

AID BY NUMBERS: Survey rates tsunami relief

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LONDON (AlertNet) - What good is rice if you have nothing to cook it in? What use is a Nordic sweater in tropical Sri Lanka?

Those are just a couple of questions raised by a new survey that seeks to quantify the effectiveness and appropriateness of emergency relief after the Indian Ocean tsunami by asking the recipients themselves how they felt about the aid, including food and clothing shipped in from overseas.



Some 40 percent of families interviewed in India and Sri Lanka said the aid they received in the first 60 days after the Dec. 26 disaster was untimely and inappropriate, according to the study by the Fritz Institute, a U.S.-based philanthropic organisation.

Fifty-five percent of Indians said the emergency clothing they were given offended their dignity, while 50 percent of Sri Lankans said the same about bedding and shelter.

The survey reveals a big difference in perceptions of the government's role in the aftermath of the disaster. Indian families expressed satisfaction with district-level administrators in providing and coordinating relief while most Sri Lankans said the authorities were not helpful at all.

"The Indian government declined international assistance for relief operations, declaring that sufficient resources were available in the country to assist those made vulnerable," the authors write. "A significant amount of the coordination and actual relief effort was done by the government.

"In Sri Lanka, the government was initially slow to respond and international, regional and local NGOs were given relatively free access to tsunami-affected areas..."

Lessons from the Tsunami: Top Line Findings is based on interviews with almost 1,500 people in nearly 200 tsunami-hit villages in India and Sri Lanka, as well as with 376 non-governmental organisations from the two countries.

While the survey underlines the many triumphs of one of the biggest relief efforts in history, it also highlights lessons its authors say are relevant in disaster zones worldwide, including the U.S. Gulf of Mexico after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Following are some of the report's key findings, presented in numbers:

60 percent of people surveyed in India and Sri Lanka said the aid they received in the first 60 days was timely and they were treated with dignity.

61 percent of Sri Lankans said they received no help at all in the first 48 hours. In contrast, **86 percent** of Indians said they received help from the government in that time frame.

55 percent of Indians said the clothes they received as aid were culturally inappropriate or undignified. **33 percent** of Sri Lankans thought the same.

85 percent of Indians said the government had been helpful in coordinating relief. In Sri Lanka, **48 percent** said the government had been helpful and **27 percent** said it wasn't helpful at all.

69 percent of NGOs in India said the government had been very helpful in coordinating relief, compared with **29 percent** in Sri Lanka.

60 percent of surveyed NGOs working in India did not have adequate warehouse facilities. **40 percent** lacked transport to carry relief supplies to affected people.

60 percent of NGOs in India and **40 percent** of NGOs in Sri Lanka reported a flood of unsolicited relief supplies.

Only **8 percent** of NGOs in India and **12 percent** of NGOs in Sri Lanka reported working with the private sector.