



with Kyra Phillips
Interview with Lynn Fritz

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PHILLIPS: Well, as you can see, much remains to be done a year after the tsunami. Lynn Fritz with the nonprofit Fritz Institute has seen the struggles for himself, talking to victims about the help that they received and what they still need. He joins us now live from San Francisco.

And we should point out, Lynn, you shared with us some photos that depict quite graphically the harsh realities of recovery. You took a lot of shots. Why don't we start talking, first of all, about just the shelter and the fact that so many people are still living in tents, right?

LYNN FRITZ, FRITZ INSTITUTE: That is absolutely correct. I think your former segment showed that pretty clearly from Banda Aceh, but it's quite the same in India and in Sri Lanka, in different villages. But, by and large, the vast majority of people that were impacted by the tsunami are in temporary shelters, in camps, tin, tar- paper type of camps or shelters, very little sanitation, no area for security or for storage. That is the absolute reality across the tsunami front.

PHILLIPS: And you and I have been talking about this since the beginning of the year. You've made so many trips over there, conducted so many interviews in different languages just to talk about the aid, did it get there, how was it distributed. You see people living like this still, and you think of all the money, a lot of it coming from the United States, to help these people. Was the aid distributed the way it should have been distributed?

FRITZ: You'll have to sort of parse this into a little different levels, Kyra. The original aid, I would call the survival aid, that came into basically sustain the families -- that's food, medical equipment, medical attention, and the rest -- did flood in. Disease was not an issue, thanks to the quick response of the humanitarian community and the military in that area, as well as local governments. So there was a vast incursion of very, very good work that eliminated some of the worst conditions and unnecessary deaths.

The next question, though, is: What happens now after the 60 days now a year later? And as, again, as your clip indicated, two or three very concerning things.

One is, you know, housing is in wretched condition. People are seeing day to day the reminders of the tsunami because they're in temporary shelters.

Perhaps even more alarming on the optimism side, or the lack of same, is that people's income -- our survey, which was over 300 villages, thousands of people were surveyed in their native languages, indicate that the vast majority of people are at 50 percent or lower of their original income. So the optimism that would churn a different sort of set of thoughts on this is omnipresent and, I think, cumulative.



PHILLIPS: What about livelihood, the fishing industry? Has it recovered?

FRITZ: Absolutely not. There was about a three-month hiatus, of course, while boats were being fixed and repaired. And there was an enormous reaction from the world to get new boats, but that was a three-month hiatus.

Once the fishermen were on the water, the market absolutely almost disappeared. It went down over 90 percent because of fear of fish that had eaten people, and the market disappeared tragically.

Now, one year later, fishermen by and large are fishing at maybe 50 or 60 percent of their normal amount of fishing, due to the fact of fear of another tsunami. So they're fishing more on just low tides, so their productivity has really been impaired.

And all of the other communities around the fishing, I think, as your tape depicted as well, are suffering because these are all support for basic fishing communities which were hit most emphatically during the tsunami.

PHILLIPS: Well, you just got back from this conference in India last week. What were, let's say, two of the main things that were discussed about what to do now, what to do with aid money that's still available, with volunteers that are still there, and the people that continue to suffer?

FRITZ: The findings were very clear and discussed between government officials, local officials, NGOs, international NGOs, that are got together at our conference to understand what to do next and what lessons learned. To that end, one of the tragic things is, you have to understand, on large disasters like this, the first responders are survivors. They're the only ones that are there for the first 48 hours.

And the lesson learned, Kyra, amongst anything else is local preparation, even the most rudimentary form, can really eliminate and avoid tragic loss of life, injuries, et cetera. That's the biggest lesson.

The second one, as I said, when you get into longer term aid, a good deal of money has not been spent, not because the governments or the humanitarian organizations aren't trying to be more effective, but, in India alone, there's been like a hundred-year drought -- not a hundred-year drought -- for the most rainy cyclone area or experiences over the last 50 years have come within the last 30 or 60 days in Tamilnadu. And, as a result, a good deal of the infrastructure that was put up has been washed away.

So is there a lot to do? Absolutely. Has the money been spent? It has not. Am I encouraged that there will be increased improvements? Absolutely. But it's going to take years, not months.

PHILLIPS: My final question, you know, your entire life you've been an extremely successful businessman. And you've put that aside now and you focus on your institute and humanitarian



work.

Why do you care about these people? Why are you doing this? And why do you spend your time going back and forth trying to figure out what went wrong and how to make it better?

FRITZ: In the end, disasters, as I think everybody in the world is now seeing, are not one-off issues now that are somebody else's problems or they won't occur or affect the rest of the world. Disasters will continue on an unabated fashion.

This is a social issue of significance, Kyra. This is a human issue of great significance. Just the economic implications of disasters and how they're attended are immense.

And I really do believe -- my feeling is -- it's a moral imperative, you know, for the world to be aware of it, the world to organize, to prepare better. I think this is a civil responsibility. And I'm delighted, actually honored, to have taken some of the measures I have, and we're just really beginning.

PHILLIPS: Lynn Fritz, it's been a pleasure to interview you. Thank you so much for your time today.

FRITZ: Thank you so much. And best wishes to you and your viewers for this season, as well. Thank you.

PHILLIPS: Thank you.

Well, tune in tonight for more inspirational stories of hope and recovery. ANDERSON COOPER 360 takes you back to tsunami-ravaged South Asia. That's tonight, 10:00 Eastern, 7:00 Pacific, right here on CNN.