

## Fundraising

## Ripples of hope

An account of fundraising in the US by  
Clean Catch and the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance

“Problems can become opportunities when the right people come together.”  
—Robert South

The world shook on 26 December 2004 literally and figuratively. The tsunami that followed the historic earthquake left indelible marks on the global psyche. Three months hence, the magnitude of human life loss is still incomprehensible.

In the aftermath, we found ourselves awed by a few things...

The reports of animal behaviour and survival ring of indigenous oral stories passed down generations. Survival of indigenous tribes that followed their ancestors’ teachings to prevent disaster seems almost magical.

A stunned global public responded in unprecedented fashion through international aid agencies and private fundraising efforts.

Wondering about the efficiency by which aid would reach the actual victims, an effort to put money directly in the hands of those affected began in the United States by Clean Catch and the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA).

The response left us speechless. What began as an email sent to a few friends resulted in individuals and communities from around the world responding not just to a call to give money, but a call to preserve a way of life that is critical to the health of the oceans.

Clearly, this was not just another relief effort—we had an agenda. Those of us organizing the fund continue to believe that how the fishing communities of the region are rebuilt will have a direct

impact on the region’s marine ecosystem, with wide-reaching ripple effects. Therefore, we chose to direct the funds to fishing community organizations dedicated to preventing the expansion of industrial shrimp aquaculture, refusing factory fishing operations, working to eliminate toxics from the marine environment, and bolstering the economic rights of small-scale, indigenous and artisanal fishing communities. We knew they would fight hard for these principles while working on rebuilding their communities.

As one of the organizers of this fund, the necessity of supporting these communities came to light early on in this relief effort when I got a call from a fishing group offering help. I should note that this was the only offer for help in response to the tsunami that I turned down.

The particular group offering help represented the large-scale, industrial, agribusiness type of fishing effort. They were suggesting that in the wake of such loss, they would help those communities rebuild and ‘modernize’ after their own image. They would take their boats there, fish the waters, map what marine species were available, sell their catch to locals or elsewhere to recover their costs, and help rebuild shoreside facilities in a manner that would support their vessels.

I thanked them for their offer, but declined as I knew the fishing communities I worked with believed they should determine what their future should look like. It would be disrespectful to impose our vision of ‘a’ future on them. Simply put, it’s about self-determination.

#### No dialogue

The conversation ended after my suggestion that, alternatively, their group

## Fisherwomen for fisherwomen

A few days after the tsunami hit the coasts of several regions in Asia, on 31 December 2004, the women of VinVis, the women in fisheries network of the Netherlands, registered a new organization called “Fisherwomen for Fisherwomen in Asia” and began to raise funds in their local communities. They distributed self-made posters and flyers, approached schools and sent out press releases. The response was good and the women’s actions received national attention.

All funds raised by VinVis are meant for reconstruction activities in fisheries, in particular for activities that will benefit fisherwomen and their families. Through direct contacts with fisherwomen’s organizations in Asia, VinVis has been able to obtain immediate and factual information on the real problems and needs of the affected communities. VinVis wishes to ensure that the rehabilitation projects it supports are planned in consultation with the affected fisherwomen and will really benefit them.

Fundraising for tsunami relief and rehabilitation has been massive in the Netherlands and also elsewhere in Europe. Many villages and fishing families in the affected tourist belts in Sri Lanka and Thailand were “adopted” by various private initiatives. There have also been several private efforts to help the affected fishing communities with new craft and gear. Many of

these initiatives, although well-intentioned, carry the risk of new disruptions.

VinVis feels it is not only its responsibility to raise funds to help the victims, but also to raise awareness and warn against all forms of help that could create ill effects for local circumstances and the environment, and cause social disparity and conflict within fishing communities. That is why VinVis has been campaigning against the transfer of fishing boats and gear from Europe, and also against the indiscriminate distribution of locally made craft and gear. Apart from advocating that aid should not only focus on the rehabilitation of fish-capture activities, VinVis has also been paying attention to post-harvest activities, which provide an important source of livelihood for women of fishing communities, and to a system of community-based management of resources.

In co-ordinating aid to the tsunami-hit parts of Asia, VinVis has been promoting the foremost need to consult fisherwomen’s organizations from the affected fishing communities. VinVis realizes that reconstruction is a long-term process that calls for solidarity, partnership and commitment.

—*This piece is by Cornelia Quist (cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl), a Member of ICSF and a Member of VinVis*

## Solidarity from unexpected places

After our first email, we began hearing from folks we never knew! Clearly, the emails were being forwarded to others, including the press. A story on the National Public Radio on 12 January 2005 created renewed interest in the effort. Most amazing were the efforts of school children in support of the fishing communities.

The Burns School in Saco, Maine raised over \$5,000 in coins which was matched by a local bank adding up to nearly \$11,000. Other schools such as the Paul Bunyan School in Minnesota and the Melrose High School in Massachusetts also held events.

From fundraising dinners, music festivals and coin drives to silent auctions, brewery benefits and art shows, the effort brought together a diverse population who began to look at fish and fishermen differently.

Nearly \$150,000 have been raised at the time of this writing and the fund will continue to accept donations that will be wired to the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) accounts free

of charge by the kind folks at the St. Joseph's Credit Union in Maine.

But it's not just the money that keeps coming. It's the ideas, interest, inspiration and energy to help rebuild, not just to bring normalcy back to people's lives but also to ensure the future of the marine ecosystem.

The tsunami created the opportunity to work on rebuilding in an ecologically responsible and economically sustainable fashion in Asia. In other parts of the world, political decisions have created similar crises that offer rebuilding opportunities.

The tools we apply to the tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction are applicable to these other battles, whether in the US, where the fight against individual transferable quotas (ITQ) and privatization is still on, or in India, where the battle to keep shrimp farms at bay continues. The movement created to put ecologically minded fishermen back at sea in Asia can help.

should consider fulfilling the needs the communities have already articulated. I even emailed them a list. I never heard back from them.

**T**he point is that that one call represented other similar ill-conceived, and usually opportunistic, efforts that have unearthed since the tsunami. From the European Union's promise of shipping its excess capacity represented by industrial vessels to the millions of dollars going to redeveloping coastal areas in a fashion that would keep the fishermen out and who knows what in, the prospects could range from destructive to unhelpful to the marine environment.

The industrial-scale factory fishing and aquaculture operations, with sights fixed on the current vacuum created by the tsunami-stricken state of the Southeast Asian fishing communities, follow the agribusiness model, which has already left its destructive mark on global food supply, land use and small-scale farmers.

The small-scale fishing communities of the region were the ones most severely affected. Their tradition of using

lower-impact fishing methods employed at lower scales and rates has less effect on the marine ecosystem and leads to higher contributions to their local fishing economies.

From the US to India, fishing communities are fighting against industrial aquaculture—particularly shrimp and salmon—and factory-style, industrial fishing operations.

Many of the Asian fishing communities affected by the tsunami have historically presented a nearly impenetrable fortress that has repeatedly fended off efforts for expansion of shrimp farms and issuance of joint-venture permits to distant-water industrial fishing fleets implicated elsewhere in large-scale overfishing and marine ecosystem damage, as well as in displacing fishing communities.

### Direct contribution

At such times of tragedy, it is hard to pick a bad place to give, but we chose to put money directly in the hands of fishing community groups that know what to do but do not have the means to do it. And we are not alone in thinking this is right, as proven by those who have given to the

fund and the many letters of support for our work.

**W**e should be *very* careful that when giving, we're not just giving to organizations that create dependency and replicate unequal and unfair power relationships," says Karla Zombro, a community activist working with AGENDA, a grassroots economic and social justice organization in south central Los Angeles.

Of Sri Lankan heritage, Zombro had planned, before the tsunami struck, to visit her mother's birth place, but she could keep her plans to visit the country only a week after the disaster. While there, Zombro met with the National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO), one of the Sri Lanka-based affiliates of the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP).

"Organizations like NAFSO have a long-term commitment to the people there and represent their interests. These are the ones we should be supporting," says Zombro. "NAFSO is not about cooking for refugees, it's about letting them have the dignity to cook and fish for themselves. My people are not victims, they are survivors... and they have their own ideas about what needs to be done." 3

This report comes from Niaz Dorry (niazdorry@earthlink.net), a freelance writer and activist based in Gloucester, Massachusetts, US