

Common Cause

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Twelve nations, more than 2 lakh casualties, and innumerable families uprooted. The tsunami was the worst tragedy of 2004. In India, 12,000 people were killed and thousands lost homes from the southern states of Andhra Pradesh to Kerala. It is estimated that the tsunami destroyed 157,393 dwellings, causing an estimated 730,000 individuals to leave their homes. In addition to widespread destruction, the tsunami impacted the social and economic structures of communities through loss of family, assets and livelihoods, breakdown of education and other local services, and disruption of common religious, cultural and social practices.

Humanitarian aid flowed in from all sectors - right from the governments (both Centre and state), non-governmental bodies (both Indian and international) and business houses (PSUs and MNCs). According to UN Humanitarian Chief, Jan Egeland, the tsunami generated an unprecedented outpouring of aid that should become the new standard for humanitarian relief with a record 90 countries - many of them poor - contributing to the relief effort along with militaries from 36 nations and workers from 500 non-governmental organisations from around the world. Appreciating the humanitarian efforts based on a series of independent evaluations, which concluded that people were very effective in the emergency relief phase given the magnitude of the challenge, he pointed out that the challenge of proper and permanent shelter to those affected still remains. As far as employment is concerned, aid group Oxfam suggests, at least half of the tsunami survivors who lost jobs after the disaster have returned to work, but much more needs to be done to restore livelihoods.

In order to understand the logistics of relief and rehabilitation operations and the extent to the efforts made by various providers, Fritz Institute has come out with Tsunami Rehabilitation Effectiveness Survey, which commissioned two studies of the affected families. The first study probed beneficiary perceptions of the effectiveness of aid in the first 48 hours after the tsunami and further during the first 60 days. The second study elicited information from the beneficiary respondents keeping in mind three timeframes since the tsunami disaster: the first 48 hours after the tsunami struck the southern coast of Tamil Nadu, during the first 60 days of the disaster, and nine months after the disaster, to understand long-term rehabilitation operations carried out by various providers for the families affected by the disaster.

The findings of the report suggest that government and members of the local community were the major providers of immediate rescue and relief services. Majority of the affected families surveyed in Tamil Nadu said that major assistance in the first 48 hours came from the government and local village community members. Forty seven per cent of the affected families reported receiving rescue services from members of the local village community, while another 23% mentioned receiving relief from the government administration. Involvement of private individuals in immediate relief and rescue operations was significant, especially in Nagapattinam district. The responses of the affected families surveyed indicate a substantial role played by NGOs, members of the local community and the corporate sector in supplying clothes to the affected families, with 20% of the beneficiary respondents receiving clothes

from members of the local village community, 16% from private individuals, 15% from local NGOs and 10% from the corporate sector.

The findings also indicate a discrepancy in the reach of the various types of providers across districts. Beneficiary respondents were more positive towards the relief offered in the first 60 days when the relief material included food, medical supplies, clothes, toiletries and counselling services as compared to nine months later.

As per the report, the issue of permanent shelter to the affected families is the most prominent one which is still pending. Efforts of all service providers in providing counselling services were perceived to be satisfactory.

Though district-level government has been ranked as the best aid provider by most of the affected families, NGOs (both international and local) too have been appreciated by a few. The role of other service providers like corporate sector and religious organisations has also been appreciated in rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations. A significant proportion of beneficiary respondents in Tiruvallur (25%), Villupuram (18%) and Nagapattinam (13%) have ranked corporate sector as the best provider for restoring services in their districts, while religious organisations have emerged significantly in Tuticorin (20%), Kancheepuram (18%) and Nagapattinam (12%) districts.