



'Poor Logistics Hampered Tsunami Relief': Report

A lack of logistical capacity created critical bottlenecks and the perception of 'dumping' during tsunami relief says a recent report by a US based institute.

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A recent survey report by the San Francisco, California based Fritz Institute called "Lessons from the Tsunami: Top Line Findings" says that aid agencies reported low capacity for warehousing and transportation. The institute brings private sector expertise to solve complex problems in delivering relief to vulnerable people.

In India, 60 per cent of responding NGOs did not have adequate warehouse facilities and although adequate relief supplies were received, 40 per cent of organisations lacked transport to carry relief supplies to the affected population.

"The survey result says that logistics gaps not only affect operations timing, but directly affect the relief experience for those traumatised by a disaster. Logistics gaps continue to be central to relief. It has been a global wakeup call to witness the ongoing relief efforts for the US Gulf Coast and realise how universal the lack of investment in planning and infrastructure is, especially in areas that are prone to recurring natural disasters," the report said.

Widespread media coverage prompted the donation of inappropriate goods. More than 40 per cent of NGOs in India reported that the receipt of unsolicited supplies had been high. The flood of unsolicited supplies, such as used clothing, in conjunction with the lack of warehousing and transportation capacity, forced immediate distribution, leaving the affected families with the feeling of materials being dumped. "They came in trucks and gave, in

excess, all old and used clothes," complained one beneficiary. "We didn't take much, they were (piled up) on the road."

The study concluded saying in a relief effort there is much more emphasis on the front-line provision of aid. Food, water, shelter and clothing are procured, and programmes for relief are developed. However, equally important to the front line is the "back room," which ensures that the supply chains for relief have been appropriately planned and that there is transportation and storage for the supplies that are being mobilised.

Visibility to the pipeline is important, as is the ability to account for the outcomes intended. During the Tsunami relief phase, most NGOs and government officials indicated adequate human resources in terms of volunteers to clear debris and facilitate distribution.

What was lacking was technical expertise and back-room capability such as medical services, transportation and warehousing. In future relief efforts, significant attention must be paid to the procurement of these types of resources.

On the December 26, 2004, India and Sri Lanka suffered one of their worst natural calamities. A massive 9.0 magnitude earthquake hit Indonesia off the west coast of Northern Sumatra at 6:29 a.m. (IST) followed by a second earthquake 81 km west of Pulo Kunji, Great Nicobar three hours later.

The earthquakes triggered giant tidal waves, which hit 2,260 km of Indian coastline along the southeast coast and more than 1000 km along the north, east and southern coasts of Sri Lanka, causing colossal damage. The current estimates suggest that more than 31,000 people were killed in Sri Lanka and approximately 11,000 people were killed in India. More than two million people were affected by this disaster in the two countries, with the number displaced hovering at about 1 million.