
Incentives and Expectations

Community Resiliency and Recovery in Tamil Nadu after the Indian Ocean Tsunami

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The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 affected several countries in Southeast Asia and caused an unprecedented loss of life and property along the southern coast of India. The islands of Andaman and Nicobar; the states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu; and the union territory of Pondicherry (now Puducherry) suffered the worst. The government of India estimated the total damages to be around \$2.56 billion (United Nations Development Program 2005). Of the 10,750 deaths in India, Tamil Nadu alone accounted for more than 7,000 (Arya, Mandal, and Muley 2006, 53).

Marginalized from major communication and economic flows, the poor coastal communities of Tamil Nadu were devastated and in most need of assistance for both immediate relief and long-term recovery. Fishermen lost their boats and equipment. The ingress of seawater into low-lying cultivated fields made the soil unfit for cultivation in large tracts of land, adversely affecting agricultural communities. Housing and habitat were devastated, and more than one million individuals, including those providing ancillary support to the fishing communities, were without livelihoods. Angela Keys, Helen Masterman-Smith, and Drew Cottle describe the victims as “undocumented,

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abandoned and ignored by their governments, forced to subsist in districts with little or no infrastructure” (2006, 197). Philippe Régner and his colleagues (2008) confirm that the political leaders of southern India had largely ignored these coastal communities even before the tsunami.

Even though the Indian government was quick to announce liberal ex gratia payments from public funds and to hand out relief materials, most government efforts were at best *inefficient* and *ineffective* (Perry 2007). Keys, Masterman-Smith, and Cottle (2006) characterize the Indian state’s response as one dominated by *indifference*. The Asian Human Rights Commission (2005) described the relief efforts in India as *pathetic*. Céline Thévenaz and Sandra Resodihardjo (2010) argue that the socioeconomic structure of the affected population might have been a significant factor in the government’s inappropriate response to the emergency. The Asian Human Rights Commission (2005) noted that most government-sponsored relief and recovery efforts were concentrated in the prosperous Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu, while other areas were ignored for a lack of political allegiance.

In addition to immediate relief, government efforts failed at restoring housing and sustainable livelihoods, both of which are instrumental for a successful recovery (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2005; H. Rodriguez et al. 2006; Raju 2013). Policies instituted for redevelopment planning, in particular the government’s attempt to relocate fishing communities inland, contributed to creating regime uncertainty and delayed the resumption of everyday activities (Rice 2005; Raju 2013). Fishing communities were frustrated by the regulatory policies that were claimed to have been instituted for their protection (Krishnakumar 2005; S. Rodriguez et al. 2008). Karen Kayser, Leslie Wind, and R. Ashok Shankar (2008) argue that for most men living in the affected areas, returning to normalcy meant engaging in their predisaster livelihood, but Willy Thoyce, the secretary-general of the World Confederation of Labor, criticized the federal and state governments on this point: “[E]ven after two months, fishermen are unable to lead a normal life, as catches have dwindled and prices have fallen” (quoted in “Government Blamed for Neglecting Tsunami Victims” 2005). The government’s response seems to have failed in two crucial areas—immediate relief and long-term redevelopment, including restoring and fostering sustainable livelihoods for the affected population.

Friedrich Hayek’s (1945) critical insight described as “the knowledge problem” highlights the obstacle of gathering and utilizing fragmented information held separately and locally by individual members of a society to facilitate social coordination in economic contexts. Russell Sobel and Peter Leeson (2007a) argue that a similar “knowledge problem” exists in generating information for natural-disaster management. They show that the ineffective response to Hurricane Katrina was a direct consequence of the U.S. government’s failure to solve the knowledge problem.

Specifically, effective disaster management requires efficient information generation at three critical stages. The first is the recognition stage: Has a disaster occurred, how severe is it, and is relief needed? The second is the needs-assessment and allocation

stage: What relief supplies are needed, who has them readily available, and what areas and individuals need them the most? The third stage is the feedback and evaluation stage: Are our disaster-relief activities working, and what—if anything—needs modification? (Sobel and Leeson 2007b, 520).

In this essay, I argue that the Indian government's lackluster response to the tsunami was likewise a consequence of its inability to address the knowledge problem. In particular, the government failed at collecting critical information in stages two and three. Coastal communities in Tamil Nadu came to believe that the government was orchestrating a "takeover" of the coastal land from the fishing communities to accommodate politically connected interests. Such concerns created a dominant pattern of pessimism about government intentions. Emily Chamlee-Wright and Virgil Storr (2010) point out that people's expectations regarding their government's behavior in a postdisaster context influence the recovery strategies they adopt. In the case of Tamil Nadu, people's low expectations regarding the government's behavior created incentives for the adoption of self-help strategies for recovery. Widespread pessimism about government intentions contributed to the affected population's adoption of a *mixed-strategy* approach to recovery.

In developing this argument, I rely on qualitative data collected by social science researchers engaged in field research expeditions that yielded information on disaster preparedness for, response to, and recovery from the tsunami. Such data are useful in gaining access to people's mental models, which shape their actions and reactions in the face of difficult and uncertain circumstances (Chamlee-Wright 2010). First, I address the knowledge problem in disaster-relief management in India. I then detail the widespread pessimism among coastal communities about government intentions, describe the rebuilding strategies adopted by the affected citizens, and, finally, consider the broader conclusions that can be derived from this case study.

The Centralized Response

India is vulnerable, in varying degrees, to different natural disasters. According to the Government of India's National Policy on Disaster Management, about 60 percent of the Indian landmass is prone to earthquake; more than 12 percent to floods and river erosion; 8 percent to cyclones; and 68 percent to periodic droughts (Government of India 2009). Different environmental risks interacting with specific local conditions and population vulnerability requires the use of decentralized, local information for effective risk mitigation and disaster management.

At the time of the Indian Ocean tsunami, India had in place a relief-driven disaster-management system, with no provisions for preparedness, prevention, or risk mitigation, and the primary responsibility for disaster management was with state governments. The central government bureaucratized the process by assuming the role of facilitator even though it had little or no local knowledge of risks and vulnerabilities. Anand Arya, G. S. Mandal, and E. V. Muley (2006) describe the Indian government's bureaucratic

approach to disaster-relief management as burdened by multiple layers of decision makers and agents trying to coordinate efforts and communicate information.

The control room in the Ministry of Home Affairs provided information about relatives and friends through its helpline to the public in and outside the country. A cabinet committee of ministers was set up under the chairmanship of the prime minister to review the relief and rehabilitation efforts on a continual basis. The National Crisis Management Committee under the chairmanship of the cabinet secretary drew up an emergency plan to carry out relief and rescue operations in the affected regions. This committee kept reviewing the relief and rehabilitation measures with the secretaries of the concerned ministries and departments as well as with the chiefs of the armed forces (Arya, Mandal, and Muley 2006, 56).

What's Needed and Who Needs It

In stage two of disaster management, “the most important information pertains to what’s needed, who needs it, and who has the means to meet these needs” (Sobel and Leeson 2007b, 524). The information problem that plagued the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency following Katrina became obvious in the agency’s allocation of disaster-relief supplies. In the first week of relief activities following the hurricane, the agency misallocated relief labor and supplies or diverted resources to superfluous areas or let them sit idle.

Similar information problems affected the Indian government. A year after the tsunami, HRW noted that the government’s lack of understanding of local needs and an unwillingness to share information or decision-making authority with local leaders created problems for the delivery of assistance (2005, 10). It also took the government several months to complete its preliminary assessment of the damages and to determine where the relief was most needed. Havidan Rodriguez and his colleagues (2006), based on a research expedition through the tsunami-affected regions, note that local initiative, bolstered by external support and expertise, provided the most successful opportunities for sustainable recovery.

Instead of utilizing the expertise of local leaders who are conversant with the realities on ground, the government divided the affected areas in Tamil Nadu into eleven zones and assigned a bureaucrat to each zone to facilitate and coordinate the relief efforts. Several of these bureaucrats were called in from other states and seemed unaware of local conditions and societal dynamics (Murty et al. 2006).

As a consequence, several irregularities and inequities related to the distribution of relief aid were reported. Relief efforts in some instances were duplicated, whereas in other cases assistance was driven by supply and not based on the affected population’s needs. HRW (2005) noted that this uneven and poorly targeted supply of relief created squabbles within communities or between villages because some received supplies that others did not.

Régnier and his colleagues (2008) further criticize the Indian policy makers for their neglect of economic-recovery needs. The lack of information on predisaster

microlevel economic activities magnified the problems of the centralized response. The government directed a large part of the relief aid to the fishing communities, ignoring the lost livelihoods in ancillary industries. According to the director of Oxfam Australia, Andrew Hewitt, the assistance did not take into account people indirectly affected by the disaster (“Am-Oxfam Claims” 2005, cited in HRW 2005, 23)—for instance, communities whose livelihoods were based on servicing the fishing communities. In addition, although the government offered to assist the owners of affected agricultural lands, it largely ignored the tenant farmers, agricultural laborers, and leaseholders who actually occupied these lands. In an interview, S. Salaya, the village council chief of Manikapanga, expressed concerns about the fact that only the landowners were receiving compensation: “[O]ur livelihood has been destroyed. The landowners will take the compensation” (quoted in HRW 2005, 24–25).

Successful relief and recovery efforts must be customized to the specific conditions of each location and community. This customization requires an intimate knowledge of the economic, race, age, and gender relations that shape social interaction and social institutions of each location and community. According to Carol Amaratunga and H. Smith Fowlerand, “attention paid to pre-existing social inequalities is much more likely to yield successful interventions, whether it be for disaster and emergency preparedness, response and mitigation, reconstruction and rehabilitation or long-term recovery” (2007, 446). Such knowledge is also essential for assessing the vulnerability of the affected population for appropriate relief targeting. A glaring example of the lack of such knowledge is the condition of women in the postdisaster environment. HRW (2005) noted the Indian government’s failure to address the needs of women and girls in particular, including the failure to provide adequate sanitation and health facilities. Robert Lalasz (2005) highlights the difficulties confronting the women in the post-tsunami environment. Chandrasekara Naidu and his team of researchers found in their interviews with representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and tsunami survivors that, “in general, public and private relief agencies failed to meet women’s essential needs for food, shelter, health and security. In addition, women face exclusion from relief and reconstruction assistance” (2005, 21).

Caste-based discrimination in the distribution of aid was a result of the lack of an effective strategy to reach out to the members of the lowest caste, the Dalits. The government’s failure to identify societal dynamics and the persistent caste distinctions in rural India made it difficult for the Dalits and several tribal communities in Tamil Nadu to receive relief. *BBC News* noted that “in a rush to hand out relief and compensation to members of the fishing community, which in terms of numbers was hardest hit by the tsunami, relief and rehabilitation efforts in Tamil Nadu have bypassed the needs of people from lower castes, ethnic minorities and smaller tribes” (“Tribals Ignored” 2005). Keys, Masterman-Smith, and Cottle confirm that “[o]n the Indian mainland, the emergency created by the tsunami has not over-ridden pre-existing divisions in the Indian society. Aid to tsunami survivors in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu has largely been delivered according to hierarchy of caste” (2006, 199). According to HRW,

a settlement of the Irular tribe in the Cuddalore district had still not received any government assistance more than a month after the tsunami (2005, 28).

Evaluation of Relief Efforts

The final piece of critical information to determine is whether the government's disaster-management plans are working. Debarati Guha-Sapir (1991) believes that rapid assessment of relief efforts is essential to ensure the best allocation of resources and relief management. Sobel and Leeson concur: "When disaster relief is centralized, there is an inability to evaluate effectively the ongoing success or failure of disaster-relief activities" (2007b, 528).

In the case of the Indian Ocean tsunami, the unprecedented nature and scale of the disaster made regular assessment and the need for community participation even more crucial. Marcia Perry notes that 88 percent of the teams evaluating relief efforts in Tamil Nadu were from international NGOs (2007, 412). The lack of government assessment teams on the ground made it difficult for the federal officials to evaluate relief activities. C. V. Murty and colleagues (2006) found that the government in Tamil Nadu was painfully unaware that some areas were receiving disproportionately more aid than the others and that the affected populations from the marginalized areas were protesting. The government had to ask for assistance from the local NGOs to better assess the situation on the ground, which led to the creation of the NGO coordination center on December 31, 2004 (Murty et al. 2006, S742). Other researchers (Mashni and Reed 2005; Rawal et al. 2005) have stressed the need for coordinated assessment in similar future scenarios, including local people, agencies, and relevant government bodies.

Michael Walls (2005) notes that the Indian government had to alter its policies for provision of relief materials following the outcry over caste-base discrimination. A study conducted by HRW found that the "government belatedly focused attention on assessing damages in the Dalit communities" only after persistent reports of caste discrimination in the media (2005, 27). Even though the change in strategy reflected an improvement in the government's assessment of its actions, it was too late, and the NGOs in the area, familiar with such discrimination, had already started dealing with Dalit groups separately (Sreenivas 2005). In other areas, poor assessment of the situation on the ground prevented corrective intervention from the government when NGO efforts to provide emergency rations to tribal groups were stalled by members of the upper castes.

Government Performance and Community Expectations

Expectations about the government's response help determine how disaster victims participate in the recovery process. These expectations are shaped by three factors. First, the citizens' predisaster interactions with the government, including the government's support for inclusive and desirable plans and policies for economic development and

its engagement with the social and economic lives of people, are important. Negative experiences tend to hurt expectations. Second, if communities with a history of discrimination also observe such discrimination in the official response to a natural disaster, they may be less inclined to rely on government-sponsored support. And third, if individuals believe or suspect that government officials are using state power to serve their own interests or the interests of their patrons both before and after a disaster, it might raise doubts about the legitimacy of government intentions. Every government action can contribute to reinforcing or modifying community expectations about its intent.

Chamlee-Wright and Storr believe that expectations about the government can be based on views of what the government intends to do and what the government is capable of doing. Pessimism about government intentions, for example, suggests “the government has no intention of helping,” and pessimism about government capabilities implies that people believe that “the government is incapable of effectively providing a public good or service” (2010, 257). Populations might be optimistic about government capabilities if they believe the government has the means and capacity to effectively provide a public good or service.

Pretsunami Interactions

Fishing villages in Tamil Nadu had long harbored resentment against government-sponsored development initiatives. Development projects including ice plants, shrimp farming, tourism, and atomic power plants had adversely affected their health, rights, and livelihood opportunities. Rajeshwar Devrakonda (2005) details the state’s support for commercial shrimp farms and their adverse impact on local communities, traditional livelihoods, beach access, the quality of drinking water, and the accentuating tensions along coastal Tamil Nadu. Devinder Sharma (2005) notes that the government allowed mangrove trees to be cleared from the coast to facilitate the shrimp-farming industry and to provide better views from hotels overlooking the water. The government did not take into account the fact that mangroves act as a bioshield, reducing the impact of winds and waves passing through them. In favoring commercial development, the government policy had left the fishing communities vulnerable to environmental risks.

In the pretsunami period, the government policy had emphasized building stronger tourism along the southern coast of India. The sale of land to private developers reduced the available beach space for fishing communities. Fishing villages have traditionally used beaches for fish drying, boat storage, net making and mending—activities directly linked to their livelihood—and for various cultural and leisure activities that are important for building and retaining strong social capital. Sudarshan Rodriguez and his colleagues (2008) found that in Tamil Nadu a majority of the villages either were never consulted or were never a part of the decision-making process during the implementation of development projects.

Post-tsunami Interactions

Following the tsunami, the government's resettlement policy disregarded the traditional rights granted to the coastal communities by the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ). The first CRZ notification was published in December 1990 as part of the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986. The notification prohibited setting up new industries and expanding existing industries within five hundred meters (about sixteen hundred feet) of the High-Tide Line (Zone-1), with the exception of industries related to the waterfront or directly needing foreshore activities. As such, authorized fishing activities and fisherfolk settlements were not prohibited in the notification. Since 1991, however, nineteen amendments to the CRZ notification have allowed for several other large-scale industrial and commercial activities on protected coasts.

After the tsunami, the government forced fishing communities to relocate more than two kilometers (one and a quarter miles) from the High-Tide Line, primarily through indirect coercion. Owners who chose not to move were deemed ineligible for any government assistance.¹ Government assistance was made contingent upon how far inland people chose to rebuild. The organization Tsunami-Relief, Rehabilitation, and Coordination of Tamil Nadu reported that in some areas there were attempts at forced eviction (cited in HRW 2005, 38).

In the Tamil Nadu neighborhoods of Anna Nagar and Kuppam, the authorities barred coastal communities from replacing huts washed away by the waves, shut off electricity and water utilities to remaining houses, and removed the residents' children from local schools (HRW 2005, 38). These actions were in clear violation of the United Nations Guiding Principles, which call upon governments to "establish conditions, as well as provide the means" to allow displaced persons to return to their homes or home areas if they wish to do so.² In several of the Nagapattinam districts, in contrast, the government did not object to fishing communities moving back into their old houses in violation of the CRZ (Bavinck et al. 2015).

Interviews conducted by HRW highlight suspicions among the fishing communities that relocation was meant to facilitate more lucrative tourism property deals for the government (2005, 38). Earlier research done by Maarten Bavinck (2003) confirms these suspicions and argues that district authorities are given considerable freedom in determining the setback line and that their criteria are not always uniformly applied. Coastal communities believed that the true motivation behind the government's resettlement policy was to empty out the coastal areas to make room for business interests to move in. Asha Krishnakumar (2005) reiterates community concerns that the government was using the tsunami as an excuse to resettle the fisherfolk away from the

1. The Tamil Nadu government Housing Reconstruction Policy, March 30, 2005, can be found at <https://www.tn.gov.in/tsunami/gorders/rev-e-172-2005.htm>.

2. See section 28(1) of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf.

seafront in order to “take over” the Tamil Nadu coastline for tourism and industrial development.

HRW (2005) also noted that although efforts were made to relocate the area’s original inhabitants, the government of Tamil Nadu did not ask existing hotels, resorts, or industrial facilities that encroached on coastal lands to comply with the regulations. Gal Frenkel (2005) confirms that in contrast to government efforts to clear out fishing communities from Zone-1, tourism and industry infrastructure remained intact.

It became increasingly obvious that redevelopment planning was favoring private interests over coastal community interests. The communities were no longer assured of their indigenous rights to the coastal land and witnessed a biased enforcement of the CRZ. Further, the redevelopment plan made it difficult for the coastal communities to rebound by disrupting the resumption of normal economic activity. In discussing the fate of the fishing communities, Sudarshan Rodriguez and his coresearchers argue that the government’s relocation plan was less than optimal for affected communities and pernicious to their livelihoods: “The access and visibility of the seas is very crucial for the fishermen as part of their daily decision making, traditional ecological knowledge, and basic livelihood activities, such as launch of boats, shore seine, drying of fish, mending of nets, berthing of boats and many other social functions” (2008, 61).

In reviewing the redevelopment following the tsunami, Sumesh Mangalassery (n.d.) found that in the coastal villages of Karikkattukuppam, Dhanushkodi, and Killai in Tamil Nadu the government sold coastal land to private developers after displacing the fishing communities in the name of conservation.

Chamlee-Wright (2010) argues that if residents are prohibited from returning to their properties or if the government favors private developers in the redistribution of land, it is an indication that the property rights that people thought they possessed before the disaster are in doubt. This doubt tends to upset the basic rules upon which the society is based, making it difficult for communities to adjust swiftly and responsibly to the new circumstances.

As part of the redevelopment planning process, the government of Tamil Nadu also initiated under the Emergency Tsunami Reconstruction Project the task of raising Casuarina tree plantations along the Kariakal and Nagapattinam coast. There was little community participation in decisions about the location and type of plantations. In interviews conducted by Sudarshan Rodriguez and his colleagues (2008), the fishing communities claim to have voiced their concerns to the government, including their preference for mango and coconut trees, which have a greater chance of survival given the soil and water conditions. Fishing communities were strongly opposed to the Casuarina plantations and in some instances uprooted the saplings, which compromised their access to boats and the sea.

Rodriguez and his colleagues (2008) argue that in addition to the lack of community support no scientific study was done on the efficacy of these plantations. Kartik Shanker and his research group (2008) claim that the development of Casuarina plantations reflects the trend to use more exotic trees as bioshields, supported by

a selective application of science to promote predetermined agendas. Rusty Feagin and his colleagues (2010) confirm that Casuarina plantations have a negative impact on biodiversity and threaten fishing communities' indigenous rights.

In spite of the opposition, the government proceeded with its plan to develop the Casuarina plantations. Ironically, in most villages the bioshields were planted behind or adjacent to the villages, not on the waterfront (Feagin et al. 2010). This example further demonstrates the uncertainty surrounding the returning citizens' property rights and their frustrations with the government policy, which disregarded the interests of the community and created roadblocks to restoring sustainable livelihoods.

Tomy Mathew (2005) further criticizes the government's relocation plans and finds that through the inland relocation, historically autonomous and self-governing communities were now exposed to other nonfishing communities and different caste groups, which escalated social tensions in the area. He presents evidence of an increase in caste-based violence resulting from the government's relocation plans. Most communities have had internal regulations on beach-space use, so the growing interaction with "outsiders" adversely affected these communities' self-governing abilities (S. Rodriguez et al. 2008).

Mixed-Strategy Approach to Recovery and Rebuilding

The Indian government showed off its capacity to provide relief and rehabilitation by turning down international assistance (Bagchi 2004), while also committing financial support to its affected neighbors (Ramasubramanian 2005). The government of Tamil Nadu was also quick to offer relief in the areas around the capital city of Chennai. Krishnakumar notes that "[a]lmost all of Chennai's residents who had lost their dwellings and means of livelihood were accommodated in more than 100 relief camps and provided food and medicines" (2005). But relief efforts were not consistent across the state.

Economically backward districts, members of the lower castes, and women were discriminated against in the provision of aid (Choo 2005). It was thus rational for these individuals to believe that the government is capable of providing relief but does not want to. Havidan Rodriguez and his colleagues highlight this general sense of discrimination in their description of a protest in the village of Karaikal: "We were informed that this [protesting] group was requesting that the government provide them with disaster relief aid in order to alleviate the economic impact of the tsunami. Given that they were agricultural laborers (not farm owners or fishermen), they reported having been left out of the proposed relief packages offered by the government" (2006, 171).

This belief about government capacity and its intentions was reaffirmed during the recovery process, when the redevelopment policies threatened livelihoods and the coastal communities' indigenous property rights. Political action was necessary for the affected communities to successfully navigate the policy environment and to bypass

regulations such as the CRZ that proved cumbersome in the postdisaster context. A report submitted by the Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) in 2005 noted that the communities that were able to collectively lobby the government were able to get more benefits for their villages.

Chamlee-Wright and Storr (2010) argue that a dominant expectation set manifests itself in a mixed rebuilding strategy, where communities choose to rebuild using their own efforts while simultaneously lobbying for government support. In describing the mixed strategy from the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, they show that the returnees recognized the importance of government support in orchestrating a successful rebound. The returnees consistently lobbied for government support through demonstrations, political protest, redevelopment planning meetings, and meetings with city council representatives and other local political leaders. Some returnees were keen on making their physical presence felt to pressure the government in securing the return of basic municipal services.

Kayser, Wind, and Shankar (2008) note based on their interviews with emergency responders in Tamil Nadu that the affected communities were eager to have their lives return to normalcy. They wanted to rebuild their communities and resume their predisaster livelihoods. They were concerned about sending their children back to school and rebuilding their family structures. HLRN (2005) indicates that official relief and rehabilitation efforts were still not meeting the affected population's needs more than six months after the tsunami.

Several communities across the state were engaged in lobbying efforts to make the government efforts more responsive to their needs. The East Coast Development Forum (ECDF),³ a local network of twelve NGOs, took the lead in organizing community members to lobby the government for support during the relief and rehabilitation initiatives. During the relief phase, representatives of the ECDF and local communities met with state and federal ministers to ensure compensation for women and Dalits who were ignored or overlooked in the official response. During the rehabilitation phase, the ECDF encouraged the government to create land-rehabilitation committees with representation from the affected communities, including the women and Dalits. In August 2005, the ECDF organized a delegation from the affected communities to travel to New Delhi and lobby for stronger federal support. After a sustained three-month campaign by the fisher people's movement, the Tamil Nadu government seemed to accede to some of the communities' requests and to relax the CRZ requirements, but it did so only on paper.

In the town of Sadras, villagers wrote letters of complaint to the local government officials, and in the Kanchipuram district members of forty-seven villages got together to form a committee to pressure the government to respond to their concerns (HLRN 2005). In the villages of Sadras and Akkaraipettai, the villagers were determined to stay in their homes, hoping that their physical presence would protect their land from being

3. For a detailed discussion of the ECDF and its advocacy role, see Kilby 2008.

sold to private developers, even though their action meant receiving no financial support from the government for rebuilding (HLRN 2005). This choice initially seemed irrational given the enormous costs of rebuilding but was possibly rational from the villagers' perspective.

The fishing communities were unhappy with the government's decision to move them away from the coast (Tata Institute of Social Sciences 2005; Raju 2013; Bavinck et al. 2015; Mangalassery n.d.). They viewed the distance of the new settlements to the shore as an impediment to engaging in their livelihoods. Fishing communities in the village of Srinivasapuram in Chennai strongly resisted being relocated more than twenty-two kilometers (thirteen miles) from the sea, and so they continued living in temporary shelters (Raju 2013). Some even moved back into their damaged homes. Although the members of these communities prevented eviction, Emmanuel Raju (2013) found that even four years after the tsunami they still had received no information about or assistance with reconstruction. Four other fishing villages known as the "Pattipulam Panchayat" passed a resolution and signed a petition refusing to relocate from their beachside settlements (Rice 2005). In the coastal village of Anna Nagar, the government made several attempts to evict the community. Convinced that the government was favoring private interests, the villagers filed a petition with the High Court and received a stay on the eviction (HLRN 2005).

But not all efforts to resist relocation were successful. Fishing communities that were relocated to the village of Kargil Nagar, for example, five kilometers (three miles) from the sea, tried to move back to the coast, citing the prohibitive transportation costs, but the government forced them back to their relocated homes. In villages where the local *panchayats* (governing councils) dispersed following the tsunami, the villagers found it difficult to collectively negotiate for better relief and rehabilitation (HLRN 2005, 6). It was important for the communities to regroup and to receive increased benefits for their villages, as demonstrated in the Kanchipuram district (HLRN 2005, 6).

Consistent with the mixed rebuilding strategy, several communities engaged in rebuilding efforts within the constraints imposed by the government. Communities relied extensively on cooperation, mutual help, and assistance from NGOs, charitable institutions, and self-help groups. Chamlee-Wright (2010) argues that both close-knit relationships and mutual assistance are essential in building sustainable bonds of social capital, which play a critical role in solving the collective-action problem necessary for community efforts to be successful.

Kayser, Wind, and Shankar confirm a collectivist culture in the small villages of southern India and describe these villages as possessing "a strong sense of self-efficacy [as well as] an expectation of shared resources for all members of the local community [and] a sense of responsibility to care for one another" (2008, 95), all of which contributed to the communities' ability to overcome collective-action problems.

Among some of the impressive community initiatives was the local Indian NGO People's Action for Development, which provided assistance to the communities for fishing, postfishing, and complementary activities through the existing community self-help groups and the creation of new ones (Régnier et al. 2008). In the town of Nagercoil, the NGO Praxis worked on consultative community housing models to be built by the community. In the Cuddalore district, a religious organization, the Ramakrishna Mission, purchased nine and a half acres of land and started constructing permanent houses with community inputs (HLRN 2005). All this was accomplished while the government was still trying to locate land to begin constructing new permanent housing for the affected communities (HLRN 2005).

NGOs with intimate knowledge of the local economy worked with the affected communities to restore their livelihoods. The priority was to relaunch predisaster activities through capitalization of know-how among the existing population. It is noteworthy that most NGOs employed a decentralized structure and operating style. The fishermen were provided new communitarian boats, motors, and different varieties of nets and hooks to encourage the resumption of fishing with the shortest delays possible. These self-help groups took over the responsibility for maintenance and repair of collectively owned fishing equipment. According to Régnier and his colleagues, "Social solidarity in the form of [self-help groups] is among the main factors explaining why post-fishing revenues have substantially increased (+30 to 40 per cent compared to pre-tsunami levels)" (2008, 416). In addition, People's Action for Development initiated Village Development Committees in charge of channeling relief assistance. These committees included representatives from the local government, religious figures, schoolteachers, and self-help group representatives, all of whom understood the local societal dynamics, which guaranteed a more inclusive and targeted approach to providing relief assistance.

Conclusion

Beyond the provision of emergency relief and aid, the biggest challenge in the aftermath of a catastrophic disaster is to provide an environment for affected communities to return within the shortest period of time to their *ex ante* economic and social activities and a life of normalcy. The role of civil society, including the resources embedded within networks of friendship, kinship, and faith, and people's beliefs in their abilities are indispensable for a successful rebound. Postdisaster government policy and the efforts of donor agencies and NGOs through the provision of safety, stability, confidence building, and domestic incentives should foster community efforts.

This article explores the responses of the Indian national and local governments to the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. The government of Tamil Nadu played a more limited role in relief and recovery. The federal government's response was centralized and excluded local communities. Several government policies frustrated and even prevented communities' efforts to rebuild. Redevelopment planning should target

rehabilitation of local economic activities, such as restoring access to local production of basic economic activities and other petty services, but the government largely disregarded rehabilitation. The government response in some cases was instead motivated by the desire to move fishing communities out of the coastal areas to make room for private interests and tourism development.

Several studies have shown that the recovery process was slow and continued to be incomplete even several years after the tsunami (Régnier et al. 2008; Raju 2013). The primary challenges are the conflict between the state and the communities about relocation, the lack of a participatory approach to redevelopment planning, and the threat to sustainable livelihoods. Instead of addressing community concerns, the government abandoned those who resisted it. These communities, like others, have relied on self-help and on help from NGOs to work around government (in)action.

NGOs active with the coastal communities of Tamil Nadu have helped relaunch microeconomic activities, with the long-term objective of providing sustainable local livelihood. Their success is attributed to their intimate involvement with the affected communities and familiarity with local initiative, abilities, and vulnerabilities.

This analysis highlights the shortcomings of government policies, which not only are ill suited to tap the potential of the civil society but also work to undermine it. An increasingly bureaucratic and centralized response and rebuilding effort is likely to cause confusion and delay while crowding out private stakeholders. In the case of the Indian Ocean tsunami, government (in)action of this form incentivized local communities to actively engage in rebuilding their lives and communities. The national and local governments must take lessons from these policy failures and recognize the significance of socially embedded resources within civil society. They must reorient their policies to tap into this amazing potential.

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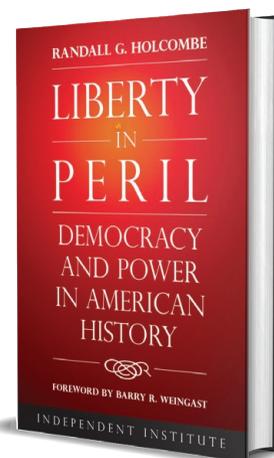
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