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# THE INTERNATIONAL AID ARCHITECTURE AND TSUNAMI RECOVERY: LESSONS FROM SRI LANKA AND INDIA

Darini Rajasingham Senanayake

The 26 December 2005 Earthquake and Tsunami in Asia generated an unprecedented humanitarian response in terms of funds and organizational efforts the world over. In the aftermath of the disaster, the affected countries took very different approaches and found different policy mechanisms to organize and coordinate the international response, including the flood of financial and human resources available from the international community. This paper compares India's and Sri Lanka's responses to the disaster, while reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of the international humanitarian response to the Asia Earthquake and Tsunami disaster. The paper draws from analysis of the international aid architecture that has developed in response to the Tsunami, as well as field research among Tsunami- and conflict-affected populations in Sri Lanka and attempts to insert the voice of the affected community in ongoing policy debates.

Historically there are few instances of linear progress from relief to recovery, reconstruction and development. This is particularly true of countries or regions affected by long-term, low-intensity conflicts that may be struck by sudden natural disasters. Indonesia and Sri Lanka were the two most affected countries. In both countries the Tsunami impacted regions already affected by more than two decades of armed conflict and uncertain peace. The coincidence of natural and man-made (*sic*) disasters generated 'complex emergencies' and posed the need for holistic and integrated recovery programming for equitable and conflict-sensitive post-tsunami reconstruction at national and community level.

International aid delivered in a conflict situation may become part of the conflict unless conflict-sensitive programming is recognized as a priority.<sup>1</sup> The failure of the Post-Tsunami Operational Mechanisms (P-TOM), which was to enable sharing of the funds for reconstruction between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), controlling regions impacted by the Tsunami, has left a vacuum in this regard. Hence,

international organizations working in the country will need to ensure the balanced distribution of assistance across affected regions in order to support the three-year-old peace process that is becoming increasingly fragile. Currently there is a significant imbalance in aid distribution. Districts with deeper poverty and higher concentrations of vulnerable communities affected by the Tsunami and conflict (Jaffna and Vanni), have far fewer projects and organizations on the ground than some other Tsunami-affected districts in the south where reconstruction is slightly more advanced.

The governments of Indonesia and Sri Lanka have effectively sub-contracted the reconstruction process to international aid agencies and humanitarian actors. In India, the third-most affected country, the disaster was handled differently. The Government of India (GOI) refused most forms of assistance and mobilized the military as well as local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the relief and recovery effort. A few international agencies with large budgets for large-scale reconstruction have been permitted to work in India after the Tsunami under the supervision of the state governments. The Indian government's response to the international response to the Tsunami disaster was contoured by several factors: existence of in-country disaster preparedness, NGOs and civil-society capacity, the experience of the Gujarat floods episode where much of the funds did not meet the most needy, as well as the desire to be seen as a net donor rather than recipient nation, given its ambitions for a seat on the UN Security Council. Moreover, the impact of the disaster was very different on the Indian and Sri Lankan economies and very different policy responses were forthcoming.

## Impact of Tsunami on India and Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, though Tsunami damage stretched from Jaffna in the north, down the entire eastern and southern coastal belt of the island, the waves affected a two-kilometre coastal strip, albeit a densely populated area characterized by extremities of poverty and wealth. Colombo,

the capital, was spared. It is estimated that 31,000 people died and many more were displaced. Livelihood sectors that were most impacted were fisheries and tourism. In India the Tsunami affected the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala and Pondicherry, and estimates are that approximately 10,000 lives were lost.

The preliminary damage and needs assessment conducted by the World Bank (WB), along with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) for Sri Lanka, estimated the country's Tsunami recovery/reconstruction needs at approximately US\$1.5 billion. Total damage was estimated to be less than 5 per cent of GDP. The Indian GDP was unaffected by the disaster, and the World Bank, ADB and UN assessment noted that the reconstruction would cost around US\$1.2 billion. The Indian response was coloured by the size and dynamism of the economy and the existence of strong in-country capacity as well as its powerful and proactive civil society.

### **Institutional Arrangements, Policy and Coordination of Rehabilitation and Development**

Unlike the Government of India, the Government of Sri Lanka has effectively leased out reconstruction to relief and aid INGOs, hoping for quick delivery. The GoSL has sub-contracted the post-tsunami reconstruction process to INGOs that have raised funds for Tsunami relief and recovery, and has set up the Task Force to Rebuild the Nation (TAFREN) to coordinate the rehabilitation, reconstruction and development process. TAFREN replaced the Centre for National Operations (CNO) that successfully coordinated the relief effort in the first three months of the emergency.

While it is generally agreed that the national and international relief that arrived after the Tsunami contributed significantly and in timely fashion during the emergency relief phase, it is evident that these early gains have been and may be further eroded in the rehabilitation phase in Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup> Project implementation and delivery of permanent housing and sustainable livelihoods—the most important needs of Tsunami survivors at the current phase of rehabilitation almost a year after the disaster—appears unsatisfactory. This is partly because there is no effective policy mechanism for post-tsunami recovery and reconstruction at this time in Sri Lanka. TAFREN is a coordinating body and lacks the necessary development expertise in-house, while the GoSL has sub-contracted the recovery process to external actors. This lacuna has significant implications for the recovery process in Sri

Lanka, not the least of which the delays in reconstruction, lack of local ownership of the recovery planning an implementation process, and lack of accountability to Tsunami survivors and beneficiaries.

This paper suggests the need for reconstruction that is owned by the communities affected by disasters, and makes a distinction between donor, national and community ownership of reconstruction policy. Local ownership of policy derives from analysis of disaster and conflict that is politically, culturally and historically located, and from social monitoring of the reconstruction process.

### **International Assistance and the Tsunami Aid Architecture**

After the Asia Earthquake and Tsunami many INGOs launched the largest-ever emergency relief and recovery operation. The funds generated for reconstruction were unprecedented. The response to the Kashmir earthquake in Pakistan and India of October 2005 in no way compares to the response to the Tsunami disaster, and marks the exceptional nature of the response. Recent estimates are that over US\$7 billion were committed for the Tsunami response, of which over 60 per cent were from individuals and other private sources, routed through INGOs such as Oxfam, Care, or World Vision.<sup>3</sup> The Red Cross movement alone received CHF2.4 billion or US\$2 billion.

The post-tsunami funds generated for reconstruction were unprecedented. Collectively, INGOs found themselves with nearly half a billion dollars to spend on the humanitarian response, and with more funds than some governments of the affected countries command for relief and recovery of the survivors.<sup>4</sup> Contextualized along other available assistance and funds for relief and reconstruction, the overwhelming international response to the Asia Tsunami disaster, both in terms of funds and human resources, clearly required relief needs on the ground, and may even exceed reconstruction needs in some of the Tsunami-impacted countries and/or regions. There is intense competition among and within humanitarian agencies to secure projects and spend funds in Sri Lanka, particularly since India has restricted the access of many relief agencies in its territories.<sup>5</sup> Many of the agencies have not disclosed how funds would be distributed among the affected countries, and voluntary disclosure of how funds are spent has not occurred.

An extensive international Tsunami aid architecture has evolved between New York, Geneva and London, following the Tsunami disaster in South and East Asia. The UN appointed Bill Clinton, rather than someone familiar with the South and East Asian region and its disaster and development challenges, such as Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, to figure-head the Tsunami operation. Sen would have brought added value to the recovery operation. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Geneva is working with Clinton's office, and the emphasis is on "building back better" and linking relief to development over a long period of time. The official evaluation of the Tsunami response is being carried out by the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London, one year later. Local ownership of recovery policy and civil-society engagement in monitoring and evaluation of the recovery and reconstruction process has been disabled by the international aid architecture, with significant implications for timely and effective recovery.

The unprecedented funds that the Tsunami disaster generated, has in turn generated an international aid architecture that is rather skewed and distant in space and mentality from the needs, priorities and recovery timeframes of the affected communities and Tsunami survivors for whom the aid was committed. This has significant medium-term implication for security and development in the affected countries as well as the region. Delays in reconstruction and delivery of assistance to the survivors may become a cause for local and national-level conflicts, and may pose a security threat in the longer term, particularly in countries that have suffered-decades of low-intensity armed conflict and cycles of war and peace, with significant implications for regional security.

A related issue is the question of local ownership of the recovery and reconstruction policy, planning and implementation process, which is increasingly being raised in Sri Lanka, as a large number of people languished in temporary shelters as the monsoon rains arrived in November, almost one year later and the danger of aid dependency of people living displaced on aid handouts becomes apparent. The current operation needs to be streamlined, and transparency and accountability of the various agencies ensured, if the funds are to reach the people they were meant for.

## Housing Sector: Are delays and displacement prolonging Psychosocial Trauma?

**P**ermanent housing is the most pressing need and demand of beneficiaries at this time – along with sustainable livelihoods. A number of aid agencies are rehabilitating and normalizing the lives of affected communities by constructing houses and community facilities and continue to supply relief via cash or work programmes. A number of INGOs have signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the GoSL's TAFREN (that has effectively sub-contracted the reconstruction process to INGOs), for large-scale, large- budget projects that sound and look good, but increasingly appear to amount to paper trails, given delays to implementing projects.

It is estimated that 70,000 houses were damaged by the Tsunami in Sri Lanka, and more units may be necessary, since some extended families living under one roof have subdivided into nuclear families after they were displaced. Some of these houses were within the 100-m buffer zone demarcated by the GoSL. 55,000 transitional shelter units have been built, but progress is slow on permanent housing, only partly due to problems with land availability.

As of December 2005, TAFREN reports that INGOs have constructed a mere 2,414 houses of the 49,000 allocated to be built. In Jaffna district, where 5,000 permanent homes are needed, only one permanent house had been completed and handed over to beneficiaries by the end of October 2005 (an additional 2000 were needed for conflict affected populations), while in Galle of the 5,080 needed, 271 permanent shelters have been built and 87 handed over to beneficiaries as of October 18, 2005.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, private individuals, businesses, members of the Sri Lankan diaspora and small INGOs that genuinely adhere to the humanitarian impulse have built and completed significant numbers of permanent houses and housing projects, and left the country.<sup>7</sup> However, many of the large humanitarian relief organizations that received extensive funds, including Sri Lanka's largest donor of permanent shelters, that have signed MoUs for large-scale infrastructure projects with the GoSL, have failed to deliver, in some instances due to problems with some of the lands that were allocated and delays by the GoSL on providing beneficiary lists. In the north and east conflict-affected regions, difficulties of access and shortages of materials have slowed the process. However, the primary reason is a lack of prior sector and development expertise, experience, and

organizational capacity to link relief to reconstruction and development.

Many humanitarian INGOs that received large amounts of funds are delaying on construction of urgently needed houses or taking a long time in the planning process in order to “build back better,” even as they extend expensive ex-pat contracts in the absence of project deadlines and exit strategies. “Building back better” appears to have become a legitimacy clause for delaying projects despite pipeline pressures to disburse funds. Most of the funds appear to be disbursed on administrative costs, ex-pat salaries and overheads of the INGOs. There is practically no transparency and reporting on how funds are being spent by the agencies.

As the often fierce northeast monsoons set into the Tsunami-affected regions from October, many beneficiaries expressed concern about having to live in flimsy transitional shelters. The lack of permanent shelter has both psychological and material consequences. The two-room temporary shelters, built for six months, where families are housed, are overcrowded and too small for women to proceed with home based income-generation activities that they had engaged in prior to the Tsunamis (coir manufacture, textile and sewing), even if they have received the necessary equipment. The lack of proper housing also impacts on women’s livelihoods and the health of children. Some mothers mentioned that their children have weekly bouts of flu.

Other beneficiaries noted the lack of a permanent home, living in displacement and uncertainty about when they would be able to have a proper home and living in limbo, prolonged psychological trauma. Affected families lack basic information (e.g., when would a permanent home be provided?), necessary to plan their livelihood and recovery strategies. In short, the question arises: whether the aid industry that came to assist the victims may now be prolonging their trauma and generating aid dependency among those languishing in transitional shelters and still dependent on handouts?

The issue here is not one of inflated expectations regarding recovery, or adjusting recovery expectations downward with appropriate media spin, particularly given the excess of funds and human resources available. It is a matter of analysing the situation and learning from mistakes made. In the past, Sri Lankan President Premadasa built 10,000 houses a year under the Gam Udawa project, and the capacity exists in-country to do so, had the GOSL played a role in policy setting and implementation of recovery, rather than merely setting

up a coordinating body called TAFREN. The reasons for the delays rather lie with the aid system itself.

## Recovery Challenges: Timeliness of Aid

**E**nsuring responsible and transparent programming and ensuing *timely* delivery of assistance to Tsunami survivors and the most vulnerable by the government and INGOs is a central issue, given the perception and fact that there is an excess of funds, and that contracts of the large numbers of expatriate staff of the international agencies involved in the reconstruction operation may be extended until the funds are spent over a long period of time.

In this context, the challenge is to develop a streamlined and rationalized Country Programme and Implementation Strategy for integrated rehabilitation and development, that centres on the needs, priorities and timeframes of affected communities and beneficiaries, rather than international aid industry, as well as an adequately participatory consultation and communication process with beneficiaries that respects their right to information.

It is not clear that the coordination efforts of TAFREN have yielded the anticipated results, whether in terms of efficiency, quality or timely implementation of Tsunami rehabilitation, or that there was proper identification of recovery programme priorities. There needs to be a balance between coordination to eliminate competition, conflicts and duplication, and the primary task of meeting the needs of survivors on the ground in a timely fashion. TAFREN appears to have lost this balance in its attempt to facilitate and coordinate so many actors wishing to spend funds on large-scale, high profile infrastructure projects, without an adequate feasibility study and assessment of the INGOs involved. The ‘advertising’ that accompanies this situation often misrepresents the reality on the ground.

## Contextualizing Risks and Opportunities for Relief Organizations

**T**he fluidity with which displaced populations move, the growing strains on host families, and the destruction of livelihoods due to the Tsunami has challenged the ability of national authorities and the international community to tailor responses to the different needs of various categories of Tsunami-affected populations.

Certain Government of Sri Lanka policies with regard to the 100-200-m coastal-reservation buffer zone (that have been

recently relaxed), as well as criteria for beneficiary identification for housing and reconstruction assistance that appear to overlook significant vulnerable communities have also complicated the resettlement and relocation process of those affected.

The recovery context in Sri Lanka presents challenges, opportunities as well as risks to the large number of humanitarian relief INGOs in terms of the need for timely, effective and equitable delivery of assistance to those affected by the Tsunami, as well as in terms of their operational capacity, experience and mandates.

The risk is compounded by an in-country critique of the government as well as INGOs and donors with regard to emergence of a large international Tsunami aid architecture in New York, Geneva and London that is quite distant in space and mentality from those who survived the disaster in Asia, and their need for timely access to permanent housing. Questions are also being raised regarding funds used by international aid agencies – including on salaries of expatriate staff, in a country where over 45% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day, and almost 24% below the official poverty line.

There are also valid concerns about the destruction of local capacity, as INGOs compete with local NGOs and poach their staff, rather than working with and through local NGOs and building their capacities in a sustainable manner.

While the public critique of INGOs and similar organizations working in Sri Lanka is informed by a current of nationalism it also raises fundamental issues regarding the ethics, politics, and practices of the international humanitarian industry given oversights and perceived lack of local and national ownership in the design, implementation and monitoring of Tsunami recovery and reconstruction programmes.

In mid-August the President of Sri Lanka and the Chairperson of (TAFREN) had taken to task several INGOs and agencies involved in construction for delays in the reconstruction, of permanent housing. The story made headline news in the national media, that is rightly performing the role of watchdog of international relief delivery in country.

### **Media Spin and the Right to Information**

**T**he Tsunami response of INGOs would need to rise to increased public scrutiny and demand for transparency, accountability and local ownership of

reconstruction policy and implementation (as opposed to national-level ownership) by affected communities in Sri Lanka. The recovery, reconstruction and development work of INGOs needs to be cognizant of the substance (as distinguished from the politics), of this critique and take appropriate measures to address it in order to maintain public trust and continued access, and ensure that the new funders who generously contributed to the Tsunami recovery operation will continue to support their interventions in other emergencies.

The country has almost 90% literacy rates and a large pool of under- and unemployed graduates that vitiate the need for large numbers of international staff, and “volunteers,” many of whom lack the requisite development expertise and in-country knowledge necessary at this stage of recovery and reconstruction. Participation of in-country reconstruction and development expertise that has been largely marginalized by TAFREN as well as the international agencies, particularly in the planning, policy making, and monitoring and evaluation process, will be vital to ensure that recovery programming considers the needs and capacities of affected people, while the assistance of the international community will be necessary to developing local capacities to cope with disasters.<sup>8</sup>

There is a growing gap between media and press releases of various INGOs that convey singular “human interest” stories to demonstrate project achievements, and the reality on the ground where little appears to have been accomplished in terms of integrated and sustainable recovery, particularly in the housing and livelihoods sectors. This situation could jeopardize the image of several INGOs that took on projects they could not deliver, on and may cause donors to rethink their willingness to contribute to these organizations in future emergencies.

Media spin and human-interest stories have trumped transparency and accountability, and INGOs and UN agencies have flown in large numbers of media, press and consultants but little has been accomplished on the ground. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is planning to spend US\$12 million on a Tsunami information system in Sri Lanka, even though very good information already exists in the Government Agent’s Offices in Tsunami-affected districts for anyone who cares to visit the district and find out what is happening on the ground. The result may be the creation of a very expensive and parallel information system, when the real issue and gap is the lack of *analysis and expertise to steer the recovery effort at*

*national and district levels within the TAFREN system and the failure to access qualified in-country professionals, rather than lack of information to analyse the existing data for coherent recovery programming and implementation. This is part of a large problem of the neo-liberal development approach that effectively de-develops a county's policy-making processes and institutions, in the name of economic liberalization. The World Bank meanwhile has called on TAFREN to explain the Rs.125 million of IDA grant spent on media awareness campaigns.*

*If at all, accountability to donors has been given priority over accountability to beneficiaries, whose concerns for getting permanent shelter before the November monsoon rains in the region have been sidelined by overemphasis on taking lots of time to plan and "build back better." "Building back better" also includes "community development" by relief organizations that lack the requisite in-country knowledge and social-sector expertise to do so, and resulting in a few instances in endless beneficiary consultations. As a result not a lot has been built as the first commemoration of the disaster approaches, after the initial success in the relief phase, and there is little local ownership of reconstruction planning and implementation.*

### **Conflict and Tsunami-affected Communities**

When international assistance is given in a low-intensity conflict situation, it often becomes part of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> There is a clear imbalance in coverage of the Tsunami disaster-affected districts. Districts with deeper poverty and higher concentrations of vulnerable communities affected by both the Tsunami and conflict (Jaffna and Vanni), have far fewer projects on the ground than in some other Tsunami-affected districts where recovery is making good progress. This is no doubt partly due to difficulties of access, for unlike in the rest of the country only a limited number of humanitarian and development agencies have access to these regions due to LTTE policies as well as donor reluctance.

At the outset of the Tsunami disaster, attention was rightly focused on meeting the immediate relief and recovery needs of Tsunami survivors. Nine months later, as long-term recovery planning is on-going there is a need to integrate programming for Tsunami-and-conflict affected populations to ensure conflict-sensitive implementation. A comprehensive country strategy and advocacy policy for holistic and conflict-sensitive programming and assistance for Tsunami and conflict-affected populations in the relevant districts at this

time to redress some of the imbalances in aid delivery, particularly the economic security programs, and stresses that more needs to be done.

Conflict-sensitive programming and equitable aid delivery is necessary at macro-and micro-community levels, since inequitable aid distribution may become a source of micro-community conflicts among beneficiaries, as well as, at the macro-or national level, given that the country has experienced almost two decades of war followed by uneasy peace, and the social context is politicized and ethnicized.

INGOs working with the GoSL would be well advised to reassess the policy approach to working with and through the GoSL and relevant ministries, and rather re-focus on community level programming. Playing a supplementary role to the government that is party to a conflict in the northeast may be counter-productive to working effectively to address the needs of the most vulnerable in those regions.

*While many agencies talk about the need for equitable distribution of assistance according to need (also among conflict and tsunami IDPs) there is little actual implementation, and TAFREN does not track aid distribution in any systematic way. Unlike in India, the role of the state and national civil society in Sri Lanka has been minimized in a donor-driven neo-liberal approach to post Tsunami reconstruction that seems designed to increase inequality and conflict-in the long run.*

A communication strategy for donors regarding the situation of "complex emergency" in Sri Lanka, and the concomitant requirement for holistic recovery programming for Tsunami-and conflict-affected population needs to be developed at this time.

Ensuring responsible and transparent programming and maximizing assistance to survivors and the most vulnerable is a central issue, given the spontaneous and large mobilization of public generosity. The situation imposes obligations to use the funds in support of the mission not only "to improve the lives of vulnerable groups by mobilizing the power of humanity," but also by contributing creatively to what is now called "Reconstruction Plus" – moving beyond the status quo ante, prior to the Tsunami, and addressing root causes of vulnerability in a conflict sensitive manner.

## Local Ownership of Recovery: Monitoring and Evaluation by Civil Society

Participation of in-country reconstruction and development institutions (eg. Institute for Policy Studies, Centre for Policy Alternatives, Centre for Poverty Analysis), and expertise, as well as academics and civil society will all be vital to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation, and local ownership of recovery. Programming will need to consider the needs and capacities of affected people, while the assistance of the international community will be necessary in developing local capacities to cope with disasters.

Meeting the challenges, risks and opportunities of reconstruction in Sri Lanka will also require a conceptual, operational and programmatic understanding of the transition for relief to development in a complex emergency, for it is now well established that: “better ‘development’ can reduce the need for emergency relief; better ‘relief’ can contribute to development, and better ‘rehabilitation’ can ease the transition between the two”<sup>11</sup>

Several humanitarian agencies that lack development expertise and country knowledge but have large funds appear to be in the throes of an identity crisis and mission and mandate enlargement, as they take on long-term term, large-scale infrastructure development projects in sectors where they have little prior experience. As a result the Tsunami operation lacks focus and coherence and is spread thin. The transition and transformation of humanitarian relief agencies to long-term reconstruction and development in a one-of-a-kind situation may require review and a cost benefit analysis.

The on-going operational shift from emergency relief to addressing long-term reconstruction and development needs of those who survived the Tsunamis poses significant challenges to relief INGOs skills, capacities and experience. Some of the sectors that constitute long-term reconstruction have not traditionally been part of the mandates and capacity relief agencies. Strategic planning, policy-making and in-house social sector expertise and capacity to engage with and consult beneficiaries, conduct needs assessments to ensure that beneficiary needs and priorities are met in a timely fashion, and that the most vulnerable and needy are targeted, as well as impact monitoring of projects and development of base line data for such, will be necessary. This is particularly necessary as the (relief) phase of universal need passes and those who initially were dependent on emergency relief and supplies access other public and personal support networks

and systems, while the most vulnerable remain relief and aid dependent.

### “Building Back Better”

The Expert Meeting on Corruption Prevention in Tsunami Relief, organized by the OECD Corruption Prevention Initiative, the ADB, and Transparency International in Jakarta noted in its Framework for Action, “Sudden flows of large amounts of money, goods and services, pressure to deliver aid quickly, as well as the substantial economic opportunities that arise from large scale reconstruction, all contribute to increased risk of corruption, waste and mismanagement...The active participation of affected communities in relief and reconstruction decisions, can minimize the risk of corruption in the delivery of aid. From the earliest stages of relief to the design, implementation and monitoring of long term projects, such communities should be enabled to articulate their needs, assist in devising reconstruction plans as well as evaluate end-results. The economic capacity and expertise of affected communities should be utilized wherever possible in delivering relief and reconstruction to reduce costs, to ensure appropriate solutions and assist in economic recovery.”

The funds available for recovery after the Tsunami suggest the ability to move beyond the status quo that prevailed prior to the disaster and address “root causes” of vulnerability, or “build back better.”<sup>12</sup> The notion of “building back better” links relief to long-term development. The danger with such an approach is that the urgent and immediate needs of those who were most affected and traumatized by the disaster, and for whom international civil society generously provided funds, may be elided given the long-term focus on big-budget, large infrastructure projects that require long-term development planning.

*Communities vulnerable to disaster (for which prime indicators are poverty and conflict), are often not the primary beneficiary of large-scale infrastructure development projects planned by government authorities that may take advantage of donor ignorance to bring out large discredited infrastructure projects (e.g., large water sanitation schemes vs community rainwater harvesting).*

The funds generated for Tsunami reconstruction are seen by the GoSL and IFIs as being able to take care of many of the country’s development needs in the next five years, hence the talk of planning and “building back better” over five years. This has led to a failure to focus on the more modest needs

and recovery priorities of the most vulnerable of the Tsunami-affected communities, including squatter communities in the coastal belt, who are excluded by TAFREN's policy of "replacing a house for a house."

The funds generated by the Tsunami disaster appear to have resulted in an over-internationalization of the recovery operation, long-term, large-budget development plans for large-scale infrastructure building that is detracting from local ownership (as opposed to national ownership) of recovery and reconstruction and timely delivery of assistance to the Tsunami survivors for whom funds were committed.

Humanitarian relief and aid agencies will have to get the balance right between quality and timely project implementation; spending big money on large infrastructure projects; and accessing pockets of vulnerable communities for sustainable community oriented and small-scale programmes. The current international intervention and programme structure and institutional culture, in the recovery and reconstruction phase in Sri Lanka appears to be top-down, with beneficiaries and vulnerable communities being seen, if at all, as end-users, rather than as partners in post-tsunami reconstruction. Their right to information and consultation is rarely respected.

### **Can Relief Agencies 'Do Development'? Implications for Linking Relief to Development**

**T**he attempt of humanitarian agencies that work primarily in relief to engage in long-term reconstruction and development projects that require different sorts of programming skills, effectively entails the risk of losing focus on mandates to serve vulnerable communities, as well as develop creative and flexible community-level approaches to disaster preparedness. Very little has been done one year later regarding community-level disaster preparedness and education, as highly technical early warning systems are anticipated from donors and the UNDP.

Doing long-term and large-scale infrastructure reconstruction and development work requires a different set of skills, analysis and programmes than doing relief and emergency preparedness at community level. It requires strategic and quality programming, planning, research and policy analysis based on solid in-country expertise with a macro- and long-term development perspective. Programme leadership, project integration, and in-country development expertise is a large lacuna in many of the relief agencies that have brought

in "volunteers" and are operational in Sri Lanka at this time, and is at the root of many of the problems and project delays. Policy analysis and advocacy for vulnerable communities remains a missing link in the recovery approach thus far, with significant implications for effective, efficient, timely and balanced delivery of assistance to beneficiaries.

A conscious attempt should be made by relief agencies that lack development expertise to pass on funds to more-experienced development agencies that have on-going collaborations with the GoSL in the relevant sectors and are involved in long-term reconstruction and development activities in the country (ADB—water and sanitation, WB – housing, etc.). Where there is inadequate capacity, funds may be disbursed directly to beneficiaries through already existing programmes such as these set up by the GoSL and WB for conflict IDPs to reconstruct their own homes.

In short, linking relief to development, and building back better" is contingent upon existence of development capacity within agencies and should not be advocated too easily for relief agencies. Doing development work requires a coherent country recovery strategy and is contingent upon accessing good country knowledge, in-country expertise and development and social-sector analysis that are crucial for long-term recovery and reconstruction programming.

### **Conclusion: Exit Strategy for International Aid Actors**

**U**nlike other disasters such as that in Kashmir, the Tsunami disaster generated large amounts of funds. Ironically the excess of Tsunami funds among INGOs and UN agencies appears to have led to a failure to implement recovery in a timely fashion, or establish project deadlines and exit strategies. Rather, a pattern of undue extending of project time frames and ex-pat contracts, and a disproportionate emphasis on quality, "building back better" is apparent.

"Community consultation" (despite the lack of information sharing with affected communities most of whom do not know when they will receive permanent shelter), and "culturally sensitive" programming, given lack of social, analysis and expertise, increasingly features as a legitimacy clause for delays in project implementation.

It is hence relevant to recall that donors gave funds for Tsunami victims and survivors, and not for the operation costs of humanitarian and development INGOs and multilateral



agencies. Transparency and accountability of all agencies involved, with a breakdown on what funds have been received and how they have been spent (including on programmes, administrative and ex-pat salary costs, and how these have been calculated) are necessary. The issue of accountability to beneficiaries, as well as local and regional ownership of the recovery and development process, is a matter of concern, in the context of what Naomi Klein terms humanitarian “disaster capitalism” and the current international aid architecture after the Tsunami.

There is little transparency and accountability in the post-tsunami aid operations, including from donors regarding how funds are spent, and despite the fact that several reports have established that in Afghanistan a mere 15 per cent of the funds pledge for reconstruction reached those it was meant for. The practices of some INGOs as well as UN agencies that have spent large amounts on institutional overheads, media consultants and ex-pat salaries raise serious issues, including the possibility of systemic and corporate malfeasance in the face of gross inequity in the aid system, as well as projects delays and failures to implement given plight of those displaced in the Tsunamis.

The culture of and practice of the international aid architecture that has developed after the Tsunami, together with the over-centralized manner in which the GoSL and TAFREN with the support of IFIs and UN agencies have been coordinating the recovery operation, effectively disables accountability to beneficiaries and local ownership of reconstruction. Clearly, there is a need for “structural adjustment” of the international humanitarian and development industry and reform of the international aid architecture after the tsunami, to enable accountability to beneficiaries, and local ownership, adequate beneficiary targeting, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the Tsunami reconstruction process. Clear time frame and exit strategies for all projects, programmes, and INGO and UN “volunteers” in Sri Lanka is necessary. At least 80 per cent of required permanent shelters should be built by next October, when the northeast monsoon arrives again. This exit strategy would include, where necessary, substantive capacity-building of local programme staff to take over projects, as well as, regional capacity building.

The new agency that the new President of Sri Lanka sets up to replace TAFREN should review the work of the various INGOs at this time and suggest exit strategies for those that lack the capacities to deliver on projects, and are otherwise blocking recovery efforts by sitting on land allocated for housing, which could otherwise have been done by private

donors from the local business community who stepped aside after making a very significant contribution in the relief phase, for the INGOs to take over recovery. The GoSL should take its cue from the Government of India on this matter, and thin the log-jam of agencies and thus the coordination burden in the current reconstruction phase, since so many agencies are no longer necessary, unlike in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

There is a striking absence of expertise and professionals from the region in the post-tsunami operation in Sri Lanka, despite the stated aim to develop regional disaster response capacity in the Asia Pacific Region by a number of agencies. The regional bodies ASEAN and SAARC need to develop regional institutions to address future humanitarian crises.

Finally, as the first anniversary of the Tsunami disaster comes around, the temptation to raise more funds for Tsunami victims and survivors is obvious, given that it was such a ‘photogenic’ Christmas disaster, unlike Kashmir. But unless there is a clear, principled and strategic rationale for further fundraising, and an improvement in project implementation, there should be a moratorium on the raising of funds for Tsunami survivors in Sri Lanka. International donors may be encouraged to give funds to other disasters in the region – since the world is not short of emergencies at this time.

This paper was presented at the ASEAN Roundtable 2005: “The Asian Tsunami: Implications for Regional Development and Security” at the Institute of South East Asia Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, November 2005.

### Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CHF	Swiss Franc
CNO	Centre for National Operations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IDA	International Development Association
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
JBIC	Japan Bank for International Cooperation
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PCIA	Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment
P-TOM	Post-Tsunami Operational Mechanism
TAFREN	Task Force to Rebuild the Nation
WB	World Bank

## End Notes

1 There is extensive literature on this subject. See particularly, Mary B. Anderson, "Do No Harm: How Aid can support Peace or War". The Post-Tsunami Operational Mechanism (P-TOM) was an indicator of the fact that aid can become a source for conflict even when consciously linked to peace processes.

2 These sentiments were expressed both by GoSL authorities in the Tsunami-affected districts as well as the Planning and Development Secretariat of the LTTE.

3 The Asia Pacific Philanthropy Consortium (APPC). See the Conference Call for Papers on "Philanthropy and Disaster: The Tsunami and After."

4 The International Federation of the Red Cross estimates that the Red Cross movement received 2.1 billion CHF or US\$ 2 billion thus far. It is likely that about 25% will be allocated to Sri Lanka.

5 While Sri Lanka and Indonesia have been relatively open and permitted access to the large number of INGOs and agencies interested in contributing to relief and recovery, India, has been more selective in permitting access only to aid agencies with proven capacity and skills to take on large-scale reconstruction after the acute emergency phase.

6 All figures from Government Agent offices and TAFREN officers in the districts.

7 Nelum Pokita, Induruwa, where 40 houses had been built by a member of the Sri Lankan diaspora and the Salzburg Village where 70 houses have been built by a small Austrian NGO. Both projects signed MoUs with TAFREN, and built on land that was once marshy in the Galle district.

8 The institutional frame for the Tsunami operation was designed by the US consultancy company Mackinsey, and directed and managed by business and finance specialists rather than development expertise.

10 This is captured in the slogan: "build back better".

11 Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell, cited in Marjorie Buchanan-Smith and Paula Fabris: *Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development: A Preliminary Review of the Debate*.

12 This is captured in the slogan: "build back better," propagated by Bill Clinton's Office. ■

Harriet Kripavoghton, *Spinning the Web*, 404, 4th Floor, 254, 2nd Street, Yellow at 8th.

### Carters' Strike

On August 15th 1906, 5,000 carters in Colombo struck work against a Municipal Ordinance prohibiting them from stalling on the cart or yoke while driving through the streets. The carters resisted as it meant walking long distances. The strike paralysed the commercial life of Colombo which depended on bullock carts for the transport of goods. The three-day strike was supported in militant ways by other Colombo workers, and the Pettah was reported to be under siege of crowds. When the Ordinance was withdrawn the carters celebrated the first victory of the working class of Colombo. A letter in the *Ceylon Independent* on August, 18th, 1906 said:

The carters' strike has supplied a splendid lesson to all cartmen as to the value of unity. The carters are men of various races and creeds, but they left all religious and racial differences aside and united hand gloriously.

Centenary of the Carters' Strike of 1906



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