

# voices from the field

**TSUNAMI SHARED LEARNING** issue 02/january 2007/sustainable livelihoods

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## Promoting sustainable livelihood

Livelihood reconstruction in post-disaster situations plays a vital role in enhancing the resilience of the affected communities. The overriding challenge is to ensure 'sustainable livelihood' rather than to promote dependency.

Disasters, both natural and human-made, leave behind a trail of destruction. When they occur in human habitation the catastrophe multiplies in various forms. Death of loved ones, care givers and head of households causes grief and hardship, while the destruction of assets sets off a chain reaction sharply affecting the livelihood of all people.

"Livelihood" refers to the variety of productive economic activities that people use to achieve food and income security. It includes capabilities, strategies and assets i.e. tangible resources as well as rights to claims and access.

Loss of livelihood particularly impacts poor, marginalised and excluded people, who without options or savings are flung further into the chasm of debt and

dependency. This eventually forces them into a life with lost hope and dignity.

Disasters do not affect everyone equally. For example, the destruction of fishing boats and equipment in the tsunami affected the lives and livelihoods of high numbers of petty traders and daily wage earners much more severely than that of the non-poor owners. Poor people, though in safer locations yet indirectly dependent on the sea and its produce, bore the hardship more heavily than anyone else. Those marginalised and discriminated against on the basis of caste, ethnicity and religion, especially women and children, suffered even worse.

Livelihood reconstruction in post-disaster situations plays a vital role in enhancing

the resilience of the affected communities. The overriding challenge is to ensure 'sustainable livelihood' rather than to promote dependency. Environmentally sustainable livelihoods maintain or enhance the local and global assets upon which livelihood depend. Socially sustainable livelihoods are able to cope with and recover from stress and shock and provide for future generations.

Thus, disaster mitigation must address not only the immediate aftermath, but also the long-term and how to build local capacities. It must also keep communities in the centre stage: treat them as equal partners, respect their knowledge and coping mechanisms, and analyse their problems rather than addressing them in a top-down, intellectually-driven, event-specific and high-cost manner. *continued >*



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fighting poverty together

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international



## actionaid's sustainable livelihood support 2005-2006 beneficiaries in india, maldives, somalia, sri lanka, thailand

**fisher folk** 82,250

**small businesses** 52,960 (including women 48,735)

**self-help groups** 91,200 (including people with disability 48,700)

**farmers** 3,657

**other enterprises** 194,080

**TOTAL BENEFICIARIES 498,127**

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Sustainable livelihood can't be promoted in an isolated manner, but requires support from multiple stakeholders – community, civil society and the state. A key facilitating factor is 'social security', which must be guaranteed by the state through pro-poor policies that ensure customary rights, entitlements, bargaining power for the poor and the marginalised and easy availability of resources. One of the most important aspects of sustainable livelihood is to analyse the various policies and their implications.

Evidence of how pro-poor policies can negatively impact the livelihood of poor and marginalised people include the ever increasing suicides by impoverished farmers and the ever increasing ratio of land alienation and related distress migration. Another is India's attempts to scrap the Coastal Regulation Zone and replace it with the new Coastal Zone Management, a plan that favours globalisation and neo-liberalisation over affording space for struggling coastal communities to exercise their customary and livelihood rights.

Civil society organisations are no less accountable to vulnerable communities when it comes to promoting sustainable livelihood. Lack of community consultation and participation resulted in

their mindless distribution of boats and equipment to fishing communities, with many of the crafts being technically unfit for the coast and many of the nets being so thinly spread over a large number of people that no one received the minimum quantity required to fish. "Beneficiaries" of this inappropriate aid found themselves struck from the list without anyone to help them emerge from this crisis.

Sustainable livelihoods are a process and not an event. All efforts must be based on field realities of the complexities, diversities, risks and multiple forms of vulnerabilities faced by the affected communities. And any vulnerability analysis must consider more than the human casualties and loss of assets, while further acknowledging that the poorest of the poor and the most excluded often do not possess assets which can be enumerated, recorded and compensated.

The people's participation and ownership is essential at every stage of design, implementation and evaluation. There is an immense need to enhance the strength, confidence and awareness of the exploited, marginalised and discriminated sections of society. They must be enabled to demand and secure their rights, entitlements and bargaining power. They must not be excluded

from the process nor left with merely momentary financial support.

Community capacities must also be developed to cope with the onslaught of globalisation and neo-liberalisation. This can be done through training, hand-holding to a certain extent, building people's organisations and encouraging various stakeholders to influence in a positive manner. Transparency and accountability are other crucial aspects which need to be promoted in every process undertaken.

Sustainability of livelihood is crucially linked to disaster preparedness and mitigation, hence building appropriate community based and owned linkages would not only provide protection but also enable quick resurrection in case of any future shock or disaster. There is a need to enumerate the varied experiences and lessons learnt in previous post-disaster interventions and to analyse every aspect before treading on with limited knowledge. Sustainable livelihood can only be achieved through a holistic approach.

**by Sajeew P.B.**

*Programme Coordinator for ActionAid's  
Tsunami Response Programme in Tamil  
Nadu & Lead for Shared Learning  
[sanjeew@actionaidindia.org](mailto:sanjeew@actionaidindia.org)*

**india** 83,788 boats were damaged or destroyed; 31,755 livestock were lost; 39,035 hectares of cropped land was damaged (Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs Report, May 25, 2005) **maldives** Tourism sector, which pre-tsunami accounted for 62% of the GDP, suffered \$250 million in damage and a 25% downturn in business (NDMC, June 2005) **somalia** Of 44,000 affected people, 40% faced a livelihood crisis (OCHA Tsunami Inter-agency Assessment Mission, March 30, 2005.) **sri lanka** In the affected areas, 90% of working men and women lost their sources of livelihood, including 40,000 widows, orphans, elderly, and disabled individuals (ILO Sri Lanka, June 2005) **thailand** More than 30,000 individuals employed in the fisheries sector lost their sources of livelihood (UN Resident Coordinator, Thailand, Six Month Report), while approx. 5,000 boats were lost or damaged (UN Resident Country Team Thailand, November 2005)



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**"It is very positive that these poor communities want to earn money to secure an education for their children.**

**Their own parents didn't do it for them.**

**It is fantastic to see how these communities believe that education is the only way for their children to move beyond the village and realise a better future."**

**- SWAIREE RUPASINGHE  
PROGRAMME OFFICER  
ACTIONAID SRI LANKA**

**Have your say!**  
Email us in 75 words or less  
nashwasim@gmail.com



Dear Friends,

It's been two years since the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, and still many of the poorest and most excluded coastal communities – whether fisher folk, small farmers or petty traders – are struggling to secure a life and livelihood with dignity. Quick cash grants and blanket distributions of equipment seemed appropriate during the relief phase, but have done little to ensure secured futures.

ActionAid's sustainable livelihood programmes, developed through a series of intense "conversations" with our partner communities and allies, aim to help poor and marginalised communities to help themselves in the long-term through building their knowledge, skills and confidence.

1. We are targeting poor and excluded communities - those surviving at subsistence levels - whose livelihood is inextricably tied to their traditional way of life and culture.
2. We recognise that disasters impact people differently, with poor and excluded groups being the worst affected. With zero or limited access to resources, support structures and capital, it takes them much longer to recover than those with assets or financial security.
3. We are attempting to change the existing power structures in regard to poor and excluded people's access to and control over backward linkages (raw materials, labour and capital) and forward linkages (markets, processes), which are so essential in pursuing livelihood.
4. Our livelihood programmes are promoting the participation of women in all stages of planning, development, implementation and evaluation. These stages have been traditionally dominated by men and thus often neglectful of the actual needs of women.
5. Through its policy work, ActionAid is pushing for greater equity and fair distribution of aid, since often those in poor rural areas are receiving less than those in high-profile wealthy urban or tourist areas. Further, we are working to ensure that poor communities receive the threshold level of investment needed for productive activity.

In the light of our evolved understanding and commitment to sustainable livelihoods, this issue of *Voices from the Field* attempts to capture the experiences of our esteemed colleagues in the field – experiences of success to experiences of frustration. At this juncture let us take a pause and introspect to further strengthen our initiatives and our effectiveness.

In solidarity,

BIJAY KUMAR  
CONVENOR, INTERNATIONAL TSUNAMI RESPONSE  
BIJAY.KUMAR@ACTIONAID.ORG





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S. THANGESWARAN/WACCO/ACTIONAID SRI LANKA (TOP)

## OUR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD **FRAMEWORK**

To research and analyse investment policies regarding tourism and fishing industry developments that are adversely impacting on the sustainable livelihoods of the informal sector:

- **Laws and policies** are simplified and shared with the communities;
- If laws and policies are not operationalised, then mobilise communities to put **pressure on local governments**;
- If they are not conducive to what people want or if they are anti-poor policies, then **alternative policies** are drafted in consultation with the communities;
- Alternative policy document is discussed with the people, NGOs and various other civil society organisations and a **Citizen's Report** is prepared at the national level;
- **Alliance building** at the community, local and national level and networks of organisations at the national level come together to put pressure on the government to change policies;
- Communities, people's organisations, civil society and movement groups come together at the international level to **formulate policy guidelines** to influence the stakeholders at all levels.

# Growing home gardens & hopes in the Maldives



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## hopes & home gardens

Aishath's small blue brick house is in the middle of the village on Maabaidhoo Island. "I was lucky," she confesses, as on December 26, 2004, her home didn't collapse amidst the waves which killed three kids and wiped out 114 houses on her island, one of the most affected in southern Laamu Atoll in the Maldives.

However, the salty water coming from both sides of this small island merged right where Aishath lives and reached two feet high, partially damaging her house and completely submerging and ruining her home garden.

With no children and her husband Mohamed (70) too old to work, Aishath Ali's (60) home garden was their only source of income. "I had bananas, guavas

and pomegranates," she remembers nostalgically. "But the tsunami washed away everything. I lost my plants; I thought I had lost my entire life."

But now, two years after the tsunami, Aishath has rebuilt her salty, ruined home garden into a successful business in Maabaidhoo.

Identified by her community as one of the most vulnerable families, Aishath is one of 14 beneficiaries of the agricultural livelihood programme on Maabaidhoo Island supported by ActionAid's local partner Care Society.

Aishath feels that she deserved the support. "We are alone and luckily we have a nice garden again," she smiles. "Tomato, okra, ridged gourd, sweet potatoes, chilli, papaya, beans, spinach... From the seeds I got from

Care Society, only one is not growing well, the rest of them are bearing nice vegetables and fruits."

Through the livelihood support programme, in May 2006 Aishath received seven different types of seeds, two watering cans, two pesticide sprays, two spades, two rakes and six sacks of organic fertiliser.

Aishath doesn't know how much money she has received through this livelihood programme. "Transparency to the beneficiaries is one aspect that must be improved. Even though they are not asking, we have to make it clear to avoid future confusion and misunderstanding, particularly when the information is with the community-based organisations (CBOs)," highlights Fathmath Rifau, Care Society assistant manager for livelihoods.

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## initial relief & capacity building

Immediately following the tsunami, Care Society supported all 142 families in Maabaidhoo through an initial livelihood support programme providing seeds, saplings, fertilisers and agricultural tools. In August 2005 they facilitated training on home gardening.

Since then more than 12 agricultural trainings have been conducted on this island by Zahangir Alam, a Care Society agricultural consultant who started working in Laamu Atoll in June 2005.

He says: “I see that people are improving. They have learned how to cultivate vegetables and plant trees and look after them properly; how to make and use organic fertiliser and how to cook newly introduced crops. Many people have shown their interest and motivation and they are currently doing fairly well, you only have to go and visit their home gardens.”

Aishath is one of those. “The most interesting programme for me,” Aishath asserts, “was the one on how to make and use home pesticides. Now I can control the insects in my garden and they don’t ruin my plants anymore.”

However, she found the cooking training the most useful: “I learnt how to cook new vegetables like okra and bitter gourd. We hadn’t seen those vegetables here before and therefore I didn’t like them. But now that I know how to cook them we eat them, they are very nutritious,” says Aishath, who is also sharing her recently acquired kitchen abilities with other members.

“Nutrition habits are changing,” affirms Fathmath. “People in the islands are used to eating fish, rice and fish only. But now they are also eating vegetables. Once they have discovered that vegetables are good, villagers are gradually including them on their daily diet.”

“This is a good opportunity brought by the tsunami,” says Zahangir. He and project officers like Mariam Naseeha also monitor closely the progress of Aishath and other “new farmers” in Maabaidhoo, helping to solve their problems and providing technical support when required.

“One of their main problems are the insects. The quality of the soil is not very good either and sometimes they don’t take proper care of their crops, neither watering enough nor providing enough space. If I can help – I have also received livelihood training from Care – I do it. Otherwise Zahangir is always around,” confesses Mariam.

## good benefits

Aishath, as she radiantly states, is happy and doing well again. “Now I probably make around 1,000 rufiyaa a month (about USD 85), but I am not sure since I don’t yet keep records,” she affirms.

“Around 1,000 rufiyaa a month on an island like this is a good profit. She has learnt very quickly how to run her home garden well. Aishath is enthusiastic and full of energy,” points out Zahangir.

According to her customers and neighbours Aishath is doing fairly well indeed. “Bitter gourd is very good,” affirms regular customer Rajimma Avil Kumar from Kerala, India, temporarily working in the pharmacy in Maabaidhoo. “It seems to me that she is making a good business. I come here very often to buy tomatoes, okra and other stuff, and the quality and the prices are very good, that’s why I always come to Aishath’s house.”

“People come to my house and buy my vegetables and fruits, especially the foreigners,” Aishath says. “My husband and I eat many vegetables and fruits, the quality is good, and I also sell some house-by-house sometimes, although people come generally to mine. From this harvest I have no more stock, I sold everything,” she says proudly.

Two years after the tsunami Aishath is visibly happy again. “The whole village has received great support and for me personally, I am doing well now. In the future I would like to grow more crops in a bigger scale. I have enough land here to grow more vegetables and fruits and become a real commercial farmer.”

“I would like to sell more products and make more money. I am saving some small money. When Care withdraws from the program I will buy seed and other necessary assets by myself or by the CBO. We can’t expect Care to be here forever,” Aishath acknowledges realistically.

## challenges

“The biggest challenge for this programme is how to engage these communities in long term and sustainable development,” Fathmath says. “Communications and logistics in the Maldives are difficult and very expensive and even the most basic

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## livelihoods

### Maabaidhoo Island

#### relief phase...

**all 142 families supported through an initial programme (seeds, fertilisers, agricultural tools and training)**

#### two years later...

**14 beneficiaries will receive 4,900 rufiyaa each from now til the end of 2007**

#### sustainability...

**12 agricultural trainings conducted by Zahangir Alam, an agricultural consultant from Bangladesh**

#### bigger picture...

**Care Society is working with tsunami affected communities on 15 islands across four atolls**

things like getting agricultural inputs has to go through a long process.”

“According to the needs and the inputs of the community and CBO, Care starts a bidding process to purchase in Male the seeds, fertilisers, agricultural tools and other supplies that are not available in the islands, most of the time not even in Male. The process is long: advertising the tender in the newspapers, receive the proposals, go through them, select the best supplier, get the supplies and send them to the islands. The whole process can take more than 45 days and during all that time the people are waiting to start their work. It is clear that we need to speed up the bid process although it is difficult as there are many different parties implicated,” Fathmath affirms.

The activities and long-term sustainability approach were discussed during a Livelihood Workshop held in April 2006 when community members from the four atolls drafted their action plans based on the community requests and the feasible options. Finally, by the end of September, once details of activities and inputs required by each household and the first bidding process were completed, Aishath and the rest

of 696 right holders supported by Care livelihood programme across the Maldives started receiving their assets.

To avoid the distribution delays to the right holders, Care Society and ActionAid have already started establishing agricultural nurseries in three islands. Construction is nearly complete on Nilandhoo and underway on Dharavandhoo and Gan. They have also started sales centres on Goidhoo in Baa atoll and Nilandhoo in Gaafu Alif atoll where villagers and CBOs can buy anything they need to grow up their crops.

“The objective is to decentralise the purchases, make agricultural inputs and tools available at island level and consequently invest on the long term run. Care Society won’t be delivering seed and fertilisers in these islands forever, that’s why they have to believe on their own sustainable development,” affirms Fathmath.

“All of us are learning and gaining experience. This is an unprecedented challenge in an out of scale disaster. Only time and hard work will provide us with the best learning for community, CBOs, Care Society and ActionAid.”

## who’s in greatest need?

Through **Participatory Well-Being Rankings (PWR)**, community members and CBOs are together deciding who is to receive support, identifying the available resources (e.g. land and skills), proposing a variety of livelihood activities and drafting an action plan.

The process involves ranking all households based on a matrix of criteria, such as the number of household members, income activities, education level, dependant members or household assets like TV, washing machine or fridge. This helps to **correctly identify beneficiaries** like tsunami camp resident Hafeeza Mohamed (pictured left) and their actual needs.

“In Laamu Atoll people are satisfied with the list of right holders. However, on some other islands, after reviewing the programme, we noticed that some people weren’t very happy,” says **Fathmath Rifau, Care Society assistant manager for livelihoods.**

“So we met with the community, raised and discussed the issues, answered their questions and tried to solve their problems. The decisions came from the community and after discussing again, **people feel that the decisions taken are fair.**”

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# From indentured labourers to independent fisher folk

Gaining dignity and sustainable livelihood through demanding rights and shifting traditional power structures in the south of Sri Lanka

In Sisilasagama village in southern Sri Lanka, a weather-beaten group of fishermen are mending their torn nets and chatting after a long hot day of fishing that for some began at 3 a.m. The topic of their discussion? They do not want to be called ‘Ghanni’ any more since they no longer have to labour for others.

Traditionally the term defines them as labourer fishermen who earn their daily wage with boats and nets rented from ruthless middlemen and rich *mudalalis* (merchants). Faced with inflated rental prices in addition to paying a high cut from their catch, these fishermen are forced to work long hours with many of them in a constant state of high-interest debt. Being poorest of the poor in their community they were among those most severely affected by the tsunami disaster of December 26, 2004.

“Thirty nine of our villagers died in the tsunami and our struggle got worse. We sent our women away to relatives because there was nothing to eat for days,” says Chaminda Kumara G.H., a fisherman and community representative, revealing that they lost everything.

Over the ensuing months many of them were unable to access government and NGO subsidies and relief since most of them were not registered fishermen and did not possess the requisite entitlement card. Only those who own boats can register as official fishermen.

Today they have their own boats and nets – and thus for the first time independence and ownership over their lives and livelihood – through the support of ActionAid Sri Lanka’s local partner organisation, National Anti-War Front (NAWF) and other NGOs. Most have repaid their debt and regained their dignity, as well as being able to put some monthly savings aside for their children’s health and education needs.

“Previously we faced debt so we had no choice but to live according to the mudalalis’ demands,” recalls Chandima, revealing that many of them owed Rs. 15,000 to 20,000 for medical costs as well as basic day-to-day living needs. “We were unable to raise dignity for ourselves since we were working for others. Now we enjoy the freedom of making our own decisions.”



dignity  
independence  
livelihood





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## highlights

- Indentured labourers now independent fisherfolk in Sisilagama village
- NAWF and ActionAid the first to reach out to unregistered fishermen
- 30 beneficiaries supported with individual sets of fishing nets worth Rs. 20,000 to 25,000 each
- Alternative livelihoods developed for the off-season
- Decision making about working hours and market prices shifted from merchants to fishermen
- Average earnings increased from about Rs. 165 per day to 10,000 to 15,000 per month
- Monthly savings scheme started to help entire community
- Debts repaid, rights realised and dignity regained

## learnings

- After the tsunami, the community wasn't reached quickly enough
- The poorest of the poor were overlooked in favour of those who owned boats
- The selection process failed to learn about people's actual needs
- Fishing livelihood programmes were being run by people without any real fishing experience
- Parallel programmes must be developed to mobilise communities to save and not fall back into debt
- Need for transparency and accountability systems to counter corruption
- Need for proper follow-up and ongoing assessment of people's needs

## programme design

NAWF has been working in Hambantota district since 2000. Immediately following the tsunami they provided immediate humanitarian needs such as pregnant mothers' kits and psychosocial care to several families across the district. In October 2005, at the request of the fishermen themselves, NAWF started helping to buy nets over which the fishermen could exercise full ownership, while other NGOs provided some of them with new boats.

"Before that we didn't receive much aid," says Chandima, noting that his community was overlooked in the initial post-disaster stage in favour of the less needy, those holding entitlement cards and even some rich people falsely claiming to be fishermen and then disappearing with the funds. "NAWF came here but didn't do the selection criteria."

In the later stage of relief 30 fishermen formerly known as 'Ghanni' and 40 registered fishermen were each given a set of nets worth Rs. 20,000 to 25,000. These beneficiaries were selected by community committees and local fishery societies via a democratic voting process that attempted to identify those most in need. Evaluation criteria – such as living standards, assets, wage earnings and amount of debt – further aimed to distinguish between those who had lost boats and nets but didn't work at sea or were economically better off.

P.K. Mohammed Azmi, who has been working as a programme officer with NAWF for two years and specifically with this poor and excluded fishing community since January 2006, believes they should have done more to learn about the fishermen's actual needs. "For example, if NAWF had known more about the type, quality and quantity of nets they needed we could have developed a better plan and made a much stronger impact."

"They just gave everyone what they thought they needed," agrees Chandima, pointing out that different nets are used for different seasons and different catch. "And in addition to nets, many of us needed shelter assistance too."

More than a year later, the fishermen's earnings have increased from about Rs. 165 per day to Rs. 10,000 to 15,000 per month in the good season. No longer under the control of middlemen or mudalalis, today they can choose their own working hours, bypass exorbitant rental fees and demand fair market prices, along with numerous other rights.

Another feature of this programme is the development of alternative livelihoods for the off-season, which runs from April to September. Again upon the suggestion of the fishermen themselves, NAWF has supported them with different nets which enable them to catch prawns and lobsters. This intervention was only possible after local groups in concert with the Fishing Ministry banned rich people from fishing with dynamite and killing everything in the ocean, leaving nothing for the small fishermen.

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**"It was a mistake that we didn't start the programme in the early stages after the tsunami... In this village we need to support more families other than just fishermen."**

- Azmi Mohammed, Programme Officer for National Anti-War Front  
Hambantota district, Sri Lanka (pictured)

**"NAWF and ActionAid were the first to reach out to unregistered fishermen, since only those who owned boats could get entitlement cards."**

- Rohitha Rajindra, Team Leader PSU South, ActionAid Sri Lanka

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Life continues to be a struggle, yet the fishermen have decided to retain their traditional outrigger canoes in favour of motorised boats better suited for rough seas and strong winds.

"We use our traditional system as a strategy to save money and cut costs," shares Chandima. According to Azmi, this is the only village in the entire Hambantota district to have not switched over to more modern methods.

Transparency of systems is also of the utmost importance, with local fishery committees collecting copies of all bills and ensuring that figures balance. Initially the fishermen uncovered some corruption after reviewing the procurement process. They bought 70 sets of nets they believed to be a certain brand, but within 24 hours learnt they had been cheated with inferior quality. Confronting the salesman the fishermen proved that the netting was fraudulent and won a refund.

"We received Rs. 120,800 that was played out from us," says Chaminda, revealing that the money is being kept in a separate account and will be used to uplift the situation of their village.

Happily, the old system of working as powerless, individual labourers has given way to the emergence of a community-based collective endeavour.

Earnings are fairly distributed and members help each other through a compulsory savings programme (Rs. 100 per month) and half-price rentals of communal wedding equipment.

"There are no divisions in this village. We do everything together," the fishermen chorus, proudly adding they have been chosen by the Ports Authority to take part in a coastal conservation project.

## Long-term sustainability

"It was a mistake that we didn't start the programme in the early stages after the tsunami," repeats Azmi, when pressed to give his opinion on things NAWF might do differently next time. "And we need to start parallel programmes such as alternative livelihoods, capacity building, nutrition, integrated education and women's empowerment so there won't be disappointment and misselections. In this village we need to support more families other than just fishermen."

So far NAWF has further provided Rs. 83,311 for four of these neediest families chosen via a village committee to buy brick making equipment, a grinding machine and a coir machine and to set up a vehicle painting business. They are also providing health care to pregnant women and encouraging all children to attend school.

Azmi believes that this is the only way that people be mobilised to save for the long-term and not fall back into chronic debt to the mudalalis. "We need to develop alternative income generating activities," agrees Chandima.

He suggests teaching them how to renovate nets and fishing gear or to become carpenters or masons so that a wider array of specialised services can be offered, idle time reduced and wages increased.

Roshan, another fisherman, points out that fishing livelihood programmes must be run by community members and not by officers without any ground knowledge of the day-to-day realities of being a fisherman: "The plan must be raised by the people."

Azmi agrees, regretting that in the beginning NAWF staff lacked the experience and didn't do a good enough follow-up.

"But now we are in the process of completing our Community Based Participatory Change Plan. We are in a good position for feedback and to learn about people's needs," he says confidently, pointing out that one year ago this was the worst-ranked GN division in terms of participation, unity, planning and implementation, but on the eve of the two-year anniversary of the tsunami it stands firmly as the best.



# pickles paving the path toward prosperity in india

Women won't compromise when "it comes to quality" or moving away from their homes by the sea



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"Our pickles are the best because we make them in a hygienic environment, use less oil and use the freshest of fish and prawns. Buy 'Sea-Dot Pickles' and you will know the difference in taste. We do not compromise on quality, we bring to you the best from the sea," says Prasanna with a smile and twinkle in her eye. And the entire room breaks into a loud applause.

This is a mock sales session in the new manufacturing unit of ActionAid's local partner Community Development Organisation Trust (C-Dot), where 50 women are undergoing training in marketing and sales. These women belong to various fishing hamlets in and around Chennai Port in Tamil Nadu, an area ravaged by the tsunami two years ago.

While sales training is going on, the production team had started work at 5 a.m. The squeaky clean manufacturing unit of C-Dot is silent but bustling with activity. Silent because as a hygiene precaution it is a rule for people entering the manufacturing unit to wear face masks and avoid talking. Sixty women run around the manufacturing unit – some making the spices, some cleaning the fish and prawns, some heating the oil and some others sterilising the glass bottles. The production team is thrilled about their brand new aprons, caps, gloves and footwear which are compulsory to wear while working.

Under the watchful eyes of supervisor and programme coordinator Stanley John, the brand new manufacturing unit

is all set to make Sea-Dot a big name in pickle manufacturing. Stanley recollects the entire process and says that it was "careful planning" from the women and "strategic partnership" that helped the idea to become a reality.

When the tsunami reconstruction focus shifted from immediate relief to long-term and sustainable development, lots of new problems surfaced in tsunami affected areas. In Kasimedu for example there were many tsunami widows and an increase in alcoholism, violence and other related problems due to the sudden availability of money (compensation packages).

Vijaya, one of the team members, sadly recalls: "I lost everything to the tsunami.

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My husband ran away with the relief money and I was left alone to support my three children. I lost hope and hated every day of my life. But now things are different. I feel ownership of this unit along with my team and I feel good about it. I wish we could have thought of this earlier.”

The Indian State did not come up with adequate answers to such issues. Some organisations supported selected communities with training in livelihood methods that the people were not really interested in. Others just dumped boats and nets.

The total cost for setting up the unit and the trainings is approximately Rs. 42,000. And it has taken the C-Dot team nine months of collective thinking, discussion,

planning, conducting research and then finalising the livelihood option to create “Sea-Dot Pickles, the best from the sea.”

Priced at Rs. 60 for prawns and Rs. 50 for fish pickles, the products are yet to hit the supermarkets. At present they are making their rounds in college and government canteens and a few hotels.

The C-Dot team is aware that the Coastal Zone Management (CRZ) will affect their unit sooner or later, as the Chennai Port has been identified as a potential market for foreign and private players under the special economic zone. But the small pickle making unit is confident that they will survive. They refuse to move away from the coast as their factory is not just

a workplace but also a license to have their homes near the sea.

Rajendran, head of C-Dot, thinks that the first two years will be crucial. He strongly believes in the potential of the production team, which shares the profits equally amongst the women.

“We have received our first few big orders from hotel groups in the city and various government canteens but we are hoping that Sea-Dot pickles will become a household name. We have a long way to go and besides the hygiene and freshness aspect it is the team spirit and unity that will make this a successful story,” says Rajendran confidently.



## “The best of the sea”

- An exhaustive **participatory consultation process** was carried out with community members and leaders. The need for an alternative livelihood option for women quickly emerged.
- **56 existing self-help groups** (SHG) in the entire area were approached and through five months of meetings the nature of the livelihood was decided.
- After deciding the products – fish and prawn pickles – C-Dot linked with research units and marketing companies to **carry out training and research**. Many companies are still providing free support to the unit.
- A selection process and a panel of community women was established to select factory workers. Criteria included skills, experience and **priority to the most badly-affected women**.
- **The total cost of the unit was Rs. 42,000.**
- A few members from the selected team were sent for a **one month exposure visit** to the port town of Tuticorin in southern Tamil Nadu where there are similar production units.
- This was followed by further **trainings for both marketing and production** teams. The production team was taught about preservation, hygiene and cleanliness and the marketing team worked on various strategies to market the products.
- A **linkage was established with the State Fisheries Department** and venues were provided to sell the products. Women gained permission to sell their products in all government offices.
- **Pilot tests** have been conducted in college canteens in Chennai.
- Today **C-Dot is working in tandem with the government and with private marketing companies**. Two hundred grams of fish pickle are Rs. 50 and Rs. 60 for the same amount of prawn pickles.
- Despite being a brand new initiative, C-Dot has already received **orders from two of the biggest five star hotels in Chennai.**

STEP-BY-STEP  
STEP-BY-STEP  
STEP-BY-STEP  
STEP-BY-STEP  
STEP-BY-STEP



## “More than anything I am happy because I have dignity”

### Kasimdu Port area, northern Chennai, 4 a.m.

The port is bustling with activity. Fresh fish and prawns being unloaded off the boats, traders trying to fix the prices, arguments, some small fights, clanging of scales and people going towards the fish markets to sell their fresh stock. In the midst of the routine chaos Meena takes her purchases and heads to the manufacturing unit, just 15 minutes walk from the fish market.

For 30 year-old Meena, life was different and difficult, just a year ago. Forced into marriage at 19, her life ended up, like for majority of the women in the area, living with an unemployed alcoholic husband, suffering abuses by her in-laws and caught up in a life of complete chaos.



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When Meena was pregnant her husband left her for another woman and her in-laws kicked her out of the house. Meena had no choice but to return to her parents. After delivery Meena started working as a maid in houses earning Rs. 500 a month to support her son and parents.

The tsunami took away all Meena's belongings and savings. Life came to a halt for her and her family. But a year after the tsunami Meena was introduced to a Self Help Group and gradually into C-Dot's livelihood support programme. Today Meena earns Rs. 50 a day and is confident that the 'Sea-Dot Pickles' will become a big name making it possible for her and her teammates to escape abject poverty.

“More than anything I am happy because I have dignity. Today I know that I am capable of contributing to my family's economy and I discovered that I have skills. It is a great feeling working with the team and I hope we can become a big industry someday. It is a bit uncomfortable working with the gloves and masks but we will get used to it really soon and then we will be faster in making the pickles,” says Meena as she hurries to clean the prawns.

ActionAid India's tsunami response programme has reached more than 381,205 people over the last two years

This includes **79,200 women** supported with **alternative livelihoods**



# Challenging tourism

The Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism to develop and derive revenue from the country's natural star resorts and new airports, many villagers are forgetting

Thailand is one of the most popular tourist destinations in south-east Asia. Since 1997 more than 75 million foreign tourists have visited the country every year, resulting in USD 10 billion in revenue annually. This is Thailand's third biggest source of foreign exchange, following exports and capital market investment.

On paper, and as Deputy Prime Minister Suwat Liptapanlop said in a tourism strategy workshop on November 23, 2004, "Tourism can alleviate poverty as it will improve the living standards of rural people." However in practice the developments and economic improvements can be cancelled out by the impact on the environment and on the lives and livelihoods of local communities.

In 2003 the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA) was officially set up to develop and derive revenue from the country's natural resources and culture. According to DASTA, its aim is to improve the landscape, develop tourist attractions and improve transport links, in order to attract not just tourists, but foreign investment as well. Since DASTA was established as a "public" organisation, the authority has carried out the government's tourism area development plan as quickly as possible.

## impact on people's lives

Nork Na community in Kor Kao Island is one of the tsunami-affected communities threatened by DASTA, alongside Phi Phi and Lanta Island in Krabi and Ban Nam Kem in Phang Nga. When the government announced that tourism

would be promoted in the area, a window of job opportunities and hope opened for the villagers who in the past just lived a simple life by small scale fishing.

"Many of us never dreamt of big money coming to our area. Although we have been living in a simple way for generations, the money would give us another kind of comfort. But once we sell the land, we will have to move somewhere else," says Prateeb, a community member who is considering what to do with his piece of land.

"The government has not clearly informed communities about DASTA... What villagers see is a new airport being built on the island and land title deed being given for 'free'. This blissful lack of knowledge is creating confusion."

- SONGSAK INDARASAWAD,  
ACTIONAID THAILAND FELLOW  
KOR KAO ISLAND

"Currently we are suffering a serious lack of consideration and laws relating to livelihood preservation. This puts the livelihood condition of many of these communities and villages in a highly confused situation," says Songsak Indarasawad, ActionAid Thailand's sole fellow in Nork Na community.

Critics argue that communities in the

designated areas will be badly affected because the government is ignoring the conservation of traditional livelihoods. Traditional livelihoods and particularly small scale fishing in Nork Na are at risk, indeed standing alone against the waves of change and the millions of dollars potentially arriving in the area.

"Villagers do not have a clear idea about DASTA and all the potential implications. Another problem is that the villagers see DASTA as a quick money generator and thus they are interested in it," Songsak says.

The government has not clearly informed communities about DASTA's potential threats or negative outcomes. Instead, what villagers see is a new airport being built on the island (see picture) and the land title deed being given "for free" to the villagers by the government. This blissful lack of knowledge is creating confusion amongst the community members as they don't know what lies behind the agenda. Currently, only the positive side of DASTA has been presented to the villagers. Further, DASTA is only considering the people's participation on paper but not in practice.

For DASTA "creating livelihood opportunities" means having local people working in luxurious resorts and businesses, while ignoring the conservation of traditional livelihoods like fisheries. The likely scenario is that people will engage in these new occupations and lose interest in their traditional livelihoods. Sometimes the fishermen won't be able to go to sea as some of these new five star hotels will block access to the natural resources.



# in the south of Thailand



Administration was set up by the Thai government resources and local cultures. In the haze of building five that the initiative is jeopardising their traditional livelihood.



**Right to information**  
raising awareness  
about DASTA policies &  
implications

**Community  
ownership**  
encouraging solidarity &  
participation

**Pro-people**  
developing alternative  
livelihoods in consultation  
with local communities

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## community mobilisation

Mobilising people in Nork Na to challenge this policy is not an easy task. Not all the 400 community members of the 70 households work in the village. Some of them work elsewhere and return home only once in a while, which means that the community does not see yet a big benefit in joining hands and working together to negotiate on behalf of the entire community.

To help this community to be more aware of the situation and to identify other occupational opportunities, ActionAid Thailand is working on a community project that will help villagers to overcome the uncertainty of their future through providing them with information on DASTA and alternative livelihood and income generation options.

The project has two objectives: 1) to raise awareness and alert the villagers about DASTA policies and implications so they can consider more seriously what DASTA can give them and take from them, and 2) to build a sense of community and ownership through engaging in a common livelihood by harvesting wild plants such as Harng Ma and Krachao Sida which are typical to the area.

Fellows like Songsak – ActionAid Thailand currently has nine fellows working in nine tsunami-affected communities – are introducing participatory approaches to the community. They are focusing on supporting and fine tuning the ideas proposed by the villagers and turning them into real projects led by the villagers themselves.

“The group is small and most of the

community members do not yet think that the project will pay off,” says community member Prateeb. “Like the others, I do not see much of the occupational opportunity because our customers are mainly the investors of the resorts. We really need to find a market that would guarantee some profit.”

ActionAid Thailand is currently planning to conduct qualitative research on livelihood in Nork Na. The goal is to encourage increased community participation, learn more about local culture and to identify suitable markets for wild plants.

For many people in Thailand, DASTA's goal of eradicating poverty is illusionary and sustainable tourism under DASTA has failed to improve the living standards of local people, creating only more confusion and uncertainty in their lives.



## meet HEMA

The vulnerability of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) during disaster or conflict situations is increased by loss of livelihood and lack of access to basic needs. Hema Allam (27), livelihood coordinator for ActionAid India's partner Society for National Integration for Rural Development (SNIRD), is proving that livelihood support has a direct and positive impact on the lives and confidence levels of PLWHA.

### HOW DID YOU START WORKING WITH SNIRD?

I used to work with sex workers, dealing with health issues and challenging the stigma and discrimination faced by PLWHA. I joined SNIRD in March 2006 as a livelihood coordinator. Initially it was a steep learning process for the entire team as **livelihood options for positive people is a tricky issue**. Currently SNIRD is working in 65 villages in Prakasham district in South Andhra Pradesh.

**"I do believe there is a visible change in the confidence level of PLWHA"**

### WHY LIVELIHOOD FOR PLWHA?

The alarming increase in the number of PLWHA in our field areas prompted SNIRD to work and fight alongside them. **Their needs are greater – nutritionally and medically** – and we believe that livelihood interventions can directly help to meet these needs, while the additional income can be used to support their other needs. Another important component is that through their work they are restoring their dignity and confidence.

### WHAT IS THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR THE LIVELIHOOD INTERVENTIONS?

**The entire process is carried out by PLWHA** and we are just facilitating it when required. The need for livelihood support was brought to us by PLWHA and then the process started with a series of meetings, consultations and discussions with the community. At the mandal (block) level, PLWHA discussed, deliberated and shortlisted the most vulnerable who should be given the livelihood support. The livelihood activities were finalised on an individual basis after taking into account their health status, skills and capabilities. From cattle rearing to

grants for fish vending, cultivation of vegetables for sale or setting up of sari shops, the activity differs from individual to individual. A cost-benefit analysis of the proposed activity was also undertaken in the planning phase.

### WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMME?

The biggest challenge is still the stigma and discrimination faced by positive people. **Many people refuse to buy products that are made or sold by PLWHA**. Stigma and discrimination is greater in the villages as everyone knows each other. Obviously we are also concerned about long-term sustainability. Many factors such as lack of government support, inadequate food security and access to treatment pose a challenge to sustaining the livelihood interventions. We are working towards overcoming these challenges by raising awareness on the virus, sensitising communities, gaining greater and more meaningful participation of PLWHA in all walks of life and advocating for policy change.

### DO YOU SEE ANY CHANGE IN THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE YOU ARE WORKING WITH?

These interventions have brought together PLWHA from various villages and for the time they have interacted and formed support groups. **These groups are drawing on each others' experiences** and realising the importance of living in a positive way. This is proving to be a great source of inspiration for them. We are also raising awareness about HIV, providing information about health services provided by the state, and creating linkages with other local and regional positive peoples' networks. I do believe there is a visible change in the confidence level of PLWHA.

*Formed in 1987, SNIRD works on reproductive and child health, Indian medicine and homeopathy, HIV and AIDS and urban health in Prakasham and Nellore districts in Andhra Pradesh, India. Prakasham is a tsunami affected district with a 2.8% HIV prevalence rate (APSACS 2005).*

**Editors** Nashwa Asim (lead), Ravi Pratap, Leah Boonthanom, Jacobo Quintanilla

**Contributors** Fathimath Afiya, Zahangir Alam, Nashwa Asim, Leah Boonthanom, Apiradee (Oye) Chappanapong, Smitha C.P., Preeti Das, Indika Dayarathna, Hema .A. Jawahar, Nishantha Mallawaarachchi, Sajeew P.B., Jacobo Quintanilla, Rohitha Rajindra, Fathmath Rifau, Wimala Sutheeadisai, Puree Wasinrapee

**Design & Layout** Leah Boonthanom

**International Tsunami Policy Advisor** moira.oleary@actionaid.org

**Maldives Communications Officer** nashwasim@gmail.com

**Tsunami Online Information Centre** <http://tsunami.actionaid.org.uk/>

ActionAid works with 14 million poor and excluded people in 47 countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas to support them in securing their rights and eradicating poverty. Our tsunami programme works with 433,000 affected people in India, the Maldives, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Thailand

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