

# The Lull after the storm

*An assessment report of Tamilnadu Tsunami by  
community women leaders with previous experience  
after the Latur and Gujarat earthquakes*



January 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> 2005

Nagapattinam and Cuddalore districts, Tamilnadu, India

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## I. Introduction

The Tsunami waves that lashed out along the south Indian coasts on December 26 have caused extensive damage in the union territories of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Pondicherry and the states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The continued aftershocks caused widespread panic and coastal communities were evacuated at least twice. However Nicobar island continued to be rocked severely causing an exodus of people to the mainland.

The first phase of relief and rescue operations, undertaken by the government and various international and national humanitarian groups, is almost over. The state governments and union territory administrations have already begun rehabilitation measures by providing temporary shelters, wage employment and by restoring infrastructure.

Three weeks after the Tsunami struck the Tamil Nadu coast, five women survivors -leaders- (with previous experience of dealing with disasters in Latur [1993] and Gujarat [2001]) reached on January 17<sup>th</sup> to express their solidarity with women like themselves accompanied by a multidisciplinary team from Swayam Shikshan Prayog (An NGO with a decade of experience in facilitating community involvement from disaster to development) partnered with CCD (Covenant Centre for Development) a Tamil Nadu based organization now working directly with affected communities on livelihoods and rehabilitation.

### I.I Methodology

The Ten-member team visited 13 villages in the worst affected areas in Nagapattinam and Cuddalore districts on the Tamil Nadu coast from January 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> 2005.

The team conducted group meetings and sharing with the affected peoples of various walks of life such as women's self help groups, youth groups, destitute, widows, the aged, children, and members of fishermen's cooperatives, *et al.*

### I.II Purpose:

- To understand the problems faced by Tsunami affected communities with focus on women and children and socially disadvantaged groups (women-headed households, widows and the aged).
- To conduct participatory assessment in relation to immediate rehabilitation needs - housing, livelihood, health care, counseling, childcare, skills/vocational training, drinking water and sanitation.
- To identify the potential role of women's self help groups in relief and recovery phase and long term community driven rehabilitation.
- To draw up action plans with self help groups
- To support activities in livelihoods, health and reconstruction of houses and community assets.

### I.III The Killer Wave

Almost all the affected villages we visited had two distinct parts - those battered by the tidal waves (where death and destruction were high) and less affected areas where all families have lost their livelihoods.

Damage due to Tsunami in Nagapattinam and Cuddalore districts

Districts	Population affected	Houses/ huts damaged	No. of Human Lives Lost	No. of injured
Cuddalore	99704	15200	617	198
Nagapattinam	196184	39941	6065	1922

We interviewed the survivors and families affected described how the monstrous curling and twisting tidal waves of about forty-to-fifty feet high struck them on December 26<sup>th</sup> at 9.15 AM. The seawater turned black with mud dashing fast on the seashore. On seeing the unusual speed and pace of the waves, people started running to save their lives.

Being Sunday, many children were playing on the beach and women and girls were assembled for buying and selling fish. Many drowned, dragged and hammered by the waves. After a lull, there came another giant wave and washed away people, houses, fishing boats, catamarans; it even demolished concrete houses.

Women described that the first two days confusion, shock and horror prevailed. Those who had relatives in nearby villages left the area immediately after the disaster and had not returned.

#### **I.IV The Relief**

The Government machinery began the relief work from 29<sup>th</sup> of December 04 in full swing. Relief assistance poured from all sides. Government provided food three times a day in the relief camps. It also provided basic household items such as stove, mat, utensils, clothes and bed sheets to all the affected families. Subsequently, each family was given Rs. 4,000/- along with provisions for a month (60 kg rice, 3-liter kerosene, and 3-liter oil). Three week after the incident, most of the families were staying in camps as they felt it was at a safe distance from the sea. However camps lacked privacy and sanitation facilities, and women feared for their safety and that of their daughters.

Balasubramanyam, a fisherman, who lost his wife in tsunami complained that he has not got any relief material except Rs.100,000 for compensation for the deceased and Rs.10,000/- for the boat. He claimed that many have not got stoves and utensils. The wick stoves provided in relief package are highly fuel consuming. Most of the people use the traditional chullas made up of mud outside their homes for cooking, as wood is the main fuel.

#### **I.V Lack of coordination**

In Madathikuppam (two kms away from the main road) women told us that relief came after four days. They needed basic things for survival - such as clean water, sufficient food etc; instead they received clothes, and other consumables. People are generally satisfied with the speed of relief work in terms of make shift shelters and medical supplies. Still there was discontent among the poor and low caste community groups over the distribution of Rs. 4000/- as relief money. Our team had done an exercise along with the interviews which shows that average family expenditure is Rs.100 -175 per day.

In Kuttiandiyur and Perumalpettai villages, the clothes were piled up on the main road which the people had thrown away as they were old, unwashed and completely unsuitable to the culture. Following this incident the government appealed to the citizens to contribute new clothes through government channels.

In Chinnagudi the rice distributed through government run civil supply shops was of poor quality and a variety, which people were not used to, and the villagers refused to take it.

#### **I.VI Malpractice**

In Wanagiri at the meeting with 200 women, they claimed that the Gram Panchayat has done malpractice over the distribution of relief money. Instead of distributing money to the affected families the elected members made multiple false claims on behalf of families, they said.

“Even persons declared missing by their families, appeared on the relief list. This was done by forging signatures on claim papers”, say Kattavarayan and Balasubramanyam, fishermen from the village. The issue came out when many of the claims were sent back by the government

officials as duplicate claims where the reported families had already received relief. Youth groups in the village got agitated over the matter and went on to manhandle the Gram Panchayat members. The accused GP members and the 23 youths who protested were arrested on the same day and collector promised to look in to the matter.

On the day of our visit extra security forces were deployed in this village. There was tension in the air as we asked to meet the gram Panchayat members. It was interesting that the village did not allow relief work to stop. In coordination with the collector, the Village has given the responsibility of managing the relief work on a group of men headed by two locally accepted leaders and say they have lost confidence over the current Gram Panchayat.

In all villages, the entire communities have been robbed of their livelihoods. Those running small business, shopkeepers, fish sellers and traders on the beach side catering to tourists are not in the list of relief. The most neglected were farmers whose crops and land were completely destroyed due to saline water rendering agricultural laborers jobless.

## **II. TEMPORARY SHELTER**

### **II.I Who needed temporary shelters?**

There has been extensive damage to the permanent shelters on the cost line. The houses of fishing families who lived on the seashore was completely washed off by the waves. Most of them were poorly built thatched houses. These families have no land to build their new houses and nowhere to go.

Even concrete and tiled houses suffered severe damages - partially collapsed walls, cracks in the roof and walls etc. Most of the damaged shelters were close to the seashore less than 500 meters, the standard prescribed nearly thirty years ago by the Government.

### **II.II Communication and Awareness**

The people have no idea about the government policy and entitlement for permanent housing. Rumors are around that they are going to get 250 sq. ft house. "This will not be enough to house joint families. There will no place to store all the fishing nets and baskets. We want their kitchen outside their home." Women were vocal about their demands in the meetings.

They have no idea about how much time it will take to move into permanent homes. The question is - how long will they have to live in the temporary shelters. For the families whose survival was linked to physical labour - moving the boats, fish loading etc. There were real concerns regarding relocation of the houses away from the shoreline. "We don't want to live close to the shore, we are ready to live behind the five hundred meter mark - give us land to build", says Shivakami, a leader of the fifteen year old Durga women's self help group of Madathikuppam village.

The women were silent when we asked about the availability of land, suitable sites to continue their livelihoods. They were concerned that they may not get alternate land even it was available. "Then you tell us what we should do," tells Alamelu, another women from the village.

Much to our surprise the government moved quickly to construct temporary shelter in time for people to move before the Pongal, a harvest festival on January 14<sup>th</sup>. Construction was in full swing on sites near the village. However we saw none of the affected families were employed to rebuild nor did they participate in the process. Government-appointed engineers and supervisors were putting up the shelters. They had hired contractors and labourers from elsewhere.

### **II.III Basic facilities**

In Pudupettai village where the temporary shelters were being built, there was one toilet for every ten families. But people complained that lack of water did not allow them to use the toilets.

In Madatikuppam village, women expressed the need of bathrooms and not just toilets in the temporary shelters, as bathing arrangements near their home were destroyed. We noticed that skin infections were on the increase in the villages.

### **II.IV Cyclone Shelters**

The area is prone to cyclones from the Bay of Bengal, which is a regular hazard repeated almost every year. Fisheries Department, Government of Tamil Nadu built Natural Disaster Prevention Shelters in 1984 (popularly known as cyclone shelters) all over Tamil Nadu coasts to rehabilitate the fishermen community during any disaster, especially cyclone. These shelters were built with the help of the European Economic Community (EEC).

We saw a number of cyclone shelters, on the road away from the shoreline. In villages like Naikarkuppam and Perumthottam, we asked whether people had used it after the Tsunami. Neither the people nor the government had rehabilitated villagers in these shelters. Instead, Police and administrative officials now use the cyclone shelter for their stay and people were housed in temples or open playgrounds. This shows that without people's participation, erecting superb structures is an inappropriate measure in disaster management.

### **II.V Community Participation**

The community was not involved in construction of temporary shelters. (Contrastingly, Government orders clearly states that the affected communities should be consulted and involved in the rehabilitation process). The officers on site blamed the villagers for non-cooperation. In our interaction with the families, women revealed that there was no consultation process either before or during construction on appropriate site selection, design or materials used for temporary shelters.

### **I.VI Site selection**

Site selection was of poor standard in almost all the cases. Only Panchayat owned lands were chosen and not those owned by other government agencies. There was no discussion held with the communities regarding the choice of land. As a result, the sites are in low-lying wasteland, which gets flooded during monsoon season, according to the residents.

Madathu Kuppam is a hamlet attached to the main village where the Panchayat is located. During the collector's visit, he had asked the Panchayat President about the availability of Panchayat land for construction of temporary shelters. When President said there is no land available within the Panchayat area, the Collector referred the matter to the administration. Nothing has been done so far, says 30-year-old Selvan, a leader of the fishermen community in Madathu Kuppam.

### **II.VII Temporary shelter model**

It was observed that, most of the villages are having two basic models:

1. Large auditorium model with partitions to accommodate 10- 20 families
2. Single row of shelters (10X12) with partition.

The model was more based on the land availability rather than people's needs. They lacked ventilation and privacy. One room was supposed to accommodate living, sleeping, and cooking arrangements. As a result, bathing, cooking and washing were done in the open resulting in very unhygienic environment. Due to the lack of space and storage facilities firewood cannot be lit up within these rooms. The wick stoves are not economically viable; kerosene is difficult to come by and they pollute the place with high carbon and hydrocarbon content.

## **II.VIII Material and Construction**

Apart from the bamboo or casuarinas skeletal structure, roofing and partition walls were done using Asphalted sheets. The use of thatch and coconut leaf was completely banned fearing of fire hazard. In case of some shelters the partition wall or the outer wall structures had started coming off with children meddling with them. Proper flooring is absent in most of the cases. There has been no effort to raise the floor level to avoid water getting into these shelters in monsoon season.

### **Observations:**

**Temporary shelters** - Everywhere we found discontent about the temporary shelters. These are built from asbestos sheets and in row, offering little privacy or safety. Already people are living outside defeating the purpose they were built for. They dread the summer months in these shelters. People have not been consulted or allowed to participate in putting up these shelters.

**Communication networks** - Our experience shows that efficient, dependable communications and information dissemination strengthen the ability of communities to access the entitlements. Women's groups can play an effective role in gathering, analyzing and disseminating information on rehabilitation policies for the Tsunami affected communities.

**Role of Women** - Women were responsive when we spoke of the mason training and the role of women as construction supervisors. Groups have to equip themselves for the construction phase so they can monitor the construction. Women can supervise safety when their houses are being constructed. The initial messages from the government were confusing preventing people from going to the sea and earning their livelihood. Instead of providing local people employment in construction of shelters the government has hired contractors who bring labor from outside for the entire process. The people seemed to be enthusiastic about taking part in construction but they are not confident as they lack skills and do not know whether they will be allowed to participate in construction phase.

## **III. SOCIAL NETWORKS**

### **III.I Overview**

Prior to tsunami, there were formal and informal community organizations like women's savings and credit groups, fishermen groups, youth groups, farmer societies etc. Most of them had participated in the tsunami relief and recovery phase as individuals. Exception was a few youth groups who had done commendable job in the relief phase. Their work was mainly physical in rescue operation - recovering bodies, helping burying them etc.

### **III.II Savings & Credit Groups**

Every village has at least five Savings and Credit Groups; bigger villages have 35 to 40 groups with 20 women members each. The Groups were formed as part of the Tamil Nadu State Women's Development Corporation to improve rural credit access through banks. Some groups were as old as 15 years and some groups are new about 5 months. The groups, which had been in operation for 6 months have accessed, loan up to Rs.150,000 in most of the cases. There are a few villages with office infrastructure for groups. They have a clear identity as micro finance support organizations in every village.

### **III.III Fishermen Cooperative Societies**

The fishermen communities were traditionally well organized. However the benefits of these structures go to large boat owners. Five or six males from upper caste communities dominate these societies. Their main role was to provide loans for boats and nets to fishermen.

### **III.IV Agriculture Cooperative societies**

The farmers belonging to the coastal agrarian community were also organized under the cooperatives to cater to agricultural needs.

Leadership in the fishermen community has a tradition of sorting out family related issues in meetings, which are held every week across several villages. The decisions taken by the leaders are final and the village follows. There is no representation of women in these meetings. During tsunami, this leadership took an active role in villages to prepare the list of damaged houses, loss of livelihoods, deaths and missing persons. Government officials have often slashed these down. They coordinated with government officials to get the relief properly.

### **III.V Relief Network**

During relief phase, the Tamil Nadu government appointed one IAS officer for every eight villages with a number of district and taluka panchayat officials to coordinate the relief efforts in the villages with various departments and NGOs. At the village level the relief measures were coordinated through the Gram Panchayats. Traditional leaders from the fishing community were also part of the decision making process. But Gram Sabhas were not called for any purpose.

### **III.VI Involvement of Women**

There was no attempt to channelise women's groups to get involved in the relief efforts. In none of the villages, women's self help group meetings were held. The group office was used to store relief materials. "This is the first time we are all meeting after the disaster", said Shivakami, the leader of Durga Group in Madathukupam village, "We have no employment. We could have earned wages if employed in construction of shelters, instead labourers from outside villages are being used".

Women's concerns were regarding how long the relief is going to continue, what are the plans of restoring their livelihoods, are the shelters that are being built permanent, how long its going to take the housing to finish etc.

Women discussed their problems they were facing in relation to basic needs - food, water, child health etc. "With large numbers of mouths to feed, we spend Rs. 30-50 a day only on vegetables, rice and other condiments. " We spend Rs. 20/- to Rs. 30/- on kerosene for cooking," Says Sumathi of Neelakkuyil group of Puthupettai village. No one eats proper food as we are used to eating fish everyday. When fish was available we did not spend much money on food." Until fishing is revived, we have no income, no food to eat, said women from Wanagiri village.

"We get water once in two days on every street but it is not sufficient. And we are not supposed to go to the other part of the village to fetch water", tells Selvi from Vanagiri.

"Teach us some skills, we are ready for alternate employment "- Lakshmi of Annai Theresa group from Perumal Pettai.

### **Observation:**

The traditional value of the fishermen community strengthens their relationships in crisis. In relief and rescue phase they showed unity for making sure that the relief materials has reached the entire community.

## **IV. PERMANENT HOUSING**

### **Overview**

The Tsunami had caused extensive damage to houses on the shoreline. The huts and houses, which were closer to the shoreline have been completely washed off.

### **IV.I Moving from the shoreline**

“We are ready to move the five hundred meters set by the Government”, say the women in chorus. But the problem is the availability of land and the impact on their livelihood activities. Following scenarios are observed in the villages:

- In Wanagiri, where the affected settlement of almost 300 houses extends to the coast, it is difficult to find suitable land for relocation. There are settlements beyond 500 meters. What is available there is not suitable for housing. The land available with the Panchayat land is in the interior and may not suffice this mass relocation. Most importantly, it will rob the poor of their livelihoods.
- In Madathikuppam village, where almost 30 houses settled on the beach were completely washed off, the land on the beach is a private saltpan. The gram Panchayat does not have any land at all in their village.
- In the case of Puthukuppam village, which was washed off completely by the Tsunami, the relocation and rehabilitation includes finding enough land to relocate the whole village with housing and all basic facilities.

### **IV.II Community Centers**

In all the villages we met the women in temple premises or open space. In order to organize women collectively, they need a proper place to meet. When we asked the women where they meet for their SCG group discussion, they said, they do not have a proper place to convene the group meeting. One of the objectives of this observation is to identify the potential of women community centers. In Chinnagudi village women have constructed a platform to sell the fish and a women center but Gram panchayat has taken them over and locked the center.

In Madathikuppam village a community center is being used to run balwadi. Panchayats refused to provide women a place for their meetings. There are 39 SCG groups in Wanagiri village; they find it very difficult to meet every month due to the lack of place. In our meeting with them, in less than half an hour, they decided to approach the Gram Panchayat. They hope to get the approval in next 10 days. They have made a rough plan of community hall model, which can accommodate 300 persons at a time and which, they can rent out for marriages and other ceremonies as well.

### **IV.III The Disadvantaged**

Most of the villages the number of widows ranged from 25 to 300 depending on the population of the villages. There were a significant number of deserted women. The other groups included disabled and destitute agricultural labourers. Inclusion of these socially disadvantaged groups should be a high priority.

### **IV.IV Involving communities**

It will be important to give the communities the space to have a dialogue for the land of their choice, confirming to the safety distance set. This would allow them to have dialogue with private, local, state and the central government for the land. It is to be understood that, if relocated without their consent, it will primarily impact their livelihoods and secondly in order to survive they would again settle in vulnerable zones near the cost, and will be hazard-prone as before.

According to Medha Patkar, a noted social activist and environmentalist, "tripartite approach" to the relief and rehabilitation operations in the tsunami-hit areas. She said the local community should be involved along with the officials and non-governmental organizations while deciding on the steps to be taken for their resettlement and resumption of livelihood. Local self-help groups could be formed in each village to procure the materials for the thatched roof and organize the local craftsmen. The local community must be empowered to monitor the execution of all kinds of works."

### **Observations**

It will be important to integrate the necessary safety measure in to the structures that are going to be constructed and to ensure that the standards are also maintained in the entire process.

This can only be ensured with community participating in the process. Other than the beneficiary family and the community at large, neither the contractors nor the government could ensure that the buildings are properly built. Rather than bringing in outside labourers and masons and materials, the community members could be empowered with additional skills and training. The whole process of rehabilitation needs to be seen as an opportunity to build the capacities and skills of the community and increase awareness to enable them to monitor the entire process to make sure that all the needs of habitat and housing are taken care of.

The upper reaches occupied by the farming community and the main produces are paddy and groundnuts. The agriculture land has become saline with the flooding of sea water and is not usable at least for three years.

## **V. LIVELIHOODS**

### **V.I Overview**

Tsunami not only took away the life of the people and destroyed the villages. It really spoiled their dream and daily bread. All of their livelihood, equipments, boats, Catamarans, nets are all damaged and destroyed due to tsunami.

There were multiple livelihood activities centred around fishing like selling, fish drying, artisans, poultry feed production from fishery waste, sea shell ornament makers etc., which are affected since the fishermen are unable to recommence fishing activities.

The killer wave has rendered hundreds of hectares of cultivable land saline and useless and destroyed the last crop, which were due for harvest. Due to this, agrarian workers also lost their daily job.

The wave also caused extensive damage to the saltpans, which was the livelihood of hundreds of workers. Tourism industry in the area also has got a blow and deprived dependent livelihoods of small traders, tourist guides, shopkeepers *et al.*

### **V.II Restoring Livelihoods**

Restoring the livelihoods is going to be a top priority in the long-term rehabilitation plan for the region. It requires immediate actions and long-term support to revive the industry back to normal.

### **V.III Fisheries**

The Immediate need of the fishermen community is to provide them with boats and catamarans and provide new nets and repair the existing one. The women demand the fish drying platforms to be rebuilt or repaired.

The Government has provided Rs. 10,000/- for those who have lost their Catamarans. But according to the fishermen, the money is not sufficient in the first place and the wood used to come from Srilanka and Kerala. Since the supply has stopped quiet some time back it seems difficult for them to get the wood to make the catamarans.

The fishermen have started collecting the damaged nets and clearing them of debris in a desperate attempt to restart their livelihoods. Nothing has been done with regard to nets so far. Once the fishing resumes the allied businesses are expected get resumed.

#### **V.IV Agriculture**

The immediate need in most of the region is to make efforts to drain the seawater, which has come stagnant in the fields. To avoid further degradation, the salt water needs to be drained and the land flushed with good water from irrigation canals and treated with chemicals like gypsum. A majority of the effects can be avoided with this, but it may take one or two seasons before the land returned to its normal state.

The irrigation canals are not operating to their efficiency in the region with hardly any maintenance being done. The traditional irrigation tanks in the region also have been filled with salt water. They also need to be cleaned immediately to avoid the infiltration of the salty water in to the aquifers below. It was found that in most of these areas there are a number of open wells and bore wells.

#### **V.V Observation**

The community needs to restart the livelihood as soon as possible as they are worried when the relief phase is going to end. As the livelihoods restoration is not a one-time activity, it needs vision, long term plans and longer-term commitments from the supporting agencies. Any plans to restore the coastal livelihoods would need to:

1. Planning at all stages of their developments has to be done in consultation with the primary stakeholders, the community.
2. It should be gender-sensitive and made so by incorporating suggestions from the women in the community.
3. It should be seen as an opportunity to improve the social capital of the society. Investments should be aimed at improving the capacities of the community and collective actions.
4. The livelihood restoration has to be with a developmental angle rather than disaster management. The opportunity should be utilized for development of the over all industry in the region and set developmental standards for others to follow.
5. The plans need to be done using “ecosystem planning” methodologies, realizing that any undesired changes in the pattern of fishing and marine operations will have a negative impact on the marine and coastal ecosystem. Care should be taken at all times to reduce such scenarios at any cost.

## **VI. BASIC SERVICES**

### **VI.I Healthcare**

#### **The response**

Overall, the government machinery has done a good job in containing outbreak of epidemics in the region. But there were reports of the incidence of chicken pox in Cudallore and Nagapattinam districts. People suffer from a range of health problems - rise in dysentery, diarrhoea especially in children due to unsafe water and lack of sanitation. Lack of public toilet in the village creates problem for women and children. There is also no drainage system in the village.

Most of the health centers are located two to five km away from the village. The distance makes it problematic for women and children who see medical care. They have to spend nearly Rs.20/- for just travel.

Government health team has set up camps in every village. Even the NGOs, aid agencies and the government mobile vans are visiting the villages. But they cater to general health services. Women's health needs are not being dealt with. Mobile health services were operating in the village to administer immunization and other preventive and curative services. Most of the medical staff has come from different neighboring districts. Since they do not give any record to the patients, follow-up will be very difficult.

The mental status of the women/children is a cause for concern. They do not get adequate sleep. The men are still afraid of going to sea. For the first time psychosocial aspects are being looked into on a large scale in disasters in India.

#### **VI.II Lack of facilities**

In Madathikuppam village, the medical camp has been set up with seven medical staff for the last 10 days. The records of the patients have been kept on paper and there is no proper system for managing these records.

We asked the doctor on the number of people who visit each day on an average and for what illness. He told us that mainly men and children come for the fractures, cough, cold and fever but very few women come. Around 20 patients a day visited this camp.

In the same village nearly five women including girls approached us and they feel embarrassed to go the health camp. In most of the villages, the health team is seating with one table. Mainly people are coming just to get free medicine. The facilities at these centers are inadequate. There is no table for check up, no pediatrician for checking children.

**VI.III Childcare** - The childcare system has been disturbed. We saw children playing in the sands and water logged areas. The personal hygiene was totally neglected. We have noticed the rise of skin infections, diarrhea and chicken pox among children. Women's groups with the help of youth associations can play an important role in sending children back to schools.

#### **VI.IV Psychosocial interventions**

People are still suffering from trauma. Most of the women reported that they are spending sleepless nights and having headaches and feel breathless. Girls are worried about their future since all their family assets have been washed off.

The village Pudukuppam has been totally destroyed. We met Papati who has lost all her children. She had lost her two children including her 9 month old daughter shows disturbance and loneliness. Papati said, government has given me compensation money, but what I will do as I have lost all my children. (The Government has subsequently offered recanalization for women who had undergone sterilization).

In Madathukuppam, we found that old age people had died just because of the shock of what they will do in future.

#### **Observations**

There is a need

- To provide card or record book to each patient
- To establish a community mutual fund. Women's groups and the young women who are into loading and selling fish should be covered in this schemes
- To create a system for referral service with the help of local health staff.
- To appoint a health worker for each village.

- To involve women's groups along with the help of adolescent girls and young boys in restoring education for children
- To facilitate women to share their distress and reorient them towards positive approach of life
- To create a team of women who can be trained in the psychosocial issues and can counsel the people.
- To make separate plans for the girls who have got injured and fractured like providing scholarship and creating fund for skills training at village level

## VII. Village Profiles

VII.I Village : Wanagiri  
Taluka : Sirkazhi  
District: Nagapattinam

When tsunami struck, most men were in the sea. Out of 53 deaths in the village, women and children were the main victims of the disaster. The deaths occurred because many of them got stuck with their dress or hair in the thorny bushes in and around the beaches. The rest fled from the village and ran as far as three to four kilometers. The entire rows of 'Kooore veedu' (thatched houses) on the coastline have been washed off. Modern structures too have been damaged.

### SCG Groups

The village has 39 SCG groups with an average of 15 members per group. Three NGOs, SNEHA, BEEDA and ROSA were behind the formation of the groups. The groups are active in terms of financial activities and have bank Linkages. They have received up to Rs. 100,000 as loan from banks. Some groups are fifteen years old while others are a few months old. The average monthly savings of members were around Rs. 50/- to Rs. 75/-.

There is no proper record keeping, as most of the fisherwomen are illiterate. Groups are also not aware about the status of their savings. Some groups have saved up to Rs.60, 000/-, they are not using for internal lending. They only rotate credits drawn from the bank, which is equally shared by all members.

### Demand For Community Centre

Women's groups have become quite active after the earthquake in the village. They have been demanding information about distribution of various relief materials. Women also came up with the demand for a community center for women. The outcomes of the discussion held with the group in the village are outlined below:

- Women identified the land for the community center. This land belongs to the temple and the group has committed to procure it after the discussion with the Gram Panchayat.
- As part of building their stake in the infrastructure, discussions were held on their contribution towards the construction of the center. They said their skills are limited but could contribute towards any kind of unskilled labor work needed for the construction. When reminded of the capacity building opportunities offered, a section of the group was inclined, while the other liked to stick to their traditional fishing related livelihoods.
- They decided to form a committee among themselves to coordinate the construction and to smoothen the activities like labor, material management etc.
- When we talked about the design of the center, they demanded a community hall model, which they could use for their meetings as well as renting out for marriages and other functions. This would generate some income towards maintaining it. The seating capacity should be for about 300 people with latrines and bathroom facilities.
- They also expressed their interest to procure necessary permission from the gram Panchayat and government offices in the next 10 days.

### Water and sanitation:

The drinking water supply to the village comes from Sayavanam Main tank, which is at a distance of five kms. from the village. The tank is filled with water from a bore well in the area. There are two service tanks in the village, which distribute water through stand posts and household connections to all the streets once in two days. There are a number of hand pumps in the village but the ground water is somewhat saline. Still people use this water for washing

and other household purposes. There were two small ponds in the village, which were used for bathing, washing and for animals. Now this pond become unusable as seawater has salinated after the tsunami.

The Gram Panchayat is responsible for the maintenance of the water supply system. They have appointed persons to fix the problems and regular maintenance. Each stand post is attached to a set of households. Only they are allowed to take water from these sources.

When we asked about the repair and maintenance, Mrs. Selvi Karunanidhi, responded, “We women only report it all the time. The GP usually does it fast, but there has been instances where have collected money and got the plumber to do the repair ourselves”. A user charge of Rs.30/- per month per household is laid for the household connections while the stand post supplies are free. Most of the houses on the beaches do not have any latrine and they defecate in the open space.

#### **Health situation**

The village does not have a Public Health Center and they go to nearby village for health services. They say that the ANM and other medical services have been operating poorly and there were no special services available for women. People have expressed their satisfaction over the medical services provided by NGOs and government during the relief phase. Various agencies administered immunization and offered curative services.

#### **Livelihoods**

Fishing was the most affected livelihood. Kattu marams, Vallams (small boats), big boats, nets and motors were either washed away or damaged beyond repair. There were quiet a number of people who earned their livelihood through fish marketing. All of them have lost their livelihoods.

Mel Wanagiri, the upper part of the village also had agrarian families. The seawater has entered and damaged their crops and the land is non-cultivable. Some NGOs have come forward to help these agriculturists to reclaim the land by applying gypsum and the work is in progress. The government Public Works Department [PWD] has assured water supply from irrigation channel for leaching the land of the salt deposits till the first week of February. The Fishermen have no means of going into the sea. In different discussions held with women, they expressed their willingness to learn other livelihood activities. They said that they knew nothing other than fishing and fish marketing.

#### **Relief in the village**

People seem to be largely contended with the relief work in terms of make shift shelters and medical supplies. But they are not happy over the distribution of Rs. 4000/- as relief money to the entire village. Kattavarayan and Balasubramanyam, two fishermen from the village said, “The Gram Panchayat has done malpractice in the distribution of the relief money. The money was to be distributed to family units. The Gram Panchayat members have made ten or more claims each; they made claims on many members of their family by forging signatures on claim papers”. The issue came out when a lot of claims were sent back by authorities saying they have already been taken and the money has already being distributed. The youth in the village got agitated over the matter and went on to manhandle the Gram Panchayat members. The accused GP members and the youths were arrested on the same day. The collector promised to look in to the matter. Still there is tension in the village and extra forces were deployed as a precaution. The village has given the responsibility of managing the relief work to a group of men headed by two locally accepted leaders and say they have lost confidence over the current Gram Panchayat.

In the case of Balasubrahmanyam, who had lost his wife complained that he has not received any relief material except one lakh rupees for compensation for the diseased and the 10,000/- for the boat.

**VII.II Village: Madathukuppam:  
Gram Panchayat: Perummthottam  
Taluka: Shirkali  
District: Nagapattinam**

In Madathikuppam village out of 14 persons died. We met a group of women mobilized by Ms. Marimuthu Among them was a vocal woman, Shivakaami, the leader of the 15 year old Durga group. “We lost lives of fourteen people from this village, ten women and four children. And here is another eight people still missing, but they too are assumed to be dead, since so many days have passed.” says Mr. Selvam, one of the fishermen leader. The fishermen community showed us the list of the dead and missing people, which they themselves helped to prepare the list.

**VII.III Vilage: Thoduvai  
Taluka: Sirgali  
District: Nagapattinam**

Population	2000
Total Death	33
Houses	800
Partially damaged	400
Fully damaged	400
Total boat	300
Completely damaged	225
Temporary shelter built by government	250
Average earning for a family	150
Fishermen Society	1
Ration Shop	1
School: Primary school	1
Health Centre	No

Thoduvai village is located 13 km from Sirgazhi. Here, 33 persons have died in the tsunami and most of them are women and children. The people who have lost their houses are now staying in temporary shelters. Even those who have not lost their houses have shifted from the seashore and live in their relatives’ or friends’ houses. They are scared of the prospects of yet another attack from the sea. There is a temporary shelter built by government, in which a total of 250 families are accommodated.

#### **Savings & Credit Groups**

There is a Savings and Credit Group (SCG), which was started by an NGO from Nagapattinam. The SCG members do not have the details about the SCG activities. The Head office is based at Nagapattinam and the women do not have a passbook for their savings account. There are twelve SCGs with a combined strength of 800. Each member saves Rs.100 a month and the collective keeps an account at the Indian Bank, Thirumalai Vasal. The women have savings for the last 6 months and each group has saved an average of Rs.20,000 to Rs.30,000.

“We have to go to Nagapattinam to get the details of the SCG and some people from there control the accounts. We do not even have a passbook,” said Muthulakshmi, the SCG leader in the village.

Thoduvai Panchayat has 7 members and there is only one woman representative. Gram Sabha meetings are not held regularly. The villagers often spend the daytime in their ruined houses, but go to houses of friends and relatives to sleep. Haunted by memories of the tsunami, most of them do not get proper sleep.

#### **Natural Disaster Prevention Shelter**

In 1984 Fisheries Department, Government of Tamil Nadu built Natural Disaster Prevention Shelters (popularly known as cyclone shelters) all over Tamil Nadu coastal areas to rehabilitate the fishermen community during any disaster especially cyclone. These shelters were built with the help of the European Economic Community (EEC). We have seen one of the shelters in Thoduvai. The government has not rehabilitated any villager in this shelter during tsunami, but built a new temporary shelter for them. Police and administrative officials now use the cyclone shelter for their stay.

#### **Healthcare**

The nearest government hospital is 3 km away at Thirumalaivasal. There is no health assistant in the village. The mental status of the women/children is a cause for concern. They do not get adequate sleep. The men are still afraid of going to sea. There is no public toilet or drainage facility in the village.

#### **Water supply**

After the disaster, water tankers are sent here daily. There is pipe water supply here but the water is salty and the pipes are damaged. The water from borewells is not potable due to high salinity.

#### **Education**

There is a school here, which has classes till 8<sup>th</sup> standard and after that they have to go to Thirumalai Vassal 3 km away from the village. The education of the boys and girls are limited to 8<sup>th</sup> standard as most of them have to work in the fishing sector to contribute to their families' livelihood.

#### **Livelihood**

The people here have lost their boats and nets and other livelihood supports. Repair and revival of boats and nets cost at least one lakh rupees per unit. The government has distributed Rs. 10,000 for boat repair but this is not sufficient. There is a fishermen's society. The members pay Rs.50 per month for 6 months and they get Rs.1200 after 10 months, with interest and government contribution.

“We cannot do anything else, fishing is in our blood. You give me pickaxe or spade we can't do anything,” said Velu Manikyam, a local fisherman. “Our children can't do any other job. Playing with sea and fishing is in our blood. Sea is our mother goddess.”

For senior citizens there is no pension. People in general are not aware of any benefit for the poor, elders and the handicapped. Most people belonging to these vulnerable sections are taken care of by their relatives. As in other villages in this coastal belt, alcoholism is prevalent in this community.

#### **Observation**

Muthukrisnan is a 12-year-old boy who lost a brother and two sisters in the tsunami. He cannot cop with the situation as memories of the tragic event still haunt him. His mother has not had any food for the past one week and the family is still in shock. The village had a mix of

problems even before the tsunami. It lacked basic facilities such as health care and sanitation. The people in the village are very cooperative and ready to do any activity that could benefit them. A model community centre could be constructed in this village as this is close to Thirumalai vassal and Kuzhayar both affected villages. SCG groups can be revived and act as catalysts to encourage better health care and awareness on government schemes.

**VII.IV Village: Swamiyar Pettai  
Taluka: Chidambaram  
District: Cuddalore**

Total Families	650
Total death	40
Houses damaged	75
Injured	36

**SCGs**

There are 10 SCGs with a total of 195 members. The credit interest rate is 2% and for medical emergency 1.5 %. Their saving is Rs. 100 per month. The groups have already contributed Rs.650 each for tsunami relief. The group is five-month-old and their account is at a local co-operative society. They have not received any loan so far.

The Village Panchayat is based at Thalayur another village 4 km away. There is no women representation in Panchayat Raj body. But the local councillor is a lady. Gram Sabha convenes once in a year to take important decisions regarding village development. Water is salty and pipes are damaged. The nearest hospital is 4 km away. The distance makes it problematic for women and children who see medical care. The local school has classes till 8<sup>th</sup> standard. There are educated boys and government employees in the village. The streets have drainage lines, but only a few houses have toilets.

**Observation**

The village women are confident and the SCGs are working normally. These groups have participated in the tsunami relief work and contributed their share. Oxfam has approached them to help setting new SCGs. Most of the village boys are educated. They also maintain close links with the Vanniyar community, a group of prosperous traders living near the village.

**VII.V Village: Bommayar Palayam  
Taluka: Vanoor  
District: Villupuram**

Population	1200
Household	450
Total death	5 (3 - child; 1 - boy; 1 - girl)
Houses damaged	250
Injured	18
Fishermen society	1 (331 members)
Destitute	1
Disabled	9
Old Age	75
Widows	67

Bommayar Palayam village is a part of Tamil Nadu, close to the border of Pondicherry.

After the Tsunami the villagers have refused to accept temporary shelters in locations without shops and other facilities. Still the government has started building temporary shelters in a

remote area. Several people here complained that they had not get any compensation yet. Now people are staying with friends and relatives and they are not happy with the government rehabilitation programme. The government ha not paid compensation to the kin of people who died in the hospital after suffering injuries in the tsunami.

### **SCGs**

Kalvi Kendra an NGO from Villupuram has formed a new SCG here after the tsunami. The group has a total of 200 members spread in 12 groups.

### **Healthcare**

Villagers prefer the nearby Pondicherry hospitals to the Tamil Nadu ones, because of the good facilities and services offered by these central government institutions. Besides, the Tamil Nadu hospital in the district centre of Cuddalore and Villupuram more than 20 km away. Still women and children often end up paying huge amounts for private medical care. On an average a family spends Rs. 800 on health care. The local panchayat president belongs to a caste different from that of the village majority, and many people complained that they do not get any benefit. Total panchayat members are 8 and there is no woman representation.

### **Village conflicts**

This village is close to a Vanniyar community-dominated area. Clash and conflicts are regular between the villagers and the Vanniyars. Kumar, a local fisherman said: ““The ‘other’ community sent back a lot of relief material, saying there is no fisherman staying in the coastal area.” There is no bore well. The pipes are damaged and the water is salty. Tankers are coming to the village daily and the villagers have to depend on this service. The school in the village has classes upto 5<sup>th</sup> standard the high school is located 7 km away.

There are about 75 youth but there is no youth club or association. About 75 old aged persons and around 67 widows in the village. They have no knowledge about any government pension for widows, poor people or the disabled. They are not aware about any government schemes and programmes. There is a balawadi with strength of 60 children. There are people who do other jobs like driving, carpenters etc. There is a private bus service to the village. Fishermen society account is in SBI, Villupuram. They have difficulty to get loan.

### **Gram Sabha**

Usually Gram Sabhas are held in temples every week. But there is no representation of women in these meets. All the major decisions related to their families will be taking by the Gram Sabha leaders.

The leader of the Gram Sabha Arumugan had prepared a full list of damaged houses, loss of livelihoods, died persons and going around the government officials to get the relief properly. There are people who run financial assistance to the family with 10 to 12 % interest rate!!.

### **Observation**

This village is close to Pondicherry than Tamil Nadu district centres. East and west are Pondicherry territory and they are isolated from Tamil Nadu.

To come out of the village, the local people have to cross a Vanniyar- dominant village next to theirs. There are frequent clashes between these communities. Vanniyars are very strong in this area with about 4,000 households, compared with the fisherfolk who comprise only 1200 households.

An NGO has already started working with women on SCG work after the tsunami. There is a potential to work with these communities on women’s health and community centers.

**VII.VI Thalamkuda**  
**Taluka: Cuddalore**  
**District: Cuddalore**

Total death	36 (Women - 15)
Households	200
Population	1200
Old aged	120
Widows	100
Damaged boats	47

This village is 8 km away from Cuddalore town. People in this village have refused to stay in temporary shelters, so the government did not build any shelter for them. They have demanded the government to build Permanent houses, not temporary one. Finally, the government did not build the temporary shelters for them. Now they are staying with friends and relatives.

The villagers' first priority is a permanent house away from seashore and the next is repair or replacement of boats and nets. Like other villagers they also want to stay away from the sea. There are no schools after 8th standard and for further studies, children have to go to Manjakuppam high school about 4 km away.

**SCGs**

SCGs are functioning in the village with total strength of 200 members. There are 10 groups and each group has 20 members. They save Rs.100 per month. They do not have passbook and no other details about functioning the SCG.

**Local Bodies**

Gram Sabha meetings are held every Sunday to discuss family related issues and solve them on the spot. No other social issues are discussed in the Gram Sabha. The Gram Panchayat is located at a different village called Villooranathan 4 km away. Out of 11 Gram Panchayat members' not single women represent the panchayat body.

**Water supply**

As in other villages pipes are damaged and the water is not potable. Tanker service is available after tsunami.

**HealthCare**

The nearest local hospital is at Manjakuppam, 3 km away. There is no public toilet in the village and the villagers use public space for their daily routine. Women suffer as they get no privacy. There is also no drainage system in the village. Children are given pulse polio in medical camps. Average monthly health expenditure for a family is Rs.300. *Chicken pox*: Now chicken pox started spreading in the villages and about 80 people have infected the disease. Collector and doctors have visited the village after hearing the news. There is a post office and Balwadi. Also there is a ration shop and bus services are available. Regarding the professionals are concerned, there are about 20 students who have passed/studying in ITI (Industrial Technical Institute). People in general are not aware about the government schemes for widows, destitute or disabled. There is a Fishermen society but getting loan is very difficult for them.

**Observation:**

People are adamant to get permanent houses. They want to get new boats or repair the existing one and new nets.

**VII.VII Village: Periya Kalapet  
Union Territory: Pondicherry**

Total population	2000
Total death	17 death (6 - child; 6- women; 5 - male)
No of Injured	26
Total houses	600
Houses damaged	400

In this village close to Pondicherry city, a temporary shelter was functioning in the local school. When the school started after vacation, the displaced people had to move out and there is no alternative/initiative by the government to rehabilitate them. Still those who have lost the houses are staying with their friends and relatives. They have received the relief money Rs. 2000 + 25 kg rice from Pondicherry government. Since the money is spending for urgent things they are already in debt.

This relief money is not enough for them to survive. Though they are getting rice and other relief material, they have to purchase vegetables and other material from the market since there is no fish available.

**SCGs**

SCGs are active in this village and they have contributed Rs. 42,000 loan to members after the tsunami. This is a government-sponsored scheme and their account is at Indian Bank. The monthly saving is Rs. 100. There are 20 groups with 12 members each.

**Gram Panchayat**

The Gram Panchayat is very strong and influential in resolving local conflicts and settling family disputes. They meet every Sunday and the decisions taken by the Gram Sabha leaders are final. Normally about 300 villagers would attend the Gram Sabha. As usual there is no women representation in the Gram Sabha.

**Kadal Thai Youth Association**

The Youth Association is very active in sports, recreation and social service. It has a strength of 80 members and participate in various sports and temple festivals, independent day, new year etc. The members contribute Rs.10 per head for the association per month. When the tsunami struck Youth association conducted a health camp in the village, a well-attended affair supported by doctors and paramedical staff.

Widows get a monthly pension of Rs. 400 from Pondicherry Government and there are about 100 widows. Out of this about 15 to 20 widows are in the trade of fish selling, each earning Rs.50 a day. There are 24 handicapped persons and each of them gets a pension of Rs.400 per month. There are two orphans in the village, one of them, a boy, lost both the parents in the tsunami. There is pipe water supply as well as a bore well . Water Supply is good and there is no tanker service in the village. The local hospital is located nearby and there is a functional balwadi.

There are seven government employees and fifteen qualified electricians in the village. But there are no carpenters or artisans in the village. The local school has classes till 12<sup>th</sup> standard. Local people complained that were not getting good sleep, because of the fear of yet another tsunami. Men are mentally not prepared to go to sea even if their boats and nets are repaired.

**Observation**

As this village is located near the city of Pondicherry, it gives a picture sharply different from that of other coastal villages. The infrastructure is good when compared to its Tamil Nadu

counterparts. Healthcare centres and educational institutions are located nearby, there are people serving in the government as well as students in colleges. The youth are very active too.

Apart from all these facilities, the women's status has still to be improved. Their health condition is comparatively worse than that of men.

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