

**PRELIMINARY WORKING PAPER
ON
RESETTLEMENT, REHABILITATION AND
RECONSTRUCTION IN THE AFTERMATH OF
TSUNAMI DISASTER IN SRI LANKA**

SUBMITTED BY

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1. INTRODUCTION

A massive humanitarian effort is currently underway following the tsunami disaster that took place on 26th December, 2004, to provide relief to help the affected people. The rehabilitation of affected communities and reconstruction of the essential infrastructure will go through an emergency phase followed by a more deliberate phase of proper planning, construction, and resettlement of people. A large number of local and international donor agencies has come forward to assist the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in these efforts.

Though Sri Lanka has many government and other institutions, and civil society organizations involved in dealing with different aspects (research, mitigation, early warnings, relief and rehabilitation, etc) of disaster management, absence of an effective national level management plan / strategy has made the efforts of all these agencies less effective in dealing with this large scale disaster. Further, this highlights the urgent need for the establishment of a national organization with wide legislative and executive powers to effectively deal with all aspects of disaster management. We are happy to note that the Government has already taken some positive steps in this direction.

The lack of pre-disaster preparation led to a large number of human casualties and massive destruction in the present tragedy. Any future rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes should take into account the risks caused by all conceivable natural hazards such as; cyclones, coastal flooding, desertification, salinization, drought, erosion and sedimentation, river flooding, earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, wildfire, and epidemics. In addition, the development of the national capacity for vulnerability assessment, mitigatory measures, early warnings, awareness education and training and preparedness is of paramount importance.

The magnitude of the disaster is of such proportion that all sectors of the society have collectively come together in this moment of national calamity to rebuild the country. International community has pledged support in an unprecedented manner. In this context, there is an urgent need to develop a proper plan of action that will optimize the benefits of the interventions. In developing such a plan, we should be bold and innovative and must think afresh so that we can convert this massive disaster into an opportunity. Our goal should not be merely to reproduce what existed before, but to evolve physical and community infrastructures better equipped to address current and future challenges.

In view of the multi-disciplinary nature of the task ahead of us it is imperative to harness all available human expertise and other resources to find effective solutions. We, at Peradeniya University are committed to assist the government in every possible manner at this time of great national calamity. The University of Peradeniya with seven faculties having staff and students in multitude of fields is in a resourceful position to do so.

Lessons learnt from nearly twenty years of ethnic conflict and the experience gained in relief, rehabilitation and community rebuilding efforts must also be taken into consideration in the formulation and implementation of these activities. The approaches to be used must also be gender sensitive and adequately responsive to the socio-cultural, regional and ethnic diversity in the country.

The aim of this preliminary working paper is to emphasize the need for a coherent national programme and identifying priority areas for sustainable interventions.

2. REBUILDING OF COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY THE DISASTER

Given the massive death toll (exceeding 30,000) and large scale displacement (exceeding 1 million people in 7 districts in Sri Lanka) caused by Tsunami, community rebuilding must proceed simultaneously with rebuilding of physical infrastructure. We need to recognize and strengthen the role of various community organizations currently involved in relief work and prevent possible development of a dependency syndrome among the people as a negative outcome of the flow of emergency assistance from outside. There is also an urgent need to create disaster awareness among all people, including school children. Ensuring community structures that respond to emergencies as well as developmental needs of the affected people and also maintain the improved physical infrastructure are other long term needs associated with the proposed reconstruction efforts.

Following are some considerations;

1. Reintegration; this can be carried out according to two modalities: (i) Developing the existing communities - i.e. villages and towns - to accommodate affected families; (ii) Establishing new communities.
2. Rehabilitation; to meet the immediate community needs, commence the program with temporary housing with access roads, water supply, sewage systems and other infrastructure.
3. New housing; to be located where there is access to economic opportunities. Reconstruction must be economically sustainable, without creating additional dependence on further aid.
4. Livelihoods; Where income generating opportunities have been disrupted, establish new enterprises with the help of the state, corporations, business leaders, NGOs and international agencies.
5. Health & Education; Depending on the size of the communities, establish primary schools, primary health care facilities, vocational training centres and access to basic information technology facilities.
6. Community cohesion; Ensure strong communities by strengthening self-help groups.

Since the short term measures such as rescue and evacuation, provision of emergency assistance, and restoration of essential services have already been satisfactorily taken care of by the Government and other agencies, this proposal will concentrate only on medium and long term plans. The medium term plans should be consistent with the objectives of the long term plans, so as to achieve the goals of rehabilitation and reconstruction in the most efficient and appropriate manner.

3. MEDIUM TERM MEASURES / ACTIVITIES

a. Relocation of displaced people and counseling

Immediate construction of temporary buildings of reasonable living quality for people whose houses were destroyed. They will remain in these “waiting-houses” until permanent housing is provided. Provide health care, counseling, schooling for children and other essential needs.

b. Drawing up plans for long-term resettlement

Plans have to be drawn up for the resettlement of displaced people in new/rehabilitated townships and villages, taking into consideration socio-economic and cultural needs, so that aspirations of people and sustainable social development are realized.

c. Drawing up of a master plan for infrastructure development

In Sri Lanka haphazard development of infrastructure, without proper planning, is very common and this has created many problems. Massive destruction caused by Tsunami can be partly attributed to inappropriate constructions along the beach. A master plan for the long term development of infrastructure, conforming to international standard to be drawn up, taking into account not only tsunami affected areas, but the entire country.

d. Conduct training programs, particularly for youth

A large number of people, especially youth, whose contributions are not utilized adequately in national development should be immediately trained to be used in the rebuilding efforts. In addition, those who reside in vulnerable areas and volunteers should be provided with adequate training in disaster management.

e. Mitigatory measures for public awareness and early warning

Establishment of early warning systems, increase public awareness and preparedness through appropriate means are urgent requirements to mitigate loss of life and property.

4. LONG TERM MEASURES

4.1 Planned Infrastructure Development

Based on the master plan for infrastructure development the following areas should be developed within a reasonable time period (say within 5 years).

- a. Transport; Highway and railway network of international standards to cover whole of the country to ensure economic development of all regions.
- b. Airports and Harbours; Development of airports and harbours, including fisheries harbours, to international standards to meet future needs.
- c. Towns; Development of existing towns and new towns ensuring proper land use practices
- d. Housing; Permanent houses for displaced people conforming to international standards

- e. Schools & Hospitals: To be developed to meet future demographic changes and national social development needs and equipped to international standards.

4.2 Ocean-Front and Beach Development

There should be planned and controlled development of the beaches. All beaches should remain public property and new legislation where necessary effectively enforced. Strict land use controls should be enforced and appropriate erosion control structures should be built where necessary. Tourism facilities along the beaches should be designed to conform to acceptable standards.

5. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The recent disasters in Sri Lanka (tsunami in 2004 December and flood in 2003 May) have brought into focus the severe shortcomings of disaster management. A pro-active approach to the problem through concentrating on post-disaster and pre-disaster phases in addition to disaster phase has become essential for proper management of disasters.

5.1 National Disaster Management Authority

We propose the strengthening of the national disaster management authority with appropriate powers and resources to plan, coordinate, and implement all aspects of disaster management, with following features;

- a. Should remain under the Executive Head of State
- b. Should be responsible for planning, execution and monitoring and dissemination of knowledge.
- c. Should have permanent coordination cells for each hazard at national, provincial, and district levels.
- d. Should coordinate all research activities pertaining to national hazards through an International Institute for Disaster Management Studies.
- e. Should maintain all information related to disasters and make them available to all relevant organizations and individuals.
- f. Should be the sole authority of issuing directives to the public, including early warnings on impending disasters.

5.2 International Institute for Disaster Management Studies

An International Institute for Disaster Management Studies (IIDMS) with the following mandatory functions should be established.

- i. Undertake relevant research studies related to natural disasters and disseminate information to stakeholders.
- ii. Undertake studies and design and plan infrastructure projects for post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction in close collaboration with line agencies

- iii. Provide training and education for NGOs and volunteers (including limited service functions) in collaboration with line agencies and NGOs on disaster management.

This will be linked to various national and international centres.

6. NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM FOR YOUTH

Provide training for all youths, similar to what has been practiced in developed countries having national service schemes. Youth could be provided training in community services, safety measures and other relevant social skills. Youth who have undergone this training will be better equipped to handle emergencies and will become useful citizens.

7. UNIVERSITY INVOLVEMENT

The University of Peradeniya will contribute in the following areas;

- a. Needs assessment surveys and data processing (on-going).
- b. Community health services (on-going)
- c. Environmental impact assessments
- d. Counselling and trauma management (on-going)
- e. Locating and sizing of infrastructure facilities.
- f. Condition surveys of structures (on-going)
- g. Design of infrastructure facilities & construction supervision
- h. Technical training on planning and enterprise development.
- i. Provide GIS services and preparation of maps for town and settlement planning
- j. Socio-economic studies pertaining to the affected areas and impact assessment

Detailed plans on the above may be provided on request.

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