

GENDER CONCERNS IN THE CONTEXT OF TSUNAMI



(Photo: Emmanuel Dunand / AFP / Getty)

**A MICRO LEVEL STUDY IN COASTAL DISTRICTS OF
TAMILNADU AND PONDICHERRY**

Conducted by

EKTA *Resource Centre for Women*

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Bimla Chandrasekar
Director, EKTA
01.12.05.

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PREFACE

When we visited the tsunami hit districts of southern Tamilnadu from Nagai to Kanyakumari, we were confronted with the challenges faced by the victims of tsunami especially women. Tsunami has neither altered the gender division of labour nor gender discriminating values. The despair in women's eyes and the sense of dejection reflected in their voices was a very painful experience. Lack of space to ventilate their feelings, the physical and mental trauma had reduced them as refugees in their own homeland. The media focus centered on the chest beating, wailing emotional women grieving over the loss of their children, husband and near and dear ones. However very little attention was given to understand women as persons engaged in productive work and their livelihood loss. It is a fact that more number of women and children died in tsunami and many women became widows and single parents!

Against this backdrop, EKTA decided to take up a study with the main aim to a) understand the impact of Tsunami on women and children, b) to provide a space for sharing experiences and information and c) to advocate for gender inclusive policies and programmes in the reconstruction process with the State and Non state actors. We strongly feel that the condition and position of women affected by tsunami can be altered if they become part of the decision-making mechanisms and actively participate in the monitoring and implementation process. Mainstreaming gender at all levels and framing institutional mechanisms could be the priorities towards realizing this goal.

The Study Team

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

On 26th of December, 2004 the Tsunami shook the coastal belt of several Asian countries. More than 300,000 people were killed, 500,000 injured, over 100,000 are still in the missing list and more than one million people are internally displaced, mostly in South and South East Asia, in particular Indonesia, Srilanka, India, the Maldives, Thailand and to a lesser extent Bangladesh, Malaysia and Myanmar (Burma). Four Countries in East Africa were also affected, Kenya, Somalia, Mauritius and the Seychelles-Media Report.

In India the tsunami caused extensive damage to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the states



of TamilNadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Pondicherry. The official death toll was put at 10,749 persons but an additional 5,640 persons were reported missing and feared to be dead. In Tamilnadu 13 coastal districts were directly hit by this disaster. Huge boats were thrown in different directions to distances unthinkable, dwelling houses of the coastal communities were wiped out, children and adults fell dead and injured

to the ravaging force of tsunami. The ravaging impact of this disaster would remain forever in the minds of people in this region.

The Need for the Study

Disaster is not gender neutral. It affects different sections in the society differently. The adverse impact is more on the vulnerable people.

“The best estimates reveal that approximately three times as many women as men died in last year’s tsunami, and according to early reports from Pakistan, more women than men were killed in the October 2005 earthquake. The precise number of women who died in the Asian tsunami has not been established as government statistics were not separated by sex” the Global Fund said, adding that its estimates were based on the sex of survivors. (Source: “Caught in the Storm: Global Fund for Women”)



There was no scarcity of reflections and commentary on the impact of the disaster. But the differential impact of tsunami or any other disasters on women and men, and different groups of women and men was a subject that *has not* been prioritized. The media has, at least until recently, looked in to almost every conceivable angle; the impact on tourism, the impact on the environment and even the impact on animals but one area that has received less attention is the gender impact of tsunami. (*Oxfam Briefing Note*).

Most agencies right from the Central Government to the State Government, and various NGOs engaged in the task of relief and rehabilitation have undermined one fundamental reality of Indian society, which is, caste, class and gender discrimination. The visible impact of the same in the current scenario is the marginalisation of social sections belonging to dalit and tribal communities in the relief and rehabilitation processes. The losses suffered by these communities have been marginally addressed by various State Government orders extending compensation. However, the crucial issue of rehabilitation of livelihoods of those who own nothing but their labour power has been grossly ignored. In this context it is needless to explain the plight of women and why the relief and rehabilitation policy currently does not have adequate provisions focusing on the needs of women from their rights perspective.

In this backdrop, EKTA a women's rights organization in Tamilnadu organized a Study Circle on 01.02.05 in Madurai. The purpose was to reflect and analyze the post tsunami scenario from a gender perspective. Participants were from the affected Southern districts of Tamilnadu and most of them were actively engaged in the rescue and relief operations. This interactive event, forwarded the following areas of concern.

1. Women and children are more vulnerable to disasters; Women and men, and girls and boy children adopt adverse coping strategies.
2. The distribution pattern of relief operation has not adequately addressed the practical gender needs of women. The State and non-State agencies working with affected people are not sensitive to the gender specific needs of women.

3. The livelihood needs of women have not been adequately considered while appraising on loss and assessing needs of the affected communities.
4. The women in the displaced communities were not engaged in consultative processes, made part of the decision making, implementation and monitoring of relief and service delivery as well as medium and long term reconstruction and development processes.
5. The plan for permanent shelters and the existing temporary shelter does not seem to ensure physical security of women and children, childcare and toilets.
6. The decisions about relocation do not recognize women's livelihood, which are often different from those of men and are linked to the physical environment and social context of their communities.
7. Women's organizations working in this area were not made part of decision-making processes initiated both by state and other actors.

The above reflection process became the basis for the present study.

Aim

The present study is to understand the gender implications of Tsunami on the lives of coastal communities and evolve strategic recommendations to mainstream gender in to the development process.

Objectives

1. To document the impact of Tsunami on women's lives from 9 coastal districts¹ of Tamilnadu and Pondichery,
2. To identify areas of critical concern to mainstream Gender in the policies and programmes of the state and non State actors from a social and gender relations lens
3. To recommend appropriate changes in policies and their implementation from a caste and gender perspective.

Methodology

It was decided to focus on the affected southern districts and adopt the following methodologies for this study. The team visited all affected Southern districts, held consultation with NGOs, women's organizations and talked to the women from affected communities. The media reports and the Government Orders were reviewed and the study team actively participated in the various consultations held by NGOs, bilateral agencies and Government. The consultative process with women were facilitated with the support of the local NGOs in Nagai and Kararikal on 9th March, in Cuddalore on 10th March, 2005 in Kanyakumari on 15th March, 2005 in Tuticorin on 16th March, 2005 in Tiruvarur Pudukottai and Tanjore on 30th May, 2005 and in Tirunelveli on 2nd July, 2005. The facts collected and observations made during the participation in various consultative processes such as Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Coordination (TRRC), Tamilnadu Tsunami Resource Centre (TNTRC) The TOOL KIT foundation and Calcutta Research Group (CRG) were also reflected during the period of this study. A consultation was held in Madurai on 27th August, 2005 to share the findings and get additional inputs from the participants in order to make the final report.

The Structure of the Report

The report is divided into 5 chapters. The first chapter is an introductory note and outlines the need for the study, aims and objectives and methodology of the study. The second chapter reflects on the gender agenda of the UN Conventions in the context of disaster. The third chapter views the available information on the impact of Tsunami in the affected districts and state. The fourth chapter provides the observations from the field visits and the final chapter is on suggestions and recommendations.

1 Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Kanyakumari, Tuticorin, Tirunalveli, Tanjore, Tiruvarur, Pudukottai (Tamil Nadu), Kariakal (Ponidcherry)

CHAPTER II

The Gender Agenda of un Conventions in the Context of Disaster

The importance of gender consideration is endorsed by the respective organizations at the highest level, in the policy documentation but there is limited evidence of application of the same at the planning and implementation level.

In recent years, there has been a major conceptual shift in how people seek to cope with disasters from natural hazards. While humanitarian response capacities are vital and need to be continued that human intervention designed to reduce the vulnerability of communities and assets can reduce the impact of disasters. Gradually environmental and developmental stakeholders are becoming more involved in the management of risk and vulnerability reduction due to its close interaction with natural resources management.

The Beijing Platform for Action

The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) recognized that many women are particularly affected by environmental disasters, disease and violence. It requested governments to "promote knowledge of and sponsor research on the role of women, particularly rural and indigenous women, in food gathering and production, soil conservation, irrigation, watershed management, sanitation, coastal zone and marine resource management, integrated pest management, land-use planning, forest conservation and community forestry, fisheries, natural disaster prevention, and new and renewable sources of energy, focusing particularly on indigenous women's knowledge and experience."

Beijing +5

Five years later, 2000, the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action identified natural disasters and epidemics as emerging issues, which deserved greater attention. It was noted that the social and economic impact of natural disasters and epidemics remained relatively invisible as a policy issue, in particular their impact on the status of women and the achievement of gender equality. Several states in Africa and Asia cited the

feminization of poverty, often aggravated by natural disasters and crop failure, as an obstacle to improving gender equality.

The twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" acknowledged an increase in casualties and damage caused by natural disasters and raised awareness of the inefficiencies and inadequacies of existing approaches and intervention methods in responding to such emergency situations, from a gender perspective. It suggested that a gender perspective be incorporated into disaster prevention, mitigation and recovery strategies. The special session also recommended that the UN system and international organizations should assist governments in developing gender-sensitive strategies for the delivery of assistance and responses to humanitarian crises resulting from natural disasters.

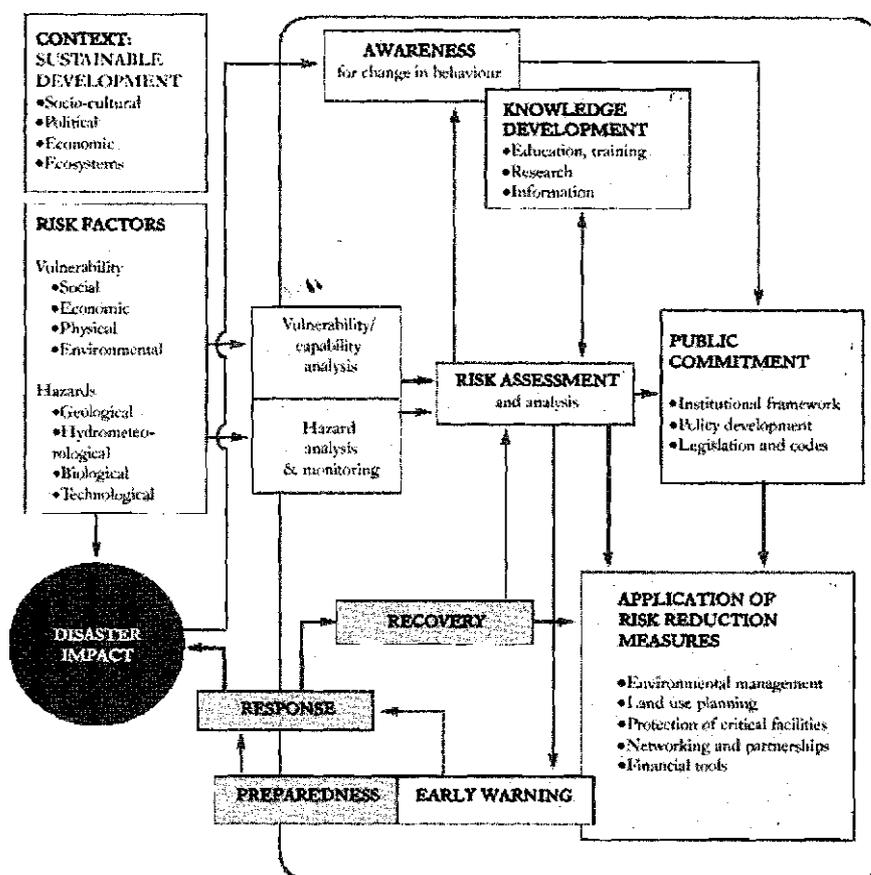
Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Several articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women explore the violations of women's human rights during natural disasters. The committee has urged certain states to pay greater attention to environment and natural disasters. It suggested that aspects of natural disasters impeded women's full enjoyment of their rights. Environmental degradation also has an extremely negative impact on the health of the whole population, in particular women and children.

Commission on the Status of Women

The UN Commission on the Status of Women, in its Programme of work for 2002-2006, will consider the "environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters from a gender perspective", for this, the United Nations Division organized an expert group *for the Advancement of Women (DAW)* in collaboration with the ISDR Secretariat. The expert group meeting discussed in detail the link between gender and environmental management and expressed their concern to address this issue holistically having women's rights in the center stage.

FRAMEWORK FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



The above framework for disaster risk reduction by UN insists on the need for analyzing the risk factors including geological, hydrometeorological, biological and technological hazards and evolving monitoring mechanisms to mitigate the same by ensuring public commitments towards institutional framework, policies, legislations and codes. Land use planning in the reconstruction process is the important response on the part of the state to achieve environmental and livelihood sustainability. Thus this framework spells both the causes and the possible responses of different actors/ implementer in a given situation. However there needs to be critical reflection on this framework to ensure women's active participation in the decision-making processes towards disaster management.

CHAPTER III

Overall Impact of Tsunami

The Overall impact of Tsunami in the region is beyond imagination and is bound to leave lasting impact on the lives of communities.

Physical Impact

Damage. The tsunami destroyed or damaged nearly 5,000 mechanized boats causing damage valued at Rs. 663.1 crore (\$152.4 million) - a total of 7,933 FRP boats/*vallams* valued at Rs. 50.1(\$11.5 million); about 24,580 boats of other categories, mainly motorized, valued at Rs. 121.0 crore (\$27.8 million); and 35,483 wooden catamarans valued at Rs. 90.0 crore (\$20.7 million). In addition 2,342 outboard motors worth Rs. 10.1 crore (\$2.3 million) were damaged or lost in Tamil Nadu. This figure is expected to increase substantially after revision. Net sets valued at Rs. 44.4 crore (\$10.2 million) were damaged or lost. Boat seines worth Rs. 19.9 crore (\$4.6 million) were lost in Kerala. The killer waves have extensively damaged 1,27,748 dwelling houses and caused immense loss to livestock population.



The gross income earned by the fishing community in the TN/Pondicherry belt in the pre Tsunami period was estimated at Rs. 2,400-2,600 crores annually. This income is earned from around 400,000 tons of marine fish / year – of which around 18% is exported. The 'street' revenues primarily by women (based on final selling prices) are estimated around Rs. 5,500-6,000 crores / year .The total assets in the affected area are in the range of Rs. 2,100 crores (includes boats, nets and other related accessories). This is based on current replacement costs. The loss of public infrastructure, houses, livelihood resources have pushed women into further marginalisation.

“The fisher folk are traumatized,” says Father Tom Kocherry, an Indian activist priest who leads the 10 million-strong National Fish workers Forum and who has worked against the globalization of Indian fishing for more than 30 years. “They have a complex relationship with the ocean. The sea is everything to them and they are angry and hurt that ‘their’ sea let them down and did this to them. They are in deep depression. They cannot bear to look at the sea now.” Wednesday January 5, 2005, The Guardian

Ecological Impact of Tsunami



In the pre tsunami context, the state did not mark the high tide line. It leveled all the existing dunes, evacuated villages (ex- Sangumal village of Ramnad) in the name of beautification and tourism projects. There is no data on the changes in the contours of the sea bed, impact of Tsunami and on coastal bio diversity, status of groundwater level taking in account the contamination due to sal.

water intrusion and burial of dead bodies and coastal forestry and parameters for measuring the high tide line.

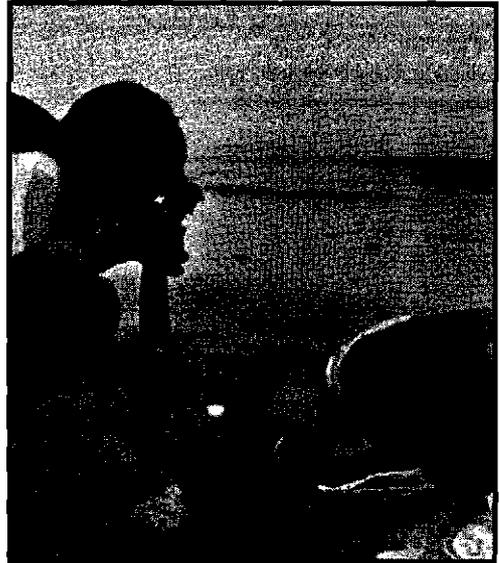
This has caused stress and strain on women in terms of meeting out their practical gender needs and livelihood options. It has affected the livelihood pattern of women who are dependant on seaweed, and shell collection. The food chain system is bound to get disrupted due to the depletion of fishing sources as a direct impact on biodiversity and affect the livelihood options of women engaged in fish vending. It has added drudgery for women in terms of their struggle for accessing potable water, firewood collection and access to toilet facilities. This is likely to cause adverse impact on the health of women and children.

Mari Marcel Thekaekara reports from Tamil Nadu saying that beachside development and violations of southern India’s coastal regulations magnified the effect of the tsunami on the already struggling traditional fishing villages.

Socio-Economic Impact of Tsunami

The immediate aftermath of the tsunami saw a pouring-in of relief on a massive scale. However side-by-side, with such gestures of humanity continued the ritualistic practice of discrimination based on caste and religion excluding dalits and other marginalized communities from accessing relief.

The government also has adopted a property-owner centric policy while addressing livelihood issues in its rehabilitation packages. In terms of the farming community whose lands were inundated by seawaters, surveys were carried out by revenue departments of various districts to assess the extent of inundation and degree of salination. Following this a GO was issued to provide relief to such farmers. It is undeniable that in any formulation of rehabilitation packages for livelihoods, the people of the fishing and farming communities who do not own boats, nets or lands, generally are ignored. In this process automatically women get marginalized, as by and large they do not own any such properties.



Cultural Impacts

The gendered division of labour is critical, as gender roles often seem to be re-enforced and even intensified as workload increases due to the change in environment. Fetching water, sending children to schools, buying goods from the market and PDS takes so much of time as their original habitation is altered to temporary shelters. Many women and men shared that they had inclination to save the male child first!

In Cuddalore, women dependent on agriculture as wage earners stayed back without migrating to other areas and were doing food for work programme implemented by the government and NGOs. This has resulted in increase of female supported households.

During their stay in the camps, women as usual were left to take the responsibility for protecting children and other members of the family, belongings if at all any. During relief phase the female supporters of the house often had little or no access to get relief goods or services, whereas families with more male family members had greater access to the relief sources. In this context it is needless to say the plight of the single women living without male protection.

The prevailing gender restrictions on tasks or occupation, conflicts with children and other domestic work, low wages and hazardous working conditions limit their ability to convert hard work into income. Women from the farming class from Thillaivilagam have either pawned or sold their jewellery which is the only personal property owned by women. In some families women who had no opportunities to sell their labour are forced to sell their bodies.



Nearly 200 adolescent girls became orphans in Nagai alone and they are in the centres run by government. Adolescent girls found it difficult to stay in the camps. They were not closer to their relatives / kith and kin or neighbors. Some of them opted to take refuge along with their neighbors. In some families some of the girls were forced to discontinue their studies, as they have to share the household tasks. In some tourist spots it is reported that the adolescent girls and boys are pushed into the flesh trade.

CHAPTER IV

Observations from the Field

I. Relief and Rehabilitation

“Being a Sunday morning on 26 December 2004, I along with my friend strolled to Keenchankuppam sea shore at 7 am to buy fish. After that we went to Serudhar seashore at 8.45 am where about 500 people had gathered to buy fish. All of a sudden the waves, strangely enough, capsized two boats and people rushed to those boats. Within a second the tsunami wave of about 10-meter height swept everyone. I started running and soon neck deep water pushed me towards a house. Everywhere there was water. No place to run. I managed to climb the nearby post office building. I saw people screaming and running helter-skelter. I managed to escape to Nagapattinam. I felt relieved that I was alive at the same time it was a gloomy situation to see dead bodies all around” – A Development worker

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, efforts were focused on rescuing and searching for the missing, bringing clean water, food, clothing medical care and shelter to survivors, and identifying and burying the vast number of dead. The response, local to global, in addressing these emergencies has been truly unprecedented.

Immediate relief: Water and food with clothing were the immediate needs of the people. With the support of the Government and NGOs the rescue teams started to provide water and food for the people and simultaneously started to look for the missing and dead people in the community.

The second phase of the relief work was focused on to providing medical treatment to the needy and with the feeding program. This was arranged through the support of aid agencies, government and voluntary support from the various groups in and outside the country. People were placed in the temporary camps and food packets were distributed. In some places the volunteers started to cook for the mass. The medical treatment was arranged with the support of the Government and voluntary doctors in the temporary shelter itself. Persons with multiple

problems were taken to different hospitals in and around the districts. Many of the women, men and children had the emotional trauma escalated by the fear of sea. Although huge piles of clothes were available especially for women and children, shortage in undergarments supply became an issue. The available school buildings were used for the temporary shelters. Schools were closed for more than 20 days. Children were just sitting and worrying about their brothers, sisters and parents.

The third phase of relief work started with looking for temporary individual shelters. Meetings took place with the people and the Government to identify the place for shelter near their villages. The temporary construction started with the support of Government as well as various NGOs in the country and International NGOs from outside. In between the community was given food grains, clothes, kitchen materials and undergarments. Interventions with the children were carried out through counseling, health camps and children's activities.

Overall issues in relief and rehabilitation

- The relief measures were extended to coastal fishermen and others closely connected with the coastal economy (GO 120, 57) and small petty traders. This narrow definition of affected communities excluded dalits, adivasis and religious minorities, particularly women
- The relief measures by the State, NGOs and INGO's have created relief dependency by the people. The 'Desire to help' got transformed to 'Desire for help' and people have been made more vulnerable due to the increasing relief dependency.
- The relief measures did not cover all households in temporary resettlements. The relief supply in many places was mismatched to the needs of the local people. It surpassed their need, for example supply of many stoves, bed sheets, and buckets to the same families by different agencies.
- On many occasions, the relief goods and services delivered were insensitive to local culture and situation. People did not accept the food supplied (Curd rice, lemon rice etc) by many agencies and so also the clothes like pants, shirts for girls.
- On the whole there was insufficient understanding about women's needs in a disaster situation and therefore the efforts are not adequate in coverage and content.

Gender specific issues in relief and rehabilitation measures

Natural hazards becoming disasters do not exist in isolation from the social and cultural construct that marginalize women and place them at the risk of vulnerability. (Waves of violence- report from SriLanka)

- An opportunity to reshape class, caste and gender relations (resources, power, division of labour) have been missed and in-fact getting perpetuated. Distribution by traditional fish worker panchayat has excluded the elderly or differentially able women households with no fishing member
- It was interesting to note that the cash compensation provided by the Government was reduced to near half for women, as the needs of women was decided by the community male leaders and as usual women did not speak up for themselves. (Initial cash relief of Rs.4000 became Rs.2000 for women!)
- Certain sex specific needs like sanitary towels, undergarments, and nutritional supplements for pregnant women and certain gender intensified needs like toilets and bathrooms, childcare were not sufficiently addressed.
- Discrimination existed in resettlement camps where there were mixed groups of communities like dalits and tribals with other communities and hence women were victimized by the exclusion.
- During relief distribution, there was no participation of women in decision-making, especially of dalit women. The relief measures have grossly neglected single women with no adult men / adolescent boys or single women who have returned to village from marital village after divorce.
- The locations of the temporary shelter, in many places are far away from their original habitation. The lack of adequate transport services has put additional pressure on women as they have to walk long distances for fetching water, firewood, sending children to schools and also to attend to their livelihood options. Children sent to private schools were excluded from the compensation. Due to this many families express reluctance for the education of their girl children.

- In post Tsunami situation, the Government provided some help for marriages that took place in the communities. Many men and some women had access to huge money, which was given to them as compensation for life loss in their families. The fear of widowed men remarrying compelled many families to arrange marriage for their adolescent girls. The marriage age in these coastal areas seem to have come down. The dowry system also has been strengthened.
- In the case of Nagai and Kanyakumari an NGO coordination was formed and they interfaced with the district administration on a one to one basis in delivering services in a concerted manner. However in another districts no such coordination was visible.

II. Health and Sanitation

Situation analysis

On the whole, the health infrastructure was not severely affected, although in some sub-centers, primary health centers were damaged by the entry of seawater into these Centres. In Nagapattinam, a district hospital was severely damaged including facilities for obstetric care. Nearly 65 childcare centers (known as Anganwadi centres, or AWCs) were destroyed and 43 were partially damaged.

The temporary living conditions of the population have raised concerns related to water and sanitation, as well as the maintenance of key health practices, such as maternal health including pre- and post-natal and delivery services, breast-feeding, good hygiene and ORS use. In an emergency situation, the surveillance of communicable diseases is one of the most important concerns. This has been successfully addressed to a large extent by the W.H.O by establishing disease surveillance units in the four most-affected districts in Tamil Nadu.

- Immediately after the occurrence of tsunami, medical camps were organized in the affected areas. Most of the doctors were male who had inadequate understanding of gender specific health needs of women. Many women have reported to be suffering from white discharge, reproductive tract infections and urinary tract infections.
- It is apprehended that when emergency care is the priority, reproductive health is relegated to second place, which can lead to skyrocketing infant and maternal mortality rates.

- It has been reported from some places that women had abortions, still birth and premature deliveries. Due to loss of livelihood, patients particularly women were not able to seek health care from private providers. This has increased the patient turnover in government hospitals which does not have adequate provision take in this increasing number of health seekers.
- The huge dumping of the wreckages in the area has posed the challenge for waste disposal and management in the region. The initiative of some NGOs to address this issue by engaging women and men in cleaning the villages through their 'food for work' programme is appreciable. However this initiative needs to be up scaled and sustained to have the desired impact.
- The lack of access to income, increasing drudgery in the household chores, prevalence of alcohol violence in the family, denial of privacy in the temporary shelters accelerated by physical and psychological insecurity has pushed many women into a state of depression.
- As caregivers to the young, old, sick, disabled, and injured, women tend to put their own needs last. In the name of extending psychosocial support to tsunami victims there is a push to normalize rather than pathologise the response of the people. This needs immediate attention.
- It was expressed that there is a need to renovate the sub-district hospitals (Sirkali and Tharangampadi hospitals in Nagapattinam; Cuddalore, Chidambaram and Parangipettai hospitals in Cuddalore; and Kanyakumari and Kollachal hospitals in Kanyakumari) and upgrade existing PHCs.

III. Education

“Shanthini from Keechankuppam, studying 3rd standard did not know that 26th morning would turn out to be a traumatic one. On that fine morning, what looked just like any other morning, she was happily playing on the seashore, picking up pebbles and throwing up sand. In a blinking of an eye, the sudden eruption of tsunami wave enveloped her and pushed her away from the shore. Someone, spotting her, pulled her from the water and took her to the rooftop of a house. After a while, she came down looking for her mother who had stayed inside the house. To her shock, Shanthini found only her mother’s dead body. And she could not see the body of her brother. She is grief stricken and inconsolable. With other’s support, she has started going to school. It will be long before she can come to terms fully with the traumatic loss of her mother and brother”

Situation Analysis

According to the rapid assessment of physical damage to schools in the affected areas. Conducted by the Tamil Nadu Department of Education, there are 252 schools needing complete reconstruction, 19 need major repairs and 49 need minor repairs. A total of 270,000 students have been affected in 567 schools (from primary to higher secondary) in 13 districts including Chennai City. Needless to say, half of the above-displaced students could be girl children. Higher education is not included in this number.

- Many NGOs expressed their concern over adoption out of the community. Institutional care for orphans too needs to be made available only if the community requests it, according to many NGOs in the field. This is an area, which does cause uncertainty in the minds of children who have lost either both or one parent. This is extremely crucial for adolescent girls as they are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.
- Another issue, which the governments and NGOs need to address, is the question of out-of-School Children. Especially in Tamil Nadu, a number of boys in the age group of 10 to 16 have dropped out in coastal areas to work on the fishing boats in the past few years. This group is now at a loose end. This is likely to increase violence in the area.

- It is feared that girls are being pulled out of private school more than boys to take care of the young ones and to assist the mothers in domestic chores.
- The government has announced 'Adolescent girls special fund' for education and skill training (G.O.No.Ms.No.6 Dated 8-01-2005)

IV. Shelter / Housing

Azheekal and her family, who lived on the beach in the Tamil Nadu village of Sagayapuram, survived the tsunami but like tens of thousands of other families dependent on traditional small-scale fishing in southern India, lost everything. "We returned to find the house smashed and absolutely nothing left," she says. "Not one of the children's school books, not even a piece of underwear. I don't know how to start life again."

Situation analysis

The primary cause for the high damage is related to the destruction of natural features of the coastal environment like sand dunes and the location of the settlements on the coastline of India. Many of the damaged settlements have existed prior to the promulgation of the CRZ. In the aftermath of the tsunami and devastation to these entire coastal habitats, the Government of Tamil Nadu is now considering relocation of some of these communities. In this context it is vital to follow the non-negotiable principle of not further victimizing the victims of the tsunami. It is very important to safeguard against any moves to convert the disaster into an opportunity to displace the local communities living along the coast.

Substantial resources have become available for reconstruction from a variety of sources. Gaps still exist however in technical expertise for designing effective habitats that are culturally sensitive, that respect the pattern of the past settlements evolved over time (but challenge caste segregation) and at the same time integrate technically sound disaster mitigation measures. There is also a need for an effective coordination mechanism linking all stakeholders and all levels of government concerned in habitat reconstruction, which ensures a participatory approach, building from the concerns of the dwellers themselves particularly of women.

Male domination in camps

Immediately after Tsunami, affected communities were given shelter in camps. There was no privacy for women, no sense of security as men can walk in at any time. Camps were sites of power and control. Men exerted their physical strength and were able to force their issues. There was a noted absence of opportunities for women to speak out their opinions and concerns. There was no possibility for women to take part in the decision-making. As usual others spoke on behalf of women. In this backdrop one can understand the focus of the media coverage, totally ignoring the livelihood loss of women.

Temporary Shelter

- The lands identified for the temporary shelters in most of the areas were a low-lying area. Two problems arise in this construction. During rains, water enters the shelters. The damp flooring, in the temporary shelters which was aggravated by water logging during rains caused immense inconvenience and made the residence vulnerable to health hazards.
- The distances between the shelters are less than 5 ft. 4m. The light roofing in shelters is simply nailed from the topside alone thus in the time of high winds the roof can be blown. Most of the temporary shelters are tinned or tarred which is not suitable for stay.
- The flooring of most of the temporary shelters was damp causing immense problem in storing the grains, clothing which was distributed to them as relief material by the NGOs and Government-, which were the meager belongings.
- Most of the temporary shelters has common toilets, which has flimsy or no doors. There were problems related to water and sanitation and garbage collection system is missing in most of the places.
- In Tuticorin the women shared that the state itself forcefully evicted people with the said objective of ensuring physical safety and placed them at a faraway place where they find it difficult to continue their traditional occupation.

Permanent Housing

“The killer waves damped our houses with seaweed. It took 11 days to clear the house. Still it needs repairing and white washing. We were not given compensation. Our children suffered from diarrhea. Many of us have lot of health complaints. When we approached the VAO for relief measures, he replied that he couldn’t consider our petition, as there is no death in the families. We feel helpless.” Jothi from Pookollai – kadamagalagud.a

“According to Malliga of Mallipattinam vice president, Meenava Pengal Kootamaippu, most of the houses were situated within the 200mts. The VAO has collected signatures from women in the absence of men in applications to relinquish their land title by force. He has intimidated them that their electricity and water connection will be terminated and their ration card will be cancelled. The government has planned to develop a coastal park in this area “.

- The circular letter dated 19.01.2005 by Mr. R.Santhanam, I.A.S., the Special Commissioner of Relief and Rehabilitation clearly stated that the existing houses will have to be handed over to the government by a process of relinquishment for appropriate action, since the beneficiaries in the new locations will be given full ownership patta for the area under their enjoyment and the construction will be fully funded either by the government or by the Non Governmental Organisations / Voluntary Agencies / Public and Private Enterprises / National / International Rehabilitation Organisation.
- The government has announced that ‘the title of the house will be given in the joint names of the wife and husband and if one of them is not alive, in the name of the survivor and the eldest child. The houses cannot be alienated / mortgaged /sold for ten years. Any transfer of the share of the wife’s property to the husband will be declared void’.

V. Livelihood

“Chinnachacha, 50 year old woman, a fishing vendor from Poombukar fisher village, went to buy fish on morning of 26th December 2004. To her alarm, she saw behind her 50 feet wall of seawater rushing at a high speed. It was so sudden she did not have time to collect her fish basket. The rushing wave swept her into a thorny bush. Her hair got caught in the bush and she could not move. For her luck, someone rushed to her and rescued her from the bush, carried her in the neck deep water to a safer place. After the wave receded, she rushed outside to recover her basket. To her shock she realized that the wave had swept away her basket, money and killed her husband. She also lost all her belongings. Life looks now bleak for this widow”.

Situational analysis

Women’s role in fisheries has historically not been recognized by government policy makers, though it periodically provides lip service on its commitment to the development of fisherwomen. As early as the 1950s the TN government launched a “quick transport scheme” for fishermen, though it was women who were involved in marketing fish. Now also such biases continue (ICSF, 1997b). The government provides off-season compensation to only fishermen. While several schemes are in place for fishermen, very few of them are directed at fisherwomen. Combined with the assumption that women’s contribution to household income is insignificant, the government has not formulated any scheme to provide life or accident insurance cover to fisherwomen while they are at work. On the other hand accident or life insurance cover is provided for fishermen. Though the TN government has formed all fisherwomen’s co-operatives, very few of them are now functioning. At times not only are the needs of fisherwomen ignored due to such assumptions, but they are also displaced by gender-blind policies of the government.

Labor market transformation

In post Tsunami situation labor market transformations have been the third key process impinging on the livelihood possibilities of the poor, particularly women. There is a trend towards an occupational hierarchy for the poor in which casual daily labor is the least preferred employment. Within the context of such an occupational hierarchy, the ‘capacity to shift’

becomes the key livelihood concern for the poor who face social marginalisation particularly women. Correspondingly, there is a great emphasis on access to finance, social networking and human capital factors which generate this 'capacity' at the level of the individual household.

- The 'capacity to shift' is increasingly becoming a new dividing line within the ranks of the poor with those unable to negotiate such shifts emerging as new categories of poor. This includes a large number of women. Most of the NGOs and donors have opted to work with the directly affected population. It is an irony that the indirectly victimized communities who are pushed to a newly created refugee status by the killer waves are becoming relief dependants. But neither the NGOs nor the government supports them.

VI. Greater vulnerability of Women in Disasters

Gender based inequalities interact with social class, race and ethnicity and age, which put some women and girls especially at high risk. Gender inequalities with respect to enjoyment of human rights political and economic status, land ownership, housing conditions, exposure to violence, education and health and in particular, reproductive and sexual health, make women more vulnerable before during and after disasters.

Clearly high rates of female poverty are an important factor in increasing women's risk in disasters. Also, women's human rights are not comprehensively enjoyed throughout the disaster process. In addition, their economic and social rights are violated in disaster process when mitigation, relief and reconstruction process don't consider the different capacities and needs of men and women, or their differential impact.

The right to adequate health care is violated when relief efforts do not meet the specific health needs (physical and mental) of women throughout their life cycle and especially when trauma has occurred.

The right to the security of the persons is violated when women and girls are victims of sexual and other form of violence while in relief camps or in temporary housing. Civil and political rights are denied if women cannot act autonomously and participate fully at all decision-making levels in matters regarding mitigation and recovery.

- Local survivors cite various reasons why the waves might have killed more women than men. Women lost their lives in their attempt to save their children and older family members. Some women also died due to cultural factors. The socially constructed identities for married women such as mangalasutra, bangles and anklet prevented them from running towards safer places as they got struck with all these physical objects.
- Women and adolescent girls lost their clothing when they were thrown by the wave. They preferred to die than to come out naked into the open. This shows the strong internalization of social values binding women, like 'shame and chastity'.
- A gendered division of labor restricts the participation of women and men to certain activities and results in different needs, capabilities and capacities. When the tsunami hit, many men were fishing at sea while the women waited near the shore for the boats to come in with the catch that they would collect, clean, and then take to the market to sell.
- One of the main arguments with regard to greater vulnerability to women is that women are poorer than men. The different and unequal ownership, access and control that women and men have over resources contribute largely to this vulnerability
- The lack of recognition (invisibility) to women's livelihoods is another major concern. This includes equal wage for equal work and ownership of assets like houses and boats, as well as life insurance and insurance of income-generating assets. It is a relief to note that some NGOs have given boats and nets to the women SHGs. But by and large it was seen that women are a neglected lot with regard to receiving compensation for the loss of livelihood. Women are bearing the burden of food shortage. Women are taking fresh loans to repay old loans.
- Natural disasters in a wide range of contexts have weakened women and girls' status and their ability to negotiate within and outside the family. The loss of assets, and family members all contribute to increased gender inequality. This has been clearly demonstrated in the affected communities.

VII. Violence Against Women

Situational analysis

Violence Against Women is one of the most under represented issue that gets sidelined in disaster situations. The short term and long term impact of this is visible in the lives of women in terms of their participation in the development process.

The new money gained by the loss of the family members has given some of the men a new class identity and they have approached younger women for remarriage. Marriages are also forced on both adolescent boys and girls to obtain the relief benefits. Young widows face physical and psychological insecurity. Few men are marrying again because their wives have been sterilized and children have died. For some young women, their marriages stopped for want of dowry.

Domestic violence often increases when men's traditional breadwinning roles are shattered by natural disasters. In some cases such relief has lead to men marrying adolescent girls, bigamy selling of rations for drinking.

Issues with women and adolescent children

- The structure of families has also undergone a change. Traditional gender roles are also being challenged in some homes as men deal with the crisis and take on the responsibilities of single parenting and learn to perform new roles.
- There is increase in pressure on women to bear children, particularly in communities where more children have died. Women who had undergone family planning operations are either forced to go for recanalization or accept remarriage of the husband. As a result of this there is more violence against women.
- There is an increase in the number of girls' marrying within the extended families in some of the affected villages in Cuddalore. This is considered as a measure for providing life and protection to these girls.
- It was reported that girls whose marriages were fixed before the tsunami and who have lost both their parents are being married off by members of the extended family or the community to other young men. These marriages seem to be done in desperation

and without the girls' consent. It is a common sight to see remarriage of older men to younger women.

- There was no physical and social security for women who have lost their husbands. Reports from Nagai and Kanyakumari reveals that women and adolescent girls, unable to manage the stress are attempting suicide.
- Early marriages for adolescent girls were reported in many of the coastal pockets. This is viewed as a deterrent to girl's education and overall development.
- Access to new money has strengthened the mobility of men resulting in increase in substance use and alcoholism.
- With the loss of so many women, others are fulfilling the traditional 'caring role of women in families'. Many new forms of live in relationships are emerging. Widows and old women who have survived are also in a desperate position and need extra support. In Nagarcoil, in Kanyakumari District in TamilNadu, for instance, many of the old women are now gathering and selling firewood to support themselves.

VIII. The role of NGOs and other civil society organisations in the reconstruction process

It was observed that NGOs were actively involved in mobilizing relief for the affected victims in their respective areas. But there was insufficient planning and coordination for the mid term and long term rehabilitation interventions

- There was no concerted effort for campaigning for a disaster management act
- Reaching out the funds claimed by the state to the victims of Tsunami was not monitored.
- Mainstreaming gender in the rehabilitation interventions of both NGOs and the state were not prioritized
- The very neutrality of the state and NGO approach to security and livelihood has hindered any interventions that sought to ensure women's safety.
- In Kanyakumari the women's organizations that were actively engaged in the initial phase of rescue and relief got sidelined for reasons not known in the later phase of rehabilitation.

Role of SHGs

- While GO 33 declares all the coastal districts as Tsunami affected districts, the relief and rehabilitation programmes are implemented only in 8 districts where there were loss of lives and property. The SHGs belonging to the Mahalir Thittam are given loans up to Rs 3000 in the affected districts. The SHGs, which are not part of Mahalir Thittam, are not given loans within the affected districts. Public interest litigation has been filed in this regard by a civil society organization and the case is pending.
- In Karaikal medu and in Nagai, women's federations played an active role in the relief operations and initiatives towards reconstruction phases. These women were engaged in rescuing people, searching for the missing ones and distribution of relief materials. In Karaikal medu the women interfaced with the traditional Panchayat leaders and were able to participate in the decision making process. The active roles played by women in some of these places have threatened the male leadership and the male leadership has replaced the woman leadership.
- However in many places SHGs were not able to assert their positions. One such example is given below

“ When we demanded an endorsement for the damages, the RDO replied you were not washed away by the tsunami. You are alive and physically well and you should not look for government relief measures. You should earn your livelihood by your own efforts. Our panchayat was a silent spectator and did not support us in our demand- Jeeva from Pattukottai ”.

CHAPTER V

Suggestions and Recommendations

The effectiveness of Aid programmes will fall short unless greater attention is paid to gender equality because ownership is central to the new Aid strategy. It must include women who are not only citizens but also key stakeholders in their country's development. (Noelin Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM)

- The relief and rehabilitation policy should be inclusive, making special provisions for those at the very bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy.
- Disaggregate data by sex, caste, class, age, ethnicity, religion and disability.
- Both state and non-state agencies working with the affected communities need to be made aware about the gender specific needs of women. Gender sensitive guidelines must be issued to officials to ensure that women and girls are guaranteed safety and security from gender based violence.
- It is absolutely necessary that women become a part of the structures of administration put in place to deal with displacement and other problems faced by those who are affected by Tsunami at every level, from the village level to right up to the state and central level operations. In particular it is critical that women become an integral part of the committees at district and state level.
- Recognize women's capacity as a resource in both risk reduction and in disaster management, and reject the view of women as helpless victims. Provide women with necessary information and skills that would enable them to reduce their vulnerability. Include women in all stages of disaster management plans.
- Ensuring of land rights, housing and shelter benefits, creation of employment; training and livelihood support for women particularly those who lost their husbands and otherwise single women, women with disability and old women should be given priority.

- The planning for relocation must have women's participation, as they are the most vulnerable category. The physical security of women and their children will be far greater in communities that are well known to them and where they have strong social resources. For example women who are able to access familiar religious sites, markets, hospitals, relatives, friends and other resources will be far less vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and psychological distress. Relocating in unfamiliar areas will have negative implications for their psychosocial and emotional status.
- Special attention must be made to land rights, housing and shelter benefits, creation of employment, reestablishment of livelihoods, training and livelihood support for women. Special consideration should be given to the specific needs of widows, women supported household, women with disability and aged women.
- Women's groups and community based groups should be supported to work with displaced women and to build closer relationships that may pave the way for more open discussions regarding the issue of violence as well as more constructive interaction with officials and important decision makers
- Counseling for children and women needs to be organized on a sustained manner with due recognition of the local realities. Equally important is the sensitivity to the age group and gender practices in the region.
- In the current situation, protection of women and their dignity in the temporary shelters and in camps is necessary. Privacy issues need to be addressed by placing water sources, toilets and kitchens at convenient locations. In camps, it means designating private spaces where women can undergo medical examinations. (Oxfam Paper)
- The panchayat government should be entrusted with the responsibility of dispersing the funds from the state for reconstruction and monitoring the reconstruction process in coordination with Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs)
- The Tamilnadu state has announced the formation of "Tsunami waves Relief committees" at district panchayat and ward levels in all the coastal districts. It has to be constituted immediately with adequate women's representation.

- The elected government must prepare the demographic data; the need assessment data and village development plan and the reconstruction plan must be executed with the CBOs under the leadership of elected government
- Reduce relief expenditure by investing more on disaster risk reduction and on building communities with equal opportunities for work that can strengthen their ability to cope with disaster. The rehabilitation process need to prioritize the following vulnerable groups: women living in poverty, elderly women, women with disabilities, women supported households, socially isolated widows, women in shelters/landless, women living alone, and women with chronic illness.

“ On that fatal morning, Vasanthi, a woman activist of SNEHA in Nagai was attending to her household chores with her daughter and son, while her second daughter Vineetha was away in her grandmother’s house. Before Vasanthi could realize what was happening, 50 feet of tidal wave washed away her house. Vasanthi and her son ran for their lives and got stuck in wild thorn bush. They lay there dead. When Vineetha realized that she lost her mother, brother and sister, her heart was torn apart. Every evening Vasanthi used to come to her mother’s place and hold Vineetha. Now, everyday Vineetha recalls her mother holding her and weeps inconsolably. Struck by the trauma, her grandfather has become speechless. (Report of SNEHA, 20005)”

“ My family was totally dependant on the income from the petty shop. The shop was washed away by the killer waves. Till to day I was not given compensation. Tsunami has not washed my shop. It has pushed me to impoverishment. Now we were left as beggars looking for people like you to intervene and support. Would the government come forward to secure our right to livelihood? Amirthavalli a petty shop owner”

Vimala sobs as she recalls the horrors of the tsunami that devastated the small fishing communities of Kanyakumari district at the southern tip of India. “It took mere minutes to destroy us completely,” she says. “My husband my mother-in-law and I just managed to grab a child each, then we were swept out. My child slipped out of my grasp. I thought that was it. Then a body hit me. I grabbed at it. By some miracle, it was my daughter brought back to me.”

EKTA is a resource centre for women established in 1990. It aims at a gender just society with sustainable development, decentralized democracy and protection and promotion of human rights.

EKTA works with women staff of the NGOs, rural urban poor women, students from schools and colleges. Through a gender and development approach EKTA facilitates the formation of self help groups and consolidation of the same at micro and macro levels, strengthens women leadership at the grass root level and within NGOs, promotes issue based campaigns to end violence against women. It also facilitates linkages within NGOs and promotes networks for experiential sharing and collective action, and advocates appropriate lobbies for policy changes to further the cause of women.



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