

Rehabilitation

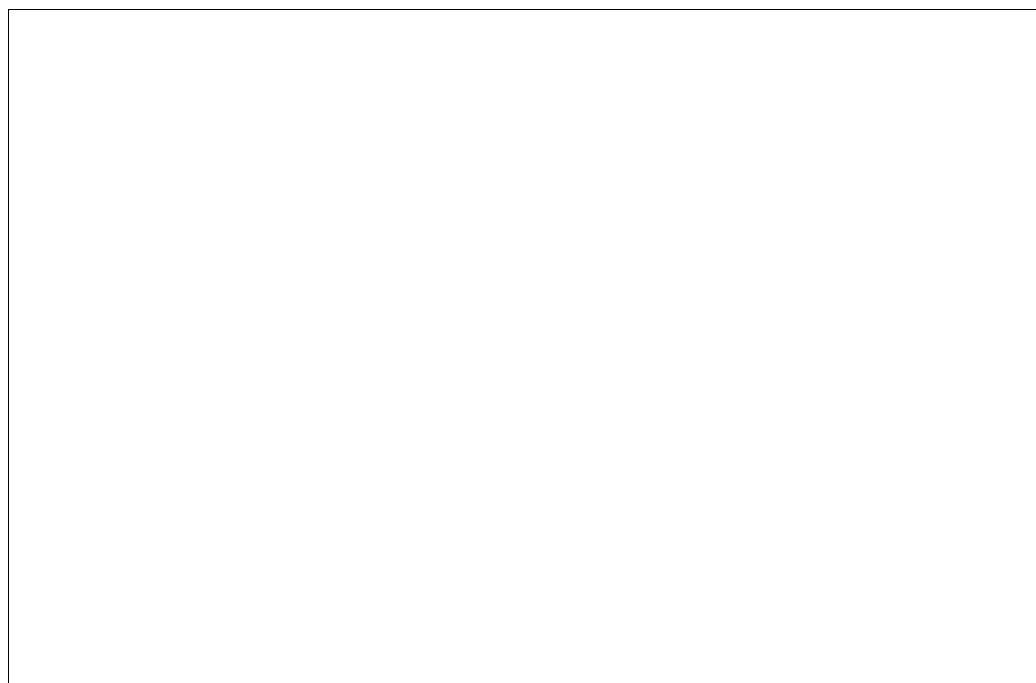
A new resource centre

This is a concept note for a proposed
NGO Resource Centre for Tsunami Relief in India

The South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS), in collaboration with Social Need Education and Human Awareness (SNEHA), a non-governmental organization (NGO) working in Nagapattinam, has been running the NGO Co-ordination Centre in the Nagapattinam District Collectorate since 1 January 2005 to co-ordinate the tsunami relief work in the district. Nagapattinam was the worst-affected district on the Indian mainland and, expectedly, attracted the greatest attention from both the government and civil society. Not surprisingly, there were serious problems of co-ordination among the NGOs and also between the NGOs and the government. Realizing this quite early on, the district administration, under a group of senior officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), established a working relationship with the NGOs and this led to the formation of an NGO co-ordination centre, with SIFFS given the mandate to run it. SNEHA, with its strong grassroots presence in the district, joined SIFFS to put the centre on a strong footing.

During its first three weeks, the centre did the following:

- Registered all NGOs working in the district and created a database for public access
- Set up a system of volunteers covering most of the affected villages and established a two-way system of information flow to and from the villages
- Co-ordinated with the government relief system to ensure that relief materials reached all camps and villages, based on the needs reported by the village volunteers
- Helped the government manage relief materials in the godowns, with volunteers to handle materials and install computerized inventory control systems
- Passed on details of unmet demands to other NGOs and donors, and organized supply of materials
- Conducted a series of meetings to create a sense of common purpose among the NGOs
- Provided information to all NGOs on a number of aspects that they need to understand to take up their tasks
- Formed sector groups related to shelter, livelihoods, counselling, health, sanitation, children, etc., which came up with guidelines and policies
- Ran a separate desk for legal aid for families of missing persons, and worked with the district administration for a single-window system for such cases to ensure speedy redress
- Worked out a consensus among NGOs on where each should work for interim shelter and thus avoid unnecessary overlap
- Put up policy notes to the government on the interim shelter and permanent rehabilitation plans



The Co-ordination Centre was run mainly with qualified volunteers from different parts of the country. A number of NGOs and organizations were happy to allow their staff to work with the Centre.

While relief activities needed co-ordination, the rehabilitation phase needs significant inputs of a different kind to ensure that the work is effective and that the long-term sustainability and development of the affected communities takes place. The response to the sectoral groups also indicates that the NGOs and donors involved in the rehabilitation would like to have access to technical expertise and policy guidelines in their respective areas of interest. The village communities themselves would like to have some entity which would help them understand the options available to them. Further, the strategy of working with volunteers is not sustainable for the rehabilitation phase, which could easily go on for at least a year.

In view of the above, SIFFS and SNEHA have decided to convert the Co-ordination Centre into a Resource Centre, which will provide a range of services to the communities and organizations involved in the rehabilitation process. The Resource Centre would work on the basis of a small core team of professionals and full-timers, supported by volunteers.

The Resource Centre will have two distinct constituencies: the communities and outside agencies. The outside agencies will include NGOs, donors, and governmental and inter-governmental agencies involved in the rehabilitation.

For the agencies involved in the rehabilitation, the Resource Centre will:

- function as an information centre for all relevant background studies, data and statistics;
- link with technical and other resource organizations and individual experts and make available technical knowhow, designs, etc. relevant for the rehabilitation process;
- provide technical and policy guidelines on themes like habitat, shelter, livelihoods, etc.;
- prepare policy notes for the use of the government and NGOs/donors; and
- organize regular interactions, meetings and workshops that will enable all the agencies involved in rehabilitation to learn from one another, develop common perspectives and strengthen collaboration.

Some heartburn, much confusion

According to one estimate, around 300 villages in the south Indian State of Andhra Pradesh were affected by the tsunami, which claimed 105 human lives and left 11 persons 'missing'. It completely destroyed 1,300 boats and damaged nearly 11,000 fishing vessels. Some 35,000 nets were lost, which was by far the most crippling effect of the tsunami for the fishers of the State. Nearly 300,000 fishers have been rendered jobless because their gear was lost or damaged. Over 1,500 houses were damaged and nearly 200 heads of cattle lost. The cost of reconstruction for the State has been estimated at Rs3.4 bn (us\$77.8 mn).

The response to the tsunami was quite confused in the early stages, with even the fishers unable to account for the strange happenings and fearing that the end of the world had come. Slowly, as the initial fears subsided, they began to organize relief measures. The district-level government agencies also recovered quickly with measures for evacuation and relief. Even as the waves continued to sweep in, senior officers reached some of the remote villages and took part in the evacuation, which was a notable achievement, considering that many of them had no idea

about the nature and magnitude of the disaster. Whole villages were quickly evacuated and people transported to hurriedly set up relief camps. The families of the dead were provided financial assistance on the spot for funerals and their insurance claims were settled quickly.

Once the threat passed and the fishers returned to the villages, rice was provided to those families that had ration cards, causing some discontent. Confining the assistance to providing rice alone and waiting for important officials to find the time to come and inaugurate the distribution programme (forcing the already starving people to wait for a day or more) added to the tensions too.

The response of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and charity groups (particularly in the northern districts) was less evident, maybe because of the government's overwhelming response or because of funding constraints. One apparent shortcoming was the performance of the 'disaster preparedness' programmes in many areas, which simply seemed to have melted down in the face of a tsunami. "But we prepared people to deal with cyclones, and not this!" insisted one NGO field

For the communities, the Resource Centre will:

- strengthen the system of village volunteers (already in place) which provides two-way communication between the communities and the rehabilitation system (government, NGOs, donors, etc.); and
- equip village communities to prepare their own micro-level plans for rehabilitation and take greater control and ownership of the rehabilitation process.

The Resource Centre will be headed by a Chief Executive capable of giving leadership to the team and interfacing with both the government and NGOs/donors.

The rest of the organization structure will comprise sector team leaders, a head of administration, an information manager,

computer specialists, etc. There will also be a team leader who will lead the community support team (in place of the existing system of village volunteers and co-ordinators). A Steering Committee will supervise the activities of the Resource Centre. It will be composed of five persons who have been part of the Co-ordination Centre activities from the start, including the heads of SIFFS and SNEHA.

Volunteers needed

The actual human resources needed for each of the sectors and departments will depend on the workload and needs felt from time to time. In addition to the full-timers, part-timers and volunteers will be made use of for various tasks.

The Resource Centre will be in touch with a number of institutions and individuals with expertise in various thematic areas connected with the rehabilitation process.

It is expected that the Centre will be funded by a small group of donors who would like to encourage participatory

worker. The arrival of charity groups carrying hastily assembled relief materials—sometimes inappropriate or inadequate—that were dumped in the villages also caused some heartburn and much confusion.

The real disaster was the rehabilitation programme. There is no agency suitably equipped to handle post-disaster relief and rehabilitation in an organized manner in the State. So, every time a disaster strikes, an ad hoc body is set up to oversee relief and rehabilitation and it comes up with ad hoc responses rather than a clearly defined system of rules and guidelines.

Velugu, an ongoing State government rural poverty elimination programme focusing on the poorest of the poor, with a specific mandate and a clearly defined framework to implement it, was chosen as the nodal agency for the tsunami rehabilitation programme.

This proved problematic as it involved short-term, one-off measures and did not address the needs of a much wider constituency of people. Its group-based, women-oriented strategies did not match the objectives of a rehabilitation programme particularly targeted at a predominantly

male-oriented package of boats and nets. This too caused much heartburn among those not covered. The fishermen are upset about getting boats and nets through the women, and antagonism towards the women's groups has grown. Moreover, the *Velugu* groups do not cover *everyone* in the village. Some recent measures to form new groups exempted from fulfilling the existing *Velugu* guidelines are likely to have adverse implications on the performance of the existing portfolio of *Velugu* programmes. The rehabilitation efforts have also been hampered by reducing community participation to mere information gathering, long delays in providing support and political interference.

Migrant fish processor-traders have been ignored in the rehabilitation package, which has been confined to providing boats and nets alone. Ironically enough, support has been provided to people and areas that had no impact whatsoever from the tsunami.

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processes and support the autonomy of the Centre. Many NGOs, donors and corporate bodies will be encouraged to depute or second staff for the Resource Centre as their contribution to the rehabilitation efforts. 3

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