HOUSING
byPeople
IN ASIA

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POOR PEOPLE FINDING SOLUTIONS TO A POOR PEOPLE'S DISASTER :

It's been eight months now since the tsunami lashed coastlines around the Indian Ocean's rim, destroying lives, houses, villages and livelihoods on a scale almost too great to fathom. These have been months heavy with bereavement and struggle. But they've also been very busy months, as people in different countries have responded to the tragedy in different ways.

Among the tsunami's victims were tourists, tycoons, a prince and many ordinary traders, workers, pilgrims and families enjoying their day off. But it was overwhelmingly the poor who suffered the greatest losses and the poor who are having the hardest time rebuilding their lives and communities after the waves. Despite gigantic aid efforts being made by groups from around the world, their task is being made harder by the same political and economic systems which marginalized and impoverished their coastal communities before the waves hit, and which since the tsunami have been trying to dispossess them of their traditional land and livelihoods.

In the commercialized world we now live in, where land has become primarily a commodity, the tsunami has given powerful vested interests an opportunity to grab this valuable coastal land, through legislation, through legalistic means or through market forces.

Asia's tsunami-hit communities are up against all the greed, corruption and ugliness that comes with land and money. But instead of waiting for the evictions to happen, many of these communities and their supporters are finding ways to tackle these big issues, and conjur out of the tragedy some opportunities of their own, not only to rebuild their houses and settlements, but to make their lives, communities and tenure more secure, more healthy, more life-sustaining than before the killer waves hit. There are some good stories and some important breakthroughs happening around the region, and it's important that we turn our faces towards them.

GOING BACK AND MAKING A NEW START ON OLD LAND :

Even when faced with new regulations and market forces which threaten their right to reoccupy their traditional coastal land, tsunami-battered villagers are going back. And once back, their rebuilding becomes not only a powerful act of negotiation, but a way of showing that traditional fishing villages and coastal development can peacefully coexist.

REBUILDING HOUSES AND RUINED VILLAGES WITH BETTER STRENGTH :

When tsunami-affected people come together, talk about their needs, set their own priorities and develop their own plans for rebuilding their ruined settlements, a lot of things happen. Read on to see how a busy, communal reconstruction process can be a great form of post-trauma therapy, as well as a community-strengthener and a magnet for the bigger, longer-term reconstruction resources that come later.

REVIVING LIVELIHOODS AND LOCAL VILLAGE ECONOMIES :

For people who lost everything in the waves, shelter, food and medicines are just one step in a long, difficult process of putting their lives and survival systems back together again. Disasters like the tsunami can be huge poverty creaters, but many groups are showing how the strength of communities can help individual families revive their capacity to earn and support themselves.

SPECIAL ISSUE ON HOW ASIA'S PRECARIOUS COASTAL COMMUNITIES ARE COPING AFTER

TSUNAMI

TSUNAMI IN ASIA

Harsh realities behind the picture post-cards . . .

It is in the nature of great catastrophes that things are never the same afterwards. And in the case of the Asian tsunami, there was plenty that wanted changing in the coastal areas that were hit on that Sunday morning of December 26th. Don't be fooled by the turquoise seas, the palm-fringed beaches, the tropical sunsets and the picturesque fishing villages. These beauties were like masks which the giant waves tore violently away, exposing layers of reality underneath that were not so pretty: dispossessed indigenous peoples, degraded coastal environments, poverty and exploitation.

Asia's tsunami-affected areas are full of communities where fisher folk and indigenous peoples (often considered minorities within their own country) have lived in ever greater precariousness, many without legal tenancy or ownership rights to land they have occupied for generations. Depending on who you ask, these communities are variously classified as cultural treasures, traditional villages, informal communities, or *illegal* squatters on public land. By continuing to be there, they were able to maintain some kind of occupation rights to their land.

In most cases, this land has become extremely valuable to the burgeoning tourism, fisheries and real-estate sectors, and these communities were already being pushed around – and pushed out – in a titan's game of profiteering, through regulation, intimidation and eviction. But once the tsunami swept these people and their settlements away, as with a stiff broom, even these tenuous occupancy rights began rapidly to disintegrate.

INDIA

13 coastal districts were affected by the tsunami in the state of Tamil Nadu, the most severely affected being Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Chennai, Kancheepuram and Kanakumari districts. In places where pilgrims and tourists flock, such as Velankanni and Kanyakumari, at the southern tip of India, and on Marina Beach in Madras, there were also many casualties.

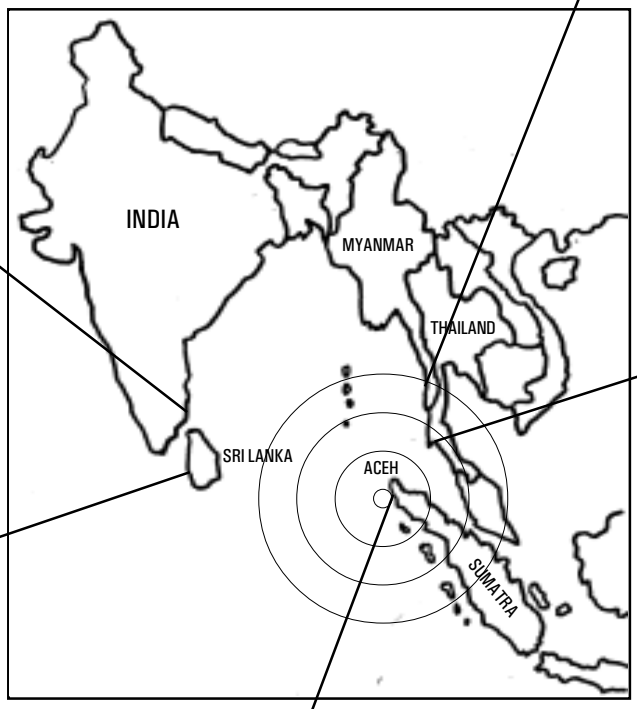
But it was overwhelmingly the fisherfolk who inhabit the land closest to the sea who were the main victims. Besides suffering the greatest number of deaths, these fishing communities face the long-term consequences of lost homes, destroyed village infrastructure and total loss of livelihood when boats and fishing equipment were lost.

Tsunami in Asia :

- 350,000 killed
- 2.5 million homeless
- 3,300 villages hit
- 173,000 boats lost

MYANMAR

By the time the waves reached Myanmar's Ayeyarawadi Delta coast, their force was greatly reduced, so there were far fewer deaths and much less destruction than in neighboring countries. In the three worst-hit districts of Pathein, Myaung Mya and Pya Pone, towns and villages were built well inland and didn't sustain much damage. The huts built along the seashore however, belonging to the poorest fisherfolk and laborers, sustained the most damage.



THAILAND

The tsunami hit six provinces along southern Thailand's Andaman coast: Krabi, Phuket, Ranong, Trang, Satun and Phang Nga (the worst hit). The catastrophe left hotels, resorts, shops, businesses, private houses, boats and vehicles in ruins, but the greatest number of victims were people living in 400 affected fishing villages.

The rehabilitation happened faster in Thailand than other countries, partly because the waves hit one of the most important tourist areas, which rakes in a third of the country's total tourism income, so there was a commercial incentive to get everything back to normal as fast as possible. Also, because a third of the 8,562 people who died were foreign tourists from 50 nations, the crisis got a lot of attention from both the government and the rest of the world from the first day.

SRI LANKA

The tsunami is the most devastating natural catastrophe in Sri Lanka's history. 80% of the island's coastline was ravaged by three or four waves. Because these areas include some of the most urbanized and densely populated parts of the country, the death, suffering and physical destruction of housing and infrastructure was far greater. Nearly 10% of the country's population was affected, the overwhelming majority being the poor.

Especially hard hit were Sri Lanka's eastern and southern coasts, but the worst destruction was in the northeast, in areas controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), where the waves have displaced 300,000 people, adding to the 700,000 already displaced by the long civil war.

INDONESIA

Of all places in Asia, the Indonesian province of Aceh (and to a lesser extent North Sumatra Province) bore the brunt of the tsunami's destructive power. The waves that hit Aceh's west coast were 20 to 30 meters high - taller than a coconut tree. Virtually all of the province's west coast fishing villages were destroyed. An average of only 10% of the original population in these villages survived, the greatest number of casualties being women and children. The coastal roads were also ripped away, so these areas were not accessible by land until April. In the provincial capital of Banda Aceh, there were four waves, which rolled 8 kilometers inland, dragging houses, cars, trees, cattle, telephone poles and wires with them, in a deadly, roaring, black wall of water and rubble. In less than half an hour, 80% of the city was in ruins, looking like Hiroshima after the atomic bomb. The tsunami was caused by a big earthquake (9.5 on the Richter scale) whose epicenter was only 250 kms west of Banda Aceh. So besides the tsunami, Aceh was also shaken 15 minutes beforehand by this earthquake – a major calamity in its own right, which caused the death of hundreds of people who were crushed inside collapsing buildings.

What the waves took away :

*Even eight months afterwords, governments around Asia are still scrambling to get accurate information about the extent of fatalities and physical damage caused by the tsunami. This is no easy task, given the fact that many affected areas are still in deep crisis and enormous displacement of people makes it very hard to account for who's where and what's what. Plus, the official statistics and the findings of groups working with tsunami victims on the ground are often quite different. Here's our own rough summary of what the tsunami took away, drawn from reports sent in by friends working on the ground in the affected countries (**Uplink/UPC** in Indonesia, **Abhiyan** in India, **Sevanatha** in Sri Lanka and **CODI** in Thailand).*

	INDONESIA	SRI LANKA	INDIA	THAILAND	MYANMAR	TOTAL
LIVES	**260,000** people killed (official number), but groups working in Aceh say the real number is closer to **400,000**.	**40,000** people killed and **23,176** persons injured, mostly fishermen and their families. **800** children left without parents.	**16,383** people are officially confirmed dead, and **5,823** are still listed as missing. **529** children were orphaned.	**5,399** people are officially confirmed dead, of whom about one third are foreign tourists. **1,100** children orphaned.	**31** people died and **51** injured. *(Our information covers only the 3 affected districts in the Ayerawady Delta).*	**321,914** people confirmed dead and **8,885** missing (and presumed dead). At least **5,000** children were orphaned.
VILLAGES	**1,000** villages and towns totally destroyed (one third of the villages in the province)	**14** main cities and **662** *Grama Niladari* village and small township divisions were affected.	**897** villages and towns and **1** big city (Chennai) affected, all in the state of Tamil Nadu.	**418** coastal villages affected, of which **47** have been almost completely destroyed by the waves.	**17** villages have been badly affected in three districts, affecting about 7,000 people.	About **3,000** villages and small townships, and about **20** major cities were affected.
HOUSES	**280,000** houses destroyed, leaving **547,509** people homeless.	**195,600** houses destroyed, leaving **1 million** people homeless.	**239,024** houses destroyed, leaving about **1 million** people homeless.	At least **3,676** houses destroyed or badly damaged (officially)	**539** houses destroyed, leaving **2,145** people homeless.	**720,000** houses destroyed or damaged. **2.5 million** people homeless.
BOATS	**80,000** fishing boats destroyed; **25,000** fishermen killed; **91** wholesale and village fish markets destroyed.	**15,300** fishing boats destoyed, representing **50%** of the island's total fleet; over **100,000** fishermen are jobless.	**74,025** fishing boats (*catamarans* and *vallams*) damaged or destoyed, as well as nets, motors and fishing equipment.	**3,307** fishing boats, **15,534** nets and breeding baskets, and **35,727** pieces of fishing equipment lost or destroyed.	**126** fishing boats (motorized and row-boats) have been destroyed or badly damaged in the three Ayerawady districts.	**175,000** fishing boats destoyed or damaged; at least **420,000** households headed by jobless fishermen or fishing workers.
LIVINGS	**150,000** fishermen lost their jobs. **25%** of Aceh's entire workforce died in the tsunami. Joblessness in the province is now **35%**.	**275,000** people became unemployed, of which **90,000** are fishermen. Tourism is the second-worst-hit sector for job-losses.	The ovehwhelming number of people out of work are fishermen, but **8,036** farmers have lost work in Nagapattinam District.	The livelihood of **120,000** people has been disrupted including fishermen, construction laborers, farmers, tourism and fisheries workers.	**15,000** people have lost jobs or work, most of them fishermen or laborers working on fishing boats or in coconut plantations.	It's difficult to put a number on the collossal loss of jobs and earning opportunities, but this is clearly the key to survival and real rehabilitation.
SERVICES	**10,000** kms of roads, **7** bus terminals, **28,000** hectares of irrigation and **100** kms of canals were destroyed, as well as innumerable public buildings	**73** hospitals, **363** clinics, **182** schools, markets, transport terminals, **50,000** wells, **1,600** kms of roads and **160** kms of rail track destroyed.	Roads, bridges, wells, power and water supply lines damaged. Sea walls breached. **15,000** hectares of farmland salinized. Small scale industries ruined.	Tourism facilities (**315** hotels and resorts, **234** restaurants), fisheries outlets, agricultural fields and orchards were destroyed or badly damaged.	**2** bridges, **8** sea walls, **2** Buddhist temples, **4** monastaries, **8** schools, **3** rice-mills and many fresh water wells and resevoirs were badly damaged.	In most of the big national tsunami reconstruction budgets, these are the big-ticket items that eat up the millions, not housing, jobs or social supports

"Bachelor villages"

About four times as many women as men died in the tsunami, according to a report published in March by Oxfam International. In Aceh, an average of 77% of the fatalities were women. Findings were similar in India and Sri Lanka, where 70 - 80% of those who died were women. Why? A lot of men were away from home or working in the fields and had more chances to flee, or they were fishing out at sea, where the waves rolled harmlessly under their boats. Men were able to run faster to escape, and even those caught up in the waves had greater strength to survive by clinging to debris. Women, on the other hand, were mostly at home, cooking or looking after children, and efforts to save their children slowed their flight. In India and Sri Lanka, many women were on the beach buying or unloading fish from the boats. Researchers found few women could swim or climb trees, while many got entangled in their sarees as they tried to swim to safety. This disproportionate loss spells trouble for the surviving women in these depopulated communities, where there are now many more men than women. The report warns that this imbalance is likely to put pressure on surviving women to marry at a younger age, which may mean loss of education, pregnancy at a younger age and more pregnancies.

Meunasah Tuha, in Aceh, is one of Indonesia's new "Bachelor Villages," after the tsunami killed a disproportionate number of women and children. Only 227 of the village's 1,408 inhabitants survived the tsunami, of whom only 45 are female.

DISASTER RELIEF :

URBAN REALITIES and SEASIDE REALITIES . . .

How NGOs, professionals and civil society groups trained in the hard knocks of urban slums are coping with a different set of realities in these coastal villages . . .

After the tsunami, a lot of NGOs, activists and professionals who'd cut their teeth on problems of urban poverty and housing suddenly found themselves plunging into the unfamiliar work of emergency relief and coastal village rehabilitation. The scale of the calamity meant that everyone's help was needed and no time to be fussy about qualifications. But as they got deeper into the work, a lot of these city folks found that the underlying forces at the seaside are not so different than those in the city after all.

These fisher folk might have had better incomes and living environments than urban slum-dwellers, but when the tsunami swept away their homes, families, friends, communities, boats and jobs, it left them poorer than anybody. And like their urban cousins, these battered fishing communities suddenly found themselves facing some of the same big, structural issues of land commercialization which push people out of the places they need to be to survive - whether it be in the city or near the sea.

For these urban groups, the tsunami has been a development challenge on a gigantic scale. And some of the old techniques and organizing principles which have helped urban slum dwellers find solutions to serious problems of land tenure, housing and livelihood have come in quite handy in this dire, new seaside setting: techniques like network building, surveying, making space for people to come together and plan together, negotiating in blocks with government, model house exhibitions, using inaugurations and ribbon cuttings to create alliances and showcase people's ideas.

In the course of the relief and rehabilitation process, a lot of the same old misconceptions about the helplessness of the urban poor were resurrected and foisted on the tsunami-hit coastal communities. And the past eight months have shown that even people who are battered, traumatized and impoverished can be extremely effective partners in post-disaster rehabilitation, as they can in any development process which concerns their lives and future.

5 Myths busted . . .

How the work of poor coastal communities and their NGO and civil society supporters are turning some old assumptions about disaster relief and long-term rehabilitation on their head :

1 Disaster victims are helpless.

Relief and rehabilitation after a major calamity is usually considered a thing done *for* victims and not *by* them. Of course there's much need for help with rescue, medical aid, food, shelter and funds. But the tsunami has shown that even badly traumatized disaster survivors can begin taking care of things very early on, organizing themselves, coming together to talk, plan and work. Getting busy like this sets a healthy ball rolling which makes the long-term process of rehabilitation go much faster and better. Activity can be an excellent post-trauma therapy and one of the best antidotes to the helpless victim mind-set, which reduces formerly active people to passive recipients of what everyone else thinks they need.

2 Governments know best.

The notion that disaster survivors need to be centrally involved in decisions about their own rehabilitation is not a radical new concept, but a lot of governments and aid organizations still don't get it. Disasters bring out a *daddy-knows-best* attitude in many of the best-intended state agencies and aid institutions. They figure that in crisis, all the lessons they learned in those participation and devolution seminars no longer apply. In fact they apply most urgently!

3 Relief is best left to relief professionals.

There's no point waiting for the formal systems, with their bureaucracies and professionals, to solve the problems - the tsunami is too big, too sudden, too complex, too off-the-map for any of the conventional systems of governance to understand, much less deal with. So instead of waiting for the system to do what it can't do, it's possible for affected people to initiate things, find ways of resolving these huge problems in their own ways. The tsunami is proving that when this happens, people can show their societies ways of dealing with calamities and these people-driven solutions can become part of the system. Plus, if the victims themselves, who know best what they need, are centrally involved in all aspects of relief and rehabilitation, there will be fewer aid mis-matches, fewer conflicts, less waste.

4 Disaster relief is democratic.

Natural disasters hit everyone in their path, rich or poor. But disaster relief and rehabilitation are seldom so democratic. The crisis in many disasters is that those with the right credentials get the aid coming through official channels, while those without don't: you need proof of residence to get a place in the relief camp, ID cards to get medical care, title deeds to get housing compensation, registration certificates to get new boats, etc. In these ways, disaster aid can become an extension of the unbalanced power structures which enriched some and impoverished and marginalized others in the first place. So another lesson in the Asian tsunami has been that the relief process must also target the untitled, the unregistered, the unlisted, the unenrolled and the undocumented, so they don't fall through the cracks.

5 Nobody would pick on someone who's just lost everything.

It may comfort some to think that land-grabbers are going to rot in hell for their sins against the poor, tsunami-battered fisher folk they are trying to disposess. But in the here-and-now, imperiled communities need more than divine retribution to defend their turf and to convince a sometimes-greedy system that in fact, their villages, their livelihoods and their ways of life can co-exist quite nicely with development. They can only do that by developing pragmatic, workable solutions. And this involves gathering accurate information, preparing alternatives and using all the tools of networking, negotiation, good design, ecological sensitivity and persuasiveness to battle the powerful and unscrupulous commercial forces that are only too ready to use such catastrophes to eliminate obstacles in the way of their plans.

NETWORKING and COLLABORATION :

When it comes to managing major disaster relief, the total turns out to be greater than the sum of its separate parts . . .

The tsunami has shown that in places where networks and working bonds between groups already existed, or were created and strengthened during the course of the relief process, a more collaborative approach and a culture of working together has helped moderate the effects of the onslaught of aid, so that ultimately, most of the aid resources reached those who really need it.

The thing about large-scale calamities like earthquakes, floods and storms is that the institutions, policies and ways of thinking which already exist in most countries are almost never able to cope with them effectively. The scale is just too big, the disaster too sudden, the needs too urgent. Existing systems designed to deal with neatly compartmentalized issues are quickly overwhelmed by the onrush of complex needs after a disaster. An organized relief and rehabilitation process cannot be implemented by one group or one agency. What such huge calamities require is for groups in many areas and with many different kinds of expertise to link together in different ways, to pool resources, information and ideas. Why? To build a common understanding of the calamity that is shared by professionals, aid organizations, government departments and community groups, and to use this common understanding to develop ways of dealing with the problems in a more coordinated, collective fashion.

This kind of common platform does not exist in most areas, and so when calamities do occur, relief and rehabilitation efforts are often plagued by lack of coordination between groups, competition for funds or recognition, mistrust, territoriality, conflicting agendas and disaster aid philosophies. But when people's groups, NGOs, aid agencies and government departments do link together, through some kind of collaborative mechanism or on a common platform, it can stabilize an otherwise volatile aid situation, and allow the separate efforts of many different groups to add up to a more unified, comprehensive and effective aid effort, so nobody misses out.

This is never an easy thing to do, especially in the heat and chaos of a major crisis situation. Establishing such a linking mechanism doesn't mean that all these groups have to work together and can't do their own thing. But it does mean that their activities and their learning should be linked. Once such a platform is established and links the work of many different groups, it can balance different factions and allow groups to make strategic moves in collaboration, when necessary. This is especially important during a crisis, when you have to move fast and when ideas and developments have to be shared quickly. Once one group shows a promising direction, for example, other groups can follow, because the flow of news and ideas is open and good ideas from one area can be quickly picked up and applied elsewhere.

Networking within countries

- **INDONESIA:** A national network of poor community groups, NGOs and professionals helps 25 of Aceh's worst-affected coastal villages rebuild *(pg 8-17)*.
- **SRI LANKA:** Two large networks of women's savings groups launch full-steam into tsunami relief, housing and livelihood-revival projects around the country *(pg 18-21)*, while a new tsunami relief fund *(pg 24-25)* is creating a new platform for collaboration.
- **INDIA:** Well-established networks of earthquake-affected women's collectives *(pg 30)*, urban slum communities *(pg 31)*, and disaster relief NGOs *(pg 26-29)*, bring their skills and experiences to help make the rehabilitation process in Tamil Nadu more people-centered.
- **THAILAND:** A collaborative mechanism established right away sets a culture of working together between community groups, NGOs, aid agencies and government departments *(pg 32-43)*, which sets the relief and rehabilitation process on a need-based, people-driven foot.

Networking within the region

- **INDIA - INDONESIA:** The NGO Abhiyan brings its organizational and technical experience with disaster relief to Uplink's work rebuilding villages in Aceh *(pg 29)*.
- **INDIA - SRI LANKA:** NSDF/MM/SPARC helps WDBF negotiate a city-wide slum redevelopment process in the tsunami-hit city of Moratuwa *(pg 21)*, while friends in Japan contribute ideas and resources to Women's Bank's livelihood revival projects *(pg 49)*.
- **THAILAND - INDONESIA:** On an early exchange visit to Thailand, survivors from Aceh and their supporters in Uplink saw the negotiating power of people's strategy of moving back to their ruined villages right away, even while land disputes raged around them.
- **INDONESIA - SRI LANKA:** During their exchange visits to coastal villages in Sri Lanka, the Acehnese visitors then got a chance to pass on the idea to Sri Lankan survivors: *"Don't wait for anybody's permission, go back!"*

A regional tsunami dialogue :

Three weeks after the tsunami, ACHR organized the first regional tsunami meeting in Phuket (Jan 19-20), as an effort to create another platform for learning and sharing of ideas, at the regional level. It was a brief meeting, but a crucial one, because it brought together some of the key groups involved in the relief process in five countries and helped all of them to sharpen their approach. The next regional meeting in Sri Lanka (March 11-13) was much bigger, and brought together not only NGOs, government and aid agencies, but many tsunami survivors from five countries. More dialogues are planned in the coming months. Here are Somsook's thoughts on what this regional sharing is all about, drawn from her presentation in Sri Lanka :

1 **To share** among groups in the region, particularly the communities who actually faced the tsunami, so they can see they're not alone, but have many friends in these other countries who are facing similar problems and finding ways of dealing with them. This is another platform for affected people to share stories, to learn from each other and to set directions in which people can be the key actors.

2 **To look forward.** We hope this sharing will lead us forward. The next stage of rehabilitation will be more complex and more difficult than the relief stage, because we will all be facing issues of land, legality, commercialization, globalization, etc. Our societies won't be automatically opening up room for people to address these larger, structural aspects of rehabilitation - people will have to create their own ways, find new possibilities of how to survive, how to rebuild their lives, settlements and livelihoods. This finding is very important, not only to solve their immediate problems, but to show how our societies can be improved - *by people.* So what kind of good ideas are already being implemented by our friends in different countries? And which ones can we borrow and use in ours?

3 **To reflect** on our various situations in our own countries and get some fresh inspiration from this sharing, so we can go back to work with a stronger commitment and a clearer vision.

4 **To give support** to our friends in Sri Lanka. We come from so many countries and so many groups and agencies with one strong intention: to support the work in Sri Lanka, so that tsunami rehabilitation by people can happen here in a stronger, more powerful way, and so this government will see the potential which is in people's hands. We bring not only moral support, but technical, physical and financial support, and we are ready to help in whatever way you need. It's up to you.

5 **To get things going.** We cannot wait for others to tell us what we should do. We want concrete action and concrete change, not only nice words in a meeting, and then people keep living in a bad way afterwards. This may be more important than the other objectives.

(For full reports and transcripts of some of the presentations made during these two regional tsunami meetings, please contact ACHR)

The tsunami struck with remarkable consistency some of Asia's most heart-stoppingly beautiful coastlines. But for the region's powerful tourism, fisheries and real-estate sectors, these ravaged beauty spots are not treasures to be carefully preserved, but commercial opportunities to be flogged to the highest bidder. These guys have plenty of reasons to hope that the communities which have traditionally lived here aren't allowed to reoccupy this valuable land.

COASTAL REGULATION ZONES :

After the tsunami, top-down edicts set new definitions of how close to the sea is too close, but Asia's coastal communities are showing another way . . .

Within days of the tsunami, without consulting anybody, governments in most of the affected countries began declaring certain coastal zones as unsafe for human habitation, and slapping down high-minded new regulations to control what and where and how rebuilding could happen within those zones. Most of these countries already had some fairly decent rules or planning guidelines designed to protect their coastal environments from over-development, but these rules are seldom taken very seriously - and often flouted outrageously. But after December 26th, coastal regulations suddenly grew some very big teeth, and for all the wrong reasons. Here's the word from Sandeep Virmani, from the Indian NGO Abhiyan, speaking at ACHR's first regional tsunami dialogue in Phuket on January 19, 2005 :

For all the countries hit by the tsunami, coastal regulation zone rules will be playing a very important role in the rehabilitation process. There's no doubt that these rules are going to be used by governments to evict people, in order to clear the way for commercial exploitation of these beach-front areas - for tourism, for fisheries, for real-estate development, for large infrastructure projects. The tsunami's destruction of traditional coastal settlements gives an opportunity for other groups and private sector operators to start encroaching and grabbing these coastal areas.

So it is very important that we are able to show, within the legal framework of these coastal regulation zones, examples of how traditional fishing villages and coastal regulation zones can coexist. This is easier said than done, but we have to set up and publicize examples which show how this can work. Such concrete examples will go a long way in lobbying for policies which allow these people to stay. But we have to work fast. We need these projects to be set up in the next few months. Otherwise, it will be too late.

One strategy : first go back and rebuild, then later negotiate for recognition . . .

One way of creating these examples is by using a strategy of first "re-invading" the old land, building permanent houses, and then getting the government to approve them only after all this investment has been made. Where there are fishing communities which don't have proper titles or land tenure rights, often times an effective policy is to go back, *to encroach* on that coastal regulation zone, where these people have always lived, and build their permanent houses.

That's what we did in Gujarat after the earthquake: the government first said *"You cannot move back to these unsafe places,"* but when the people's presence in those places became an established fact, and so much money had already been spent on putting up permanent houses, the government had little choice but to agree to them staying there. This is a good and simple strategy, and it can be employed by communities which otherwise would never have any legal standing with the government.

INDIA : 200m

The Government of India's 1991 Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification, under the Environmental Protection Act, prohibits any new building, industrial or commercial development within 500 meters of the high tide line (called CRZ-1). The notice makes a prominent exemption for the country's fishing communities living within CRZ-1 however, and guarantees their "traditional and customary rights" to continue to live and carry out their fishing activities there.

Three months after the tsunami, however, the Tamil Nadu State Government issued Government Order No. 172, which attempts to clear CRZ-1 for "public use" by refusing to grant any state rehabilitation or housing reconstruction assistance to families living within 200 meters of high tide line, unless they agree to relinquish their land and move to government relocation areas inland of 500 meters, where they will get all sorts of assistance, including a hefty Rs 150,000 for house construction and a fully-serviced and titled plot. The order also encourages households in the area between 200 and 500 meters from sea to relocate.

The term "public use" is largely perceived as a government ploy to open up the coast for tourism and prawn farming. This perception was confirmed when the state recently gave permission to construct a 20-story hotel at MGR Nagar and began promoting "eco-tourism" in several coastal wildlife sanctuaries and mangrove forests - in clear violation of CRZ rules.

THE ALTERNATIVE :

Among Tamil Nadu's fishing communities and their NGOs supporters, there has been a huge and well-organized opposition to this policy, which is probably illegal anyway. A survey carried out in 61 tsunami-affected fishing villages by Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Coordination (TRRC) reveals that most fishing communities aren't taking G.O. 172 very seriously. 95% of the 38,314 houses within CRZ-1 have no intention of relinquishing their land, houses, or places of worship, and are rebuilding even without government assistance. Most of the 5% willing to relocate are households who do not depend on the sea for their living and see this as an opportunity to properly own a house.

for more information please contact Louis at TRRC: louis@pwtn.org or visit their website at www.trrcindia.org

SRI LANKA : 100m

Before the tsunami, two national laws controlled development along Sri Lanka's coasts: one banning all new construction within 300 meters of high tide line, and another declaring the strip of coastal land within 1km from the shore a special *urban development area*, within which only developments approved by the UDA can take place. Both laws were largely flouted. After the tsunami, however, the government introduced a new law banning all building within 100 meters of the shore (in the densely-populated west and south), and within 200 meters (in the badly-damaged east and north).

The imposition of these setback zones prevents 30% the tsunami affected population from returning to their land and requires the construction of some 250,000 new houses for them farther inland. Since the government has neither land nor funds to carry out this colossal resettlement project, the law has been difficult to implement. Meanwhile, thousands of families remain in legal limbo in the relief camps.

Most people affected by this law lived in fishing villages and informal settlements with deep cultural roots, where they may have been poor, but they owned their houses and had fairly good tenure rights. The new law was widely condemned by fishermen, aid agencies, the hotel sector, the UNHCR and even some ministers. The government's motives for taking control of this land have come under increasing suspicion as exemptions have been made for tourist hotels and related businesses within the zone.

THE ALTERNATIVE :

The good news is that the UDA has conceded that the buffer zone law, which was made without much study or consultation, was a mistake. It's not official yet, but the government is now allowing local authorities to propose alternatives to buffer zone rules and then rubber-stamping these exceptions. This has already happened in Point Pedro (a high-density area in Jaffna, in northern Sri Lanka), and at Kalmunai (a badly hit Muslim / Tamil community on the east coast, where the people refused to reclaim valuable paddy-land to build housing). In Moratuwa, WDBF, WB and Sevanatha are working with the mayor to develop a program of on-site reconstruction in some of the informal settlements where people are already rebuilding.

INDONESIA : 2km

Within weeks of the disaster, Jakarta announced a "blueprint" for Aceh in which no rebuilding would be allowed within a 2km *buffer zone* along the province's coast, and virtually all villages, towns and fishing communities in that zone would be relocated. In Banda Aceh, the *blueprint* divided the ruined areas of the city into three zones: totally destroyed, structurally damaged and not-damaged-but-flooded. The plan called for the construction of a sea wall to protect the city and the relocation of all the surviving households and businesses in all three zones (70% of the city!) to three new futuristic "model cities" that the government would construct ten to thirty kilometers inland. All three zones would then become coastal greenbelts, where no building would be allowed.

This radical plan was supposedly being imposed for reasons of safety, but as soon as the policy was announced, there was a huge rush by government insiders to buy up land in the "model city" areas, while private sector contractors and military-backed conglomerates began queuing up for the lucrative mega-project contracts the blueprint would entail.

THE ALTERNATIVE :

In Banda Aceh, a network of 25 coastal villages, whose livelihoods depend on the sea, began working with Uplink to rebuild their ruined settlements. Their moving back, in defiance of the government relocation policy, became step one in a process of formulating a viable alternative which allows people to decide about their settlements and rebuild their lives in the same place. The network used *safety* as the basis for their counter-proposal, in which people would make their communities *safe* by creating protective ecological buffers between sea and village. In March, this alternative was formally presented to the national government. Uplink made sure every step was well covered in national and international media, to build awareness of the issue and support for people's determination to go back - especially among donors, who were waiting for a pro-people reconstruction policy before releasing aid money. As a result of these efforts, the 2-km buffer zone was scrapped and the policy now is to support a process of micro planning, in consultation with villagers and local government, in which villagers are free to choose either to go back or relocate.

THAILAND : 40m

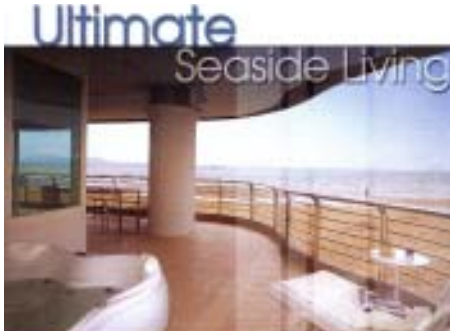
In Thailand, there was a lot of hand-wringing about overdevelopment and environmental destruction in tsunami-hit areas, and calls for more stringent shoreline planning regulations, In February, the National Environment Board declared beaches and resort islands in tsunami-hit provinces "environmentally-protected zones," to curb land uses considered ecologically harmful and to prevent any building within 40m of the shore. But nobody took these regulations too seriously, and unchecked rebuilding continues.

But in southern Thailand, where tourism is law, the greater threat to tsunami-hit coastal communities comes not from environmental controls but from economic forces. In April, the government tabled a new bill that would create *"special economic zones"* around the country, including all six tsunami-hit provinces. To attract foreign investment, these zones would offer tax breaks, exemptions from fees, approvals for liberal use of alien labor and public land, and would be largely immune to Thai legislative, executive and judicial authorities, national strategic plans and the authority of provincial and local administration directives. If this fiercely-opposed bill gets passed, goodbye poor fishing villages and hello Club Med!

Then in June, the government's *Designated Area for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA)* began drafting tourism development "blueprints" for several tsunami-hit areas, drawing more lines and readjusting land-use patterns without consulting any local communities, many of which were already exhausted from six months battling to keep their old land.

THE ALTERNATIVE :

Thailand's embattled coastal fishing communities with unclear tenure rights have also employed the strategy of reoccupying their former land and rebuilding as soon as possible, to assert their rights to the land, and to negotiate from a position of occupation. Especially in cases where powerful business interests are making spurious ownership claims to the villagers' land. And so far, in most of the cases, the reoccupation strategy has paid off, and the communities have been able to negotiate some kind of secure land rights, either through long-term lease, or land-purchase, land-sharing or relocation to nearby land.



ACEH, INDONESIA

A national network of urban poor groups and their supporters bring fresh ideas into Banda Aceh's tsunami rehabilitation process :

Urban Poor Linkage (Uplink) is a network of poor community groups, professionals and NGOs in 14 Indonesian cities, working to establish strong, independent city-level and national networks of urban poor communities which can develop and promote just and pro-poor alternative social, economic and cultural systems in Indonesian cities. The network is coordinated by the Jakarta-based NGO *Urban Poor Consortium* (UPC). Since the tsunami, UPC and Uplink have been working in Aceh, in close partnership with the German funding agency Misereor.

In the early weeks, Uplink provided emergency relief to survivors in Banda Aceh and other areas of Aceh Province, the most devastated area in all of Asia, organized urban poor groups from across the country to contribute cash, clothing, food and tools to this effort, and mobilized volunteers to come help in the relief efforts. After shipping in 50 tons of emergency supplies, they worked closely with several NGO networks and aid organizations to coordinate and distribute these supplies. In the camps being set up in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, Uplink sent in alternative health teams to treat injured survivors and musicians to boost spirits, and gradually began collecting basic data on survivors.

Since late January, UPC and Uplink have been working more closely with a large group of coastal villages along the devastated western coast of Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, to support the longer-term rehabilitation of these people's ruined villages and lives. In the following pages, we take a detailed look at this extraordinary work.

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Barracks: Why tsunami survivors are so keen to get out of the government's relief housing . . .

The tsunami left over half a million survivors without homes in Aceh and North Sumatra. The mind-boggling task of providing temporary shelter for so many has involved the combined efforts of innumerable local and international organizations. The UN divides the hundreds of relief camps that have been set up around Aceh into three categories: *Spontaneous Settlement Camps* (put up by tsunami survivors themselves), *Host Communities* (set up inside mosques, hospitals, schools or on land offered by businesses and private land-owners), and state-built *Temporary Living Centers* (which the government calls *relocation centers:* note the shift in emphasis).

In early February, the government announced plans to construct a series of enormous "relocation centers" for tsunami victims, to be built "to UN standards of comfort, with clean water, sanitation and public kitchens." Designed like army barracks, these wooden structures comprised long lines of small rooms opening onto outside corridors. Each relocation center has 40 barracks, each of which house 100 people. Nobody who just lost a decent house would be thrilled to live in such rough conditions as the government camps offer in, where those "UN standards" were definitely not met. But in Aceh, these barracks inspire a bitter resentment which has to do with more than their physical conditions. Why do people hate the barracks and why are they so determined to get out of them?

Government says people will have to stay here for ages. When the Indonesian government announced its initial rehabilitation schedule, it called for displaced people to stay in these shelters for up to three years, while the rehabilitation and reconstruction processes grind along.

They're far away. In Banda Aceh, most *spontaneous settlement camps* and *host communities* are in the undestroyed part of the city or built around surviving mosques fairly close to the ruined villages. But the government barracks are 20 - 30 kms from the city, far from people's former homes, far from friends and relatives, far from schools, jobs, markets and health-care, and way outside the loop of news and information. Once out there, people are really isolated.

There's a very bad history of camps and army control here. The freedoms of all Acehnese have for years been curtailed in many ways by the heavy military presence. In recent years, the Indonesian military has often herded Acehnese from their homes into camps very similar to these, so soldiers could hunt rebel fighters battling for an independent homeland in Aceh. Those camps became prisons during periods of martial law, with people being prevented from carrying on their daily lives as fishermen or farmers, and constant reports of killing, rape and violence. Even after the tsunami, the supervision, monitoring, food supply, and choice of occupants in these relocation centers has been entirely under army control. It's no wonder both aid workers and local people have been wary of these places, and have feared this temporary housing could become permanent.

They're places of hopelessness. In these camps, people have no jobs, no money, no state assistance of any sort. The only aid comes from NGOs and international aid agencies like CARE, USAID and UNICEF, in the form of minimal food, provisions, medicine, water and temporary sanitary facilities. As one young barracks resident put it, *"I can't imagine being here for two months. We just day-dream the whole week, since there is nothing to do."*

A relief camp inside the city. Seven days after the tsunami, Lukman and a group of survivors from his village, Cot Lamkuweh, moved into this "host community" relief camp set up around a local TV station in Banda Aceh. The camp, which houses 1,800 people, was organized by youth groups. People were given tents, some relief supplies and assigned space in one of the camp's four areas. There's a make-shift mosque, a few water taps and a line of smelly pit-latrines built by the Australians at the back. Lukman's group has constructed a raised wooden platform using salvaged wood and patched together a big, communal tent where 25 people from Cot Lamkuweh stay together and share a kitchen.

An Army-run barracks near the Banda Aceh airport, 20 kms outside the city. "At night we have no clean water and sometimes we can't bathe for a week. Now there is no food aid or medical assistance at all. It's like a broiler, where we just sit and get hot and lose all initiative." The first barracks were built with small rooms opening off both sides of a dark, central corridor. But after there were reports of rape, stealing and harassment by soldiers, the UN and other relief agencies persuaded the Indonesian government to redesign the barracks with rooms that face outwards, so people could have more privacy.

"Three days after the tsunami, we went back to our own homes. Initially, we were scared, but because we are fishermen, we can't stay too long in the refugee camps. We need to continue our livelihoods, because the tsunami aid is not going to continue to sustain us for the coming year. So we took the initiative to return home together."

A fisherman from Lam Tengoh village, in Aceh Besar District.

Bahasa Aceh language lesson number one : "Woe u gampong" means "Go back to the village"

Just a few days after the tsunami, survivors staying in camps and barracks around Banda Aceh began making their first tentative journeys out to their ruined villages. At first they went looking for lost family and community members and began burying them on land they set aside for burial grounds in their villages. Here is a description from Wardah Hafidz, of Uplink, which explains how this initial going back gathered steam and started to become a movement :

Even though three-quarters of the people in these coastal villages died in the tsunami, the survivors are still determined to rebuild their lives and their communities. Using their own hands, they have gradually begun clearing the debris, collecting wooden planks and other materials to later use to build their temporary shelters and *meunasahs* (community mosques) in their villages. With only minimal support from outsiders, these brave people are attempting to go back to land which is clearly sacred to them - sacred because that is where their roots are, as well as their ancestors, their history and their future.

Through the relief process, Uplink had begun to make contacts with villagers staying in the camps and barracks around Banda Aceh. Gradually, we began identifying communities that were expressing their strong intention to go back by taking the initiative to start cleaning up their village land and collecting recyclable materials for building. In some cases, the villagers themselves came to Uplink, in others, the headmen made the contact. We began gathering these people together to talk about what to do, and made it clear that if they wanted to return to their old villages together, we would support them.

When the government began saying *stay in the camps, it's not safe to go back*, the leaders of fishing communities around Aceh organized a province-wide meeting to talk about what to do. They invited the Minister of Maritime Affairs to come. For these people, relocation to new village 20 kilometers inland was not possible. They are fishermen and moving to these places would take their livelihoods, their land and their future out of their hands. At the end of the meeting, they made a very strong public statement that the fishermen don't want to relocate, they want to return to their old villages. It's a matter of life and death for them, they said, because fishing is their means of survival.

The 15th of February was the date the government had formally set, by which time all the tsunami survivors should be in the relief camps and government barracks. On the 26th of February, villagers from a large number of ocean-side communities in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar District organized another event to demonstrate their defiance of the government's barracks and relocation policies and their determination to reoccupy their old land. This time, they spoke with their actions. In the camps where they'd been staying, they folded up their tents, gathered their meager belongings and all together, as a big group, went back home. They went in trucks, on scooters, on bicycles and on foot, across the ruined city and back to their original villages. It was a motley but triumphant parade, and was widely covered by the media.

Lam Jabat is one of the first villages to go back home :

This moving back wasn't something that happened all at once, but certain rituals became common milestones in the process for many villages. When a group from Lam Jabat village, for instance, decided to return in January, the first thing they wanted to do was to build a *meunasah* (a small village mosque) before any houses were constructed. This was to be the symbolic first step of their village rebuilding. This new *meunasah* was initially no more than a flimsy tent, set up on the plinth of the village's ruined mosque.

It was evening by the time everything was ready. A bleak wind howled across the wastes on all sides, while just a few meters away, a row of corpses lay in black plastic body bags, waiting to be collected. Inside the tent, 25 people in a circle spoke their first prayers and shared their first meal of fish and rice. A single bulb lit this gathering, wired to an old car battery someone had brought along.

Wardah tells how moving it was to be there with these people who only three weeks earlier had lost everything, and to join their first collective step towards rebuilding their ruined village. Before wrapping themselves up to sleep, the people had a training session in alternative massage and herbal compresses. Back then almost everyone was still badly bruised and battered from the waves.

In the morning, there was another ritual of planting coconut trees and banana seedlings all around the meunasah, to bring life back to the place. After breakfast, they set to work right away with the tasks of mapping the old community and building a well.

"We cannot separate ourselves from this village, because this is the place of our ancestors."

ACEH, INDONESIA

An outside intervention helps support and organize this going back, and sets off a people-driven rehabilitation direction in the process

Three weeks after the disaster, Uplink began to shift the focus of its activities from emergency relief to supporting those villages which were clearly determined to go back and rebuild their lives and communities on their old land along the coast. Besides being some of the worst-hit areas in all of Asia, these coastal fishing villages close to the city were among the most threatened by government policies to relocate them to areas far away.

Uplink's work with the urban poor in other Indonesian cities had shown that isolated projects in isolated communities seldom create the momentum for significant change. But when networks of communities with common problems link together and jointly tackle problems of land, housing and livelihood, a number of things happen:

- Wider linkages create larger platforms for learning and sharing ideas between vulnerable and isolated groups.
- This allows groups to borrow from each other's successes in designing their own solutions to problems they face with land, housing, livelihood, health and access to basic services.
- Linking into wider networks also builds the scale and clout required to negotiate with the state to support these people-driven alternatives they develop themselves.

Uplink's intervention in tsunami-ravaged Aceh, therefore, sought clearly to help build and strengthen a network among these returning villages, so they could work together and learn from each other and create a unified force for change. With the active support of its established partner, the German funding agency Misereor, Uplink set about supporting a growing number of villages to link together and jointly tackle all the short and long-term tasks involved in rebuilding their lives in the old villages.

By May, the project covered 25 ruined villages, occupying one long, continuous stretch of coastal land which is partly in Banda Aceh Municipality (in Meuraxa and Jaya Baru sub districts), and partly in Aceh Besar Regency (in Peukan Bada sub district). Besides assisting these homeless villagers to go back, Uplink's intervention also sought to use the rebuilding to show an alternative to the government policies which conflict with people's need to return to their own land.

The idea has been to show an active, people-driven alternative to the government's relocation policies, with enough scale to make an impact on the government policy and enough viability to show other tsunami survivors in Aceh how going back is possible.

We can be happy and be sad together. Now we do everything together: we build our houses together, we will move back to the village together. It was our idea to move back to the village and Uplink supported us. Uplink said "It depends on you. If you want to go back, we'll help. If you need houses, we'll help."

(Lukman, community leader at Cot Lamkuweh Village)

Forming a large-scale survivors network in the worst-hit part of Asia's worst hit country. . .

In March, 14 returning villages joined together to form a network, and decided to call themselves *Udeep Beusaree* (*"Live together"* in Acehnese). By May, the network had expanded to 25 villages, all in some stage of moving back to their old land and constructing temporary houses there. The network's energy and determination have generated waves of returning villagers in neighboring areas and given life back to the area. As Wardah describes it, "In the day time, the sun shines on growing numbers of corrugated zinc roofs, and at night, generator-powered electric lights are to be seen twinkling where before all was blackness." With organizational support from Uplink, each village has set up teams to handle various aspects of relief and reconstruction :

- **Construction teams** build temporary and permanent houses and infrastructure.
- **Logistics teams** distribute food, manage public kitchens, buy and distribute building materials.
- **Survey teams** gather and keep updating detailed information on survivors.
- **Women and children teams** look after the special needs of women and children.
- **Environment teams** organize tree planting, eco-village planning and alternative health services.
- **Economic teams** support income generation projects and manage accounts.
- **Advocacy teams** share information and maintain links with outside groups, facilitate negotiations on inter-community issues such as joint infrastructure and village borders.

There are also inter-village teams made up of representatives from each of the teams in all 25 villages, and these teams work closely with Uplink's technical support team. These inter-village teams are extremely busy now, with a crowded schedule of meetings, exchanges, big events, groundbreakings, official visits, sharing of ideas, making for a very large and vital field of learning.

The first and the biggest and the most and the worst . . .

If you drew a line around the 25 Upeep Beusaree villages on a map which shows the tsunami's radiating path from the December 26 earthquake's epicenter in the Indian Ocean, you'd see something chilling: this small, intensely-inhabited crescent of coastline lies closest to that point and was one of the first places the waves struck. When they did strike, the waves were bigger here, more powerful and more destructive than almost anywhere else. More people died in these 25 villages alone than in all of Thailand. It's no exaggeration therefore, to say that in all of Asia, these communities comprise some of the worst-hit villages in the worst-hit city of the worst-hit country.

The Udeep Beusaree network :

Number of villages in the network:	**25 villages** *(in three adjacent sub districts of Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar)*
Pre-tsunami population in these villages :	**14,144 people** (3,507 families)
Number of surviving families :	**2,754 families** (78% of original families)
Total surviving population after the tsunami :	**6,683 people** (47% of original population)
• Number of **FEMALE** survivors:	**2,642** (39% of total survivors)
• Number of **MALE** survivors:	**4,041** (61% of total survivors)

The Udeep Beusaree network at work ...

This network understands that the best way to overcome trauma is by being active, not just sitting around in the barracks without hope. And speaking of hope, these people's ambitious plans call for nothing less than the comprehensive restoration of their social, economic and cultural lives. Eventually, all 3,000 families will have permanent, earthquake-proof and fully-serviced houses; their environment will be restored in ecologically-sustainable ways; social and cultural facilities will be in place; their economic vitality will be revived through boat-building, agriculture, home industries and informal economic activities; their communities will be organized and their land-rights secured; they will actively participate in decisions about things that concern their lives, communities and city. Here's a bit about what the network is up to:

"It's best to keep busy. If we sit and think too much, we'll go crazy" *(Lukman)*

1 Managing the onslaught of external relief aid

There are a bewildering number and variety of aid organizations at work in Aceh. Tsunami survivors staying in the camps and out at the villages are of course in dire need of just about everything - food, clothes, medicine, clean water, wells, water tanks, temporary toilets, electricity generators. But the money, materials, services and good intentions these agencies offer usually come with their own agendas, their own priorities, their own systems for determining who gets the goodies and who doesn't. What ends up happening is that some villages get a lot of help while others get nothing. It can get very lopsided. To deal with this, the Udeep Beusaree network set up a special committee to coordinate external aid. In early March, they made a public statement (which was well-covered in the press) announcing that this committee of survivors would themselves coordinate all outside aid to the network's 25 member villages, so that everyone could get what they need.

2 Building temporary houses and meunasahs

The construction teams in all 25 villages are now busy building temporary houses - ten or twenty at a time - as swiftly as possible, to enable as many people as possible to move out of the camps and barracks and back to their villages. At first, some villages put up tents on the tiled foundations of their ruined houses, while others began right away knocking together more solid wooden houses, using timber, tin sheets, hardware and tools provided by Uplink. In most of the villages, the first step is to construct a *meunasah* (small community mosque). Besides providing a place for prayers, these structures provide space for meetings and shelter for members of the construction team.

3 Planting trees and restoring coastal mangrove forests

There is a lot of tree planting going on in the Udeep Beusaree villages these days. The network organized a big public event on April 9th, in which the villagers planted tens of thousands of mangroves, cypress, coconut and pine trees along the coast, with various ministers and local officials joining in. This was partly a symbolic launch of the people's ambitious protective coastal greenbelt revival plans, and partly a memorial to those who'd died in the tsunami, with each tree being planted in a specific someone's memory. Each village has also been planting coconuts, bananas, papayas and other kinds of trees amidst the ruins, and some are beginning to plant special saline-reducing plants in fields and rice paddies that have been flooded with salt-water.

4 Developing permanent housing and community layout plans

Each village is also working with the architects on Uplink's technical team to draft physical master plans for the redevelopment of their settlement. This process includes learning how to construct earthquake-proof permanent houses, exploring innovative means of providing low-cost and environmentally-friendly infrastructural services such as paved roads, water supply, electricity and waste-water treatment, and looking at ways of incorporating agriculture and fisheries into village plans.

5 "Digitizing" the complex land history of 25 erased villages

Community mapping has been happening in all the villages at two levels simultaneously. The villagers draw up their own settlement maps as part of their process of surveying and developing their reconstruction plans. At the same time, Uplink's technical team is helping to make computerized cadastral survey maps of all the villages. The villagers mark the corners of people's plots with stakes, and then the surveyors use the machine to plot these points electronically. A group of young villagers have now been trained to use the surveying machine (a loaner from friends at Abhiyan in India). Once these maps are "digitized", the information in the computer can be used to print-out maps at any scale, to determine how much area each family or the whole village occupies and to make lists of property ownership. Once the maps are done, villagers can begin matching land plots with the survey lists of surviving families. All land records and cadastral maps were destroyed in the tsunami, along with the sub district offices where they were kept, so these maps will end up being extremely important documentation for establishing ownership of the land in these destroyed villages. After all 25 survey maps are finished and survivors clearly identified, the network will take the maps to the local government and ask them to issue new ownership deeds.

▲ *There are Lukman and Iskandar, and the second-hand Chinese motorcycle (with an open trailor rigged up to the back) in which we rattled across the ruins of Banda Aceh.*

BANDA ACEH

Five months after the tsunami, signs of life return to these battered villages . . .

In May, we had a chance to spend a few days visiting the Uplink project in Banda Aceh. Our wonderful guides from Udeep Beusaree were Lukman, the community leader in Cot Lamkuweh, and Iskandar, a young carpenter from Gampong Baru, both working full time now on rebuilding their villages. We'd seen the pictures and newscasts of the destruction in Banda Aceh, but nothing could prepare us for the shock when Lukman first drove us out into the vast areas where the tsunami struck. At first it was mostly ruined buildings and piles of rubble, but as we got closer to the sea, things became more and more empty. Finally, there were no landmarks, no houses, no trees, no anything - just vast expanses of broken ground, muck and rubble, as far as we could see. Here are a few of the photos and notes from that visit.

Network headquarters : ▲

We set off from the spruced-up old farmhouse and barn in Ulee Kareng, a part of Banda Aceh that escaped the tsunami's fury, where Uplink has established a lively headquarters for both the Udeep Beusaree villagers and for Uplink's professional support team. The place buzzes all day long with meetings, phone calling, visiting friends and officials from all over, data-processing, architectural drawing and model-making. There is always coffee and something to eat, and at night the place becomes a crowded dormitory. Most of the project staff helping out with data processing, office work, reception and logistics are survivors from the Udeep Beusaree villages.

A few snapshots from Lukman's guided tour of villages in the Udeep Beusaree Network . . .

It was a beautiful city ▶

The location of Banda Aceh is spectacular. Built at the extreme northern tip of Sumatra, the city sprawls across a crescent of flat land which encloses a natural bay, and is surrounded on three sides by lush green mountains, where they grow coffee and cinnamon. In the purple distance, you can see an active volcano, which exhales a flourish of steam all day long. Before the waves destroyed almost three-quarters of it, Banda Aceh was a city of cafes, tree-lined streets and hundreds of mosques - the older ones flanked by white minarets and topped with huge, black, onion-shaped domes.

◀ Everything gone

Everywhere we look, twisted steel bars, bricks, uprooted trees, stinking pools of water and sludge, and almost no trees to give shade from the relentless sun. They've cleared a lot of the large-scale rubble by now, but when we stop and walk around, we find the ground everywhere littered with the small-scale detritus of human lives - rubber slippers, handkerchiefs, broken teacups, picture frames, school books, hair-clips, bits of wooden furniture, cushions, license plates, belt-buckles, toothbrushes. How eerie it is to think that a whole city used to be here, with houses, cinemas, apartment buildings, banks, hotels, mosques, shops, markets, petrol pumps, telephone poles, public buses, parks. Everything - *everything* - is gone.

First Udeep Beusaree houses

It is only once we come out to the coast, where the long line of Udeep Beusaree villages begins, that we start seeing signs of life and hope and activity. Out here, the little timber houses, with their twinkling tin-sheet roofs, are the only objects on the horizon, except for a few surviving coconut palms and an old tree or two. Aid agencies like PLAN, CARE and Oxfam have provided water tanks or tube wells or water purification plants in some villages, and an Australian group has built pit latrines. Dedicated returnees with no temporary houses yet camp out in sturdy UNHCR canvas tents, set up on the plinths of ruined houses. But as Lukman says, *"No government anything!"*

◀ People's stories

We never asked anybody directly about their losses in the tsunami, but everywhere we go, the stories come tumbling out anyway: the harrowing escapes, the miraculous rescues, the rolling up of pant-legs and shirt-sleeves to show the scars of terrible injuries, the rosters of dead children, spouses, parents, siblings, friends. It's been only five months since the tsunami, but already there is a sense that the process of absorbing all this unimaginable loss has begun. You can imagine these same stories being told and re-told in the coming years to children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Coffee in the wilderness

There is a lovely tradition in Banda Aceh of socializing in coffee houses that are all over the city *(called "alamsha" in Acehnese)*. The delicious, locally-grown coffee is brewed by being poured dramatically through a big cloth filter, back and forth between two steel pots *(above)*. It's served strong, black and very sweet in little glasses, along with plate-fulls of syrupy rice sweets. Lukman says *"Yaaa, man! It really gives strength!"* In tsunami-wrecked areas of the city, the very first businesses to pop up amidst the desolation are make-shift *alamsha* - knocked together with scraps of salvaged wood and tin sheets, in the shade of some surviving tree or along a rutted road. These places instantly become vital points of congregation, where people stop to refresh themselves and get the news, on their trips out to the old land to clean up, to build, to mourn, to see what's happening. And business is definitely booming.

Pride of place

We stop in the village of Meunasah Tuha, where so many people died that the survivors are thinking of completely reorganizing their village plan, so people can live closer together - and further from the sea. The temporary houses people are building here are knocked together with the roughest of rough green timber planks, but even so, they remain studies in pride of place, even out in this desolate place. Many villagers have painted their houses in vivid shades of red, pink, green and blue, and added lots of nice flourishes with gingerbread cut-outs and some mismatched architectural bits salvaged from the rubble - some nicely turned balustrades here, an elaborate window frame there.

Prayers in the meunasah

In Lam Gurun village, Lukman joins the men for prayers at the make-shift *meunasah* they've built with salvaged wood at the center of the community. Lukman is a very devout Muslim in a very devout region of Indonesia, and can recite long passages of the Koran in Arabic with great feeling. After the men all wash their hands and feet and go inside to pray, we sit outside with some of the children, who one by one shake hands and tell us their beautiful names: *Amelia, Molina, Sofriani and Aida.* At the end of the prayers, the men form concentric circles and go around shaking each other's hands, until everyone has greeted everyone else. And after shaking hands, they touch their hearts.

Cash-for-work

So many people we meet lost their jobs after the tsunami and have little hope of finding new work in the near future. In the mean time, we pass many teams of villagers making a little money by helping clear the heavy rubble from their villages, which is still going on, even five months after the tsunami. Several organizations, like IRD, Mercy Corps, Oxfam and USAID have a scheme which pays Rp.30,000 to 40,000 (US$ 3 - 4) per day to help clean up the rubble from tsunami-ravaged areas.

Spirits with good reasons to be unquiet

There is an indigenous tradition in Aceh - from long before Islam - of performing death anniversary ceremonies on the third, seventh, 40th and 100th day after a person's death. Uplink had plans to organize a communal prayer ceremony for all the tsunami deaths on the 100-day death anniversary, in early April. But things got so busy around then, with ministerial visits and relief work, that the ceremony only happened in small, scattered ways. Shortly afterwards, there were eerie disturbances in the Uplink headquarters, and many felt there were unhappy spirits around who could not find their way along. Some spirit mediums in Jakarta and Aceh who'd been in touch with each other decided to come and see if they could help these spirits make their way out of this world they'd somehow gotten stuck in. The second night we were there, we drove with them in the day's last light all the way out to Lam Gurun, one of the last villages in the Udeep Beusaree line. The road was too broken up to drive any further, but the spirits directed them to "follow the smoke" which we could see rising from behind a little hillock in the near distance. It was too dark to go on, but the mediums gave directions to the villagers who later discovered a cave behind that little hill, in which many bodies lay undiscovered.

It's no wonder there are bewildered spirits around, where so many people died so violently and so suddenly, many without ever being identified, many with nobody left to mourn them. As bodies were found, they were just wrapped in plastic bags and bulldozed into mass graves, without any funeral rites or prayers. Even six months after the tsunami, skeletons and corpses were still turning up regularly in caves, flooded fields and on beaches.

ACEH, INDONESIA

THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN : Clear all settlements within a 2-km "safety zone" and relocate everyone to new towns 20 - 30 kms inland . . .

While the government's aid to tsunami-hit Aceh has been notoriously slow, Jakarta was quick to draft policies to prevent people from moving back to their coastal communities, presumably for safety purposes. Six weeks after the disaster, Jakarta's "blueprint" for Aceh's reconstruction and rehabilitation was made public. In the 12-volume master plan, all coastal villages and towns within 2 kms of the sea would have to be relocated to new sites inland.

In Banda Aceh, the *blueprint* went further, dividing the wrecked areas of the city into three zones: totally destroyed, structurally damaged and not damaged-but-flooded zones. Initially, the plan was to construct a US$ 67 million sea wall to protect the city and relocate the tens of thousands of surviving households and businesses in all three zones (covering 75% of the city!) to three new futuristic cities that the government would construct 20 - 30km from the sea. In the blueprint, all three zones would then become coastal greenbelts, where no building would be allowed.

This was also supposedly for reasons of safety, but as soon as the policy was announced, there was a huge rush by government insiders to buy land in the "new city" areas, and private sector contractors and commercial interests began jockeying for a share of the lucrative mega-project contracts the *blueprint* would entail.

Even before the relocation policy was nixed, support for the villagers' rebuilding efforts come from many quarters. Besides survivors from all over Banda Aceh, Udeep Beusaree communities have received blessings from many important guests, including the UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery Erskine Bowles, the Minister of the National Planning Board, the Minister of Environment, the Mayor of Banda Aceh as well as local district and sub-district heads. National mass media such as Kompas Newspaper, national TV channels, and international cable TV stations such as NHK, Dutch Television and the Sydney Morning Herald have also come and filed upbeat reports on the people's rebuilding program.

THE PEOPLE'S ALTERNATIVE : Use ecological means to create safety in the villages where they are now . . .

From very early, one of the most urgent tasks of the Uplink and Udeep Beusaree networks was to jointly formulate a viable alternative to the government's top-down *blueprint* - an alternative which would allow villagers to decide about their own settlements, to maintain their livelihood and to build their future life *in the same place.* To do this, a two-level strategy was adopted:

- **At the grassroots level**, to continue assisting villagers to move back to their former villages, build temporary housing and carry on with their rehabilitation planning, regardless of the official policy.
- **At the policy level**, to formulate a strong on-site redevelopment alternative to the government's relocation plans, to use to negotiate with local and national government agencies. Safety became the basis for the network's counter-proposal, in which people living within the three zones would rebuild in the same place, but make their communities *safe* by using other means, such as ecological buffers between sea and village, rings of greenbelt, escape routes and evacuation centers (*see next page*).

In early March, this community-based alternative was formally presented to the committee set up under the *National Development Planning Board* to deal with the relocation policy for Aceh. The timing was critical. By then, international donors were waiting for a reconstruction policy from the government that was clearly *pro-people* before releasing aid money, and nobody imagined evicting the entire province's coastal communities could be perceived as being *pro-people*. So this gave the people a little room to maneuver. At the same time, Uplink worked closely with the media, so all the activities happening on the ground in the Udeep Beusaree villages were well-covered in the national newspapers and television programs. This helped build awareness of the issues and support for people's determination to go back.

IT WORKED! As a result of all these efforts, the government scrapped the 2-km "safety" zone and accepted the people's *in-situ* alternative. The zoning policy for Banda Aceh was also cancelled. Instead of any blanket zoning, the official policy now is to support a more *bottom-up* process of micro-planning, done in consultation with the affected villagers and their local governments. Villagers are now free to choose either to go back to their original villages or relocate. Needless to say, very few are opting for relocation.

TEAMWORK : How some strategic inputs from outside friends helped convince the government to ditch the 2-km safety zone and allow villages in Banda Aceh to rebuild *in situ*

Help from friends in INDIA

In January, professionals from the Indian NGO Abhiyan joined Uplink and ACHR on a visit to Aceh. During the visit, Uplink arranged for the Indians to present to the Environment Minister their experiences of participatory rehabilitation and self-help reconstruction after the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat. The Indians proposed the idea that planning in Aceh could similarly incorporate both green belt safety features as well as in-situ rehabilitation of traditional coastal habitats. The minister accepted the idea and subsequently became a key ally in promoting a participatory, in-situ redevelopment. Since then, Abhiyan has provided technical assistance to Uplink and the 25 villages to start refining and localizing the "eco-village" concept, adapting the elements to suit the particular needs and environmental conditions of Aceh.

Help from friends in JAKARTA

Andy Siswanto, a senior architect from Semarang, has helped urban community groups around Indonesia to develop technical alternatives to government-planned evictions and lobbied for these alternatives at national level. Andy hasn't worked in Aceh directly, but has coordinated with Uplink to refine and formalize the concept of *in-situ* eco-village redevelopment and present it to the government, as a viable alternative to the 2km safety zone. The teamwork has been very good: Uplink fed Andy with maps and community data, which he then used to prepare a sophisticated and persuasive presentation of the "eco-village" concept, complete with colorful drawings, plans, concept notes and conceptual diagrams in PowerPoint, showing all the protective layers between sea and village, the escape routes, etc.

Help from friends in GERMANY

An unusually active and committed funding agency also played a key role in bringing about this important policy change for tsunami affected villages in Aceh. Besides supporting the formation, expansion and ongoing development activities of the national Uplink network, the German funding agency Misereor has also been a strong supporter of all aspects of Uplink's relief and reconstruction work in Aceh, from the very beginning. Besides funding, this active support has included advice, bringing in experts from elsewhere in the Asia region to assist the process and helping get regional networks to support the Udeep Beusaree villagers in different ways. Misereor also supported all phases of the preparation of the "eco-village" alternative, which was eventually was accepted by the government.

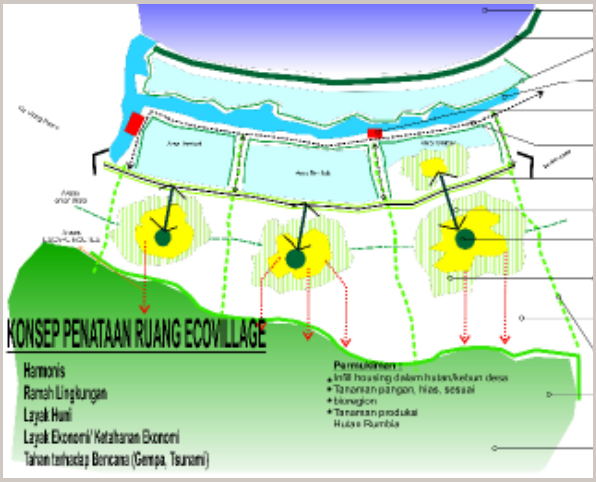
HOW THE ECO VILLAGE CONCEPT WORKS :

The idea of using ecologically-friendly means to make coastal villages more safe is not just utopian thinking by some dreamy architects and environmentalists. Studies have shown that in areas of Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India that were protected by mangroves, coastal forests, coral reefs and other natural barriers, damage from the tsunami was much less.

A key aspect of the argument for rebuilding *in-situ* is that the villagers themselves can be the prime movers in a process of restoring - and expanding - such natural defenses along Banda Aceh's vulnerable coastline. The reconstruction project being undertaken by the Udeep Beusaree network is showing how these 25 villages can be made more safe by creating layers of green buffers between the sea and settlements. Besides helping stabilize and fortify the coastal environment, these green buffer zones also create wind-breaks, provide flood control, channel drainage and storm run-off, while they provide environments for agriculture, aquaculture and animal-rearing, to supplement incomes and make these communities more self-sustaining.

The eco-village concept is not a fixed rule-book but a set of many elements which people can put together in a variety of ways as they draft redevelopment plans to suit the particular geographic and social realities in their villages. All 25 villages in the network are firmly committed to incorporating eco-village planning into their reconstruction process, thus creating a continuous protective strip along this worst-hit part of Banda Aceh with some of the following features:

- **Natural and built buffers :** Natural barriers such as mangrove forests, coconut and pine plantations and rice fields are being planted to absorb the force of waves, winds and storms and provide numerous and varied protective layers between the sea and the settlements. Built barriers such as dikes, ditches, roads (lined with still more trees), canals and fisheries ponds will also be incorporated to add more protective layers.
- **Escape routes and escape hills :** Each village is planning special escape pathways and evacuation centers in the nearest hills or high-ground, so everyone knows which way to run in the event of another tsunami. Lam Tengoh village's new escape route, for example, has already been tested. When another 8.7 magnitude earthquake rocked Aceh in early April, the villagers proudly reported that it took only a few minutes to evacuate the entire village.
- **Sustainable village development :** Villagers are also exploring new ways of making their communities more ecologically healthy, more self-sufficient and more in harmony with the environment by using such things as local building materials, recycling, organic waste-water treatment, kitchen gardening, biogas digesting and non-polluting alternative energy.
- **Holistic community revival :** The people's plans also include fostering some less tangible aspects of community revival such as participation, trust, mutual help, sharing of resources, caring for those less well off, creating jobs within the community, respect for nature, etc.



Natural protection: *This schematic map shows one possible arrangement of eco-village planning elements. Nearest the sea are bands of mangrove forest, coconut palm plantations and tidal rivers, where fishing boats are moored. Then come sea-walls, rice paddies, fish farms, and more fruit and coconut tree plantations on both sides of the road. Finally come the villages, surrounded by more trees and coffee plantations, with escape routes to the hills behind.*

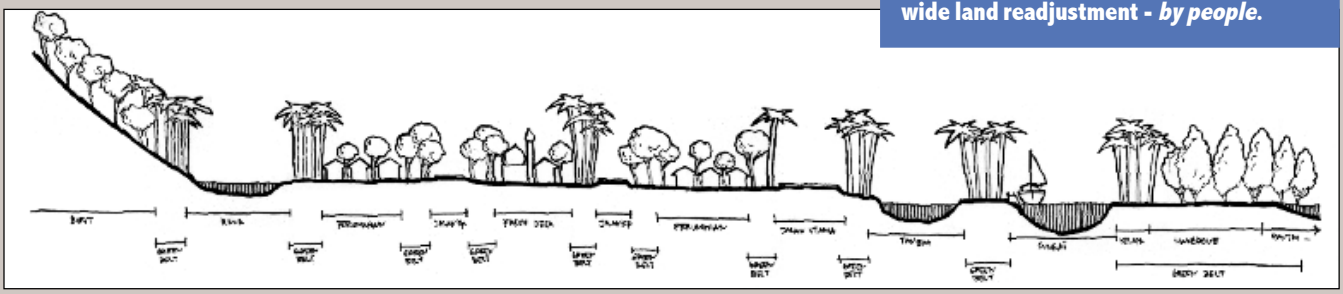
Juggling the dissonant issues of private land ownership and collective village planning . . .

In all the villages, so many families are gone that when survivors start rebuilding houses on their old plots, the rebuilt villages begin looking very scattered and "unfriendly." It also becomes very expensive to lay new roads, electric wires and water supply pipes between such far-flung houses, with large areas of waste in between.

The problem is that everyone owns their own piece of land, and for many, this land is all they have left. So creating a new, more compact layout plan for these ruined villages becomes very difficult - nobody wants to give up their ancestral land to do what they would call in Thailand *reblocking*. Plus, even where a plot's owners have all died, their relatives or heirs in other towns are likely to show up some day to claim the land. The idea of collectively reorganizing these villages to make them more compact has been discussed, but nobody has pushed anything.

In the village of Meunasah Tuha, so many families have perished that if the 150 surviving families all rebuild on their original land, the place will be like a ghost town. In this village, the people have decided on their own to do "land consolidation." They want to live close together with their surviving neighbors. They also recognize that it's safer to rebuild the village on land farther back from the sea, and plant mangroves, coconuts and build a dike along the seafront.

So they decided to start with a clean slate and make a whole new village layout, with new house plots and new infrastructure. If things go well, Meunasah Tuha will be an important test case in Aceh for village-wide land readjustment - *by people*.



ACEH, INDONESIA

After a lot of discussing, designing, costing, modeling and adjusting, the real houses finally start appearing . . .

Part of Uplink's project in Aceh involves helping the 25 Udeep Beusaree villages to build about 3,000 permanent, earthquake-resistant houses. With help from some committed young Javanese architects and the Indian NGO Abhiyan, Uplink has worked with the people to develop 24 house models, from which the four most popular models were chosen to be built in the villages. To provide a hands-on training in earthquake-proof construction techniques, one model house is being built by the construction team in each village, for a family chosen by that village to be the first.

Meanwhile, the building of the other permanent houses also got started. Construction of the first batch of 20 permanent houses began in ten villages in July, and in the remaining 15 villages in August. The rains usually start in September, and everyone is keen to have the construction well under way by then.

When the first set of model houses are finished in August, the network will organize a big celebration, with the Minister of Public Works, the Mayor of Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar District chief invited to cut the ribbons. Uplink is also working with ACHR to use the occasion to invite groups of survivors and support NGOs from other parts of Aceh, as well as from other tsunami countries, to make it another regional survivors' dialogue on people-driven rehabilitation strategies.

How much will it all cost?

These houses will all be free. The funds to build them come from Uplink's donor partner Misereor, as a subsidy, not a loan, and will come in the form of materials, not cash. The budget for houses and infrastructure below is a ceiling, and is enough to build the four basic models the people have designed.

- **Budget per house : 38 million Rupiah (US$ 4,200)**
- **Infrastructure subsidy per household : 12 million Rupiah (US$ 1,300)**
- **TOTAL housing subsidy per household : 50 million Rupiah (US$ 5,500)**

3,000 permanent houses in 25 villages :

No easy matter constructing dwellings on a scale this big in a place where just about all systems are down . . .

3,000 houses may seem like a drop in the bucket in a place where half a million traumatized souls are still homeless. But for both the community network and their supporters, it's a mega-project - way beyond the scale and nature of anything they've ever done before. Plus, this enormous housing project is happening at a time when reconstruction is happening all over Aceh, building supplies are low and prices are going through the roof. But within the project's modest budget, everyone is committed to making the houses safe and finding low-cost and environmentally friendly ways of doing infrastructure.

1 Economies of scale

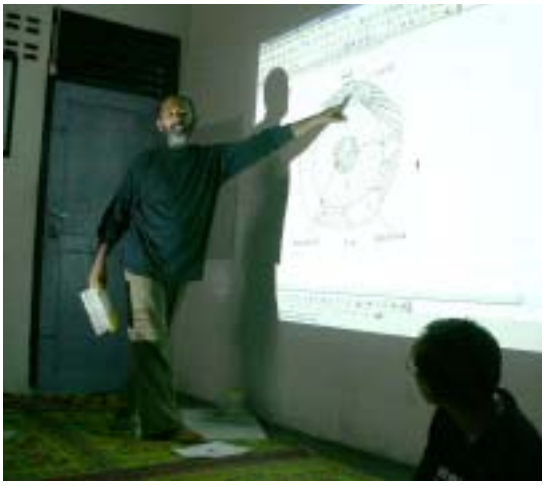
The logistics of building 3,000 houses in a place where most of the commercial and transport infrastructure has been destroyed, but where everybody is trying to rebuild, are daunting. Since the tsunami, building material costs in Aceh have skyrocketed, and steel, cement, bricks, wood, sand, aggregate and stone are scarce. Plus, environmentalists are screaming about the Sumatran forests being cut down to re-house the half million tsunami survivors. So Marco, Zooli and Kunto, on Uplink's logistics team, are working with the network to find ways to save money by shipping some of these materials up from Jakarta, or southern Sumatra, where they are still the normal price. A local supplier has agreed to let them use his big warehouse. They will require about 150,000 bags of cement, for example, to build those 3,000 houses. In Banda Aceh, a 40-Kilo bag of cement is now going for 31,000 Rupiah ($3.50). But a 50-kilo bag in South Sumatra costs only 23,000 Rupiah ($2.50) to buy and 7,000 Rupiah ($0.75) to ship. So if they can ship all this cement and store it, they'll save millions.

2 Fitting new shoes on old feet

Many foundations and plinths survive in these ruined villages, like phantom imprints of the houses that used to stand there. It's no surprise that most families chosen to get the first models want their new houses built on the foundations of their old ones. But when it comes time to place the new models on the old foundations, things inevitably don't line up - the rooms are all different sizes and shapes and laid out differently. In Lam Gurun village, for example, the villagers decided the first house should go to Muniza, a 23-year old widow who lost all her family in the tsunami. Muniza wants the new house built on the plinth of her old one, which was much bigger than the model, but has foundations that are in pretty good shape, and a bathroom which is almost intact, minus the walls. It's a tricky job for the architects to adjust the plans to try and make use of the old foundations, and it's not always possible. Eventually, the idea of a standard house model might have to be rethought. In the mean time, the main purpose of the house models is to get people thinking, to show some real progress and to get the energy going.

3 Keeping the benefits at home

Usually, money spent on a construction project just flies out of the area, into the pockets of outside contractors, outside craftsmen and outside suppliers of building materials. In the Udeep Beusaree villages, Uplink is working with the people to try to find ways of ensuring that the reconstruction process actually strengthens the local economy. They have no single blueprint for how to do this, and each village is developing its own strategy. They've set a rough target, however, of making sure that 60% of the funds used to rebuild houses should stay in the village, and only 40% should go into the market. To do this, they are exploring a number of things. First they will use skills available in the Udeep Beusaree villages as much as possible. Many of the area's skilled craftspeople died in the tsunami, but among the survivors are some carpenters, masons, plumbers, electricians, small building contractors, laborers and artisans of all sorts - all of whom will be part of the process. Next they are studying locally-available materials and local building traditions and to see how these can be incorporated into the designs, instead of just buying everything from the market - materials like local stone, sand, coconut wood and soil-cement blocks which the villagers can make themselves (with a little training and a borrowed block-making press from their Indian friends at Abhiyan).



Demystifying earthquake-proof building techniques :

Abhiyan has developed many techniques for teaching poor (sometimes illiterate) villagers how to make their traditional house-building methods more earthquake-safe. Kiran's lectures are often given without slides, under a banyan tree or in a dung-floored village square. To help explain technical aspects of earthquake building, Abhiyan has produced some illustrated booklets (left and below), which Kiran brought to Aceh, where they've been translated into Acehnese and have become hot items in the villages.

Designing these houses to survive earthquakes :

Banda Aceh is a very high-risk earthquake area now. The epicenter of the earthquake that caused the December 26 tsunami was only 225 kms west of Banda Aceh. While most of the death and destruction was caused by the tsunami, hundreds of people in Banda Aceh were killed inside collapsing buildings during the earthquake that shook the city 15 minutes earlier. Another quake hit in January and still another on June 17, with hundreds more casualties. You can't just build any old ordinary house in Aceh now and go to bed with a clear conscience. Houses that are not designed to resist earthquake pressures are bound to be extremely dangerous to live in.

It may not be possible to build a house that is tsunami-proof, but it is definitely possible to build a house that is earthquake-resistant. Uplink's only requirement for the houses people rebuild is that they be designed in such a way as to withstand an earthquake, and Kiran Vaghela has come from India to help people do just that. Kiran is a civil engineer from Bhuj, a city in Gujarat, India's westernmost state. This city was almost totally leveled by an earthquake on 26 January, 2001. 100,000 houses were destroyed, 400 villages badly damaged and 20,000 people were killed, most when the stone and mud houses they were sleeping in collapsed on top of them.

After this calamity, the government, the NGOs and the people all wanted to know how to make houses that could withstand such an earthquake. As part of Abhiyan's technical team, Kiran helped gather ideas from architects, engineers, and earthquake survivors around the world, and for the past few years has been translating those ideas into the rehabilitation of Bhuj. In June, on his fourth trip to Aceh, Kiran gave a slide-lecture on earthquake-proof building to a packed room of villagers at the Uplink headquarters, mostly members of the Udeep Beusaree construction teams.

As Kiran puts it, "There are two ways of looking at an earthquake: You can say that the earthquake killed my family and there is nothing we can do about it. Or you can say the earthquake didn't kill anybody, the houses that people built killed my family."

After explaining about how earthquakes work, Kiran began to show how masonry buildings can be made much safer by incorporating certain features, like reinforced concrete bands at plinth, sill, lintel and roof levels to tie the house together. "These are small points, but they are very important for the long life of the building and for making sure the family inside is safe." Kiran never stopped emphasizing that "If you build a house without following these principles, to save time or money, *you are killing that family. It's murder!*" All this may sound very technical, but among these survivors of both tsunami and earthquake, there was intense interest and furious note-taking and poor Kiran was mobbed afterwards with questions. *(More on Abhiyan's tsunami work in India on pg. 26 - 29)*

Piggy-backing on the disaster experiences of some friends in Gujarat, India :

While Uplink and UPA have developed considerable advocacy and mobilization skills through their work with the poor in Indonesian cities, organizing a large disaster reconstruction project like this one is a new game for them. To fill in some gaps, Uplink has developed a close working partnership with the Indian NGO Abhiyan, which had dealt with the technical issues of large-scale, participatory reconstruction, after the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat.

The match-making between these two far-flung groups was facilitated by Misereor, the German funding agency which has partnered both Uplink and Abhiyan for years and has been a key supporter of several innovative, community-driven tsunami rehabilitation projects around Asia. In early January, Misereor invited Abhiyan to join ACHR and Uplink on a visit to Aceh, where it was agreed that Abhiyan would act as a support mechanism to Uplink's rehabilitation programs with the communities.

Since then, three professionals from Abhiyan - Mansi, Kiran and Sandeep - have made frequent trips to Aceh to provide a very focused, but very low-key and friendly support to Uplink. As Kiran describes this sharing between two countries and two disasters, "We come to share what we've learned and to give back something after the disaster in Gujarat. We don't want the people in Aceh to make the same mistakes we made!" So far, Abhiyan's assistance to Uplink has been in several areas :

- **In-situ redevelopment :** helping to persuade the Ministry of Environment to support in-situ village rehabilitation in Aceh, incorporating environmental aspects and natural barriers.
- **Information :** organizing the socio-economic survey process in the Udeep Beusaree villages, and setting up a computerized information system to manage and update the data.
- **Surveying :** training villagers, architects to survey ruined villages and develop digitized maps.
- **Housing :** helping organize a participatory housing design and construction process, including training in earthquake-resistant construction.
- **Village planning :** helping people to develop master redevelopment plans for each village.
- **Building materials :** Training villagers to make their own stabilized earth blocks and providing one block-pressing machine.

Sri Lanka's two large grassroots networks of women's savings groups (Women's Bank and the Women's Development Bank Federation) have both been actively involved in tsunami relief from the beginning. For both federations, responding to a calamity on this scale has been like jumping from primary school into the Ph.D. program, and the learning curve has been steep. In their different ways, both are using their widely-flung networks as a base to reach large numbers of people in need. And for both federations, the tsunami has turned out to be an important opportunity to expand their work, to go beyond their usual savings and credit activities and to extend their systems of support to a much wider group of affected communities.

SRI LANKA :

Women's Bank brings to the tsunami crisis 15 years experience of using credit as a potent problem-solving tool

In June, 2004, the Women's Bank (WB) marked its 15th anniversary. What started with three small groups of women in Colombo slums has now grown into a country-wide, community-based micro-credit movement, with more than 35,000 members around Sri Lanka. The savings and loan scheme they created has evolved over the years, and now has a decentralized management structure, with 89 branches, mostly in the western part of the country. WB is self-financing, is not dependent on any external resources and meets all its managerial costs through self-investment profits from branches.

In 2004, WB loaned out a total 240 million Rupees (US$ 2.5 million) to its members for livelihood, housing and other social needs, all using money saved by some of the country's poorest women. Recovery is almost 100 per cent. Recently, it has initiated life and health insurance schemes and community-based health posts. Local WB groups are also undertaking community upgrading projects to improve water supply, drainage and solid waste systems in their low-income settlements, and are active in environmental and children's cultural programs.

About 25% of the loans WB allocates are for house building and improvement, toilet construction, electricity installment, water connection - and sometimes land purchase. Housing loans range in size from Rs 10,000 - 100,000 (US$100 - 1,000), at 2% monthly interest. Loans are usually repaid in two or three years, so the funds can revolve quickly. Even so, the WB's capital available for housing loans has so far been limited to its savings.

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"We haven't had a culture of requesting grants from any donors for the past ten years' time. The expansion of Women's Bank has always continued entirely from the interest earned on loans. But the new work to be done in tsunami-affected areas is too great. That is why we need some external assistance now, but we are standing by our loan system as the best development strategy, even in such a crisis." (Nandasiri Gamage)

Women's Bank members around Sri Lanka pitch into the relief and rehabilitation efforts . . .

The Japanese development academic, Hosaka Mutsuhiko, has been a friend and supporter of Women's Bank since it was established in 1989. Since the tsunami, he has kept in close contact with WB, helping to raise funds and to document their ongoing relief work in tsunami areas. The following notes are drawn partly from Hosaka's reports and partly from e-mails from Nandasiri, WB's chief advisor.

I wasn't able to reach Nandasiri by phone until December 27th. Though many had lost their houses, furniture and personal belongings, core members of WB had already started relief operations by then, to their fellow members in more seriously damaged areas all around the island. The information they collected through this relief process soon revealed that out of about 35,000 WB members, 189 families in five districts (Colombo, Gampaha, Moratuwa, Kaluthara, and Hambanthota) had been affected by the waves, through deaths, lost houses or lost jobs.

A year ago, WB set up a national disaster management committee. It hadn't been very active, but after the tsunami, the committee was revitalized and became instrumental in organizing relief to WB members. Donations by WB members around Sri Lanka - in the form of new clothes, medicines, dried foods, school books and kitchen utensils - were collected and distributed, in collaboration with the Green Movement organization. WB also transported medicines from Colombo to remote areas and to three health clinics they had earlier set up in Moratuwa and Colombo, as part of their community welfare and safety-net programs. 2,000 members were mobilized to join *shramadhan* (donated labor) to clear debris, restore electricity and help rebuild houses in the western coastal areas of Moratuwa and Kaluthara, and the eastern areas of Batticaloa and Ampara. New cloth provided by the Green Movement was cut and stitched into clothes by WB volunteers. WB groups in Gampaha District are also planning to set up an orphanage for children who lost parents in that area.

After reviewing the situation of survivors in the camps and devastated areas of the country, WB core leaders soon came to the decision that it was important to extend support beyond the five districts and reach other tsunami-affected people, especially refugees and displaced families in war-stricken coastal areas in the North-East under control of Tamil militants. Many are hoping that new relationships and national structures might emerge from the united relief and reconstruction efforts and help end the 20-year armed conflict. With its Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim members working closely together, the WB can be an effective vehicle for relief, reconstruction and peace-building.

What big people's networks can do better . . .

"I think at this stage, it is very important that resources go to actual development on the ground, as much as possible, to trigger a process of redevelopment which comes from people and which causes change in development directions at the upper level. NGOs will take their time to think everything through, to study, to discuss, to train, to coordinate - it will take a long time. People's networks like Women's Bank and the Women's Development Bank Federation are in the best position to intervene and to set off broad action which brings support swiftly and directly to the affected people. Why? Because you are community peoples' networks and you are working for concrete action for people on the ground."

(From Somsook's June 24 e-mail to Nandasiri)

WB's special tsunami relief fund :

Women's Bank tweaks its group-based loan system a little to make it into a disaster rehabilitation mechanism in Sri Lanka . . .

Besides providing emergency relief, WB also decided to begin helping tsunami-affected people to get back on their feet by extending loans to re-start their income-generating activities and rebuild their houses. It was clear, however, that applying the WB's normal housing loan scheme to people who had just lost everything - houses, boats, family members and means of livelihood - was unrealistic. So in March, they established a special emergency revolving loan fund for housing, land acquisition and income-generation, which would offer loans to tsunami-affected WB members through the normal WB loan mechanism, but on easier terms. To borrow from this special fund, people still need to be members of WB savings groups, but in order to extend the fund's benefits to more people in more tsunami-hit areas, they also decided to relax the rules of their savings group system, to make it faster to join and easier to get loans :

- **Ease WB membership** rules to allow new savings group members to take loans. (Usually members only have access to loans after an 8-month probation period).
- **Admit new women and new groups** with difficulties into experienced savings groups, whose branch leaders can then extend management training and advice through weekly visits.
- **Accelerate normal loan stages**, so new members can immediately obtain housing and income generation loans, at no interest.

In the first batch of loans, 70% of the new fund was immediately released to tsunami-hit members in 5 districts, for housing (3.7 million Rupees for 161 families) and income generation (1.2 million Rupees for 104 families). Initially, the WB's central committee assigned four leaders from four established branches to regularly visit new groups in the affected areas, support them and monitor the fund. After reviewing the first batch, the second and third batches of loans were released in April and May. As more and more tsunami-affected families join Women's Bank as new members under this accelerated scheme, the new revolving fund's coverage increases.

In May, with support from ACHR, the Women's Bank greatly accelerated its work of mobilizing new members from among the poorest victims and setting up new branches in tsunami affected areas where the WB had not been active before (especially in districts in the worst-hit southern and eastern coastal belts of Sri Lanka, such as Hambanthota, Mathara, Galle and Ampara, and the evacuation camps in Colombo). By linking with organizations like JICA, the Green Movement, NHDA, FAO and Local Government bodies, WB has been able to more quickly organize new groups and provisional branches in many new villages and to launch rehabilitation activities in house-building, land acquisition, informal debt refinancing and income generation, using the new emergency loan fund (*as well as the even newer Joint Tsunami Fund - see page 24 - 25*).

WB's Tsunami Relief Fund :

(as of August, 2005)

Original Selavip grant	**Rs 6 million** (US$ 60,000)
WB matching funds	**Rs 1 million** (US$ 10,000)
ACHR grant *(Misereor, Homeless International)*	**Rs 11 million** (US$ 115,000)
Fund's total capital	**Rs 18 million** (US$185,000)

Loan versus grant

The Women's Bank has been getting some flack for using donor money to give loans instead of grants to tsunami victims for rebuilding their houses. It's one thing to charge interest on income-generating loans, but in most of the other tsunami countries, people's houses are being re-built with grants, not loans. Many have argued that forcing people who have just lost everything, including their means of earning, to pay for their own house is too great a burden on them.

But the WB has stood by its group-based savings and loan system as an effective and self-sustaining development mechanism for the poorest - even in a catastrophic situation like this one. WB has, however, made some adjustments to their normal loan system, to make the terms easier for tsunami-affected members who borrow from the special new fund :

- **Loan size :** Rs 10,000 - 400,000 (US$ 100 - 4,123)
- **Loan purposes :** Housing, land purchase, livelihood, informal debt refinancing.
- **Interest rate :** No interest (normal WB loans given at 2% monthly interest)
- **Repayment period :** Maximum 5 years
- **3-month grace period** on repayments
- **Repayment terms :** Minimum monthly repayment is Rs 250 (US$ 2.50). 25% of the loan amount goes into the WB's Branch reserve fund, and 50% goes into that community's own revolving loan fund.
- **Discount :** 25% of loan amount will be credited to borrower's savings after repayment.
- **Free insurance policy** worth Rs 50,000 to the family's bread-winner
- **Free connection** to the WB's death donation system, for the entire family.

Some grand totals on Womens Bank's special tsunami loans :

(As of July 1, 2005. Amounts in US Dollars)

	District	*House building / repair loans*		*Land / debt refinancing loans*		*Income generation loans*		*Total loans for district*	
1.	**Moratuwa / Colombo**	**1,510**	**(1 household)**	**52**	**(1 household)**	**2,850**	**(3 households)**	**4,412**	**(5 households)**
2.	**Kaluthara**	**13,929**	**(39 households)**	**2,887**	**(3 households)**	**14,742**	**(50 households)**	**31,558**	**(92 households)**
3.	**Gampaha**	**7,106**	**(16 households)**	**0**		**12,814**	**(11 households)**	**19,920**	**(27 households)**
4.	**Galle**	**2,981**	**(8 households)**	**14,432**	**(10 households)**	**3,814**	**(10 households)**	**21,227**	**(28 households)**
5.	**Matara**	**748**	**(3 households)**	**852**	**(9 households)**	**13,287**	**(14 households)**	**14,887**	**(26 households)**
	TOTALS :	**US$ 26,274 (67 households)**		**US$ 18,223 (23 households)**		**US$ 47,507 (88 households)**		**US$ 92,004 (178 households)**	

SRI LANKA :

Swimming lessons in rough water for the Women's Development Bank Federation :

The *Women's Development Bank Federation (WDBF)* is a national network of 1,200 savings and credit groups in 450 rural and urban communities. The federation was launched in 1997 and is now active in nine districts in Sri Lanka, with the support of a small NGO *Jana Rukula* (which means "people working together"). Loans are made from women's own savings for small businesses and emergencies and to pay off crippling debts to money lenders. The smallest unit is the savings group, made up of 10 women who save together weekly, and loan rules are highly flexible, based on need and trust.

Members are emphatic that their federation is a movement, not a bank, and the idea is to put their resources, ideas and support together to solve their problems locally. Though savings and credit have been the federation's chief tools to do this, they have recently set up a small housing fund (with funds from Selavip and ACHR) and are gradually beginning to bring issues of housing, land and sanitation into their work in communities.

Since the tsunami struck, the federation's work on housing rehabilitation in a growing number of tsunami-hit villages is pushing the WDBF into new areas and calling on them to conduct increasingly large and difficult negotiations with municipalities and the national government on land and housing.

Taking care of ours first :

Both the WDBF and WB began their tsunami aid efforts by mobilizing emergency assistance only in areas where they had savings groups and initially targeted only their own members who'd been affected by the waves. Taking care of your own friends first is certainly a natural response in a crisis. But both federations soon found that it is not so easy to draw lines between who is a member and who is not in a tragic situation like this, where entire communities are suffering together. As the WDBF began negotiating for the housing rehabilitation of their members in several wrecked communities, they quickly realized that the problems they faced were community-wide problems that required a more inclusive, community-wide approach to solve.

A few early entries from WDBF's tsunami diary

December 27 : First visits to ruined coastal slums in Colombo and Moratuwa. Met only a few friends who had come to check out things around their old houses. But everything is totally destroyed, nothing is left. The rest are spread out in different relief camps. Sent out word to all nine districts in the federation requesting donations of clothes and food from members.

December 29 : Donations come pouring in from all over. Teams start putting together emergency packets to distribute, with rice, tea, sugar, milk powder, biscuits, soybeans, coconut, lentils, spices, mugs, plates, tooth paste and brushes, matches. Clothes are bundled in separate parcels. Start distributing packets in Colombo and Moratuwa to member and non-member families.

December 30 : Federation meets and decides to support the rebuilding of houses. Agrees that the primary branches of the savings groups will make money available for house repairs - as grants and not loans. Will decide later how to reimburse this. Also start organizing a proper system for distributing in three districts the large quantities of donated aid provisions coming in.

January 1 : Meet with homeless federation members to discuss their needs. All are very strong in wanting to rebuild their houses. Federation agrees to help them. All primary branches of WDBF have agreed to donate money for house rebuilding. Set target of collecting US$ 4000. Many carpenters who are husbands of federation members offer their skills free to help build houses, and 100 federation members volunteer to help clear rubble in communities in Moratuwa on January 7.

January 4 : Distribution of aid parcels continues. Federation leaders start having meetings with member families in their ruined settlements of Moratuwa to discuss what to do. Women share stories of how they survived the three successive waves by clinging to trees, railings, electric poles. Many more community people join the discussions. Federation leaders agree they must widen their support to include more than only federation members.

January 6 : WDBF leaders (along with Celine from SDI and Somsook from ACHR) meet with the mayor of Moratuwa. He is supportive of the federation's tsunami relief work and asks their help in rehabilitating the affected settlements in Moratuwa. He insists, however, that he wants the affected communities in the government's 100m "no-build" zone to be re-housed in high-rise buildings in the north of the city, not on their old coastal sites. It becomes clear that dealing with this 100m zone is clearly going to be one of the biggest challenges for the federation.

January 7 : 150 federation members from other districts assemble in Moratuwa for *shramadhan* (volunteering labor) to help clear rubble in the ruined communities.

January 23 : WDBF organizes a meeting in Moratuwa, in which community people present their tsunami rehabilitation ideas to the Minister of Urban Development and Water Supply and key government officials, including the deputy mayor of Moratuwa. 800 people from 7 tsunami-affected settlements attend, all staying in camps now. The people present two points very clearly :

- *Although some families are frightened and want to move away from the sea, the great majority of people want to return to their old land by the sea and rebuild permanent houses there.*
- *Federation surveys reveal that 80% of households in these settlements are either fishermen or involved in fisheries related work and cannot survive if forced to relocate to inland sites.*

The Minister gives permission to build temporary houses in the old settlements, the Municipal Council agrees to supply electricity, drinking water and toilets, and the WDBF agrees to provide materials to build the temporary houses and to facilitate the survey, organizing and construction processes.

"People we talked to who were living in tents in the camps around Moratuwa, and all along the coast, were desperate to get back to their normal lives. The federation has helped poor communities to improve their living conditions by mobilizing their own energy and their own resources. We thought these same principals could be useful in organizing communities after the tsunami as well."

Upali Sumithre, Director of Jana Rukula, the WDBF's support NGO

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"My impression is that it's not so black and white, and there is a lot of room for negotiation on the 100 meter zone. I worry that if we take too reactive a stance now, we may cut down on our options. I think we must first do our homework and make a proposal for housing rehabilitation that works for the communities and the city and then see how the government responds."

Celine d'Cruz, from SDI, on a visit to Sri Lanka in January.

WDBF thinks "city-wide" for rebuilding Moratuwa

Using the crisis to start a pragmatic dialogue on land and housing, between the poorest tsunami victims and the city they are a part of

Moratuwa, Sri Lanka's third largest city, was one of the most severely battered on the island's west cost. Six informal settlements along the city's coastline were almost completely obliterated by the waves, leaving hundreds dead and 3,000 families (mostly poor fisher folk) scattered in distant relief camps, without homes, belongings, boats or jobs - and most without any land ownership papers. Moratuwa quickly became a focal point for WDBF's initial relief work and has since become an important testing ground for the federation's housing rehabilitation strategies.

People in Moratuwa's relief camps were almost unanimous in their desire to return to the old land and start rebuilding, but they had no place to stay there. So the construction of temporary shelters became the federation's most urgent task. They set a target of building 400 temporary houses in the six settlements, giving priority to households closest to the sea, who were generally the poorest and the worst-hit. With community women, they negotiated to use a ruined municipal playground in the Jayagathpura community and set to work building the first batch of 70 temporary houses, with funding support from ACHR (Misereor) and infrastructure from the city. At the same time, the federation helped community members to form savings and credit groups and used donor funds to begin making small loans and grants, to groups and individuals, for income-generating projects - especially boat repair.

Meanwhile, the government enacted a controversial policy banning all construction within 100m of the shore. This policy, which effectively prevents the poorest of the country's tsunami-affected households from returning to their seaside homes, threatened to stop community-led rehabilitation in it's tracks. Many suspected that the policy was a sneaky way of using the crisis as an excuse to snatch land occupied by the poor for commercial and tourist development. Their hunch proved correct when in several areas, the government began handing over land within the 100m zone to the National Tourist Board, and exceptions allowing high-rise hotels and tourist facilities began to be announced.

GOING AHEAD ANYWAY : On June 19, the federation's permanent housing program in Moratuwa began with the construction of the first house, a solidly-built "tsunami-proof" design, built up on concrete pillars with space for income generation activities in the open area below, for one Mr. Harold, in Jayagathpura. More houses followed, and nowadays, those ruined old communities are coming back to life with all the house building going on. Without the required title deeds, none of these families could get the government's promised reconstruction grants of 250,000 Rupees, so the houses are being paid for with external donor funds (from ACHR, Misereor and SDI).

Some strategic help from friends in SDI :

The WDBF has had considerable experience mobilizing large numbers of poor communities to resolve their own problems through savings and credit, but they're newcomers to the tricky art of negotiating with cities about difficult issues of land and housing for the poor. Since January, Slum Dwellers International (SDI) has been assisting the federation in several key areas, bringing housing skills and negotiating strategies that have worked in other countries and the clout of an international organization to WDBF's tsunami reconstruction efforts. In Moratuwa, WDBF has signed an MOU with the Moratuwa Municipality (in which SDI, the Indian NSDF and ACHR are partners) to survey all the city's slums and develop a people-driven, city-wide program, in collaboration with the municipality, to upgrade all those settlements (in tsunami-hit areas and elsewhere) and to develop people-centered relocation programs for families who opt to move away from the shore. SDI has also helped raise funds (especially from the South African Catholic Church) to support the WDBF's tsunami housing reconstruction projects.

How a collective response to a difficult situation helped get these communities back on track . . .

In March, Malcolm Jack, from the UK-based funding agency Homeless International, joined the second "Tsunami Survivors Dialogue" in Sri Lanka. Homeless International is a key donor partner for most of the community federations within the SDI network and has helped channel funds raised by the UK social housing sector to help community-driven rehabilitation work in several tsunami-hit countries. Here is Malc's take on the struggle to legitimize the people's rebuilding within the 100-meter "no-build" zone :

A collective response was vital in this difficult situation. The WDBF, with the encouragement and strategy ideas of community networks facing similar problems with coastal regulation zones in tsunami-hit areas of Indonesia, Thailand and India, helped give these communities in Moratuwa the confidence to begin rebuilding, no matter what the regulations said.

After a lot of negotiations with many departments and ministries, the WDBF was able to persuade the local government to acknowledge the urgency of the situation, relax the rules and allow these people to move forward with their lives, back in their old communities - *within the 100m zone*.

In the longer term, those families who opt to resettle away from the sea will also need to identify land, ensure houses are appropriately designed and find new jobs and schools. The mayor of Moratuwa has been so impressed by the WDBF's work, and by the community-driven housing developments he saw when visiting the National Slum Dwellers Federation in Mumbai last year, that he has committed to a city-wide slum upgrading strategy, beginning with a community-led survey and enumeration of all slums - tsunami affected and otherwise.

A collective community approach will again be crucial in helping relocate families affected by the tsunami, and in capitalizing on this important political breakthrough.

Read more about HI's tsunami aid work at:
www.homeless-international.org/tsunami

. . . and two months later, Upali writes from WDBF :

The government could push these communities out only because they were not strong, were dependent on others for all their needs, and were not united in their opposition to this policy. Now we have community organizations that are very active in all six affected settlements in Moratuwa. They have joined together to form their own federation and are determined to manage their own post-tsunami rehabilitation and resolve their common problems of land, housing and livelihood - *as a united force*.

SRI LANKA :

The tsunami pushes Help-O, a small NGO in Galle, from environmental issues into the city-wide reconstruction process :

The tsunami hit the lovely historic port city of Galle, on Sri Lanka's southwestern coast, with three waves. Though Galle's magnificent forts and colonial buildings (declared by UNESCO a World Heritage Site) were mostly spared, the city's coastal neighborhoods and fishing communities were devastated. Nearly 3,000 people died, 14,000 houses and several hundred boats were destroyed, and more than half of the city's population was affected.

Help-O (*Human and Environmental Links Progressive Organization*) is a small NGO which has been working in Galle since 1993 on issues of community development (especially savings and credit) and urban environmental issues. In recent years, Help-O has worked to get local communities actively involved in developing plans to conserve environmentally sensitive areas of the city, especially the coastal greenbelt zones. After the tsunami, besides helping deliver emergency relief materials to poor communities, Help-o has worked with donors to :

- **Organize cash-for-work scheme :** Help-O coordinated the clearing of rubble along Galle and Matara district's ruined coastline, from Ambalangoda to Ahangama, in partnership with USAID. The scheme gave jobless tsunami survivors a chance to earn a little extra money (Rs 300 per day, including meals), while preparing badly-wrecked areas for reconstruction.
- **Begin collecting data on affected communities:** Help-O motivated a batch of volunteers to talk to survivors, collect socio-economic data and begin identifying people's needs in tsunami-devastated areas of Galle and Matara districts: Thelwatta, Peraliya, Hikkaduwa, Mahamodera, Galle, Katugoda and Habaraduwa and Ahangama.

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"One of our biggest problems is finding land where people still living in relief camps can build permanent houses. The decision of the government to move people away from the sea and provide resettlement deep in rural areas is not a productive solution. Galle's fisher folk need to be near the sea to survive." (Chathura Welivitiya)

NEW NETWORK of tsunami-affected communities is launched in Galle and Matara districts . . .

When the regional tsunami survivors' dialogue was organized in Colombo in March, Help-O arranged to come, along with a big group of affected community people from Galle. In that meeting, they met with tsunami survivors from Indonesia, India and Thailand, and heard about many of the community-driven rehabilitation projects these groups were working on. Of all the ideas in the air at that meeting, it was the importance of community networks that grabbed the Galle team the most. Back home, Help-O and a group of community leaders set about building from scratch a network of tsunami-affected communities in Galle and Matara districts, to begin making the rehabilitation process in Galle more community-centered, and to tackle the enormous problems of land, housing and livelihood collectively, rather than in isolation.

To do this, they began by forming community organizations where there were none before, and strengthening whatever organizations already existed (mainly already established savings and credit groups), in all the communities hit by the tsunami, in the two districts. Later, each of these community organizations formed committees from among their affected families which meet weekly and tackle specific issues, including (1) land and housing (including water and sanitation), (2) livelihoods (especially fisherman), (3) women and children, and (4) environment and health.

Help-o then facilitated a process by which these issue-specific committees were linked into divisional and district-wide committees, which all together now form the *People's Action Network (PAN).* These larger networks, then began to interact with the government's relief process, and to represent people's needs and convey their ideas in important forums at district and division levels. So far, the network has surveyed all the tsunami affected areas in the two districts and established information centers in several affected communities. Help-O is now working with the network to identify land and explore strategies to build permanent houses for survivors now living in relief camps, as an alternative to the government plans to relocate them to remote jungle sites. Sevanatha has assisted Help-O and communities in the new network to develop community reconstruction action plans.

As elsewhere in Sri Lanka, small fishermen were the group most severely affected by the tsunami in Galle. Help-O and PAN have also been working with donors (and with the new ACHR tsunami fund) to set up boat repair yards and get fishing boats, nets, motors and equipment to out-of-work fishermen, as well as bicycles to fish-sellers. These boats and equipment are all given free, but the network has worked out a system where beneficiaries pay back 20% of the value into a special disaster fund, to be managed by the fishermen's committee, for relief in any future catastrophies.

What happens if you aren't on the government's official beneficiary list?

In Galle, there are some families who lost their houses in the tsunami, but are not in the beneficiary list prepared by the Central Government's divisional secretariat. Why? Because they were tenants and could not prove their occupancy, since the houses they were living in had already been claimed for reconstruction benefits by the owners. So Help-O and PAN have prepared a list of about 30 of these tenant households, and have identified a 1-hectare piece of privately owned land on which to prepare a pilot housing relocation project. They are now checking the title condition of this land, and if everything checks out, they will apply to the new ACHR tsunami fund for a land-purchase grant of Rs 100,000 (US$ 1,000) per family to buy it. Once they have the land and the title is clear, they will develop good plans for a small housing scheme, and use those plans to negotiate funds from other donor sources for housing and infrastructure.

Sevanatha zeroes in on long-term tsunami rehabilitation :

Over the past 15 years, the Colombo-based NGO Sevanatha has worked with poor communities, government agencies and development institutions in Sri Lanka to promote a more people-driven style of community development, through projects involving community action planning, community contracts and technical advisory services for housing and infrastructure improvements. Here are some notes on Sevanatha's tsunami work, drawn from an August 10 discussion with Jayaratne, Sevanatha's director:

After the tsunami, we did some work rehabilitating wells and sanitation facilities in Kaluthara District. But more than relief work, we wanted to focus our energies on making the longer-term reconstruction process more participatory, more people-driven. Community-driven development has been held in check in Sri Lanka for a long time, partly because of the war, and partly for want of resources to support it. Since the tsunami, however, there is suddenly a lot of money in the country, and with it came a lot of opportunities.

But also plenty of problems! Most of the tsunami relief and redevelopment operations have been carried out by the central government system, which clearly lacks the capacity to deal with a crisis of this scale. The post-tsunami instructions coming down from the center have been confused, hasty and in some cases disastrous, as with the 100/200-meter coastal buffer zone (*see page 7*). Local governments, on the other hand, who are left to deal with the repercussions of these bad policies, are used to taking their orders from the center, have little experience guiding their own local development, and are ill-equipped to shepherd the innumerable relief agencies working in their areas into a unified, sustainable, long-term rehabilitation program.

Meanwhile, donors, charities and international relief agencies of every sort have converged on Sri Lanka and are handling a lot of the relief work, in a manner which is not coordinated at all. Many of these groups come for a very short period, spend their money or deliver their goods quickly, then go, without knowing who really needs their help the most. In the process, some communities get nothing, while others become so accustomed to getting everything free that they can't be persuaded to do anything participatory or self-help.

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Playing the tricky role of middle man . . .

Sevanatha looks for ways to get communities and government moving along the same people-centered redevelopment track :

We've realized that in the long run, local communities and local government have to be involved in the relief process - *and they have to work together*. They are the ones who have to deal with problems left behind by the donors or caused by central government decisions. Our main work since the tsunami has been trying to get local governments to interact more with the affected communities and to support a more community-driven reconstruction process in their areas, in which local authorities provide land and infrastructure, while the communities plan and implement their own housing, community and livelihood redevelopment projects. The resources to support such community-city partnerships are now available. So in a few areas, like Moratuwa, Galle and Trincomalee, we are working with community groups and playing a coordinating role, sharing information about the communities' needs with the local authorities and with the various agencies and divisional secretariats in the central government system.

As we have worked to link affected communities with their local governments, we've found there is another advantage: when people who had no secure tenure get into the development process because of the tsunami, their status improves. Before the tsunami, many of these people had no land tenure and no legal status at all. But as tsunami victims, they get "recognized" on the official list of beneficiaries, and as beneficiaries they become eligible to get things like land and housing.

1 Pilot housing redevelopments at Moratuwa

A lot of the tsunami housing reconstruction programs in Sri Lanka are taking either a very heavy, top-down approach, with government contractors and no participation, or else a very ad-hoc approach, where families are just given money or materials and left to rebuild their own houses individually. In Moratuwa, we are partnering with *Women's Bank* and the *Women's Development Bank Federation* to show the authorities a different way, in which people in poor coastal settlements do their own planning and reconstruction, in partnership with the municipality and the Urban Development Authority (UDA). We get the people into a process of planning their own community layouts and housing (which they build with donor funds from ACHR, SDI and other sources) and then get the municipality involved, initially by approving the plans and legitimizing the process. Part of our role has been to negotiate with the UDA to relax its strict 100m buffer zone regulation and to allow below-minimum house plot sizes.

We are also working closely with the municipality, the divisional secretariat, the UDA and the Ministry to prepare a community-based development plan for a large area which has been declared a *"special development zone"* for about 1,000 families who have lost their houses. This area covers many poor communities, both tsunami-affected and otherwise, and will involve both on-site reconstruction and relocation, in a varied set of housing projects with full infrastructure improvements. As part of the process, Sevanatha is helping to establish procedures with relevant authorities to shorten the approval process, so they are more friendly to a community-driven process.

2 Pilot housing redevelopment at Trincomalee

In the east-coast port city of Trincomalee, we have teamed up with the Women's Bank to assist the Austrian Red Cross, which has money to build about 600 houses for tsunami-affected families in the city – mostly poor fishermen who were living right on the beach. The central government's Divisional Secretariat is providing some fairly decent land for resettlement a bit inland from the seashore (but not too far away). In this five-sided partnership, Sevanatha assists in the physical planning process using "community action planning" methods, Women's Bank mobilizes the communities and initiates women's savings groups in them, Red Cross provides funds for the houses, the government provides the land (for which people will get clear land title) and infrastructure, and the communities will help design the community layout, prepare the new site (which is now dense jungle, and we have negotiated to let the people handle the site preparation, to preserve as many existing trees as possible) and design and build their own houses.

SRI LANKA :

QUESTION : Can the tsunami relief process help rekindle a war-torn country's people-oriented culture?

Even seven months after the waves hit, thousands are still languishing in relief camps around Sri Lanka. While these people are all desperate to return to their land and begin rebuilding their lives, millions of dollars of aid is pouring into the country for tsunami reconstruction. All the raw ingredients are in place for promoting a nation-wide scale people's process to rebuild Sri Lanka's ruined communities.

But this is happening only very slowly and only in scattered places. Instead, the country's recovery process has been slowed down by lack of vision, failure to consult the affected people and some ill-informed decisions by authorities which have resulted in increasing bureaucracy and heavy social costs. While the upper levels of government bicker and posture and hold up both aid flows and the peace process, the lives of a million people remain in limbo.

As one observer put it, "Sri Lanka used to be so people-oriented. This is same country that launched the celebrated *Million Houses Program* in the 1980s, which made poor communities the driving force in a national slum upgrading process, and which became a lightning rod for people-oriented development around Asia. But the country has somehow gotten sidetracked into an over-politicized, over-professionalized culture which is more concerned with abstract ideas of how things should be than human beings. After the tsunami, there is much more concern for rules and regulations than for the needs of the affected people. There is also an unwillingness to compromise, which we see at the highest political level, with the inability to strike an aid-sharing deal with the Tamil rebels and neither side willing to give an inch. There is suffering on a very large scale, but there's just no sense of urgency."

For more information about this new joint tsunami rehabilitation fund, please contact ACHR

The small picture and the big picture : *There are many things that organizations working alone can do to help tsunami victims. But in a tragedy on this scale, there are also things which call for a much broader collaboration between many groups, like opposing the government's ill-conceived 100m "no-build" zone, which effectively kills any community-driven rehabilitation process before it even starts.*

New joint fund for tsunami rehabilitation :

Special fund supports small, innovative projects in wave-hit areas while it creates a platform for different groups to work together

There are many committed groups working on tsunami relief in Sri Lanka, each with its focus area, its special expertise and style of working. Some maintain informal contacts with each other, but their scattered efforts have so far been unable to present any strong, united alternative to the national policies being handed down from the top, which clearly work against people's needs. To tackle this problem, ACHR and Sevanatha organized a series of meetings to bring together some of the key groups working with tsunami-hit communities, to discuss the problems, share experiences and begin creating a common platform to link their scattered work into some kind of larger whole. Such platforms have been crucial ingredients in the streamlining tsunami aid efforts in Thailand, India and Indonesia, but in Sri Lanka, the culture of working together has not been a strong point.

The meetings brought together community leaders, Women's Bank, WDBF, Sevanatha, UN-Habitat and several NGOs, as well as some enthusiastic officials from the National Housing Development Authority and local authorities hungry for new ideas. Some very good proposals were made about how working together could begin to tackle some of the big problems.

One idea that came up was to set up a special tsunami fund, as a means of starting some real activities. Everybody agreed to go back and see what kind of activities the affected communities wanted to do - things like surveying, building temporary or permanent houses, launching income-generation groups, repairing boats, organizing meetings, getting people to work together, planning exchange visits to good projects. The important thing was to start doing the work right away. The new fund could support these activities and become a means of loosening this stagnation and getting the affected communities themselves into an action mode. And so the new fund was established in May, with a proposed initial capital of Rs 10 million (US$ 100,000) from ACHR (Misereor).

The fund is being used by all the groups and managed by a joint coordinating committee which combines community people and professionals, and meets at least once a month to agree on which projects to support and to share news about what the different groups are doing. This is seen as an attempt to bring all these efforts into a common picture, which everybody can see together. Otherwise everybody does their work in isolation, and there's no chance to share, to help each other, to learn from each other.

5 Big ideas behind the new joint fund :

- **It should go directly to the affected people.** Project proposals should come from the affected people themselves, as much as possible. The fund should enable people in the greatest need to come together, make their plans and move ahead. It could be grants or loans, but the people have to decide.
- **Communities are the main actors.** Proposals can come from different areas, different kinds of groups and support different ways of doing things, but what is most important is that in all the projects, communities should be the main actors in solving their problems of land, housing and livelihood.
- **Projects should promote change.** The fund can support only a small number of projects with small amounts of money, so it's important to use these resources strategically, to support seed projects or experiments which demonstrate new systems, new ways of doing things which offer alternatives to the existing policies.
- **Communities should link together.** In all the work, communities should link together, work together, share information, learn from each other's experiences, visit each others projects, meet together. This should happen within cities, within districts, and within larger constituencies.
- **Work should link with the local government.** In all the projects, it is important to get the local government to be involved and to agree with what the communities are doing. And it should be made clear what the government 's role should be in the projects.

A few of the first joint-fund projects :

1 **Information centers (Help-O) : Rs 37,000 (US$ 370)**
To set up 2 community-based information centers at Katugoda and Magalla, in Galle. These centers will keep people and donors informed about the damage and progress of rehabilitation and reconstruction, and are run by volunteers and community leaders. *(April 2005)*

2 **Income generation loans (Women's Bank) : Rs 2.92 million (US$ 29,200)**
- **Kapparotota (Rs 1.5 million)** Loans to 15 families to buy boats and fishing equipment. People in this south coast fishing village didn't lose houses in the tsunami, but they did lose their means of earning. *(May 2005)*
- **Pelena (Rs 1 million)** Loans to 11families in this south coast village (which go back into a village revolving fund) to start small businesses and buy fishing boats. *(June 2005)*
- **Unawatuna (Rs 420,000)** Housing reconstruction loan (1 house) and income generation loans to 7 households, to start small shops and businesses. *(August 2005)*

3 **Land purchase loans (Women's Bank) : Rs 1.45 million (US$ 14,950)**
To help 20 families in Kosgoda village (Galle District), who lived within the 100m no-build zone, to buy 10 fully serviced housing plots in an existing private housing development farther inland. Two families will share each plot, so the land cost will be only US$ 725 per family. They're camping on the new land now and discussing how to build houses. *(August 2005)*

4 **Income generation grants (direct to communities) : Rs 2.24 million (US$ 22,400)**
- **Batticaloa (Rs 1.8 million)** To puchase 2 boats with engines and 10 small boats without engines for 12 affected fishermen in three east coast villages. *(August 2005)*
- **Kalmunai (Rs 425,490)** To buy tools, equipment, bicycles and sewing machines for 33 families in this small Muslim Tamil community to initiate their livelihoods *(June 2005)*

5 **Land purchase grants (Help-O) : Rs 7.5 million (US$ 75,000)**
Grant to 35 families in Galle (who were tenants of destroyed houses and therefore not on the beneficiary list) to purchase a 1-hectare piece of land for resettlement as a new community. Once the people have secure land, it should be easier to find funds from other donors to support the construction of their houses and infrastructure. *(August 2005)*

6 **Toilet building (Help-O) : Rs 244,000 (US$ 2,440)**
Help-O provides technical and financial assistance to 30 families living within the 100m coastal buffer zone in Galle, to build pit-latrine style toilets, on a self help basis. *(July 2005)*

7 **House construction grants (Help-O) : (Budget not final yet)**
14 families in Galle, who used to live in informal settlements within the 100m coastal buffer zone, are in the process of constructing new houses on the land of relatives or friends. Grant will cover housing construction, with infrastructure and design help from the NHDA.

8 **Community exchanges (organized by Sevanatha) : Rs 56,000 (US$ 560)**
Grants cover food, transport and accommodation. **June 2005:** Tsunami-affected people from Dutch Bar (east coast, Batticaloa District) visit housing reconstruction projects of Help-O and Women's Bank. **July 2005:** Community members from east-coast villages visit housing and income generation projects Galle and Colombo being implemented by Help-O, Women's Bank and Sevanatha. **August 2005:** 3 communities slated for relocation in Trincomalee (a badly damaged east-coast city) visit communities in Colombo and meet members of Women's Bank to discuss starting savings groups back home.

Using the fund to show a different way :

As of July, there were about ten organizations linked together through the new fund, and projects were slowly starting to come in. Many of these groups are new to the idea of using a small fund like this one as a catalyst, so that small investements of money can create big changes in perception and demonstrate new ways of doing things. If a community of 200 families needs to build permanent houses, for example, that would require a lot of money, much more than the new joint fund can provide. But the fund could support a project to start building the first 20 houses, and use those 20 houses to show how people can organize the whole process, manage the money, build cheaply, find efficient construction techniques, develop beautiful layouts, etc. That way, those 20 house become a kind of pilot project, which then offer vital learning for all the other groups. That's why the fund links so many groups together, so they can all learn from each other and follow each other's projects.

INDIA :

ABHIYAN : the disaster specialists from Kutch bring seven years' work coordinating people-driven rehabilitation to tsunami-hit Tamil Nadu

Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan (*Abhiyan* for short) is a network of 28 NGOs based in Kutch, one of the harshest and most disaster-prone corners of western India. Over the past seven years, Abhiyan has developed and implemented an unconventional and highly effective relief and rehabilitation process through a series of major disasters in Kutch: two cyclones, three droughts and the devastating earthquake of January 26, 2001. Abhiyan's approach has grown out of two important realizations :

- That an effective response to large scale disasters must bring together the resources and varied expertise of many different groups, professionals and government departments into a collective and well-coordinated whole.
- That disaster-affected communities know best what they need and can manage all aspects of their own rehabilitation, with the right support.

Abhiyan's member organizations collectively cover 644 of the total 951 villages in Kutch, through their work in natural resource management, watershed development, micro-credit, livelihood intervention with craft artisans, health, education, drought management and women's empowerment.

After the December 26 tsunami, Abhiyan got an SOS from NGO friends in Tamil Nadu. A team from Abhiyan is now working with NGOs and the government there to see how some some of the disaster coordination and people-driven rehabilitation ideas that were so effective in rebuilding Kutch can help in tsunami-ravaged areas of Tamil Nadu – especially in the worst-hit district of Nagapattinam. *(The following four pages are drawn from Abhiyan reports)*

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1 FIRST STEP : NGO Coordinating Center

To enable a more coordinated interaction between district and state governments, NGOs and affected people.

In the early stages of relief work in Tamil Nadu, Abhiyan's assistance was mostly associated with relief and rehabilitation activities being planned and implemented through the *NGO Coordination Center (NCC)* in Nagapattinam. The idea of the NCC was to establish a regular and transparent interaction between the district and state government agencies and NGOs and to ensure that the needs of the affected communities were properly represented and effectively addressed.

Nagapattinam, the district worst affected by the tsunami, attracted the greatest attention from both the government and civil society. But in the first days, a lack of coordination between local NGOs and the district administration in immediate relief operations and damage assessment was causing duplication in some areas and gaps in others. It was also difficult to get accurate information on the real situation in the affected areas, in order to carry out *need-based* action. The district administration responded to the situation by establishing a working relationship with the NGOs. This led to the establishment of the NCC on January 1, 2005, with SIFFS (South Indian Federation of Fishermen's Societies, a local NGO) mandated to run it. SNEHA (another local NGO working with fishing communities), with its strong grassroots base in the district, joined SIFFS to put the center on a strong footing. Here are some of the NCC's achievements in the first few months :

- **Registered 400 NGOs working in the district** during the relief phase, and created a database for public access.
- **Set up a system of volunteers to cover most of the affected villages** who would establish a 2-way system of information flow, to and from the villages, on their relief needs.
- **Coordinated with the government relief system** to ensure that relief materials reached relief camps and affected villages, based on needs reported by village volunteers. Helped the government manage the flow of relief materials and install computerized inventory systems.
- **Coordinated with NGOs and donors to organize the supply of relief materials** for needs not met by the government depots. Highlighted uneven distribution of relief to vulnerable and marginalized communities, based on verification by the village volunteers.
- **Placed over 200 youth volunteers** in various organizations during the relief phase.
- **Conducted meetings to create a sense of common purpose amongst the NGOs.** Provided information to all NGOs on a number of aspects and contributed to an enhanced understanding of the local context. Worked out a consensus between NGOs on where each would work for interim shelter, to avoid unnecessary overlap.
- **Enabled the formation of sector groups** relating to shelter, livelihoods, counseling, health and sanitation, children, etc, which flagged the critical issues and undertook collective responsibility to try and address these issues on the ground.
- **Set up a separate grievance redressal desk for legal aid** to families of missing persons, and worked with the district to set up a "single window" system to handle this speedily.

Opened up the coastal zone issue : One of the most positive aspects of the tsunami rehabilitation process in Nagapattinam – and in the rest of Tamil Nadu - was the existence of a common platform of NGOs, which the NCC helped to establish and strengthen. Through this platform, several important political issues were raised, such as the government's efforts to remove the poorest fisherfolk from the 200-meter coastal regulation zone. This powerful consensus, backed up with accurate information and the clout of many aligned groups, was able to put forward alternatives from the people's perspective, and force the state to back down.

Don't let anyone tell you the big international aid agencies have a monopoly on disaster expertise :

Abhiyan's approach to disaster management and people-driven rehabilitation was home-sown in the particularly harsh soil of western Gujarat, but some of its key aspects have transplanted very well in the salty coastal sands of Tamil Nadu, as well as in the tsunami-ravaged wastes of Aceh, in Indonesia (see pages 26 - 29)

"External aid always brings with it the danger of weakening in people the spirit of self-reliance, especially after a major disaster. Abhiyan is committed to leveraging available resources to catalyze a reconstruction development process which further strengthens the innate force of the community, so that its members emerge from a disaster stronger and richer in experience of cooperation."

2 SECOND STEP : Rehabilitation Resource Center

The Nagapattinam Rehabilitation Resource Center is established to tackle the long-term tasks of rebuilding the district

With so many organisations and so many immediate needs, the initial tsunami relief phase required a lot of coordination of relief materials, information and volunteers. But as we've entered the rehabilitation phase, the number of organizations in Nagapattinam has reduced drastically, and a different set of inputs are needed, to make available innovative ideas and approaches (including access to and exchange of sectoral and regional perspectives), technical expertise, reliable data - especially for NGOs and donors. Similarly, Nagapattinam's affected communities are no longer vulnerable recipients of relief, but are are being confronted with many decisions in the process of re-establishing their livelihoods, rebuilding houses and settlements and repairing damaged assets. They are also having to choose which organizations they'd like to work with and seeing how government policies affect them. This decision-making process is colored by anxiety for the future and fear of being left out, as well as by a desire to make a future that is better than the past. People are also confronted with the limitations of their traditional community leaders to cope with these challenges.

The communities have clearly expressed a need for help understanding the options available to them, so they can make informed decisions. After discussions with NGOs, professionals and government representatives, SIFFS and SNEHA have decided to turn the NGO Coordination Center into the *Natapattinam Rehabilitation Resource Center (NRRC).* The center is now working for the rehabilitation of the district's affected coastal areas on principles of long-term development and sustainability, and providing a range of services to communities and organizations involved in the rehabilitation process. The resource center is managed by a core team of professional and full-timers, with support from volunteers and several partner organizations.

Demonstration center showcases new habitat and livelihood ideas . . .

The new NRRC is also working with the Nagapattinam District Administration to develop a demonstration center where different institutions with expertise in house-design, shelter planning and sanitation can demonstrate their technical and design ideas by building actual models of seismic, cyclone and wind safe structures.

These models become seeable, touchable, look-at-able, full-scale demonstrations of technical details, innovative designs, and appropriate uses of sustainable materials, which can be easily replicated. Similarly, toilet and sewerage systems that are appropriate for fragile coastal ecosystems, solid waste management systems and safe waste-water recycling models will be constructed on the site leased by the District Collector to the NRRC, where the Rehabilitation Resource Center has been established.

This center will be an important place of ideas and assistance for tsunami-affected communities busy reconstructing their villages. It will also be a place to develop the skills of artisans and workers in the Nagapattinam area. The center will also exhibit models of various kinds of boats, nets and fishing equipment, to showcase the livelihoods of the affected communities and to display new ideas and products that could enhance existing livelihoods.

How the center helps PEOPLE . . .

- Ensures two-way communication between communities and the rehabilitation plans of NGOs, government, donors, through information centers in all villages (with compters / internet access in the larger villages).
- Equips each community to understand and prepare its own micro-level rehabilitation plans, to actively participate in any planning process by implementing agencies and to take greater control and ownership of the rehabilitation process. Ensures that different sections of the village are all participating in the planning process.
- Ensures the most vulnerable community members (marginalized communities, single women, elderly, disabled, orphans) are integrated in the recovery, rehabilitation and development process by facilitating their access to resources, information and decision-making.
- Ensures government assistance / compensation is reaching the community.
- Identifies genuine grievances and brings them to the district administration.
- Makes policy guidelines and procedures understandable to the community.
- Facilitates consultations on various aspects of rehabilitation at village level between the community, NGOs and government representatives.
- Collects and collates village-level "dynamic" information as various processes, decisions, attitudes evolve and transform on the ground.
- Monitors the quality and progress of the rehabilitation process, and flags any issues that become impediments to the smooth and effective rehabilitation of the communities.

and helps NGOs, DONORS, GOVERNMENT

- Maintains an integrated data base on the disaster, covering all the different sectors, all the affected regions and all the specific affected communities within the district.
- Maintains a resource directory that enables NGOs and donors to access resource persons, institutions, studies, reports and expertise in relevant sectors.
- Provides a sharing mechanism by which the various implementing agencies can better understand each other's projects, methodologies, perspectives and prototypes.
- Provides a consultation mechanism between various stakeholders in the district, in order to develop a common perspective on rehabilitation in different sectors, to strengthen collaboration, and to move towards a process which is more development and empowerment oriented
- Undertakes policy advocacy based on community feedback, discussions and data from the ground. This includes preparing policy recommendations and notes, as has been done in the relief phase.
- Ensures that all information, government resolutions, macro plans and policies are clearly understandable to the affected community, and brings such information into the public domain.
- Makes available the technical and policy guidelines on themes such as habitat, shelter design, tenure regulations, livelihoods in particular to the different stakeholders.

INDIA :

A FISHERMEN'S DISASTER :

How the group that lost the most are taking the lead in rebuilding their own lives and livelihoods . . .

In places of pilgrimage, such as Kanyakumari and Velankanni, and on the crowded Marina Beach in Madras, the December 26 tsunami caused many casualties. But it was overwhelmingly the fisher folk, who live and work in the few hundred meters of land closest to the sea, who were the tsunami's main victims, and therefor relief and rehabilitation efforts have been focussed on them.

Besides suffering the greatest number of deaths (most of the 6,000 deaths in Nagapattinam District were among poor subsistence fisher folk), these fishing communities face the long-term consequences of lost homes, destroyed village infrastructure and lost livelihoods, when their boats, nets and fishing equipment were swept away or badly damaged. Around 75,000 fishing boats were lost, destroyed or badly damaged in Tamil Nadu, along with nets, motors and fishing equipment.

As soon as the Abhiyan team arrived in Tamil Nadu three days after the tsunami, they established contacts with several key local organizations with firm roots in the tsunami-hit areas, and sought to support them in their relief efforts. Two of the most important of these organizations were *Sneha*, a local NGO working at grassroots level specifically on issues of concern to fisherfolk and fisheries workers in Tamil Nadu, and the 50,000-strong *South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS)*, which is active in Nagapattinam District. SIFFS, which has been working with small-scale fishermen (and fisherwomen!) for 20 years, in the four south Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, has became one of the main actors in the tsunami relief and rehabilitation process.

While taking care of immediate relief needs in the aftermath of the tsunami, SIFFS plunged straight into rehabilitation issues of fishing communities. They began by carrying out a massive survey in the fishing villages to quantify the extent of damage in terms of lives, houses, infrastructure, fishing equipment and boats. Armed with this detailed information, they set about launching the rehabilitation programs described in the following story *(drawn from reports available on the SIFFS website, below).*

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SIFFS' struggle for fisherfolk doesn't end with new boats and houses.

Even as these battered fishing villages struggle desperately to put their lives back together after the tsunami, the guys from World Bank, EU and WTO are in Tamil Nadu negotiating mega loans to modernize Tamil Nadu's harbors, improve its coastal transport and liberalize its fishing sector – all projects which spell more trouble for the state's maritime ecology and its small fisher folk.

QUESTION : What's the best long-term rehabilitation strategy?
ANSWER : Simple. FISHING BOATS.

Since so many of Tamil Nadu fishermen's boats, nets, engines and equipment were lost or seriously damaged, the first priority in SIFFS's rehabilitation work has been to help repair or replace this essential equipment wherever possible, to facilitate the resumption of fishing, *at the earliest!* As Vengkatgiri Vivekanandan from SIFFS is emphatic about repeating, "The easiest way for local NGOs, in collaboration with the government and international aid agencies, to spend their money is to provide fishing boats as a rehabilitation strategy." So what equipment do these small-scale fishermen need to get back to sea? They need a boat (which could be a timber catamaran, a fiberglass catamaran called a "Maruti", or a canoe made of marine plywood or fiberglass), an outboard motor or sails, nets, hooks and a few other items of equipment. It's a modest kit, but when you multiply it by tens of thousands, the task of replacing it becomes a mammoth task. *So how is SIFFS going about doing it?*

- **Helping fishermen to get compensation for their lost boats** and houses from the considerable compensation budgets being managed by various government agencies, or helping them get funding assistance from foreign, corporate or private donors, largely through the collaborative mechanisms of the Nagapattinam Rehabilitation Resource Center, which SIFFS helps run.
- **Repairing damaged fishing boats and engines.** As a first step, SIFFS sent out mobile teams of carpenters and mechanics to repair any of the boats and engines that were salvageable, so a first batch of fishermen could start fishing again. As soon as repairs started, it became clearer what kind of spare engine parts and raw materials would be required, and in what quantities. Using both government and donor funds, SIFFS found local suppliers of spare parts and materials such as fiberglass and marine plywood for repairing canoes and catamarans.
- **Getting other basic fishing gear to fishermen**, with or without boats, including nets, lines and hooks, so that even those without boats can at least carry on with shoreline fishing.
- **Building new fishing boats.** Even before the tsunami, SIFFS ran 12 boat-yards, which could produce a total of about 150 boats per year. Faced with such an enormous need for new boats after the tsunami, SIFFS has been scaling this up by relocating boat-making teams to various affected districts, starting new boat-building teams, setting up more boat-yards and training carpenters to assist master boat-builders. The special timbers used for building fishing boats are not easily gotten hold of. One of the best woods, *albizzia falcataria*, grows only in Kerala. SIFFS had its own *albizzia falcataria* plantation, which it felled in the early weeks after the disaster, but it only provided 400 logs, where 20,000 were required in Kanyakumari District alone.
- **Housing :** In many fishing villages, SIFFS has also been involved in the reconstruction of temporary shelters and "fisher folk-friendly" permanent houses. Instead of single rooms in the long, oven-hot, tin-sheet sheds the government and international aid agencies were offering, SIFFS chose to put up traditional palm-thatch houses as models for temporary relief housing.

Giving something back . . .

For three days, the people of the tsunami-hit fishing village of Karaikalmedu went out to sea in 84 boats and did the unthinkable with their catch: they went through the town and distributed their fish free to anybody who wanted it. They gave away over 4,000 Rupees worth of fish – a lot of money for a struggling village community. "Why did you do that when you need every penny you can get?" I asked Indriani, one of the fisherpersons. Indriyani's family lost everything to the sea. Eleven of her family were swept away, along with 50 from her village. "The whole world came to help us," she says. "Even before the government aid reached us, local people rushed us to the hospital. They fed us, looked after our children, helped us to retrieve our dead. People just came here and gave. We must give something back." *(Exerpted from a story by Mari Marcel Thekaekara, in The Guardian - UK, July 6, 2005)*

ABHIYAN : 7 ways to promote a people-driven rehabilitation process

During ACHR's regional tsunami meeting in Phuket, on January 19, Sandeep Virmani, from the Indian NGO network Abhiyan, offered these suggestions about how to channel people's energies - in a large way - into the disaster rehabilitation process: When it comes to policy, the government wants to know if something can be done at scale. When they talk about building thousands of typical contractor-built houses after a disaster, they know they can deliver it. But if you talk about participation, they don't know how to do it - they don't have that kind of expertise or those kinds of people. So how can we, as NGOs and community organizations, convince governments that in fact we *can* provide for people's participation on a large scale?

1 **People should construct their own temporary housing, on their old land**, as quickly as possible. In Tamil Nadu, we got a policy enacted in which government provides materials and a little money and people build their own temporary shelters, on their old land. This was a big step, because the government wanted to bring in contractors, which would have taken too long. But there is a lot of tension around this because the government wants to clear the 200m coastal zone, and knows how hard it is to remove people once they've built temporary houses there.

2 **People should also be able to construct their own permanent housing, not contractors.** The money should be given to people, in stages, so they can make their own houses, following the government's rules. That gives a big power to the people. After the big earthquake in Gujarat, we were able to do that very well. Fortunately, the government recognized that making 200,000 houses was a job that not even the government could handle! So that is why they agreed to the policy of giving the money to people directly, in stages, to construct their own houses.

3 **Villages decide which NGOs to work with, not the other way around.** After any major disaster, all kinds of NGOs appear out of nowhere, some only to cash in on the big funds in the relief work. In Tamil Nadu, we are lobbying for a policy in which every NGO that wants to work with a particular village has to get the endorsement of that village first, so villages adopt NGOs and set the conditions of the partnership, in writing, instead of the other way around. That is what we did in Gujarat and it worked very well. A lot of villages decided to do their own "owner-driven" redevelopment without any NGOs at all, and they did very well.

4 **Set up a "legal watch" system to make sure nobody loses their traditional land rights.** No poor family with traditional rights to their coastal land should be evicted after a disaster. In the initial relief phase, NGOs do a lot of advocacy and networking around this, but the moment reconstruction starts, they get too busy with housing construction for advocacy. So it is important that some groups look only at advocacy on tenure and entitlements. One way is to set up *legal watch* systems in clusters of villages, to ensure that nobody is left out or dispossessed.

5 **All affected communities have to be linked into a larger organization.** After a disaster, it is important to have a larger system which links together all the affected villages. When you lobby for policies or changes, you can't bring only four or five villages with you and expect the government to listen - *you have to take masses!* After the earthquake in Kutch, we had about 100 young social workers whose only job was to set up committees in each village (called *setus* which mean "bridges" in Gujarati), do quick surveys and keep sitting and talking to people, *without any agenda*. This *setu* system allowed us to gather concrete information quickly about what people want. And the government listened, because they didn't have this information.

6 **A good, centralized information management system early on is essential**, to inform the next phase of rehabilitation. If it is highly professional, it can make a big impact on policy. The relief phase is the most cathartic phase because everybody is there doing things. But as soon as the relief phase ends, there is usually a period of huge confusion for a month or two – *what to do next?* That confused period is very critical for the entire next three years of rehabilitation. So if you are able to get good information and look into all the policies that need to be designed, in this one or two months period, then you will have a good start in the long rehabilitation process.

7 **Need to make a larger coastal area planning, from a people's perspective.** The first coastal regulation zone enacted in India did not involve any fishermen and did not mention fishermen anywhere in the document! Some NGOs or professional groups not directly involved in the reconstruction can help prepare plans for large areas of the coastal areas, almost like the government would do, but from a participation-based approach, and making sure all the governments rules and environmental laws are incorporated, so the government can't say no. This would involve not only setting up examples, but putting those plans into place, and put it in front of the government to say, *look this is possible*. The government is going to realize a little too late that this kind of larger planning needs to be done. And by then, if we can have our own plans in place, it goes a long way in lobbying for solutions that work for these coastal communities.

Disasters can open up huge opportunities to do new things . . .

1 These traditional fishing communities need alternative economies. The younger generation aren't all interested in fishing - they want jobs and entrepreneurial options. If they go into tourism, it usually means working for the private sector. But in Thailand or Sri Lanka, for example, fishing communities can get involved in tourism, through "home stays" and eco-tourism.

2 This is a chance to bring in new environmental technologies that aren't high-tech, but can be developed and used by local people, who can be assets in managing and protecting sensitive coastal environments.

3 After a disaster, the building industry often becomes the largest economy. Normally, that construction is controlled by private sector contractors. But as we showed in Kutch, it's possible for extremely small-scale construction actors, masons, carpenters and community enterprises to take over a lot of the reconstruction work, boosting local economies and household incomes.

4 Our coastal communities have fallen into the trap of trying to copy the big cities in how they develop. So if somebody has money, they just build a concrete box. They haven't had a chance to rethink their traditional housing systems, to improve them without throwing away their culture and history. We're not saying *go back to your old ways and build a hut!* But this is an opportunity for sensitive architects and planners to look at people's situation and local traditions and help solve their housing needs with new materials and new planning methods which give back their identity.

INDIA :

SSP in Tamil Nadu :

Those earthquake-savvy Mahila Mandals from Latur and Kutch come to the rescue again . . .

Three weeks after the tsunami, a group of poor women villagers, who are survivors of the 1993 and 2001 earthquakes in Latur (Maharashtra) and Kutch (Gujarat), traveled to Tamil Nadu to show their solidarity with women like themselves, along with a team from **Swayam Shikshan Prayog - SSP** (a Mumbai-based NGO) and the **Covenant Center for Development** (a Tamil Nadu-based NGO working with affected communities). The team spent several days visiting 13 villages in the two worst-affected districts, Nagapattinam and Cuddalore, where they talked with survivors, shared stories and organized meetings with women's groups, youth groups and fishermen's cooperatives.

Their purpose was to understand the problems tsunami-affected communities were facing, with a focus on women and children, and to identify possible ways they could support these villages in developing their long-term housing and livelihood rehabilitation programs. Drawing on their own experience with several disasters, they set out to help these tsunami-stricken villages use the reconstruction process as an opportunity to build local capacities and strengthen social and political structures. There are several key concepts in the SSP's community-driven rehabilitation strategy :

- Forming village development committees of women's groups and other community institutions to manage the rehabilitation and to monitor disaster-safe reconstruction.
- Making financial and technical assistance within easy reach of affected communities.
- Defining clear roles for local government in the areas of planning, monitoring, problem solving, infrastructure development and disaster safety.
- Using local skills and labor and including women in all aspects of reconstruction.

(for more on SSP's earlier work in Kutch, please see ACHR Newsletter No. 13, June 2001, page 3)

These brief notes on SSP's work in Tamil Nadu are drawn from a few of their detailed reports, all of which can be downloaded from the beautifully-designed "Disaster Watch" website (below), which is also a rich source of recent news and accounts of work going on in other tsunami-hit countries - as well as with other disasters - from a women's perspective.

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WOMEN in post-disaster reconstruction :

Post-disaster reconstruction is often considered a professional's domain, and villagers - especially women - are often not consulted. In the process of galvanizing women's groups in disaster-struck villages over the past 12 years, SSP has found that women played a vital role in finding cheap, appropriate techniques for repairing their houses, and also acted as crucial bearers of information to other community members. They were also able to help ensure that government relief funds were properly spent. Here are two examples of how SSP and their partners in Tamil Nadu are helping local people to make the tsunami reconstruction process their own.

1 People-built temporary houses in Savadikuppam village

Disaster to development: *The development opportunities in disasters are seldom recognized and are often reduced to infrastructure-rebuilding programs once the focus shifts from relief to rehabilitation.*

Savadikuppam is a tiny fishing village of 400 people in Nagapattinam District. 23 houses close to the shore were destroyed while many houses built earlier by the state fisheries department were so badly damaged that people could no longer live in them. A women's self-help group called Kaveri, which had been working in Savadikuppam for 15 years (with support from a local NGO Sneha) invited the SSP team to help build temporary shelters.

Working in collaboration with their technical partner, the Dehra Dun-based *People's Science Institute (PSI)*, SSP helped the villagers develop an unusual house model, which could be built cheaply and quickly by the people themselves, using timber, gunny-sacking and cement (as an alternative to the oven-like tin sheet houses being built elsewhere). After persuading the *panchayat* (village government) to support the process with materials and labor wages from the government rehabilitation program, and to use the people's beneficiary list (with 40 households) instead of the official's list (with only 35), the construction process began.

In the system which SSP helped set up, village volunteers monitored the flow of building materials and the attendance of the laborers and government engineers, to ensure there was no wastage of materials, money or time in the house construction process. All the laborers were recruited locally, who besides getting a decent daily wage, were also trained through the work.

2 Designing disaster safe houses in Poompuhar village

There are still plenty of officials who consider housing to be too technical for communities to understand or participate in - especially when it involves special disaster-resistant technologies. To disprove this tired old chestnut, the SSP team helped villagers in Poompuhar, another badly-wrecked fishing village in Nagapattinam District, to work out a replicable, participatory process to construct decent, affordable, disaster-safe houses which meet the complex needs of the families who will live in them.

Leaders of women's self help groups from Latur and Osmanabad districts, in Maharashtra, led the process, bringing with them their experiences rebuilding their houses and villages after the devastating earthquake a decade ago. They began by organizing a series of meetings with small groups of affected families to discuss and prioritize all aspects of house design. With engineering support from PSI, the villagers' house design gradually evolved. The final model was miles away from the government-sponsored concrete box, and included the following elements:

- disaster-safe design features for earthquake / cyclone safety
- extra-strong "core room" to safeguard life and assets
- taller structure with external stair case to escape to roof during floods
- flat concrete slab roof allows for future expansion upwards
- rainwater harvesting facility with storage
- toilet and bathroom entered from outside
- low-cost ferro cement roofs for kitchen, toilets and veranda
- traditional *"vastu"* considerations incorporated in the design

To demonstrate earthquake and cyclone safe building techniques, SSP then organized a 4-day "hands-on" training program for 17 local masons, with local women watching and taking part, so they can later supervise the rebuilding of their own houses.

"The real lesson from the earthquakes in Latur and Kutch is the need to involve communities, and particularly women, in the design of the reconstruction and repair effort, and thereafter in the ongoing needs of development in the community."

Kalpana Sharma, Journalist

The tsunami gives the poor fisherfolk at Chinnakalapet a chance to use the disaster relief process to show the city a model for long-term, community-led redevelopment which can work in other Pondicherry slums, as part of a city-wide slum upgrading process. Our objective is to get the city to look at the bigger picture, so we hope the idea will spread.

The SPARC / NSDF / MM Alliance in Pondicherry

House rebuilding in one tsunami-hit slum becomes an opportunity to show how community-led redevelopment can work all over the city.

Soon after the disaster, National Slum Dwellers Federation and Mahila Milan volunteers from several Indian cities rushed to south India to help out with the crisis relief, distributing food packets and helping households to link with disaster aid sources. In several tsunami-hit communities in Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu's Cuddalore and Kanchipuram districts, where the federation had contacts, they worked with survivors in the following months to survey the damage and begin repairing water pumps, building temporary bamboo and thatch houses, toilets and community centers. The federation is now concentrating its work on two poor fishing communities in the tiny union territory of Pondicherry, where very few lives were lost, but hundreds of houses were partly or fully destroyed. This update is drawn from an August 18th phone conversation with Celine D'Cruz, from the federation's NGO partner SPARC :

Only two settlements that the federation works with in Pondicherry were hit by the tsunami - Chinnakalapet and Nellavadu North. Most of the houses here were only flooded or somewhat damaged, but some were totally destroyed. We've had savings groups in both these communities for many years, and the federation had built some community toilets and water pumps before the tsunami hit. After the crisis, we helped build about 100 temporary houses of thatch and bamboo for families whose houses had been destroyed, and so most of the people were able to go back to their land right away. There was no need for any relief camps in these areas.

Now we are starting to construct permanent houses in Chinnakalapet, the larger of these two coastal slums, where many poor fishermen and fishermen's helpers live. In the first phase, we will start with the 100 families who were already organized through the savings groups. But the Pondicherry government has asked us to help build 250 houses, to cover the whole slum. So in the next phase, we'll build another 150 houses.

The Pondicherry government has a policy in which either the state rebuilds with its own funds, or it allocates specific areas to NGOs, which have to bring their own funding, up front. With so many international NGOs in the area, I don't think finding money to build will be difficult. The city has already signed an MOU with us, which formally acknowledges that these two settlements exist and gives us permission to construct houses and infrastructure on the same beachfront site. So the project in Chinnakalapet comes with secure tenure. Unlike in Tamil Nadu, there have been no problems with people being forbidden to rebuild their houses near the sea in Pondicherry.

There were two reasons why we decided to concentrate our energies on these two settlements in Pondicherry. First, because they were a little out of the way and were being passed over by all the NGOs for the more badly-damaged communities in Tamil Nadu. And second, because these communities already had savings groups and were part of the federation. Their experience with managing money and making decisions collectively makes it a lot easier to organize a good tsunami reconstruction process there, and makes it more likely we'll have a success, in terms of getting people to do things together. Pondicherry is a very small and lovely state, and the government there is very motivated to find good solutions - solutions to both the city's relatively minor tsunami damage, and to its much more serious problems of housing for the city's poor.

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Designing a cheap, cool, cyclone-safe house that people can build themselves . . .

The Pondicherry government is specifying a very expensive concrete house for tsunami victims, with a kitchen, bedroom, hall and store-room, costing about Rs 145,000. The trouble is, nobody can afford that kind of house and nobody is offering to give us that much money. We need to design a house that can become a model for the city to replicate elsewhere, both in terms of design and in terms of economics. So we've been racking our brains about how to bring the cost of a house down to a more affordable Rs 70,000 or so.

Aaron Wegmann, a Swiss architect who has helped out with a lot of the federation's housing projects, worked with the Chinnakalapet people to make a few initial house designs. In Pondicherry settlements, people usually build single-story houses right on the ground, with low brick walls (plastered with mud or cement) and light coconut thatch roofs. These houses are cool, cheap and use local materials, but they haven't stood up too well when battered by waves and storms.

So one idea is to take this traditional thatch-roofed house and build it up on top of very sturdy framework of tall, reinforced concrete columns. In the event of another cyclone or flood, then the water can flow right under the house without causing much damage, and the people living upstairs will be safe. We figure we can build this for Rs 70.000.

As communities in many of the more watery south-east Asian countries well know, a house built up on stilts offers many advantages, besides safety from floods. The space underneath becomes a cool, shady place to hang out, cut vegetables, set up a workshop, keep animals, or sleep during the hot season.

THAILAND

Thailand's tsunami relief work taps the power of networks and joint effort from the first day . . .

The day after the killer waves hit southern Thailand, the *Community Organizations Development Institute* and the *Thai Community Foundation* met with NGOs, civic groups, community networks and government organizations operating in the southern part of the country to see how they could work jointly to assist the tsunami victims in the six battered provinces (Phangnga, Phuket, Krabi, Ranong, Satun and Trang).

It was clear that providing quick, effective relief after a catastrophe of this scale was far beyond the means of any government or single organization. The job called for the combined support, skills and resources of as many groups, individuals, relief agencies and community networks as possible. So the *Save the Andaman Fishing Communities Network* was hastily established. The network's first task was to set up six working teams (one for each province, with about 10 people on each team) to go out and do two things:

- **Survey the damage:** In the process, the teams linked with more groups in each province to help. In some places, community networks did the survey. In others, CODI linked with local NGOs and government agencies to gather information and begin building a common data-base on affected communities: their family information, their dead and missing members, the condition of their houses and boats, their employment situation, their lost documents. Within a few days, some preliminary figures had been gathered, and over the past months, this information has continuously been added to and refined.

- **Begin providing relief assistance** to people in tsunami-hit villages, in the form of tents, clothes, medicines, food, water, coffins, and rallying help with funerals and the search for the dead. Within a week, the longer-term work also began of setting up temporary housing in relief camps and working with people to revive their lives and battered villages.

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CODI's media unit continues to produce detailed documentation of the tsunami relief and rehabilitation process in Thailand, in the form of videos, books, pamphlets and reports. Unfortunately, most of this stuff is in Thai. For English-language documentation of the Thai tsunami work, please visit the ACHR website or contact us for a copy of our press clippings file.

"If we want to restore the tsunami-hit communities, we should think about how to restore their lives as a whole, not just thinking about giving them boats or houses. There are also the intangibles, such as one's relationship with others that we must recognize. If we want to help them restore their lives, we must let them think for themselves, about what they need and how they would go about solving their problems. If they finally realize they must rely on themselves as a group to answer their needs, it will be an opportunity for the communities to become strong again."

(***Nidhi Eoswseewong, scholar and member of the Save the Andaman Network)***

Using the rehabilitation process to build a more secure future for Thailand's vulnerable coastal communities . . .

Besides causing so much death and destruction, the tsunami tore open and exposed many deep, pre-existing problems of poverty, social exclusion, land tenure uncertainty, commercial over-exploitation, government indifference to indigenous groups and lopsided systems of power. The waves also created a whole set of new problems when people's livelihoods, social structures, survival systems and ways of life were swept away, along with their houses and boats.

But with all this spectacular misfortune came an unexpected opportunity for these already imperiled coastal communities to use the relief process to begin tackling these other, deeper, more structural problems which jeopardized their future. Unless these people could start speaking on their own behalf and deciding what they want to do, they'd remain powerless objects of somebody else's idea of what they need, what they should do, where they should go and how they should live.

CODI and friends in the Andaman networks set out to use every aspect of the relief process to organize and strengthen these coastal communities. In this way, the tsunami relief process has become a very big, very urgent experiment in *community revival*. If space, resources and support could be made available to help communities become the key actors in planning the rebuilding of their lives, settlements and coastal environments, in close collaboration with local authorities, NGOs and support organizations, then the rehabilitation process could be a community-builder, a local relationship-builder and an important step in correcting what was wrong before the waves hit.

It was also clear that rehabilitation had to encompass many aspects of people's lives. In villages wiped out by the tsunami, people lost everything - their families, houses, boats, livelihoods, support networks, social systems and ways of life. Providing housing isn't enough. To rebuild lives that were shattered by this crisis calls for a more comprehensive rehabilitation program which includes - and integrates - other crucial aspects of people's survival, such as support for income generation (so people can begin earning again), for ecological revitalization (so they can become key actors in the revival and protection of the fragile coastal ecosystems they occupy), for rebuilding of social networks and reviving of traditional cultures destroyed by the tsunami.

People-to-people support :

As soon as the bad news broke, many rural and urban community networks across Thailand began sending rice, vegetables, fish, clothes, utensils, tools and building materials by the truckload to tsunami-hit areas. Hundreds of community volunteers have come to help build, cook, mend boats, look after kids, massage aching bodies, clear debris, search for missing family members, offering a little cheer in situations of major loss and heartbreak. This kind of *people-to-people* assistance has been a vivid feature of the tsunami relief process all along.

The *Community Planning Network*, which is very active in southern Thailand, has been a key ally in tsunami rehabilitation. In the first days, the network's leader, a rubber farmer named Pooyai Gomet, mobilized men to help set up the Bang Muang camp and build temporary houses. He asked each of the network's member communities to send three volunteers, but most sent six or seven burly farmers and carpenters, so a crew turned into an army! They brought their own tents and slept right in the camp with the refugees.

Besides helping with the physical aspects of relief operations, like building housing and setting up boat-building workshops, this sophisticated and resourceful network has been a tireless partner in the more political and organizational aspects of rehabilitation. The network helped several communities to negotiate against eviction, and organized many of the exchange visits between tsunami-affected communities. Supporting this kind of horizontal learning, which is a big feature of the community planning network, has helped to build new networks among affected communities, and helped them tackle common problems as a combined force.

The relief camp at Bang Muang :

How some of the tsunami's worst-affected victims took charge of their own relief operations and found that cooperation, hard work and a little karaoke can be highly therapeutic . . .

Early on, it was clear that the most urgent need was to provide temporary housing to bring back together people scattered by the tsunami, so they could organize themselves, discuss, set priorities and begin developing *a collective vision* of their future. Camps were soon being set up by aid organizations and government departments up and down the Andaman coast. In Phangnga, the worst affected province, this network helped set up five camps. The largest and the first to open was the camp at Bang Muang. Though originally planned for 400, the camp eventually gave shelter to 850 families (3,500 people), most from nearby Ban Nam Khem, Thailand's worst-hit village, where over 2,000 people died and 1,300 houses were destroyed.

What makes the Bang Muang camp unusual is that it is being managed by the tsunami victims themselves. Community Planning Network leaders and organizers from CODI and NGOs worked with the tsunami survivors to organize the camp together. After putting up toilets, bathing areas, cooking tents and setting aside space for relief activities, they laid out neat rows of tents in a system of 10-family groups and 3-group zones, each with its own leader. Committees were set up to manage cooking, camp hygiene, water supply, medical care, visitors, children's activities, lost people, registration of newcomers and temporary house construction. Camp-wide meetings are held every evening to discuss practical aspects of camp management, to make announcements and to give the committees a chance to report on the day's work. Everyone knows what's happening and all decisions are made in public every evening, with everyone's agreement.

A boat-repair workshop was soon started, savings groups and a community bank were established, and a variety of income-generating projects were launched to tide people over, in the face of lost livelihoods and slow-moving government compensation. The idea of organizing all these activities was to find practical ways for the tsunami survivors to take part in running their camp and to be actively involved in managing as many aspects of their lives as possible, even in this extreme situation, so they could get back into the active mode of taking care of things themselves.

There is a lot of grief here, of course, sleepless nights and talk of ghosts. But the shock for many visitors to Bang Muang is the lively atmosphere of the place, more like a village fair than a refugee camp. Life hasn't stopped. In the children's tent, kids paint memories of their villages before the waves hit, while old women in the folk medicine tent soothe bruised limbs with herbal compresses. Over in the donations warehouse, kids play fancy-dress on the mountains of donated clothing while their mothers look for things that fit. Loud-speakers blare announcements about government aid programs, Buddhist and Muslim prayers and sappy love-songs from the community radio station that has been set up. Women cook curries and rice in pots big enough to swim in, while princesses, politicians and rock stars materialize in caravans of vehicles with blackened windows. News reporters and TV cameras are everywhere. A perspiring Australian volunteer in a *"U-Turn for Christ"* T-shirt rushes in asking if anybody knows how to ask for a spanner in Thai.

"If people do it themselves, all the activities involved in managing a very big relief camp like this become rich opportunities to build trust and organizational skills, to bring back people's self-confidence through work and mutual assistance. The system of collective work set in the camp becomes a good preparation for the longer-term tasks of negotiating for secure land and rebuilding their communities, their lives and livelihoods and their cultures." (Amporn Kaewnoo, the Coordinator of CODI's Southern Regional office)

"I've been in many refugee camps in Sudan, Bosnia, Rwanda and Cambodia, but I've never seen one as clean as this one. There's no garbage anywhere - what's going on? It even smells good, like everyone is making *pad thai* at the same time!" *(Donna Leinwand is a young reporter for the Washington-based newspaper, USA-TODAY)*

Managing the "second tsunami" of relief aid

The good intentions of people from all over the world to offer help was marvelous, but when money, goods and assistance come pouring in all at once, it can create a chaos of squabbles and bad feelings. There are stories of people driving into the Bang Muang camp and handing out roasted chickens or envelopes of cash to the first people they saw and then driving away, creating storms! Since the camp opened, over 60 Thai and international organizations have come with various kinds of assistance: medical aid organizations, volunteer doctors, children's organizations, disaster-counselors, women's organizations, students, corporations, local and international NGOs, global relief agencies.

People recognized right away that all this external help had to be organized through a system that was collective, transparent and managed by the people themselves, so they wouldn't be overwhelmed by it. So a committee was established to welcome these aid groups, organize space for them to set up and make sure people knew they were there and what kind of help they offered. A donations committee was also set up, with a desk at the camp entrance, to receive all the donations of money, clothes, food, medical supplies, toys and equipment. Every night in the camp meeting, the committee reports what's been donated and posts lists of donations, so accounts are clear and people can make collective decisions about what to do with all this stuff.

The Bang Muang camp quickly became an important pilot project for a relief process being managed by tsunami victims, in collaboration with a large number of assisting organizations, all of whom could feel part of the process, without overpowering the people. It hasn't been easy, but most aspects of the camp's functioning have happened with an unprecedented level of good humor, pragmatism and friendly cooperation.

THAILAND

A big contrast between the flow of human kindness and all the problems and conflicts around the issue of LAND :

The fishing villages along Thailand's Andaman coast have a long history of being pushed around in a titan's game of money and power. A lot of this land, especially in the worst affected province Phangnga, used to be public land. Despite being already occupied by long-established fishing villages, huge tracts of this land have been concessioned out over the past century for commercial exploitation, first to tin mining companies and later to shrimp farming interests. Now tourism is upping the pressure to chuck these perpetually vulnerable communities off their ancestral land. Many of the resorts where so many foreign tourists perished were built on land previously occupied by fishing communities. Those which survive have faced increasing threats of eviction.

The land status of most of the tsunami-hit communities is extremely precarious. Some are on public land (under the control of many different ministries and government agencies and subject to many different policies), some are on national park land while others are on land being fought over by two owners or claimed by private businessmen. Though people have lived here for decades - even centuries - many have no title deeds or lease contracts, and therefore considered by some to be illegal squatters. Even within these villages, the tenure situation is a messy patchwork of murky tenure rights, conflicting claims of ownership, spurious land titles and criss-crossing land disputes.

What the tsunami has done is to tear open and aggravate all these already difficult issues of land: who determines how it's supposed to be used and who has the right to use it.

For the affected communities and their supporters, the biggest and most difficult post-tsunami project has now become finding ways to resolve the overlapping "traditional" land rights of these fishing villages, and the so-called "legal" land rights of the speculators, developers and politicians.

Serious stuff : *On May 20, an 18-year old boy from Ban Laem Pom, Piyawat Suksrikaew, was found dead, hanged from a pine tree on the beach near his former home. After losing his mother, sister and home in the tsunami, Piyawat faced the additional stress of a private company's attempts to take away their land for a luxury resort, and his father's being arrested for "tresspassing" on their own land.*

"This place used to be a tin mine. It was state-owned land. How could it become personal property unless there was some fishy business involved? In the past, they've tried to steal our land and were so angry that we put up a fight. Now they've sent tractors to demolish our homes and made death threats. When the tsunami struck, they thought it was an opportunity to keep us out for good."

(Ratree Kongwatmai, a tsunami survivor from at Ban Laem Pom, a village settled by tin-mining laborers 40 years ago, which has become one of the hottest land-conflict cases)

Post-tsunami land grab resumes in earnest just a few weeks after the waves . . .

For a while after the tsunami, there was a lot of hand-wringing in the press about the ravaged coastal ecosystems even before the waves, vanishing mangroves, illegal resort building, banished indigenous peoples and unrestrained capitalism. This rhetoric wasn't much help for Andaman villagers, however, who found that after a very brief lull, the assault on their land rights was resumed with even greater energy and viciousness than before.

Of the 47 villages destroyed by the tsunami, at least 32 are now embroiled in serious land conflicts - about half of these in the province of Phangnga. In the village of Ban Nam Khem alone, more than 80 court cases over disputed land have been filed since the tsunami, mostly by wealthy capitalists.

In recent months, variations on the same story have played themselves out in 30 or 40 villages, as armed thugs, policemen, officials and perspiring lawyers try to prevent villagers from returning to their land. And it's not only private land-owners. In other cases, local administrative bodies have conjured up bogus civic projects or newfangled zoning plans as a pretext for preventing villagers from rebuilding houses on the public land they have occupied for ages.

Because both local and national politicians have been partners in - or beneficiaries of - schemes to commercialize the Andaman coastline, the government's role in managing these public lands is deeply compromised by conflicts of interest. To these powerful interests, the tsunami has been like a prayer answered, since it literally wiped the coast clean of the last communities which stood in the way of their plans for resorts, hotels, golf courses and shrimp farms. As far as they're concerned, these ruined villages are now *open land!* Senator Chirmsak Pinthong, on a recent tour of tsunami-hit areas to investigate land rights, put it this way: *"The developers have tried before to chase people away. Now the tsunami has done the job for them."*

Under Thai law, squatters can apply for legal title to a plot of land after 10 years of continuous occupation. In practice, few succeed and millions of people around the country continue to live on what is technically public land in a kind of legal limbo, without papers, without clear rights. Speculators exploit this ambiguity by using various "informal" means to get land purchase records back-dated or documents issued in their names, and then accusing villagers of encroaching. Battles over land title are common, particularly where tourist dollars are at stake.

Bringing land into the public discourse :

But the voices of the fisher folk who want to go back to their land have become very strong now. Newspapers are filled with stories of small fishing communities fighting the fat cats to reclaim their land and rebuild their lives. Their land problems have also come out in a series of well-publicized meetings and large seminars organized by different ministries and civic groups in the aftermath of the tsunami. Behind the scenes, people's groups and prominent figures have also been lobbying government advisors and officials, on these people's behalf. In these ways, the issue of land for these traditional coastal communities has become much more open. There is now more information, more discussion, more awareness of the needs of these fishing communities among all the groups involved in tsunami rehabilitation. All this public discussion has helped to slow down the land grabbing (and the eviction of traditional fishing villages) considerably.

1 The government's response to land conflicts : Build little boxes inland and relocate them

It was the government's position to consider tsunami-affected fishermen without formal land papers to be squatters, and in the third week, announced a policy of providing them free houses, but only in resettlement sites on public land 4 or 5 kilometers inland. This may have been a well-intended compromise, but community surveys showed that 70% of the affected people don't want to move to inland sites, even if they get a lease and a free house. Why? Because as every single one of them kept saying to whoever would listen, *they are fishermen and cannot survive away from the sea.*

There were immediate protests from communities, civic groups and support organizations, who tried very hard to persuade government organizations to allow affected people to be involved in whatever kind of rehabilitation was being planned. But in its attempt to deliver relief and rehabilitation quickly, the government claimed there was no time for any *participatory process*, and opted instead for a conventional exercise in top-down, centralized control. Plus, a sizeable government budget had already been allocated for the construction of housing, and vested interests in the construction industry were now involved. This gap between what the government wants to do with its tsunami rehabilitation program and what people actually need has only widened.

2 The villagers' response to land conflicts : Reoccupy our land and negotiate "in-situ"

When the rich land owners started making their dubious claims of ownership a few weeks after the tsunami, officials from the district land offices counseled people still staying in the relief camps to be patient, to allow land officials to reappraise the sites in question or to wait for ownership to be determined by the courts. But some community people very quickly understood that if they followed that system, they'd never get their land back. So instead of waiting for permission from anyone, they decided to leave the camps, go back to their old land and start rebuilding - even if it was only make-shift bamboo shelters. They also knew that all the world was watching, that elections were coming up, and that the tsunami media attention wouldn't last forever. So they seized the opportunity and acted. Who would kick off their land a bunch of poor fishermen who'd lost everything, while the BBC cameras rolled? In one way, it was a savvy ploy to win sympathy and strengthen their negotiating position, but in another, it was a visceral human impulse to protect what was rightly theirs.

Their hunch was right, and moving back turned out to be an effective way of getting the system to work better. This "people's strategy" for negotiating has already paid off in reasonable tenure solutions in several cases. This process has also led to some tensions, of course: soldiers, thugs and armed police have been sent in by land-owners or officials to intimidate people, and there have been threats, confrontations, gunfire in the night, electricity black-outs and water cut-offs. But finally, the negotiations went on, and in several cases the disputes have been resolved and people have got their land (*see following pages*). Why? *Because those people never stopped building houses.*

The first well-publicized cases of "invasion" provoked other communities to go back to their land and start building. The idea that staying on their old land was actually possible spread quickly through the grapevine which linked these communities, through exchange visits, news and seminars. Plus, the cases where communities started rebuilding their houses on their old land were well covered in the press, and there was great public sympathy for these people.

"We will move forward together. I'm not afraid of anything now. I have lost everything to the tsunami: my daughter, my father, my sister, my brother, my aunt, my nephew and my home. My duty to my family now is to keep their land. I feel incredible warmth returning home, although it's only empty land now. We will rebuild our lives here. I feel proud that I am not doing this for myself, but for the whole community."

(Ratree Kongwatmai, from Ban Laem Pom, where the village's 40 surviving families "invaded" their old land on February 25th)

National tsunami land tenure committee :

Not everyone in government took sides with these powerful so-called land-owners, however. Many understood what was going on and sought ways to help people get a fair deal. Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, who was in charge of the government's National Poverty Reduction and Land Reform programs, became one of the strongest and most vocal champions of the land rights of the affected fishing communities. In January, a special high-level committee was set up to deal with the more serious land conflicts which had arisen in tsunami-hit areas.

This 30-member committee includes officials from all the key departments and ministries relating to land, social development, natural resources and environment - including CODI. The idea was that only such a high-level committee would have the clout to negotiate possible solutions with all the district and provincial authorities, government departments and powerful private and public land-owners who were parties in these land conflicts.

After gathering information and studying the extremely complicated land ownership and tenure situations in all the coastal communities affected by the tsunami, the subcommittee came up with a list of 30 of the most red-hot cases, where communities were facing the most serious land ownership conflicts. After intense, behind-the-scenes negotiating, involving a variety of actors at community, district, provincial and national level, several of these cases have now been resolved and are being used as possible models for how other community land conflicts might be dealt with.

This committee has become a very effective tool in finding pragmatic solutions to serious land conflict cases - solutions which allow the people to redevelop their communities on the same land - or on land very near by.

"I have no idea who owns the land, but I have lived here since I was born. Our ancestors are buried here. My children were born here. It is our home. We are not intruders and will not be going anywhere. Assistance will soon end and we want to resume our livelihoods as soon as possible. We don't want anything, just our land."

(Hong Klathalay is a 37-year old Moken fisherman and the leader at Ban Tung Wah, which "invaded" their old land on January 22nd)

THAILAND :

6 Tenure variations :

Six cases where embattled coastal fishing communities have managed to negotiate secure land tenure and rebuild their communities, in the same place or on land that is very close by . . .

By the end of June 2005, after a lot of work and a lot of negotiating, 12 of the 30 communities facing serious land conflicts had reached agreements allowing over 1,000 households to go ahead with the rebuilding of their lives and settlements. These cases are creating a growing repertoire of alternative options for how disaster-struck villages with insecure tenure can be rehabilitated, in ways which allow people to plan, to construct and to manage the process by themselves, through a planning process which strengthens their way of life, instead of erasing it.

None of the solutions worked out in these land conflict cases are perfect. There have been great losses in these communities, and people have had to make huge adjustments to dramatically changed circumstances after the tsunami. But the various strategies used and compromises made in these projects have allowed these traumatized villagers to get some secure land (either public or private) and to begin the arduous task of rebuilding their lives - with better tenure security than before.

Its' important to keep in mind that these land tenure breakthroughs didn't happen in isolation, but emerged from a large, well-organized and well-linked community network process.

1 Relocation to nearby government land with long-term individual leases at BAN TAA CHATCHAI

Baan Taa Chatchai is an old community of fishermen, vendors and laborers which occupied a strip of Treasury Department-owned land along the northernmost tip of Phuket Island. The tsunami destroyed 46 houses and all their fishing boats, but nobody was killed. At first, the people worked with two young architects to draft plans for redeveloping their houses in the same place and used these plans to negotiate for a long-term collective land lease.

But the Treasury Department, which had been trying to relocate them for years, to make a public park, would not allow these 46 families to rebuild. Eventually, the people agreed to shift to a relocation site the government had prepared some years earlier about 500 meters away, and are now collectively constructing their own tightly-designed "twin houses" on the 50-square meter resettlement plots.

They lost their beach-front location, but the trade-off was long-term secure land tenure and free houses of their own design, on fully-serviced plots in the same area. Of the remaining families whose houses were further back and were not destroyed in the tsunami, some have land title deeds and some have gotten permission to stay. The Deputy Prime Minister inaugurated the project on January 20, 2005, and by May, the houses were nearly finished.

Tenure terms at Taa Chatchai

- **Number of families :** 20 (out of the total 57 families in the old community)
- **Tenure terms BEFORE :** Long term occupancy (without any legal title deeds or lease) on beach-front public land under Treasury Department ownership.
- **Tenure terms AFTER :** 3-year renewable land leases to individual families on Treasury Department relocation site at nominal rent of 300 Baht (US$7) per year.
- **Houses :** The 4 x 9 meter twin houses (on 50- square meter plots) have been designed and built collectively by the community.
- **House cost :** 150,000 Baht ($3,750), with materials paid for by donations and community labor subsidized by the district.

2 Rebuilding on the same public land with long-term community lease at KLONG PAK BANG

Klong Pak Bang is a tiny fishing community of 16 households which has occupied this small plot of coastal land at Patong Beach, on Phuket Island for generations. Somehow, as the area around them has grown over the past few decades from a sleepy backwater into one of Thailand's hottest, most popular and most intensely commercialized tourist beaches, this little remnant of quieter days has survived.

Although the people in Klong Pak Bang have carried on their simple lives as subsistence fishermen through all this mega-development, when the tsunami struck, killing hundreds of foreign tourists who were sunbathing on the beach, the waves swept away the villagers' houses, boats and fishing gear - and put their tenure in doubt.

At first, the provincial authorities tried to use the disaster as an excuse to eject these poor fishermen at last. But with support from the land tenure committee, the community negotiated permission to stay and rebuild their houses on the same site, with funding support from private donations gathered by I-TV. Klong Pak Bang makes a good case for the notion that traditional fishing villages and tourism can coexist amicably, even when they're surrounded like this one by night clubs, pizza parlors, hotels, restaurants, spas and hordes of tourists. They can even become "features" of that area.

Tenure terms at Klong Pak Bang

- **Number of families :** 16
- **Tenure terms BEFORE :** Long term occupancy (without title deeds or lease) on beach-front public land under Provincial control.
- **Tenure terms AFTER :** Temporary occupancy rights (under "Land law No. 9") which can later be upgraded to a long-term lease.
- **Houses :** The redevelopment plan which the community people have drafted, with help from CODI architects, focuses on preserving the surrounding environment and making Klong Pak Bang into an attractive feature on Patong Beach, where visitors can see how a "traditional fishing village" works, watch the day's catch being brought in, see nets being repaired, fish being sorted, boats being repaired, etc.

3 Squeezing more families into the same public land on long term collective lease at BAN NAIRAI

This Muslim fishing village in southern Phangnga is in a coastal area of tourist resorts and deep pits left over from the tin-mining days, when all this public land was concessioned out to mining companies. The land was originally settled by mining laborers, but their grandchildren now work as fishermen or boat-hands. The tsunami destroyed most of the community, but when the people came back, a rich guy appeared with a deed claiming to own 120 hectares of the land - almost the entire village! He got the police to try to stop people rebuilding and has since filed a court case against the villagers.

Inspired by "invasions" in other tsunami-hit villages, a group of 20 families decided to "negotiate with their hands" by quickly reoccupying their land and starting to rebuild. Their 3.2 hectare site used to belong to five families, but to accommodate others without land, they divided this into 20 small plots and began building modest wooden houses. The community's plans also include a children's center, open-air *salas*, tree planting and a lake-front park, all described in a beautiful scale model built by architecture students from Maha Salakam University.

Baan Nairai's struggle against eviction has been supported by the 4-Regions Slum Network, volunteers and community people from other parts of the country, who have come to help build.

Tenure terms at Ban Nairai

- **Number of families :** 20 (out of the total 180 families in the old community)
- **Tenure terms BEFORE :** Ban Nairai is a patchwork of uncertain tenure and unclear land status. Some have title deeds or tenure documents, most don't.
- **Tenure terms AFTER :** If the community can establish their right to stay on this public land, they are planning to apply for a communal long-term land lease, as a group.
- **Houses :** The simple, inexpensive timber and bamboo-panel house model (on stilts) which the people developed with the architecture students costs about 100,000 Baht ($2,500). The people build the houses collectively, with only a few hired carpenters to help, using private donations.

4 Relocation from destroyed island to private land purchased collectively at BAN PAK TRIEM

The small fishing village of Ban Pak Triem used to be on a tiny island just off the coast of northern Phangnga, near the town of Kholaburi. The tsunami tore so violently through the island that it was divided into two parts, and the villagers' land is now mostly under water. Although they lost all their houses, boats and belongings in the tsunami, only one villager was killed.

As soon as they had gathered in a relief camp on the mainland, the people decided to begin searching for land they could buy as a group to resettle on. They managed to find a small 3 rai (0.48 hectare) piece of land bordering the seaside mangrove forests, only a 10-minute boat ride from the old island, and collectively purchased the "user rights" to this public land for $5,250 ($175 per family), using a special no-interest loan from CODI. After dividing the land into two rows of 50-square meter plots, with a community center and children's play area off to the side, they began building their beautiful wooden houses on raised pillars.

People in Pak Triem are happy to tell how before the tsunami, families took care of themselves, but now they do everything as a group. Everyone still eats together in the communal kitchen and takes turns cooking. Only when all the houses are completely finished will families start cooking their own meals.

Tenure terms at Ban Pak Triem

- **Number of families :** 33
- **Tenure terms BEFORE :** Long term occupancy (without any legal title or lease) on public land.
- **Tenure terms AFTER :** Villagers will have permanent "user rights" to this public land, under a communal land title, which will be issued by the Land Department after surveying and checking the new land.
- **Houses :** The people's basic 70-square meter 2-story timber house model is adjusted by each family. All are being built collectively.
- **House cost :** The community received a donated subsidy of $3,500 per family, of which they spend $2,000 on the house and use the rest for basic needs or land payments.

5 Island-wide secure tenure planning in partnership with district on Koh Lanta at BAN HUALAM

Ban Hualaam is one of two fishing villages that were hit by the tsunami on the non-touristy side of Koh Lanta island. Both villages have been there for over a century, on shoreline land that is now considered public. Both lost a few houses, but the loss of their boats was the more serious problem. Originally, the district administration agreed to let them stay, but later changed its mind and tried to get the communities to relocate to inland resettlement sites. The district even went so far as to start building some new houses for Ban Hualaam on a hill nearby, but the people refused to leave.

In February, Koh Lanta became the first test-case for an unconventional kind of participatory, post-disaster coastal planning process. CODI, along with a special planning team and with support from the UN, facilitated a process in which all the local groups (fishing communities, civic groups, district officials, local businessmen and NGOs) sat together, talked about what they would like to do and developed a collective master plan for the island.

There were plenty of conflicts to be resolved, of course, but one important aspect of the final plan was that traditional fishing communities like Ban Hualaam will be allowed to stay. With help from the Siam Architects Association, the people from Ban Hualaam have now developed a comprehensive plan for rebuilding their current community and the terms of a long-term land lease from the District are being finalized.

Tenure terms at Ban Hualaam

- **Number of families :** 231
- **Tenure terms BEFORE :** Long term occupancy (without any legal title deeds or lease) on public land under control of the National Coastal Zone Department.
- **Tenure terms AFTER :** Long-term collective (renewable) land lease to the community cooperative, through the local district administration.
- **Houses :** Many houses were damaged by the waves, but only 14 completely destroyed. These are being rebuilt collectively by the community for 100,000 Baht ($2,500) using donor funds and community labor.

THAILAND

LAND SHARING :

Thailand's win-win strategy for resolving land conflicts in which both people and land owners in tsunami-hit areas are thinking "practical" instead of "historical"

Land is without any doubt the bottom line in the clash between the capitalists who want to exploit and the traditional communities who want to continue occupying this increasingly valuable, increasingly commercialized coastal land.

In most cases of land conflict in tsunami-hit villages, the title deeds these so-called land-owners are producing may be questionable, but the reality is that it could take years and years to dig down into all the layers of shady deals and overlapping claims to determine who really does own the land - or has the right to use it - and would almost certainly involve going to court. And even if the courts ruled against the people, as they often do, it's never easy to evict poor families in Thailand, especially where communities are strong and willing to fight. For both private and government land-owners, eviction is messy, time-consuming, expensive, bad for the conscience and bad for the image. Meanwhile, the villager's lives would be in suspension while the speculators would be unable to make any money, so everyone would lose.

There's a much easier and more practical way of resolving such sticky stand-offs without opening up the Pandora's box of land ownership: set aside some portion of the land and allow people to rebuild their houses there (with legal, secure rights to the land) and give the rest back to the land owner to develop commercially, so the disputed land is shared by both parties, and both parties benefit.

That's land sharing, and it's a home-grown Thai compromise strategy which allows people to stay in the same place and start their lives again, while it allows the land-owners to begin harvesting their tourist mega-dollars right away.

Land sharing has helped thousands of urban slum-dwellers get secure land and housing, and now it is proving to be a useful strategy in post-tsunami land conflicts. Land sharing involves a lot of negotiation, of course, to determine who gets how much and where the lines are drawn, and this usually requires some sensitive mediation. The Tsunami Land Tenure Committee has been playing this role and actively plugging the land sharing option as one solution which allows the villagers to stay.

The Moken and coconuts :
Many of the coconut trees (which people clung to during the waves to survive) are still standing, so the Ban Tung Wah village is still green and shady. The Moken use coconut trees as a kind of living calendar. As the tree grows, each year's growth produces a ring, so you can count the rings to determine how old a coconut tree is. This has made it possible for many Moken communities to prove how long they had stayed on their land, by showing the trees they had planted themselves 50, 60 or even 80 years ago.

6 Land sharing at Ban Tung Wah . . .

Ban Tung Wah is a village of indigenous *Moken* sea gypsies in Kao Lak, a badly-hit area of Phangnga. The village is on public land, but its proximity to the coastal highway and a big tourist hub made it prime real-estate. All 70 houses in the village were swept away by the tsunami and 42 people were killed. A few weeks later, Tung Wah survivors staying at the nearby Kuk Khak relief camp were shocked to find a big sign-board on their old land announcing the construction of a German-financed public hospital. A few phone calls to the German Embassy in Bangkok revealed the project was bogus and the sign board was a crude attempt to seize the land. Though they had no title deeds, these fisher folk had lived there for generations and considered the land their own. They were certainly not interested in the government resettlement sites being offered.

So without waiting for anyone's permission, they gathered themselves together and marched right back home, where they encircled their wrecked village with rope, in a symbolic gesture to mark their land ownership. With the entire community camping out there, it became difficult for the authorities to chase them away, especially given the intense media attention being focused on tsunami rehabilitation and the plight of such poor Andaman fishing communities. With help from a few architects and the Community Planning Network, the people immediately set to work, designing a wooden house model, securing doner funds and starting to build permanent houses. Within days, Ban Tung Wah had become a lightning rod for the land rights struggles of many similar villages, and visitors started flowing in.

The district officials and the provincial governor, meanwhile, continued intimidating the villagers and eventually the land tenure committee got involved. It was the land committee which first suggested a land-sharing option for Tung Wah, in which the people would keep part of the land for redeveloping their settlement, and give part to the province, supposedly for "public use". At first, the people were indignant at the idea of giving up a single bit of their ancestral land. But they came around when faced with the prospect of years lost in legal battles and the possibility that the courts might eventually rule against them, leaving them homeless. So the negotiations about how to divide the land began.

THE LAND SHARING DEAL : The original village occupied 4.16 hectares of land. Initially, the provincial governor wanted at least half this land, but after some tough haggling and many tense meetings, it was agreed that the villagers would keep 2.56 hectares and give 1.6 hectares to the province. As part of the agreement, the villagers can now regularize their tenure status under a communal land-lease, given by the province for three years, initially, as a first step towards permanent tenure.

On February 27th, the people invited the Deputy Prime Minister to inaugurate their first ten permanent houses. He spent over an hour in Ban Tung Wah, talking with the people, listening to their stories and climbing up to see how cool the new houses were inside. It was a friendly, human occasion, but also an important acknowledgement, from the highest level of government, that *what these people were doing was right*. Hundreds of fisher folk from other communities had also come to join the celebration and to see for themselves what was possible.

The impact of the case at Ban Tung Wah :

Once the land-sharing agreement had been made, the villagers at Tung Wah were able to get back to the reconstruction of their houses and community in earnest. Almost all the houses are finished now and many have gone back to sea to fish. The impact of this case, and of what these determined people are building into their community, is much stronger and more valuable than all the months and years they might have spent haggling with the land authorities about who really has the right to this land. Once the people went ahead, many other communities started coming to see what they were doing and to learn from their example. In this way, Tung Wah has become an important model for how to resolve land-conflict cases. Now, officials from the sub-district come to Ban Tung Wah to learn about "people-managed tsunami rehabilitation" while researchers and university students turn up there by the bus-full to study "indigenous people's wisdom."

The amazing Moken sea gypsies…

Among the groups hit hardest by the tsunami in Thailand were the sea gypsies (called Moken in Thai), one of three indigenous fishing peoples whose villages have peppered the Andaman coasts of Thailand for centuries. Although they lost boats, houses and belongings in the tsunami, there were far fewer casualties among the Moken than in other communities. These are people who live with the sea and really understand its signals. In Moken villages, kids grow up in the sea, learn to swim before they walk and to fish before they read. When they saw the sea receding on the morning of December 26th and noticed insects and lizards running inland, most Moken knew what was coming and ran like hell for the hills, giving the alarm to their neighbors. For this reason, most escaped.

The Moken people follow neither Buddhist nor Muslim faiths. They worship only the sea, by offering it yearly feasts of fish and rice sweets, asking for forgiveness for what they have taken from it and blessings for their wooden fishing boats. It is the belief of many Moken that the tsunami was the result of too much greed in taking from the sea. And when you see the kind of environmental devastation that has been wrought on Thailand's beautiful coasts in recent decades, you can see their point. To make amends, Moken villagers have held many rituals since the tsunami, to pay respects to the Goddess of Water and ward off bad luck by offering her rice, curries and coconut sweets, lighting firecrackers and tying brightly-colored ribbons around the prows of their long-tail boats, before joining in boat races and then going fishing.

In their loosely-scattered settlements, which are usually built very close to the sea, they live in modest houses of the lightest possible sort, built up on wooden stilts, with woven bamboo walls and roofs of thatch or tin sheets. Where their houses are airy and light as basketry, though, their fishing boats are built stoutly of tropical hardwoods, to withstand the high waves of Andaman seas.

Despite the storms of profiteering which have rolled across southern Thailand over the past century - tin-mining, shrimp farming, tourism, globalization - the Moken have somehow managed to preserve their ways, carrying on quietly and unobtrusively fishing, weaving their nets and introducing their young to the mysteries of the sea. Because most of them lead extremely simple lives as subsistence fishermen, some Thais look down on the Moken as primitive yokels who eat with their hands and almost never go shopping. In a context where all things human and local are being swept aside in a tide of commercialization, the survival of the gentle Moken is nothing short of a miracle. Instead of being evicted, these communities ought to be considered a national treasure, but there are no government policies to support, or even recognize, such indigenous groups, and many carry on their lives completely off the map of officialdom.

Their simple ways might not count for much in the currency of modern global values, but after the killer waves struck and many villages were in a mess, the communities that some consider backward turned out to be the most united in the fight for their land. Their grit, their quiet strength and their togetherness have inspired all tsunami survivors, won the admiration of community networks all across Thailand and made the Moken the path breakers of the post-tsunami land tenure movement.

"Their unity and courage is liberating and contagious. I've learned from the Moken that we can prevail if we are united."

(Ratree Kongwatmai, the community leader from the village of Ban Laem Pom, which is embroiled in one of the most acrimonious post-tsunami land disputes, made these comments after visiting Moken villages at Ban Tap Tawan and Ban Tung Wah in February)

New network of Moken communities

Before the tsunami, you never heard anybody talking about *Moken pride*. As Hong Klatalay, the young leader at Ban Tung Wah describes it, Moken people in different villages and different provinces all speak the same language, but they hardly ever communicated with each other. Most just did their own thing, in isolation. And because they were isolated, they have been easily pushed around in the storms commercial development raging around them.

Hong never tires of describing how the tsunami has changed his community, and how their struggle to keep their land and rebuild their lives has brought them together like never before. The tsunami has also helped link Ban Tung Wah with other Moken villages along the Andaman coast and given these scattered communities plenty to talk about, to share, and to be proud of. For better or worse, the tragedy of the tsunami has given the Moken a keen awareness of their place in the larger picture of Andaman development and shown them that only by coming together and being consciously alert about their culture can they survive.

With help from the Community Planning Network and CODI, innumerable meetings, seminars and exchanges have been organized to bring together Moken and other tsunami-ravaged villages to discuss vital issues in the rehabilitation process - issues like land, housing, boats, jobs, orphans, welfare. These gatherings have become opportunities to strengthen links between communities that are going through the same struggle to rebuild their lives after the tsunami. Giving people as many chances as possible to meet, to compare notes, to share stories and ideas is a way to begin building a network around these key issues.

There is a great need for horizontal links between these vulnerable fishing communities. New networks of affected communities are creating new links for learning, for good will and for mutual help. And it's not only the Moken - there are also networks of boat building workshops, networks of communities embroiled in land disputes, networks of communities within various constituencies and under various land-owners.

THAILAND

Permanent houses for tsunami survivors . . .

Who decides where they're built, who is entitled to them, how they're designed and who does the building?

All along the Andaman coast, housing projects are being developed by charitable foundations and aid agencies to provide permanent housing for tsunami victims. The Thai government has been going full out with its own housing scheme, with plans to eventually build some 6,000 houses in the six affected provinces. These houses are all being built according to two or three of the most conventional, most minimal possible house designs, some by contractors and some by the army – none by the people who are to occupy them. They are all being paid for with donated relief funds and are to be given free, with lease contracts for the public land they are built on.

There have been no consultations with affected people at any stage, no inputs sought from beneficiaries on design, site planning, construction systems or allotment procedures. Because most of these projects are not being built on the original village sites, but 4 or 5 kilometers inland, they are proving to be extremely unpopular with fishermen, who never stop stressing their need to be near the sea. And because they have little to do with the local climate or local needs, thousands of these new houses may go to waste if survivors abandon them, or refuse to move into them in the first place.

These projects stand in stark contrast to the spacious, airy houses which a growing number of survivors are designing and building for themselves, with donations from non-government sources.

In Ban Nam Khem - Cost: $3,000

This 32 square-meter 2-room "shop-house", is one of two models being built by a contractor and given free to tsunami survivors in Ban Nam Khem - but only those who had formal land title before the waves hit. Each house comes with its own green plastic plaque telling who donated the money used to build it. As news of other community-built house designs have circulated, there has been increasing grumbling about this little unit.

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS OFFERING . . .

In all fairness, these government houses aren't so bad. If you were a slum dweller in Bangkok or a shopkeeper from Hunan, you'd probably jump at the chance of such a free house on a secure land lease, no matter how small. But when you see how these Andaman fisher folk live, with their boats, their animals, their breezy wooden houses built up on stilts in groves of coconut palms, these little boxes the government is foisting on them look like bad news from another planet. As one disgruntled activist working in Phangnga put it, *"The message these houses convey is unmistakable: you must give up your sea, your land, your fishing, your animals, your culture, your way of life, your history and your power of choice. But you're lucky, because we're giving you these houses for free!"* It's no wonder that these houses have caused so much bitter resentment that some of the relocation projects in Bang Muang and Takua Paa Districts have had to be curtailed. And the resentment has come not only from the intended "beneficiaries" but from ordinary people throughout Thai society, who are uncomfortable with what is being done to these people in the name "rehabilitation."

In Bang Muang District - Cost: $3,750

When fishermen first saw these NHA-designed 36 square-meter "town-houses" 6 kilometers from the sea, one said *"It looks so narrow and dark - it must be really hot in there."* Another asked, *"Where will I keep my boat? Or my goats?"*

In Takua Paa District - Cost: $3,750

These little 32 square-meter concrete block houses come with two rooms, one toilet, two windows, two doors and one tube light. They are being built by a contractor with donations from the city of Surat Thani, but so far, nobody has moved in.

This army of young architects and planners is helping villagers develop people-driven alternatives to this stuff :

Very soon after the tsunami, CODI began to mobilize architects, planners, design students, professors and architectural associations from around Thailand to help communities develop plans for rebuilding their houses and settlements. This far-flung army of designers is being coordinated by Acharn Muk (*"Professor Ink"*), an architect and university teacher who has been working on CODI's *Baan Mankong* community upgrading projects. "No one knows how to build a house better than these fisher folk," Acharn Muk says.

"We have to begin with what these people want. Our role is to sit with them, help adjust their ideas to circumstances which have changed after the tragedy, and then formalize their ideas, in the form of drawings, models, plans." Like all aspects of rehabilitation, a little sensitive intervention is making the process of planning the rebuilding of their houses and settlements another opportunity to strengthen and rebuild these traumatized communities. At the same time, people's involvement in this planning is making it better, more comprehensive, more appropriate, more responsive to their real needs.

The beautiful plans, drawings and models being churned out by these professionals have been much looked at and publicized in the media. Besides giving land-conflict communities alternative plans to negotiate with, these drawings and models have given a big boost to the idea of *planning with people*, as an alternative to the top-down rehabilitation schemes described above. Most tsunami-hit villages had never had any contact with architects or planners before. But the crisis is turning out to be an important opportunity to forge new relationships of mutual assistance and mutual respect between sectors of society which might never have understood - or even thought about - each other.

. . . AND WHAT PEOPLE ARE BUILDING

Something very different is happening in villages where tsunami survivors are rebuilding their own houses, using donor money they've managed to access directly. In these places, the houses people build are invariably *beautiful* - bigger, cheaper, better ventilated and better designed to meet the particular needs of the fisher folk who will live in them. But they are also beautiful because they represent a lot more than rebuilt housing: they are a crucial first step in a process of community rebuilding after this terrible tragedy. Here's how Amporn Kaewnoo, from CODI's southern office puts it: *"We start by looking at who the people are in that community and seeing how to strengthen those people, their relationships and their ways of living. If we can just find ways for communities to set the rules and decide what to do together, no need to worry too much about what the houses are like or who has the right to live there. If we can focus on rebuilding that community, all the rest will take care of itself."*

"If the houses built by the government do not suit your needs, you can break them down and build your own. This is very correct, the way people are going back to their former land and building their own houses in the same place."

(Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, speaking to a group of 900 tsunami survivors at a seminar in Phangnga on February 27, 2005)

1 This "twin house" at Ban Taa Chatchai costs $3,750

The 20 families at Ban Taa Chatchai went through dozens of designs with two young women architects but finally chose this single-story, semi-detached, 4 x 9-meter *twin house*, to make the most efficient use of the tight 50 s.m. plots. The ceilings are high to help the rooms stay cool. The house costs 150,000 Baht ($3,750) to build (100,000 for the materials, 20,000 Baht for services and about 30,000 for labor, which is being subsidized by the District Authority). Each family provides the labor and does the main grunt work of building their own house, but the community has collectively hired an all-women team of skilled masons to help lay the steel reinforcing in the foundation, set the columns, build the roof structure and do the final plastering.

2 This house at Ban Tab Tawan costs $2,500

The timber houses the Moken people in Ban Tab Tawan have designed with Acharn Muk are small, but well designed for the lives of fishermen, with 2 or 3 airy rooms up on concrete stilts, and a lovely porch in front, leaving ample space beneath the houses for storing fishing equipment, nets, crocks, etc. The kitchens and toilets are out back. All the houses have some slight variation of the front porch, and each family has designed elaborate timber balustrades. The walls are made using the same pre-fab woven bamboo panels the folks are using at Baan Nairai and Ban Pak Triem. The house offers 68 square meters of space, and when you add the useable open space underneath, it comes to 93 square meters. The cost is under 100,000 Baht.

3 This house at Ban Pak Triem costs $2,000

After a 3-day workshop with the CODI architects, the Muslim fisher folk at Ban Pak Triem came up with this basic timber house model, which offers 68 s.m. of living space (93 s.m. with the area underneath). Each house is a little different, adjusted to suit that family's needs, and the timber craftsmanship is very fine. Some use woven bamboo panels for walls, while others opted for more expensive fiber-cement clapboard siding. The community jointly hired a few skilled carpenters, but all the labor is provided by the people themselves. Each family received a donated subsidy of 140,000 Baht ($3,500), of which they spend about 80,000 Baht ($2,000) on the house, and use the rest for schooling, food, boat repair, transport, or paying-off their land loans.

4 This house at Ban Tung Wah wins the most popular Andaman house award

Everyone who visits these large, airy houses at Tung Wah loves them: villagers, architects, ministers, foreign dignitaries, donors, crown princesses. Because they have been designed by the people (with help from Acharn Muk and friends in community networks) in traditional Moken style, these houses suit the lives of coastal fishing people perfectly: they're built of wood, up on pillars, with lots of windows and doors for air cirulation, covered porches and ample space underneath where people and animals can relax during the heat of the day. Since the people are constructing all 70 houses themselves, as a community, there are no labor costs, so the full 140,000 Baht ($3,500) cost goes into materials. With an upstairs living area of 49 square meters, a 12 s.m. veranda, a 21 s.m. kitchen and toilet out back, and 50 s.m. of useable space beneath the house, these houses offer a whopping **132 square meters of useable space!** Who wouldn't prefer this to the airless concrete boxes the government and some aid organizations are trying to get fisher folk to move into?

"Any Moken would love this house"

"The architects asked why we don't nail the floorboards closer together, to make a proper floor? But that's not the way we build. The gaps in the floor make for natural air conditioning. Plus if a baby has to ching-chong or an old woman needs to spit out her betel nut juice, the gaps are like a natural drain! It's just sand down below anyway, so no problem! That's our Moken style." (Hong Klaatalay, Tung Wah's irrepressible 37-year old community leader)

Besides building the houses themselves, the people at Tung Wah have also learned to build and repair their own boats, and to make their own giant water storage jars, which by tradition are placed at the corners of the house, to collect rain-water channeled through gutters from the roof. *"We didn't know it then, but we can build our own houses. We can also build our own boats, our own lives. We have to show our own power."*

THAILAND

NO BOAT, NO LIFE . . .

"Our most urgent need is to repair our boats and replace our lost fishing gear so we can earn a living again." *(Ahlee Charnnam, a fisherman from Koh Poo, Krabi)*

For Andaman fishermen, the seas in February usually teem with marine life and make for the year's best fishing. But two months after the tsunami, most fishermen along the coast were still sitting around with no hope of going fishing after their long-tail fishing boats had been destroyed by the waves. As Lek Sompop from CODI puts it, "Without boats, people are beggars. No boat, no life."

According to the Fisheries Department, 7,162 fishing boats, 15,534 fish-breeding baskets and 35,727 pieces of fishing gear in the six affected provinces were damaged or destroyed by the tsunami.

The government's compensation scheme promised fishermen who lost registered boats 60,000 Baht (US$ 1,500) for small boats, or 200,000 Baht (US$ 5,000) for big ones. Thousands of the lost boats were not registered, however. In these cases, Deputy Prime Minister Suwat Liptapanlop announced magnanimously that "fishermen whose unregistered boats or fishing equipment were destroyed by the waves will get compensation equivalent to 70% of the actual damage, even though they have no right to claim compensation."

Either way, it was officials deciding who got compensation and who didn't, leaving plenty of room for manipulation and palm-greasing. By February, only a fraction of fishermen with registered boats had got the compensation, while others were still going through endless red-tape to verify their claims. Anyway, all the fishermen agreed the compensation was too little to buy new boats or even to repair damaged ones.

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35 Community boat-yards up and running . . .

While red tape and dithering holds up government compensation, 2,000 boats are being built and repaired by fishermen themselves

It didn't take long for fishermen in many different areas to come to the same conclusion: that there was no point waiting around passively for state assistance. Their clearest need was to get their boats fixed (or built new) as soon as possible so they could get start earning their living again. But how?

As Hat Thip, the community leader in Sang Kha-U village says, "All of us fishermen used to know how to repair and even build our boats. But in many communities nowadays, we just buy our boats, so our skills have gotten rusty." That's why the Community Planning Network, the Save the Andaman Network (SAN) and CODI decided to support several of these communities by securing donation funding and hiring some local skilled boat-builders to come work with the communities, and teach them how to build boats. These networks encouraged fishing communities to identify their needs, draw up their own restoration plans and manage them as a group. Boat-building and boat-repair was item number one on most village's list. Promoting activities like boat building was not only a strategy for reviving the spirit of self reliance, but also a means of building villagers' collective strength to tackle other problems in the future.

The first community boat yards were set up at Sang Kha-U (on Koh Lanta Island in Krabi) and at Batuputeh (on Koh Libong Island in Trang). Word spread quickly, and by early March, about 20 boat yards were in operation in tsunami-hit villages. The number grew after the first boat-building exchange was organized in March, in which a big group of fisher folk from 10 coastal villages in Krabi and Phangnga came to see the boat-yard at the Sang Kha-U community and to learn about how to repair boats.

All these boat-yards are managed by committees of local fishermen, who make their own rules about how to use the grant funds and set criteria for who gets new and repaired boats first. In Ban Nam Khem, the town which lost the most boats, the boat yard they set up at the Bang Muang relief camp began with only ten fishermen and a seed grant of 100,000 Baht (US$ 2,500) from CODI. This wasn't enough for a full boat (which costs 130,000 Baht), but it allowed them to start building right in the middle of this big, busy, much-visited relief camp. Two boat-builders from Krabi were hired, whom the local fishermen assisted and learned from. Once visitors could see this clear, concrete self-help activity, the Bang Muang boat yard became an attractive target for donations (especially from Toyota and Cement Thai) which allowed the boat-building fund to grow rapidly. Like many other groups, the Bang Muang fishermen adopted a system where the fishermen repay half the cost of their new boat as soon as they start fishing again. This money goes back into the fund to finance more boats.

In the first of March, the fishermen at Baan Nam Khem launched the first batch of 15 new fishing boats they had built themselves (out of a target of 300 new boats!). The boats were inaugurated by Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh. Before putting out to sea, the men gathered at the boatyard to pray and have their boats blessed with colorful pieces of cloth tied around the prow for good fortune. By mid-May, 34 community boat yards had been set up in the six affected provinces and 700 boats had been repaired or built, with another 1,300 damaged boats yet to finish. There is still a long way to go, and many are still in dire need, but it's a considerable dent in the problem.

The boat yards have given fishing communities devastated by the tsunami another common point for building their networks for mutual support. Buoyed by the renewed sense of community, many villages are extending their work with community boat yards to start providing boat repair services to other villages and setting up new collective projects such as community fish markets, to cut out the middlemen. Many of the villages have also learned from each other that setting up community savings groups can help them with low-interest loans - and wean them from extortionate loan sharks as well.

Some of these boat stories and quotations were drawn from articles by **Santisuda Ekachai**, a veteran journalist with the Bangkok Post who has written with great insight and sympathy about the struggles of Andaman fishing communities after the tsunami. Some of her articles can be read on the ACHR tsunami website, or else go to **www.bankokpost.com**

"My boat is everything. My life totally depends on it. When the tsunami came, it destoyed our boats and put an end to everything for all of us. But now we have the boats back and our livelihood as well. We can go fishing again."

(A fisherman from Ban Hualam Village on Koh Lanta Island, whose community boat-building group has almost finished rebuilding the 70 boats that were destroyed by the tsunami)

No generic fishermen, no generic boats

What kind of fishing boat fits what kind of sea?

"I am also impressed with the villagers' management of these boat yards. Some villages decided to repair the least-damaged boats first so they can quickly work and bring back fish to share with the community. Others decided to wait until every boat was repaired so that they could go back to the sea together. But they decided things together. I've learned that each community has its own thinking and wisdom that works for them. There is no standard formula for success." *(Prayong Hirunyawanich, CEO of Michelin Siam, one of the corporate donors which is underwriting several of the community boat-yards)*

1 Different kinds of community boat-yards

The fishing boats used along the Andaman coast have distinctive characteristics. In English, many get lumped under the name *long tail boats*, but in Thai they're called *reur hua tong* (gold-headed boat). Most have a high bow with a low, narrow stern to manage the rough Andaman seas. Some have a flatter keel to sail in the shallow waters along the Ranong and Satun coasts, while in Krabi and Phangnga, the boats need a deeper keel to manage steeper waves. In the boat yard at Ban Nairai, they're building a much smaller boat with a flat bottom. It takes three men a day to build one boat and two men another day to waterproof and paint it in vivid primary colors. In the past, fishermen here would buy the wood and hire a boat-builder when they needed a new boat, but now they're learning to make the boats themselves. In the process, they've added their own improvements, switching from iron to stainless steel bolts which won't rust, and using high-quality marine plywood instead of planks for the bottom.

2 Different kinds of fishing boats

Southern Thailand is a region rich in boat-building talent. SAN and the Community Planning Network didn't need to go far to find master boat-builders to help villagers set up boat yards and train local people in the process. In most cases, these skilled craftsmen stay with the community until all the boats are built or repaired. A boat-builder came with a group of vocational students from Surat Thani to help fishermen set up the boat yard in Phangnga's Khura Buri District, which repairs wrecked boats for free. The Muslim fishing village of Ban Hualam is being assisted by Buddhist monks from the Buddha Issara Ashram in Nakhon Pathom to replace the 70 boats that were totally destroyed. In Koh Poo, the fishermen got compensation from the government fairly soon, but the money was soon eaten up in food and housing needs. They are now using the process of repairing over 100 boats as a means to not only regain their livelihood but to strengthen their long-term struggle against the big trawlers, whose dynamite fishing sweeps the sea of life and destroys the coastal ecosystem.

3 Different ways of managing the money

All the fishing boats being repaired or built in these community boat yards are partly or fully funded with donor money from many different charities, foundations, aid organizations and corporate donors. SAN has taken the role of helping link all these donors with the 34 boat yards now in operation. Prachum Meesiri, a boat builder from Surat Thani says it takes at least 110,000 Baht (US$ 2,750) to build a 10-meter *reur hua tong*, install an engine and equip it with fishing gear. In many villages, the fishermen have decided to gradually pay back part or all of the cost of rebuilding their boats to help set up a community fund, which can then be used to finance other programs to benefit the community, as part of their longer-term rehabilitation plans they have developed, with help from SAN. The important thing is that each community decides these things together. Villagers are nominated to take on various tasks in the boat-building process, including builders, assistants, materials purchasers, account-keepers, and fund managers.

Boat-building friends in the private sector :

These boat yards have shown that alliances between communities, NGOs and businesses willing to support people's empowerment can go a long way to solving villager's real needs. "Our company was looking for ways to help the tsunami victims and to ensure the assistance really reached them," says Prayong Hirunyavanich, CEO of Michelin Siam, one corporate supporter of the community boat yards. When they learned through SAN about the fishermen's need for community boat yards, his company decided to help. With matching grants from the parent company in France and local subsidiary, Michelin is supporting 12 community boat yards in five provinces, where 304 boats had by mid-May been repaired. "I am very impressed with the fishermen's concerns for their environment," Prayong went on. "One told me that even when the fishing was good, he headed back home when he figured he had earned 500 baht (US$ 12) that day. But doesn't everyone want to make as much money as possible? He said, *if we get more than we need, the sea will soon be empty*. He humbled me."

MYANMAR

Burma's coastal villages are spared the worst of the waves' fury, but government restrictions hamper aid efforts . . .

For some time, it was difficult to get accurate information about the impact of the tsunami in Myanmar (Burma). Very few NGOs or civil society organizations were allowed to work there and no visitors were allowed in the restricted areas where the waves hit. Eventually a coordinating team of international aid agencies was given permission by the Burmese government to conduct a piecemeal assessment of damage in areas hit by the tsunami. The team found that although there had been some deaths and considerable destruction of houses and fishing boats, Burma had been largely spared the most destructive forces of the earthquake and tsunami.

Those who suffered the worst effects of the tsunami in Myanmar were subsistence fisherfolk and poor laborers (working in coconut plantations and on fishing boats) who lived in huts on the seashore in three coastal districts in the Ayeyarwady Delta (Pathein, Myaung Mya and Pya Pone), where the waves swept away the houses, belongings, boats and fishing nets of several hundred families.

In 2004, some catastrophic floods in southern Myanmar caused much greater damage, death and losses than the tsunami, but word of the tragedy did not get out and there was no international aid. The task of organizing emergency assistance to tens of thousands of flood victims fell mostly to monks from local Buddhist temples. With the tsunami, the role of Burma's Buddhist temples has again been very important – in identifying needs, organizing relief efforts and providing a strategic partner for outside organizations to quietly channel relief and longer-term support to tsunami-affected communities, within a restricted political environment.

The immediate needs for temporary shelter, water, food and emergency supplies were met fairly quickly, through a close collaboration between various aid groups, local NGOs and the temples. The same quiet, collaborative approach is now being used to give longer-term support to families to restart their livelihoods and rebuild their homes.

Because of government restrictions on the flow of information and aid in tsunami-hit areas of Myanmar, groups offering relief and rehabilitation support to victims there have had to work in ways that are extremely quiet and low-key. For more information, please contact ACHR.

"Without Burmese migrant workers, we have no workers to go out to the deep sea to catch fish. As consumers, these workers also help generate income for the community, spending money on food and necessities in the market. The Burmese workers fill a gap left by Thais who have no interest in this kind of hard work. We're glad to see them coming back to the community." *(Manoch Theppithak, a fishing operator in Ban Nam Khem)*

Thailand's "invisible" Burmese migrant workers and their "invisible" tsunami losses . . .

Most of the Burmese tsunami casualties were not in Burma at all, but in Thailand, where thousands of Burmese migrants were working in the areas most badly hit by the waves. More than 120,000 Burmese laborers were officially registered in the six tsunami-hit provinces of southern Thailand, working in the fisheries, construction, rubber and tourism industries. But when you add the thousands of migrant workers without permits, the real number could easily be twice that. Thousands of these people are believed to have perished when the waves hit. According to survivors, 1,000 are missing in Phangnga province alone, but the real number may never be known because of the large number of undocumented workers.

The Thai government's response to the needs of Thai tsunami victims and foreign tourists was fairly quick and well-organized. But Burmese tsunami survivors, who also lost family members, sustained serious injuries and lost their livelihoods, found themselves not only excluded from the relief loop, but being treated like criminals. Many lost their ID cards in the tsunami, and without them, could not apply for replacement work permits, which in turn provide protection under Thailand's labor laws, access to public health care and permission to stay in the country.

To avoid arrest and deportation, thousands of unregistered workers – as well as legal workers who'd lost their papers in the tsunami – were forced to go into hiding in nearby mountains and jungles, where they camped out with their families and friends, hungry, frightened and jobless. Injured migrant workers without work permits or health cards were afraid to approach hospitals to treat their wounds, while the same fear kept most from going to the official mortuaries to identify their lost colleagues or loved-ones, and prevented them from carrying out burial rites.

It's no easy thing being a Burmese migrant worker in Thailand . . .

These fears are grounded in some very harsh realities. In January 2005, after some spurious reports were made of Burmese being seen looting in tsunami-damaged areas, several hundred Burmese migrant workers were rounded up by Thai police, arrested and deported.

There is a long history of bad blood between Burma and Thailand. Even centuries after Burma sacked the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya, the Burmese are still stereotyped as sneaky and ruthless opportunists who rob, cheat and carry contagious diseases. The popular media and nationalist versions of history do little to correct these prejudices.

Decades ago, it was largely Burmese laborers who built the hotels and resorts that line Thailand's Andaman coast, and now, after the tsunami, it is Burmese who are rebuilding them. Thai citizens may not realize it, but most businessman will tell you that Burmese migrant labor plays an enormously important role in the construction, fisheries, rubber and tourism economy in southern Thailand.

Despite this, most Burmese migrant workers in Thailand lead almost invisible lives. They take the jobs most Thais consider too dirty, dangerous or demeaning, for which they are paid well below the Thai minimum wage, working long hours in unhealthy conditions, without access to health care, labor protections or schools for their children.

Their employers may be happy to have their cheap labor but are often reluctant to pay the high fees (US$ 100) for registering these migrant workers legally, so many remain constantly at risk of arrest and deportation. Even so, hundreds of thousands of desperately poor workers continue to risk everything to flee Burma's repressive military regime and high unemployment rates in search of jobs in more prosperous Thailand.

Burmese migrant workers in Thailand :

Thai and Burmese NGOs join forces to provide delicate and low-key support to some of the tsunami's most vulnerable victims . . .

The legality problem which makes Burmese migrant workers so vulnerable also makes the task of supporting them (many still in hiding) much more complicated. Soon after the tsunami, a group of Thai NGOs and Burmese community-based organizations, including the MAP Foundation, the Human Rights Education Institution of Burma (HREIB), Grassroots Human Rights Education and Development Committee and the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) decided to pool their efforts to help Burmese tsunami survivors in southern Thailand under a coalition called Tsunami Action Group (TAG). Here is a brief note on some of TAG's work on several fronts :

1 Making initial contact and providing emergency relief

In the first days after the tsunami, TAG teams began visiting areas where Burmese workers and their families had fled after the waves, to assess the situation and develop appropriate aid programs, to listen to people's stories, to begin distributing emergency assistance to meet their basic needs – and generally to show some friendly faces in a place which had suddenly become hostile.

2 Setting up temporary relief camps in Buddhist temples

Even a month after the waves, while many Thai relief camps were well organized and coordinated, there were no relief camps or information centers for Burmese tsunami survivors, most of whom remained in hiding, in scattered encampments in coconut and rubber plantations. In order to provide more organized assistance, TAG helped set up temporary shelters for nearly 3,000 migrants in the only places these traumatized migrants felt safe, within the precincts of several Buddhist temples.

3 Helping migrant workers access health care

Initially, many Burmese migrant workers who sought treatment for their tsunami injuries in public hospitals were turned in to the immigration authorities when medical staff found out that they were not registered. Word spread quickly and many badly injured people in desperate need of medical assistance kept away from the hospitals. To deal with this, TAG worked on several fronts: helping to get registered workers' health insurance cards re-issued, visiting and translating for Burmese patients in hospitals and negotiating agreements with doctors and social workers in several key public hospitals to ensure that if workers from Burma - with or without cards - come in, medical care would be given to them. TAG also linked with *Medcines Sans Frontiers* to conduct public health workshops to train migrants from 21 jungle encampments in first-aid and basic health.

4 Helping identify lost relatives

Most families of Burmese tsunami victims in Thailand were afraid to come forward to claim missing relatives for fear of being arrested and deported. By early February, only 65 migrant workers had contacted victim identification centers in Phuket and Phangnga, in search of missing relatives among the thousands of unidentified corpses – many believed to be Burmese. Things only got worse when the victim identification centers, initially run by volunteers, were taken over by the Thai police. Even so, the *Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma* helped Burmese families to gather documents or undertake DNA checks to prove family relationship and accompanied them to the centers.

5 Helping arrange death rites

Most Burmese migrant workers are Buddhist, and according to Burmese tradition, when someone dies, surviving family members must perform certain rites such as offering food and robes to monks, performing water-pouring ceremonies and undertaking meritorious deeds in honor of the deceased. TAG arranged for a group of Burmese monks to go around with the relief teams to provide spiritual support for tsunami victims and bereaved families and help them through their mourning. TAG also gave financial support to perform death ceremonies for the deceased at several temples where Burmese migrant workers were living, with several hundred people attending.

6 Helping to get lost identity documents replaced

Most Burmese migrant workers who were legally registered with the authorities lost their temporary ID cards, health insurance cards and work permits in the tsunami. These papers are the key to safety and dignity for migrant workers in Thailand, and without them, they become vulnerable to harassment, arrest and deportation. So one of TAG's most urgent tasks has been to help liaison with employers and district offices to have temporary work permits re-issued for those who had been registered, and issued new for those who were working illegally. By Mid July, TAG had helped over 300 workers in Phangnga to receive replacement ID cards.

Migrant workers from different parts of the world find themselves in the same boat . . .

There were also many migrant laborers from the Northeast of Thailand (Isaan) working in tsunami-hit areas who lost family members and jobs in the tsunami. Although they are Thai citizens, they also found themselves being passed over by various government agencies in the aid process because they were not from the affected areas. On many construction sites and fishing trawlers, workers from Burma and Isaan had worked side by side and developed friendships. Since both groups are Buddhists and many long-time workers from Burma speak Thai, there were already some connections. TAG has also been working to strengthen these informal connections and to begin building a migrant laborers network for future support and cooperation.

While the various organizations that came together to form TAG have their own long-term projects, they will continue to work together as a coalition on some tsunami-related issues such as medical care for affected migrants, art activities for children, counselling, etc. TAG will evolve as time goes on, and even now, they are expanding the coalition and holding monthly meetings with as many groups as possible who are working with migrants in Thailand.

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PHILIPPINES

Advice from the poor living in high-risk areas of the Philippines : Prepare yourselves BEFORE the disaster strikes

The Philippines is no stranger to disasters. This island nation is yearly buffeted by the deadliest typhoons the South China Sea can muster, which tear up coastal areas and cause flooding, landslides and storms farther inland. The victims of these disasters are invariably and disproportionately the poor. Why? Because for lack of alternatives, the process of urbanization is forcing more and more of them to find shelter in some of the most dangerous, most vulnerable, most disaster-prone areas of the country's cities and towns - areas no legitimate development is allowed to take place.

Look at the aerial photos of any Philippines city and you'll see in the most low-lying floodlands, on the most precarious hillsides, along the most exposed shorelines and river-banks, and within the most toxic and dangerous margins of highways and railway tracks the most densely-populated pockets of human habitation. When almost any disaster strikes, these poor communities are on the front line.

Nobody understands this better than the **Philippines Homeless People's Federation**. On the morning of July 10, 2000, part of the mountainous garbage dump at Payatas collapsed after weeks of heavy rain, burying hundreds of scavengers who were living and working nearby. For the federation, the biggest lesson of the tragedy was that if communities can prepare themselves and develop their own solutions to problems of land and housing, long before such calamities ever happen, p-eople will have more choices and be more in control. Since then, the federation has been actively surveying and organizing settlements in "danger zones" around the country, and using their information and resettlement ideas to negotiate with the government to find long term solutions to their problems of land and housing.

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Out of the pan and into the fire :

The hair-raising tale of how 300 families were moved out of one danger zone into another, and then rescued by disaster victims from another danger zone when disaster inevitably struck . . .

The federation has also notched up some considerable experience managing direct, people-to-people relief and rehabilitation efforts after several disasters, including the Payatas garbage slide. In November, 2004, when flash floods turned part of a government resettlement colony into a raging river, it was not the government or the aid agencies, but the Homeless People's Federation who came to the rescue. This dramatic story of the calamity at Kasiglahan comes from Ruby Papeleras, one of the federation's national leaders, from the nearby Payatas community.

Kasiglahan is a vast government relocation colony of 8,011 units in the remote northern fringe of Manila. Built in 1996 by developers, without any subsidy, it was a pet project of the former Philippines president and the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC). For several years, people evicted from settlements around the city were dumped in Kasiglahan, where they are obliged to make hefty, market-rate mortgage payments for the privilege of buying airless little 22sm rooms in this death-trap. This is the relocation colony that was built in the wrongest of wrong places, and in violation of just about every government building regulation on the books. Kasiglahan was actually constructed in the bed of a major river, which was only flimsily diverted by dikes which almost every year are breached by floods. It's no help that steep, deforested, eroding hills ring the place on all sides. Kasiglahan is a disaster waiting to happen.

A month before the tsunami, a big typhoon hit the Philippines' main island of Luzon. In Manila, there were landslides and floods everywhere. And sure enough, in Kasiglahan, when the flash floods hit, the river burst over the dikes and roared right through the relocation site. It was about midnight and most people were asleep when somebody raised the alarm. Some people managed to run away, but others could only scramble up onto their roofs, where they were trapped by the rising water. Hundreds of text messages from hundreds of mobile phones went out to friends in nearby Payatas, *"Save us!"* (Philippines is the text message capital of the world!)

A big team of federation members from Payatas rushed over. When we arrived, the water was rushing like a river, four or five meters deep, so people stranded on the rooftops could not swim or walk to safety. The immediate need was to get people out of there as quickly as possible. We had thought to bring along ropes, which we tied to electricity poles, houses or whatever was solid, and flung them to the rooftops, where people made them fast. This gave them something to hold on to as they pulled or swam their way out of the torrent. We also threw them inner-tubes, to use as make-shift life-vests. Despite our efforts, four children and one priest were drowned that night.

More than 300 families were flooded out in the low-lying end of the resettlement colony. They irony was that most of these flood-victims were survivors of the deadly Payatas garbage-slide, who had been forcefully relocated to Kasiglahan for reasons of "safety" from their houses in the danger zone around the dump.

Some moved to the nearby transit area, some moved in with friends in areas that hadn't flooded. We offered disabled and elderly families to move into unoccupied units at the federation-built resettlement site at Bangon Silangan, where some garbage-slide victims were already staying. The next morning, the federation began mobilizing relief – we gathered donations of rice, food, clothing, medicines and mosquito nets and began distributing them to the victims. At the same time, other groups initiated negotiations with the government about upgrading the river dikes or finding alternative places for these 300 families, who would clearly be in serious danger as long as they remained in the same houses. And these negotiations – which have not been easy - are still going on.

Nobody wants to live in a danger zone! *58% of Metro Manila's population are squatters, more and more of them living in extremely dangerous places. Nobody wants to live this way. We are organizing ourselves and developing resettlement plans which meet our needs, but we cannot afford to buy land in the conventional way. We need other options and are ready to work with the government to find secure shelter options for these vulnerable communities.*

Disaster relief notes from PAKISTAN :

A few days after the December 26 tsunami, we got this e-mail message in the ACHR office from the Karachi-based architect ***Arif Hasan*** *: "The tsunami, I hope, will open our eyes to the fact that if we rob and steal our natural assets, nature will punish us. Having worked with earthquake rehabilitation, famine and drought, I have always marveled at the remarkable energy and strength that communities put into rehabilitating themselves. A lot of aid agencies do not realize this. Aid could be far more meaningful with this realization." A few months later, Arif was in Bangkok and we got a chance to sit down with him and hear a little more about his disaster rehabilitation experiences in Pakistan. Here is the compressed version of the stories. (For the full version, please contact ACHR or e-mail Arif at* ***arifhasan@cyber.net.pk****)*

1 EARTHQUAKE, 1974

In 1975, there was a big earthquake in Bisham, a mountainous region of small villages and regular earthquakes in northern Pakistan. Houses here are traditionally built with stone, mud mortar and heavy timber rafters, which are covered with mud for insulation. When these houses collapsed in the earthquake, people inside them were crushed. As part of the government's rehabilitation program, the Appropriate Technology Development Organization and I were asked to develop and introduce appropriate technology for earthquake disasters.

The government had decided to build one-room earthquake-proof houses for affected households. We were very much against this, because it was really a capital-intensive, contractor's program, not a people's program. Instead of spending this money on building earthquake-proof houses, we proposed that :

- we should introduce simple house-building technologies that would cause minimum damage to occupants during future earthquakes.
- these construction techniques to minimize damage should be promoted amongst craftsmen and small contractors - the people who actually build houses most people live in here.
- public buildings like mosques, schools and health centers, on the other hand, should be built to be properly earthquake-proof.
- children (the major casualties) should be educated, as part of the school curriculum, in what to do when earthquakes happen.

Of course the contractors and engineers wanted the government's capital-intensive program, and the politicians wanted it too, because it was highly visible, compared to our *soft* program. So our program was never actually implemented, apart from the education and the earthquake-proof public buildings part.

2 EARTHQUAKE, 1979

Some years later, I helped develop a number of earthquake-proof prototypes for the Aga Khan Foundation's self-help school-building program, in the northern areas, along the Karakolum Highway. For this project, we used a number of well-tried technologies which were extremely simple and relatively earthquake resistant, to the extent that they may be damaged but would not collapse during a major earthquake.

We developed both stone, mud and stabilized earth block prototypes, all of which had steel reinforcing bars and mesh at corners, foundation, sill, lintel and roof level, to hold the building together and resist lateral loads during an earthquake. For the roofs, we got rid of the dangerously heavy, flat mud-and-timber roofs and replaced them with a much lighter system of galvanized iron sheets on timber joists, with locally-manufactured plywood drop ceilings below, and straw insulation in-between.

The environmentalists were very much against this, saying these tin roofs spoiled the region's historic vernacular beauty. But the school teachers loved these buildings because their insulation made them much warmer in winter and cooler in summer. The old government-built schools had cost a fortune to heat and were extremely uncomfortable all year round. In winter, when temperatures fall to minus 20 degrees, the children used to sit out in patches of sun to keep warm while they studied, while in summers, which get very hot, they used to sit outside under the trees.

These new schools became very popular and the various prototypes, which were extremely cheap to build, were adopted. Since then, about 2,000 classrooms have been built and/or modified using these technologies, and they have all survived very well the earthquakes which have rocked the area in subsequent years.

3 FAMINE, 1983 - 87

I was also involved with the drought and famine in the Thar desert in southern Pakistan. In 1987, after four years without rain, the press was calling it the worst drought in history. I knew the area a little bit and thought there must have been other droughts before. When I looked up the meteorological data, I discovered that droughts happen in the Thar in a regular cycle of drought and excessive rainfall.

I published an article describing this natural cycle, suggesting that the calamity this time was caused not by drought but by social and demographic changes in the desert. After that, the government invited me to make an evaluation, with the Save the Children Fund and UNICEF.

After spending time talking to elders in the area, it gradually became clear what had happened. The livestock-raising desert communities and the wheat-growing riverine communities had a complex relationship of economic interdependence, while the old caste system assured the range land and water sources were maintained. Partition, war and demographic shifts changed everything, leaving these desert communities with no means of generating cash and no means of dealing with droughts. I documented all this and we eventually convinced the government that these problems were real and must be addressed. As a result, the *Thar Rural Development Project (TRDP)* was launched :

- **A relief program**, to provide food, medicines, mobile medical teams, and fodder for cattle; set up seed banks and build roads.
- **A long-term development program** to establish an organization in the desert which would create conditions for the development of a new community-based governance system, in which people are organized around neighborhood savings groups, which invest part of their savings in water schemes, tree-planting and range-land management. We started in one pilot area, then slowly expanded into other areas. Now the program is very big, covers various cultural aspects of the desert, and has become well integrated with the larger government and private sector systems.

Since 1987, when we began the program, there have been droughts in the Thar desert. Between 1997 and 2002, there was again no rain. But this time, the people weathered the drought quite well.

▲ *This 19th Century wood-block by the master printmaker Hokusai has become one of Japan's most famous, iconographic images. It depicts a tiny fishing boat riding the heels of a great wave. It's not a tsunami, of course, but the print conveys a vivid sense of the island country's vulnerability to the furious seas which have buffeted Japan's coastlines as long as the collective memory stretches back.*

JAPAN :

The place which gives us the word tsunami is also a country rich in experiences and lore about the sea's sometimes brutal power . . .

It is Japan which gives us the word *tsunami*. Our friend in Tokyo, Mami Nakamura, writes that *tsunami* is a very old word, composed of two characters (*tsu*, meaning a little port + *nami*, meaning a wave) which describes the massive, destructive waves caused by earthquakes, volcano eruptions or strong storms which have hit Japan for centuries.

The irony of a tsunami is that if you are out at sea, you may not even notice when one rolls by under your boat. That's why so many fishermen out at sea survived the Asian tsunami, while people on shore got such a battering. It has to do with the period and length of the wave, which shortens and intensifies in shallow water, so energy that was diffused over a long line out at sea, gets compressed near shore into a force so great that it can carry more destructive power than a nuclear bomb.

Tsunamis travel very fast also - faster than a jumbo jet. On May 22, 1960, a big earthquake rocked the South American country of Chile, unleashing a tsunami in the Pacific ocean. 15 hours later, the devastating waves smashed into Hawaii, and seven and a half hours after that hit Japan.

While it was Japan which gave us the word, it was oceanographers in Hawaii (where there are many people of Japanese descent) who first made *tsunami* the official technical term for these giant killer waves, as distinct from ordinary *tidal waves*. Almost anything that happens under the sea in the Pacific Ocean will eventually hit Hawaii, which was also the first place to develop a full-fledged tsunami warning system. But unless you lived in Japan or Hawaii, the chances are you might never have heard this word, until December 26, 2004, when tsunami became a household word around the globe.

Tsunami survivors from Okusiri share experiences and offer moral support in Sri Lanka . . .

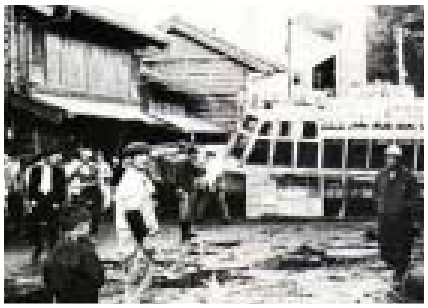
On July 12, 1993, at 10:17 PM, a major tsunami hit Okusiri, a tiny island of mostly traditional fishing villages, off the westernmost point of Hokaido, in northern Japan. Although the island's meteorological observatory had issued a tsunami warning twelve hours earlier, nearly 200 people still died when the wave struck, 143 people were injured and hundreds of houses and civic infrastructure were destroyed. The amount of the damage was calculated to exceed 66.4 billion Yen (US$ 602 million). The Japanese government's reaction to the disaster was to spend trillions encircling the island in such an elaborate system of sea-walls, breakwaters and space-age fortifications that the place is now rumored to have the best tsunami protection in the world (though it's difficult to actually see the island any longer, under all that concrete!).

When tsunami survivors on Okusiri, most of them still working as fishermen, heard about the Asian tsunami last December, they resolved to go see how they could help. With assistance from the Japan Water Forum NGO, a group of Okusiri fisherfolk and Japanese university students traveled in March to Sri Lanka, where they spent a week visiting relief camps and offering the kind of moral support that comes only from those who've experienced the same misfortune first-hand. The following notes are drawn from a brief report on the exchange, as translated by Mami Nakamura :

The fifteen Japanese visitors made the rounds of relief camps, children's libraries and elementary schools, where they had a series of discussions with tsunami affected people in Negombo, Moratuwa, Hikaduwa, Matara and Colombo. The people from Okusiri described their experience of the 1993 tsunami. Sri Lanka today looks very much like Okusiri did 12 years ago, they said, but were relieved to see so many smiles. In their experience, they said, reconstruction requires a lot of money. They described some of the barriers the government had constructed to protect the island from future waves. They also described the process of moving their houses away from the seashore to new sites on higher ground. Those who decided to rebuild their houses in the same place, close to the sea, had then to construct foundations which were several meters higher.

In the badly-hit city of Moratuwa, the Japanese team met survivors in several relief camps, and helped build simple, low-cost toilets in one, under the guidance of Moratuwa University and the NGO Net-Water. They also met with the city's mayor, who was eager to exchange ideas and learn how tsunami reconstruction could be tackled on a municipality-wide scale, as it was in Okusiri. The idea of launching a sister-city agreement between Moratuwa and Okusiri was discussed.

On March 17th, there was a tsunami scare, which turned out to be false, but the Japanese team saw for themselves the frightened faces of hundreds of people running inland as word spread. In discussions afterwards, the Okusiri team emphasized the importance of a good tsunami warning system and a strong program of disaster management training, including the rehearsing of rapid evacuations to higher-ground along established escape-routes. At the end of the visit, the Okusiri team joined a group of Japanese disaster management specialists and volunteers from the earthquake-hit city of Kobe, for a televised forum on disaster management, with a large group of Sri Lankan professionals and NGOs working in the fields of fisheries, education, public administration and environment.



During and after the Okusiri tsunami :

The enormous expense of shoring up Okusiri's coastline with such spectacular civil engineering works as this concrete breakwater (left) may not be the most practical safety measure for countries with more modest construction budgets than Japan's. But for low-budget human solidarity, it's hard to beat the experience of bringing together people from different countries who've been through the same trauma to compare notes.

CONTACT : For more information about the Okusiri-Sri Lanka tsunami exchange, please check out this website : **www.waterforum.jp/eng/srilanka/**

It is almost never possible to restore communities to their previous condition, after a major disaster, no matter how much governments spend. However, our experience in Japan has shown that if self-build reconstruction and autonomous livelihood revival can be initiated by communities and by people themselves – and if their efforts can be supported by donors and governments - it makes a very good start.
(Professor Uchida Yuzo)

Some disaster management wisdom from Japan, hard-won via earthquake, flood and typhoon :

On Feb. 18, 2005, ACHR-Japan gathered at the University of Tokyo to discuss the Asian tsunami. After Mami Nakamura, a graduate student at Sophia University, made a presentation about her recent visit to tsunami-hit areas of southern Thailand, the group discussed the possibility of sharing some of Japan's considerable experience coping with natural disasters. Over the past three decades, Professor Uchida Yuzo has helped prepare reconstruction plans for demolished towns and villages around Japan after several major disasters - the typhoon in 1975, the great Hansin-Awaji earthquake in 1995, and the Niigata earthquake in 2004. Here is a brief summary of the recommendations he prepared for ACHR Japan. (For the full version, please see the ACHR website: ***www.achr.net****)*

1 **The poor are the biggest losers in most disasters.**

Disasters are seldom democratic. It is almost always the poorest who suffer the most and bear the worst effects of natural calamities. Why? Because the poor have the fewest options and access to the least resources, which means delays in reconstructing their houses and restarting their livelihoods; they often live in the most environmentally risky, most densely-built-up and least-accessible areas, in houses of poor quality that are least likely to withstand disasters; their uncertain tenure often disqualifies them for government compensation. For these reasons, it is important that post-disaster rehabilitation programs take into consideration the special needs of the most socially and economically vulnerable victims, so that they are not displaced, impoverished or further marginalized by the disaster.

2 **People should move back to their former land as soon as possible.**

It is crucial that people go back to their former neighborhoods and villages as soon as possible after a disaster, wherever possible, whether it be in tents or pre-fab housing units, self-supported or government-supported. This is the best way to keep communities from being scattered and broken, at a time when horizontal community support is most needed, and the best way for people to remain central in the reconstruction process. Remote or scattered relief camps are a sure recipe for killing initiative and generating hopelessness and isolation.

3 **Permanent housing must meet the needs of the former residents.**

Disasters tend to be very effective gentrifiers. When they destroy informal housing and cheap rental accommodation, this stock of affordable housing is usually not replaced, or is replaced with much more expensive, higher-cost housing. In these ways, lower-income workers, the elderly, the landless and economically vulnerable families end up being forced out of their neighborhoods and villages. It is therefore important that long-term housing reconstruction programs include subsidies, supports or soft loan facilities which make it possible to rebuild housing in the same area which is affordable to all affected households, especially lower-income ones, whether it is public or private housing, and whether self-built or state-built.

4 **Rebuilding damaged infrastructure is only the beginning.**

Economic, social, environmental or physical problems which communities face tend to be intensified when disasters strike, leaving communities as a whole as vulnerable as individual disaster victims. Restoring transport systems, water supply pipes and public facilities is only the first step in the complex and long-term task of rebuilding a flourishing community and the complex lives within it, which have been shattered by the calamity. It takes more than big civil projects to bring a community back to life after a disaster. It requires a long-term and comprehensive process of rebuilding houses, environments, livelihood opportunities, social support systems and all the intangibles which are part of a healthy and sustaining human community.

ACHR-Japan raises funds to launch a special "Friendship" reconstruction fund in Sri Lanka . . .

Soon after the tsunami, members of ACHR-Japan raised funds from their members and fellow citizens through a series of seminars and e-mail campaigns. When contributions reached a million Yen (US$ 9,000), they sent the money to the Women's Bank in Sri Lanka, where it was used to set up a special revolving community reconstruction fund, called *Sahayogitha Aramudala* ("Friendship Fund"). The fund was soon enlarged by additional donations collected by students at Nihon Fukushi University and by several ACHR-linked groups in Korea, led by Father Mun-Su Park.

Women's Bank leaders decided that the fund's first project would be to set up a series of boat-building yards, to be linked together under a single, registered cooperative society called the *Community Action and Technical Assistance Marine Association (Catamaran)*. The fund provided seed capital to purchase moulds and raw materials for building and repairing small fiberglass fishing boats at three boat-yards, initially, along Sri Lanka's west coast, at Kaluthara, Moratuwa and Colombo North.

The Women's Bank has negotiated a deal in which all the boats Catamaran completes are purchased by the National Development Bank (for the cost of labor and materials, plus a 20% profit margin) and given free to tsunami-affected fishermen. This money then goes back into the boat-yard to purchase more materials, hire more boat-builders and make more boats. This way, the boat yards become not only a means of supplying much-needed boats to out-of-work fishermen, but a self-sustaining employment opportunity for teams of boat builders in a growing number of areas. Eventually, each boat yard will repay the initial capital to the Friendship Fund, so the money can revolve and help start boat-yards and finance other kinds of rehabilitation activities in other areas.

Besides providing seed capital and materials, on a cost-recovery basis, from the "Friendship Fund", WB also helps new boat-building groups to negotiate to use government land for their workshops and helps strengthen their management skills. Here is Hosaka's photo of one of the boat-building tool kits WB is distributing, with help from the fund.

TSUNAMI DONORS :

Building bridges between so many good intentions and so many needs on the ground . . .

Here are some thoughts from Somsook on the aid which flowed into Asia from around the world :

If you look at the scale of the donations governments around Asia have received, *it's so huge!* Donations from inside and outside the countries, from aid agencies, foundations, embassies, governments, private companies and individuals - even from princes and movie stars. People saw what had happened and felt a spontaneous need to offer whatever help they could: money, goods, assistance, time. At ACHR, we got e-mails from so many consultants, small trusts and individuals asking how they could contribute. In the relief camp at Bang Muang, in Thailand, people came from all over the country with truckloads of food, clothes, toys, roast chickens, PVC pipes, plywood sheets - *whatever!* Some people even went into the middle of the camp and started handing out money. Now not all of this stuff may be so useful to tsunami victims, but all of it clearly comes from the heart.

I see this big, spontaneous urge to help as a very powerful force in our societies. Most of the time, this force is hiding, but major disasters like the tsunami have a way of bringing it out, of shaking us out of our selfishness and awakening this genuine compassion for others who are in trouble.

But it is important that all this money and all these offered goods, which come pouring into the tsunami areas from so many directions at the same time, be managed properly, so all these good intentions can go to the right place. That is the key issue. That kind of coordination is never easy to do, especially in disaster situations, where the scale is just so big, and there is usually nobody to manage all this help. But without this kind of coordination, the aid and the group it targets don't always connect, and big gaps grow between the assistance and the real needs.

With all the best intentions : *In this press photo, Britain's Prince William and Prince Harry help pack aid bound for victims of the Asian tsunami at a Red Cross depot in Bristol. Even members of the British royal family are adding their bit to the enormous outpouring of relief aid and goodwill from around the world. The question is, how useful will all these rolls of toilet paper be to the poor fishing villagers who lost everything in the waves?*

"What needs to be clear first is what communities want, what they need in the short-term and long-term perspectives. . . When you start looking for helping hands among yourselves, that is what we understand as development: that the people should be in the center and that the poor should drive the process."

Martin Brockermann-Simon, from the German funding agency Misereor, at the "Regional Tsunami Survivors Dialogue" held in Sri Lanka in March.

Formal systems and informal needs :

Why it makes sense to also get tsunami aid to those groups which can channel it directly to people on the ground . . .

Mismatches between aid and real needs are not likely to be resolved by the *formal* systems prevailing in disaster-hit countries. The challenge in disaster relief is to meet people's immediate needs as quickly as possible, but after a major disaster like the tsunami, those needs are huge, messy, complex, urgent and highly *informal*. A government bureaucracy, with its rules and procedures and layers of hierarchy, is not the ideal system for meeting those needs in a crisis quickly and flexibly. So it's likely that donations to governments will get stuck, or at least slowed down considerably, on their vertical path down through the bureaucracy. The big relief agencies are also held in check by the formal agreements they must sign with the host governments.

One good way to beat the problem of mismatched aid and needs is for relief support to be *diversified*, so it goes not only through the *formal* channels of government and big relief agencies, but also to the NGOs, civil society groups and community networks already in close touch with *informal* realities on the ground. These groups may not be the conventional disaster-relief actors, but they are in a very good position to get the aid quickly, efficiently and directly to the affected people. These are the kind of groups who can build bridges between the complex needs on the ground and the aid resources coming from so many directions at once.

The role of innovative donors in this bridge-building can be crucial, when they identify these kinds of groups already working on the ground and push them to get involved in the disaster relief process. They may be organizations that work on urban poor housing, or on sanitation or savings and credit. The important thing is that the connection between these groups and the affected people is *horizontal, not vertical.*

This is not to say that governments shouldn't be involved in aid and rehabilitation. Certain kinds of assistance will always be handled by government agencies and go through the government system - especially in managing the longer-term, big ticket items of post-disaster reconstruction. But we have to bear in mind that this formal system - with all its stiffness and limitations and regulations - can deliver only up to a certain level, and then only very slowly.

4 Ideas for disaster donors, from the survivors themselves . . .

Drawn from the "Declaration for a People's Centered Tsunami Recovery and Reconstruction Process" adopted by 150 tsunami survivors from Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and Thailand, during the "Tsunami Survivor's Dialogue" meeting in Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, in March 2005.

- **We speak as survivors not as helpless victims.** We are deeply grateful for the support shown at home and around the world. We have lost our loved ones, houses, belongings, livelihoods and legal documentation, but we have not lost control over our lives.
- **Our most urgent priority is to return** to our traditional land, where our livelihoods, support structures and cultural roots are, and where we can work together as communities to rebuild our houses, our lives and our self-reliance, in collaboration with government, donors, NGOs.
- **We are ready to rebuild our own communities.** The task cannot be done for us. But besides rebuilding our houses and infrastructure, the tsunami is a historic opportunity for us to secure our tenure and to become more active in protectors of our fragile coastal environments.
- **Support people-based solutions.** The scale and urgency of the reconstruction task is beyond the capacity of our governments to handle alone. It calls for an innovative, decentralized and people-based approach. We are ready to work as partners with local governments and donors to work out how best to rebuild our settlements, for the benefit of all. This will allow appropriate shelter and reconstruction to take place in hundreds of different places at the same time, in a timely and efficient manner.

Flexibile tsunami aid . . .

When aid comes to locally-grounded groups, with trust and flexibility, it's more likely to reach the most vulnerable disaster victims :

Disaster aid doesn't necessarily need to be big to be effective. If local groups with a grounding in local realities can tap into aid resources that are quick and flexible and given with the kind of trust that comes through established partnerships, they can help set a healthy, people-centered direction in the rehabilitation process early on, so that the much heavier aid investments that come later on - for housing, infrastructure reconstruction and the economic revival - can go in the right direction. Aid which goes through these less formal channels can help affected people and communities to do things in ways which change perceptions and challenge bad rules. It can help start things right away, generate excitement and support innovations which can help legitimize the position of people who are off the government's official map. And once legitimized, these people's rehabilitation projects can then draw down the larger, more formal aid resources for the longer-term reconstruction.

CASE IN POINT : Misereor in Asia

The German funding agency Misereor is a key supporter of many of the projects described in this newsletter. These projects offer several good examples of what is possible when a donor gives the freedom to its local partner group to respond to the crisis creatively and realistically, implementing whatever relief activities they feel are appropriate to meet immediate needs. Misereor's assistance also shows how when local groups are allowed to lead the relief process, it can lay a good foundation for the longer-term redevelopment process, and make it much easier for subsequent aid from other donors to go the right way, to those who most need it.

A COMMON PICTURE : Misereor played a role in enabling local partners to link with different civic groups early on, to develop a common understanding of the situation and a common strategy for dealing with issues, which could be shared by NGOs, professionals, aid organizations, community groups. The 6-province survey that was conducted in Thailand and the network that was established in Nagapattinam in India helped to create a larger, more structural understanding of the calamity, helped to plan strategic moves and effective ways of dealing with problems, and began to create a culture of collectivity and collaboration in the solving of these problems.

RELIEF CAMPS : The six relief camps which CODI and its NGO partners set up in Thailand's worst-hit areas were supported by Misereor. From the beginning, these camps were used not only as focal points for delivering relief, but more strategically for gathering together traumatized survivors from the same villages, as soon as possible, and organizing them to take charge of their rehabilitation and prepare themselves for the future. The camps became vital experiments in collective, community-driven relief and the launching pads for the next stages of rehabilitation.

PERMANENT HOUSES : When the governments announced policies forbidding rebuilding near the sea (in Aceh and Sri Lanka) and local authorities and land-grabbers began showing up in ruined villages with spurious claims of ownership (in Thailand), the affected villagers understood that the best way to defend their traditional land was to reoccupy it and start building houses right away. But no formal donors or government schemes doing housing reconstruction would touch the many villages whose land tenure was unclear or disputed by these regulations. Some funds from Misereor allowed many vulnerable fishing communities in these three countries to start building temporary or permanent houses (lovely, sensitively-designed ones) and to use the rebuilding process as a tool in their negotiations for secure land, which eventually led to policy changes and secure tenure in many cases. This house-building also provoked a public discussion, with daily press coverage, on the larger, more structural issue of land, and who has the right to use it.

BOATS : Once they have a boat, they can survive, but in the early stages, fishermen could get little help replacing lost or damaged boats. Some seed capital from Misereor helped set up boat repair yards in fishing villages in Thailand and Sri Lanka. Once these pioneering boat yards got going and this active, essential self-help relief activity could be visited and seen, they became a magnet for all kinds of other funding assistance, from corporate donors, UN projects and other relief agencies. This has allowed the fishermen to scale up and spread out their boat-building and repairwork.

Four tips for disaster donors from the Asia network :

1 **Relief assistance must reach affected people and communities right away.** In many countries, even after months had passed, relief was having to pass through too much bureaucracy and reaching people much too slowly. It is important to find ways of diversifying relief support so it can go to many actors, not just to governments and the big relief agencies. If aid can also go to civil society groups, local NGOs and established community networks and federations, it will enable people to support each other in crises. Horizontal support can be a very powerful addition to other relief efforts in a major crisis like this one.

2 **Relief should be linked to rehabilitation for ALL affected communities.** The coastlines of all the affected countries are dotted with fishing communities and indigenous settlements whose land tenure is unclear. Even though they've occupied the land for decades (or centuries), many are considered squatters on public land, and efforts to deny these people the right to rehabilitation on their old land began immediately. This is especially a danger given the soaring values of the coastal property they inhabit and political pressures to grab that land for powerful commercial interests. So it is imperative that relief aid be linked to rehabilitation for *ALL* affected communities, regardless of their legal tenure status - not only for that minority of community members with legal land status.

3 **It is crucial that people be centrally involved in planning the rehabilitation of their own communities.** The reconstruction of settlements that were damaged or destroyed by the tsunami presents an important opportunity to organize and strengthen these communities, many of which were poor, marginalized and vulnerable even before the waves struck. If space and resources can be provided in the rehabilitation process for communities to be the key actors in planning their own reconstruction of housing, infrastructure and environment, in close collaboration with local authorities, sensitive architects and planners, NGOs and support organizations, then the rehabilitation process will become a *community-builder*, a *local-relationship-builder* and an important step forward in national poverty alleviation goals.

4 **It is also crucial that the rehabilitation process be comprehensive**, encompassing many aspects of people's lives and needs. In thousands of settlements wiped out by the tsunami, people lost everything - their houses, their families, their boats, their support networks, their social systems, their way of life. A rehabilitation program which provides only housing will fall far short of rebuilding the lives that were shattered by the tsunami crisis. So it is important that aid support a rehabilitation process which rebuilds all aspects of people's lives and survival systems, including support for income generation, ecological revitalization, rebuilding of social networks and the revival of the traditional cultures.

(Recommendations agreed upon during ACHR's regional tsunami meeting in Phuket, January 19, 2005)

Lament of a father . . .

In most of this newsletter, and in much of the tsunami rehabilitation work that the groups described here are doing, the emphasis is on the positive signs, the upbeat developments, the little triumphs and the policy breakthroughs. But all the optimism in the world can't erase the immense suffering and grief and loss which the tsunami has heaped on the shoulders of so many. To honor this great loss, we close this issue with a simple poem. It was written by Baharuddin, a fisherman and the village leader of Lam Tengoh village, one of the 25 villages in the Udeep Beusaree Network in Aceh, Indonesia (and translated from the Acehnese by Wardah Hafidz). Baharuddin lost every single member of his family - both immediate and extended - in the tsunami. He wrote this poem, along with many, many others, right on the ply-wood walls of his temporary house, which he and his neighbors have built on the ruined plinth of the lovely big house where all these people used to live.

Let me endure the rest of my life in suffering.
Wife, father, mother, brothers and sisters are all gone,
I am now alone.
Who is there to talk to
As I carry on through the rest of my life?

Every day the tears come again
When I think of the beautiful moments I spent with all my children.
I have so many things to ask them, but they are no more,
Taken away by the tsunami I don't know where.

Now I can only pray
For them to be happy in heaven.

My beloved children, your names
will never leave your father's heart.

Alawiyah (wife, 41), Dedy Bahar (son, 17), Dian Bahari (daughter, 15), Siti Sara (daughter, 13), Ayu Fitri (daughter, 11) and An-Nisa (daughter, 1 month).

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Are you on our mailing list?

If you'd like to be on the mailing list for future ACHR publications, please send your mailing address and contact details to Tom at ACHR. It's always nice to hear a bit about the work that you or your organization is doing, also.

Photos: *Sri Lankan fisherman Jeeraman Jelvarajah holds a photograph of his missing son in Mullaitivu, a remote village 350 km northeast of Colombo, in this photo clipped from a June 24 newspaper story (above left). And one of the hundreds of missing persons notice boards put up in a relief camp in Banda Aceh (below right).*

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

Housing by People in Asia *is a publication of the* ***Asian Coalition for Housing Rights****. It is produced in Bangkok and edited by Thomas Kerr, with great big thanks to Huyen, Hosaka and Mami for editorial assistance; to Malcolm, Hosaka, Nandasiri, Upali, Jayaratne, Arif, Aaron, Yuri, Moo, Maurice, Andy, Wardah, Muk, Rodney Rascona for photos and drawings; to Misereor and Homeless International for funding assistance; to Pui, Chai, Boon and Lukman for production assistance; to Khun Kitti at Color Point for printing; and to all the tsunami survivors around Asia, as well as their supporters, donors, well-wishers and far-flung friends,who are helping squeeze a little good out of a terrible calamity.*