

TRRC
Tsunami Relief & Rehabilitation Coordination
-Tamilnadu & Pondicherry

A Brief Report
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Tsunami – Relief and Rehabilitation Coordination (TRRC)

–Tamilnadu & Pondicherry

I. OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Tsunami-Relief and Rehabilitation Coordination – Tamilnadu & Pondicherry (TRRC) was a result of spontaneous and instantaneous reflections of more than 90 NGOs to the Tsunami tragic. As it used to be always, many NGOs instantly responded to Tsunami in their own way and capacities. Once they had to face the reality in terms of the magnitude and severity of the impact, most of them thought that the situation cannot be handled by any single organization, but require pooling of resources and expertise which in turn necessitates some organized and coordinated effort. Great people think alike; this was made true by a group of NGOs begun conversing within and among themselves and has arrived at a decision to hold an emergency meeting on 30.12.2005.

People's Watch-Tamilnadu, CEDA Trust and Tamilnadu Women's collective have taken joint responsibility of organizing the meeting. To everybody's surprise, the meeting on 30.12.2005 at Trichy had to accommodate more than 90 NGOs as against the anticipated 20-30. Subsequent to sharing of experiences and observations of the participants the issues and challenges that may emerge out of the Tsunami were taken for detailed discussion. This discussion part of the meeting only has made everybody feel the need for concerted action and coordinated effort. (Please visit www.trrcindia.org for a complete report on the meeting)

TRRC was established on the same day, under the convenorship of Ms. Sheelu, Executive Director, Tamilnadu women's Collective, Chennai, Mr. L. Antony Samy, Executive Director, CEDA Trust, Dindigul and Mr. Henri Tiphagne, Executive Director, People's Watch-Tamilnadu, Madurai and Mr. M. Louis as the State Coordinator.

II. PURPOSE OF TRRC

TRRC is neither an implementing organization nor a nodal agency for any funding organizations. It is only a coordination that remains to be informal in its form and structure. The core business of TRRC falls on the following lines;

- Monitoring of State relief and rehabilitation activities
- Dialoguing and campaigning on issues relating right to relief & rehabilitation of all the affected people, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable communities
- Influencing the relief & rehabilitation policies of the state
- Demonstrating and influencing all actors, particularly the state to demonstrate transparency and accountability
- Ensuring that the Coastal communities' 'Right to the Coast' is protected.

III. APPROACH

TRRC believes in 'inclusiveness' and 'Rights principles' and is open for NGOs, Movements, Organizations and Expert groups who fall in agreement with its codes and principles. TRRC does not have any other criteria what so ever to become a member except for the codes and principles. Since its inception on 30.12.05, the membership has grown from 90 to 300. Except for matters of emergency, all decisions of TRRC are only taken through a consultative process.

IV. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

All of TRRC's activities are based on the principles that are stated below;

- i. Commitment to the Rights and Equity principles in the relief & rehabilitation
- ii. Recognition of the coastal communities 'Right to the Coast' under customary international laws
- iii. Positive discrimination based on Gender, caste, religion, livelihood, disability, Persons living with HIV / AIDS (PLHA), children and others to be ensure.
- iv. Ensure protection of coastal ecosystems and natural landscapes
- v. Community participation to be ensured at all levels of relief & rehabilitation
- vi. Committed to the principle of inclusiveness and social cohesiveness in relief & rehabilitation
- vii. Commitment to minimum habitation standards – 5 cents of land; 500 square feet built area for a family of 4-5 with running water, sanitation and other livelihood oriented facilities.
- viii. To prevent and resist forced eviction of coastal communities
- ix. To support all community based sustainable livelihood initiatives
- x. Adherence to the principles of transparency and accountability in relief and rehabilitation

V. ACTIVITIES

1. State-Level Consultations

Chennai, 26 January 2005: Public-Private Partnerships in Tsunami Rehabilitation

Members of the Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation (TRRC) met, in combination with state government representatives to discuss the State's long-term rehabilitation agenda and current challenges to implementation based on both Government and NGO activities to date. As this consultation was convened especially in reference to Government Orders 25 and 26, much of the dialogue there concerned the proper nature of the "public-private partnerships" envisioned in those orders. At the same time, concerns about equality of access to assistance and about inclusion of marginalized groups also figured prominently throughout the session.

The consultation marked its start with a minute of silence and moved thereafter to four consecutive sessions traversing the context, partners, accountability mechanisms, and participatory structures belonging to the relief effort. These discussions were followed by the presentation of ten resolutions approved by the body, and finally by a question-and-answer session in which Mr. Santhanam, IAS, Special Commissioner for Relief and Rehabilitation and Mr. C.V. Shankar, IAS, Special Officer of Tsunami Relief responded to queries about future government policy and the State's provision of relief to date.

Outcome: The government responded positively and has assured that nothing will happen against the interests of the affected communities. This consultation has indicated the strength of TRRC to the the government.

Cuddalore, 30 January 2005: Child Protection and Education

TRRC convened a consultation on children affected by tsunami along with child rights organizations working in the affected regions. The state was also represented in this meeting by officials from the Education Department. With the welfare and rights of the

child as its primary focus, the consultation covered a wide range of issues from education to the rights of unborn children. It was stressed that schools in the affected areas should be reconstructed as social spaces that cater to the complete rehabilitation of the affected children. Further, the tsunami should be used as an opportunity for creating a holistic education program that will bring children who are out of school into the education system. Discussions also covered adoption policies for children orphaned by the tsunami, community parenting, the threat of exploitation, and the need for complete and balanced nutrition for children and pregnant women. Finally, concerns were raised about examinations for the affected children, especially children facing the board exams this year.

The consultation resulted in the formation of special committees to look after each of the areas covered throughout the day. The first of these high-level committees, focused on the urgent issue of examinations and headed by Dr. Andal Damodaran, has already met with the Education Secretary and the Chief Secretary to represent the concerns raised at the consultation. This resulted in the government postponing the exams for the 10th and 12th standard students and announcement of fresh dates at a later point of time.

Outcome: The government issued orders to the effect of conducting special examinations for the students affected by Tsunami.

Chennai, 28.02.05; NGOs Consultation on 'Right to the Coast'

The recent trends in the post-Tsunami scenario are raising many concerns, especially the coastal communities' right to the coast, which is currently under serious threat. While the relief and rehabilitation have not fully reached the victims and the reconstruction process is yet to get its footing, the coastal communities are being forcibly evicted. Signatures have been obtained from community members (without clearly informing them the purpose of the signatures) to relocate them beyond 1000 meters, while the position of industries, resorts, hotels and other corporate project on the coast will not be affected. These trends clearly show that the market globalization forces have come into the process of taking over the coast using the Tsunami as a pretext for relocating the coastal communities from the coast.

It is essential that the civil society ensure the coastal communities' right to the coast. The purpose of this consultation was to generate a common position on the coastal communities' right to coast and create a common action plan. This meeting provided a platform for those working with the coastal communities and facilitated the discussion in order to reach clear position on the coastal rights. It was also hoped that state level activities would be discussed and that this meeting would benefit the future of the communities residing in the coastal region of Tamil Nadu.

The meeting took place on February 28, 2005, in Padi Chennai, and was organized by the following organizations:

- Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Coordination (TRRC), Tamil Nadu & Pondichery
- Kattumaram – Makkal Medai (KMM)
- North Tamil Nadu Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Committee (NTN TRRC)
- Coastal Action Network (CAN)
- Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation (HRFDL)
- National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)

Outcome: Six organizations have come together to imitate a state wide campaign to fight for the right to the coast of the coastal communities.

Chennai, 12.02.05, Memorandum to the Education Secretary, Govt. of Tamilnadu

Subsequent to the consultation held at Cuddalore on 30.01.05 on issues relating children and education, a high level committee of educationists has been formed to make a representation of TRRC to the Government of Tamilnadu. A memorandum to the effect of influencing the government to conduct special examinations preceded by an expert committee assessment of Tsunami affected students of Class 10th and 12th was presented in person to The Secretary, Higher Education, Government of Tamilnadu and the Commissioner of School examinations. This memorandum was accepted in principle by the state and orders to this effect has been issued on the next day-13.02.05

Outcome: The government issued orders to the effect of conducting special examinations for the students affected by Tsunami.

Chennai, 10.06.05, State level consultation on G.O 172 on housing

The findings of the study on G.O 172 has resulted in TRRC organizing a state level consultation on issues relating the allocation of land in housing reconstruction and right to the coast. The study revealed the disapproval of G.O.172 by a large majority (95%) of the affected communities. It was also made clear that these communities are not willing to relinquish their existing properties as required by the G.O.

More than 20 INGOs and another 20 NGOs and movements have participated in the consultation. Unlike the previous consultations, this consultation has witnessed a majority of INGOs falling in line with the policy influencing mandate of TRRC. This consultation has lead to TRRC along with other actors including INGOS to take a position of;

1. *The government to allow the tsunami affected communities to reside in places which are most preferable to them.*
2. *The government to rehabilitate people, irrespective of their place of preference for living, and*
3. *The government to pursue people centered approach to rehabilitation”.*

Outcome: A state level meeting of the traditional panchayat leaders of the fishing communities has been scheduled for 12th July at Chennai, since it was felt necessary to organize the voices of the affected communities to express their disapproval to G.O. 172.

Chennai, 12th July 2005: State level consultation with the Traditional Coastal Panchayat representatives on issues in land allocation for housing

The state level consultation with the representatives of the Traditional Coastal Panchayat has witnessed the participation of 140 traditional panchayatar, 35 NGOs, 26 INGOs, 7 representatives of fishermen movements / associations and many other media people. The findings of the study mentioned in the previous paragraph were completely endorsed by the panchayat representatives and the following decisions were made;

1. TRRC will write a letter to the Chief Minister on behalf of the Tsunami affected communities seeking for an appointment to make a direct representation on the issues surrounding land allocation and the implications of G.O.172

2. Failing to get the appointment of the CM or the representation itself yielding no positive results either, the coastal Panchayats along with the support of the TRRC will organize protests in all the coastal blocks, demanding the state government to withdraw / nullify the G.O. 172 and invite the affected communities for evolving people friendly rehabilitation policies, on 15th August 2005.

Having had no response for the letters sent to the CM, TRRC after due consultation with the Panchayat representatives has facilitated all the coastal Gram Panchayats to pass a resolution demanding withdrawal of G.O.172, during their Gram Sabha Meeting on the 15th August which is the independence day of India.

Outcome: Right now, TRRC is in the process of collecting the resolution copies and the available information indicates that at least 60 out of 103 Gram Panchayats have passed a resolution to this effect.

2. Zonal Consultations with Affected Communities

The zonal consultations—held at Cuddalore, Thoothukudi, Kanyakumari, and Nagapattinam in the first week of February—were essentially aimed at making the affected communities aware of the policy pronouncements and government orders relating to relief and rehabilitation and at assessing the extent of implementation by the State administration. These consultations were designed in a format where policies were spelt out to an audience of representatives from the various strata of the affected communities and then comment invited. On this basis, the TRRC organizers canvassed the diverse subsets of tsunami survivors on the feasibility of government policy, the status of implementation, and the needs of each community. Finally, this input and related demands were formulated into resolutions addressed to the government. These consultations have resulted in a number of issues being thrown up including discrimination based on caste, livelihood, gender and disability. Further several gaps and exclusions in the relief and rehabilitation process have come to the fore. Per its mandate, the TRRC has used these consultations to advocate for better and inclusive implementation of the existing government orders and for a more non-discriminatory, egalitarian, inclusive, and participatory policy regime.

These meetings concluded with an overwhelming demand from the communities for a grievance redress mechanism, as most of the government orders and their lofty intentions relating to tsunami have been violated on the field. They resolved also for the formation of a Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Committee in every village, consisting of representatives of traditional Panchayat leaders, elected Panchayat leaders, women, children, co-operatives, and NGOs to plan, implement and monitor relief activities. Finally, the coastal communities asserted their inalienable rights to the coast and its resources under the customary law. They called upon the government to support these rights and to assist in the clearance of investment encroachers—including tourism, mining, and other intrusive industries—from the coastline.

Outcome: Study on “Discrimination / Exclusion in the State relief”

3. District level consultations with NGOs; Right to the coast

Following the resolutions of the state level consultation with NGOs on ‘right to the coast’, TRRC has organized district level consultations with locally present NGOs on matters relating ‘right to the coast’. The consultations were well received by NGOs who

represent the felt needs of the affected communities. And these consultations have paved a way for carrying out a massive ‘petition drive’ among the affected communities through petitions signed by them, demanding the state to protect their right to the coast. However, in the mid of more than 100,000 signed by the people, the state government has started waving positive indications on the issue. The petition drive has come to a brief suspension; awaiting further actions depending on future notifications of the state.

Outcome: Overwhelming participation of local NGOs and community groups in the “Right to the coast” petition drive and increased membership to TRRC

4. District level People’s Committees

As an effort towards facilitating community participation in relief & rehabilitation and for facilitating the affected communities to recognize their right; not only for relief & rehabilitation, but also for their ‘right to the coast’, it has been planned to promote People committees in all the 13 coastal districts. People’ committees will be promoted by the local NGOs who have joined TRRC during the district level consultations just held. TRRC will invest much of its resources in strengthening these people committees, so as to enable them in dealing issues that affect them and limit its operations with only a supportive role over a period.

5. Post-Tsunami Research Studies

Completed: TRRC has carried out the following studies which are first of their kind in the post-tsunami context;

1. Rapid Impact Assessment study; report was released on 10.01.05 at Trichy (carried out by People’s Watch-Tamilnadu)
2. Study on “Discrimination / Exclusion in State relief”
3. Study on “Profiling of Widows and Orphans”
4. Study of “People’s Perceptions on G.O.172”

In progress: The following studies are in progress and are expected to be completed by the end September.

1. Assessment of Impact of Tsunami on Coastal ecology, Water & Sanitation and Emerging health issues – ongoing
2. Study on assessing the vulnerabilities and Livelihood security needs of the secondary impacted communities.
3. Extensive study titled, “Housing construction; People Vs NGOs – Contemporary Issues” – October.

In the agenda: The following studies have been planned for the next 3-6 months.

1. Study from a human rights perspective, on the participation of Children and Adolescent girls in Tsunami Rehabilitation
2. Study on financial resources inflow and utilization by the State,
3. Study on financial resources inflow& utilization by civil society groups and others
4. state funds – corruption and misappropriation
5. Psycho social and educational status of children affected by Tsunami

6. Representation in International / regional forums

Bangkok, 13-14.02.2005: Asian Civil Society Consultation on Post-Tsunami Challenges

State convenors of TRRC have participated in the Asian Civil Society Consultation on Post-Tsunami Challenges, which held in Bangkok, Thailand from February 13th to the 14th, 2005. Forum-Asia and ActionAid International have organized this consultation around five agendas; the sharing of stories from affected countries, the specific concern of vulnerable or marginalized groups, issues relating to the disaster response, identification of key challenges and strategies for joint action. The program included a discussion and brainstorming session on civil society activities to date, achievements, failures, and key issues to be addressed. Representatives from Burma (Myanmar), India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. There will be thematic presentations on Humanitarian aid, Development, Peace and Conflict and Human Rights.

Sri Lanka, 11-13 March 2005: Post Tsunami - People Centered Recovery Process

This was a regional meeting to enable tsunami survivors from across South Asian countries to explain their needs and priorities in the recovery process. The meeting was organized by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) in collaboration with Women Bank and Women Development Bank micro credit networks in Sri Lanka and Sevanatha Urban Resource Center. This meeting was also held in collaboration with Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and COHRE which are concerned very much with the issues of protecting the housing rights and livelihoods of the poor in urban and rural areas.

Women from the tsunami affected communities in Tamilnadu have participated in this consultation along with a representative of TRRC.

7. Information support to the affected communities

TRRC has been publishing a quarterly news letter; the first edition with 25,000 copies was published in the month February 2005. This news letter named, "Tsunami Relief & Rehabilitation News letter" carries an array of Tsunami related information, press clippings, highlights of various issues and more importantly a gist of Government Orders on Tsunami Relief & Rehabilitation. TRRC zonal offices and district representatives take the responsibility of distributing them direct to the affected communities within a couple of days of printing. This news letter is the first of its kind in the post-tsunami scenario.

8. SPHERE Standards

Considering the appropriateness and importance of the SPHERE standards, TRRC has initiated educating the communities and various actors involved in the R&R processes. As the first step towards this, TRRC has translated the "minimum Standards" chapter in Tamil. Translation of the rest of the SPHERE standards hand book is in progress. On completion, the entire book will be published in Tamil and be disseminated to the larger audience. This work is supported by OXFAM.

9. UN Guidelines on "Protection of Internally displaced persons in situations of Natural Disaster"

TRRC has been advocating that the UN guidelines on the protection of internally displaced persons in situations of natural disaster must be taken into account while

framing the rehabilitation policies for the tsunami affected communities. The rehabilitation policies of the Tamil Nadu state government has completely ignored these guidelines and that TRRC has been pursuing it a major agenda. While planning for a state level consultation on this, TRRC has also decided to disseminate these guidelines in printed book form. TRRC has managed to get the Tamil version of these guidelines from its Sri Lankan associate and the printing of the books is in progress.

10. Influencing INGOs

TRRC values the support and partnering strength of International Funding Agencies who have been very much active and who have a greater say over the relief and rehabilitation processes in Tamilnadu. Although, many of these INGOs regularly take part in all the consultations organized by TRRC, they could not take a stand on issues that necessitates countering the state. However, having experienced a lot of difficulties in beginning to implement their housing projects owing to the poor housing rehabilitation policies of the state, the INGOs have started recognizing the need for a strong policy influencing and advocacy work and that TRRC has become an important resource for these types of tasks.

It was in this background, TRRC was invited to make a presentation on the issues relating G.O.172 among a group of 20 INGOs who have come together to form an INGO Coordination. The INGO Coordination is primarily comprised of INGOs funded by the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) of UK, and few other INGOs. Action Aid India plays the lead role in building the coordination in India. In addition to making direct presentations, TRRC also shares all of its research documents with a wide number of organizations including the INGOS.

VI. TASKS AHEAD

Coastal communities' 'Right to the Coast" and Protecting "Coastal Environment"

Although, the recent announcements of the state appears to be positive; meaning, permitting the coastal communities to reside within 500 meters, future actions need be subjected for close monitoring, particularly when physical construction begins. A doubt on the intentions of the state in granting this permission remains valid in the context of many private beach resorts still businesssing within 200 meters and the state keeping mum on this matter. In addition, this also raises a series threat over the agenda of conserving the coastal environment.

Uncertainties in this regard provide an imperative for TRRC like organizations to continue their activities till the issue is addressed with a long term perspective.

Housing Policies of the state

Even after 8 months of the Tsunami, except for a few, none of the affected communities have got their houses built. Despite, having a large number of INGOs / NGOs who have adequate money and willingness to construct houses, the state finds it difficult in allocating lands / villages for them to begin their work. In addition, the state has not yet declared its policy / intentions on ensuring disaster resistant technology in rebuilding of houses. TRRC feels that it has a major role to play in this regard.

Owner driven housing

Giving due consideration to the complexities involved in housing by third parties like the NGOs, INGOs and the state, TRRC firmly believe that only the concept of ‘owner driven housing ‘ would be the best solution. There are successful models available in many places including Gujarat. Also, the contemporary housing reconstruction programs in Indonesia and Thailand adapt this model, which the communities find very promising. TRRC would like to promote this concept through a series of policy influencing and advocacy activities.

Securing the Livelihoods of the coastal agricultural communities, marginalized & vulnerable communities

It is so very evident that a many groups and communities, including the inland / backwater fishing & para fishing communities, non fishing & coastal agricultural communities have been either excluded or discriminated in the relief & rehabilitation processes of the state. For reasons of not having visible / physical damages these communities have not been listed as eligible for relief. Where as they have lost their livelihoods sources and in many cases these lose are irrevocable. There is a pressing need for them to be provided with one or the other alternate source of livelihood that only could make them manage their living.

Governments attention needs to be drawn on these issues and that TRRC presume a role in it.

VII. UP-COMING EVENTS

- State level consultation on issues relating land allocation by the state for housing – October
- State level consultation on the Disaster management Bill 2005 with specific reference to UN guidelines for, “Protection of Internally displaced persons in situations of Natural Disaster” , Gujarat State Disaster Management Bill 2003 and our own experiences - October
- Releasing of the report of the study on, “Vulnerabilities and Livelihood security needs of the non-ocean fishing communities affected by Tsunami in Tamilnadu” – September
- Releasing of the report of the study on, “Housing construction; People Vs NGOs – Contemporary Issues” – October.
- Community representatives’ visit to Kutch to learn ‘owner driven housing practices’

VIII. CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

TRRC is not an exemption for problems that are common to any coordination of this nature. TRRC’s inclusive approach itself is a constraint when it comes to matters of urgency. This is because the key member organizations in TRRC do have their own programs and commitments in Tsunami relief & rehabilitation work. For want of time, one needs to prioritize matters between their respective organization and TRRC. This at times either increases the pressure or limits the speed in delivering things.

Another major challenge that we foresee is the ‘dilemma’ of the affected communities with regard to maintaining their stand to residing within 500 meters. The continuing series of earthquakes in Indonesia and Andaman & Nicobar Islands have made these communities re-

think of their stand. This may provide a context for the state to revert to their original orders of relocating people beyond 1000 meters.

Caste based discrimination has been part of our system for a long. Coastal communities cannot be an exemption for this menace. Still for all, having necessitated by their occupation, they have working in collaboration amidst the differences. But, the relief & rehabilitation activities of the state have started triggering these differences, knowingly or unknowingly, to the extend that many of the dalit communities can no longer work and live with the fisher folk. There also appears to be some efforts by a few vested interest groups to politicize the issue. These need to be handled with at most care and diplomacy, the failure of which might lead to another disaster of a human inducement.

All these together, make the task complex and challenging.

IX. LEARNINGS & BEST PRACTICES

Learning

Leave alone the tragic behind Tsunami; it has been a rich experience and learning in terms of getting to know about varying issues and dimensions relating livelihoods of different communities. Particularly, in the pre-tsunami context of hardly any NGO working with the coastal communities, our involvement in the relief and rehabilitation has brought in new learning and understanding about these communities. The learning about the social structure and systems that were inherited by the fishing communities from their fore fathers is certainly an eye opener, not only for TRRC, but also for any development organizations. It cannot be a statement of exaggeration, if we say that these communities run a parallel civil administration. The community parenting and widow caring systems that exist as an integral part of their culture is definitely a learning for many of us. The notion of orphan is rarely seen in these communities.

Also, it is surprising to note that caste based discrimination and integration co-exists in many of these communities where only a thin line of distinction is seen between the dalits and fisher folks. Any carefully planned long term investment would certainly bring in social changes.

In nutshell, the social capital for these communities in general and the fisher folks in particular is so very strong, that need be capitalized for any interventions that are intended to benefit them.

Best practices

Amidst a number of difficulties, TRRC has demonstrated its commitment and persistence in addressing issues in the 'Human rights' way. Though there many NGOs to make a claim for their right, there only a few to voice for the rights of the affected communities. This long standing phenomenon has been proved to be wrong in the post-tsunami context, in which many NGOs keep joining TRRC. If the untiring and focused work of TRRC could be taken as a reason for this, the recognition by these NGOs of their social responsibility must be taken as the other reason. TRRC is confident of creating a model for the future, for any coordination of this kind.

X. CONCLUSION

Since its inception, TRRC remains informal in its form. As a conscious decision, it does not entertain channeling of resources to its members or any other actors for that matter. It never

thought to be a permanent organization. All that TRRC want is to make sure that the affected communities get what they really deserve without any bias or what so ever. TRRC might not exist, once the state exhibits its accountability and demonstrates transparency in all of its Tsunami-relief and rehabilitation.