

## Trainers Network for Disaster to Development, Tamilnadu, India

Tharangambady, Nagapattinam dt.  
December 19, 2008



Grassroots women from Cuddalore and Nagapattinam districts were assembled together to share the initiative in disaster risk reduction. This has been organized by Trainers Network for Disaster to Development, Tamilnadu. Though the network was active for the last 6 months this event was used as formal launching pad.

In commemoration of South Asia Tsunami 4+, women leaders from eight federations assembled together to announce the state level network of grassroots community trainers in disaster risk reduction. The event was well attended by more than 100 trainers from Cuddalore and Nagapattinam district to share the initiatives after tsunami and declare action for the coming years. The event was facilitated by ROSE, CCD, and SSP.

As Kasturi Chandrasekar from Mahakalasangam Federation, Madurai pointed out in her speech that this is the right time to wake women community to organize themselves and work towards sustainable development linking disaster risk reduction.

### Summary

Selvarani, Disaster Task Force team leader, Vellakoil village, Nagapattinam District.



Our village is small and there was no unity among community. We never went out, attend any meetings or speak before tsunami. Now we lead the community from the front because we have got courage and confidence thru knowledge and learning from tsunami initiatives. Now we are more united, women are going out, speak in meetings, understand the issues etc. Because of our initiative many issues has solved related to water, light, waste management etc by approaching local govt.

Training on disaster task force was an important element in our experience. This training has changed us slowly; we understood our strength, skills and shortfalls. Now men from our village wait for our action and advice. It can be of anything form approaching govt officials, good road or electricity.

Our Task Force Team in Vellakoil village was trained by Sanghamitra from Andhra Pradesh in 2005. We have a full fledged team of 30 members consists of 6 members in each 5 groups. Representation of women and men are equal. Now we have developed our skills further and started training other villages in Tamilnadu.

Our first training as trainers was at Thennampattinam village where Women's Federation on Disaster Management and Community Development, Nagapattinam (facilitated by SSP). Now Thennampattinam task force started give training to other villages as well. Then we went to Madurai, Pudukkottai districts to provide training on flood affected communities where task force teams have been formed.

We also have our own savings to sustain the activities and we prepare ourselves to protect our village. We have visited Nagapattinam collectorate to show our skills in front of Fire Force.

Our total savings for Disaster Task Force savings is over rupees one lakh at the moment. It includes contribution from NGO ROSE, rich people from the village and our own.

During the recent rains we were well prepared and there was no fear or problem in our village. We know how to protect ourselves, we went to beach and check whether boats are safe, we had food and stayed at home.

We get respect in society. Our strength has increased and skills are developed.

#### **Manimegalai, Fishvending Federation, Poompohar, Nagapattinam Dt**



Manimegalai spoke about the trainer's network initiative. She stressed about the need for bringing various knowledge and skills of women as the network has different kind of federations.

She said, "This event shows the unity of women and we can become good leaders of community. We all came here to share our experience and knowledge by separate federations and become the strength of grassroots women's initiatives in DRR.

#### **Kasturi Chandrasekar, Mahakalsm Federation, Madurai**



Kasturi shared her experience of GROOTS India with her experience from the beginning. She said, "this moment is very important for me. It is a dream comes true after 18 years of my effort with grassroots communities.

In 1996 when CCD started Mahakalsam nobody was educated. Community was not envisioned the changes. We had 4 federations before tsunami in non-coastal areas. After tsunami we came to work with fishermen and agricultural communities in coastal areas. When we started organizing community into livelihood activity groups, there was problem of plenty. We doubt whether we can continue our work. We did not gave money to people but organized them to start own business to rebuild the lives. Now these groups are capable of taking initiatives in their villages, train other community and share their knowledge not only in Tamilnadu but also other countries as well.

#### **Chitra, Leader, Women Federation for Disaster Management and Community Development, Nagapattinam**



Like other villages SHGs activities was only in name before tsunami in my community. The only activity was to collect money by leaders and put in to the bank. Women did not realize their strength.

After tsunami SSP visited our village, identified health, water and sanitation is the priority for action. We learned how to tackle these issues and make it sustainable. The formation of ASHAA (Association for Health Awareness and Action) was the turning point. The ASHAA group provides space to enhance knowledge, bring the community in health issues, negotiate with local government, reduce the health expenditure, encourage visiting primary health centre, accessing govt schemes etc.

In the time of Chikun Gunya we have discouraged people to access govt health system to reduce the health expenditure. We have reduced lots of training from SSP and other NGOs. We transfer this knowledge to many communities.

**Hazard Mapping** development training was another tool which we could prepare ourselves to reduce the risk in disaster. Through this training we understood what vulnerability is and how to use local resources carefully in the time of disaster.

We know the problem of low lying areas and narrow roads, etc. We also have the knowledge of resources in the village, how to make use of it and prepare community. We have provided hazard mapping training in 4 villages. Our next six months plan is to cover 10 more villages to create resilient communities.

As Selvarani said we have also received **Disaster Task Force** training from ROSE. After this training we have updated our knowledge through learning exchanges and exposure visits. Now we have provided task force training into three more villages where they also setup such team.

Thenampattinam panchayat received **Nirmal Gram Puraskar** award from Government of India for one of the best panchayat in sanitation initiatives. The main energy behind this award was ASHAA. ASHAA groups provided several awareness programme in the village on toilet construction, village cleaning, govt linkage and formation of federation.

When Sri Lanka grassroots women team visited our village was impressed by our work in health, water and sanitation.

”Here I would like to say that our network federations have different kind of activities. This gives us a wide range of knowledge and experience. I am sure that this network will be a good initiative in Tamilnadu to show other states to follow suit. Because of these kinds of workshops and exchanges we learn a lot on grassroots activities.”

#### **Vijayalakshmi, Women Federation for Disaster Management and Community Development, Cuddalore Dt**



Vijayalakshmi briefed about how SSP facilitated grassroots women to take initiatives in community health. Appointment of health guides and later formation of ASHAA was crucial in Cuddalore villages to change the scenario.

We are working closely with primary health centre, local govt offices and other institutions. Now we have our savings that created in forming women’s federation, conducting village health checkups by contributing money to invite doctors and lab test centres. We promote good health behavior by encouraging to use herbal medicines, growing herbal trees thus by discouraging to use of allopathic medicines which has side effects and costly.

Now men from our village says “Women are doing everything” Now they approach us to get any demands, help from local govt.

#### **Rajendran, Health Inspector, Thiruvangad Primary Health Centre (PHC), Nagapattinam Dt**



I feel very happy to see such an energetic gathering of women. In my opinion, “if a boy study, he will be useful for home, but if a girl study she would be helpful for the entire community. That is my learning.”

He briefed about his experience with ASHAA leaders in changing the primary health centre at Thiruvangad. The infrastructure of PHC, behaviour of staff and attitude of community was not favour before tsunami. Very few patients were accessing the centre, there was no proper medicine, other facilities. When ASHAA was formed in neighbouring village organized campaign on improving health facilities, encouraging community to access health centre, negotiating with doctors on awareness programme etc. The situation changes immensely as community started accessing PHC, doctors do their duties more efficiently, village health nurse visit their village regularly etc.

Because of ASHAA initiatives around 400 people are attending OP and pregnancy rate is high. Before tsunami there was only 2 to 3 deliveries occur in the hospital in a month. Now this has increased into 30 deliveries per month!. Thanks to ASHAA leaders who had carried out these changes.

#### **HFA survey**

A briefing on HFA survey has taken place at the end of the meeting. SSP, CCD and ROSE has taken the initiative of HFA survey facilitated by Huairou Commission. CCD is carrying out this survey with community members in 55 villages, ROSE in 5 and SSP in 40 villages. Final results of the survey would be completed by middle of January 09.

#### **Book Release**



“Grassroots Stories” written by women leaders were released by Mr. Kandasamy, District Revenue Officer (DRO) Nagapattinam District. He has promised to read the book and give the feedback.

#### **Formal launch of Trainers Network for Disaster to Development**

At the end of the programme Kasturi made a declaration by formally announcing the launch of Trainers network for Disaster to Development in Tamilnadu. Everybody has joined their hands in rounded circle for few minutes to declare the network and carry forward the activities in more organized manner.



- Disaster Watch, December 2008