

Asia/ India**Rebuilding hopes**

These “Recommendations for Tsunami Victims”, dated 20 January 2005, were put forward by the National Commission for Women and the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Women

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The tsunami of 26 December 2004 has devastated the coastal communities over long stretches of Tamil Nadu, killing thousands, destroying houses, boats, fishing gear, agricultural lands and salt pans, and wiping out millions of livelihoods. Nearly a month after the killer waves hit, the National Commission for Women and the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Women, held, on 20 January 2005, an interaction with tsunami victims and civil society organizations working among them, to formulate recommendations for relief, rehabilitation and restoration of livelihoods in the affected areas. The recommendations below that emerged from the interaction were, later in the day, presented to the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Recommendations:

1. Title to permanent houses constructed for tsunami victims must be in the joint names of the woman and the man of the household. The titles must be given with the proviso that any alienation of her share by the woman in favour of the man would be, *ipso facto*, considered invalid. Female and male heirs of beneficiaries will have equal rights of inheritance.
2. Rehabilitation and restoration work in each affected community must be formulated and implemented in a participatory process, in consultation with the concerned community, including its women, and not purely by bureaucratic decisions.
3. A sustainable livelihood security strategy should be evolved based on the principles of gender equity and social inclusion.
4. Women of the fishing communities and also other women living in the area, who were involved in selling fish, have completely lost their livelihoods. They must be counted separately as tsunami-affected, and special relief packages must be

offered to them. Alternative livelihood options must be provided for them until they are able to resume their former economic activities.

5. Separate enumeration of pregnant women and lactating mothers in the tsunami-affected areas must be made. Special relief packages, including full nutritional support, must be offered to them all through their pregnancy/lactation period.
6. The traumatic effect of the disaster on pregnant women must be assessed, and special medical care, including necessary scanning and psychological counselling, must be immediately offered to them free of cost.
7. Liquor shops run by the government’s Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) in the affected areas are reporting roaring sales as men make a bee-line to them, with relief amounts in their hands, apparently to get over the tsunami-induced gloom. The TASMAC centres in the tsunami-affected districts must be closed for at least a month.
8. To ensure that relief amounts fully benefit children and families, the amounts must be paid to the women of the households.
9. In many tsunami-hit shores, trees and bushes that provided toilet cover for women have been destroyed. Children, who normally went to the water’s edge to ease themselves, are now totally scared of the sea and would not venture near it. So, toilets must be constructed immediately to allow women privacy and also for the sanitation of the area. These must be provided even in temporary shelters.
10. Protected water supply must be provided to the affected communities.
11. A number of self-help groups had been functioning among women of the fishing community, and these have been badly hit by the tsunami. The loans of these self-help groups must be written off. If it is not totally feasible, then the loans must be rescheduled according to the repaying capacity of the shattered communities.
12. A policy for adoption of children orphaned in the calamity must be evolved, with great care and concern and in consultation with the community. Experienced social workers and childcare organizations of repute must be asked to study the specific context of each child and propose the suitable arrangement for each child. Decisions in matters of adoption should not be taken as per a blanket government order, however well-intentioned

it is.

13. Children in the affected areas have suffered a complete disruption of their studies, loss of study materials and loss of family members, resulting in great psychological trauma. Schools must be immediately opened and children put on the return path to normalcy. Psychological counselling must be arranged in all the schools in the areas.
14. The printing and supply of textbooks and notebooks and of uniforms by the Tamil Nadu government is, no doubt, a welcome measure. However well-intentioned it is, it will take time to supply study materials to children in all classes. Priority must be given to children in the tenth and twelfth standards and study materials must be immediately supplied to them. Special coaching for them, free of cost, must be arranged to enable them to face their examinations with confidence.
15. The examinations for the tenth and twelfth standards in tsunami-affected areas must be postponed.
16. As for children in other classes/standards, in view of the devastation they have experienced, all of them in the affected areas must be promoted to the next higher class at the end of the year.
17. Adequate supply of kerosene, free of cost, for families to resume cooking must be ensured until normalcy is restored.
18. Landward housing sites for fishers and other affected families must be provided. The new houses should respect the 500-m coastal regulation zone and should be ecologically designed. They should also be close to their earlier locations, to ensure the fishing community its lifeline to the sea.
19. The design of the houses must be decided in consultation with the communities and experts in disaster-proof housing.
20. In places like Chennai, many hutments along the seashore had been occupied by tenants, who lost everything when the waves hit. In such cases, relief and rehabilitation entitlements must be given to the actual losers, after careful verification.
21. Women rendered destitute by the disaster should be rehabilitated in their own community to the extent possible, providing them with adequate livelihood security and independent housing. They should not be herded into destitute homes.
22. The need for counselling and trauma care for victims is being stressed. The government is



training a large number of teachers and social workers to serve as counsellors. The counsellors must be allotted to specific communities for a certain length of time. They should establish a relationship with the community to generate a confidence in them.

23. The non-fishing affected communities, like agriculturists, those engaged in occupations ancillary to fishing, salt pan workers and so on must have the same entitlements as the affected fishing people.
24. Massive food-for-work programmes must be undertaken in all the affected areas. Women must be given at least 50 per cent of the employment generated by the programmes.
25. A special "Food for Livelihood Revival and Eco-Protection" programme should be initiated in all the affected areas. The programme should be sanctioned for a year and should aim at creating assets for the tsunami-ravaged areas. The precise priorities can be developed for each village in consultation with local *panchayats*, particularly with its women.
26. Most of the works can be entrusted to self-help groups (SHGs). Priority works to be undertaken through the above schemes are:
 - raising of mangrove forests, with appropriate species, to serve as speed breakers during tsunamis and other coastal storms and also as carbon sinks
 - organization of community nurseries of mangrove and other appropriate tree species

- building artificial coral reefs
 - reclamation of salinized soils for restoration of agricultural lands
 - integrated capture and culture fisheries. Women of fisher families can be trained to take up the rearing of prawns and suitable salt-tolerant fish species in canals along the sea coast, using low external-input sustainable aquaculture techniques.
27. The tsunami calamity provides an opportunity for achieving a paradigm shift from unsustainable to sustainable fisheries. The major aim of aquarian policy must be the conservation of living aquatic resources, sustainable use, equitable sharing of benefits, and harmony between artisanal and mechanized fishing.
28. School buildings and *aganwadis* in the area, which were already in a pathetic state of disrepair, have collapsed in the tsunami. They should be rebuilt to be attractive and child-friendly, with all the necessary facilities. They should become centres for rebuilding the shattered confidence and hopes of the communities. This requires well-trained teachers, to be posted in adequate numbers (one per class, whatever be the class size). Part of the funding for reconstruction must be utilized for strengthening the public school system in the area.
29. A good number of persons seem to be missing. Attempts must be made to declare them dead at the earliest. The commissions are particularly concerned about young women, who may have to wait for a long time before remarrying, if the husbands are not declared dead. It would be in the interest of victims to put their lives back on track by re-marriage or completing other legal formalities one year after the tragedy. The stipulation of seven years as the “presumption of death” period as per Hindu Succession Act and the Indian Evidence Act is too long, particularly in the context of a calamity that has claimed many lives. Necessary amendments to the Acts at the Central and State levels must be considered to curtail the length of the period.