



PEOPLE + DISASTERS

When **DISASTERS** happen, how are the communities most immediately affected by them coping? And why is it so important that space be made for these communities to be at the center of the process of rebuilding their lives and communities?

This report describes an ACHR and IIED sponsored seminar on the subject of “*Communities as key actors in disaster rehabilitation*,” which was held on November 3, 2008, during the fourth World Urban Forum, in Nanjing, China.

The idea of organizing this seminar in Nanjing forum was not only to bring out the people-driven disaster rehabilitation processes that have been going on in many Asian countries, but to re-emphasize in a big, international forum that making communities the key actors should be an important principle in all kinds of development work which involves the poor and poor communities – not only disasters.

The seminar was also a chance for the group which plays the most vital and primary role in working out lasting solutions to Asia’s most urgent problems of poverty and housing – *the poor themselves* - to meet each other, to speak about their experiences and to be heard. The absence of this most central voice in the change-making process continues to skew the quality of our understanding and undermine the sustainability of our development planning and policy-making.

So this little seminar was organized a bit differently, and it was our attempt to bring the people - who represent the real army of development workers after any disaster, and who should be the real owners of any development or rehabilitation process - to present their experiences and their ideas themselves, in their own way.



fire
flood
storm
volcano
tsunami
landslide
earthquake

Key participants in the discussion :

Besides our own team of community participants from nine disaster-affected countries (and their translators/supporters), we got a fairly good crowd for the seminar. About 70 people squeezed themselves into MR-206, one of the little blue conference rooms in the gigantic, shiny-new Nanjing International Expo Center, to listen to some poor survivors of various kinds of natural and man-made disasters speak about their struggles.



This was ACHR's second crack at organizing a seminar of this kind at a World Urban Forum, and it followed very closely on the themes of the first one at WUF 3 in Vancouver two years ago. For us, that Vancouver seminar was a new experience in finding ways that poor people themselves could be the ones to speak and to present their experiences rebuilding their lives and communities after the 2004 Asian tsunami.

And the participants in that two-hour session in Vancouver - tsunami survivors from four countries - really spoke some truths: about the problems they faced, about the changes they'd seen, and about the way development should and shouldn't happen after a disaster. They struck at the heart of many of the issues being debated at the highest levels of the development profession even today. For many of us development professionals, the presence of those voices and those truths was something so, so important.

Then, when some friends proposed that we organize another seminar at this World Urban Forum in Nanjing, we decided to use the same strategy of letting disaster-affected people speak for themselves. But this time, with two more years of disasters and two more years of community-driven disaster rehabilitation experiences under our belts, we wanted to broaden the scope of the discussion about addressing disasters in new ways and with new strength - by people.

This time, the groups we invited came from many different kinds of disasters in many countries, and we weren't sure how to deal with this greater variety - all these different experiences, different contexts, different political cultures and different ways of thinking and doing things. So once we were all assembled in Nanjing, we met together several times and were gradually able to come to a common understanding about how to organize the seminar.

Everyone agreed that instead of trying to plan out who would say what and make what points, it was more important that the poor people who'd come had time to speak and share their experiences and ideas. This informal process of planning together how to get the important experiences across in the seminar was in itself a good bit of learning for all of us.

From Burma :

- Mr. K. Z. (From a Yangon-based voluntary organization working in Nargis-affected area)
- Mr. M. D. (From another Yangon-based voluntary organization)
- Mr. M. (from a Thailand-based NGO supporting Nargis-affected communities in Burma)

From Indonesia :

- Ms. Wahjutini (Community leader from a village covered by the Porong mud volcano)
- Mr. Muchamad Irsyad (Farmer and community leader from a mud volcano-affected village)
- Mr. Winarko (Urban Poor Linkage NGO, Uplink-Porong, Porong mud volcano area)

From the Philippines :

- Ms. Jocelyn Cantoria (Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines, Community leader from Mount Mayon volcano-affected area)
- Mr. Rolando Villanueva (HPFP national community leader, working in Mt. Mayon area)

From India :

- Mr. Harijan Hirabhai Bhimabhai (Carpenter from the earthquake-affected village in Kutch)
- Mr. Prashant Shantilal Solanky (Hunnarshala Foundation NGO, based in Kutch, Gujarat)

From Thailand :

- Mr. Siwakornwisit Ouampuan (Community leader, Northern Region Disaster Network)
- Mr. Amporn Kaewnoo (Community Organizations Development Institute - CODI)

From Vietnam :

- Ms. Hoang Thi Minh Huong (Danang City Women's Union)
- Mr. Nguyen Dung Sy (Danang City Local Government, Chairman of Thuan Phuoc Ward)
- Mr. Bang Anh Tuan (Director, ENDA Vietnam)
- Dr. Ngo Huy Liem (Senior advisor, ENDA Vietnam)

From Mongolia :

- Ms. Enkhbayar Tsendorj (Urban Development Resource Center, Ulaanbataar)
- Ms. Shinetsetseg Munkhbayar (Urban Development Resource Center, Ulaanbataar)
- Ms. Urantsooj Gombosuren (Center for Human Rights and Development, Ulaanbataar)

From Sri Lanka :

- Mr. K.A. Jayaratne (Sevanatha NGO, supports tsunami-affected communities nationally)

From New Orleans, USA :

- Mr. Sam Jackson (Carpenter, public housing resident, founder of MAYDAY New Orleans)

From ACHR in Thailand :

- Ms. Somsook Boonyabancha (Secretary General of ACHR / Director of CODI Thailand)
- Ms. Natvipa Chalitanorn (ACHR / CODI)
- Mr. Thomas Kerr (Publications coordinator, ACHR)

From international development agencies :

- Ms. Diana Mitlin (International Institute for Environment and Development, UK)
- Mr. Laliith Lankatilleke (Senior Human Settlements Officer, UN-Habitat, Fukuoka, Japan)

Introduction to the seminar :

Somsook (Thailand) : Today we will be talking about the people and the communities who are directly affected by disasters and about why and how they should become the most important actors in the process of rehabilitation after those disasters. We have a good number of people from Asia with us today, and all of them are working on different aspects of disasters.



A note on the report :

This report was prepared by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) in November 2008.

The report is a full transcript of the discussion which took place during ACHR's two-hour seminar entitled "Communities as key actors in disaster rehabilitation" at the World Urban Forum in Nanjing, China. The transcribed text has been only slightly edited to prune a little repetition and clip a few grammatical and syntactical thorns - hopefully not so much that the voices of the speakers still come through.

BLUE BOXES : All supplementary material that has been added to the report (but was not actually part of the discussion) has been placed in blue boxes.

For the support given to make this seminar at the World Urban Forum possible, we have very special thanks to give to our good friends at the International Institute for Environment and Development (UK), Misereor (Germany) and the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (USA). And thanks also to UN-Habitat for making space available for this seminar to take place.

Why this **PEOPLE'S FORUM** is a little different :

We come to many, many big meetings like this, and always what we hear are the experts, the professionals and the big people from big international agencies giving their reports and saying things on behalf of poor people. But this will be one out of all the sessions at this prestigious World Urban Forum where poor people themselves are the ones to speak. The poor people who are the ones most affected by different kinds of disasters and the real owners of all the problems that come with disasters will be the main speakers. This is their forum. This is their space. Professionals and international participants in the room are also welcome to join in the discussion, if you feel there is some point missing or some aspect that has not been treated properly. But mostly let us listen to these people as they tell their stories, assess their situations and make whatever points or recommendations they think may be important.

In this way, this session is organized in recognition of the huge changes that have come about in our societies, but which our development and governance systems have not been able to change along with - at least not very much. Our tired old development systems still operate on the assumption that change can happen only from the top, from the *supply side* of the development equation. We are not yet in the habit of seeking change from the bottom, from the *demand side* of the development equation: *from the people*.

The world today has changed and people have changed with it. With the development of the media and all kinds of new communication tools, even poor people in the most backward corners of Asia see things around the world and around their country. They understand things better than ever and recognize their place in a much larger context. *And they are hungry for change for the better*. The prevailing development theories and processes, however, are not following this movement, are not changing fast enough to keep up with these changes - in the world as a whole and in people's perceptions and aspirations. I hope that this session on community involvement in post-disaster rehabilitation will contribute to a growing body of knowledge about how *change by people* can happen - and should happen.

We have several groups here today - from Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Vietnam and Sri Lanka. We also have a friend with us from the United States, from the city of New Orleans that was affected by Hurricane Katrina - a city that is still waiting for help from the government. The people from communities in these different countries have all faced major disasters and major struggles to rebuild their lives and communities. They have a great deal of expertise and they understand from first-hand experience how to deal with disasters and how to develop a rehabilitation process by people, on the ground.

We decided to organize this session a little differently than our seminar in the last World Urban Forum in Vancouver, when all the participants were survivors of the same disaster - the December 2004 Asian tsunami. This time, since our participants come from so many different places and have had so many different disaster experiences, we decided to begin by just letting these different groups tell their own stories and bring out some of the different possibilities and different strategies in their work.

So we will start the session by asking the members from each group to briefly introduce themselves and to tell us what kind of disaster situations they have faced and what people in their places have done to deal with the problems they faced. No need to be too long, because we all know by now about different kinds of disasters. And we all know that more disasters are going to come, because of global warming, because of ignorance, because of unlimited and wrongful development, because of greed, because of many things which are unfortunately increasing. We are already having to face increasing numbers of these calamities in many Asian cities and in many parts of the world.





“I was there five days after the storm, and I went to some areas where I could see people fixing their houses, helping each other and organizing themselves.”

A note on names : Because of severe government restrictions on the flow of information and aid in and out of Nargis-affected areas of Burma, groups offering relief and rehabilitation support to survivors there have had to work in ways that are extremely quiet and low-key - sometimes even anonymous - in order to continue. For this reason, our participants from Burma have asked that their own names and the names of their organizations be withheld from this report. For more information, please contact ACHR.

BURMA

“But one of the very good things inside Burma has been the people. They are not waiting for help from the government.”

Mr. M. (Thailand) : I’m a Thai, but we have been working inside Burma for twelve years on a grassroots leadership training project, through my organization, which is based in Thailand. These are my colleagues from two of our partner organizations inside Burma, who have also gotten involved with the Nargis work, Mr. M.D. and Mr. K.Z.

Mr. M. D. (Burma) : (showing PowerPoint photos) Cyclone Nargis struck Burma on May 2, 2008, and took away the lives of at least 130,000 people, leaving millions homeless and destitute, most of them from small farming villages in the Irrawaddy Delta region of western Burma. After the cyclone, several of us wanted to go help. First we went to the area, bringing as much food and medicines as we could gather among ourselves. But it wasn’t only us and other international groups coming in to assist. There were many individual people from all over Burma who spontaneously donated things and came to help the cyclone survivors in different ways.

But after a month or so, the donations and visits slowed down, even though the situation of the Nargis survivors continued to be very bad. So several groups in our network of local of voluntary organizations began to think about doing something more than just delivering rice and medicines. First we raised some funds, and then we went back to the Irrawaddy Delta area and began to gather information and survey some of the worst-hit areas. Many of the affected communities and other local groups we had been working with before the cyclone expressed interest in working together and adding strength to this movement for Burmese people to help Nargis survivors in various parts of the delta region. They launched several kinds of activities in these areas in house reconstruction, food production and repairing the damaged infrastructure. They also took care of the well-being of these traumatized communities, who had lost everything.

Cyclone Nargis, May 2008



For two days, May 2-3, 2008, Cyclone Nargis pounded Burma (Myanmar) with winds and rain that were powerful enough to uproot huge trees, blow away houses and create tidal surges which flooded a good part of the country. It was a disaster on the same or even greater scale than 2004 Asian tsunami.

An estimated 140,000 people perished in the calamity, most in the Irrawaddy Delta area, Yangon District and the Kayin and Mon States, which bore the worst effects of the storm. Information coming from Yangon gradually began to reveal the severity of the storm, with homelessness, water shortages and sharply increasing food prices affecting a large majority of the country’s population - a population already

impoverished and vulnerable after years of economic instability and increasing inability to meet their basic needs.

Everybody knows already the story about how reluctant the generals in Burma’s ruling junta were to let in any foreign aid, or how slow they were to respond to this enormous catastrophe with any kind of assistance for people.

In the weeks before the UN and foreign aid organizations were finally allowed in, the greatest source of help and support to the cyclone victims came from Burmese people themselves, and particularly from monks in the vast network of local Buddhist temples around the country, which gave shelter to people who’d lost their homes, helped provide whatever food and health assistance they could, and helped organize cremation ceremonies for the dead.



After three months or so, the affected communities began to be more active and the quality of their participation got stronger. We gave them some training on development issues. The communities also got some support to start their own self-help savings and loan groups and to plan how to rebuild their communities from visiting community groups from the tsunami-hit areas of southern Thailand. After four or five months, we shifted the focus of our work from initial relief to the longer-term issues of livelihood and rehabilitation. We began to focus our work on restoring people's means of livelihood - giving loans to the farmers for seeds to plant a new crop of paddy and vegetables. We also gave loans to fisher folk and to villagers to start small businesses.

Mr. K. Z. (Burma) : I work with an Yangon-based organization, and before Nargis, we never went to rural communities at all. After the storm, when everything was in a state of chaos, we had no idea what to do or how to help. And even until today, we don't have exact details about the effects of the storm. Because our voluntary group is a registered in Burma, it was very difficult and risky for us to do anything openly in the cyclone-hit areas. I have twice been confronted by the authorities asking, "Who are you? What are you doing here? What is your background? Where did you get the money for these activities?" It is difficult to answer these questions. The authorities in Burma - the government, the police, the soldiers - don't like any kind of gathering or organizing, and they're suspicious of any group that tries to organize anything.

Mr. M. : As you know, some 2.5 million Burmese people were victims of this cyclone Nargis. So far, we have been able to cover only a small part of the cyclone-affected area of the Irrawaddy Delta. Some other NGOs have been working in the area as well, but even now, six months later, more than 60% of the cyclone victims have not been reached by any kind of external assistance.

In a situation where people can't depend on the government, they do for themselves

Mr. M. : But one of the very good things inside Burma has been the people. They are not waiting for help from the government. This is one of the good parts because they *cannot* depend on the government. This is why three days after Nargis hit, the people just did it by themselves, organizing without any organizations or NGOs to help them.

I was there five days after the storm, and I went to some areas where I could see people fixing their houses, helping each other and organizing themselves. Also the Buddhist monks and the churches in the local areas were helping people.

The best approach to use in Burma is to let the people do it, with the help of whatever traditional institutions exist in the area, which have a long connection with the local communities.

There is a definitely a role for NGOs, though. NGOs like ours can help with some parts, but our work is made very difficult by the government, which tries to control everything more and more.



The network of monks, temples, monasteries, churches, local voluntary organizations and grassroots groups around the country - and particularly in the Irrawaddy Delta area - has already been very useful in assessing needs directly with and through local grassroots partners and channeling relief and aid to the victims over a very large area.



Somsook : The problems after Cyclone Nargis are very big in Burma: so many deaths and so many difficulties for the survivors to find their way. So they solve the problems all by themselves, as much as possible. But even when they try to do so, with some support from various agencies, the military and the police and the local authorities are checking, *Where did you get that money from?* Instead of supporting the people properly, they are interrupting their efforts to rebuild their lives and villages and making it more difficult for outside support to reach the people in need.

But people are trying to help themselves, and they have been able to set up savings groups in many villages, to work together and to use a small common fund to support their rehabilitation and to decide how they are going to rebuild their houses, their farms and their livelihoods together.



“There are certainly lots and lots of natural disasters. But there are also disasters that are entirely man-made, like this one.”

INDONESIA

Somsook : Many of these disaster stories we are hearing today - the cyclones and typhoons, the floods and earthquakes, the volcanic eruptions and landslides - are similar in that they are *natural disasters*. But there are also disasters that are entirely man-made. In Indonesia we have a case where a very big company, run by one of the country's richest men, secretly began drilling for natural gas in Porong, a part of the country which has a lot of volcanic activity and a very fragile geological crust. And because they drilled too deeply and too carelessly into the ground, without following the proper procedures, they triggered an eruption of boiling hot volcanic mud. For the past two years, this mud volcano has continued to spew out hot mud, displacing some 10,000 families and burying their houses, their villages and their farms with an ever-deepening and broadening lake of mud.

Winarko : We came from Indonesia and we want to share some information about what some people say is a kind of disaster that has no precedent in the world. I want to show you some pictures to start our story (*shows in a PowerPoint the photo shown above, of a vast lake of liquid mud, with a sunset in the distance*). I often ask people to guess where I took this picture. Most think it is at the beach somewhere, because we can see the horizon where the sun is setting. And when we sit in the mud-flow area and look out over the growing lake of mud in Sidoarjo, in East Java, it *does* sometimes feel like a beach. Except that there, the “sea” is where all our homes and rice fields used to be.

Two years ago, this was all a very green area of paddy fields and trees and small farming villages. It was a very peaceful area and well developed. But up to now, 800 hectares of this beautiful land has been covered by the hot mud, which is also full of toxins. And we want to tell you that this mud volcano has not yet stopped. Nobody knows how long it will continue to spew out hot mud. No experts can tell us how much longer it will continue.



Porong Mud Volcano, May 2006



The mud volcano at Porong, in the Sidoarjo area of Eastern Java, began spewing out hot mud on May 28, 2006. A big Indonesian company, Lapindo Brantas, had been secretly drilling for natural gas in the area, and its reckless drilling procedures and failure to use safety casings on the drilling equipment resulted in a massive upsurge of gases and toxic mud at high pressure.

Both the company and the Indonesian government at first claimed the mud volcano was caused by an earthquake in another part of Java. But in October 2008, an international team of leading geologists concluded that the volcano's eruption, which triggered a social and environmental disaster, was definitely caused by Brantas' drilling for gas. Despite all attempts to block

the hole, the mud kept coming out, submerging a larger and larger area with the hot, toxic mud. The mud volcano has now been flowing for over two years, creating a mud lake that initially submerged 4 villages which are now found within the mud levee built by the government to protect the surrounding areas. These four communities totaling 1,600 families, were relocated to a newly constructed market. Although attempts have been made to contain the mud flood, many more villages are being slowly submerged under the thick blanket of mud.

To date, over 75,000 people have been displaced from 14 villages with a 3km radius of the well center. The slow expansion of the mud lake means people have had to watch helplessly as their houses, farmland and communities are destroyed over an extended period of time, without the help and attention most sudden disasters would get.

Uplink's growing **DISASTER** portfolio :

Urban Poor Linkage (Uplink) is a network of poor community groups, professionals and NGOs in 14 Indonesian cities, working to establish strong, independent city-level and national networks of urban poor communities which can develop and promote just and pro-poor alternative social, economic and cultural systems in Indonesian cities. The network is coordinated by the Jakarta-based NGO *Urban Poor Consortium (UPC)*.

After the tsunami in December 2004, UPC began working in Aceh, the most devastated area in all of Asia. At first they organized urban poor groups from across the country to contribute cash, clothing, food and tools, and mobilized volunteers to come help in the relief efforts. They soon began working more closely with a group of 25 villages along the devastated west coast of Banda Aceh, to support an extraordinary process by which these communities used the process of rebuilding their ruined houses and communities to begin a long term process of rebuilding their lives and livelihoods.

When the earthquake hit Yogyakarta in East Java in May 2006, killing thousands and leaving half a million people homeless, Uplink was there within hours mobilizing emergency relief supplies and setting up emergency centers. A week later, they were helping organize village teams for *Gogur Gunung*, a local term for team work, to begin cleaning up the rubble from their ruined houses in several communities, instead of waiting around for slow-moving government assistance.

These disaster rehabilitation projects are breaking the myth that disaster victims are helpless, and showing that when the affected communities themselves are at the center of the relief and reconstruction, the rebuilding can become a community-strengthening, security-building and livelihood-generating opportunity.

TSUNAMI in ACEH December 2004



EARTHQUAKE in Yogyakarta May 2006



FLOODS in Jakarta February 2007



So far, 75,000 people have been displaced by the mud volcano, and the number is increasing as the mud spreads into a wider area. These people have lost everything. Somehow, the government and the company that caused the disaster have not given much attention to this, nor have they asked for any help from the international community, as they did with other disasters in Indonesia. And now I will try to translate for my two colleagues who come from the affected communities in Porong. Wiwi's house has already been buried in the mud, and Irsyad's village is still OK, but all his farmland has been lost.

Wahjutini ("Wiwi") : My name is Wahjutini, and I am one of the direct victims of this disaster. My house is gone, it has been completely submerged by the mud. This disaster started on May 28, 2006, when a company called Lapindo Brantas came to drill in our village. This company is a joint venture between Santos Australia and a company owned by the wealthiest man in Indonesia. When they applied for permission to start their activities in our area, they told us they were going to set up a livestock factory. We only came to know that they were actually drilling for gas after the disaster started happening.

Winarko : Because the company didn't follow the standard safety procedures (they didn't use the required safety casings on their drilling equipment and drilled too deeply, 3,000 meters), when they hit a high pressure area and removed the drilling equipment, massive amounts of gases and boiling hot mud began to spew at high pressure like a volcano up through the hole. And as the mud flow increased, the hole got bigger and bigger. Today, the volume of mud that comes out has reached 150,000 cubic meters per day. This volume is equivalent to 50 Olympic-size swimming pools of mud, every day, without stopping for over two years.

Wiwi : The mud covered everything: our houses, our rice fields, schools, factories, churches, mosques, even the grave yards where our ancestors lie buried. Therefore we call for support from the international community that attends this forum, since our government seems to be powerless against this company. Please help us - we have to stop the mud to start to restore people's lives, and the company has to start realizing their responsibility and paying compensation to the victims. And finally, please be very careful about drilling for fossil fuels in your places, because in Porong, we have all experienced how greediness for oil and gas has caused suffering for so many thousands of people. Thank you.

Winarko : We suspect that the political complications and delays we have faced in getting this disaster stopped and in getting help for people are because the owner of the Lapindo Brantas company was the Minister of Social Welfare who is supposed to be taking care of these kinds of disasters!

Somsook : So this mud flow is a disaster that is still happening and still causing suffering. But people are organizing. You can see in the PowerPoint photos that people in Porong are trying to come together and trying to talk to the authorities, from the local area right up to the central government authorities. Unfortunately, the rich man who made this hole in the ground is a minister! So it makes the negotiations a little tough.

Disaster survivors speak at the **World Urban Forum Nanjing**, November 2008



PHILIPPINES

Somsook : Now we will turn to the Philippines, which is a country that faces many kinds of disasters. But the Homeless People's Federation is trying to get people affected by many of these disasters to organize themselves and to find a way to rebuild their communities themselves. We have with us today two community leaders from the Bikol region, an area which faced the triple disaster of two back-to-back typhoons and a volcano eruption.



Rollie : I am from the Philippines and I work on disaster intervention with the Homeless People's Federation. I was dispatched to intervene with the victims of the two typhoons that hit the Bikol region in September and November of 2006. This area is 519 kilometers south of Manila on the island of Luzon. During the first typhoon, thousands of houses were destroyed, and just when people were starting to repair their houses, the second and much fiercer typhoon hit. And on the same day the second typhoon hit, the Mount Mayon volcano erupted. Hundreds of people were buried in their houses or while trying to run to safety. The local hospitals could not cope with the hundreds of injured survivors, and many had to go to neighboring provinces for care. Communications and roads in the area were destroyed. For the people who survived, their houses, their belongings, their appliances, and their livelihoods were all gone. But the Homeless People's Federation rushed to the area and began making contact with survivors two days after the storm.

SEVEN STEPS to energize a traumatized community :

1 MADE CONTACT AND CONDUCTED SURVEYS : We began immediately by linking with contact people in the displaced communities, who were all busy trying to meet their immediate needs. We asked them what they needed, and they said they have no food, no noodles, no rice. So we began by trying to help mobilize these things, and used the relief stage to begin surveying the survivors in the three worst-affected municipalities: Guinobatan, Daraga and Camalig.

2 THOUGHT LONG-TERM COMMUNITY REBUILDING : For the federation, our strategy was not just to provide relief help and then go away, but to make a long-term binding with these affected communities. Many of these people didn't know each other very well before the crisis. We can use the short-term relief assistance to help bring them together and develop a long-term rebuilding process that they manage themselves - *together*.

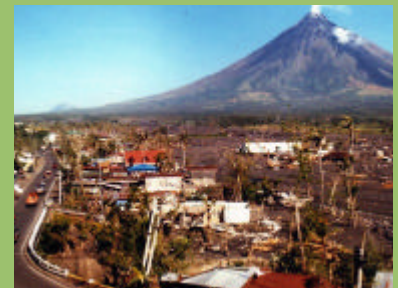
3 STARTED SAVINGS GROUPS : Even though they were disaster victims and living in temporary shelters, we right away introduced our savings program, to help the survivors organize themselves and start managing finances and activities together, as communities. *And they saved!* Within a year, all the savings groups in the three municipalities had collectively saved more than a million pesos (US\$ 20,500).

4 ORGANIZED EXPOSURE VISITS : We also organized several exposure visits of teams of community leaders and some key local government officials from Bikol. These groups traveled to Quezon City to learn about community savings and about the housing initiatives that poor waste-pickers had carried out themselves, through their savings groups and homeowners associations, after the deadly garbage slide at Payatas in July 2000.

5 SEARCHED FOR ALTERNATIVE LAND, FORMED HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATIONS : It wasn't possible for many survivors to go back to their old land, since the government declared the whole area a "no man's land" after the volcano eruption. The government offered alternative land, but it was too far away, and not everybody who needed land was on the beneficiary list. So the Homeless People's Federation helped the people to begin their own search for suitable and affordable land in a safer place, so they wouldn't face this kind of disaster every year. We helped them to form legal homeowners associations, so they could buy the new land collectively, and to negotiate cheaper selling prices with the owners of several possible sites they identified - all within five kilometers.

6 NEGOTIATED WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES : After that, we faced a lot of challenges with the local government, which considered us as competitors to their relocation scheme. They even threatened us. The alternative land they were offering survivors was "free" but it was coming without any title or any legal papers. We told the people that this kind of "free land" is very risky, because maybe in the next month or the next year, they may be evicted from that land. Finally, the change from the *dole-out mentality* into a self-help initiative has become very healthy and strong in that region.

7 LOANED PEOPLE MONEY TO BUY LAND : With down payments from the people's savings, and land loans from the Federation's Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF), the organized survivors in all three of the affected municipalities have collectively purchased three pieces of land in safer places - one in each municipality - and developed subdivision plans for their new settlements.





Jocelyn : Actually the government prepared its own relocation sites for people who'd lost their land and houses. but there were not enough plots for the large number of affected families. The government always says there is not enough money to relocate all the affected people. So the communities organized themselves, with help from the Homeless People's Federation and implemented the savings program and bought their own land for their own relocation sites. The three pieces of land they bought will accommodate 343 affected families, each with 100 square meter plots. Now they are working together to as a group to plan and build their new houses on the land.

“The Philippines Government has a lot of rules about developing land and housing that make it very hard for communities to do it themselves.”

The old problem of **RULES** and **REGULATIONS** getting in the way :

Jocelyn : But we are facing big problems with compliance and permits now, because the Philippines Government has a lot of rules about developing land and housing that make it very hard for communities to do it themselves. The authorities say the lots are not the right size, the people's housing plans are not up to the government's standards, the cheap agricultural land they bought is not yet allowed for housing subdivisions, the houses can't be built until the right permissions are given.

Because of these problems, nearly one and a half years after the disaster, many of these families are still camping in evacuation centers - they have their own land, but until now they are not allowed to build on it. But we are always trying to negotiate with the local government and housing agencies in our country to get the necessary permits, so the people can build their own houses on the land they have bought.



Somsook : The Philippines is a country that is very kind to the rest of Asia because it always stops or slows down the typhoons that come from the East, on their way to Vietnam or Thailand. But because of their position at the eastern-most edge of Asia, they have to face at least 30 typhoons every year - and about five really bad ones. These storms cause serious problems for everybody, but especially for poor and vulnerable communities in their path. Luckily, the communities that link to the Homeless People's Federation are able to access the strength and abilities of the national federation. And the federation sends its leaders to help see how the affected groups in many of the country's disaster situations can solve their problems by themselves. They start with surveys, with gathering information, with discussions and with savings.

This whole process is not only about disaster relief, but it leads to a more permanent solution to the problems these vulnerable communities have long faced. Why? Because as Josie has said, whenever there are problems like this, the government says *“We have no money! No land! No solutions!”* People living in risky areas face this response year after year. But the federation's intervention helps the people in disaster situations to come together, start saving, build their own funds, link with the larger fund that the federation manages, and ultimately develop their own solution to the crisis - even though it may take a lot of hard work and hard negotiations. That is the story, that once communities are strengthened, they are able to find some solution.

2 typhoons + 1 volcano, November 2006

Two successive typhoons ravaged the Bikol region in the last half of 2006. Typhoon Xangsane (called in the Philippines *“Typhoon Milenyo”*) hit on September 27 and Typhoon Durian (called locally *“Typhoon Reming”*) hit on November 30, which came in with a fury of more rains and stronger winds at 225 kilometers per hour and ravaged the newly repaired and renovated houses and structures as a result of Xangsane.

In a bizarre coincidence, the Mount Mayon volcano erupted on the same day that Typhoon Durian hit. The volcano eruption and the storm together triggered huge floods, landslides, mud-slides and lava flows that brought huge car-sized boulders

crashing down into dikes, roads and houses in several localities around Mount Mayon, along with mud and land slides, leaving at least 500 people dead and hundreds more missing. The land within and around three severely-affected municipalities was declared “no man's land,” to which none of the survivors will be allowed to return.

The double-disaster at Mount Mayon is just one of many calamities in the Philippines, a country with more than its fair share of just about every kind of natural disaster. The country experiences volcanoes, earthquakes, landslides, flash floods, garbage slides and at least twenty or thirty typhoons a year, of which at least five are particularly severe.





When people manage the relief money :

When the big floods hit Uttaradit and Phrae in May 2006, killing hundreds, flooding 1,000 villages and causing land-slides, CODI was involved in helping to organize a bottom-up, tsunami-style, community-based clean up and house rebuilding campaign in 700 villages. Special rehabilitation funds were set up immediately in each village, which the people managed collectively, to support the house-building, farm revitalizing and clearing work, and to draft village rehabilitation plans to use as blueprints for the various government agencies to support.

THAILAND



Somsook : Now we will turn to Thailand, which has a similar experience of how community networks are playing an increasingly important role in supporting communities hit by disasters. The idea is that we shouldn't leave single communities to solve these problems in isolation. Larger community networks can assist disaster-affected communities and link them together with other communities that are facing similar problems, or have faced them in the past.

Amporn : I work with the Community Organizations Development Institute, which works with community-based organizations in urban and rural areas throughout the country. In Thailand we have experienced several kinds of disasters. In December 2004, we faced the tsunami and nearly 10,000 people died. In 2006, we had big, big floods which covered about 30% of the total area of the country. Mr. Siwakorn is a community leader and a rice farmer from the central part of Thailand. If any of you eat the famous Thai jasmine rice, perhaps it comes from his farm. He will tell you about the big floods in 2006 and I will translate.

Siwakorn : After Typhoon Xangsane hit the Philippines and Vietnam in 2006, it reached Thailand and caused massive flooding and landslides in 29 of the country's 76 provinces. The worst-affected were 15 provinces in the central part of Thailand, in the Chao Phraya River delta. The government assistance that came in response to the floods had some problems - *it didn't go the right way or to the right people and communities, and it came with the wrong kind of solution.*

“The people’s movement in Thailand is increasing. The community networks around the country are organizing themselves and linking communities together on many different levels.”

And so the flood-affected communities organized themselves to help each other. They collected information themselves about the damage and about the various needs of affected families. In these communities - in both rural and urban areas - everyone knew very well who got what damage and which people were the most in need of assistance.

In the past, it was part of the natural cycle that every year or two the Chao Phraya River and its tributaries in central Thailand would flood. The annual floods were nothing tragic - they brought fertile silt and nutrients and fish to the rice paddies and farm land, and everyone knew how to cope with the water. But these floods usually lasted only for a week, or ten days at the most. These recent floods are something quite different. The quantity and force of the water is much greater, and the towns and fields stay flooded for about two months. The rice and crops in the fields can't survive underwater for that long, and the harvest is lost.



There are many reasons for this new kind of disastrous flooding - and for more frequent landslides in mountainous areas - besides climate change: wrongful development, urbanization, blockage of waterways by dams and new monoculture farming practices in the mountain areas upstream where there used to be forests.

The people's movement in Thailand is increasing. The community networks around the country are organizing themselves and linking communities together on many different levels - at local sub-district level, district level, provincial level and also at regional level. They also link together communities affected by floods and other kinds of disasters in different regions of the country. The network of communities affected by the tsunami, in southern Thailand, for example, has been an important source of ideas and assistance for many other disaster situations.



Thailand is a country rich in **COMMUNITY NETWORKS**

“Instead of just passively reacting to these disasters only AFTER they have happened, these community networks are trying to see how they can build a more systematic collaboration between the community groups and the government, BEFORE the disasters happen.”



Somsook : Thailand is a country with so many kinds of community networks: people link together in the same cities, along the same waterways, in the same forests, on the same state-owned land - there are many, many different kinds of community networks forming and working together in the country. In the past few years, as disasters have occurred in increasing number and severity, all these networks have also been linking together and looking into the issue of disasters together. Instead of just passively being the affected groups and reacting to these disasters only after they have happened, these networks are trying to see how they can help each other and how they can build a little more systematic collaboration between the community groups and the government, *before the disasters happen*. By being together in these large networks, it makes the voice of the people a little stronger when they sit together with the government. These are the kinds of networks that have been mobilized to deal with various disasters and to find ways that the rehabilitation process happens in a faster, better and more inclusive way.

Floods and landslides, May - October 2006

2006 was one of the worst years of flooding in living memory in Thailand. During that year's long rainy season, there were storms, cyclones and extraordinarily heavy rainfall. Between May and October, nearly three-quarters of the country's 76 provinces experienced waves of flooding, landslides, burst dams, washed-out roads, swollen rivers, destroyed crops and destruction of urban and rural infrastructure. It's up for debate whether all that destruction was caused by global warming, El Nino or by the wrongful stewardship of the country's waterways, forests mountains and river deltas. But one thing is certain: like the devastating tsunami in 2004, the scale of this ongoing calamity proved too great for the government and aid organizations alone to respond to properly.

And like the tsunami, the role of horizontal relief and rehabilitation, which was directed and managed by coalitions of community networks and flood-affected people themselves (especially those poorest and most vulnerable), proved to be a vital, efficient, fast, flexible and effective supplement to formal relief and reconstruction efforts. And again, as with the tsunami, when the affected people took a key role in the reconstruction of their damaged houses and villages and in the rehabilitation of their livelihoods, the disaster became an opportunity for longer-term development gains for some of the country's poorest rural and urban communities.

The 2006 floods - and the many, many disasters which have followed since then - have allowed the people-centered relief and rehabilitation processes which were developed in the aftermath of the tsunami to be put back into use, scaled up, refined and streamlined by community networks into a national process which is as much about planning before disasters happen as it is about responding to disasters after they happen.

All over the country, community networks at provincial level are now working with local government departments to gather and understand technical information about disaster-prone areas, and using this data to inform a process of community-managed disaster planning, before the disasters happen. The idea of this process is to get the communities in areas prone to disasters to prepare themselves and to develop systems for dealing with various disaster problems.

People are usually accustomed to dealing with disasters only after they happen. For most of them, this is their first experience developing disaster plans when the floods haven't flooded yet and the mud hasn't slid yet! But this is the year that people are beginning to think of things like that and beginning to link together before, during and after the rehabilitation period.





“The entire reconstruction was in the hands of the people themselves. And the government money was given directly to people, in three installments, with a lot of support mechanisms for them to be able to build on their own. That was the strategy, and India is probably the only government that has adopted this strategy at this scale, as a policy.”

INDIA



Somsook : India is another place where they have lots of earthquakes. And we have two people with us here from a group in western India who will present one example of how they have found a way for the families and communities affected by a major earthquake to become the key actors in dealing with the situation. Instead of giving the relief assistance to contractors, they were able to convince the government to allow people to rebuild their houses and villages, using their own knowledge. The government provided its compensation directly to the families and the NGO provided technical and organizational support.

Prashant : I work with an organization called Hunnarshala which has been working in Kutch for many years. With me is Hirabhai. He is a carpenter by trade and comes from a family who have also been carpenters for generations and generations. He is a really good singer as well.



Hirabhai : In the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, my village of Meghpur, and all the surrounding villages were totally destroyed. The NGOs came pretty quickly in the first couple of days, and they gave us food, clothing, medicines and relief items. But we didn't know whether the NGOs that were coming would help us with housing. So we got together ourselves and made small temporary shelters from whatever materials we could salvage from the rubble.

Then, Manav Sadha, an Ahmedabad-based organization, came to our village and offered to help rebuild our houses. This NGO gave us timber roofing materials and helped transport suitable mud, and we built our own houses using our own labor and building skills.

Meanwhile, the government came and surveyed all the houses, and categorized them according to level of damage, from G-1 to G-5 (G-1 being partially damaged and G-5 being totally destroyed), and according to that assessment, the people were given compensation, in different amounts. The compensation was given in installments: the first installment (about 40%) was given right away to the villagers, the later installments were given when their new houses reached lintel and roof levels. The money went right into the bank accounts that each family had to set up.

Earthquake in Kutch, Gujarat State, January 2001

On the morning of 26 January, 2001, a devastating earthquake rocked Kutch, a desert region in Gujarat, India's westernmost state. 200,000 houses in 400 towns and villages were destroyed, and 20,000 people were killed. The area's main city, Bhuj, was almost totally demolished by the earthquake.

After the earthquake, a network of NGO's called Abhiyan (and its partner technical NGO called Hunnarshala), based in Bhuj, worked with the communities and the government to develop an "owner-driven" reconstruction strategy in which the entire reconstruction was in the hands of the people themselves, and the government money was given directly to people, in three installments. Many support

mechanisms were also set-up to enable people to build on their own. Abhiyan was involved with helping develop many support mechanisms so that people could actually rebuild their houses properly and in their own ways, using their own particular building traditions, but with earthquake-proof techniques.

It was a very successful disaster reconstruction program, in both the urban and rural areas. More than 200,000 houses came up in just one and half years - most of them built by people - and the safety levels in these new houses were almost 86%. And the diversity of construction that finally emerged - in both design and materials - was possible only because people were deciding on their own.



“Our village is a village of traditional crafts people. After the earthquake, the NGO actually asked us for advice on which materials to use and where to get them.”

Hirabhai : People were allowed to choose whether they wanted to build their houses themselves, or whether they wanted the NGO to build them. And they were also allowed to decide whether they wanted to rebuild their houses together or individually. A few NGOs came to our village, and one (KMVS/Hunnarshala) built some round houses, using mud and cement. When this NGO came to our village, we had a village meeting and decided that we would work with that NGO. We were afraid that if we got the money directly, then people wouldn't use it to rebuild their houses but spend it on other things like food or clothing. So we wanted the NGO to play the safeguarding role. In my village and the surrounding villages, about 35% of the houses were built with NGO help, and the rest were built by people themselves.

The materials we use to build our houses - the mud, the wood and the roof tiles - all come from the local area. The NGO actually asked us for advice on which materials to use and where to get them. Our village is a village of craftspeople. In my family, we are all carpenters and wood-carvers, and next-door is somebody who does stone masonry. Others do earthwork. And so we all knew where to get the cheapest and best materials. So using our advice, the NGO was able to get materials very cheaply and therefore build houses very cheaply.

I'm not an NGO or a government worker. I'm simply a village carpenter. But me and my team of carpenters from my village were able to build over 4,000 roofs on new houses in my region of Kutch, after the earthquake. And I am proud to say ours was one of the first regions to come back up after the earthquake.

The amazing “BHUNGA” houses of Kutch . . .

Hirabhai : In my region of Kutch, Banni Vistar, we call our traditional round houses “bhunga.” They are built from mud (adobe) walls, with cone-shaped roofs made of timber, bamboo and thatch. In all the villages around here, the houses we always build - and our ancestors have always built - are round *bhungas*.

The *bhungas* are able to resist the horizontal forces much better than rectangular houses during an earthquake. So the houses that we rebuilt after the earthquake are also round, but we built them much stronger, with extra steel reinforcing, so that cyclones and earthquakes won't affect them very much when they happen again in Kutch.



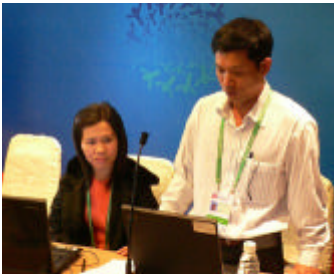
Hirabhai : And then CRS (Christian Relief Services), the third NGO, came and also built houses with us. I have some land near my house, and I offered the use of this land to the NGO to set up a yard for making earthen blocks. And they made earthen blocks there for the whole surrounding area. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you. Please forgive me for any mistakes I might have made!



“This is a very important experience, because in Kutch, people have confidence in their knowledge: how they should build their houses. And after the earthquake, they stood up and said this is the kind of house we want to build. And little by little, they were able to convince the government that the best way is to pass the budget directly to the families.”

Somsook : So the government asked all the affected families to open bank accounts, and they passed the budget directly to each family. And in the local area, the community people sat together and decided what kind of housing they wanted. So this allowed the people the freedom to discuss, to think and to build their houses after the disaster. So they could use their considerable knowledge. Otherwise, all the ideas of what people should and shouldn't do come from international agencies, outside experts, NGOs and government - so it all looks the same, thousands of houses all lined up and all from only one model! Just boxes with windows and doors. No indigenous knowledge, no vernacular wisdom, no traditional patterns, no local variations. In Gujarat, we see a whole rich culture of building coming with the people. And when we let the people do it, all that culture comes into the reconstruction quite naturally.

VIETNAM



Somsook : In Vietnam's socialist system, we have another kind of structure with government and mass organizations at the center and with branches in each province, in each district and in each and every ward. They're trying to find a way that this extensive formal government system can be as active and as accountable as possible to the problems people face when disasters strike. And Vietnam is another country with a lot of natural disasters - floods, cyclones, landslides, fires. Today we are looking at disasters from many angles, and with this group from Vietnam, we can see an approach in which the government tries to go into urgent disaster situations and to let the people's problems determine the government's plan of assistance.

Dr. Liem (ENDA Vietnam) : We have two persons here with us today: Ms. Huong is working in the field as one of the staff in Vietnam's Women's Union, and Mr. Sy is the chairman of a ward in the city of Danang and he has for many years been involved in community development and also disasters.

Sy (Chairman of one of Thuan Phuoc Ward, Danang City) : (Showing PowerPoint) This is an example of community rehabilitation after the Typhoon Xangsane hit the city of Danang in September 2006. We have the experience for many years of dealing with this kind of disaster and have a workable system already in place. After the storm, the district government formed task force with the Women's Union and different agencies and mass organizations, first to get some quick information on the situation and what people needed, who got what kind of damage. The relief and rehabilitation work was implemented almost entirely at the local level - in the affected communities. In response to the storm the government provided assistance to affected families in several ways:



- **Housing:** The government provided five million Dong (US\$ 320) to each poor household whose house was destroyed. Other households also got help funding and labor to repair their houses.
- **Food:** The government ensured no one was hungry and provided noodles and rice and other food items to all the affected families.
- **Environment and health:** Government agencies and civil partners actively engaged in activities to clean up the environment after the storm and to provide medical help.

Small grants and loans were offered to households and individuals through the Women's Union, the Policy Bank and other community development programs. People used the loans to repair and renovate their houses and restore small businesses that had been damaged by the storm.

What did we learn from the Typhoon Xangsane rehabilitation experience? We learned that at community level, it is important to get infrastructure (like roads, communication lines, health clinics, schools, agricultural and fishing facilities, etc) back into operation as soon as possible. We learned that households and individuals need assistance to quickly restore their income-generation activities. And we learned that rehabilitation assistance needs to be done as soon as possible, right after disaster occurs.

Typhoon Xangsane, September 2006

Typhoon Xangsane hit the east coast of Vietnam at the end of September, 2006, and was the worst storm to have hit Danang in memory. In Danang Province alone, it destroyed 25,000 houses completely and damaged 300,000 houses.

“Four on the spot”

I would like you to look at these pictures, because we will explain later on the principles they illustrate. We feel that we were quite successful in responding to disasters in Danang based on four key principles which we follow all the time. (Dr. Liem : *There are always lots of slogans like this in Vietnam!*) We call these principles for disaster response “Four on the spot.”

1. The resources should come from the local area.
2. The direction and decisions should come from local communities and from people who live in the affected area.
3. The means and utilities (all the cars, boats - everything used in the disaster response) should come from the affected area.
4. The logistics of what should come and what should happen should be based at the community and local areas.



In conclusion, it is important that the community and the local authorities in the long run should always play a leading role to improve the well-being of its community members. And other institutions, government agencies, mass organizations, local and foreign NGOs should play a supportive and enabling role to provide basic and strategic opportunities for equity and sustainability.

Somsook : So in Vietnam, we can see a country where the formal systems and the people are linking together and working together after disasters happen.

SRI LANKA



People design, people build :

The house shown above, in the coastal town of Kosgoda, is part of a collective community rebuilding project that was designed and built entirely by families whose former houses were destroyed in the tsunami. This and many other houses were built with support from the local and national branches of Women's Bank and with financing from the Community Livelihood Action Program (ClapNet) fund. The ClapNet fund combines community savings, and donor grants from ACHR and Homeless International UK. Technical support for the project came from Sevanatha.

Tsunami, December 2004

The tsunami was without a doubt the most devastating natural catastrophe in Sri Lanka's history. 80% of the island's coastline was ravaged by the waves. Because these areas include some of the most urbanized and densely populated parts of the country, the death, suffering and physical destruction of housing and infrastructure was far greater.

17,000 people died and 200,000 houses were destroyed, leaving over a million people homeless. Nearly 10% of the country's population was affected, the overwhelming majority being the poor.

Somsook : I would like to ask Mr. Jayaratne to say a few words about how the tsunami helped to bring different groups to meet each other and work together, a little bit. Jaya has been intensely involved for the past four years in supporting a people-driven tsunami rehabilitation process, especially through his work with the Women's Bank, a very large, national network of small women's self-help savings groups.

Jayaratne (Sri Lanka) : I'm representing an NGO based in Colombo called Sevanatha. Over 100,000 houses were destroyed by the tsunami in Sri Lanka. As soon as the tsunami disaster happened, many donor agencies came forward, hired local consultants and contractors and began building houses for people. So if you ask the government now, they may say that 95% of the tsunami housing problem has been solved. But the thing we can learn from Sri Lanka is that many of these people who got their houses through the contractor-built system - maybe half of them - are not happy at all with their houses. They are unhappy for many reasons. People were not involved in the design of these houses and in many cases, the houses were not built according to their needs and far away from their jobs and places of livelihood.

Sri Lanka has long history of participatory housing. Unfortunately, when the tsunami hit about two-thirds of our coastline, many donors came forward to build houses for affected families. The government didn't use the decentralized institutional structure that had been involved in building houses with people more than 25 years ago. The tsunami housing was handled by newly-created centralized institutions, with people who did not have any experience in people's housing processes in Sri Lanka. Colombo-based consultants convinced donors that they knew how to design houses for people and donors got contractors to build houses. Most of the houses they built for affected people were far from their livelihoods and most were walk-up apartments which provided only minimal living spaces, without basic facilities like paved roads, drains, street lights, solid waste disposal and maintenance systems. Some families refused to live in such houses and went back to places closer to their jobs.

Then how to do it differently?

1 PEOPLE PLAN, PEOPLE BUILD : At the same time, we have been involved in a small process where we got the families to work together and they had control over both the design of the houses and the resources. They were also involved in the building of the houses and managing the whole construction process. If we compare these two approaches, the people who had control over the design and the money are invariably more happy. But where the people were not involved, there are still plenty of problems coming to the government or to the donor agencies to sort out.

2 PEOPLE CONTROL THE FUNDS : In another example, we worked with ACHR support to set up a common community fund for tsunami rehabilitation. When we gave control over this money to people, they opted to convert grants from the fund into seed capital for their own revolving loan funds, and it has become now a kind of community fund. Initially, the money from this fund was used for housing, but through this revolving mechanism, when the people repay their money, through their savings programs, later on they use this money for livelihood support, infrastructure, community waste systems and further housing improvements.

3 PEOPLE FORM LARGER NETWORKS : The important thing is that where the people were involved in this process, they are now getting into a larger network. It's not only the individual communities, but also they are learning from other experiences. So I think this is one thing we can learn from the tsunami rebuilding process in Sri Lanka, not to panic after a disaster, but to take the time and give the communities a chance to organize and also to get their participation into the design, as well as the construction of housing and infrastructure. Because in the long run, you find that the people who built their own houses and their own communities are more happy than the people who got the free houses.

Somsook : The tsunami was also able to bring several key groups in the country to work together. The Women's Development Bank Federation, another large national federation of community savings groups, has been able to build several housing projects for tsunami survivors, in collaboration with the Municipality of Moratuwa, one of the worst-hit cities on the southern coast of Sri Lanka.

What Jaya is saying is that if we use the disaster as a way in which communities can be strengthened and can work together, they can overcome many other problems - sometimes the land problem, sometimes the housing problem, sometimes the problem of groups never wanting to work together, sometimes the problem of not having the guts to take on big housing projects. When a disaster on the scale of the tsunami happens, it is in fact an opportunity - an opportunity to think big, to tackle all those problems and change that culture also.



“Although the United States is one of the richest countries in the world, our housing policy treats poor Americans as if they don’t matter.”

NEW ORLEANS, USA

Somsook : Now I would like to ask Sam, our friend who has come from New Orleans - *so far away!* - to say a few words about the experience of Hurricane Katrina, after it battered and flooded his city, which is in one of the richest countries in the world. America is a *superpower* country, but it turns out that when their disaster happened in New Orleans, they took much longer to deal with it than many poorer countries with much bigger disasters! So let’s listen and learn about what a disaster situation is like in a rich country.



Sam Jackson : And three years later, the disaster is still going on. Anybody here today from the United States besides us? (*two hands go up in the audience*) Where are you at? *How ya doin’?* Well, my name is Sam Jackson. I’m a resident of public housing in New Orleans. I’ve been living in public housing in New Orleans for 30 years. My wife and I we raised five kids in public housing. For those who don’t know, public housing is housing that the U.S. government provides to families that cannot afford housing in the private market.

Hurricane Katrina destroyed a big part of the city of New Orleans. My family and I were able to get out of the city before the flooding, but unfortunately, many of our neighbors and friends were left behind. And our government continues to leave them behind.

Hurricane Katrina, August 2005



Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005, but this historic city escaped the worst wrath of the storm’s 320 km/hr winds, which veered past the city. It was only later, when storm surges overwhelmed the system of levees which surround the city (which is mostly built on swampy, low-lying land in the delta of the Mississippi River) that the real devastation began. 80% of the city was flooded with a toxic swill of sewage, chemicals, rats, snakes and bloated corpses.

Despite calls for everyone to evacuate, some 100,000 people stayed in the city, many of them elderly or handicapped. About 1,500 of them died in New Orleans, mostly because they were trapped in their houses and drowned when the flood waters rose. News footage showed families trying to escape, huddled on rooftops and stranded on highway overpasses. Looters stripped stores and houses, while police officers fled the city or stole expensive cars from dealerships, claiming the cars were needed to transport Katrina victims. Public order completely collapsed, while the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), national, state and local agencies responded

to the crisis with ineptness and corruption at almost every level. To people watching the news broadcasts, or living through the nightmare in the city, New Orleans looked more like a war-zone in Iraq than a major American city.

200,000 housing units were destroyed in New Orleans city alone, and 750,000 New Orleans residents are still living as refugees in far-away cities all over the USA, where the government shipped them after the storm. Most can’t afford to repair their storm-damaged houses, can’t afford the skyrocketing rents, or they’ve been locked out of their public housing units. Despite the big loss of affordable housing since Katrina, the government decided to demolish most of the city’s public housing, even though it was only minimally damaged by the floods.

The worst affected were overwhelmingly poor and black. New Orleans had a pre-storm population of about 460,000 people. 75% of the people who lived in the most damaged neighborhoods were black, 30% were poor, 53% were renters and at least 10% were unemployed. These are the people who are least likely to have home insurance or the resources to return and rebuild. Without any help to return, a poor black city is rapidly turning into a rich white city.

How to get rid of a city's stock of **AFFORDABLE HOUSING** :

After the storm, the government decided to demolish most of the public housing in New Orleans. These were communities of families and friends who supported each other - *the only thing we did wrong was being poor*. We protested against this destruction of our communities, because we knew that if the city tore down the public housing, many of our family members, friends and neighbors wouldn't be able to return.

The funny thing is that the public housing wasn't badly damaged during the hurricane at all. In fact, they were some of the most solid structures in all of New Orleans. They were built to last out of bricks and mortar.

But despite all of our protests, demonstrations, and pleading, in April of 2008 the city of New Orleans began bulldozing over 4,800 units of public housing. Now these structures were solid brick buildings, nothing wrong with them. These were places where folks from the surrounding communities ran to during the storm, folks who were left in the city and didn't have anywhere safe to go. So the public housing was the safest place there was in city of New Orleans during the storm.



DEMOLISHED : 1,400 units of solid, decent, vibrant, minimally-damaged public housing at the Saint Bernard project.

Sam : Since Hurricane Katrina hit, the homeless population in New Orleans has doubled. Rents have increased at least 40%. And the new plans for the city do *not* include a "one for one" replacement of the public housing units they've already destroyed. We asked our city officials, "*Where are the poor people going to live?*" And, honestly, they just don't know. This is our city government! These are the people that are supposed to take care of the city, make sure the people are provided with housing and health care.

This is not just happening in New Orleans. This is happening to poor communities all across the United States. Under federal programs, government officials in Chicago, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Las Vegas and San Diego are demolishing their public housing communities too.

It started in New Orleans back during the National H.O.P.E. Program. Well you all probably don't know about the National Hope Program, and I'm telling you it wasn't anything about hope. The National Hope Program was a government program to tear down public housing and build *mixed income* units in the same place. Since the beginning of the national H.O.P.E. program, over 63,000 units of public housing have been destroyed all across the United States. This has increased homeless populations in these cities. Families - including women and children - have been left to fend for themselves after the destruction of their public housing.

Although the United States is one of the richest countries in the world, as Somsook said, our housing policy treats poor Americans as if they don't matter. By and large, the United States' housing policy is geared towards the private market and advancing corporate profits. With this current housing crisis, we see that this *mixed income* model doesn't work. We love mixed income housing, and we love beautiful housing, but it's just not working and not everybody who needs it can get into it.

So I am working with public housing residents and groups across the United States to ensure that the voices of Hurricane Katrina survivors and the voices of poor people and communities across the United States are heard. I hope that through the work of my organization, May Day New Orleans, not just the city of New Orleans but the entire United States will recognize the need for housing policies that address the needs of poor people and guarantee the human right to housing for all.

This is just one man's story, and I have many, many more stories to tell. But this story is still going on in the United States. When they say, well the United States is fine! Nothing wrong with the United States! But if you see it for yourself, if you go visit some of the poor communities where the poor folks are living, you'll see how those poor communities are still being broken until today. I want to thank you all, Ok?



The newest form of eviction : **EVICTED BY DISASTER**

Somsook : This is a story that isn't only happening in the United States. Housing policies that work against the poor, or against public or low-income housing, still exist and are being followed in places all over the world. For all kinds of poor communities, or for traditional settlements whose occupants don't have formal title to the land they have occupied for generations, disasters can be a very convenient and effective excuse for governments to evict them. This is a new and a growing form of eviction: *eviction by disaster*.

The only way around this is for poor people themselves to understand the situation and to use the disaster as an opportunity to organize themselves and to negotiate to secure the land they already occupy, or to get hold of some alternative land in the place where they have been living and where their livelihoods are. This can happen in different ways: people themselves can purchase it, or they can get the government to buy it or lease it to them. Either way, their networks can help negotiate as a big group.

Question:

Why is it so important that the people and the communities directly affected by disasters be the main actors in their rehabilitation?

Somsook : There are plenty of voices still saying that people who are battered and traumatized by major disasters are in no position to do anything for themselves - they're too poor, too weak, too traumatized, they don't know how to do anything. And so they should let the government, the relief agencies, the disaster "experts" or even the contractors come in with their bulldozers and their clipboards and their big budgets and they very quickly take charge of cleaning up the mess and rebuilding things after a disaster. But the theme of this seminar today is "communities as key actors in disaster rehabilitation." So I'd like to begin the discussion portion of the seminar by asking our participants why it is so important that the affected communities and affected people be at the center of disaster relief and the main actors in the process of rehabilitation? And I'd like to ask them to speak it very loud, so the whole World Urban Forum can hear.

Savita Sonawane (India) : (Savita is a community leader and Mahila Milan savings collective member from a large slum in the city of Pune. Her settlement, Jai Bawaninagar, is located on a steeply sloping hillside in the center of the city and has for decades been the target of eviction attempts by the municipality)

"Whatever our problems are, the community has to solve them. The municipality can't solve them, the government can't solve them. But if poor communities are organized and are able to put their problems in front of the government, and explain to them who can do what, then that's a way to start solving those problems."

There is one community in my city, in the Yerawada area, where the municipality has given the people some basic infrastructure, but they haven't given them land tenure security. So those improvements are useless - the people might still be evicted from that settlement any day. They don't mind not having infrastructure, but what they really need is secure land. So we have to get together and talk to the government and negotiate with them to put the land in our names, so we can develop our settlements ourselves, for the long term, with security.

Rachman (Afghanistan) : I am an engineer from Afghanistan working for UN-Habitat in Afghanistan. Why community participation is important to rebuild their houses? Actually, communities can identify their needs, they can solve their problems, they can do the work of rebuilding their houses in a transparent way. In Afghanistan, for example, during the long war our country was too much destroyed. About 70% of the country's houses were destroyed. Then after the interim government came, so many NGOs and donor agencies they came to Afghanistan. Many of our people had migrated to neighboring countries like Pakistan and Iran and to more distant countries. When they returned back to their home places in Afghanistan, they were faced with serious housing problems. So our project arranged a *people's process* to help people rebuild their houses: communities purchased the materials, communities distributed the materials and communities selected the beneficiaries for the project. In this way we were able to construct so many houses at that time. Now we have a nation-wide solidarity program in our country, how to bring the people together. In rural areas, we have community development councils that are preparing their action plans for rebuilding their villages. This will be a more transparent way to manage reconstruction.

Somsook : This is a good description of the role of the UN, which is very good at seeing the needs and importance of people doing it and people building it.

Enhe (Mongolia, UDRC) : Why people? Because people are the first ones to suffer in a disaster, the first to benefit from any relief or rebuilding process, and therefore should play the main role.

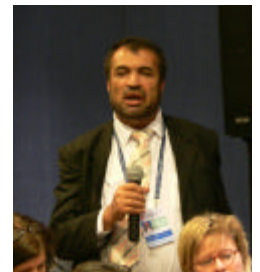
Somsook : They benefit, they live there, it's their problem! It's not the problem of the outsiders from far away who come in after a disaster!

Sonia Fadrijo (Philippines) : I am from the Philippines Homeless People's Federation. Communities should be at the center because during disasters, it is us who are affected. It is us who are the owners of our own lives, it is us who have the information, it is us who have the solutions also, because we live there. Sometimes after a disaster, outsiders just go to the scene, with their own motives. And sometimes governments cannot act immediately. But the affected communities, with or without resources, they should be on the front line.

Somsook : But not people as individuals, but communities, right? The force of people working together and helping each other is the most important process and the one we need to build up and strengthen.



"Why community participation is important to rebuild their houses? Actually, communities can identify their needs, they can solve their problems, they can do the work of rebuilding their houses in a transparent way."





Lajana Manandar (Nepal) (from the Kathmandu-based NGO Lumanti, in Nepal) : Of course people should be in the forefront of managing disasters in the communities. Why? I think it came out very clearly from the presentation made by our friends from Indonesia. The lady from the Porong mud-flow warned us to watch our own behavior - especially the greediness which makes us careless about mismanaging our environment and sometimes cause disasters ourselves. I think most of these human-made disaster are made by governments and private sector companies bent on profit. But people in nearby communities can do a lot more than simply watch these disasters happen: they can actually address all the problems that they face after these disasters happen, in a comprehensive way. They can also use disaster rehabilitation as an opportunity to build the strengths and capacities in their communities, and to help reduce their vulnerability to future disasters that may happen. And I would like to add that communities - and especially women - must be leading all the activities before disasters actually happen (minimizing risk) and after disasters happen (addressing all the issues of reconstruction and long-term rehabilitation).

In Nepal, we have been working with the network of women's savings groups in the Kathmandu Valley and in other areas of the country, and helping them to map the possible risks in their own communities, many of which are built in areas that are environmentally vulnerable to floods and landslides and other calamities. In many poor settlements, for example, the electricity lines have been strung up so haphazardly that if anything happens, people could easily be in danger of electrocution. And the women they saw it, they realize how they are prone to such potential risks, and then they develop plans to take action to lessen that danger.



PEOPLE know best what to do . . .

In Nepal, we have plenty of small-scale disasters happening as well. Every year, a few houses are washed away by swollen rivers during the rains or destroyed by landslides or fires. These aren't the kind of large-scale disasters that attract the attention of the global media and donors, but they are regularly happening. And it is only the people, only the communities and only the women who are continuously addressing the fallout from these micro-disasters. These are the people who have all the capacity and indigenous knowledge to know best what has to be done in these cases. The people have the best knowledge about how to rebuild after disasters, and we have to promote the strengthening and sharing of that local knowledge, local culture and local skills to address these disasters in a more comprehensive way. If big and small disasters are managed by people like this, at the local level, the rehabilitation process becomes sustainable and also costs much less. But this is only possible if we involve people - and especially the women - in the process centrally.

“We hope to see that the government machinery also transforms itself to take and give more space for the communities to participate.”

Dr. P. Bore Gowda (India) (Dr. Gowda is the Commissioner of the Karnataka State Slum Clearance Board) Probably I will be giving a different version to support the views of all of you. I have been working in government and I've seen two successful projects during my tenure. One was an irrigation project with 100% community involvement. Another very recently, the first district in the country to achieve the open-defecation-free status, in the total sanitation campaign. All this happened only because of community participation. With community participation, I was able to do in twenty months what would have taken six years to do. That is possible even in slum redevelopment, where I have seen a lot in six months of time. We may build houses, with government assistance, with contractors and engineers, but we can't build homes. A real home has to be built by its inhabitants, by the beneficiaries. And their involvement is a must and a necessity. And unless and until we involve the people, see their preferences and take them along with us, no project can be a successful one. I endorse the views of all of you, and we hope to see that the government machinery also transforms itself to take and give more space for the communities to participate.



Somsook : So the government in Bangalore has endorsed this very important approach that communities have to be the key actors. I think that most of us here are already convinced.



Sam (New Orleans, USA) : See, in the United States, a lot of the folks in poor neighborhoods don't own homes at all. These are folks the government housed for the good of the city economy, to bring in workers who will take on all the low-paying jobs at five dollars and thirty-five cents an hour. These folks are less educated, they've got many children and lots of them are working two or three jobs in order to keep a roof over their family's heads. Lots of them are single moms raising three or four kids. Now these are poor folks. I just don't see how these folks are going to rebuild, living like they were in government housing, and now the government has destroyed that housing too, and they're not rebuilding it. So those folks that were working in the city of New Orleans and living in public housing, they are not here any more. In New Orleans, the only folks who can rebuild their houses are the folks that got the *moo-moolado* [money]. During Katrina, all of my community was displaced. And they are still displaced. We've been trying to find ways to bring those folks back home to help fight for their community, which is public housing they don't own.

Question :

In a disaster rehabilitation process in which communities are the main actors, what should be the role of governments and relief agencies?

“The first thing for us as outsiders to do is to ask them, What do they want to do better that you have already begun? And how can we help you do that?”

Somsook : We like the idea that people should be the main actors in disaster rehabilitation and that communities should be an active force to make this change and to solve the problems. Now let's imagine that all of you here are international experts on community-driven disaster rehabilitation, and our question is how are you going to make that possible? We know very well that affected people are important and should be the main actors in disaster rehabilitation, but can we find clear, practical ways to open up space for that? How should governments and development agencies act after disasters happen - and how shouldn't they act - in order that this strength of people and communities to deal with and solve the problems can emerge and become stronger in the rehabilitation process? How can we do that?

Father Tieng Treay (Kenya) : I am a native of Belgium, and I am representing the Holy See. I have been working in Africa for forty years and am presently working part time in the Kibera slum in Nairobi. First I would sharply respond to the question why to work with the communities? Because human beings are social beings, and they invariably work as communities and as a social group. I think that when there are disasters, we see that people - all by themselves - will begin immediately to work in teams and groups in some way. So the first thing for us as outsiders to do is to approach them and ask them *what do you want to do better that you have already begun? And how can we help you do that?* That was the way I began in the Kibera slum and we see the fruits of that approach.

Somsook : Thank you for that reminder about that very important step, which is to ask the affected people what they want and how they want us to help them? That is a very simple question, but so many people forget to ask that simple question, unfortunately!

Waiting around for government and NGOs is a **REALLY BAD HABIT . . .**



Hirabhai (India) : After an earthquake or a cyclone, outsiders *can* come to help, and they *should* come to help. But when they do come, what they should do is they should talk with the communities - and they should know how to talk properly with the communities. The people who are hurt are themselves the ones who know best what hurt is and who know best who will bring the solutions. The outsiders aren't hurt, and they don't know what hurt is. In my region of Kutch, in the earthquake, we really learned what hurt was.

And when these outside people come, it should be our role to *help them* build the houses. What this meant in Kutch was that instead of working twelve hours a day, we'd work fourteen hours if we needed to. We'd go that extra mile to get the work of getting everyone back in their houses done. And what we'd also do is we'd help each other. We'd go to other villages and we'd help each other. We could work together like that.

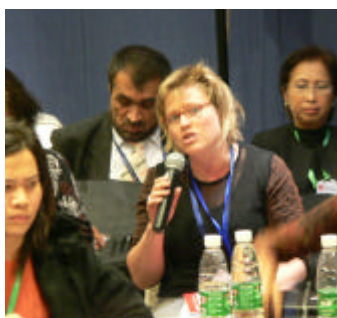
A lot of people say, *“The government should come and help us!”* Or they say *“The NGOs should come and help us!”* And they just wait for that to happen. That's a really bad habit, and I know a lot of people who have that habit. But no, these are *our own houses*, these are *our own villages*, this is *our own country*. It's we who have got to do this. We can't wait for these others to come and do it for us.

Somsook : Thank you for that! So it is our house, it's our community, it's our country! Then we should do it. That's very clear!

Sam (USA) : I know we shouldn't blame it all on the government. But to make it better for the people in the United States, the government needs to provide more jobs and better health care, OK? Another thing our government doesn't do, it doesn't live up to the rights of the law about the rights of Katrina survivors to return to their city. Like I said earlier, we don't have folks returning back to the city of New Orleans, even after all these years since the storm. The United States government should recognize Katrina survivors as *“internally displaced persons,”* with all the rights accorded to them, based on international and national laws. We must demand that the United States government to comply with the charter of the United Nations, and with these national and international laws, to make sure that no one is without adequate housing in the community of their choice. This is not just New Orleans, but part of a struggle that's going on around the world.



“The urban poor and the communities affected by disasters are ready for change, but for any change to be meaningful, there must be the participation of the affected families.”



Get the money into people's hands, **RIGHT AWAY . . .**

Siwakorn (Thailand) : The government is always slower in acting after a disaster happens! The way the government thinks what to do, what to plan, how to make the budget - it's always much slower than what affected people themselves are able to do. People know the problems very well and can act much faster and much more efficiently. And what the government finally does is often not even relevant to the real problems the people are facing! And when the budget resources come from the government, it always happens that there are different kinds of corruption along the way (*Sam: Conspiracy, too!*) and there are lots of problems. So a better idea is to find a way that the money goes directly to the affected people, so that they can determine the use of the money quickly, as soon as possible.

Rollie (Philippines) : What should the government do? No matter what they do or what they plan, they must first consult the people - the communities. And they must involve them in the planning. The urban poor and the communities affected by disasters are ready for changes, but for any change to be meaningful, there must be the participation of the affected families. And what they must NOT do is to politicize the project in an emergency situation. Sometimes the politicians use relief projects to get votes - they claim to be bringing assistance, and because I am a community leader, they support me and try to get me to persuade people in the community to vote for one politician or another.

Jocie (Philippines) : I will add a point about what the development agencies can do. During the Mount Mayon disaster, we had the experience of lots and lots of international aid coming in to help, but there was no one monitoring it. Lots of money was given to the government but most of that money never reached the affected communities. Nobody knows where it went. So maybe the development agencies need to have some kind of monitoring system to ensure that the money they give to the government is *surely* going to the communities who need it, and not into the pockets of government officials along the way. (*Sam: A-men!*)

Somsook : Or try not to give all the aid money to the government alone. You are still proposing that the aid money for disasters should go to the government, and that's how a lot of it leaks away in loopholes and corruption. A better idea is to try to give the aid money to the people directly, as much as possible.

Rebecca (Australia) : I just wanted to present an NGO perspective for people here who may be actually going into some of these areas and assisting post-disaster. We spent some time in Sri Lanka in Hambantota, an area not far from Moratuwa. In order to be able to consult with the community, we had to work very hard to convince the government of the value of that kind of consultation. For practical and political reasons, the government was not in a position to consult regularly with the affected people about rebuilding. So for us it was an exercise in negotiating with the government systems to allow that consultation to take place. And I just wanted to say that there are different strategies which can allow NGOs, communities and governments to all think creatively about how to make sure that that stuff is really and truly *bottom up*, and comes from the people.

Huong (Vietnam, Women's Union, Danang City) : In Vietnam, we have a slogan that goes, “*The people know, the people discuss, the people implement, and the people monitor and supervise.*” So we have our system in place, and whatever disaster happens, we transfer down and we discuss with the affected people. In our Vietnamese tradition, we also have the saying that “*You have to support yourself first, before the others will come to support you.*” And if the problems are really impossible and out of your control, then the others - government and other agencies - will come and support you.

The trouble with **FREEBIES**



Celine D'Cruz (Slum Dwellers International - SDI) : There is a poor coastal settlement called Jayagathpura, in the city of Moratuwa, in Sri Lanka. It took us three and a half years to get government compensation for the people's houses that were destroyed by the tsunami. In the meanwhile, they were able to get a little money from some funders. But during the time that they were waiting, many NGOs and many groups from outside kept coming and selling the idea of aid to them, saying “*We'll give you more money, put our placards up there, you can build our houses.*”

The biggest challenge for the Jayagathpura community, and for the larger Women's Development Bank Federation they are part of, was to say, “*No, we don't want your money and we will wait for the government compensation, because it is government's business to participate in this reconstruction.*” And just having this negotiation with the community was a very difficult thing. Because it was very attractive for them to take money that came easily - the Salvation Army, the Red Cross. Everybody just wanted to give them free money, and they said no to that money.

So I think that this is one of the challenges: how external aid can corrupt communities during a time of emergency like this, and can cause people to lose their sense of self-worth and their sense of what they can do on their own. As outside consultants, I think that it is important that everybody remembers that we should not make people lose that sense of self-worth and that dignity that comes of doing for themselves. Even if you are putting in money, how can you incorporate that money in ways that builds communities and doesn't break them?

“One way to do this is to mobilize all the community networks to take a look at all the areas at risk of different kinds of disasters and then to map out the possibilities and make plans about how to deal with potential disasters - before the disasters happen, not after.”

Man in audience : I want to bring this back to the issue of disaster risk-management. I think that in the present climate scenario, it is becoming more and more possible now to know where many disasters are likely to occur. The term “participatory rural appraisal” is used a lot, but it’s not the NGOs or the governments who know what to do best in the communities - it is the people themselves. And unless we involve them in participatory decisions, we cannot move forward on that. And I would say that transparency is the biggest problem in rehabilitation situations. Because most funds for disaster rehabilitation are channeled through government, and nobody knows where most of that money goes. It would be good if there were a mechanism in government which knows where the money is coming from and where it’s going to.

Strengthening communities **BEFORE** disasters happen :

Winarko (Indonesia) : Many scientists are already saying that in Indonesia, we are like a *ring of fire*, with so many active volcanoes and tectonic fault lines and potential earthquakes. In so many parts of Indonesia, disasters are very likely to happen. My point is that we shouldn’t only pay attention to community strengthening after a disaster happens. If we decide now that communities should become the main actor in disaster rehabilitation, let’s start right away strengthening all the communities that are at risk of disasters - *before they face an actual disaster*. If we only start organizing and strengthening them after the disaster, it’s already too late. And that’s what happened with most disasters in my country.

Somsook : This is a very important point that we cannot wait until the disasters happen to start strengthening the communities. We have to do it before, as much as possible. As Siwakorn, the Thai community leader, was saying, one way to do this is to mobilize all the community networks to take a look at all the areas at risk of different kinds of disasters and then find ways to map out the possibilities and to make plans about how to deal with those *potential disasters - before the disasters happen, not after*.

Mr. M. (Thailand) : I would like to add that many of the international aid agencies that have ties with evangelical Christian groups should also be more aware of local cultures. When the tsunami struck the southwestern coast of Thailand, some communities were converted to Christianity during the relief process. If they didn’t convert, they wouldn’t get the money, so they converted. That has to be changed as well.

Somsook : There are always opportunistic factions which use disasters as opportunities to impose their unrelated agenda on vulnerable and needy groups of people. This is something very strange, but it’s real.

Making **OWNER-DRIVEN** reconstruction a national policy in India



Prashant (India) : In Kutch and in other disasters, we’ve seen that governments often struggle to respond adequately to disasters. There are often so many urgent issues and demands to deal without time and space to make considered decisions about policies. If there is any government pre-planning, it is only on what to do when a disaster strikes. Planning beyond the immediate rescue and relief is often lacking. As a result, it takes a long time for things to happen, and when they do, and when they do, the quality of response is often not satisfactory, from the people’s point of view. People on the ground, on the other hand, are often in a haze of confusion - they don’t know what is going to happen tomorrow or what new government scheme will come out.

That’s why it is important that before disasters happen, some sort of policies and principles are in place, so that government agencies know in advance what steps they should follow when a disaster strikes, in both the immediate relief and medium and long-term rehabilitation. It is important that those principles and those policies be prepared before a disaster happens, so that the adequate mechanisms to implement them are in place.

In India, we are a part of a collaborative process that is advocating for a reconstruction policy that favors “owner-driven” approaches to rehabilitate disaster affected families, including assessing damage and needs, providing interim shelters and reconstructing houses. A series of consultations have been planned as a part of this process. The first one, at regional level, was organized in July 2008 in Gandhidham, Gujarat. The final one will be a National Conference in New Delhi, where the broad contours of the policy framework will be discussed. We hope that “people-driven” disaster reconstruction will soon find a place in public policy in India.

Somsook : In India, from the successful experience of “owner-driven” house reconstruction after the Gujarat earthquake, they have tried to scale it up, and have organized several regional, national and international consultations on this theme now. And they are building up this concept of people rebuilding their own houses and trying to make it into a national policy, a new practice in disaster situations. Whenever there are disasters happening in India, how to find ways in which the government supports the “owner-driven” rehabilitation? This is one example of how this “community-driven disaster rehabilitation” way of thinking is in the process of being institutionalized and mainstreamed in India’s formal community development culture.

Somsook : I hope that in this international development forum, this voice can be heard by the larger institutions, about how the governments and key institutions would allow the “owners” - or the affected communities - to manage the disaster reconstruction all by themselves, as much as possible. If we think it is their problem, and we are going to strengthen their ability to deal with that problem, and if we are going to allow them the new space to solve their immediate (and pre-existing) problems and rebuild their whole lives into a new strong community, then we will find a lot of answers, a lot of possible working processes - before disasters, during disasters and even after disasters happen. So the orientation of development agencies and how to develop in our society - this is something we need quite seriously to adjust.

Closing remarks :

- **Diana Mitlin (IIED, London)**
- **Lalith Lankatilleke (UN-Habitat, Fukuoka)**

“If you are not organized, aid cannot help you. Because when aid agencies come from outside, they cannot know who needs help and who doesn’t.”

Somsook : As we come to the end of this seminar, we will ask two of our senior friends to say a few words. Lalith comes from UN-Habitat and has also been doing a lot of work with disasters, and Diana comes from the International Institute for Environment and Development, and they have dealt with a lot of disasters and issues of environment and poverty. IIED has also helped to support this seminar.

Diana (UK): Actually, I know very little about disasters. But after visiting the Philippines last month, I know a bit more. And it is really for the community members here that I have this message: if you are not organized, aid cannot help you. When aid agencies visit communities, what they have learned is that they have to ask who they should help, because when they come from outside, they cannot know who needs help and who doesn't. And even though they know that their aid will be given to some communities but not to all, they have to use the systems that they are offered for channeling that aid. Most aid agencies and workers are not happy about this, but there is often no system to give it to all.

When we were in the Philippines, one of the communities explained to me that the government would give money for 400 or 500 of families in need, when actually there were 800 of them in need. So you have to recognize that if you are not organized, you cannot receive external finance in a way that will strengthen your community - instead it will weaken and divide your community. It will weaken the community because you will all wait and hope to be included, but not all of you will be included. You need an organization that can propose an alternative to those outsiders, a different way of using the funds that *does* strengthen your community, that *does* suit your needs and your ways of doing things, and that uses the available finance from development agencies to work out a way to use it that benefits *everyone* - with special help to those who are most in need.

People like me who sit outside of your communities and your cultures, we cannot replicate that organization. We are helpless if you are not organized. There is no way we can support your development strategy. So what I have for you is a challenge: You can try and ask groups from outside your country for development assistance from them, but the bottom line is that you need to be ready to organize the money yourselves. Thank you.

Lalith (Sri Lanka) : All of us have now heard these community leaders presenting their views as to how they can take the lead in post-disaster recovery and reconstruction efforts. In such situations, we see that the biggest obstacle to people's own development is first the bureaucracy, and second the professionals. The professionals, with their standards and their systems! We know that when there is a disaster, there is so much planning and so many procedures that the governments and everybody else gets involved in. In the end, these policies and plans cannot deliver houses. And it is the people themselves who actually deliver houses. We know that now. As external development agencies like the UN-Habitat, we have a role of really getting this message across to governments and also to our development partners.

Some governments and some policies **ARE** changing in a more people-driven direction :



Lalith : But some governments have been changing. We have to recognize that. And then we have to support the governments in trying to see what systems have to be put in place. In the last twenty years or so, we have come a long way - we must say that. And the national policies in certain countries have changed. I can give you several examples :

- **THAILAND :** The community-driven Baan Mankong community upgrading program in Thailand is certainly one very important example.
- **AFGHANISTAN :** And in Afghanistan, there is now a national program to give money to organized communities for them to decide how they should do their own development and rebuilding in their villages.
- **PAKISTAN :** And if you take the example of Pakistan after the Kashmir earthquake, out of the 600,000 houses that were destroyed, over 500,000 houses have been rebuilt in less than three years - it is a massive operation and it was done by the people themselves, because the government accepted the policy of allowing the people to do their own house rebuilding.

I also want to congratulate the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights for bringing disaster-affected community people from across Asia together. We have to develop and strengthen this voice, of people in this region and also the whole world - we even have someone with us from the United States! This is what would make the governments and the development agencies change. So with that I will stop here. Thank you very much.

What we need today is a **NEW APPROACH**



Somsook : What we need today is a new approach. A new approach in which development agencies and governments understand a new way of working. People may face disasters and may have many problems, but it is important that they be given a chance to *respond, to rebuild and to take care of their own needs*. We need a new process in which the strength, the ideas and the abilities of the people can be organized. And we need to use this new process to strengthen that capacity so that communities can go along, develop things, and own the development process themselves. This is a new technique which the formal development world needs to learn a little more.

Often times, our financial systems, our bureaucracies, our rules and our regulations make it too difficult for people to participate, and make it too difficult for people to follow the method, process we try to conduct. So the rules, the regulations and the institutions themselves can sometimes become a much more serious problem than the disasters they exist to deal with. This is the other kind of disaster we are facing, and we have to completely change that from the supply-driven approach to the demand-driven approach. People are ready, people want to change things. The question is how can we find a new way.

I hope that this World Urban Forum will be able to understand this new change by people, change in which communities and affected people become important actors and strengthen the development by themselves as much as possible.

What next?

The people who came to Nanjing with us didn't just come to listen. They told their stories and presented their ideas, and the next step was to think together about what to do next. How could these ideas, which poor themselves brought out, be put into action in different ways? And how could development agencies also learn and move things forward into some of the new possibilities they suggested? After the seminar, we had one last discussion together and set out some plans for what to do next and see how ACHR could support those plans - to build a regional community-driven disaster process that can better support disaster-affected communities and groups in the region in the longer term. Some of the activities proposed include :

- **Learning centers :** Across the Asia region and within each country, identify and list good disaster rehabilitation and rebuilding processes - *by people* - that others elsewhere can visit and learn from.
- **Resource people :** Across Asia and within each country, identify and list people with experience and knowledge about working within and supporting a people-driven disaster rehabilitation who can give help, advice and support to others.
- **Regional meeting :** After identifying and listing learning centers and resource people, organize a region-wide meeting to get more full participation of groups around Asia and to discuss how to set up a coordinating support mechanism for this region-wide community-driven disaster rehabilitation process.
- **Exchange visits :** Organize exchange and learning visits and advisory visits, within the Asia region and within each country, using these lists of key learning centers and advisors, supported by ACHR.
- **Projects :** ACHR can provide some budget, if necessary, to some community-driven disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction projects whose implementation can show the strength of people doing it.

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More information on disasters : ACHR has produced a number of newsletters, video films, field reports, documents and special publications with a lot more detail on the experiences of several of the disaster rehabilitation processes discussed in this meeting. Please contact ACHR for copies, or visit our website, where most of these documents can be downloaded.

Not just a seminar, but also a public **EXHIBITION** of community-driven disaster rehabilitation stories from countries around Asia :

At this year's World Urban Forum in Nanjing, ACHR booked a double-wide booth right in the middle of the exhibition hall, where all sorts of publications and dozens of colorful posters were on display to showcase many of the disaster experiences discussed in the seminar - and on community savings, community funds, settlement upgrading, housing and land tenure as well.

They say these big international meetings are a kind of marketplace, in which ideas, concepts, alternative visions of development are presented, haggled over, bought and sold. If that's the case, sales at the ACHR booth of a "community-driven development model" were reassuringly brisk! The booth ended up being a lively place of almost constant discussions, impromptu negotiations, informal meetings and gatherings of old friends.



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Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR)

73 Soi Sonthiwattana 4,
Ladprao Road Soi 110,
Bangkok 10310, THAILAND
Tel (66-2) 538-0919
Fax (66-2) 539-9950
e-mail: achr@loxinfo.co.th
website: www.achr.net