

Trincomalee District

Affected Divisional Secretary Divisions

- (1) Kuchchaveli
- (2) Town and Gravets
- (3) Kinniya
- (4) Seruwila
- (5) Muttur
- (6) Echchilampattai

Affected People

- Total number of persons displaced: 72,986
- Number of affected families : 30,574
- Total number of affected persons: 126,679
- Total number of deaths and missing: 967

Damages to Different Sectors

Information on damages to different socio-economic sectors is not available.

Actions Taken

- A District Task Force was formed to coordinate the relief and reconstruction activities with the participation of civil societies, development agencies, political parties, business community, LTTE and other government institutions.
- More than 100,000 persons have already returned to their homes or are staying with relatives and friends. The others are in temporary shelters such as tents, schools and other buildings.
- Nearly 3,320 families (13,778 persons) were temporary resided in 33 welfare camps.
- Pledges were given for 13,126 transitional shelters and 8549 permanent houses by local and foreign donor agencies.
- Construction of 2,677 transitional housing units have been completed and 3,380 are under construction.
- A Council for rebuilding district of Trincomalee was formed.
- Transitional Accommodation Project (TAP) and Tsunami Housing Reconstruction Unit, operating under TAFREN have established their offices in the district of Trincomalee to coordinate and monitor housing construction activities.

Confronted Problems and Issues

- Non-familiarity of the many involving organizations regarding the problems of conflict affected communities and ethnic and community tensions in the area.
- Inadequate capacity of some Local Government Authorities.

- Slow decision making and slow re-construction process resulted from centralized disaster management system.
- Lack of regular forum between the Government machinery and the LTTE in the coordination of relief and reconstruction activities.
- Unequal distribution of tsunami relief and irregularities in reconstruction activities due to the existing ethnic and political discord.

Challenges Ahead

- A strong coordination and communication system should be in place to deal with the large number of NGOs and other actors as well as influx of resources for relief and reconstruction activities.
- Strengthening Central and Local Government administrative systems and capacity thus enabling to improve district reconstruction plans.
- Have a more decentralized decision making system to respond to the real needs of the people effectively within a short period of time.
- Improving the transparency of central government policies and ensuring effective communication from top to bottom.
- Avoiding resumption of armed hostilities and having a close dialogue with the LTTE in carrying out the tsunami reconstruction activities in un-cleared areas.
- Strengthening community participation in the implementation of reconstruction plans.

Post Tsunami Recovery Process District Experience and Challenges Ahead

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EXPERIENCE AND CHALLENGES AHEAD TRINCOMALEE DISTRICT

Background and Executive Summary

Trincomalee District has 141.6 km of coastline. The Tsunami affected 6 of the 11 Divisional Secretariat (DS) areas. The Immediate impact resulted in 30,547 families being internally displaced (126,679 individuals, 24% of the district population), but with a comparatively low number of deaths, 967.

Of initial concern was the damage to housing. 4873 houses were fully damaged and 3945 houses were partially damaged. NGOs, businesses, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, private individuals, UN agencies and other concerned parties have pledged 13,126 transitional shelters and 8,549 permanent houses. In spite of numerous obstacles, at latest report 3,380 transitional shelter units were under construction and now, almost four months after the tsunami 2,677 transitional housing units have been completed (16 April 2005, TAP office, Katchcheri, Trincomalee).

As of the end of March, there were still 33 IDP camps, with 3,321 families (13,778 persons) staying in 15 schools and 18 other buildings (29 March, Additional Government Agent's Office, Katchcheri, Trincomalee). Of those initially displaced, more than 100,000 have been able to return to their homes or are staying with friends and relatives. The remaining continue to live in temporary shelters including tents, schools, other government buildings, temples, etc.

Extensive damage also occurred to, among others, the following sectors: fishing and agriculture; health; water supply and sanitation; other utilities; tourism; education; physical infrastructure (182 km of road, damage to Trincomalee port, bridges, bus and train systems, etc.); government and public facilities.

Experience

By 31st December 2004, the Government Agent(GA) in collaboration with civil society and other key development actors, elected political representatives, representatives from political parties, police, military and other GOSL departments, the LTTE and representatives from the business community created the District Task Force to coordinate Tsunami response and relief activities. Six sub committees were formed: education; shelter management; camp management; search and rescue; data collection; health, sanitation and public utilities.

The District Task Force Committee provided an opportunity to bring everyone together at the same table and created a forum for dialogue among the different actors, particularly among the Government and LTTE. However, the Task Force was constrained by the lack of clear authority from the GOSL, as a result it was forced to operate by consensus, and many actors continued to focus on their own specific interests.

The Task Force was replaced in mid February (19th Feb) by a new Council for Rebuilding Trincomalee District, chaired from Colombo. Other than an initial fact finding and orientation meeting, the new Council has been inoperative and there continues to be a lack of clear direction from Colombo on reconstruction policies for Trincomalee. The Transitional Accommodation Project (TAP) and Tsunami Housing Reconstruction Unit (THRU), both operating under the (TAFREN) have established offices in Trincomalee and are monitoring and coordination housing reconstruction.

Following the tsunami a large number of NGOs and other concerned parties came to Trincomalee district to assist in the disaster response. There were positive and negative consequences of this influx of assistance. The increased number of actors improved the local response capacity and provided vital assistance in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. However, the large influx also created a difficult coordination and logistics environment, with many organizations and individuals acting without clear communication or coordination with the government or other actors, particularly in the initial response period. The government structures in place after the tsunami were not sufficient to monitor and coordinate ongoing activities.

Additionally, many organizations and individuals arriving in Trincomalee did not have previous experience in Trincomalee or the conflict affected North East of Sri Lanka. These organizations were unfamiliar with the history of the conflict or aware of the ethnic and community tensions. Lack of familiarity with the local situation led to inappropriate construction materials being used, lack of culture and gender sensitivity in Food and Non Food Relief Item distribution, ignoring conflict affected IDPs, etc.

The influx of organizations and other actors was accompanied by a proportional inflow of resources, both financial and human. Countless hours and materials were donated irrespective of race, gender or religion, acting as possible source of reconciliation between the different communities involved in the Sri Lanka conflict.

However, after the initial response, because of the continuing inflow of high levels of resources, many of which are earmarked only for tsunami response, competition has increased among NGOs and other actors. Imbalances have been perceived among communities receiving assistance and local market distortions are occurring as organizations feel compelled to use their resources. There is also a perception that organizations are spending disproportionate levels on overhead instead of assisting the affected people. The abundance of resources has also increased opportunities for graft and corruption among officials. There is also concern about ulterior or secondary motives of actors involved in the reconstruction process, whether political, religious, cultural, economic, etc.

The sheer magnitude of the disaster and the number of actors involved in response and reconstruction has highlighted weak existing government structures, particularly in regards to data collection, reporting and monitoring.

The wide range of organizations involved in response and reconstruction and the wide variety of activities undertaken including assessments, surveys and other data collection, has proven difficult for the government to manage. Constraints on the government including lack of personnel trained in data collection, lack of resources, lack of communication and coordination among different government agencies leading to duplication, lack of standardization in data collection efforts, etc., has severely hampered the effectiveness and accuracy of data collection and monitoring of reconstruction activities, and limited the ability of the government to verify data collected by the government or by outside organizations. There are often wide discrepancies among data collected by independent organizations and the government, and even among different government agencies.

A serious concern continues to be the lack of consistent coordination among organizations working in Trincomalee. Since the cessation of the District Task Force, there have been no District wide coordination efforts involving all actors. Many agencies continue to participate in sector wise coordination meetings as part of the original District Task Force subcommittee structures, either on a District or local level, but other organizations have ceased or have never participated in coordination efforts.

The underdeveloped infrastructure in Trincomalee district resulting from the 20 years of conflict has proven both a blessing and a curse. The lack of development meant that, in comparison to the South and other areas, there was less infrastructure to be damaged by the Tsunami. However, the condition of the existing infrastructure is so bad that it has been an impediment in relief and reconstruction activities, substantially increasing transit times, creating difficulties in communication between government officials, and the lack of economic diversification, with the principal sectors being fishing and agriculture, has had serious long term livelihood impact resulting from the tsunami. The lack of skilled labor has also slowed the reconstruction process.

The government staff and structure in Trincomalee has also had positive and negative experiences responding to the disaster. The existing government welfare and food distribution system has been able, with only minor setbacks, to address the needs of the affected populations. Many government staff have experience with internal displacement and disaster from the conflict period, and were able to implement emergency procedures such as using government facilities for initial IDP camps. Also there are dedicated public servants in the government cadre who continue to spend long hours working to respond to the disaster.

However, the tsunami also overwhelmed the existing government staff and structures in many ways, revealing serious lack of local government capacity in some areas. A principal constraint has been the continued centralization of the disaster response resulting in; slow decision making and the corresponding slow reconstruction process; confusion over local authority, decision making processes and legal powers (the Buffer Zone); lack of communication and clarity from the centre; erosion of the already weak Local Government (Pradeshiya Sabhas and Municipal Councils) by the Central Government; and political influence and interference that does not represent the interests or concerns of the district. Sadly, there have been a few isolated cases of corruption among officials.

Also of concern has been the ongoing violence between various groups in the East which has begun to spread to Trincomalee district, creating an increasingly unstable situation for reconstruction activities. There continues to exist tension between the SLA and LTTE. This has been exacerbated by the lack of a regular forum for coordination between the LTTE and government officials in disaster relief and reconstruction.

There continues to exist strong community identification along ethnic and political lines, polarized by political elites for their own benefit. There have been several Hartals (general strikes) called by the various communities post-tsunami protesting unequal distribution of relief supplies and other perceived irregularities in the relief and reconstruction process.

Another ongoing impediments have been environmental conditions. Unseasonable rain has severely affected families living in tents, substandard transitional shelter and low lying lands. Continuing fear of another tsunami, highlighted by the public response to the 29 March earthquake in Nias, Indonesia, and uncertainty about the full extent of environmental impact and degradation caused by the tsunami also hinder efforts at rebuilding affected communities.

Challenges ahead

The high number of NGOs and other actors and influx of resources will continue to pose a challenge to reconstruction efforts, until a strong coordination and communication system is in place and regularly used. But if effectively coordinated and efficiently used, the resources presented by these organizations can pave the way not only for short term relief and rehabilitation, but for long term sustainable economic and infrastructure development in

Trincomalee that can raise living standards above the pre tsunami level. A difference can really be made, particularly among vulnerable groups.

Critical to long term sustainability of initiatives undertaken in the rehabilitation and reconstruction period are:

- Strengthening Central and Local government systems and capacity to better manage district reconstruction efforts
- De-concentration of decision making power to better respond to the needs of the affected communities
- Increased transparency of central government policies and effective communication of policies to actors
- Avoiding a resumption of armed hostilities and coordinating with the LTTE in unclear areas
- Overcoming vested interests at the local, district, regional and national levels to provide cooperation and dialogue among all actors in the reconstruction process, especially in the political system
- Strengthening of community participation

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- District Task Force Committee (every one involved an opportunity for dialogue)
- Large no. of INGOs and NGOs, other concerned parties
- Lots of resource.
- The government staffs and structure.
- Low no of deaths
- Under developed infrastructure.
- Concerned individuals donate time, resources (land and money)

Weakness

- District Task Force committee
- Data collection, reporting and monitoring
- Coordination
- Centralization of process, slow decision making process
- Constrains on local officers from center
- Lack of communication and clarity from center
- Confusion over authority and legal powers (Buffer zone)
- Lack of capacity in government
- Weakness of local government

- Competition among NGOs and other actors
- Political influence/interference
- The deteriorating security situation
- Lack of joint mechanism
- Spontaneous increasing NGOs (Especially with no experience in North East)
- Lack of infrastructure
- Conflict situation
- Hartal
- Divided communities along ethnic/political lines
- Slow decision making process resulting in slow reconstruction
- Environment – weather, fear of tsunami, etc.
- Ulterior / Secondary motives of actors involved in reconstruction (political, religious, cultural, economic, etc.)
- Corruption
- Lack of skilled labor

Opportunities

- Increased number of NGOs/ actors
- Increased resources
- Support from Central and Local government
- MOU / renewal of peace process / increased security / increased dialogue and cooperation / Joint Mechanism
- Cooperation and dialogue among different political parties
- Strengthening of community through participation and support from individuals (land, time, resources, etc.)
- Long term sustainable development – making it better than before
 - Infrastructure improvement
 - Economic diversification
- Improved living conditions / economic status of community
- Increased coordination among development actors
- Targeting vulnerable communities

Threats

- Political (interests/influence/interference)
- Security / potential for renewal of conflict
- Environment (fear of tsunami, unseasonal rain, cyclones, flooding, etc.)
- Continued centralization of reconstruction

- Slow reconstruction process
- Ulterior/secondary motives of actors involved in reconstruction
- Corruption
- Changing government policies
- Lack of clear leadership, coordination, directives, policies, authority

