THE
TSUNAMI
LEGACY

INNOVATION
BREAKTHROUGHS
AND CHANGE

Executive
Summary
In the years and months that have gone by since the devastating Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami of December 2004, the affected communities – from Banda Aceh to Batticaloa, Puntland to Phang Nga, Noonu to Nagapattinam – have seen both tragedy and triumph.

Tragedy, because the destructive power of the tsunami left countless communities without homes or livelihoods, eradicated key infrastructure in countries around the region, and irrevocably damaged large swaths of coastal area. In all, more than 228,000 people – in 14 countries – perished as a result of the disaster.

Triumph, because while the disaster wreaked havoc and devastation on the coastlines along the Indian Ocean rim, it also triggered an overwhelming national and international response, delivering emergency relief and recovery assistance through multiple partners, funds and programmes. Milestone successes have been collectively achieved in supporting affected communities to restore their lives and livelihoods, and to reconstruct their houses and settlements, all with care to empower future generations to thrive. Individual citizens, national governments and international financial institutions around the globe contributed funds to the recovery, resulting in an estimated US$13.5 billion in aid.

With an operation of such unprecedented scope, a number of useful lessons have been learned across the recovery spectrum about what worked and what did not. To take stock of these collective and country-specific findings, this report asks if those involved in this massive undertaking were able to achieve meaningful development and reform? The report takes its cue from former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s words – “it’s not enough to pick up the pieces. We must draw on every lesson we can to avoid such catastrophes in the future” – and from the call of the UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, President Bill Clinton, to “build back better.”

The full report, The Tsunami Legacy: Innovation, Breakthroughs and Change, can be found on the enclosed CD on the back cover.
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“Who Stops to Think?” The Challenges of Leadership and Coordination

Both the destruction caused by – and the response to – the tsunami were unusual in terms of scale. The unique situation warranted intensive strategic coordination for the recovery to be effective as well as considerable pressure to deliver tangible results. Closest to the epicentre, the Indonesian Province of Aceh faced one of the most complex situations with a massive loss of life, extensive destruction of infrastructure, and an extraordinary influx of actors. In response, a dedicated body, the Aceh-Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR), was set up in April 2005, with a 4-year mandate to coordinate all recovery activities as well as implement a number of government projects.

Elsewhere, in Sri Lanka, the tsunami was a catalyst for creation of the Ministry of National Disaster Management and Human Rights in 2006. The Government of Maldives moved swiftly to set up a similar structure. On the same day as the tsunami, it created a National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) to coordinate activities.

This development of lead governance mechanisms for relief and recovery, tasked with coordinating ministries, donors, agencies, communities, women’s groups and others, and with building national and local capacities to manage the process, turned out to be a critical breakthrough in all these countries. Carefully connecting the local body to a broader, global coordinating infrastructure – as was done in Indonesia via the Global Consortium for Tsunami Recovery, the Multi Donor Fund (MDF) and the UN Office of the Recovery Coordinator for Aceh and Nias (UNORC) – was key to facilitating coordination in a complex recovery context involving countless international and national stakeholders. As new structures, void of institutional baggage, these agencies also benefited from the ability to be flexible and quickly adapt to local circumstances.

In India, too, where no new body needed to be created, government seized on the moment by devolving significant authority to local administrators, a crucial aspect to the Tamil Nadu recovery effort. A network of state- and district-level knowledge centres provided the infrastructure for disseminating vast amounts of information and reliable village-level data; it also became a focal point for NGOs on how they could contribute to recovery. The key to coordinating recovery here and elsewhere was maintaining speedy, flexible and accountable coordination systems and procedures, including at the local level.

Recovery partners in Indonesia learned a similar lesson. By giving the coordination structure full authority and basing it ‘close to the action’ it was able to become more responsive to the local context. Importantly, BRR was given full authority to manage all aspects of the tsunami recovery in Aceh on behalf of the central Government, which allowed for a much smoother coordination process, devoid of any potential inter-ministry politics. Significantly, BRR Headquarters was located in the capital of Aceh, and not in Jakarta.

Flexibility and know-how, coupled with a culture of risk-taking, was a central aspect of BRR’s success and led to several important breakthroughs and innovations. These included the Tim Terpadu (a one stop shop for processing all visa, customs, tax and other clearance requirements for thousands of aid workers and equipment) and a mandatory Project Concept Note (PCN) format for all programmes, which helped avoid unnecessary duplication and ensured efficient use of funds.

Similarly, when Maldives faced a shortfall of nearly US$100 million in recovery funds, a number of innovative partnership strategies were implemented to secure additional funding. The unique “Adopt-An-Island” initiative implemented by UNDP, emerged as a particularly powerful marketing tool under which donor support could be matched directly to a specific project. By mid-2006, 44 percent of the US$41 million that UNDP had raised was mobilised through Adopt-An-Island. In both cases the willingness to be opportunistic and take risks with “breakthrough initiatives” accelerated recovery and facilitated “building back better”.

In the final analysis, however, lack of local capacity has remained an issue, throughout. In the Maldives, the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) was set up to coordinate activities in a similar vein to BRR. But while the Centre took the lead in many aspects, being new to disaster management it relied on outside help to a significant degree. And in the future, it must be remembered that building local capacity is an important priority if the purpose-built recovery agency is temporary and the local Government is expected to sustain the gains in the long term.

Saying Yes to Change

- Develop in advance a governance mechanism for relief and recovery, tasked with coordinating Ministries, donors, agencies and communities.

- Give coordination structures full authority to make decisions over all aspects of the programme and, where practical or necessary, base them close to the action. As the bodies overseeing and managing the recovery, they need to become intimately familiar with – and responsive to – the local context.

- Seek “breakthrough initiatives” to accelerate recovery and build back better and avoid a culture of risk aversion. Business as usual will not suffice in unusual situations.

- Appoint credible senior officials who have good knowledge of local conditions and are familiar with affected communities, with a willingness to consult widely and the communication skills to explain the rationale for major decisions.

- Maintain speedy, flexible and accountable coordination systems and procedures, including at local level, that provide incentive to act. The demands of complex recovery require multi-sectoral expertise and the ability to adapt to changing needs.

- Undertake in-depth and continuous sectoral stocktaking: collect and collate all relevant documents, studies and data for wider circulation.

- Integrate monitoring and evaluation for all sectors to determine what has been implemented and what the future should be, engaging women’s and community groups in the process.

- Build national and local capacity at every turn. Local government and communities need to be prepared to take over responsibilities, resources and assets – and maintain them. The sustainability of the recovery depends on it.

- Ensure a visible and responsive presence of government and coordination bodies in the field. Daring to devolve and decentralise coordination will help promote responsiveness and grassroots involvement.

- Foster strong global and regional support mechanisms. Stand-by agreements on funding and coordination structures that go past the immediate disaster will enable a smoother transition between the humanitarian response and longer-term recovery.
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While international codes and principles guide relief and recovery efforts, many tsunami-affected communities were still unable to adequately access assistance immediately after the disaster because of barriers associated with their gender, ethnicity, age, class, religion or occupation. Often, tight deadlines imposed by the need to deliver fast had the effect of dropping equity issues – or of the wrong projects being taken up by the wrong organisations for the wrong reasons.

Many people could not access assistance after disasters simply because of their gender, ethnicity, age, class, religion or occupation. In particular, it is women and the poorest whose needs tend to be overlooked. Yet the tsunami also provided an important opportunity to address underlying social inequities and strengthen human rights protection for vulnerable groups, a task quickly seized upon by India’s strong civil society and vibrant media. Combined with a state Government in Tamil Nadu that displayed swiftness, responsiveness and openness, this made the difference in bringing all survivors back on the road toward recovery much faster.

As recovery actors in all five locales quickly realised, there could be no more business-as-usual when dealing with a disaster of such unusual proportions. Responding to the initial exclusion, they were quick to catch up in innovative ways, many employing a human rights perspective to create an enabling environment for participation. In India, the State Government’s timeliness, responsiveness and openness to working with representatives of different social groups in addressing flaws stands out as particularly praiseworthy. Authorities in Tamil Nadu did not simply respond to practical needs but offered real opportunities for change, through several key steps.

Breakthroughs in India included the implementation of disaster-resistant construction and the institution of inexpensive, 10-year housing insurance against all forms of disasters. Houses were built for indirectly affected families who were also given housing assistance and rights to land ownership. Women benefited from opportunities for strategic change in their status, such as joint housing rights for spouses and funds for the education and resettlement of orphaned adolescent girls and unmarried women, amongst other initiatives.

Across the waters, in Sri Lanka, strong emphasis was placed on equity and the targeting of vulnerable groups after the tsunami, especially with regard to permanent housing, road building and highlighting of issues such as human rights, participation and the environment. Along these lines, a number of successful – and flexible – interventions were initiated, with many partners coming to see the importance of addressing conflict and post-conflict issues in the post-tsunami setting as a consequence. For example, the Government resettled the conflict-affected permanent housing under its Unified Assistance Scheme or had their houses upgraded. Hallmarks of the scheme included clear eligibility criteria, management at local and provincial levels, and significant community involvement.

For equity gains to be sustained it was necessary to anchor innovative practices in the institutional infrastructure of the recovery – good intentions can only do so much if systems are not in place to track and identify vulnerable groups. Rather than a piecemeal approach, then, countries succeeded best when there was a commitment from high-level managers to ensure equity. In India, a series of independent equity audits were carried out in 2005 and 2006, at the request of local and international NGOs, by the Social Equity Audit Secretariat and trained auditors. The success of the audits is reflected in the fact that amongst some NGOs, the percentage of budget that went to directly support interventions for the excluded rose from 10 or 12 percent to 60 percent.

Building on women’s grassroots activism, recovery actors in Indonesia, among other things, sought to ensure that gender issues were considered in all development sectors through a special unit that formulated a comprehensive gender policy. UNIFEM placed a gender advisor in BRR to provide sustained input and guidance and BRR also employed gender-specific data for monitoring and evaluation, developed practical checklists for use in health, housing, education, livelihoods and institutional change, and promoted active participation of tsunami-affected women in plans for their future.

Successes in India and Indonesia underscore the importance of developing institutional anti-discrimination capacity by reviewing organisational culture and offering training to staff on rights-based approaches, including awareness and understanding of gender-sensitive international codes, guidelines and principles.

Depending on the context, this was not always an easy goal to achieve across the board. In Sri Lanka and Aceh, both regions affected by conflict, there was a need to also address the victims of conflict as well as those of the tsunami. However, most post-tsunami organisations largely ignored the post-conflict context, in part due to donor-stipulated restrictions on how they could use their funds. This led to numerous grievances raised by conflict-affected communities and perceptions of rising inequalities in aid provision. If conflict sensitivity had been more widespread and funds not restricted to tsunami victims only, building back better could have been more equitable all along. The provision of “untied” donor funds that offer flexibility to modify assistance packages to suit local needs would have enabled more flexibility to address these issues in a straightforward manner.

**Saying Yes to Change**

- Ensure a human rights perspective and provide an enabling environment for participation of different players in decision-making processes, with emphasis on directly affected women and men.
- Build capacity to – and provide opportunities to – demand rights or make claims on the humanitarian system and authorities through a strong platform for community feedback.
- Seek to extend equity through practical reform such as joint land titling.
- Ensure that policies and programmes are based on solid and detailed assessments. Making assumptions about impact risks leaving less visible victims out of the picture. Developing sex-disaggregated databases, along with a rapid, detailed assessment of disaster-related damages ensures 100 percent coverage.
- Include serious and specific inputs, outputs and outcomes related to women and disadvantaged people into recovery programmes.
- Develop organisational anti-discrimination capacity by reviewing organisational culture and offering training to staff on rights-based approaches to relief, recovery and development, including awareness and understanding of gender-sensitive international codes, guidelines and principles.
- Provide “untied” funds that offer the flexibility to modify assistance packages along the way. If new groups emerge as being in need of assistance (ex-combatants, ethnic minorities, women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities etc.) rigid eligibility criteria may risk further excluding them.
- Include equity issues in the early planning stages. A deep understanding of political and cultural contexts will help recovery actors to know where to look.
- Embrace the opportunities offered by the recovery. In many instances, tsunami recovery actors were able to push the envelope on matters of equity and equality by refusing to accept status quo.
- Partner closely with civil society actors to benefit from their expertise and experience.
2 Seeing Those Who Are ‘Invisible’: Achieving Equity In Recovery

While international codes and principles guide relief and recovery efforts, many tsunami affected communities were still unable to adequately access assistance immediately after the disaster because of barriers associated with their gender, ethnicity, age, class, religion or occupation. Often, tight deadlines imposed by the need to deliver fast had the effect of dropping equity issues—or of the wrong projects being taken up by the wrong organisations for the wrong reasons.

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Creating a ‘Virtuous Loop’: Embracing People’s Participation

While citizen participation is widely considered a cornerstone of democratic governance and efficient programming, too often those most in need after the tsunami were not seriously consulted about planning or implementation of relief and recovery. Concerted efforts were made in all countries affected by the disaster; however, to curb this initial trend. Perhaps the most valuable benefit of promoting participation was something that, in the end, is not easily quantifiable: a feeling of individual empowerment, “ownership” of community resources, and the unleashing of people’s own capacities to cope.

Efforts to overcome the lack of consultation were particularly successful in Sri Lanka, Maldives and Thailand, where recovery actors employed participation by both women and men, through extensive people’s consultations, beneficiary surveys, Help Desks and community monitoring of projects. The Government of Sri Lanka empowered the national Human Rights Commission to conduct people’s consultations in more than 1,100 tsunami-affected communities in 13 districts. Although it was not always easy to ensure community participation, in cases where participation was enforced, projects were more successful.

As a result of the thousands of complaints received during the people’s consultations, United Nations could provide support to the Human Rights Commission in establishing Help Desks in each district to raise awareness among communities on their rights and entitlements and to follow up on grievances.

In the Maldivian context, community consultations had rarely occurred before to the extent instituted after the tsunami. Beneficiary surveys deepened knowledge of important, qualitative dimensions of recovery, increasing accountability to affected communities, and were hailed as “one of the most significant innovations of the tsunami response.”

Thailand, too, made it a priority to give communities a strong voice. Local authorities took the lead in many reconstruction efforts and were supported to improve community consultation, including training to strengthen women’s leadership and decision making. One of the most successful such initiatives was the restoration of indigenous livelihoods in Koh Lanta, an island district of 30,000 in Krabi province. Taking into account the traditional livelihoods of the many ethnic groups on the island, the island was developed by community mobilisation, savings schemes, and cooperatives.

Still, it was not always easy to ensure community participation, especially as some agencies and organisations sometimes tended to approach the issue with only limited enthusiasm. Many, it appears, tacked on consultations as a programmatic afterthought, and did not approach it as a key component of the project’s success. Indeed, several NGOs have acknowledged that mistakes could have been avoided if a more participatory approach had been used earlier on. Many had to readjust along the way to respond to realities and needs on the ground. A key requirement for these organisations was to decentralise authority within the organisation to the local levels. Both CARE and World Vision, for example, put their field offices in the driver’s seat, reasoning that they would be best able to deal with the needs and demands of the tsunami affected people. Some other NGOs, on the other hand, found it more difficult to implement effective participation since many key decisions were being made back in their headquarters, rather than in the field.

Similarly, the success in the Maldives didn’t come easy. For one, it proved difficult to engage communities in disaster risk management awareness, given that many Maldivians saw the tsunami as a “one-off” event that would not recur. Critically, however, the Government and recovery partners were persistent, even translating basic disaster risk management terminology into the local Dhivehi language.

Saying Yes to Change

- Regard civil society as a partner in relief and recovery, with international agencies sharing information with affected people so they can participate.
- Foster participation at all stages of the recovery — in planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- Conduct people’s consultations as early as possible to engage marginalised groups in discussions of damages and community expectations, capacities and needs.
- To manage expectations, explain progress, and outline plans, recovery partners need to draft credible and accessible communications strategies. The medium is the message: communicating to communities on their terms, in their local languages, using concepts and ideas that appeal to them, will elicit responses and promote dialogue.
- Take a holistic approach, in the true sense of the term. Recovering and rebuilding affected communities should only translate into infrastructure. It also means the recapturing or strengthening of social capital and contributing to a sense of security. People who played a key constructive part in the community’s structure before the disaster should be encouraged to resume their roles.
- Complement housing reconstruction with overall community development projects to strengthen relationships, networks and trust.
- Build capacity of existing community structures/mechanisms rather than establish new ones.
- Connect participatory mechanisms to tangible results. Participation is a two-way street and for communities to truly feel like they have a stake in the process, traditional surveys and interviews will not be enough. Soliciting input and ideas from the community should not be treated as a must, but as a critical component of recovery programmes.
- Provide programme implementers with the tools necessary to conduct participatory planning, implementation and monitoring. Participation done wrong, risks a backlash. Recovery partners need to have skills and experience in working with communities and employing a human rights framework in post-disaster contexts.
- In order to truly build back better, donors, organisations and governments need to embrace participation as key to the success. Stringent deadlines and supply-driven policy making, while satisfying reporting requirements and a home public eager for results, do not always make for measured and efficient programming. Taking the cue from the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, recovery partners need to internalise the need for a pragmatic approach to consultations and participation.
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Similarly, the success in the Maldives didn’t come easy. For one, it proved difficult to engage communities in disaster risk management awareness, given that many Maldivians saw the tsunami as a “one-off” event that would not recur. Critically, however, the Government and recovery partners were persistent, even translating basic disaster risk management terminology into the local Dhivehi language.
Countering Corruption and Ensuring Accountability

With large amounts of cash and goods in motion, corruption is always a threat during a crisis. But despite the influx of billions of dollars in tsunami affected countries, corruption levels across the board were kept remarkably low. Key to this success was a commitment to view corruption, not as a nuisance or unfortunate side effect of the recovery, but as a core threat to the reconstruction effort as a whole. In Aceh, where an unprecedented US$6.4 billion were pledged for recovery, Dr. Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, the Director of BRR, urged the recovery community to set the bar high: “We see the fight against corruption in Aceh and Nias as advancing Indonesia’s wider struggle against corruption.” A punitive focus on “finding corruptors” would not be enough.

From the first days of the recovery, then, steps had to be taken to ensure anti-corruption and accountability would inform all levels of operations, starting with the institutions themselves. BRR set out to pay its employees competitive salaries to ensure that the best and brightest were not “poached” by international agencies – and, more importantly, to break a culture of gift-giving.

To enable complete transparent access and tracking of all tsunami-related funds, BRR developed a comprehensive information management system, the Recovery Aceh-Nias Database (RAND). All agencies involved in tsunami recovery were required to register with BRR, set up an account on RAND and send regular updates on funds committed and disbursed. Complementing the process-based RAND, a “survey-based” Housing Geospatial Database (HGD) was created to provide a snapshot of recovery by verifying and digitally mapping the vast housing reconstruction sector. The HGD was recently merged with a third database, covering all other assets – bridges, hospitals, schools, roads, etc. – creating a combined information system which is one of the most comprehensive and “leak-proof” in the recovery spectrum.

As Indonesia realized, however, good systems will not deliver ‘on their own’. Accountability mechanisms need to be client oriented. After being slow to get off the ground, international and national partners, and provincial and district governments were contacted to identify what types of analytical products, as well as what information and in which format, would be useful. Then, RAND changed accordingly – absorbing a major lesson in ensuring participation.

A strong complaints mechanism is equally important. Early designation of grievance focal points and an adequate budget for grievance facilitation are critical for reporting of abuses and corruption, as is empowering affected communities, including the most vulnerable, in understanding and using these mechanisms. Affected people must be empowered to articulate community claims, actively monitor and evaluate reconstruction and make their own choices. Recovery data, however complex it may be, should be shared in layperson terms to the extent possible.

In Sri Lanka the establishment of an effective complaint mechanism through local Help Desks (in response to input solicited in consultations) was a particular breakthrough. The public could here question eligibility for assistance, report potential cases of corruption, or file a complaint. By October 2006, the DRMU had received 17,000 complaints and successfully resolved most. In addition, UNDP Sri Lanka set up an AidWatch initiative to enable communities to closely monitor projects. Such vital linkages contributed to increasing responsibility and accountability toward the community and laid groundwork for continued networking.

Many organisations, notably BRR, responded to the threat of corruption by putting in place more stringent anti-corruption policies than required by national law. To tackle graft and fraud, BRR became the first Government agency to have an autonomous Anti-Corruption Unit (SAK) set up to work with other Government institutions, international institutions like the World Bank, and civil society organizations such as Transparency International Indonesia in carrying out its primary objectives of prevention, investigation and education. Since its inception in September 2005, SAK has received 1,530 confidential complaints.

Saying Yes to Change

- Build mechanisms of accountability from the start
- Look for opportunities to reform that go beyond business as usual
- When a good idea does not work the first time, persevere until the right solution that works for all stakeholders is found
- Promote systems that create genuine transparency and access
- Create accountability systems that remove integrity traps or conflicts of interest
- Ensure that culturally sensitive information about activities is available to affected populations – i.e., what the funds are being spent on, where, through and for whom, and when – in order to better manage expectations and prevent wider disparities
- Empower affected people to articulate community claims, actively monitor and evaluate reconstruction and make their own choices. Develop strategies to ensure that women and marginalised groups have full access to information
- Create a strong complaints mechanism. Early designation of grievance focal points and an adequate budget for grievance facilitation are critical for reporting of abuses and corruption, as is empowering affected communities, including the most vulnerable, in understanding and using these mechanisms
- Properly orient project implementers so that they treat complaints as opportunities for improving project design and outcomes, not as “burdens”
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5 What If It Happens Again? Innovations In Disaster Risk Management

The tsunami has precipitated a critical shift in the minds of policy makers and communities alike. It is no longer tenable to view disasters as isolated events and respond without taking into account the social and economic factors that aggravate the situation. The tsunami drew attention to the importance and urgency of reducing the enabling causes of disaster. In all tsunami-affected countries, a newfound enthusiasm for securing the country and community against future disasters has engendered the creation of disaster preparedness institutions and policies, new regional and national early warning systems, and concerted efforts at promoting community-based disaster awareness and preparedness at every turn.

Critically, new disaster preparedness structures have been established in four out of the five tsunami-affected countries and a regional tsunami early warning system has been operational since 2006, complementing the global commitment pledged by 168 governments to reduce multi-hazard risks and vulnerabilities under the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.

Thailand in particular has been a leader in numerous disaster risk management initiatives, and its early warning system is well-positioned to become a regional role model. Through ASEAN, the Thai Government swiftly proposed a regional tsunami early warning centre that would coordinate with various nations’ early warning systems to ensure complementarity. It established a Voluntary Trust Fund and donated US$10 million in seed money to it; additional funding came from donors such as Sweden. Thailand was also quick to create a ‘one-stop map server’, combining databases that previously could not be used together into one. This clearing house of information includes high-resolution satellite images, aerial photographs and base infrastructure maps, all available at the touch of a button in an emergency.

Maldives’ first disaster risk profile, created after the tsunami and based on Geographic Information System mapping, represents another innovative approach to disaster management. The Government has used the profile as a key source for development strategies to mitigate climate change and future disasters, particularly in developing a “Safer Islands” programme, which provides incentives for voluntary migration to safer islands.

Sri Lanka, too, has come a long way in establishing comprehensive disaster management-related systems. Organised around 7 key themes, a “road map” has been developed, identifying over 100 investments to reduce disaster risk. Under it, numerous innovative initiatives have begun toward developing a multi-hazard approach for disaster management. In addition, the Disaster Management Act that had been under discussion for about a decade prior was passed in May 2005.

Following intensive efforts by 29 governments around the Indian Ocean, a regional tsunami early warning system has been operational since 2006 as part of a coordination plan by UNESCO-Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. However, preparedness is not just about high-tech early warning systems. Community participation in disaster risk mitigation is also a necessity. Women, in particular, are well-placed to participate in risk assessments and the promotion of disaster risk reduction, ensuring consideration of gender-specific concerns. Training of a number of community leaders, teachers, local disaster managers and media personnel has demonstrated the use of response techniques.

Even before the tsunami, large community-based disaster risk management programmes existed in vulnerable areas in countries such as India – where they have been credited for capacity strengthening in search and rescue, first and evacuation methods that resulted in saving countless lives during the disaster as well as minimizing damages to assets and livelihoods. Post-tsunami, excellent opportunities have been presented for deepening community disaster risk management across the region, setting up local and national partnerships. In Thailand, for example, the early warning system was taken to the local level, linked with loudspeakers in rural villages and with more than 100 warning towers along the coast.

The tsunami, finally, brought an increased awareness on the importance of natural defence barriers. Healthy coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves, estuaries, wetlands and sandy beaches, are able to provide good protection against the force of tsunamis and storm surges and contribute to disaster risk reduction while providing diverse livelihoods, sufficient nutritious food, shelter and access to goods for communities. Several organisations and programmes, such as Mangroves for the Future, now focus on the humanitarian implications of failure to protect coastal ecosystems. But while most people are aware of the importance of resource-based industries such as ecotourism and fisheries to coastal economies, there is less comprehension of just how important these goods and raw materials are in terms of their multiplier effects nationally and locally.

Saying Yes to Change

- Mainstream disaster risk reduction (DRR) in development policies and programmes, including gender and development initiatives. DRR can not be treated as a purely technical undertaking; in vulnerable communities it should be a core feature of all programming.
- Empower community groups to build resilience and protect themselves from disasters by building on local knowledge and strengthening capacity.
- Value indigenous knowledge and technologies for early warning and mainstream gender in all risk communication strategies.
- Commit more firmly to women’s and men’s right to know, raising awareness, enabling people to make informed decisions and strengthening capacities to advocate.
- Build accessible and easy-to-use disaster information management system from cost-effective, sustainable open-source software so that all parties can work together and easily access data. Having a common baseline by which to judge both challenges and gains – and having common tools to access these – is critical for efficient policy making.
- Improve “last-mile connectivity”: No matter how impressive the technology, early warning systems will not deliver as promised unless they reach out to the totality of the population, even those living without phones and in isolated areas.
- Encourage and ensure community participation in the implementation of disaster risk management policy through extensive consultations.
- Enact robust disaster response legislation, incorporating learnings from the tsunami experience. Future DRR regimes – from the national down to the local level – need to be informed by multi-hazard understanding of disasters, and be equipped to respond accordingly.
- Build on the momentum created by the tsunami to create early warning systems across the Indian Ocean rim. In as much as possible, foster inter-regional and cross-border information sharing between national and regional systems.
- Continue using the Hyogo framework as the baseline for regional and global disaster risk reduction policy.
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Will We Do Better Next Time?

If another tsunami happened tomorrow, would the response from governments and the international community be stronger and better? Can we multiply our successes, learn from our shortfalls and apply this in the future for both emergency relief and longer-term recovery? You only know lessons have really been learned when you stop thinking about them and simply do them.

Particularly in light of the current global financial crisis, many believe that whatever innovations we think are replicable have to be at a low-cost level. Luckily, the most important lessons we have learned are not necessarily those that depend on the availability of large amounts of funding. Effective leadership and coordination, beginning at the grassroots and involving Governments and development organisations alike, can go a long way in ensuring an efficient and sustainable recovery. And while coordination and leadership may be more easily talked about than put into practice, they remain particularly important in a disaster context where chaos goes hand in hand with calamity.

We have learned that Governments need to listen and respond to the voices of those most affected – including those normally not consulted, especially women. However, Governments cannot be alone in solving the leadership equation. The many delivery partners who make up the reconstruction community must also develop the quality and effectiveness of their leadership.

We have learned that accountability and preparedness are critical, as is a willingness to take risks and embed institutional as well as cultural reform amid disaster response. This must include serious reflection and be a continuous process through which weaknesses are overturned and strengths capitalised upon.

Our most important lesson, however, is that disasters themselves should be seen as opportunities for reform and improvement. What stands out in this report is that governments in all five of the most tsunami-affected countries embraced change as a core ethic to confront this catastrophe. The challenge now is to constantly build on and improve these new institutional arrangements. Change must be embraced, not for its own sake, but rather because in a disaster, organisational weaknesses are severely tested and exposed. Continuous improvement is the only way to ensure all new institutional arrangements remain robust and relevant.
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Tsunami Global Lessons Learned Project