

Engaging Communities: Post-Tsunami Crisis — The Case of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

On Boxing Day 2004, 62 per cent of the coastal area of Sri Lanka was knocked out by a high-scale tsunami. With 100,000 buildings damaged or destroyed; roads and railways washed away; common utilities dislocated; and above all, 40,000 lives lost and double that number injured, it was an unprecedented calamity and an unmatched challenge to citizenry and the public services of the country. Lack of early warning and un-preparedness made rescue and recovery a daunting task.

Still, the community responded : individuals braved the waves to rescue total strangers; families opened doors to the stranded; vehicles ferried injured with no fare; places of worship, converted into temporary dwellings, took in all comers, with no distinction of faith. Community organisations joined hands with state agencies to co-ordinate these dispersed efforts. Thus, relief and restoration became a tripartite effort, engaging the community, its organisations (NGOO) and the state.

This paper examines the measures taken, from early individual efforts, through cooperative endeavour to institutionalised activity. It also sets out the extents affected; relief provided; reconstruction and rehabilitation taken in hand and results so far achieved. In the presentation, they will be appropriately illustrated. Reference will be made to failures and drawbacks too. The running thread in the story weaved around the Tsunami as it affected Sri Lanka, is the narration of the engagement of the community, both informal and formal. In the latter, mention will be made as to how this became interwoven with the ongoing efforts at the resolution of the over quarter-century-old 'national conflict'.

Introduction

A crisis resulting from either a natural disaster or a human-induced situation brings in the communities involved into its resolution. This may happen by itself through spontaneous actions of the community, state intervention or third party participation, such as the involvement of non-government organisations (NGOs). Often, depending on the magnitude of the crisis, it is a combination of all three. Bringing back normalcy, through reconstruction and rehabilitation, is always the ultimate aim. A point to be borne in mind is that "post-conflict (crisis) reconstruction is a critical step in the continuum between humanitarian relief and longer term development".¹ So, the community involvement has that dimension, too.

¹ *World Bank Conference on Conflict*, Paris, April 1998.

The crisis that occurred in Sri Lanka, following the Tsunami of 26 December 2004, is unique in that natural disaster fell upon a community that was already devastated by a long drawn-out conflict inflicted upon itself by one of the most ferocious terror outfits called the 'LTTE', due to actual or perceived grievances of one section of this community. And the Tsunami occurred while the resolution of this conflict was being attempted (by both sides to it), but not fully resolved. While it is outside the scope of this paper to undertake a comprehensive analysis of these two parallel developments, while dealing with the manner in which the community responded to the natural disaster, in association with the state and the 'third party' (NGO), it would reflect, even marginally, on how the longer-term conflict (between the LTTE and the government) impacted on the post-Tsunami reconstruction effort.

The Tsunami

Sri Lanka is an island of 65,610 square kilometres, with a total coast length of 1585 kilometres, in the Indian ocean. The massive earthquake, computed at 9.0 on the Richter Scale, that occurred off the west coast of Northern Sumatra in Indonesia during the early hours of Boxing Day 2004, devastated nearly 62 per cent (or 985 kilometres) of the Sri Lankan coastal belt, in some places reaching 1.5 kilometres (but mostly between 100 and 500 metres) inland, at an approximate speed of 600 km/h (Figure 1). "Nearly 40,000 lives were lost (including the missing persons), over 550,000 persons displaced, 113,525 houses destroyed or damaged, roads, railways, bridges, high and low tension power lines, transformers, hospitals, schools, police stations, beach hotels, other public buildings and over 22,800 fishing boats were destroyed. In all, over one million people were directly affected".² Province/District-wise data on the situation, as at the end of January 2005, is given in Table 1 (Appendix 1).

Table 1 also shows data that illustrates the plight of those affected. Of those who escaped death, over 23,000 had been injured, needing health care; 4000 were missing (since accounted for as dead or found injured); over 62,000 were living in 'welfare centres' (maintained by the state or NGO); about 60, 000 houses needed complete reconstruction or replacement, while another over 43,000 required repair.

Among the persons affected, the position of the children and of the infrastructure damaged, those in the fisheries and tourism industries need special mention; on the one hand due to its humanitarian implications and on the other on account of its impact on the livelihood of those involved and the effect on the national economy.

² Commissioner General of Essential Services, Sri Lanka.

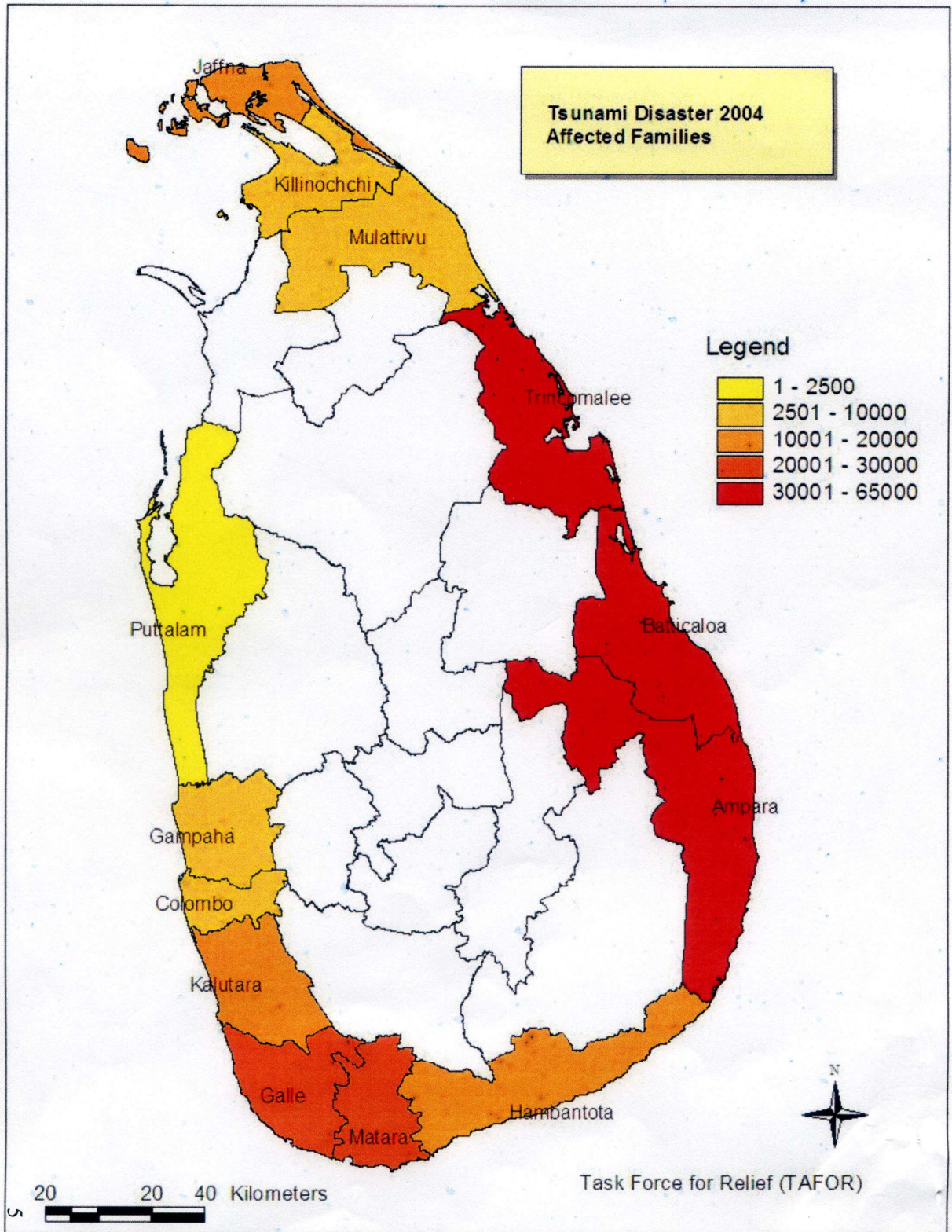


Figure 1. Map of Sri Lanka, showing the Tsunami-affected areas

Children

Around 12,000, or about one-third, of the total number that died due to the Tsunami have been children. More reliable data is available as to the children who survived either within the affected areas or elsewhere, but rendered destitute, as one or both of their parents perished. In all, 1044 children lost both their parents and another 3498 lost one of them. The greatest

number was from the three provinces directly hit by the Tsunami, as the following figures would show.

Table 2. Number of children who lost their parents

Province	Lost both parents	Lost one parent
Western	42	63
Southern	249	1243
North –East	740	2151
Rest	13	41
Total	1044	3498

The problem of taking care of children was not confined only to finding suitable persons or institutions to do so — only 20 children have been entrusted to institutions; the rest of the 3400-odd opted to live with relatives. What was more problematic was to prevent these children going into the hands of undesirable characters, in the guise of relatives. There were several cases of children being claimed by more than one party. Among them was the celebrated case of ‘Baby 89’ supposed to have been claimed by seven or eight sets of ‘parents’ and eventually restored to the right parents, after a court determination based on a DNA test. (This featured on the CNN.) While the individual cases were taken care of by the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) and the police, the legislation (Tsunami Special Provisions Act No. 16 of 2005) provided for the proper custody of destitute children and their legal adoption.

The education of over 79,000 school children was affected by the destruction caused to about 163 schools, either partially or fully (Table 3 — Appendix 2). Of those schools, 98 needed to be relocated. In addition, another 282 schools had to be used as temporary camps for the displaced persons, hindering the education of children in those schools, too. There was considerable damage to some universities and other higher educational institutions in the coastal areas, affecting the education of adult students in them, but the effect of the Tsunami on children was the most pathetic.

Fisheries sector

Fishermen and their families, representing one of the poorest segments of the Sri Lankan society were the worst affected by the Boxing Day Tsunami. A total of 1431 male and 2581 female (total 4012) fisher-folk perished and 137 others were missing. The number of fishery households affected was reckoned as 72,211 (Table 4 — Appendix 3) with the sector-wise number of fisher-folk whose livelihood was affected being as follows:

Table 5. Fisher-folk affected, by sector

Offshore	27,258
Coastal	30,498
Lagoon	14,584
Total	72,340

In all, 22,808 fishing crafts and 14,839 had been destroyed due to the Tsunami. This is estimated to cost a colossal sum of over USD\$74 million to replace or repair.

Tourism industry

Considering the numbers involved and the livelihoods touched, fisheries may be the worst affected. But, as an industry — especially an industry with a promise — the most severely affected was tourism. The promise in the Sri Lankan tourist industry is mostly in the ‘sand and sun’. Battered by constant threats from terrorism, the industry was recovering after the ‘Cease Fire Agreement’ of February 2002, and in 2003 it was able to pass the landmark figure of 500,000 tourist arrivals. December (being the winter in the West) is the peak in any year and December 2004 had the tourist resorts full, especially in the South and East. The industry was employing over 12,000 persons. Then came the Boxing Day Tsunami. Forty foreign tourists died. (Not a single had been killed in the 25 Year War.) One hundred and fifty one ‘locals’ perished with them. Four hundred and twenty seven tourist plants were damaged (Table 6 — Appendix 4). It is estimated to cost USD\$600 million to bring them back to activity. How much more it will cost to persuade the tourists to get back to the ‘sunny beaches’ (now remembered for death and destruction) is a moot point.

Connected to the tourism industry, there are several small scale enterprises and in the Tsunami-affected areas there were about 210 such enterprises engaged in such trades as gem and jewellery, leather, furniture, textiles, etc. and employing around 300 persons. The damaged caused to these enterprises is estimated at USD\$5 billion. (Though small in size, some of them carried high value stocks like gem, gold and silver.)

With this account of the Boxing Day Tsunami and how it affected the people and their livelihood in Sri Lanka, it is now possible to look at the rescue, recovery and reconstruction effort that it ensued and the manner in which the community involved itself in this endeavour.

Community awoken

As the massive tidal waves ‘invaded’ the interior in their fury as described above, three factors impeded immediate and effective response. Sri Lanka was never (before) considered to be in the ‘earthquake prone’ zone; minor tremors have occurred, but nothing that justified the ‘quake’ designation. As for ‘tsunami’, it was in scientific text books and discourse. Not many

had heard of anything like that and even now there is no equivalent in the local languages to this term. Equipment to generate information, if any, were in universities and those to receive were with officials, enjoying a sultry Sunday. So: (1) with no early warning; (2) with no preparedness; and (3) with most of the population in bed, and almost all radio and television switched off, nobody would have cared; if at all, there would have been only more chaos, if the 'invading army' was apprehended in time.

But, by and by, the community was awoken. There were the fishermen returning home after a late night catch; there were the holiday makers, taking their kids to the beach; and, there were the beach-front folk going to the beach for 'more than one reason'. Some of them braved the waves, especially the second — unexpected and most ferocious onslaught — with nary a care for their lives, and others, unfortunately the children, who, in their innocence and that of their parents, followed the first (comparatively mild) wave and perished in the next. The community engagement first occurred there.

Out of the hundreds of stories of individual valour, three that featured in the international media may be mentioned. First is the story of a man — an ex-seafarer — who had had some exposure to tsunami elsewhere, who recognised the gravity of the first wave and knew what to expect in the next, beckoned all and sundry, including his own reluctant master, to safety. This was carried in the CNN. The second is the story of American high school teacher, Laura Dunham, whose entire family was rescued by the inn keeper's ingenuity and later, in her own words "...[that is] how we survived the trauma of this disaster because we had the generosity and hospitality of Sri Lankans. Every family in the village took in tourists for three days we had to wait before we were evacuated. They shared their meagre belongings, their limited food and their precious water. They who had nothing and lost much, gave everything" (New York Times). The third is from a Sri Lankan lady-lawyer, Ramya Pagoda, working in Sydney, Australia, but who had been holidaying with her sister's family in the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka on that fateful day. She narrates the story of how she and the family, including nephew Yavin who was at first thought to have perished, were rescued by the navy men, themselves off duty and holidaying in the same beach hotel. Here the hospitality came from a nearby army camp (Sunday Island, 30 January 2005). If one goes from international media to the local press, hundreds of such 'engagements' by the community in the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami could be recounted. But what is given above should suffice to make the point that it was the local community, that too spontaneously, that was first in what may be called the 'operation rescue'.

Community engagement — Open doors

Table 1 shows that of nearly 416,000 persons displaced, over 350,000 or around 84 per cent, were living with 'relatives and friends'. This is incredible, but true, considering the close-knit family system in Sri Lanka. Beyond the narrow stretch of the sea belt, which was directly affected, there lived families with whom the affected families often partied (weddings/funerals)

and not so infrequently quarreled (family feuds/land disputes). In distress, all that was forgotten and the doors of the humble dwellings of the latter (hardly sufficient for themselves) were opened to their kith and kin. The rest, around 17,000 families or 62,000 persons were accommodated in 'welfare centres'. At one stage there were 162 centres. (These numbers would have changed over time, consequent to other developments that would be related later.) Most of the centres were initially in schools, which had been closed for the weekend, but with the overflow and the need to release these schools early, the village temples (Buddhist), kovils (Hindu), churches (Christian/Catholic) and mosques (Muslim) were also used. All places of worship opened their doors, with no reference to the faith of the seekers of shelter. And the clergy, who normally depend on the charity of the laity for their own sustenance, sustained these people, using their own resources — both moral and material.

Feeding (and clothing, where necessary) the needy is a precept taught in all religions. It has become so ingrained into the culture, that it was a common sight to see truck loads of, first cooked meals, and later dry rations being taken not only to welfare centres, but also to the families that housed the destitute. This has happened in the past, when certain areas of the country were affected by severe droughts, major floods or occasional earth-slips. In the Sri Lankan villages there are the 'welfare societies' or 'death donation societies'. (It is said that these are the most democratic institutions in the country, because they are totally voluntary.) These societies, often led by the village priest or the headmaster of the school, organised truck loads of supplies to be taken to the affected areas. On this occasion of the Tsunami, 'non-traditional' outfits like ladies' clubs in urban areas and media houses in Colombo, organised such 'motorcades' of supplies to the coastal areas of the South, the East and the North. Here again, there was little religious or ethnic distinction in the voluntary distribution of supplies. In fact, it has been mentioned even in parliament later that, to the North and the East where mostly Tamils and Muslims live (and the worst affected areas at that), it was the Sinhala Buddhist groups that first went with assistance. All this should illustrate that, in the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami disaster, 'the engagement of the communities', in the most basic sense of that term, was total in Sri Lanka.

The Engagement of the 'Formal Communities' – NGO

Naturally, a calamity of this magnitude attracted the attention of the 'formal communities' or the non-government organisations (NGOs). In the initial phase of providing relief, it was only the village level or less-organised organisations (such as welfare and death donation societies mentioned earlier) that came in. This was followed by the better organised local NGOs, among them 'Sarvodaya', which could command a budget of USD\$14 million, local Red Cross and Help-Age, took the lead. But at this stage some international organisations, perhaps with some justification, considered them to be 'too small to work with'. In any case, the influx of international NGOs into an 'opening' like this was both inevitable and understandable. Eventually, over 60 such international NGOs were seen in the scene. Some of them, like CARE, ICRC, Oxfam, Medicines Sans Frontiers and World Vision, were very well

known international organisations. There were also religion-motivated organisations, such as Salvation Army, Catholic Relief Services and Christian Aid Ministries, which were drawn into service. Even organisations founded for other, though related, activities like the Foundation for Co-existence, an outfit for conflict resolution, found a place in the band-wagon. So did the Tamil Relief Organization (TRO), generally considered a 'front' for the terrorist organisation LTTE. They all performed a useful service, especially in the transition from immediate relief to transitional measures, such as provision of temporary accommodation. Most of them employed local 'labour', though at a low level. Consequently, some of these international NGOs were accused of extravagance over expatriate staff, spending anything between 3 and 40 per cent on overheads. Of course, in the case of organisations connected to a particular religion or political persuasion, their own agendas became only too clear.

International agencies such as UNICEF, WHO, ILO, WFP, UNDP and UNHCR also joined in this initial stage of rescue and restoration effort and worked in harmony, not only with the government agencies, but also with the civil society, both organised and dispersed. In fact, the entry of international agencies, both within and outside the UN system, has made it a cardinal principle that, not only these institutions, but also the government itself, be proactive in responding to all unmet humanitarian needs of the Tsunami survivors. A case in point is the insistence by the UNDP that in its project to construct 1100 Tsunami-struck villages, the affected families identify their reconstruction concerns. So, even in the initial efforts of the NGOs (both local and international) and the 'international community', meaning donor agencies and individual countries, the engagement of the community, especially those affected, became the rule.

Entry of the government

The government also entered the rescue and relief operations on the first day. In the absence of the president from the country, the prime minister held an emergency cabinet meeting that evening itself (in which the present writer officiated) and the next day the president, having returned after abandoning a holiday abroad, took charge. To supplement the efforts of the local officials, including the police, weather watchers and fire-fighters, the government mobilised the armed forces. The first priority in the rescue and relief operation was the provision of food, water and clothing; shelter; medicine and sanitation. In these, the spontaneous and later organised initiatives of the community and their organisations have already been described. Then came infrastructure restoration. This included roads and transportation; telecommunication; electricity; public institutions like hospitals, schools, police stations; and other government offices. For both these purposes, the government used both its existing institutions as well as new (some ad hoc) ones set up specifically to expedite matters. Just to illustrate how the community responded to the call for assistance in this second endeavour — the restoration of infrastructure, the story of the railway line down south — (from the capital city of Colombo to the coastal town of Matara), a track of about 160 kilometres, may be mentioned. As is well known, public servants in developing countries

(often ill-paid) have a reputation of being lethargic. The railway employees of Sri Lanka are no exception. In fact, the worst tragedy that occurred due to the Tsunami — plunging an entire railway, with about 1100 passengers and approximately another 600–900 ‘hangers on’, at a place called Hikkaduwa down the same railway line, is attributed to the negligence of the rail staff involved. But the rail line, which was extensively damaged due to the Tsunami, was restored for transportation, within a record period of six to 27 days, due to the initiative and enterprise of the employees of Sri Lanka Railways.

The end of the first phase

When the first phase of the post-Tsunami crisis management ended in about a month, mainly due to the engagement of the community and also the commitment of the organised sectors of the civil society and the government itself, it was possible to claim the following, without contradiction:

- None died of starvation and no malnutrition observed and no disease outbreaks
- No deaths due to lack of medical care
- Law and order situation effectively maintained
- Basic infrastructure such as roads, telecommunication and electricity restored.

A post-script to the end of the first phase on how the local communities, with some assistance from assorted organisations and agencies of the government, coped with the immediate problems arising from the crisis created by the Tsunami may be in place. That is, of nearly 40,000 persons who perished in this unprecedented tragedy, over 31,000 (Table 1) were confirmed dead and, in most cases, their bodies were recovered. While some were identified, others were not. Similarly, while some were from the same areas or vicinity, others were not — the latter were mostly holiday makers who had come to the beaches from the interior and there were several foreigners among them. Disposal of these bodies required the cooperation of the local community, hordes that came from afar looking for their relatives (again some foreigners among them), the religious practitioners and functionaries of the officialdom. In the case of Muslim dead, this created an added problem, as they were bound by time limits set by their religion. However, this task was attended to, mainly by the community itself, magnificently, so that disposal was done with the least possible delay and in most cases, with autopsies taken and deaths registered. In case where such paper work was not possible and in the case of the missing, the government brought in legislation immediately (Act No.16 of 2005) to provide for death certificates, after due inquiry.

A community in transition

Though it is not possible to draw exact dividing lines, from about the second month of the event a period of transition commenced during which time, while maintaining the supply of food, payment of cash allowances, etc., the focus shifted from immediate relief to much more durable support. This was especially so in the matter of accommodation, where it was earlier a case of finding living space in friends'/relatives' houses, temporary camps in schools or

individual tents; but now a question of providing more 'permanent' accommodation, until the ambitious program of constructing 'houses for all' is completed. As a result of these 'transitional' arrangements, it was possible to reduce the total number of persons from 552,000 in 733 camps to 73,000 in about 100 camps by mid-May 2005.

This was the result of the implementation of the 'Transitional Accommodation Project' (TAP) set up by the government, in collaboration with NGOs (both local and international), international agencies and foreign governments. TAP has a total target of 60,000 units of transitional accommodation and by mid-May construction on 34,000 units had commenced and nearly 25,000 completed (Appendix 5). All house construction, transitional or otherwise and sponsored by the government or NGOs/external agencies, has a considerable component of contribution, especially with labour (for cash or otherwise) by members of the communities concerned. At the end of six months after the Boxing Day Tragedy, which may be considered as the completion of the 'Transitional Period', and despite all the efforts made by the community, NGOs and the external agencies, it was not entirely a 'success story', as far as reconstruction and rehabilitation is concerned. This is reflected in the following headlines appearing in one weekend news paper published on 26 June 2005:

"Waiting for a roof above their heads"
"When will they have a house of their own"
"Tsunami debris piles on mounting garbage"
"Rehab at snail pace..." (*Sunday Times*).

But, writing under the appropriate title of 'Stay the course and 'build back better'', this is what an independent observer has stated the next day, 27 June 2005:

"...it is worth acknowledging six months on that some real achievements have occurred...one 31,000 transitional houses have now been built and more than 23,000 others are to be completed in coming weeks.
More than 90 % of children are back in school, well-uniformed with text books and bags in hand. 910,000 people have received the food assistance – 53,000 tonnes in all...and the programme will increasingly be fine tuned in coming months to target assistance to vulnerable groups, school feeding and 'food for work' activities." (Miguel Bermeo, UN Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator for Sri Lanka)

Another article appearing in the first newspaper referred to above, by and under the benign picture of President Bill Clinton (looking affectionately at a group of Tsunami-survived children) had this as its heading:

" Hope for a new dawn"

This may be adapted as the title of the next section of this paper.

The new phase

This new phase of reconstruction, following the phases of rescue and relief and transitional, is about the permanent and more sustainable measures, on which alone a 'new dawn' (such as envisaged by President Clinton) could be realised. This again is a tripartite exercise: the state taking the lead; international community consisting of multilateral agencies and individual countries lending a hand; and the community consisting of both NGOs and the citizens getting fully involved. Before attempting that, it would be appropriate if, at least in the major sectors, the estimated costs of reconstruction are indicated:

Table 7. Estimates of reconstruction (USD\$)

Education	\$169m
Health	\$100m
Tourism	\$58m
Telecommunication	\$18m
Water supply and sanitation	\$205m
Fisheries	\$153m
Electricity	\$115m

This, by no means, is a complete catalogue of cost of the disaster. While fairly reliable data has been collected on the wreckage and its value, the estimates for reconstruction are still under preparation. Anyway, USD\$2.5 billion has been computed as a reasonable estimate of the costs involved. Of this, nearly USD\$1.6 billion had been pledged by various multi-lateral and bilateral donors. At the Development Forum held in Kandy, Sri Lanka (in place of the normal 'Paris Club' aid meeting) on 5-6 June 2005, this amount was totally covered within the USD\$3.5 billion pledged for overall development assistance to the country. In addition were the pledges of assistance in debt repayment, either by rephasing or total waiver or a combination of both by individual countries, some as indicated in the G8 meeting in Paris.

But between the cup and the lip there is a slip and it involves the machinery to be used for aid utilisation. Interestingly, at the heart of the problem, is engagement of the community. This needs explanation.

Disaster management

Sri Lanka has a three-tier administrative system. At the apex is the Central Government; at sub-national level the Provincial Councils and at the most peripheral level, the Local Authorities — Municipal, Urban and Pradesheeya (Village) councils. While the Local Authorities had been in existence for over a century, introduced during the colonial times, they were subservient to the government at the Centre and governed by mere statute. But the

Provincial Councils are both of recent origin (after the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987) and bestowed with devolved authority, under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. However, there are several grey areas, even after 30 years of operation of that Amendment, where the authority between the Centre and the Province is not well defined. Added to this is the complication that the Centre maintains its own chain of command down the line, with District Secretaries (government agents), Divisional Secretaries and Grama Niladhari (Village Officers). Management of any disaster has to be carried out within this rather nebulous administrative set-up.

At the time the Tsunami occurred in December 2004, there was functioning a 'Disaster Management Centre' under the Social Services Department, coming within the central Ministry of Social Welfare. This operated through its own officials as well as those of the Social Services Departments of Provincial Councils. It was an altogether satisfactory arrangement to deal with the natural 'disasters' hitherto known to the country, like droughts, floods, occasional earth slips, etc. It also handled human-induced disasters like dealing with the internally displaced persons (IDPP) of the quarter-century-old terrorist generated 'war' in the North and the East. But when it came to facing the enormous calamity that resulted from the Tsunami, it was considered to be totally inadequate. So the government, in addition to appointing a Commissioner General for Essential Services and utilising the services of the Armed Forces primarily to maintain essential supplies to the affected areas and persons, also created a few ad hoc outfits by such exotic names as: Task Force for Rescue and Relief (TARER); Task Force for Logistics, Law and Order (TAFLOL); Task Force to rebuild the Nation (TAFREN); and a National Operations Centre (NOC) to collect and disseminate all Tsunami-related information. They were all of a temporary nature.

While both the old and the new institutions of the centre worked in tandem with the 'local authorities' and the many local and international NGOs now associated with post-Tsunami relief and reconstruction work, still a formal link-up with the civil society was lacking. In a parallel development, and after a long gestation 'pre-Tsunami' period of vacillation, a law was passed in parliament in May (Act No.13 of 2005), which provided for an elaborate organisational set up to deal with disasters, including advisory committees for the involvement of the professional and civil communities. Though this would have been quite satisfactory for the rest of the country, it was not considered sufficient by the international community to meet the 'principle of subsidiarity' as far as the Northern and Eastern provinces of the country are concerned.

The North and the East

The Northern and Eastern Provinces (two of the nine provinces in the country) comprise a total land mass of about 20,000 square kilometres and about 100 kilometres of sea coast. Two factors in these provinces impacted on post-Tsunami reconstruction, one unconnected to the Tsunami and the other directly connected. As in the rest of Sri Lanka, all the three ethnic

groups of the country live in these provinces but with a preponderance of Tamil and Muslim communities, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Number and proportion of ethnic group members by province

Province	Sinhala		Tamil		Muslim		Others		Total
	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)
North	35,128	3	1,021,006	88.7	91,666	8	2271	0.2	1,150,071
East	243,701	25	410,156	42	316,481	32.4	5958	0.6	976,296
Grand total	278,829	13	1,431,162	67.3	408,147	19	8,229	0.4	2,126,367

Source: Census of 1981 — no proper census since then due to civil strife

It would be seen from Table 8 that while the Tamils (88.7 per cent) are in a clear majority in the Northern Province, the Muslims (32.4 per cent) come a close second to the Tamils (42 per cent) in the Eastern Province. The Sinhala (25 per cent) are actually in a minority. However, the Tamils form the majority when the two provinces are taken together. This is the rationale for the 'North-East', an entity created after the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987. Though this was to be temporary, until a referendum was held in the Eastern Province to determine whether the people there would like to 'merge' with the North or not, this was never held due to the armed opposition of the LTTE and the arrangement goes on permanently on a 'temporary basis' (the obvious contradiction of terms to be excused under the circumstances). The 'circumstance' being the insistence of the LTTE, (with the almost unanimous approval of the Tamils, but almost equal disapproval of the Muslims and the Sinhala people living the area), that these provinces should be permanently merged. What is more, this is the Tamil 'homeland', for which the LTTE has been fighting the forces of the Sri Lanka government for nearly three decades with a death toll (on both sides) of around 65,000. Though the demand for 'Tamil Homeland' has never been conceded and successive governments of Sri Lanka have been unsuccessfully working on a 'devolved model' to settle the problem. However, in the Cease Fire Agreement of February 2002, the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) has recognised that the LTTE is in de facto control of certain areas in the North — the whole of the Districts of Kilinochchi and Mullaitiv and the northern parts of Vavuniya and Mannar, which are considered by the GOSL as 'uncleared areas'. This area also has approximately 100 kilometres of seaboard, which was battered by the Tsunami. Though not officially recognised even by the CFA, it is generally known that the LTTE has much influence and (armed) clout in some of the so called 'cleared areas' of North and East. While this position is not connected to the Tsunami, it makes any machinery to deal with the post-Tsunami reconstruction developed solely by the GOSL unacceptable to the LTTE. The reality of the matter is that without its acceptance no machinery is workable, not only in the LTTE

controlled areas, but also elsewhere in the North and the East, as it has the capability to sabotage any such arrangement.

As for the 'connected' factor, it would be seen from the map (Table 1 — Appendix 1) that more than two-thirds of the area affected by the Tsunami lies within the North and the East, the latter being the worst affected. In terms of deaths and displaced too, these two provinces (with the East coming first), take the lead, as Table 9 shows.

Table 9. Number and proportion of deaths and displaced families by province

Province	Deaths		Displaced families	
	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)
North	6200	19.8	13,090	9.2
East	14,489	46.4	83,557	59.2
North + East	20,689	66.3	96,647	68.5
Rest	10,540	33.7	44,375	31.4
Country total	31,189	100	141,022	100

Added to this is the left over from the over quarter century war with the terrorists, which has significant numbers still left 'internally' displaced and mostly living in camps within and outside the North and the East. The total number is (as at 31 December 2004), 87,159 families and 352,374 persons (UNHCR).

It was the inability to deal with this problem to the satisfaction of the LTTE that contributed to the breakdown of negotiations that it had with the GOSL, held with much fanfare after the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) of February 2004, ostensibly aimed at the resolution of the 'National Question'. (Ostensibly, because the objectives of the LTTE were always in doubt.) Anyway, the combined effect of these factors constituted the 'slip' between the 'cup' of donor assistance and the 'lip' of the recipient government and its Tsunami-affected people.

Emergence of a 'joint mechanism'

It may be mentioned here that the 'international community', which insisted upon an 'interim authority' to provide assistance for rehabilitation of the areas affected by the internal strife between the GOSL and the LTTE, after the Tokyo Conference of June 2003, now made international assistance for post-Tsunami reconstruction also conditional upon the establishment of such a machinery. The Royal Government of Norway, which was working on the 'peace process' between GOSL and LTTE since 1995 and functioned as the 'facilitator' in their negotiations after the CFA, volunteered to develop a mechanism to meet this situation. The mechanism proposed was for the LTTE to be directly involved in responsibility for policy formulation; project development and execution and fund management both at 'regional' and

'district' levels and monitoring of implementation. This is expected to meet, at least in the eyes of the donors, the subsidiarity principle of involving the 'affected communities', though this is being hotly contested by the Muslim and Sinhala communities living in these provinces.

The 'Joint Mechanism', since baptised as the 'Post-Tsunami Management Structure' or 'P-TOMS' for short, signed between the GOSL and LTTE on 22 June 2005, has provision to engage the three communities living in the North and East, as follows:

- The Tamils, by the LTTE, which claims to be the 'sole representative' of that community (rather the 'nation'), though hotly contested by not only the other two communities, but also by sections of the Tamil community
- The Muslims, by representatives at all three levels of the mechanism (the mode of representation is yet to be decided)
- The Sinhala people (who form the majority — 70 per cent of the population — in the country) ostensibly by the GOSL (ostensibly, because the GOSL is supposed to represent all communities of the country — not just the majority only).

'P-TOMS' is to operate through three committees:

- High-Level Committee of three, consisting of one each from the LTTE, Muslims and the GOSL
- Regional Committee of ten, five from the LTTE, three from the Muslims and the remaining two from the GOSL
- District Committees, one for each Administrative District (six in the Tsunami-affected areas), the composition of which is supposed to be 'as already established'.

In effect, while the High-Level Committee would deliberate on 'high level' policy and monitor overall progress, the District Committees will identify project proposals and report on them to the Regional Committee. It is really the Regional Committee that will be the nerve centre and the place 'where things happen'. The Regional Committee, which has a solid majority of the LTTE, is expected to work through 'consensus'. It is envisaged that through this novel device, a brainwave of the Norwegian facilitators, all communities in Sri Lanka could be kept fully engaged with the post-Tsunami reconstruction work and it is also hoped that this will lead to permanent peace between these communities.

Conclusion

It was seen how the Tsunami that struck Sri Lanka on 26 December 2004 destroyed human life and property on an unprecedented scale. The response of the communities living not only in the affected areas, but also in other parts of the country to this tragedy, was spontaneous and admirable. Their organisations and the Government of Sri Lanka, joined in the rescue and relief operations immediately. The international voluntary bodies (NGOs), foreign countries and donor agencies were not slow to follow. The efforts of all these parties in the first phase of the operation are laudable and have produced tangible results. Reconstruction,

on a transitional basis, was also undertaken in the same spirit, with the communities, both organised and otherwise, playing a significant role. The position up to the end of the second or the 'transitional stage', ending the six-month period in May 2005, has also been noted. Though no such demarcations are accurate, the third or the final phase, where permanent housing and infrastructure restoration and development are to be undertaken, has already commenced. According to the chairman of TAFREN, the task force on 'rebuilding the nation' and incidentally the only task force among several set up for specific purposes immediately after the disaster, yet to remain in operation, has stated at the end of May that "1659 permanent housing units are now under construction. 23,846 will be under construction by mid July."

But, in the words of Migguel Bermeo of the UN referred to earlier, "Given the sheer scale and complexity of the task – securing adequate land, building 90,000 plus permanent homes with clean water and sanitation and infrastructure, and restoring livelihoods for every family – it simply cannot be done in a few months." And one could have added, "by the people of Sri Lanka and their Government alone". This is where the pledges of the international community, comprised of multi-lateral agencies; individual countries and other foreign organisations/ individuals, become relevant. But this is also where the 'engagement of the communities', which was a fairly simple and often spontaneous task at the first and, to some extent, the second stages of recovery, has become more complex. It was seen how the 'carry over' from a quarter-century-old civil strife in the country impacted on this. The people in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country in general and the LTTE, which claims to be the 'sole representative' of the Tamils in particular, will not accept the mere word of the government or the international community for the equitable allocation of (foreign) funds to all parts of Sri Lanka struck by the Tsunami; they want this in 'black and white'. Hence, the need for a 'Joint Mechanism' or P-TOMS, as it is now called.

It was thought that, as given in the Preamble to the Agreement or the 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MOU) signed between the GOSL and LTTE on 22 June, this would meet the "urgent need for all communities, Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and others, to cooperate on humanitarian grounds in the face of this common adversity". In fact, this was the predominant sentiment that prevailed immediately after the tsunami, not only in respect of 'all communities', who were all 'treated' equally by this unkind act of nature, but also, with regard to all political parties and other 'divisive forces' in the country. In the early euphoria, it was thought that a 'national government' comprised of all communal and political parties, with which the LTTE will at least cooperate, will emerge. Unfortunately the events, both up to the signing of the MOU and thereafter, have proved that this was only wishful thinking. By the time the MOU was signed on 22 June, the government of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was reduced to a 'minority government', with its major partner, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a Marxist but nationalist-oriented political party, breaking away; differences visible in what is remaining; and above all, leaving the Muslim community, the one

that was treated by the Tsunami 'more than equally' whether they are in the government or not, thoroughly disillusioned. As for the LTTE, instead of being appreciative of the efforts made by the president to make the 'MOU' a reality, is in the process of issuing 'ultimatums' to her on issues, which could be traced to the split that occurred in its own ranks sometime back. Added to the bargain, the two major political parties in the country — the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) — seem to be preoccupied not with the recovery from the Tsunami, but in their traditional game of 'playing politics'. There appears to be only one hope for the future of Sri Lanka — the distant possibility of achieving the objectives set out in the 'Joint Mechanism' (P-TOMS), whatever its technical flaws may be, even under these adverse conditions. If this happens, it should be possible for the country to 'build back better', even if takes three to five years to do so, as estimated by the UN Special Envoy, President Bill Clinton on his visit to Sri Lanka late last May (Daily Mirror 27 June). In this endeavour, the engagement of all communities in the country is absolutely essential.

Appendix 1 — Table 1. Statistics of affected persons by province

Tsunami Disaster, 26 December 2004												
As at : 02/06/2005												
Province	District	Affected families	Displaced families	Displaced Persons			Deaths	Injured	Missing	Damaged houses		No. of camps
				In welfare centres	With relatives and friends	Total				Completely	Partially	
Northern	Jaffna	14,767	6676	0	33,381	33,381	2640	1647	540	6084	1114	0
	Killinochchi	2754	407	0	1603	1603	560	670	0	246	-	0
	Mullaitivu	6745	6007	8212	14,390	22,602	3000	2590	421	5033	424	21
Eastern	Trincomalee	30,547	30,545	13,778	59,208	72,986	1078	1328	45	4830	3835	35
	Batticaloa	64,151	15,113	19,770	35,047	54,817	2975	2375	340	12,232	5376	37
	Ampara	59,275	37,899	8829	7294	16,123	10,436	6711	161	14,143	10,574	12
Southern	Hambantota	14,344	2808	1686	12,362	14,048	4500	434	1334	2278	1752	4
	Matara	21,140	2235	3403	6406	9809	1342	6652	600	2223	6075	22
	Galle	24,583	24,165	581	120,247	120,828	4330	313	564	7032	7680	5
Western	Kalutara	11,497	8134	2141	32,530	34,671	279	401	68	2683	3835	9
	Colombo	9647	6702	2897	30,614	33,511	79	64	12	3388	2210	14
	Gampaha	6827	308	876	573	1449	6	3	5	278	414	2
North Western	Puttiam	222	23	66		66	4	1	3	23	72	1
Total		266,499	141,022	62,239	353,655	415,894	31,229	23,189	4093	60,473	43,361	162

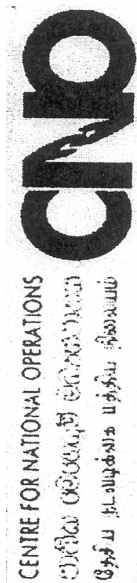
Note:

1. These figures are tentative and presented here as reported by the District Secretaries of the affected districts.
2. Displaced Persons refer to people who are in the IDP camps and/or staying with relatives and friends.

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Source: District Secretaries of the affected districts

Appendix 2 — Table 3. Education — schools damaged 16 January 2004



No.	District and zone	Total number of:			Number of schools			Estimated cost (Rs.Mn.)	No. of students in affected schools	No. of teachers in affected schools
		Schools	Students	Fully destroyed	Partially damaged	Total				
1	Hambantota	311	129,874	01	05	06	34.00	5541	224	
2	Matara	375	165,411	05	06	11	118.00	7810	448	
3	Galle	435	217,136	10	14	24	175.00	15,861	691	
4	Kalutara	415	192,052	02	04	06	24.25	6987	260	
5	Gampaha	537	319,485	-	02	02	5.00	3115	103	
6	Batticaloa	314	117,197	15	18	33	202.00	11,513	462	
7	Am para	388	153,408	25	13	38	211.00	17,927	680	
8	Trincomalee	259	94,236	05	14	19	106.00	4091	167	
9	Mullaitivu	102	26,965	0	12	12		3593	119	
10	Kilinochchi	No damage								
11	Jaffna	411	134,960	07	05	12	-	2576	109	
Total		3547	1,551,324	59	104	163	1131.25	79,016	3263	

* This information was provided by the Ministry of Education on 5 January 2005

Appendix 3 — Table 4. Fishery households affected by the Tsunami on 26 December 2004

District	No. in welfare centres	With relations	Own homes	Total	Houses			Total
					<100 m	101-300 m	>300 m	
Jaffna	2438	1173	1467	5078	2381	1172	1525	5078
Killinochchi	224	305	1560	2089	229	1009	851	2089
Mullaithivu								
Trincomalee	2346	923	5218	8487	3586	1844	3057	8487
Batticaloa	3781	695	5896	10372	802	2779	6791	10,372
Ampara	1516	1250	3769	6535	1277	1926	3332	6535
Hambantota	290	875	4921	6086	884	1783	3419	6086
Matara	379	1716	5052	7147	2292	2632	2223	7147
Galle	692	1059	5406	7157	1835	2876	2446	7157
Kalutara	423	559	1841	2823	1423	736	664	2823
Colombo	393	544	1664	2601	2014	465	122	2601
Gampaha	137	1345	4507	5989	1007	2146	2836	5989
Puttalam	8	536	6449	6993	2784	2518	1691	6993
Mannar	-	-	854	854	-	-	-	854
Total	12,627	10,980	48,604	72,211	20,514	21,886	28,957	72,211

Notes: Data for the Mullaithivu District is not available

Standards form was given to each fishing household in disaster areas to register for the development assistance

Fishing household information were recorded as at 15 February 2005 and information summarised.

Source: Statistical Unit of the Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources

Appendix 4 — Table 6. Classification of damaged institutions

	Type of institution									Total
	Hotel	Restaurant	Rest house	Guest house	Water sports	Travel agency	Other			
Western	5	3		3	1	3				15
Gampaha	9	2		3						14
Kalutara	30	10		21	2					63
Total	44	15		27	3	3				92
Southern	56	36	2	83	5	3	2			187
Matara	11	6	1	27						45
Hambantota	10	3	1	15						29
Total	77	45	4	125	5	3	2			261
Eastern	5	4		6		1	4			20
Batticalloa	3	1	3							7
Trincomalee	15			3			29			47
Total	23	5	3	9		1	33			74
Grand total	144	65	7	161	8	7	35			427

