities dealing with all these problems, in order to transform these difficult situations and rebuild their lives and settlements and livelihoods?

Somsook : Now we will leave the discussion about problems and move into questions about *solutions*. What are affected people and communities doing to rebuild their lives and settlements, in the face of all these serious problems? What are their ways of turning these big problems into opportunities?

Wardah (Indonesia) : Perhaps we can start with the question about how to have an early warning system. Others can maybe learn when people tell what they did about this question of early warning. Perhaps anybody from the four countries wants to share about what to do to be prepared?

Elly Milliya (Indonesia) : This is something that should be taught widely to kids in school, so they know when a disaster is coming. Besides the big government early warning systems, which are very high tech, traditional communities in Aceh have a lot of wisdom about this, which comes from their memory of former disasters. A good example of this is from the island of (*Nias? Singalu?*), just off the coast of Aceh. Many of the people on that island survived the tsunami because they read the early signs of a coming wave in the conditions just before the waves – when the water along the shore suddenly receded, and when insects and animals went running inland, they knew something was going to happen. So they raised the alarm and ran to the hills.

People-managed relief at the Bang Muang camp in Thailand



Maitree (Thailand) : In my area of Baan Nam Khem in Thailand, the affected people began to organize ourselves as a group, at the very beginning, at the relief camp that we all helped to set up at Bang Muang, three days after the tsunami.

- **Organizing survivors starts right away in the relief camp :** In the camp, we organized ourselves so that every ten families living in tents would have one leader, and these 60 or 70 group leaders would know all the problems of their ten families, to bring to the nightly meeting. Then we divided all the tasks and all the responsibilities of taking care of the camp and all its functions – so there were people’s committees to take care of all the issues such as toilets, bathing spaces, communal kitchens, security, managing donations, posting information about missing persons, liaising with government agencies, transport for school-children, providing stalls for the visiting aid groups, etc.
- **Managing all the good intentions from outside, so it doesn’t create conflicts :** Our camp at Bang Muang was the largest tsunami relief camp in Thailand. For many months, there were more than 50 aid agencies and charities and organizations offering various kinds of services in the camp, such as medical care, children’s care, mental counseling, traditional massage, etc. But all this outside help was organized by those of us who actually lived in the camp. We got a lot of donations from various groups and people in the camp. But instead of allowing people to just hand out cash, we organized the donations so they could benefit everyone, and it was clear what was coming in each day. Everything was announced and discussed in the nightly camp-wide meetings.
- **Setting up savings groups to start work on longer-term revival :** And right away we started working on longer-term issues of rebuilding our livelihoods. We started savings groups and set up a revolving fund using some of the donor money, so that people who didn’t have any thing to do or any means of earning could start some income generation projects. This is how the people began very soon to organize themselves and start thinking about rebuilding their lives, while they were still staying in the relief camp. The savings group is a very good starting point for people to collectively deal with problems of lost income and lost occupations, but also with problems of housing and land. The saving group is a mechanism which links people together in practical ways, and gives them a chance to think together about what they want, what they need, how they want their rehabilitation after the tsunami to go. The savings group is a way to get people to start solving their problems right away, even when they are in this very bad situation, having lost everything.
- **Setting up our own people’s “tsunami watch”** We also organized teams of people to keep a watch out for signs of another tsunami, because the government was not able to tell us when the danger was approaching.
- **Using community radio to keep people informed.** We also set up a community radio station right in the camp, which broadcast 24 hours, to keep people informed about all the vital issues, all the developments, to announce offers of assistance from various visiting groups – and to also play music to make people feel good!
- **Linking with other tsunami-affected groups in other provinces, to form networks of mutual learning and mutual assistance :** Very soon after the tsunami, we also began to link with tsunami-affected communities all along the Andaman coast, in all six affected provinces, through visits, seminars, big meetings and boat-building training. All these affected communities had no strength on their own, and they had no links to ideas, to information, to assistance that was available. Very soon, this linking began to form a network of tsunami-affected communities, which could then have the broad base to begin linking with the tsunami rehabilitation policies and to make proposals to the government which come from a large, representative body of affected communities.

Somsook : Making the relief process into a process of organizing for longer-term development :

Maitree is describing how even badly-affected survivors, people who are in a very difficult situation, can start using different issues of rehabilitation and relief to organize the people. This is the key issue you are seeing here: how the tsunami-affected people themselves, who were never organized before, are using all aspects of the relief process to empower themselves to manage various issues of their longer-term development, and then to link with all the tsunami-affected areas in the rest of the province, as well as with tsunami-hit communities in all six provinces. Then this becomes a network. And as you saw in the film, it’s not just one network of tsunami-affected communities, but several networks have been established around many different issues – networks of indigenous sea-gypsy communities, networks of communities facing land conflicts, networks of boat-building groups, etc.

Anoma (Sri Lanka) : In the process of learning, and also in the process of organizing ourselves, my organization, Women’s Bank, has already started that process. First of all, we had to create a forum where people could voice their feelings and their problems, where people can speak out. And then we supported them to understand what is happening and offered them some skill development training, so they can manage their rehabilitation process together, and manage the money for reviving their livelihoods.



Annie George (India) : This is exactly what we did in Nagapattinam. We realized that there was a need for reliable and timely information, and we brought communities together so that they could have representatives from each of these habitation who could give us timely and correct information about the situation in the affected villages. The second part of it was finding out what their requirements were. For this, we created platforms where the communities could come together with the NGOs locally to discuss what was required at that level. And the third part of it was making this [detailed information about the situation on the ground] available even to the policy makers. For this, we started a coordination platform, where the NGOs could come together with the policy makers, and also have advocacy on that platform. So we knew what was happening at the field level, we knew what was happening in the communities. We carry back these concerns to the government, and see that fine-tuning is done at the policy level. So the NGO Coordination Center in Nagapattinam is doing precisely all these things that have come up as solutions.

Somsook : This takes us back to the point about the role of local development agencies and NGOs in the rehabilitation process, in helping to build bridges between the needs of people on the ground, and the resources which come down from the policy level.

5.

QUESTION : How are affected communities dealing with the difficult issue of land?

We'll move next to the land issue, because this is one of the most interesting aspects of the struggle which tsunami-survivors in these four countries are finding ways to solve.

Sonia Fadrigo (Philippines – Philippines Homeless People's Federation, SDI) : The federation in the Philippines has had good links with the tsunami-affected communities in Asia, through exchanges within the ACHR and SDI networks. After the mud-slides happened in the Philippines, all the solutions were the same: on the community side, we organized a survey and gathered information after the mud-slide. And then we conducted exchanges in Iloilo, drawing on experiences that were shared from the tsunami-affected communities in Thailand and Indonesia, by the ACHR network. We also organized these exchange visits to include also the local government officials, along with the affected community people.

Somsook : So we have surveys, linking people together through exchanges, using every issue as an opportunity to organize people and to empower them. These are some of the important tools for our community-led disaster rehabilitation. Then, when the NGOs and affected people link together, that creates a platform of negotiation and begins to set a development direction for the longer term rehabilitation. So this brings us to the serious issue of *land*.

Woman from the audience (from Canada or USA?) : There is another element that is kind of missing from the discussion. Among all the key issues, you don't talk about the different caste systems or different marginalized groups within the affected communities. And without actually acknowledging that, it is very difficult to move on in the discussion of land issues. Because not everybody the same access, even within these marginalized groups.

Somsook : Thank you for raising that point. Now I'd like to ask Ratre Kongwatmai, a woman who is facing one of Thailand's most serious post-tsunami land conflicts to speak. If you pick up almost any issue of the Thai newspapers, you will find stories and interviews about her village's struggle to keep their land from being taken over by capitalists.



Ratre (Thailand) : The biggest issue we face in my village of Laem Pom is the problem of land. We have stayed on this coastal land for many decades, on land which was clearly government land, formerly on concession to the tin-mining companies our ancestors worked for. But before the tsunami, a company owned by a powerful politician appeared, claiming to own all our land, and threatened us with police if we didn't leave. This conflict got worse after the tsunami, when this company tried to keep us from returning to our land, after the village was destroyed by the tsunami. Since the tsunami, we have linked together with other communities which have the same kinds of land-conflict problems, to share ideas, to exchange and discuss and to find ways to resolve the problem we have in common.

Somsook : In southern Thailand, they now have networks of tsunami-hit communities which face similar problems – so there are networks of indigenous sea gypsy communities and networks of communities embroiled in land-conflicts with private land-owners, who are then trying to move the land issue in the same direction. The most important thing Ratre had to say is that you have to go back to your land where you stayed before – even if they don't want you to return. Then you start building your houses or even simple shelters, because you need some where to stay, some place to protect your family. *And then, by actually going back to that land, you have begun your negotiation to keep that land from a position of occupation.*

Ratre (Thailand) : In the past one and a half years, since the tsunami, we have struggled with many issues in rebuilding our lives in my village. And we've been able to solve many of these problems. But the land issue is still in the fighting mode – that's the issue that is much more difficult than everything else, especially if the government do not support us.

“The tsunami has exposed so many rights issues that already existed in our society, in which these very weak groups of people have been trying to get something for so long. But they couldn’t get it because they never had any power before.”

Somsook : One and a half years since the tsunami, and still there are so many communities facing land conflict problems. And since solutions to these problems are not coming from the government, these communities link together and try to find ways to negotiate, one after the other. Ratreer hopes that somehow, her voice will be heard, in some way, by the government or the concerned organizations.

Wardah (Indonesia) : We have the same problem in Aceh. The government doesn’t want to build houses for the landless and the renters. So what we do in our network (the Udeep Beusaree Network of 26 tsunami-affected villages in Aceh) is to use communal land available within the existing communities, to divide into small plots and sell on installments to landless and renter families in the community, so that they can have a house and secure land there, and can pay for the land gradually, as they are able, in installments.

Preeda (Thailand) : I would like to talk about the broad land problems in Thailand. In Ratreer’s village, the people have stayed for a long time there, and the way they are trying to solve their land problem is *from the ground up to the satellite!* Because they have gathered a lot of satellite photos which show the people occupying this settlement since decades ago. But still this private land-owner is claiming he still owns this land, as well as all the land in the area. It happens the same way in so many areas, where claims of ownership appear out of the blue, and almost always claiming ownership of land occupied by the sea gypsies, the fisher folk, the very poor coastal communities. There is also the problem of the Thai people who live close to the border of Burma, and because they don’t have the citizenship papers, the government’s tsunami assistance isn’t available to them. There are so many of these kinds of problems.

The point is that the tsunami has exposed so many rights issues that already existed in our society, in which these very weak groups of people have been trying to get something for so long. But they couldn’t get it because they never had any power before.

But there have also been many cases in Thailand where other affected communities have managed to get some secure land in some way – by negotiation or by buying or leasing some nearby land – and have been able to start redeveloping their housing by people: people build the houses, people build the walkways, people make the water supply and plant the trees – they do it all themselves. There are now so many communities that have redeveloped their tsunami-wrecked villages this way.

Question from man in audience : Do they have “squatters rights” in those communities? If they have been on that land and developed it over a period of time, do they not have a right to be there - if the land is not privately owned?

Somsook : Most of these Thai communities had no official papers or legal rights to occupy the land where they had been living for so long. But after the tsunami, many have been able to secure some legal rights to the land, through negotiating lease agreements on government land, or finding inexpensive private land nearby to purchase.



Annie George (India) : In India, according to the Coastal Regulatory Zone Act, any house which was there prior to 1991 has an inalienable right to that land. And the fisher folk also who have been there for a long time have an inalienable right to that land.

Man in audience : So they’re not in this kind of legal battle with the government in India?

Annie George : No. In India, it’s likely different from what’s happening in the other places. In India, it is the communities themselves who have got a “two house theory,” in which they say that they would like to shift inland and get a new house, as well as keeping the other house that’s already there on the waterfront!

Somsook and others, in chorus : *Not everybody!*

Man in audience : I’m from the Habitat International Coalition’s Latin America office. I would like to share an experience of El Salvador after the hurricane in 1998, and the experience of an NGO called (*Fondacal?*). There was a problem with the land, because some affected people were landless and others had land. And the solution for the reconstruction was to use take one traditional construction system for those who owned their land, and to use a “moveable” system for people who do not own their land – then once they become owners of their own land, they can move their house to the new site. This was one solution in El Salvador.

Somsook: It would be nice to hear some additional points to the process in Moratuwa, one of the badly-affected cities in Sri Lanka. Maybe our Thai friends would also like to say how they made use of the tsunami not only to deal with the land issue but to broaden the possibilities to several other communities also.

Celine d’Cruz (India, SPARC, SDI) : I think Moratuwa, a small city not far from Colombo, is a good example in Sri Lanka where the federation was not very strong, and as in most of the settlements affected by the tsunami, the settlements along the coast were not organized before the tsunami came. So had to begin their organization after the tsunami came. And we used this opportunity in Moratuwa to negotiate with the city to include other slums in Moratuwa that were not affected to create a city development strategy for all the slums in Moratuwa – both tsunami affected and not affected. So they used the tsunami as an opportunity, and turned it over its head, to redesign the plan for those affected and not affected by tsunami, so that everybody benefited and used that time as an opportunity.



“After the tsunami, the people’s strategy was just to go back to the land where they used to stay, and start rebuilding their houses – right away.”

Somsook : This is an important point about the tsunami creating an opportunity – a larger opportunity, not only for the affected communities but for others. We have to broaden the support and change the structural problems to include other communities also.

Island-wide solutions in Thailand : There are similar cases in Koh Lanta and Phuket, in Thailand, where there are situations similar to what Celine has just pointed out. In Thailand’s Koh Lanta Island, only two communities were badly hit by the tsunami. But in the process, they started by building houses in those two communities and trying to solve the land issues there. But at the same time, other communities on the island,



that didn’t get the tsunami, are in exactly the same position, with extremely insecure land tenure. So on Koh Lanta, they enlarged the redevelopment process from these two communities to include all 23 traditional communities on the whole island, and made a network of communities, which then made the issue of secure land tenure an open, island-wide issue, and developed a new partnership between communities and the local authority, to try to address the land issue for all these communities, and to revive the their local culture, develop many other aspects of island life and well-being together. So this is another case where the tsunami problems were used as a lever to open up all these issues and to broaden opportunities for development of all communities in similarly vulnerable situations. On the much larger and more touristed island of Phuket also, they started the process with a few tsunami-hit communities, but have now expanded the secure land and housing movement to include something like 20 communities.

Preeda (Thailand) : In our case, after the tsunami, the people’s strategy was just to go back to the land where they used to stay, and start rebuilding their houses – right away. After that, they began to negotiate with the local authorities and with other agencies involved in the land conflict issue. Then after gathering information and documents about the history of their land, they could ask for help from the government, which eventually set up a special high-level committee to deal specifically with these tsunami land conflict situations involving traditional communities – on both government and private land. Finally, several of these communities have already been able to resolve their land conflicts and have got community title or long-term leases to their land – in Thailand, these tenure agreements have not taken the form of individual title or individual land leases, but have all been community land title or land lease agreements made out to the community cooperative.

“The tsunami has given us opportunities in several ways”

Ridwan (Indonesia) : The tsunami has given us opportunities in several ways :

- **The opportunity of having peace.** First, because Aceh was a military conflict area, and now we can open from that, and the conflict is over. So the tsunami has given us the opportunity for peace.
- **The opportunity to open up Aceh to the outside world.** Before the tsunami, because Aceh was a very closed area, we never met any foreigners. We didn’t know anybody from outside Aceh. So the tsunami has given us the opportunity that now we have brothers and sisters from other countries, working with us and helping us. And we are grateful for that.
- **The opportunity to work with others.** The tsunami has also given us the opportunity to open up our lives to working together with neighboring villages and also with groups from other sectors. Before the tsunami, in our area, even neighboring villages were suspicious of each other, and we acted like enemies to each other. But now we have strong network, we have a large people’s organization in which we all work together for the reconstruction of our villages and our part of the country.
- **The opportunity to extend our collective development to include other poor people in our area :** Also, we don’t limit our reconstruction work only to our own communities, but have also begun to work with others, like pedi-cab drivers, most of whom are poor and landless – we fight with them in their struggle for land and houses.
- **The opportunity to do for ourselves, to have more control over our own environment.** The thing is that since the tsunami, we have done so much for ourselves. We have the confidence now, the very strong confidence that we can actually take our own communities and manage our environment and our natural resources. Before the tsunami, it was all in the hands of the private sector or the government, all these decisions which affect our lives and our environment. For instance, we have many natural springs in our area, and now we have those springs and the good drinking water that comes from them in our own hands – it’s no longer being controlled by the private sector or government. Through the rebuilding process, we worked with our partners like Uplink and UPC to develop our capacities, to train ourselves to take over more and more of the construction and management and organizing process, so we are confident now that we can continue our lives, in a better way than before the waves.



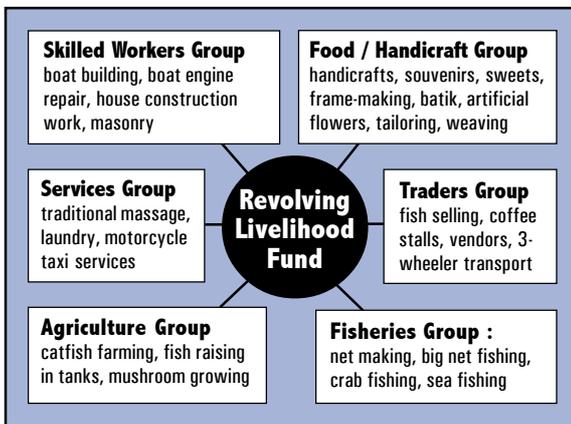
6.

QUESTION : What opportunities has the tsunami created in the affected communities, what have we learned, and what do we want to tell other communities which face similar disasters?

Somsook : Our Indonesian friends have moved us to the next point: what kinds of opportunities have been created by the tsunami? What have we learned during the last year and a half of intense reconstruction work? And what would we like to pass on to other communities around the globe who may face similar kinds of disasters in the future? We hope such terrible things don't happen again, of course, but if they do, we shouldn't have to start from zero each time - we can bring these lessons into the process of implementation right away.

Man in audience (Canada) : I was in an earthquake in 1946, when I was a little boy, and right after that earthquake, we had a tsunami that went right through the center of our community. So there are many areas of our world that are experiencing these [erratic occurrences?] Turkey has had many earthquakes. We have to do the things that will make us prepared. And that means educating people about the signs which indicate when there is going to be an earthquake, and also to have provisions for safe-routes, as they have in the Oregon coast, where they have a siren system to warn people. They also have signs that show the way to go to the safer and higher land – that's all along the waterfront areas, so people can see that at all the times. So things like that, that kind of preparation, can save a lot of people pain and suffering and all that. I was wondering what happens to the jobs after the tsunami? I know that many jobs are lost in the earthquake. My business is earthquake preparedness, so I'm also involved in this area.

Somsook : There isn't much time, but perhaps after we finish the discussion we could talk very quickly about jobs, if there's time. Unless any community people would like to respond to this question?



Maitree (Thailand) : Now we have more than twenty occupation groups in Baan Nam Khem, to help people in the affected communities to start earning again, through different kinds of jobs, like handicraft production, batik, setting up coffee shops, food vending, boat-building, fishing net-weaving, motorcycle-taxis. But the main point is that it is the people – it is the affected communities themselves – who manage all this, not outsiders, not other agencies, not a government agency. Because these affected people know best what they need, and what they can do, and they know how best to manage this kind of occupation revival project. But they have got the opportunity to do this.

Somsook : I think the key issue is to get the communities which have different interests to come together, and to have access to these kinds of flexible revolving funds, which allow them to develop whatever kinds of housing or livelihood or development initiatives they need to rebuild their lives. (*showing slide of a bubble-diagram*) This is the diagram which shows how the revolving fund in Maitree's community works: each circle is one group. You will see different kinds of revolving

fund for different groups of people who are joining in the same occupational work, and all these mini-revolving funds are linked to the central fund, which provides loans to start all these businesses. This is how we use the fund together with the community organization process, so the development and the organization go together.

“I think this is one of the most important points of this meeting: how we can use the process of solving problems as a development issue, to lead to the development of strong community organizations, and to empower people to handle all aspects of their lives – even very battered, traumatized tsunami survivors.”



Ridwan (Indonesia) : We do the reconstruction ourselves - the communities. So all of us have the opportunity for getting jobs through this very big reconstruction project. Some are masons, some are carpenters or materials suppliers. But also because of the revival of the farming activities, women are starting to plant chilies, bananas, papayas, and coffee. So we start with our own economic activities.

“Nobody is idle. And that is also a very good way to overcome trauma of the disaster we've all been through, by being very busy.”

Woman in the audience : I just wanted to mention that one of the main findings that come out of this tsunami and of most of disasters is that there is no human rights followed in the disaster management and response. So it's a complete violation of all the existing human rights standards that should be applied in post-disaster situations, by government and by international and national and regional and local NGOs. We believe that the right to relief and rehabilitation is a human right.



Another woman in the audience : I would just like to add that we acknowledge that it's the people's movement that are actually affecting any kind of change, and also in terms of rebuilding these communities. So I really hope that each one of us in this room, who have been a part of this dialogue, can actually go back and be able to support these mobilizations and these movements of people.

Nilanthi (Sri Lanka) : **The main lesson we have learned through the tsunami is that people should never be prevented from being the owners of their own lives. They should decide what they need and what they should do, even when they are in bad shape, after a crisis.**

Man in audience : As you know, when the tsunami happened, there were a lot of questions about where did all the money go. In our community [of expatriate Sri Lankans living in Canada], we raised a lot of money for the tsunami, and we sent it to UNESCO and the Red Cross, etc. A year ago, a group of cyclists also raised about ten thousand euros, and they didn't know how to dispose of it. They knew us pretty well and knew we had links to Sri Lanka, so they asked me how they could get this money to some really deserving people? So I went to some people I knew, who had done some work in Sri Lanka, and they came back with five community groups in Sri Lanka. One of them was a group of widows with families who had lost their husbands and some children in the tsunami. They had formed a cooperative movement to survive in the affected communities. And we sent this thousand Euros directly to them. They sent us the bank account and a thank-you letter, identifying. So the lesson is that they could survive with this ten thousand Euros, if it went directly to them, to control and to decide how to use themselves.

Fitriya (Indonesia) : **“Another lesson that we learned is that we now know that actually each of us has a potential that we didn't realize before. And it is the tsunami that has given us the opportunity to know that we have the potential. And second, we have learned that we will be strong if we are together, if we stand together as a network. If we are just working on our own, as individuals, we won't be able to achieve our purpose.”**



Maitree (Thailand) : Money that is just freely passed out to individual people within the affected communities is always a waste. The aid organizations and development agencies should believe that people can conduct the work, can lead the development process. *They can think and they can do things.* And when we link with other communities facing similar problems gives us a lot more confidence and learning and understanding. It creates a lot of new allies also. And learning among communities becomes almost automatic when these linkages increase, and this will cause a big change in the people, and pave the way for solutions.

Anoma (Sri Lanka) : We understood that people have their own management capacity. The only thing is that we were not using that capacity. But this tragedy gave us an opportunity to begin practicing that capacity.

7.

SOME CLOSING REMARKS FROM SENIOR TSUNAMI SUPPORTERS :

Somsook : Before we end the session, we'd like to ask a few of our senior friends, who are long-time supporters of the larger people-driven development process around the world, to say a few words about their take on the tsunami, and the lessons it has generated for a people-driven development process. In Asia, we always come back to the senior-most friends after listening to all the others! I'd like to invite Gregor Meerpohl to speak first, because the day after the tsunami, he was the one who first tried to persuade many of us who were busy doing other things to rush to assist the areas hit by the tsunami. One thing about the tsunami is that it was so big, and it caused destruction on such a great scale that is required so many activists, so many people and organizations to come together and join hands in trying to find ways to solve the people's problems on the ground. And that is quite different from earlier disasters. And Gregor is one of the key persons behind the proposal to bring together so many people and groups from across the Asia region to work together on this great calamity.

Gregor Meerpohl (From the German donor agency MISEREOR) : Sorry but I don't see myself as a senior or anything else! I don't think I have to say much, because when video started in the beginning, I think everything has been already very well documented – how in such a case people have reacted, and which kind of support they should be given.

As Celine mentioned, it doesn't really make much difference whether it's a natural disaster or a man-made disaster – when we started to support the relief and rehabilitation work in the tsunami areas, there were some huge evictions in Mumbai. I was in India at that time, and I made some photos of the evictions in Mumbai, and then I made some pictures from the tsunami areas in Banda Aceh. And I showed these photos afterwards to my colleagues in Aachen. At first, nobody realized I was showing pictures from two different disasters – they thought it was all tsunami photos, in Aceh and in India. They didn't realize at first that they were looking at photos of a man-made disaster as well.



“I am coming from MISEREOR, a small, church-based development support organization in Germany. We are not actually a disaster or a relief support organization. There is a growing number of specialist organizations which deal specifically with disasters. In fact is we are seeing a dramatic increase in natural disasters around the world. And there is a whole disaster industry developing also, which is waiting for disasters, and they are immediately able to raise funds and run into the countries and try to do something, bringing their experts and pre-fabricated solutions to push towards people, but nothing whatsoever is happening. So what is the message in such a world? How to do it differently?”

As has already been mentioned here, we have the ACHR network, the SDI Network, the Uplink Network – these are the partners MISEREOR has been working with and supporting, right from the beginning. And so what have we learned from these networks?

- **First of all, there is already so much capacity in the grassroots people**, which is mostly being neglected in the normal development work which is being done.
- **You have to start where the people already are**, and don't develop or decide where the people have to start from the outside.
- **You have to go in and listen, and to reflect and only then to act.** In most disaster situations, of course, there is this huge pressure behind the bigger organizations to act quickly – *they don't listen, they don't reflect, and they don't even think!* I think this is something which is very important.
- **And one thing we also try to support is the learning among the involved groups** – there is already so much knowledge available within the Asia region. This was not mentioned much in the discussion, but it's something important. In Banda Aceh, for example, when the tsunami happened, we already had contact with Wardah and the Uplink Network. And two or three years earlier, there were a lot of activities within the Asia region in which ACHR worked with UPC to create the national Uplink Network in Indonesia. And then this national network was able to react immediately when the tsunami happened, and was able to mobilize local resources and assistance, which is very often neglected in disasters, when aid is coming in from outside, and nobody looks at the capacities already existing within the country or to activate local government's responsibility to contribute to the disaster. Because the government also has an obligation.



Somsook : One thing that is very important in what Gregor was saying is the need to involve the groups who are already linked into large-scale networks within the country. In Thailand, in Aceh, in Sri Lanka, in India – in all these cases, the groups who were able to work very effectively and on a very broad scale with the tsunami-affected communities were the groups which already had networks in place. So they were able to quickly mobilize people from those networks to go into the area and help.

What Gregor *did not* mention is the way in which his donor organization supported the people in the tsunami crisis: they made room for a very flexible system of managing the finance, and allowed the groups working on the ground to channel resources according to all the different needs and situations, to where resources were most needed. Of course they asked a lot of questions about where and how the money went, but we could explain and they agreed with that.

Father Norberto Carcellar (Philippines) : I'm Norberto from the Philippines. The Philippines is a country which is located along the “Ring of fire” in the Pacific rim. We have an average of 19 typhoons a year, we have earthquakes, we have erupting volcanoes, and we have land-slides and flooding every year. Many of these disasters are of such a huge magnitude that we have to call the military to intervene. The trouble is, the military are primarily trained to shoot! After the rescue operations using their boats and helicopters, they leave the people in the barracks. And after that, what can the affected people do? So this is what pushed the national federation to do something, to intervene *after* the disasters. And this is the longest project of all, because we are not just building houses, we are rebuilding the lives of people damaged after the disaster.

“Funding after disasters, like most funding for development, is divisive, is too expensive. Decisions are made in distant places by people who don’t even understand the language of the people they are meant to be working with. And the accountability is always upwards, it’s never downwards.”

Jan Meeuwissen (UN-Habitat) : Somsook asked me to summarize the event today. I’d like to do this very shortly. I can say *the people have spoken!* I think it’s very important for the people here to listen to the experiences of the people who have gone through this disasters, who have organized their lives, who have overcome the difficulties and have made opportunities out of those difficulties. I think it is very important for all of us to realize the potential which in the people, and for we as support organizations, like UN-Habitat, to really promote this type of approach. We promote the fact that the solution is with the people. So our role is to facilitate that process, to help the people in their own process of reorganizing their lives. So all the projects which we are having in the disaster-hit countries – in Indonesia, in Sri Lanka, in Thailand - have gotten the title *“Rebuilding communities.”* What we want to indicate with that is not just the physical process of rebuilding the houses and the infrastructure which was lost in those places, but also rebuilding the social structure, the social capital of the communities, by bringing them together and regaining what they have lost, as a social fabric. And that’s also the strength that you sense from today’s discussions, that the people have in getting back to their lives. What came out today, when people are taking development in their own hands – we see it also as a better way in dealing with development in general. Not only after disasters, but most of those who informally live in the slums use the same process of getting organized, attracting new resources, identifying the resources they have themselves, and in that way improving their communities. Again, this is the process which UN-Habitat promotes and supports in its development projects as well. That’s the reason we asked the organizers of these post-tsunami projects to come here and share that, with all interested parties here.

David Satterthwaite (IIED, UK) : I suppose the thing I want to reflect on is that what we’ve heard today isn’t necessarily new, but it reinforces something that we’ve learned with difficulty over thirty years. But the funding systems don’t change. The funding structures don’t change. The funding institutions don’t change. Funding after disasters, like most funding for development, is divisive, is too expensive – decisions are made in distant places, by people who don’t even understand the language of the people they are meant to be working with. And the accountability is always *upwards*, it’s never *downwards*. I suppose it’s our responsibility to remember what we said here and ask ourselves, *How do we change funding systems? How do we change funding structures so they actually deliver to this community-driven process?* We know that this process is the only one that really works, but *how do we change?* It would be nice if the World Bank was no longer a World Bank for governments, it was a World Bank for communities.

Kirtee Shah (India) : My name is Kirtee Shah. I’m certainly senior - my beard, my gray hair. I want to make several learning points :

- **People know best :** What we’ve heard from the communities today tells us very clearly how wise, what an enormous amount of wisdom they have. If the policies and programs are designed, based on what people say, we know we will never have problems. This is a very important thing that we have learned. As David said, it’s a re-learning, but the fact is, we have to remind ourselves time and time again that people know best.
- **People should stay where they stay now :** There are good reasons for people to stay where they now stay - good social reasons, good economic reasons, good cultural reasons. Therefore if you want to displace people or to remove people from that land, you must be very, very careful. Disasters certainly should not be a reason to displace people. This is very important in terms of the land issue.
- **Governments needs to learn how to listen to people.** I personally believe that there was a great amount of concern when governments said, people should not stay near the sea because they could be damaged or they could be hurt. The problem is they don’t have the ability, they don’t have the instrumentality, they don’t have the tools to go to people and listen to them. If this problem was handed over to people, that here is the danger from the waves, what do you want to do? If they’d been asked, they certainly would have come up with very different solutions than the solutions that the government came up with. Therefore if the government developed tools to talk to people, they would do much greater than they usually do.
- **Governments can learn and they can listen.** Let me give just one concrete example. There are several people sitting here from Gujarat. They were able to relate to government in 2001, when the great earthquake happened, that if you really keep people in the center of the whole process, people will be able to do a good job. After the earthquake, 300,000 houses had to be built – and the government did not build a single house. All 300,000 houses have been built by the people. Therefore if you are able to communicate this to government, government will listen.
- **People should rebuild their houses, not the government, not the contractors, not the aid agencies.** If you look at earthquakes and tsunamis, 90% of the houses that get destroyed are the houses of the poor. Then you should know that these are the houses that were built by people themselves in any case. Therefore people should rebuild them, not the contractors, not the government, not the funding agencies. Therefore if you want to rebuild them, keep people in the center of the process and you will do them well, you will move faster, and you will do exceedingly better.
- **Rehabilitation has to be “reconstruction plus” – it can not be just the reconstruction of what got destroyed.** Because so much really is available. Now that “plus” could be sanitation, that “plus” could be community processes, that “plus” could be many things. But that “plus” must be identified and must happen.
- **A disaster can also be an opportunity.** It’s an opportunity to rebuild communities, it’s an opportunity to strengthen people, it’s an opportunity to end wars, it’s an opportunity to go a step forward. If this happens, we’ll be able to do it better, and the communities have shown us today how they know it better than most.



The world we live in has changed . . .

Somsook : But sadly, in all the larger discourse on disaster relief and rehabilitation, people are not mentioned very much. And I think it's important to point out that in a disaster situation like this tsunami, we can't rely on conventional systems, conventional government departments, conventional strategies for delivering relief and hand-outs, conventional ways of thinking and dealing with a crisis situation. Why? Because the tsunami brought problems that are just too huge, too diverse, too urgent, too intense, too wide-scale for any conventional systems to handle.

So the best idea is to adopt tools which support the affected people to deal with all these diverse problems themselves, as much as possible. That in turn creates a big opportunity for reorganizing, for redeveloping, for solving whatever deeper, structural problems exist in those places – problems that existed even before the tsunami happened. So from a community activist's viewpoint, a major disaster like the tsunami can create huge opportunities for community organization. If we are able to do it properly, in such a way that people are the main actors and are leading different aspects of the development process in a very big way, then you'll start seeing some real change for the better.

I'd like to end here with one last observation. *The world we live in has changed.* The conventional approach, in which governments and development agencies look at people as passive recipients, should be changed. It's time to throw away that sad old rule-book once and for all. You can hear very clearly from today's discussions that even the very poorest affected people can stand up and be the leaders of the rehabilitation process themselves.

So the agenda for the world's development should be changed, so that people are no longer passive recipients, but can be the most active implementers of their own development. Not only people affected by the tsunami. Anybody living in urban slums, any poor people living rural areas can have this same potential. And this is the task of the development community to learn how to equip ourselves with this new understanding and to support the people in a big scale, to be able to manage their lives, to have this kind of confidence, and to develop whatever initiatives they like to change their situation – in their communities, in their countries, and in the whole world.

If we look at development that way, we can see that this world urban forum is really positive, because we've found a new way to change the world: and the way to change the world is by giving people this power, the power that we've taken away from them for such a long time. Now we have to find ways to pass this power back to the people, so they can lead the development process. Because they are the real armies in our societies. This is what the tsunami has taught us. And I think that we will take these lessons with us, think about them, and apply them to any kind of disaster, or any kind of development initiatives we are working on in the long term.

Thank you very much.



With big thanks to Hosaka, Cak-Cak, Sandeep, Homeless International and Acharn Muk for photos.

**Asian
Coalition
for Housing
Rights**

More information on the tsunami :
ACHR has produced a number of newsletters, video films, field reports, policy recommendations and documents on the Asian tsunami. Please contact ACHR for copies, or visit our website, where most of these documents can be downloaded.

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