

Tsunami Crisis and Savings

*Visit to Srilanka 5, 6, 7 the Jan 05 just after the Tsunami crisis
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It is difficult to capture all the emotions that you sense on the ground in a report like this. The sea rolls on as if nothing happened while all around look at it with suspicion. While there is lot sadness there is also hope for reconstruction and the spirit and energy is just picking up. The fear after the Tsunami is of thieves who came in to plunder whatever was left. Men and women come searching from the relief camps for their jewelry and documents but in vain. The other fear is their loss of home and evictions. "If not managed with care this can cause a Tsunami 2" Somsook, Thailand.

The purpose of this report is both for internal and external use.

- To record the story from the federation lenses since 27th Dec 04.
- To assess what the federation can do and cannot do. Their areas of strength and weakness.
- To help them look at what capacities they need to build and what support is required to manage the crisis, material and non-material.
- To plan a post relief strategy for land and housing for the families affected.

Background Information

The federation in Srilanka, Women's Development Bank Federation (WDBF) works in 9 districts in Srilanka with the support a very small NGO Janrukula which means 'Bringing people together'.

Janaruluka and some of the rural leaders had the first convention of the rural poor in 1999 where they invited ACHR and SDI. This is when they got exposed to urban issues. After their first community exchange to Cambodia in late 1999 they began organizing the urban settlements.

Janaukula and WDBF used savings and loans to organize these communities, as they were very familiar with that form of organizing. They slowly included housing issues in their work. Till today the groups main activity is savings and loans but they now have a parallel housing fund. It has taken them a while to begin to understand the housing process and the capacities needed to work on negotiating for land and housing. Today the federation works in 9 districts of Srilanka and 30,000 members save regularly. The last convention was held after four years in October 2003. There were nearly 5000 urban poor at this convention. Many SDI communities participated as well. Soon after this convention Janarukula and the WDBF have begun negotiations in two areas

1. With the City of Colombo for the rehabilitation of 490 houses in a settlement in the center of Colombo called libbgewatta.
2. With the Paliagoda Town Council on account of the Malawattha Settlement that received an eviction notice on the 22nd Dec 04 because they are in the way of a highway project. They have been asked to move by the 15th Jan 05. Negotiations are on for an alternative site along with proper compensation. People will move only after this has been settled with the Town Council.

Federation response to the Tsunami

According to Government /media records, 30,000 people have been identified dead so far. Rebuilding these communities is not going to be easy. Whole communities have lost their neighbours and many children have been separated from their parents.

The Federation responded only in areas that they had saving groups in. These were in three out of nine districts affected by the Tsunami. While they started with 140 houses they have decided to respond to larger groups of the community as well. Especially on land on housing negotiations it is important to look at solutions that work for an entire community that is if it is possible to get families of a community together.

The WDBF and Janaruluka started off with:

Morotuwa 3 settlements, 50 houses
Colombo 3 settlements, 40 houses
Kalutara 3 settlements, 50 houses

26th Dec.

Tsunami hit the East and West Coast of Srilanka. Approximately 120,000 people were affected.

27th Dec.

Federation members visited Pichhamal Wattha, Kadirama Wattha and Sri. Wicrma Pura, three slum settlements in Colombo (West). They could not visit the other districts, as they were not accessible. They began searching for federation members missing and distributed 1000 rupees each to the 10 families of the federation from the federation fund

28th Dec.

Visit to Morotuwa (Western province). They met only 5 people they recognized. The rest they were told were all spread out in different relief Camps. These 5 had come to check what had happened to their homes. The federation gave them 250 Srilankan rupees from their own funds (these were in refugee camps so they were looked after unlike the ones affected in Colombo) At this stage the people expressed the need for clothes, underwear and children's food and clothing. The federation requested them to come back to the site for a meeting soon as it was difficult to do so at the relief camp with thousands of people there.

This is when the federation sent out a word to all the nine districts they work in to send clothes and food and got a very good response from the federation members not affected who made a lot of collections.

29th Dec.

Federation teams started putting together packets for distribution. This comprised of rice, tea, sugar, milk powder, biscuits, soyabeans, coconut, dhal and spices, mugs and plates tooth paste/brushes and match boxes. The clothes were bundled in separate parcels. These packets were distributed on the site to federation families and also to some non-federation families.

30th Dec:

Federation meeting to make certain decisions like 1.decided to support the rebuilding of houses and agreed that the primary branches of the savings groups should make money available for house repairs. These were going to be grants and not loans and they would later decide how to reimburse this. 2. Large amount of collections and therefore a method to put into place a system for distribution e.g. food, clothes and children's requirements.

30th, 31st Dec 04 and 1st Jan 05.

Continued visits to the Colombo, Kalutara, Morotwa and refugee camps in search of affected members. Spent time talking and listening to them.

2nd Jan.

Federation Office full of Collections from all other federation members in other districts.

3rd Jan.

prepare fresh parcels for distribution

4th Jan.

Federation leaders meet with 15 families. Distribution of parcels continue and an urgent request to affected members to come together for a meeting on site as it was difficult to discuss future plans. The women affected spoke non-stop about the incident. They described the impact of the three huge waves and each time they were washed off they just clung on to different things. The Federation told them not to be afraid and assured them that they were going to be there for them. Other members of the community also joined in and there was a discussion with about 50 other community members

who joined in. (by this time the federation leadership began to notice that it had to begin to support more than just the affected members)

They visited Kalutara later that day. Many structures were in a retrievable condition unlike Morotuwa where the devastation was much greater.

There were mostly three types of responses from the women of Morotuwa.

1. Many would like to continue to stay in the old place only if the others come back with them.
2. Some were frightened to go back and wanted an alternative place to stay.
3. Most of the families want to continue to live there. (The federation roughly estimates 80 % of the families involved with fishing who want to live on the site with fewer numbers involved with fish trading and the rest carpenters. They are presently doing a quick survey to establish these facts. In a meeting with the Mayor of Morotwa his facts were opposite to that of the federation.)

5th Jan.

Visit to Morotwa. The municipality had begun clearing the rubble. Seems like a Marathon task. There were a few men around searching for stuff they lost. No women around. All of them were at the refugee camp and some supposed to visit the community the next day for a meeting with the federation. (Celine from Bombay joins the federation for three days).

The federation on their way back home visits the libbgewattha, the settlement in Colombo who is about to begin the rehabilitation of 450 houses. They have received 500 dollars each for the first 100 families in the first phase. Each family has a savings amount of about 20,000 to 25,000 Srilankan rupees. The approximate house cost will be about 75,000. The Mayor of Colombo has been very motivated to begin this project.

6th Jan.

The Federation organizes a meeting with the Mayor of Morotwa Mr. Gunashekar. He was extremely supportive and had already met Jock in from NSDF and SPARC earlier in October 04. He said he was looking for Jock in and found his telephone number through city-net. He wanted us to help him with the rebuilding of houses for the urban poor settlements in Morotwa after all the construction work he saw in Bombay. (Somsook from Thailand comes for a day joins in the meeting)

We introduced ourselves to him and told him that we were here to support with land and housing issues post Tsunami. He was keen for us to support his district with this aspect of reconstruction. He explained that 5,000 houses and 14,000 people were affected in Morotwa. He also said that there was a law that the government is keen to re-enforce stating that no one could build 100 sq.mt from the high tide line. Morotwa he said has an age old tradition where the people of Morotwa never leave their land. Even if married they continue to live in Morotwa and this identity is very important to them. That is why the densities in Morotwa are very high. This was not the case of the other districts in Srilanka. He told us what he had in mind and explained that there was land available at Jaygathpura and LanciaWatth. He also spoke of more land available towards the north of the district for which he has plans for land sharing. His idea is to put the fishing communities closer to the shore and the carpenters further in the north. However, according to him they were not fishermen and mostly fish traders and carpenters (this information is different from the federation which implies many will have to move towards the North. At some point in his discussion he made a slip. "We have wanted to move these settlements since a long time and could not do it this. The Tsunami was a blessing" He soon realized what he said and changed his song again. (Well, why should this surprise us? It just makes us clearer that we need to make sure that the affected communities find an alternative that suits them. This is going to be one of the big challenges for the federation). After seeing the Bombay slum rehabilitation program and the multi-storey buildings the Mayor is keen to do the same in Morotwa where most buildings are ground structure and a few are ground plus one or two. Here I had to intervene and tell him that the multistory solution for the fishing community in Madras was a disaster as no fisher men wanted to climb up with their nets and boats.

There are also other issues of the size of house which needs to be established (the federation needs to be clear about this as well. On an average 2 to 3 families 10-12 members live together in 2 perches.

(1 perch is 272 esq.. so 2 perches is 272 x 2= 574 esq..) There was no clarity on what will be given in this relocation. He seemed to waver between 1 and 2 perches to which my response was that we would be confronted by the community to give each family a home as 10-12 members cannot possible live in one or 2 perches) These are areas the federation has to begin a discussion with the community and so its homework on quickly.

- 1.Suitable alternative land for relocation
- 2.Area of house for different family sizes.
- 3.House / Settlement design for different occupation groups
- 4.Community spaces required (e.g. work shed, community center, children's crèche etc.
- 5.Cost of house and source of funding.

Somsok contributes 6000 USD to the Federation Relief work and urges the federation to begin to create a momentum in the settlement which begins to engage people.

7th Jan.

150 federation members from other districts assembled together in Morotwa for 'Shramdhan' which means 'volunteering the labour' to clean their homes, drains and roads.

List of things identified that need to be done:

1. Brisk survey of the affected communities where the federation is involved by the 20 the of Jan. 05. Occupations of women and men, incomes, size of house and no. of family members adults and children are important information to have at this stage.
2. Dialogue with the three district officials and communities on rehabilitation plan. Identification of land and suitable plan.
3. Continue with Relief work for some more time. Food, community tent/center, other relevant goods and services.
4. Managing Money. Separate accounts for Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation work
5. Managing Scale of work. Moving beyond the 150 federation members who are affected.
6. Long-term support from SDI for Capacity building to deal with new roles and functions.
7. Linking ongoing housing projects of the federation with the rehabilitation of affected members to create a district level strategy.

The Federations want to use this crisis as an opportunity for creating new relationships between the urban poor settlements and the district /city officials. It also wants to use this opportunity to begin talks on land and housing with city.

Weak aspects of the Federation that needs to be strengthened:

1. Absence of technical support e.g. like architectural support and documentation support (especially in English)
2. The federation has not been involved with large-scale construction before. However recently they have built one community toilet with 4 seats in Gampa district along with the Urban Development Authority.
3. They have not managed large sums of money. Neither do they receive any significant ongoing external monies. SELAVIP in 2002 gave a sum of 20,000 for house repair loans and individual toilet construction. Selavip have agreed to a loan of 500 USD for the first 100 houses in libhagyawattha settlement. Slum Dwellers International has contributed 20,000 USD of which 2,505 USD was used for construction of the common toilet in Gampa where the community contributed 50,500 rupees (1 USD = 100 Srilankan Rupees) The rest was used for doing drains in libhagyawattha. This was much before the rehabilitation of the settlement was discussed.
4. They are just beginning to learn to negotiate with the city on land, housing and infrastructure projects and now the rehabilitation of the Tsunami affected victims.

Strengths of the Federation and support NGO:

1. Long experience in working with and mobilizing communities rural and urban especially in the area of savings and loans
2. Good account systems.
3. Work with 30,000 urban poor all over Srilanka.
4. Construction of one community toilet and drainage in one settlement.