

Tsunami aid effort 'missed many'

By Jane Sutton

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MIAMI (Reuters) – Despite the unprecedented global relief effort for the Indian Ocean tsunami, just 60 percent of those affected in India and Sri Lanka said they got timely and adequate aid in the first 60 days, according to a survey released on Tuesday.

The survey of affected families and aid workers in the two countries showed the relief effort succeeded in delivering aid to millions of people, according to the nonprofit Fritz Institute, a San Francisco group that specializes in logistics for humanitarian relief.

"Sixty percent may be fabulous under the circumstances, but some very large number of people did not (get timely aid). There needs to be a very large effort to figure out what is good enough," said Dr. Anisya Thomas, one of the research supervisors. "We're talking about human life here."

The Fritz Institute's survey report, "Lessons from the Tsunami: Top Line Findings," showed problems similar to those that surfaced along the U.S. Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina hit, the institute members said.

In India and Sri Lanka, about 60 percent of the non-governmental aid groups surveyed said they did not have enough warehouse facilities and 40 percent lacked adequate transportation. They had enough supplies, but there were bottlenecks and they couldn't get the right items to the right place at the right time.

"They were giving rice, but no vessels to cook (with)," one recipient said.

Families in both countries said old, used clothes were dumped in piles

for them to pick through. They felt humiliated and the clothes were often wrong for the coastal climate.

In some instances, the most vulnerable residents, including the elderly, widowed and disabled, were excluded from relief distribution.

"The aid goes to the people who are on the front of the line, or assembled in the place where aid is being distributed," Thomas said. "Widows, the lower caste, people like that were not in the process."

Local role vital

Government's role made a difference, the survey said. In India, where the government was the No. 1 provider of aid, the affected families said they were satisfied with the visible role of the district level administrators in providing and coordinating relief. Eight-six percent got help within 48 hours.

In Sri Lanka, where the military, medical organizations and religious groups were the top providers of aid, 39 percent said they were rescued by the military but 61 percent got no aid at all in the first 48 hours.

"The local government knows the nuances. They know the old people, the young, where they live," said Fritz Institute Director General Lynn Fritz. "Whether it's the First World or the developing world ... the only functional way to approach this is on a local level."

He called the report, as well as the U.S. experience with Hurricane Katrina, a global wake-up call that shows a universal lack of investment in planning and infrastructure in areas prone to recurring natural disasters.



Sri Lankan soldiers carry sandbags to shore up defenses against another tsunami.

"How well the local people in the local agencies were prepared has everything to do with the response," Fritz said.

International donors have raised more than \$11 billion for tsunami relief in the nine months since it struck the Indian Ocean region, according to a United Nations emergency coordinator who called the response unprecedented.

The survey was based on interviews with 1,406 people affected by the tsunami in 197 villages in India and Sri Lanka and with 376 nongovernmental organizations in the two countries.

Recipients were asked their impressions of the aid process two and 60 days after the disaster. A follow-up survey is to be scheduled to be completed in December.

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