

# Building Back Better: From Tsunami Recovery to Disaster Prevention

Action workshop to scale up women/community initiative

27th December 2006, Santhome, Chennai

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) in partnership with Knowledge Links and Covenant Centre for Development (CCD) organised Action workshop to scale up women and community initiative in tsunami intervention on 27<sup>th</sup> December in Chennai. This workshop was held with the support of Huairou Commission, Groots International and disasterwatch.net

Active participation of grassroots leaders, NGOs, Govt Officials and experts made the workshop very interactive by sharing and hearing the initiatives in Tsunami Reconstruction at grassroots level in Tamil Nadu. Among them Mr. Vinod Menon, (NDMA, Govt of India) and Mr. C.V. Sankar, Officer on Special Duty (Rehabilitation, Govt of Tamil Nadu) carefully listened to the grassroots initiatives in different levels.

Prema Gopalan in her introductory remarks pointed out that this workshop is intended to share the initiatives by grassroots people, CBOs and NGOs, and how it could be scaled up further.

In his keynote address, Mr. Vinod Menon highlighted the community involvement in tsunami reconstruction. He said the temporary shelters were facing difficulties, permanent construction activities not done properly and many houses are still to be built. Just constructing of houses is not enough, we have to build schools, health centres, bridges and other facilities in these areas, he indicated.

We have to bring back the life. It may take one more year. Are we building back better? Can we build up in such a way or back to the situation we had before? The challenge of community, NGOs and government is to bring back the normalcy.



After the introduction of participants, grassroots leaders presented the initiatives in tsunami.

## FISHERIES SECTOR

### **Manimekalai, Fisher women Federation, Pumpuhar**

Pre-tsunami, women were not permitted to talk to anyone except customers at the fish market. Men have insurance but women have none. She requested the government to provide insurance to children and women living on the coastal zone. The priority in rehabilitation should go to widows and abandoned women. Initially fishermen Panchayat was against women federation.

When they formed SHGs, have a saving of 40 crores so far and it will cross one crore rupees in this year. They planted trees along the coast to prevent the disasters. She stressed the coordination among traditional and elected panchayat to improve the situation in the village.

### **Chithra, SHG leader and ASHAA member, Keelamoovarkarai**

Women helped men in the village to remove dead bodies, taking people to safe places. Post-tsunami, only men were engaged in these tasks. We ensured that everyone affected got the benefits. In our SHGs several members had died and they had taken loans to the tune of 10 lacs. All records had been swept away. We approached the authorities and got these loans written off.

An NGO wanted to build toilets in our village and we negotiated that they build toilets in each one's household and it was done. Fishermen drink a lot and harass their wives and we have removed liquor shops from our village through an agitation.

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**Moahana, ASHAA member, Singarathoppu village, Cuddalore:** Before tsunami women were not coming out. Now they are involved in community development. SHGs (ASHAA Group) started Solid Waste Management in our village. We want to expand these activities into neighbouring villages. It provides us an income as well as house and surroundings are clean and green. We want to get the Training on Disaster Preparedness.

**John Suresh, PLANT, Thiruvalluvar district:** We formed men's group. It is very difficult to organise men. Now the asset is 1.2 lakh to 2 lakh. For better precaution and prevent of future disasters, we conduct education and awareness programmes within the community. We provided GPS for fishermen to reach safely and track the fish movement. Formation of fish finders is useful identifying the area where fish is abundant.

**Sasikala, Community leader, Indira Nagar:** During the flood in Dec 2005 in Tamil Nadu, the worst affected neighbouring villages were totally isolated. SHGs in our village decided to help them. We visited the village which were affected by floods. We gave them food, clothes, drinking water and cash collected from the whole village as a gesture of solidarity and also as a result of our own experience in tsunami. They had helped us. We joined together, contributed money, purchased food items, cooked, packed and distributed. We used boats to distribute the food. Initially men in the village were hesitant to help us. Youth from the village helped us. This activity continued for one week until the village situation comes into normal.

## AGRICULTURE SECTOR

**Anbarasi, SHG Leader (CEAD):** We desalinated the land with the help of CEAD. Now women's groups run vermin compost and the village is clean now. To increase the income of SHG members, we segregate wet/dry solid waste material and using the vermiculture method. We produce manure and sell to market. Now each member earns around Rs.4000/- a month. Ten villages around our habitat have picked up this practice. Not a single waste is there in our village now.

We formed the Federation called Amudham which helped us to produce, market, and provide training for members. We collaborate with school students and adolescents groups.

**Ganesh, CEAD, Pondicherry:** We organized men and women to desalinate the agricultural lands, desilted drainage and canals. We have organized 58 farmers' self-help groups, provided training on waste management for other communities and NGOs.

Unfortunately there are no subsidies from the Government for organic fertilizers. Post-tsunami, members have saved and lent to needy farmers Rs.66.5 lac in a year of which over 95% has been repaid. Federation lends money before planting time and so farmers are free of usurious money lenders. They have to repay only after harvest. Farmers did not get the subsidy per acre of Rs.12,500 properly. This needs to be rectified in the at least now. The functioning of the agricultural department needs toning up in the tsunami affected areas.

## Dialogue with NDMA and Government of Tamil Nadu

During the day participants had a dialogue with Dr. Vinod Menon (NDMA, Government of India) and C.V. Sankar (Government of Tamil Nadu).

Chitra, ASHAA leader from Keelamoovarkkarati villages asked to provide Identity Cards for ASHAA members to work with PHCs and Government offices. Mr. Shankar said to get a copy of the identity card is being used in Maharashtra to replicate it in Tamil Nadu. He said that the Government has a large amount of money; it is people's money and that they should put up their requirements from each area.

Rajasekar, CCD Farmers federation leader requested that the priority should be given to children of farmers in agricultural colleges for B.Sc/M.Sc agriculture.

Pushparani, from Chengalpettai requested that Government should look into the electricity problem in her village. C.V. Sankar informed her to meet the officials in Chennai.

Dr. Menon stressed the need to study of Salt Pan Workers. He is pointed out that there is a need for understanding the reasons for such a huge price differences for salt in Vedaranyam and Thoothukudy. He also urged that wage difference in that region between men and women need to be sorted out. SHGs should work on this issue. Government insists on equal wages.

FACE requested the help of like minded NGOs with professional expertise in trade union organization and micro finance management.

Manimegalai requested the government to provide financial support for the time of holiday in the month of May and June.

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**Rajasekar, Cauvery Delta Federation, Poompuhar:** Our major impact was bringing 1000 acres of dry land under cultivation. This is done by farmers group. We constructed godowns in various villages to store our products. This place can also be used for meeting and training.

We formed farmers groups and federations. Federation provides loans to the members thus eliminating usurious money lenders. All schemes should reach farmers directly. People should prevent giving bribe to government officials. Farmers' children should get admission in agricultural college.

**Pushparani – Community leader, Fisherwomen Federation leader, Kancheepuram district:** We organised 150 Groups of dalits and fishermen community. Now we can go to offices, meet collector, access the schemes from govt.

We provide loan for Rs. 1000-2000 from their savings. We have formed Children's Groups and started their own savings. We also have adolescents and youth groups. When the construction of the houses was not properly done, we organised ourselves and asked the contractor to construct well. Due to our united effort we got good houses.

**Vasantha, GUIDE, Kancheepuram District:** We facilitate and women take decision on community involvement in addressing local issues. We conduct Children's parliament on information and awareness building. We provide training on govt schemes to access it properly, construct houses for dalits and assist them to access govt schemes. We empower women to speak out.

## ANALYSIS

- 2000 acres of land were salinated by tsunami
- Crops which were ready for harvest were destroyed by the tsunami; that too after two years of drought.
- Banks do not lend to farmers and hence they get trapped by usurious money-lenders
- High cost chemical inputs have impoverished the land and the yield has reduced – land needs to be rejuvenated.

## POLICY SUPPORT NEEDED

- \* Recognize farmers' federations as a route to lend money to farmers
- \* Peer control ensures 99% repayment
- \* The Government is requested to link NABARD to Registered Farmers' Federations

## HEALTH SECTOR

**Chitra, ASHAA leader, Keelamoovarkkurai, Nagapattinam:** In my village, there are 350 houses and 22 SHGs. We want the entire village to get the benefit of rehabilitation inputs. Our women too removed dead bodies, pulled out the injured from the debris and acted as the first line rescue and relief workers by making common kitchens etc. We have regular contact with village health nurse and PHC doctor.

SHGs obtained pension from government for the aged and the widows. Earlier our village did not have toilet facilities and when an NGO came to build common toilet blocks, the SHGs requested them to construct individual toilets.

During Chikun Gunya, we have organised special medical camps in ten villages with the help of PHC. PHC services were under utilized; hence we registered all pregnant women at the PHC and improved its utilization.

Alcohol problem was rampant in my village. Through a signature campaign we got the local liquor shop closed. We launched an agitation to close down illicit brewing joints.

**Arumugam, BLESS, Cuddalore:** Before tsunami nobody addressed fishermen's woes. Temporary toilets became another disaster in the area. In the coastal zone drinking water was available within ten feet and poor sanitation ruined ground water.

Total sanitation project does not have any concept of Ecosan. We organised 7200 farmers in 2 blocks in 32 villages in Cuddalore. We need better coordination among Traditional Panchayat and Elected Panchayat.

BLESS campaigns on EcoSan toilets in entire coastal areas. We have started Total Sanitation Campaign in 101 villages.

**Dr. Ravi, FACE, Vedaranyam:** The Government doctors in Vedaraniyam need to be shifted out and good doctors have to be appointed. Women workers in salt pan have to start their work by 3.00 a.m. since during the day, it is very hot and there is too much of glare. Their work is very hard; they develop neck pain and severe head ache.

**Ezhilarasi, ASHAA member, Sonangkuppam, Cuddalore**  
Now all women have been enrolled into SHGs. We have organized women to segregate solid waste into biodegradable/non-degradable items. Assisted women to resume their original occupation, facilitated children...

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Facilitated children orphaned by tsunami to get admitted in Government orphaned by tsunami to get admitted in Government created facilities and worked in *tandem* with the PHC to create awareness about Chikun Gunya disease in the village.

We petitioned the Collector to remove stagnant water pools and he sent the PWD personnel to level the roads to prevent mosquito breeding. Each woman member of Village health committees pooled Rs.50 a month and the money was used to help the needy for their health care services without any interest.



### SALT SECTOR—TOWARDS INCLUSIVE REHABILITATION

**Dr. Ravi, FACE, Vedaranyam:** Salt Pan Workers are the poorest of the poor in the country. Their work days are only 80-100 per annum. All the salt pans were washed away by the tsunami and the salt pans were filled with sea mud and slush. The Government had not listed them among the segments affected by the tsunami.

Lack of transportation of salt through land and sea routes. While the salt fetches Rs.400/- per tonne in Tuticorin, salt from Vedaraniyam is sold at Rs.150/-. More iodized salt is produced in Vedaraniyam than in Tuticorin. The critical factor is lack of transport. The Government had not listed them among the segments affected by the tsunami. There are 2,00,000 salt pan workers (SPW) in TN and in Vedaranyam has 30,000.

**Ms. Kalaiarasi, Women community leader (FACE):** Our names have been taken for housing, but we do not know what will happen? We formed 82 groups and enterprises. Women cook early and go to work at 2 am. We face neck and head pain; body pain; we have to walk a long way for work. We do not want our kids to do this work. We are unable to educate our children if men alone work.

We conducted study tour to Tuticorin. There is no security to get loan from bank. Some of these groups are into poultry, coir making and they need to scale up. People are migrating to Rameswaram. We don't have proper light, water.

**Initiatives:** Men get Rs.80 per day and women Rs.35. But FACE paid equal wages for both men and women. We provided cash for work programme to assist salt pan workers to clean the salt pans. FACE provided support to start rabbit/poultry farms, coir making and other income generating activities for SPWs. It erected 30 sheds where SPWs can rest during hot weather at work place. We Supplied tarpaulin sheets to SPWs to protect the salt from rains. We also facilitated students to obtain Government scholarship to continue studies.

We encouraged alternate employment opportunities during the lean season. Gave Rs.1000 per group as revolving fund. Around 3000 salt pan workers were organized to meet the Collector. Government provided compensation for loss to a part of the affected. We mobilized leaders of all political parties to constitute Vedaraniyam Development Committee (VDC).

### DISASTER WATCH— *A peer learning activity initiated by Huairou Commission.*

*As part of Disaster Watch, community leaders Kanta Bai Patil and Annapurna Devi from Sakhi Federation, Latur, Maharashtra; Nirmuberben Patel and Gomiben Chavda, SHG leaders from Gujarat; Niteesh Kumar, Knowledge Links, Delhi; Prema Gopalan, SSP visited Tsunami affected villages in Nagapattinam & Cuddalore districts on Dec 25 & 26, 2006 to see the initiatives and changes after two years.*

**Kanta Bai Patil, Sakhi Federation, Latur:** In Latur Earth quake, Government was not visible for a few days, people did remove the rubble, pulled out the injured and took them to hospitals. It was self-help. Government developed a scheme to involve women's groups in the process. Government appointed women's groups to supervise the construction in each village. We were called *Samvad Sahayaks* or communication assistants. Government paid a stipend of Rs.600/- each of the community communicators. *Samvad Sahayaks* were appointed in 500 villages to supervise the construction work of 200,000 permanent shelters.

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## DISASTER WATCH

We went to each house and ensured that the house is built properly. We underwent training to supervise construction; to check whether proper quantities of cement and sand are mixed, we are going to live in it; we need to be watchful. Initially, masons dismissed us saying what women know of construction. We also kept track of the work of the engineers appointed by the Government. For the review meetings, along with engineers we too were called by the Government; our opinions were also sought by Government. We even got three engineers suspended.

After the house construction was over, we did not return home to merely cooking and washing clothes; but formed 22 groups and started savings and credit groups. Now we have 10 federations in Maharashtra. We have women who do small business, access loans from federation, know how to get Government schemes and have urged the Panchayats to apply for them.

I see that in Tamil Nadu, a large number of houses are yet to be constructed; that the kitchen is too small and toilets are inside the house. NGOs should involve women and take their suggestions in the design of the house.

**Gomi Ben Chavda, SHG leader, Shirani Wand, Kutch, Gujarat :** After Gujarat Earth Quake, it took more than three days for NGOs to reach our village. We helped ourselves initially. We thought that the Government will help us for everything.

In Kutch, villages are far flung and small. For the first three days, villages not on the highways did not get any external assistance. We noticed that outsiders and Government people were only talking to the educated villagers. We decided to put our children to study. Earlier, very few of us sent our children to school.

We formed women's groups and federation. We gave loans; we have more than 400 groups now. Loans have been given for more than 100 groups for agriculture. It comes back to us. Prior to the Earthquake, women would not come outside the house; nor talk to men outside the family. SSP trained us and we constructed with masons our community centers where we hold our cluster meetings. Here, women of all castes would mingle and talk which was prohibited earlier.

*Mahila Mahiti Kendra (MMK) Women's Information Centers*, were helpful for women to come together, provide training programme for the girls.

In Tamil Nadu, after tsunami, women are more organized but women's burden has increased; they look after children, family, cook, sell the fish, look after business; thus, though income has gone up significantly after tsunami, their workload has increased.

### Disaster Watch main findings:

- Newly built houses are good with water connection
- In the new settlement, people are from the same village, women are allowed to go out; they attend meetings and speak out.
- Bad things are lack of PHC, Schools and Rations shops are at distance
- Spending money for sending children to school has increased but income has decreased.
- Organisations such as CBOs and SHGs are visible, access to information is much easier, communication channels and using of technology has improved, and skills on handling bank accounts, negotiations are enhanced.

## Manu Gupta, SEEDS, Delhi: Community Radio Experience in Andaman & Nicobar Islands

Andaman & Nicobar islands are more than 500 small islands. In the community radio experience we started this initiative with All India Radio, Port Blair. We share our experience across community, across islands.

Now the Government of India has relaxed the policy on Community Radio. Anyone can start it. We used AIR Channel to broadcast our information and sharing. We have ongoing programme of Micro Credit. Community radio helping people come to know what is available locally.

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**V.C. Nadarajan, CCD, Madurai:** Mr. Nadarajan made the presentation on the intervention in agrarian sector by CCD. He described how CCD helped farmers for converting land to fertile. They formed groups and savings.

**Concluding remarks by Vinod Menon:** In his concluding remarks Dr. Vinod Menon said, this workshop is a very useful learning experience. I have been to several districts and places to see the situation. Listening to you people make me well aware about what went wrong and what to be done.

It is also interesting to listen the Maharashtra and Gujarat grassroots women on their assessment of tsunami work and their own experience.

A study conducted recently shows that Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are coming forward in the area of women power. We need to study and take it forward. Kudumbashree in Kerala is an excellent example.

Dr. Menon thanked CCD, SSP, Knowledge Links for field visits to capture the mood and trend of the community. He stated that NIDM is documenting tsunami experiences in different states and needed more.

**C.V. Shankar, Officer on Special Duty, Relief, Govt of Tamil Nadu**

Nobody can prevent disasters, but we can reduce the vulnerabilities. For this we should use better technology, early warning system and disaster task force have to be established. Government is implementing the Disaster Management Plan in the state. We should understand who should be saved first, how and what are the preparations? How can we create Task Forces in villages, how do we update frequently?

Self Help Groups have an important role to play to carry forward the initiatives. If you take the statistics the number of SHGs increased after tsunami as 2,70,000 members joined in SHGs. The earning of the fishermen community is varying. They can't go to sea for 6 months. Income levels becomes ups and down. They have to form groups and access loans and govt schemes. There are revolving funds by govt of Tamil Nadu, you have to use it.

We should give Training for computers and other livelihood activities. Use govt schemes for house repair and rebuilding old houses. Central govt Health Insurance plan is a better way to reduce the burden on health expense. We should watch the programme how it is implemented. We respect the capacity of women. They are marginalised section. Government cannot do everything. If we work together with Community, NGOs and CBOs, it will be very effective and sustainable.

"We can always build it better if everybody works together".

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SHELTER SECTOR

- \* Should consult women while construction
- \* Permanent houses should be given to widows and abandoned women
- \* Government should take out insurance policy for them pay the premium
- \* Government should examine the new settlement structures for their standards and to ensure it is safe and provides better infrastructure.
- \* Women should get information on all schemes for their development.
- \* Cyclone shelters need to be kept operational through regular community activities.
- \* Implement the new scheme for providing pucca houses to all hutments on the coast.

### FISHERIES SECTOR

- \* When the fishing holiday is declared for 45 days in the month of May, the Government should provide ration and Rs.500 financial support per month per person.
- \* In the monsoon season, the Government should provide support to the fisherfolk to reduce the work load.
- \* The Government should facilitate scaling up of alternate livelihood initiatives with adequate funds.

### SALT SECTOR

- \* Urge the Salt Commissioner at the Central Government to establish SPWs' Welfare Board
- \* Liaison with the Minister of State for Railways to ensure that he fulfils the promise to extend the operation of railways upto Vedaraniyam
- \* Obtain recognition for the salt industry on par with agriculture and legitimize subsidies.
- \* Obtain a waiver of loans of SPWs as is done for farmers affected by tsunami
- \* Link Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme with the SPWs.

### AGRICULTURE SECTOR

- \* Provide the capital to Panchayats to create a grain bank
- \* Create a Panchayat fund for all villages on the irrigation/drainage canals for periodic desilting
- \* Farmers did not get the subsidy per acre of Rs.12500 properly. This needs to be rectified in the at least now.
- \* The functioning of the agricultural department needs toning up in the tsunami affected areas.
- \* Form farmers' associations, federate them and the Government should Register them.
- \* Government should disseminate agriculture related development schemes through these federations.
- \* Till 2006 Farmers' Federations have lent Rs. forty crores through their own savings and these have been returned after harvest. Hence, banks should give loans to farmers through these federations.
- \* Organic farming a strong movement in Tamil Nadu. The Government should provide subsidies and marketing support to this movement and promote it State-wide.
- \* Preference should be given to the children of farmers in the admissions for B.Sc./M.Sc agricultural courses.

### HEALTH SECTOR

- \* Provide identity cards for women's groups to monitor health services
- \* Involve NGOs and SHGs in implementing govt health programmes
- \* Create public— private partnership in health care services.