

# Portrait of a disaster

RAPID ASSESSMENT REPORT OF THE EFFECTS OF TSUNAMI  
CRUSHES IN SRI LANKA



**Disaster Management & Information Programme**

**2004**

## ABSTRACT

At the moment the Government of Sri Lanka, United Nations, International NGOs, Embassies and High Commission Offices and national civil society agencies are working hard to assist the people who are affected by the December 26, 2004 catastrophe. Not as glorious note, but this disaster management operation is the biggest in Sri Lanka ever. Understandably, there are positive and negative impacts of this operation.

This rapid assessment report aims to provide a picture of the effects and impacts of the catastrophe at community level and share this with all the stake holders in Sri Lanka.

The report covers the effect on population, damage on building and infrastructure, issues with health facilities and water sanitation, livelihood damage, problems with food/nutrition, secondary threats, response to the disaster, issues with logistics and distribution system and priority needs. The rapid assessment report also provides observations by the field information gathering teams of environmental damage in affected districts.

Base on these information the rapid assessment report provide three recommendations as follows:

1. Information gathering and co-ordination mechanisms of the relief response
2. Planning for transition and focus for sustainable development
3. Livelihood recovery and rehabilitation for small and medium scale fishermen and farmers

The Disaster Management & Information Programme (DMIP) is a joint collaboration between the Green Movement of Sri Lanka and the Trauma & Development Component of the Disaster & Development Centre at Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.

DMIP aims at establishing a national process of research, educational, mitigation and response to deal with natural and human made disasters in Sri Lanka.

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## BACKGROUND

An extremely powerful earthquake rocked northern Indonesia Sunday (December 26, 2004) that sent massive tsunamis<sup>1</sup> crashing into several countries including Sri Lanka. The U.S. Geological Survey reported a quake of magnitude 9, which struck at 8 a.m. about 100 miles off the west coast of the island of Sumatra. Massive tsunamis stemming from Sumatra epicentre, hit Sri Lanka — some 1,000 miles west creating the worse natural disaster in the recent history of the tiny Island in the Indian Ocean. This is the largest earthquake on Earth since the 9.2-magnitude Good Friday Earthquake which struck Alaska, USA, on March 27, 1964, and the fourth largest since 1900.



Source: Wikipedia, 2004

## Damage and destruction – Initial phase

### \* Rising water levels

The multiple tsunamis which struck and ravaged coastal regions all over the Indian Ocean, devastated regions including the Indonesian province of Aceh, the coast of Sri Lanka, coastal areas of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, the resort island of Phuket, Thailand, and even as far away as Somalia and several other countries in Africa, 4,500 km (2,800 mi) or more west of the epicentre.

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<sup>1</sup> A tsunami is a series of ocean waves generated by any rapid large-scale disturbance of the sea water. Most tsunamis are generated by earthquakes, but they may also be caused by volcanic eruptions, landslides, undersea slumps or meteor impacts.

A wall of water up to 10 metres high triggered by the 9 magnitude earthquake swept into Indonesia, over the coast of Sri Lanka and India and across southern Thai tourist islands.

In Sri Lanka, the first effects of the tsunamis had impact on the coastal regions of Hambantota District, and whole of the Eastern Province. Local media reports claimed of flash floods created by these waves as high as 5 meters. The after shock and the resulting waves then washed out towns in the whole of the southern parts of the country and that of the northern coastal belt.



**Satellite photo of southwestern coast of Sri Lanka shortly after the tsunami struck**

Source: (DigitalGlobe)

Numerous aftershocks of magnitude between 5.7 and 6.3 were reported off the Andaman Islands in the following hours and days. Aftershocks off the Nicobar Islands were also reported, including ones of magnitude 7.5<sup>2</sup> and 6.6<sup>3</sup>. Other aftershocks between magnitude 5.0 and 6.3 occurred near the location of the original quake<sup>4</sup>. On Sunday the Government of Sri Lanka had declared a state of emergency taking to count the initial devastation that occurred.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/recenteqswww/Quakes/ussmax.htm>

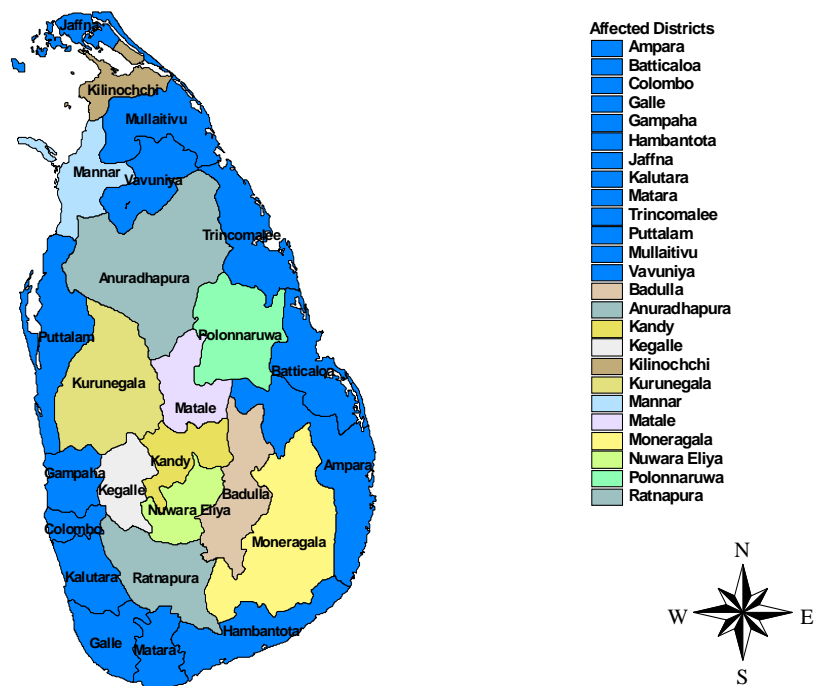
<sup>3</sup> <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/recenteqswww/Quakes/ussmbj.htm>

<sup>4</sup> [http://earthquake.usgs.gov/recenteqswww/Quakes/quakes\\_all.html](http://earthquake.usgs.gov/recenteqswww/Quakes/quakes_all.html)

## Initial death toll

Initial media reports stated that the death toll in Sri Lanka amounted to 162<sup>5</sup> - in which 150 bodies in the Muslim villages of Muttur and another 10 in the town of Trincomalee. The number of deaths by the end of the day rose to 324. The current rate is stand at 27,589 dead according to the Government with 4,059 missing.

## Affected Districts



Source: UNDP –  
Sri Lanka, 2004

<sup>5</sup> Relief Official D M Rodrigo's statement – Jakarta (AFP) – 12/26/04

## METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Methodology of this rapid assessment is an inductive and narrative methodology (Walker, 1982 and Blaikie, 1993) that used observation, informal interviews<sup>6</sup> and literature reviews. The Disaster Management & Information Programme of the Green Movement of Sri Lanka deployed six trained teams of four people each to Puttalam, Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Information on Jaffna, Mullativue and Killinochchi was collected through the Green Network Partners and the Secretariat for Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North and East (SIHRN), Government Agent Offices and TECH in Killinochchi.

The geographic locations were selected according to the optimum mobilization possible. The six teams covered six regions with overlapping administrative authority of each divisional and local government authorities. The teams were deployed to the field on December 27, 2004 morning and there were in the field till the evening of December 29, 2004.



**Devastation in Colombo District**

Source: GMSL

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<sup>6</sup> These Informal interviews are based on UNDMT Rapid Assessment Format.

## DATA

Region	Kalutara and Galle
<b>Geographical Area</b>	Piayagala, Maggona, Beruwella, Aluthgama, Benthota, Kosgoda, Balapitiya, Ambalangoda, Kahawa, Seenigama, Hikkaduwa, Rathgama, Ginthota, Galle, Akmmemana, Karapitiya
<b>Local authorities interviewed</b>	Grama Sevaka –Village Officers Police Officers Community Based Organizations
<b>Others</b>	Community Based Organizations Religious Leaders Community/Social Groups Victims/Affected People

## \* Effect on population

According to the local authorities there are 3,455 reported deaths, all most all the survivors are injured and displaced numbers are not been estimated. The team had informal discussion with about 500 affected people, it was apparent that they were in a state of anxiety and stress. They are located in religious places and schools on a temporary basis.

## \* Building

Nearly 90% of building including houses in the coastal belt is completely destroyed. These building being of primary nature has less concrete support. The observation team found 03 schools that are destroyed. All most all government buildings such as health centres, post offices, co-operatives, and government offices are been destroyed or is filled with rubble washed in from the sea.

## \* Infrastructure

The main and sub roads have been washed-out in selected places. The bridges of Magalle, Gintota, Seenigama, Hikkaduwa are damaged and need immediate attention to support

transportation of relief to affected communities. The rail way tracks are completely destroyed, where a train in Tellwatte was found washed up with passengers dead inside. Telecommunication networks and electricity lines are destroyed and need immediate response.

\* Health Facilities

The Balapitiya base hospital and government medical centres are closed down. The Karapitiya hospital is accessible, but the staffs are overwhelmed with dead bodies and injured people, and require further relief support. Medical services lack medicine and medical equipment to support and control the chaos. There is fear among the communities and the local authorities on outbreaks of water born diseases, dermatological diseases and tetanus.

\* Water Sanitation

Affected communities are totally dependant on out side assistance for drinking water. Water supply systems are completely destroyed and interior water sources are over utilized. Rushed relief to the area have brought bottled water and also the surrounding towns are supporting the communities with water needs. But the long term effects indicate the relief centres may lack durable solutions to water and relevant sanitation facilities. Though drinking water is supplied there is less or no water to support basis sanitation requirements of the affected communities.

\* Livelihood Damage

The main fishing harbours have been completely destroyed, including majority of the boats. All most all small and medium entrepreneurs are affected in the disaster areas, and employment is of critical concern. There are comments by certain people within the relief centres that they do not want to go back to their normal livelihood of fishing.

\* Food/ Nutrition

Affected communities are totally dependant on outside food distribution. There is no apparent storage space to house relief goods and support is greatly needed in this regard. Apart from the storage facilities since most coastal shops have been destroyed, there is a problem of

communities being without food for a longer period, which indicate that outside support needs to be much more coordinated. There is also the challenge of developing an effective distribution system, to avoid concentration to selected places.

\* Secondary Threats

Community members stated that the corpses are not been properly cleared and there is a threat of the decomposed corpses, which could influence a larger out break of diseases and epidemics. There are also threats posed by looting, violence against women, and psychological problems. Though communities would be receiving support on essential items there is the concern of basic security, specifically for women and young children who are more prone to vulnerability. The Police may be under staffed or lack skills to support emergency support related security for the people. This was in abstract pointed out by members of the affected communities in certain places.

\* Response

During the visit the visible relief interventions were only done by the government, local NGOs and community groups. More coordination with local authorities is of dire concern and need. At the initial stage, may be due to the lack of assessment data, the national and international NGO activities are of minimal. A coordinated support mechanism is lacking in the initial response where individual support efforts are disarrayed leaving out the Government support structures that could play a vital role in the coordination. The lack of support to the government structures and the individual efforts are creating a tension among the communities that the government is not doing anything for them at the time of need.

\* Logistic and Distribution system

Due to lack of resources the government authorities and community groups are finding it hard to co-ordinate work in the affected areas on relief activities. On the initial assessment the team found that the distribution networks are of minimum function and unable to cope with the given situation. Though media efforts have mobilized communities in the support activities, it is seen that distribution is limited due to lack of coordination. The communities stressed upon the

sustainability of efforts in this regard, where they not see active participation from the government.

\* Priority Needs

According to local authorities search and rescue operations need more man power, equipment and technology. Local authorities requested that they need temporary and permanent houses, support for livelihood activities such as fishing, transport facilities and health care services should be focused in relief approach. Also, the community members explained the need for establishing social networks, long term development activities and basic facilities.



A father crying over the dead body of his son  
Source: GMSL

<b>Region</b>	<b>Matara and Hambantota</b>
<b>Geographical Area</b>	Habaraduwa, Ahangama, Weligama, Mirissa, Matara, Tanglle, Nilwella, Kuda-Wella, Ma-Wella, Kirinda, Yala, Hambanthota
<b>Local authorities interviewed</b>	Divisional Secretaries Grama Sewaka –Village Officers Police Officers Social Protection Officers Army and Navy Officers Manager Fisheries -Kirinda
<b>Others</b>	Community Based Organizations Religious Leaders Community/Social Groups Victims/Affected People

\* **Effect on population**

According to local authorities there are 13,000 reported deaths, 5,000 (approximately) missing. Most of the survivors are injured and displaced, where numbers have not been estimated with rigor. Informal interviews with 300 affected people, showed basic anxiety symptoms – such as sleeplessness, loss of appetite, constant vigilance, temporary memory loss and fear of life – a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. These basic anxiety systems may lead to traumatic conditions, where certain interviewees showed a state of shock. Affected communities are based in temporary relief centres in schools, religious and public places and where possible with relatives. Coordination among the centres is of minimum, and relief support is of dire need.

\* **Building**

Nearly 96% of buildings including houses in the coastal belt are completely or partially destroyed. Along the route the observation team countered 28 schools that have been ruined. All most all Government structures such as health centres, post offices, co-operatives, and other government offices are been devastated, curtailing government operation in this areas.

\* Infrastructure

The main and adjoining sub roads have been completely or partially washed-out in certain places. Bridges linking towns and villages are dysfunctional in certain key entry points, where communities are stranded. The Matara to Galle rail track is completely damaged further curtailing transportation. Telecommunication networks and electricity lines are destroyed in certain places limiting information flow coordination of the relief activities to a certain degree.

\* Health Facilities

There is a lack of doctors and nurses in hospitals. The observation team only met two medical doctors in relief centres in the area and there was no active participation of paramedics. Medicine stocks - antibiotics and other essential medicines are of meagre quantities, curtailing medical support to the affected communities. Local authorities and communities were concerned of out breaks of water born and dermatological diseases.

\* Water Sanitation

Affected communities are totally dependant on out side assistance for drinking water. Water supply systems are completely or partially destroyed and community groups from neighbouring districts are been organized to support relief measures in the affected areas. A sustainable approach to water collection and storage during the relief period is of crucial importance according to the communities interviewed.

\* Livelihood Damage

Crop and agriculture sectors are badly affected by the disaster. According to local authority's nearly 15,000 cattle have died as a result of the tsunami. Goats, pigs and chicken are also found dead in large numbers, decomposing on the roads. Main fishing harbours have been completely destroyed including 1,500 boats and 40 deep sea trawlers. Through relief measures are taking place at various phases in differed coordination, there is concern by the communities about the continuation of there livelihoods and commencement of employment.

\* Food/ Nutrition

The team observed that there are major issues pertaining to food and nutrition. There are no proper storage facilities among the communities for food items including infant food. According to the affected community, there is a greater need for suitable food for pregnant and lactating mothers. It is predicted by local authorities that the communities need food donations for another three months.

\* Secondary Threats

Local authorities and affected communities complained about fears of epidemics, looting, violence, suicide, psychological problems and increased risk with existing infrastructures. Maintenance of law and order is of concern by the communities in the relief centres.

\* Response

During the visit the visible and minimal coordinated relief interventions were only done by the government and community groups. Other relief efforts need more effort in coordination with local authorities.

\* Logistic and Distribution system

Due to lack of resources the government authorities and community groups are finding it hard to co-ordinate work in the affected areas on relief activities. On the initial assessment the team found that the distribution networks are of minimum function and unable to cope with the given situation.

\* Priority Needs

According to local authorities search and rescue operations need more man power, equipment and technology. Tracer programmes may be needed in locating and identifying the casualties and displaced communities. Community members requested that they need temporary and

permanent houses, support for livelihood activities such as fishing and agriculture, transport facilities and health care services should be focused along with the relief approach.



**A damaged house in Hambantota District**  
Source: GMSL

<b>Region</b>	<b>Gampaha and Colombo</b>
<b>Geographical Area</b>	Gampaha, Negombo, Seeduwa, Ja-Ela, Wattala, Mattakkuliya (Crow Island), Bambalapitiya, Wellawatta, Dehiwella, Mt.Lavinia, Rathmalana, Lunawa, Moratuwa
<b>Local authorities interviewed</b>	Deputy Mayor – Moratuwa Divisional Secretaries Grama Sevaka –Village Officers Police Officers
<b>Others</b>	Community Based Organizations, Religious Leaders. Community/Social Groups Victims/Affected People.

\* **Effect on population**

Comparing with other affected districts the effects on population in Gampaha and Colombo are less. According local authorities there are 7,508 houses have been destroyed and displaced 42,435 people in Colombo. Gampaha is least affected compared with damage to 3 houses. The most crucial affect is that of water seeping into the houses in both the districts where the disaster struck. The stranded people are based in religious places and some have

\* **Building**

Some of buildings have been affected, including damages to government institutions. Most of the buildings that have been affected are those houses of communities living in the coastal belt, which are made of wood and temporary structures. Some houses that are constructed from bricks have been destroyed as well. A definite number on the damages is hard to estimate that this point of time.



**Damaged houses in Gampaha District**  
Source: GMSL

\* **Infrastructure**

There seems to be no permanent and challenging damages to the main and sub roads. Telecommunication networks and electricity lines are destroyed in certain places, but overall there seems to be less impact in this regard.

\* **Health Facilities**

There are no damages to the health facilities, but coordination is required in supporting relief centre medical work coordination.

\* **Water Sanitation**

There are no permanent and long term affects to water and sanitation. However, there is concern among the communities about the possibility of the purification tanks based in Kelaniya may be affected and lead to contamination.

\* Livelihood Damage

The main fishing harbours have been destroyed in certain places, including majority of the boats. All most all small and medium entrepreneurs are affected in the disaster areas, and employment is of critical concern. There are comments of by the certain people among within the relief centres that they do not want to go back to their normal livelihood of fishing.

\* Food/ Nutrition

Affected communities are totally dependant on outside food distribution. There is no apparent storage space to house relief goods and support is greatly needed in this regard. Apart from the storage facilities since most coastal shops have been destroyed, there is problem of communities being without food for a longer period, which indicate that outside support needs to be much more coordinated. There is also the challenge of developing an effective distribution system, to avoid concentration to selected places.

\* Secondary Threats

There are threats posed by looting, violence against women, and psychological problems. Though communities would be receiving support on essential items there is the concern of basic security, specifically for women and young children who are more prone to vulnerability.

\* Response

More coordination with local authorities is of dire concern and need. At the initial stage, maybe due to the lack of assessment data the national and international NGO activities are of minimal. A coordinated support mechanism is lacking in the initial response where individual support efforts are disarrayed leaving out the Government support structures that could play a vital role in the coordination.

\* Logistic and Distribution system

On the initial assessment the team found that the distribution networks are of minimum function and unable to cope with the given situation. Though media efforts have mobilized communities in the support activities, it is seen that more coordination is still required.

\* Priority Needs

According to local authorities search and rescue operations need more man power, equipment and technology. Local authorities requested that they need temporary and permanent houses, support for livelihood activities such as fishing, transport facilities and health care services should be focused in relief approach. Also, the community members explained the need for establishing social networks, long term development activities and basic facilities.



**A welfare centre at ST. John's Baptist Church, Colombo District**

Source: GMSL

<b>Region</b>	<b>Puttalam</b>
<b>Geographical Area</b>	Vennanpuwa, Katuneriya, Mahawewa, Madampe, Chilaw, Udappu, Mundalama, Kalpitiya, Puttlum, Wanathawillu
<b>Local authorities interviewed</b>	District Sceretary - Puttlum Divisional Secretaries – Kulpitiya, Wanthawillu, Chilaw Police Officers
<b>Others</b>	Community Based Organizations, Religious Leaders. Community/Social Groups Victims/Affected People.

According to local authorities and the community members Puttalam district is the least affected area. The Disaster Operation Centre of the Government statistics shows 04 deaths and 1,345 displaced people. Chillaw is the worse affected areas in the district. There are four welfare centres – Wennappuwa: 02 camps (970) people, Battalanguuduwa: 01 camps (75 people) and Palugathurai: 01 camp (300). Generally in Wennappuwa the neighbouring communities are helping the affected communities. Battalanguuduwa roads are been devastated and the relief response are not able to reach the camp. According to the Government Agent in Puttalam the Palugathurai camp is in the LTTE controlled area and the government response team are not able to reach this camp.

Region	Ampara and Batticaloa
<b>Geographical Area</b>	Arugambay, Pottuvil, Uranny, Kommari, Ummari, Thandyady, Palakuda, Vinayagapuram, Thirukkivil, Thambiluvil, Pinnawarkirraman, Thambattai, 40 Mile Post, Akkarraipattu, Nindhaoor, Attalachennai, Kalmunai, Marudhamunnai, Akbar Village, Kottaikallarru, Kaluwanchikudy, Kathankudy, Mattakuly, Mamangam, Palameenmadu, Batticaloa, Vallachanai, Kalkuda
<b>Local authorities interviewed</b>	Additional Government Agent – Ampara Divisional Secretaries – Thirukkivil, Akkarraipattu Administrative Officer - Batticaloa Police and Special Task Force Officers
<b>Others</b>	LTTE Community Based Organizations, Religious Leaders. Community/Social Groups Victims/Affected People.

\* Effect on population

According to local authorities and other groups approximately 10,000 people are dead and a large number of people are missing. Over 300,000 people are reported displaced and injured.



The team informally met with 270 affected community members in this visit. Water levels in certain parts of the town were still high and accessibility is low to certain areas as well. The people are stranded in religious places and schools.

**Dead bodies in the coast in Batticaloa District**

Source: GMSL

\* Building

Community groups claimed that about 16,000 houses are destroyed. The team found 08 schools that were completely washed out. Government structures such as medical centres, offices, post offices and 16 religious places (10 Hindu temples and 06 Mosques) were devastated. Key fisheries industries and other related infrastructure support is seen destroyed.

\* Infrastructure

The Batticaloa – Pottuvil road is damaged in certain places cutting down the accessibility to towns that may need support. The team found 13 medium and small scale bridges that were destroyed. Electricity and telecommunication lines were completely destroyed and communication is restricted.



**Damaged bridge in Ampara District**

Source: GMSL

\* Health Facilities

The team found about 15 doctors from Colombo working under poor conditions with the doctors in local hospitals. Local authorities stated that there is a lack of medicine and medical equipment. Medical services are lacking enough medicine and medical equipment. Local authorities and communities are concern of out break of water born, dermatological diseases and tetanus.

\* Water Sanitation

Affected communities are totally dependant on out side assistance for drinking water. Water supply systems are completely destroyed and interior water sources are over utilized. But the long term effects indicate the relief centres may lack durable solutions to water and relevant sanitation facilities. Though drinking water is supplied there is less or no water to support basis sanitation requirements of the affected communities.

\* Livelihood Damage

All the fishing harbours and 90% of the boats are destroyed. Cattle, goats and chicken are found dead in large numbers and found decomposing on the roads. This poses a huge constraint of continuing livelihood activities in the short term.



**Flooded paddy fields in Ampara District**

Source: GMSL

\* Food/ Nutrition

Affected communities are totally depending on relief response. The need for dry food and water is massive.

\* Secondary Threats

Community members stated that disputes in affected communities due to uneven relief responses. Psychological trauma, suicide rates and security issues can be increased. There is also fear among the communities of land mines and UXO's that may be washed up due to the waves.

\* Response

During the visit the visible relief interventions were only done by the government, Special Task Force of Sri Lanka Police, NEIAP, NECORD, Sewa Lanka Foundation and local NGOs. Community members stated that the UN system is still in discussions and preparing for relief activities. There are also threats posed by looting, violence against women, and psychological problems. Though communities would be receiving support on essential items there is the concern of basic security, specifically for women and young children who are more prone to vulnerability.

\* Logistic and Distribution system

Due to lack of resources the respondents are finding it hard to co-ordinate work in the affected areas on relief activities. On the initial assessment the team found that the distribution networks are of minimum function and unable to cope with the given situation. It was observed that more coordination is needed among the stakeholder groups in the distribution of relief.

\* Priority Needs

According to local authorities, shelter, food and water are the priority needs at the moment. Apart from these a proper system to clean up bodies and effective transport methods such as helicopters to work in areas where roads are destroyed is much needed. Weapons of armed forces and rebel groups are been washed away and recovering them and de-mining is also a priority need according to local authorities.

<b>Region</b>	<b>Trincomalee</b>
<b>Geographical Area</b>	Muthur, Kinnya, Trincomalee, Nilawelli, Upuwelli, Kuchchaweli
<b>Local authorities interviewed</b>	Divisional Secretariat - Trincomallee Grama Sevaka –Village Officers Police Officers
<b>Others</b>	Community Based Organizations, Religious Leaders. Community/Social Groups Victims/Affected People.

\* Effect on population

According to local authorities 250,000 people are been affected. The team informally interviewed about 200 affected community members. The people are stranded in religious places and schools.



Children has to find new books and start their education again – Trincomalee District

Source: GMSL

\* Building

The local authorities stated 9,135 (approximately) houses and buildings have been destroyed. The team found many hospitals including the Trincomalee base hospital, medical centres, Hindu temples; government military bases, harbour, technical collage, police stations and the public library have been severely damaged.

\* Infrastructure

Main and sub roads near to the coastal belt are badly damaged. Bridges in Kinniya and Muttur are destroyed. Telecommunication and electricity structures are badly affected and essential services are at a stand still.

\* Health Facilities

The team could not find doctors and nurses in hospitals and medical relief centres. Local authorities and communities are concerned possible out breaks of water born and dermatological diseases.

\* Water Sanitation

Affected communities are totally dependant on out side assistance for drinking water. Water supply systems are completely destroyed and interior water sources are over utilized. Rushed relief to the area have brought bottled water and also the surrounding towns are supporting the communities with water needs. But the long term effects indicate the relief centres may lack durable solutions to water and relevant sanitation facilities. Though drinking water is supplied there is less or no water to support basis sanitation requirements of the affected communities.

\* Livelihood Damage

All the fishing harbours and 90% of boats are been destroyed. Cattle, goats and chicken are found dead in large numbers and found decomposing on the roads. Main fishing harbours have been completely destroyed cutting down of continuing fisheries activities. Through relief

measures are taking place at various phases in differed coordination, there is concern by the communities about the continuation of there livelihoods and commencement of employment.

\* Food/ Nutrition

According to local authorities there are no proper storage facilities for food items and infant food. Further community members claimed that there is a lack of proper food for pregnant and lactating mothers. Affected communities are living in schools, religious and public places and relatives where they need dry food items to receive enough nutrition. It is predicted by local authorities that the communities need food donations for another three months.

\* Secondary Threats

Community members stated that disputes in affected communities due to uneven relief responses. Psychological trauma, suicide rates and security issues can be increased, where there are threats of looting and violence against women. Though communities would be receiving support on essential items there is the concern of basic security, specifically for women and young children who are more prone to vulnerability.

\* Response

During the visit the visible relief interventions were only done by the government, LTTE, TRO, Sewa Lanka Foundation and local NGOs. Community members stated that the UN system is still in discussions and preparing for relief activities.



Source: GMSL

\* Logistic and Distribution system

Due to lack of resources the respondents are finding it hard to co-ordinate work in the affected areas on relief activities. On the initial assessment the team found that the distribution networks are of minimum function and unable to cope with the given situation.

\* Priority Needs

According to local authorities search and rescue operations need more man power, equipment and technology. Local authorities requested that they need temporary and permanent houses, support for livelihood activities such as fishing, transport facilities and health care services should be focused in relief approach. Also, the community members explained the need for establishing social networks, long term development activities and basic facilities.



**Recovering fishing industry in Trincomalee District is a priority need**

Source: GMSL

<b>Region</b>	<b>Jaffna, Killinochi, Mulathiv,</b>
<b>Geographical Area</b>	Piont-Pedro, Keermalai, Velvetaithurai, KKS, Nagarkovil, Karrainagar, Neduntheevu, Kilinochchi, Challai, Mulativu, Vinayagapuram, Nayar, Kokilai.
<b>Local authorities interviewed</b>	Assistant Government Agent – Killinochchi
<b>Others</b>	SHIRN, TECH

\* Effect on population

According to local authorities there are 9,195 deaths and over 86,026 affected people. The team informally interviewed about 200 affected community members. The people are stranded in 78 welfare centres including religious places and schools.

\* Building

The local authorities stated that large number of houses and buildings have been destroyed. In Mullativue District 4,000 houses are reportedly damaged. The informants found many hospitals including the Trincomalee base hospital, medical centres, Hindu temples; government military bases, harbour, technical collage, police stations and the public library have been severely damaged.

\* Infrastructure

Main and sub roads are somewhat damaged and travel is restricted to a degree. Telecommunication and electricity structures are badly affected and essential services are at a stand still.

\* Health Facilities

There seems to some coordination in the health services delivery in the region, but greater support was emphasized by the communities and the stakeholders.

\* Water Sanitation

Affected communities are totally dependant on out side assistance for drinking water. Water supply systems are somewhat destroyed and interior water sources are being utilized. Long term effects indicate the relief centres may lack durable solutions to water and relevant sanitation facilities. Though drinking water is supplied there is less or no water to support basis sanitation requirements of the affected communities.

\* Livelihood Damage

All the fishing harbours and 90% of boats are been destroyed. Through relief measures are taking place at various phases in differred coordination, there is concern by the communities about the continuation of there livelihoods and commencement of employment.

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It is predicted by local authorities that the communities need food donations for another three months.

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On the initial assessment the team found that the distribution networks are of minimum function and unable to cope with the given situation.

- \* Priority Needs

According to local authorities search and rescue operations need more man power, equipment and technology. Local authorities requested that they need temporary and permanent houses, support for livelihood activities such as fishing, transport facilities and health care services should be focused in relief approach. Also, the community members explained the need for establishing social networks, long term development activities and basic facilities.

### **Environmental Damage**

The teams that visited the ten districts have observed serious environmental damages in affected areas. The following points are the observations of the field information gathering teams of the Disaster Management & Information Programme of Green Movement of Sri Lanka.

- \* Because of the sea pollution the tide waves transported the dirt in to the land. The affected areas have become polluted.
- \* The dead livestock such as cattle, goats, chicken and pigs are not been cleared and decomposing in cities and villages.
- \* Because the lagoon eco systems are been polluted there is a high risk for dengue, malaria, Japanese encephalitis and cholera outbreak.
- \* The tsunami has influenced top erosion, the farming lands have become infertile. This is an issue for agriculture and the farming industry.
- \* The disaster has devastated various eco systems such as turtle life cycle and sea crabs in the coastal belt in affected areas. This will be a reason for the imbalance of bio diversity.



**A dead goat in the road side – Trincomalee**

Source: GMSL



**Dirt in the coastal belt – Hambantota**

Source: GMSL

### Technical and Realistic Connection

The world's fifth-largest quake in a century that hit Sri Lanka shows that the Sri Lankan government is not prepared to deal with natural disasters. Being a small tropical island the most common natural-disasters in Sri Lanka are floods, Landslides, Cyclones, Droughts, Wind storms and coastal erosion (Ministry of Social Services, Government of Sri Lanka – 2004).

Earthquakes in living memory have not caused disasters in Sri Lanka. There is a record of some several hundreds of people killed in the Seventeenth century, when sea intruded inland western coastal areas near Colombo. There is no clear evidence how this sea level rise took place more than 400 years ago. It could well be due to Tsunamis or a tidal wave resulting from an offshore earthquake that engulfed and flooded the western coast of Sri Lanka. This proves that tsunami threats are not a common natural disaster in Sri Lanka.

On the other hand the national disaster reduction and management policy is still an infant. The policy itself states the lack of training and education in the disaster management field, lack of funds, no specific packages to assist the victims/survivors of disasters, delay of the relief and rehabilitation channels and inadequate search and rescue operations in Sri Lanka. The Government set up a National Disaster Management Centre in early 2004 and still a growing body. Nevertheless, the damages, hardship and the relocation arising from natural disasters taken together with the human-made disasters including civil conflicts and political violence are indeed very serious for a small country like Sri Lanka.

This section of the report discusses the areas that the Sri Lankan disaster management discourse should include for the future development of a holistic disaster management perspective for the Country. Also, this section is a preamble for the following sections of discussion and recommendations.

While no one argues against that political solutions are necessary for conflicts, natural hazards are often considered unavoidable and swollen in to the 'act of God' pigeon-hole. But, as a proverb from the horn of Africa says, "God makes droughts, man make famine."<sup>7</sup> In this way natural hazards can be a misleading description for hazards such as droughts, earthquakes, cyclones, floods and tsunamis. Recognizing these hazards as often natural, recognizing the

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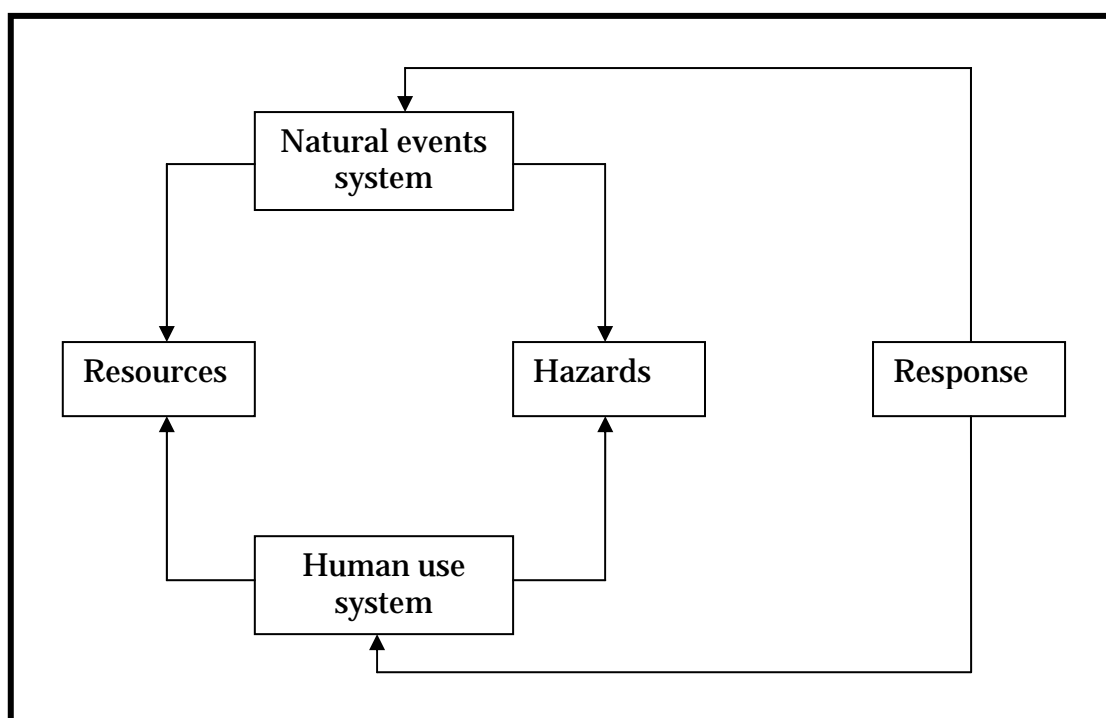
<sup>7</sup> World Disaster Report - 2001

many human-made root causes and advocating structural and political changes to combat them, is long overdue.

Hazards are no longer a brief thrust on the curve of development but a danger to the process itself. The poorest of the poor are becoming more vulnerable, trapped in vicious cycles of structural poverty and marginalization beyond their power to change.

Developing countries provide most of the victims – 98% of all those killed and affected by natural hazards come from developing nations. Globally during the last decade over 665,000 people reportedly died in natural disasters alone, excluding conflicts, technological accidents and public health crises. [*World Disaster Report*. International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – 2001]

The natural system functions largely independently from human activities. Interaction of the natural system and human system creates resources. It also creates hazards or negative resources.



Resources and hazards from nature and human: *Burton, Kates and White* – 1993 (P. 32)

According to Burton, Kates and White, natural events are always not hazards. Sometimes an extreme natural event can be a useful resource, such as flood fertilizing the fields or a

lightening start a fire essential to the preservation of a forest ecosystem. The hazard is the risk encountered in occupying a place subject to lightening or flood. The actual hazard, not the natural event, is the present subject of inquiry. Although the hazards result from the interaction of natural and social systems, the two can not be compared as causes. Natural systems are neither caring nor unkindly motivated toward their members, they are natural, in the sense that they neither set nor prescribe powerful constrains on what can be done with them. It is people who transform the environment in to resources and hazards, by using natural features for economic, social and political purposes.

How an extreme natural event can become a hazard and then a disaster that make humans vulnerable? As natural system function independently, a wildfire in a far a way or a cyclone in far in the Atlantic Ocean is not a great importance. What is really important is the social disorder that creates by a natural event. The disruption of the routine life of communities is a result due to the presence of dead bodies, the increased depression, the material damages and losses and the psychological stress inflicted by the extreme event. The other side of this is the concerns resulting from the communities own vulnerability caused either by contradictions within the social structure.

## **Discussion**

As Tenna Mengistu, the Secretary General of the Ethiopian Red Cross (1999) says: “Emergency relief will save the day, but when people are living on the verge of hazards it isn’t enough to return them to the status quo. If we can raise the quality of life, we may enable most vulnerable not just to survive but to cope with and prevent disasters”

At the moment the Government of Sri Lanka, United Nations, International NGOs, Embassies and High Commission Offices and national civil society agencies are working hard to assist the people who are affected by the December 26, 2004 catastrophe. Not as glorious note, but this disaster management operation is the biggest in Sri Lanka ever. Understandably, there are positive and negative impacts of this operation. The aim of this rapid damage assessment is not to criticize the players in the disaster management effort. But, to provide a picture of what is happening at the community level that are suffering from the catastrophe, where the disaster managers can use this information for a quality and effective interventions.

After meeting more than 1,500 people the Disaster Management & Information Programme of the Green Movement of Sri Lanka, qualitatively assess the situation at the moment as follows.

\* Effect on population

Even being a society that experienced a civil conflict for more than 23 years, people are devastated and shocked by the effects of the disaster. Numbers of deaths of loved ones, missing relatives and injured people has influenced the survivors for a shock. Teams experienced that people are angry and frustrated with the situation. Losses and destruction seems to be too much for people to deal with – physically and emotionally.

\* Building

Damages of buildings including houses are not been assessed properly. The team found that the houses, schools, medical centres, post offices and public offices are been severely destroyed. Cities, towns and villages are completely washed out. People will need new structures and plans to resettle in their own places, mainly not to remember the great loss that they have to experience on December 26, 2004. Also, most of the cities and towns were not properly planned, but evolved during the history. So, there is a need for effective and quality planning and reconstruction of destroyed places, expressed by authorities and communities.

\* Infrastructure

Infrastructure damage is also not yet properly estimated. The damaged and destroyed infrastructures such as roads and railway roads were built more than 100 years ago for different purposes of colonial masters. This situation can be taken as an opportunity to build roads and rail roads according to the needs and wants of Sri Lankans.

\* Health Facilities

The situation with health facilities is that rather than estimating the damage it is important to strengthen the emergency health care facilities for survivors. Needs for medicine and medical equipment is far bigger at the moment expressed by local authorities and communities.

\* Water Sanitation

Though the estimations are lacking, drinking water supplies are severely damaged and destroyed. The water sources have to be cleaned and drinking water has to be provided in larger quantities. Also, women in many places mentioned to the team members about the need of sanitary pads and clean underwear.

\* Livelihood Damage

Livelihoods and livestock, of affected communities are completely damaged. Among livelihoods 85% of sectors are the agriculture and fisheries. It is important to support small and medium scale farmers and fishermen to re-establish their livelihood activities as soon as possible. The damage has to be assessed and provide initial support – technically and financially – to start livelihood activities.

\* Food/ Nutrition

An action programme has to be conducted to reduce the food vulnerability. There has to be an effective mechanism for food storage, food distribution and a campaign to encourage people to be part of the food programme. An assessment about the pregnant and lactating mothers, infants, children, elders and disabled has to be conducted.

\* Secondary Threats

Prevention process of epidemics, increasing security, prevention measures for violence against women, rapid assessment and rebuilding structures and effective programme to deal with weapons and mines has to be implemented as soon as possible. To contribute to the long term recovery measure a psychosocial assessment of the situation has to be conducted immediately. Also, a close eye should be kept on prevention of communal violence according to local authorities and communities.

\* Response

The teams found that in many areas that the grassroots level government structure has been damaged due to dead and missing Grama Sewakas, divisional secretaries and other officials. This situation has contributed to the lack of information gathering at the community level and then less effective relief interventions.

\* Logistic and Distribution system

Lack of fuel, vehicles and equipment as well as skilled workers has largely contributed to the ineffective logistic and distribution system. All the teams found that there are no distribution criteria for the relief intervention parties.

\* Priority Needs

Priority needs has to be properly assessed with transparency, accountability and participation of affected communities. At this level water and sanitation, food and water, shelter and health are the priority needs of the people. In coming weeks these priorities will be changed in to more long term housing and livelihoods. Existing transport systems are severely damaged and alternative methods are not being used in order to provide relief for everyone.

Though the above discussion points are qualitative, these are the expressions of affected communities. The Disaster Management & Information Programme of the Green Movement of Sri Lanka is producing the following recommendations.

**Recommendations and conclusion**

It is always easy to provide recommendations after an assessment. In many cases people who conduct an assessment may not have to implement their own recommendations at the field level. The Disaster Management & Information Programme consider this fact throughout the information gathering and analyzing. The Disaster Management & Information Programme, the network partners of the Green Movement of Sri Lanka and many other associates including the Disaster & Development Centre at Northumbria University in United Kingdom will support the

Government of Sri Lanka and other stakeholders to implement these recommendations in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating.

1. Information and co-ordination: Relief co-ordination bodies should be established at district level to gather information about the co-ordinate relief activities by the UN agencies, INGOs, civil society agencies, business communities and community groups for effective and quality relief distribution for all the affected communities.
2. Planning for transition and sustainable development: All the players of the disaster management process should focus on planning the relief process towards the sustainable development of affected districts as well as the whole country.
3. Livelihood recovery and rehabilitation: Affected communities, especially small scale and medium scale farmers and fishermen should receive technical and financial support to recover and rehabilitate their livelihoods. This process has to be a participatory action process, where communities will receive information and take responsibility of their own sustainable livelihoods.

Based on these recommendations the Disaster Management & Information Programme of the Green Movement of Sri Lanka concludes the rapid assessment report with the Manager of UNDP Gujarat Programme, Preveen Pardeshi (2001):

***“In every sector, transition should lead to recovery that facilitates movement to sustainable development. In other words, the foundations laid for sustainable recovery during transition must put people on a path to sustainable development”***

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