DRAFT

Rebuilding Hope and Justice: Handbook for Aid Workers in Natural Disasters

Harsh Mander

In a natural disaster, in the space of a few merciless hours—or sometimes even barely minutes—tens of thousands of people are suddenly rendered utterly defenseless before the fearsome rage of nature. This Handbook seeks to focus on some of the conventionally most neglected elements of reconstruction and rehabilitation, and propose a broad framework for long-term disaster response, with emphasis on social justice, and the rights and dignity of survivors.

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By Harsh Mander

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I learnt most of what this handbook contains from the incredible stores of wisdom, resilience, strength and humanity, of the survivors of the Orissa super-cyclone of 1999, the Kutch earthquake of 2001 and the Gujarat carnage of 2002. It is to them that this volume is dedicated.

Much of what is contained in this handbook is derived from experience of handling natural and human made disasters both within the civil services, mainly as the district head in several districts of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and the Orissa super-cyclone and Kutch disasters, and Gujarat massacre, as country head of Action-Aid India.

I therefore owe a great debt to my dedicated and compassionate mostly youthful colleagues, who helped shape and operationalise all the ideas contained in this handbook.

Harsh Mander

Healing Wounds

Prashant was only in middle school when he returned home, seven years earlier, to find the doors to the house barred. He kept knocking and no one responded. He panicked and called his friends. They helped him squeeze into the house through a window. When his eyes got used to the light, he began to scream. His mother was hanging dead from a rope tied to ceiling.

His father was a Bengali prawn fisherman in a village coastal Orissa. Life had been uneventful until just two months earlier, when his mother had taken to weeping and fighting because his father had taken a mistress.

After the dust settled a little, his mother's brothers took him, with his younger brother and sister, to their village Kalikuda, in the prosperous coastal district of Jagatsinghpur. Prashant's uncles were convinced that his father and mistress had killed his mother, and they filed a complaint with the police. He was jailed for two months, then Prashant does not know what transpired but he was set free. The case lingered on in the courts, but in the end he learnt from his uncles that his father was acquitted.

The wounds on the spirit of the three bereaved children slowly healed, because of the love and acceptance that they found in the home of their maternal uncles. Their mother's three brothers all lived together, with their wives and children, under a single roof. Prashant and his brother and sister were absorbed into the large and bustling joint family as though they had been born into it.

The years passed, and the children grew up. The horrors of the memories of their mother's hanging body and their father's alleged complicity and incarceration, slowly faded in their young minds. They would not have believed that life could turn against them with the same brutality and heartlessness ever again. But it did. There were more storms to weather.

On October 27, 1999, Prashant had gone to block headquarters of Ersama, some 18 kilometres from his village, to spend the day with a friend. In the evening, a dark and menacing storm quickly gathered, and the winds beat against their houses with a speed and fury that Prashant had never witnessed before. Dense incessant rain filled the darkness, ancient trees were uprooted and fell, and the screams of people all around filled the air as houses and people were swiftly washed away. Angry waters swirled neck-deep into his friend's house. The building in which Prashant’s friend lived was of brick and mortar and was strong enough to survive the devastation of wind velocities of 350 km per hour. But the cold terror of the family grew with the crashing sound of uprooted trees which fell upon their own house, cracking the roof and walls, some time in the middle of the night.

The crazed destruction of the cyclone and the ocean surge, the worst natural disaster in the country of the century, continued for the next 36 houses, although wind speeds reduced somewhat by the next morning. To escape the rising waters in the house, Prashant with his friend's family had taken refuge on its flat roof. Prashant will never forget the shock of his first glimpse of the devastation wrought by the super cyclone by the grey light of the early morning. A raging deadly brown sheet of water covered everything as far as the eye could see; only fractured cement houses still stood in a few *places. Bloated carcasses of people and animals floated in every direction. Even huge old trees had fallen all around. Two coconut trees had fallen on the roof of their house. This was a blessing in disguise, because it was only the tender coconuts on the trees that kept hunger at bay for the trapped family for several days that were to follow.*

For the next two days, Prashant sat huddled miserably with the family of his friend on the open rooftop. They were frozen in the incessant rain, and the rainwater washed Prashant's flowing tears. The only thought that lashed his brain was whether his family had survived the fury of the super-cyclone. Was he to be bereaved once again?

Two full days later - which seemed to Prashant like two years - the rain ceased and the rain waters slowly began to recede. Prashant was determined to set out to seek his family without more delay. It was still dangerous, and his friend's family pleaded with him to stay back a while longer, until the situation was more safe. But Prashant knew he had to go.

He equipped himself with a long sturdy stick, and with its assistance he started his long expedition of 18 kilometres to his village through the swollen floodwaters. It was a journey he would never forget. He used his stick to constantly locate the road, where water was most shallow, at places waist deep, as he slowly made progress. At several points, he lost the road and had to swim. After some distance, he was relieved to find two friends of his uncle who were making the same journey to their village. They decided to move ahead together.

As they waded through the waters, the macabre scenes they were to see grew more and more grim. They had to push away as they walked hundreds of human bodies - men, women, children - and the carcasses of dogs, goats and cattle that the current thrust against them. In every village that they passed, they could not see a single standing house. Prashant now wept out loud and long. He was sure that his family could not have survived this catastrophe.

In this way - wading, groping, swimming, weeping - Prashant and his 2 companions made their way to their respective villages. On the way, one companion found that his entire village was swept away. There was no sign of his home. His wife and son miraculously had survived. But his own soul could not carry the burden of all that he had witnessed that day. Two days later, he was to die suddenly of a heart attack.

Eventually Prashant moved on alone. In his own village, Kalikuda, which he reached that evening, he panicked further. Where their home once stood, there were only remnants of its roof, and some of their belongings were caught mangled and twisted amidst the branches of trees just visible above the dark waters. His heart went cold.

His last hope was a large cyclone shelter, which had been built only recently in the neighbouring village of Khuranta, by the International Red Cross. It was indeed one of the few cyclone shelters in the entire vulnerable coast-line of the region. When it was built, the Red Cross had asked for volunteers and young Prashant had given in his name. They had been trained in first aid and rescue. If his family was alive, the only chance were that they were at this shelter.

It was in the fading light of the evening that Prashant finally reached the shelter, swimming desperately, and utterly weary. From a distance, he could see it crowded with people. Daring to hope, he at last the reached the shelter and pulled himself on it.

Among the first people he saw in the crowd was his maternal grandmother. Weak with hunger, she rushed to him, her hands outstretched, her eyes brimming. It was a miracle. They had long given him up for dead.

Quickly word spread and his family gathered around him, holding him to their breasts. Prashant anxiously scanned the motley, tattered group. His brother and sister, his uncles and aunts, they all seemed to be there. No, his middle aunt was missing. With a sinking feeling, he asked about her. When the storm broke out, and they all had rushed to the safety of the cyclone shelter, she had stubbornly refused to abandon the eighteen heads of cattle that the joint family had owned. She drowned with them.

She had been like a mother to him, and Prashant felt bereft once again.

However, by the next morning, as he began to take in the desperate situation in the shelter, he decided to take hold of himself. Amidst the clamour of a crowd of 2500 people, he saw the dense and deadly swirl of settled grief. A total of 86 human lives were lost in the village. All 96 houses had been washed away. The population of the village was predominantly of Bengali immigrants engaged in prawn cultivation, like Prashant's family, and all the prawn ponds had been submerged and destroyed. Everywhere was the pervasive smell of shit and urine. But even stronger than all of these, Prashant saw the desperation of hunger. It was their fourth day at the shelter. They had survived so far on green coconuts, but there was too little to go around such a tumult of people. There was rice stored in the granaries of the one village merchant, which had also been submerged. Prashant was told that the villagers had besieged him to give them the grain, but the merchant had stubbornly refused, even though the soaked grain was rotting.

Prashant enquired about why the village head, the elected panch, did not take matters in hand. He had lost his wife in the cyclone, and he was unable to shake off his anguish and despair. Meanwhile conditions deteriorated in the shelter. Almost a dozen people, mostly old people, had died of hunger, of the cold, and probably of broken hearts.

Prashant, all of 19 years, twice violently bereaved in his short life, decided that he must take on leadership of his village if no one else would. He first organised a group of youth and elders to jointly pressure the merchant once again to part with his rice. This time the delegation succeeded and returned triumphantly, wading through the receding waters with rice for the entire shelter. No one cared that the rice was already rotting. Branches from fallen trees were gathered to light a reluctant and slow fire, and the rice was eventually cooked. For the first time in four days, the gathering of 2500 survivors at the cyclone shelter were able to fill their bellies.

His next task was to organise a team of youth volunteers—he described them in English as a task force—to clean the shelter of its shit, urine, vomit and floating carcasses, and to tend to the wounds and broken bones of the many who were injured.

On the fifth day, a military helicopter flew over the shelter and dropped some food parcels. It then did not return. The youth task force gathered empty utensils from the shelter, and deputed the children to lie in the sand left by the waters around the shelter *with the empty metal vessels on their stomachs, to communicate to the passing helicopters that they were hungry. The message got through, and after that the sortees of the helicopter to the shelter became regular, airdropping food and other basic needs.*

Volunteers began to stream in on foot and by boat, first of a local organisation called Sarvodaya Mandal, followed shortly by the army—whom a young boy described as the Kargil people. They were joined by Prashant's youth group in clearing the trees that blocked the roads, disposing carcasses and tending to the sick.

Word spread that in the block headquarters of Ersama, 18 kilometres distant, the government and NGOs were distributing food and polythene sheets for temporary shelters. In the village, after the flood waters receded, most villagers scoured the site of the village for what may have survived of their belongings, and for any rotting food. Prashant instead organised a team of men to go to Ersama to demand and secure the share of food for their village.

This became a daily trek. The state authorities and NGOs distributed food only sufficient for one day at a time. After a fortnight, larger stocks for three days at a time were given, for another 20 days.

Prashant found that a large number of children had been orphaned. He brought them together under a small polythene shelter that he constructed, and started to take care of them. He mobilised some support from the women to tend them, while the men secured food and materials for shelter.

Among the orphans was 12-year-old Vasudeva, eldest among six brothers and sisters. On the night hours before the storm, his disabled father heard the warning on the radio about the impending cyclone. Youth volunteers of the village who had been trained by the Red Cross persuaded the villagers to secure their lives in the cyclone shelter. His father discounted the warnings. I have seen the floods in 1982 when the embankment of the river Dalaighai had broken, he declared. Even that we had survived. Nothing will happen to us.

But when the winds raged and the waters rose, his father's brother swam with Vasudeva and his two brothers to the safety of the shelter. His mother took his two sisters, then swam back for her husband, father and infant son. When they did not return the whole day—although dead bodies and unconscious survivors floated past the shelter in large numbers - the 12-year-old boy became desperate. His uncle's son helped him to go out to search for them, by tying a rope to a standing tree, and then to another, slowly and dangerously approaching their settlement. When Vasudeva found on reaching there that nothing at all remained of his home, he knew with the pain of a knife slashing his chest, that the worst had happened.

It was children like Vasudeva and his siblings that Prashant took into his makeshift shelter. Heroically overcoming his grief, the 12-year-old boy Vasudeva insisted on joining Prashant's youth task force—clearing roads, disposing bodies, securing food for the village.

Some two weeks later, a young officer of the IAS arrived at their village, a trolley attached to his jeep loaded with a large tent and utensils. He said he wanted to set up a shelter for orphans and widows, and was looking for volunteers. The villagers led him to

Prashant, and he found that he had already taken into his care the children. A shelter was set up, called a Mamata Guha, and widows also were brought under its roof for protection. An NGO took responsibility for the programme, which they called Sneha Abhiyan or Campaign of Love, and it appointed Prashant as a sneha karmi or community care volunteer, in charge of the Mamata Guha.

As the weeks passed, Prashant was quick to recognise that the women and children in the Mamata Gruha were sinking deeper and deeper in their grief. The women he persuaded to start working in the food-for-work programme started by the NGO, and for the children he organised sports events. He loved to play cricket himself, and he organised cricket matches between children in the 35 Mamata Guha spread out across the district. With other volunteers of the organisation, Prashant is engaged in helping the widows and children to pick up the broken pieces of their lives afresh. Initial government plans to set up institutions for orphans and widows have been successfully resisted. They are to be resettled in the community, possibly in new foster families of childless widows and children without adult care.

It is six months after the devastation of the super-cyclone. Vasudeva is firm that he does not want to be adopted or taken care of, and stubbornly refuses all assistance and adult protection. It is I who will take care of my brothers and sisters, he declares with resoluteness well beyond his years. I will rebuild my house where my parent's home stood. I will not go anywhere else. When I awake very morning, I want to see the faces of peple I know and have grown up with.

And as for Prashant, this time the wounds on his spirit have healed simply because he had no time to attend to them. His handsome youthful face is what the widows and orphaned children of his village most seek out in their darkest hours of grief.

Introduction: Principles of Disaster-Response

In a natural disaster, in the space of a few merciless hours—or sometimes even barely minutes—tens of thousands of people are suddenly rendered utterly defenseless before the fearsome rage of nature. As nature stalks unforeseen corners of the planet, it leaves in its wake a trail of terrifying devastation—of homes, lives, dreams and hope.

Disasters of nature recur with the stirrings of every season in India. However, there are a few in which the unbridled fury of the forces of the planet are so malevolent so as to grip national attention, even in an ancient teeming country inured to the daily excess of human suffering and loss. What has challenged both our collective humanity, and capacities for governance, is that three such monumental disasters have followed each other in exceptionally quick succession in India, during the space of a few years, clustered around both bends of the turn of the century. In 1999, cyclonic winds brutally swept away lives and livelihoods of impoverished people along the coastlines of Orissa. In 2001, the earth stirred thousands of kilometers westwards in Gujarat, tearing down homes and pitilessly crushing lives within and around them. And now, at the end of 2004, it was the sudden angry rising of the ocean in the wake of the massive earthquake that cruelly preyed once again on the coastlines and inlands not just of India, but from Indonesia to Somalia.

Headlines ached as they reported the mounting toll of the killer tsunami, and images of imcomprehensible loss and suffering that defy human endurance daily crowded television screens in living rooms around the world. As a shoeshine street boy near Bhuj in Gujarat contributed two rupees to the tsunami relief fund, he symbolized the resolve that has touched most people, to do all each one of us can to mitigate the intense torment of people living on the coastlines and islands who fell victim to the murderous ocean waves. It is in order to piece together some of these learnings, and to focus on some of the conventionally most neglected elements of reconstruction and rehabilitation that this handbook has been assembled.

The major learnings and principles on which this handbook is founded are summarized below: -

(i) The need for long-term engagement:

In the initial days and weeks after any major disaster, the empathy and engagement of citizens as well as officials and official aid agencies is most intense, and many reach not just into their pockets, but actually converge on disaster sites, clogging and even choking the already collapsed infrastructure. However well-meaning, this tends to seriously hamper the specialized challenges of rescue and initial relief, which is best left to professionals.

It is only weeks and months after the TV cameras shift and images of the disaster fade from newspapers, that the survivors most need our sustained support and solidarity, as they attempt to gather the shattered fragments of their lives. But public memory is notoriously fickle and short, and the large majority of support tends by then to evaporate.

This handbook outlines a few of the most unmet and neglected challenges and needs of survivors of major natural disasters that arise after the phases of rescue and initial survival relief have passed. They require the commitment of sustained engagement, for at least two years if not longer, from the time that the disaster initially strikes.

(ii) Psychosocial support:

In the aftermath of most disasters, resources pour into the reconstruction by brick and mortar, but rarely into the reconstruction of hope and the human spirit. Especially where the victims are extremely impoverished, we tend to focus only on their physical survival, neglectful of their emotional torment.

No doubt people need desperately to rebuild their shelters and livelihoods, and the movement to normalcy is impossible unless the infrastructure ravaged by nature is urgently restored. However, what is too often forgotten is the mostly unmet challenge will be to help the survivors deal with the enormity of their psychological and emotional trauma and loss. People have to help people heal emotionally, to come to terms with their profound grief and loss, and to gather the resolve to pick up the threads of life once again.

A 70-year-old man spent New Year's Day inside his tsunami-ravaged home, separated from his wife and children. Silvaikurisu Christopher was the only remaining inhabitant of a 15-kilometer stretch of beach 30 kilometers east of Nagercoil, near the southern tip of India in Tamil Nadu state. All others in his Puthoor-Mandaikadu village, including his family, have gone to relief camps after tsunamis hit on December 26. The waves killed 15 people in the village.

His family members and neighbors pleaded with him to join them as they fled to safety. But he told them he wished to stay on the beach. “I'm an old man. I have spent my whole life on the sea. I don't fear the sea. I have survived violent seas several times,” he said. “But this was different,” he admitted.

Christopher, who lost a leg in a sea accident some time ago, said he had “no place to go” and had been on the beach seven days without food or drinking water. “I'm scared to live here. But I'm handicapped. I didn't go to the relief camps fearing that I can't use the toilets there,” Christopher added.

“The silence here wounds me,” he said, noting that he has never seen the shore deserted like this. “There were always people around, inside houses and out in the streets.” Sometimes, Christopher continued, he sees the “faces of the dead in his sleep.” He would like people to return to the shore and resume a normal life. “I don't understand why they are keeping away from the shores. Now the sea is normal and they should return home,” he murmured.

Source: India - Disabled man survives tsunami, but is home alone on southern beach
http://www.rveritas-asia.org/news/janwk1india7.htm / http://www.apcdproject.org/tsunami

(iii) Affirmative action for vulnerable and discriminated groups:

In any natural disaster, it may be assumed that all segments of society are equally affected by the assault of nature. However, there is a larger body of evidence suggesting that even at the stage of rescue, and more so in subsequent phases of relief and rehabilitation, the injustice, discrimination and imbalance of power that characterizes society even in normal times, obstructs and crushes even more severely in times of catastrophe, those segments of society than are socially and economically most vulnerable, discriminated against and excluded: such as women, dalits, adivasis, minorities, disabled people, children and the aged.

"There is a girl whose lower extremity has been completely paralyzed, as she was immersed in water for 2 days, before she was rescued. Her other family members were washed away by Tsunami. She has refused to come to Port Blair for treatment. She is living in a camp in Car Nicobar Island".

- Shri Uday Kumar, Director, Social Welfare.

Source: Tsunami & Disability: Report of Visit to Indian Islands by Rama Chari & Rajul Padmanabhan, Disability World (available at http://www.disabilityworld.org/12-02_05/news/tsunamivisitreport.shtml)

There is, for instance, far less urgency to secure medical attention and food for women and girls, as compared to men and boys. Post-disaster deaths in India therefore tend to be much higher among women than men. Disabled people, children and old people, particularly those who have lost their caregivers, are the last to access relief supplies. In assessing compensation and rehabilitation entitlements, and in locating their new homes and livelihoods, there is frequently open discrimination against dalits and minorities.

Therefore, those citizen groups and aid workers who resolve to partner with the survivors in their long and arduous journey of revival in the months and years after any natural disaster, must recognize the imperative to clearly take sides with those who are most oppressed, by gender, class, caste, community, disability and age. For people whose survival and rights are precarious and gravely contested even in normal times, a disaster leaves them even more defenseless to resist the forces of both social bigotry and official collusion. The solidarity of other people who believe in justice and equal human rights would be invaluable to correct a little of the social injustice that routinely characterizes disaster rehabilitation.

(iv) Respect for dignity of survivors:

Another frequently neglected contribution that we may make is to defend the dignity and rights of the survivors, from official and even non-official agencies that are charged with relief and rehabilitation. Too often are food packages thrown from trucks to scrambling desperate masses of survivors. Many aid agencies force people to line up daily for hours to receive their paltry handouts. Alternative ways should be found to reach aid quietly and with respect to people where they are in need.

When relief material was being distributed in his area, 75-year-old Perumal of Devanampattinam, close to Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu, quietly stood alone in the remains of his thatched hut, refusing to join the hungry crowds jostling for aid.

When asked why he did not join in, Perumal shook his head and said, “It is no use. I have been pushed out on earlier occasions and have fallen on the ground. I know I will get nothing this time around too.

“Some cars came by and just threw the packets. The fastest gets the food, the strong one wins. The elderly and the injured don't get anything. We feel like dogs.”

Source: Tsunami earthquake disaster: latest from India; NGO latest, HelpAge International 7 Jan 2005 Reuters Alernet. (Available at http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/110511330454.htm)

(v) Respect for rights, capacities and participation of survivors:

Travelling along Tamil Nadu’s tragically shattered coast days after the tsunami, we heard other stories of how local Muslims helped the victims. In Pudukuppam one afternoon, we found a dozen exhausted Muslims, all wearing white caps, resting in a boat. They had just finished distributing cooked food to the villagers, for the eighth day in a row.

How this happened was one of those gorgeous stories that great tragedies invariably throw up. In nearby Parangipettai, Rafiq was going to be married at noon that Sunday, 26th December. The food was ready, the guests had gathered, festivities were about to begin.

Then, terrified villagers from coastal Pudupettai, Pudukuppam and elsewhere poured into Parangipettai, running from the tsunami.

The men from Rafiq’s wedding party quickly brought out their food and distributed it to the dazed victims, then started cooking more. And more. Eight days cooking, by the time we met them in Pudukuppam. Eight days that they had quietly and efficiently cooked for the villages of Chinnur, Pudupettai, Samiyarpettai, Velankarayanpettai, Kumarapettai, Panjakuppam, Shanmuganagar, Dalbastaikar and Pudukuppam. Lemon rice on the menu today, to feed 300 people in Pudukuppam.

It’s lucky, says Mohammed Hameem who told me this story as he sat in the boat, that there was that wedding scheduled that day.

Yes, but did Rafiq ever get married? The men look at each other in surprise. Cooking so steadily, none of them knows.

Source: ‘The day after’ by Dilip D'Souza. (Available at http://specials.rediff.com/news/2005/jan/25rep.htm)

One major failing of most government and even non-government relief and rehabilitation work in the aftermath of any disaster, is to treat the people affected as mainly passive, powerless recipients of materials and services; unable to secure their physical survival themselves and to actively partner the planning, implementation and monitoring of efforts to provide them succor and to rebuild their lives. In tumultuous moments of disaster and crisis, whether created by nature, civil strife or war, it is usually believed that people survive primarily because of external support, mounted by state authorities and relief workers. The truth however is, in practice most people survive the ravages of disasters substantially because of the resilience and compassion of the human spirit… their own frequently heroic but mostly unacknowledged efforts to cope and retrieve themselves from their unforeseen and profound loss and crises, to help rebuild not just their shattered lives, but also those of other people in their communities.

Chhansara: The Community Takes Charge

Says Poori Behn, a mother of two, “Our minds were so confused that we would sometimes put spices into the tea and tea leaves in the food. After the first week it became apparent that the only way things could get back to normal would be by starting 'normal' activities.” So the women of the village collected in one of the makeshift shacks and got back to doing the embroidery work the area is so famous for.

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a well-known NGO specializing in micro-finance and livelihoods, guided them on market trends and designs, arranged for exhibitions in different parts of the country, and, with the return of livelihood, the wheels of normalcy soon began turning. The women now earn about Rs 30-40 a day as compared to the Rs 10-12 that they used to before.

Source: Gujarat Earthquake: One Year Later: Well into first phase of Bank assistance, tales of progress from the field. (Available at http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20041944~menuPK:34460~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html)

The Spirit of Gujarat

“For a split second, when we heard the rumbling sounds, we had no idea of what to expect. Nothing had prepared us for the devastation that was to come. But as mothers, we soon realized that we had to get a firm hold on our feelings and deal with the other realities—children who were terrified and had to be fed, no houses available. One of the first things that we wanted was a make-shift school for our children,” explains Fatima Behn, a resident of Dabhi village in Patan District.

Fatima Behn exemplifies the spirit of the people of Gujarat. When the earthquake struck, it killed, in a matter of seconds, about 14,000 people, injured another 167,000, reduced to rubble some 230,000 houses, and damaged nearly a million others, besides disrupting the power and water supply, and road, irrigation, and telecommunication networks. Thousands of schools, hospitals, administrative buildings, and markets collapsed. And with all of this, families, livelihoods, and social networks were traumatically destroyed. The response of civil society within and outside Gujarat and of the international community was swift and generous. Relief and rescue teams, food, tents and medicines, cash and donations, and long-term offers to help in reconstruction, flowed in.

But the greatest response was that of the affected communities themselves. Unwilling to passively accept aid and assistance, and displaying remarkable strength and resilience, survivors quickly began to take charge of their lives. The government, in consultation with its civil society and international partners, decided to embark on an owner and community-driven recovery strategy, but this was almost a natural decision given the initiative of the communities themselves.

Source: Gujarat Earthquake: One Year Later: Well into first phase of Bank assistance, tales of progress from the field. (Available at http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20041944~menuPK:34460~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html)

Therefore, officials and relief agencies who are charged with rebuilding lives can do no better than building partnerships based on respect, equality and solidarity with the survivors themselves. They need to identify, reach out to and support potential people's leaders and workers, especially youth and women, in whom is vested the extraordinary resilience, compassion, and the capacity to rebuild what is hardest of all after a tragedy of such stunning and overwhelming brutality and magnitude—hope.

It is therefore appropriate that the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2004 lists 'participation' as the first common standard, stipulating that aid agencies must ensure that 'the disaster-affected population actively participates in the assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the assistance programme.'[1]

The Charter notes that 'participation in the programme should reinforce people's sense of dignity and hope in times of crisis, and people should be encouraged to participate in programmes in different ways. Programmes should be designed to build upon local capacity and to avoid undermining people's own coping strategies.'[2]

The previous day Rs. 4,000 each in cash, dhotis and saris, bed sheets, cooking oil and rice were distributed by the Government. Most women present told us that the money had gone straight to the liquor shops and they were left without any money. We asked the women if they could manage the finances and see to it that their hopes and their aspirations can be met by themselves. The women slowly realized the importance of their power in togetherness and agreed to form a 10-member group of management among themselves.

Source: Report of Tsunami Relief Work at Nagapattinam By Dr.V. Mohini Giri, Chairperson, Guild of Service. (Available at http://griefandrenewal.com/widows_tsunami.htm)

(vi) Transparency and People's Monitoring:

Linked to the right of participation of survivors, is the imperative for transparency and people's monitoring systems. There should be a consensus to enforce transparency regarding all resource and supplies received and expenditure incurred, whether by governments or NGOs.

The Humanitarian Charter 2004, recognizes the importance of sharing information: "Women and men of all ages from the disaster-affected and wider local populations, including vulnerable groups, receive information about the assistance programme, and are given the opportunity to comment to the assistance agency during all stages of the

[1] Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards Response, Pg. 28
[2] Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards Response, Pg. 29

project cycle".[3] It goes on to state that "mechanism should be established to allow people to comment on the programme e.g. by means of public meetings or via community-based organization. For individuals who are homebound or disabled, specific outreach programmes may be required." People need to be empowered to exercise their right to information and conduct regular people's audits, to prevent the corruption and waste that shamefully characterizes most large relief and reconstruction efforts.

(vii) <u>Community based rehabilitation of vulnerable groups:</u>

Both government, and frequently non-government agencies, tend to opt for institutionalized, semi-custodial models of rehabilitation for the most vulnerable survivors like widows or orphans, disabled people and old people left without caregivers.

These models should be actively discouraged, to prevent once again traumatically uprooting these highly vulnerable people, and condemn them to the loveless existence of state or private institution. Instead, the effort should be to develop models for their resettlement, in accordance with their aspirations, within their own communities, with community-based systems of protection, care and development.

In the subsequent chapters, this handbook will attempt to elaborate some ways to elaborate these principles. It will endeavor to assist us to meet some of the most daunting challenges posed by any major natural disaster—the enormous agony and loss of the survivors, many of them impoverished, discriminated, dispossessed, and to partner them for as long as it is necessary for the defense of justice, and to enable them to dare to hope again.

3 Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards Response, Pg. 28

Chapter 1

Participation, Transparency and People's Audits

Too often do governments, and even well-meaning non-governmental, aid agencies treat women and men, boys and girls who survive natural disasters, as mere passive recipients of their relief and rehabilitation services. The unstated assumption is that they lack the capacity and the potential to contribute to overwhelmingly daunting challenges of rebuilding of their own lives.

As we have already observed, the actual experience everywhere in the world and throughout human history, is at complete variance with this assumption. The greatest contribution to the restoration to normalcy after any disaster, is unarguably of the survivors themselves. The aftermath of every disaster, natural or human-made, is crowded with innumerable and mostly untold stories of the resilience and compassion of survivors. It is this innate strength and humanity that is the greatest resource in any post-disaster response. Government and non-government relief and aid agencies no doubt have the duty and capacity to contribute a great deal to disaster response in terms of resources and technical expertise. However, their efforts are likely to best succeed only if they build these efforts on the foundations of a genuine partnership with communities of the survivors themselves.

Their chapter will attempt to elaborate some illustrative ways in which such democratic partnerships between aid agencies and survivors groups can be built.

(i) Right to Information:

At every stage of post-disaster response, efforts must be made to actively share all relevant information with survivors. An illustrative list of the following critical information relevant to the confirmed survival, well-being and resurgence of the survivors, includes those that may relate to the following:

a. The causes and impact of the disaster
b. Chances of recurrence
c. Steps undertaken by state officials for rescue, relief, reconstruction and disaster response
d. Officials at each level, and details of the nature of their responsibilities
e. Official grievance-redressal mechanisms
f. Legal entitlements of each category of survivors, and full details of government schemes, including how these can be accessed
g. Disaggregated budget allocations and expenditures
h. Details of non-governmental agencies engaged in disaster response, including the past experience areas of expertise, of these agencies, and their commitments regarding time period and geographical and functional areas of engagement
i. Funds received by non-government agencies: sources and magnitude, and disaggregated details of expenditure

j. Needs assessment and project reports of various aid agencies, as well as monitoring and evaluation reports

It is the duty of official and non-official agencies not merely to make this information available on demand, but to actively share this information with all groups of survivors, through locally appropriate methods. These may include wall writing of major messages, pasting on the walls of panchayats and villages and special groups meetings. Care should be taken to ensure that separate meetings are organized for socially discriminated and vulnerable groups, such as women, person with disabilities, dalits and minorities.

(ii) Right to be consulted and to informed choice and consent:

All categories of survivors have the right to be consulted and their informed consent obtained for all decisions related to all stages and aspects of post-disaster response. Major decisions in which consultation and consent of survivors is imperative would include those related to the location and design of shelters and public buildings, the reconstruction, upgradation or replacement of livelihoods, and physical and social infrastructure. To fail to do so is not just undemocratic; it also frequently leads to unconscionable waste and possible corruption. Many post-disaster reconstructed settlements have shelters that no survivors are willing to occupy, because the designs and locations are unacceptable to them; or those which are occupied but do not satisfy the needs and aspiration of survivors.

Certain principles must inform all such processes. The state and other aid agencies have the duty to share all relevant information and technical options to enable people to make genuinely informed choices. The choice of various categories of women and men, boys and girls who constitute a community includes but is not coterminous with the choice of the elected or traditional leaders. In other words, consultation and consent of the community leaders does not in itself amount to the consent of the entire community.

These consultations can be facilitated by the use of a variety of participatory tools like social mapping, focus group discussions and micro-level planning. Further, processes of consultation must be highly sensitive to the decisions and highly unequal power and voice of various segments of a community. Therefore, processes of information sharing and consultation must be undertaken separately with each identified category of vulnerable groups.

State and other aid agencies must ensure that the cumulative outcomes of collective decision-making in any community must not compromise and adversely impact the interest of less powerful and socially discriminated groups. For instance, many reconstructed village plans in post-earthquake Gujarat segregated and ghettoised dalits and minorities into locations of poor access and services.

The defense that is sometimes put forward is that disasters should not be treated as an opportunity for social engineering, and what is rebuilt can be legitimately expected to reflect the divisions that characterize society in normal times. This argument is dealt with specifically in the chapter on disasters and social inequality. However, it is enough to reiterate here that the aspirations and interests of vulnerable social groups must be actively defended in all post-disaster responses, and that informed choice and consent of a community fully must include those of people who are most powerless among them.

(iii) Right to monitor, evaluate and audit all disaster response work

In the communication era in a fast-shrinking globe, heart-wrenching images of major disasters crowd television screens in living rooms around the world. Large parts of both official and non-official aid are funded by small donations from innumerable concerned individuals world-wide, including those who may live thousands of kilometers away from where the disaster struck. There is therefore a special responsibility of both official and non-official aid agencies engaged us post-disaster work to periodically place detailed accounts, progress reports and independent evaluation reports on the net, to enable individual donors to assess the manner in which their contribution have been used and to widely publicize that this information is available.

However, even more important than the accountability of official and non-official aid agencies and workers to those from whom these resources have been gathered, is their direct accountability to those women and men, boys and girls for whom these donations have been made. The first requirement for this is the pro-active and regular sharing of all relevant information with the affected populations, to which a reference has already been made.

Monitoring committees may be constituted in every affected settlement by election or consensus, taking care that there is majority representation to socially vulnerable groups, like women, dalits, adivasis, aged people and persons with disabilities. The members of these committees should be fully consulted and informed about all major decisions related to expenditures such as purchases and indents, and have access to the relevant documents, on demand. Once every month, detailed accounts should be presented to this committee, along with relevant documents including tender papers, bills and vouchers, and they should be invited also to inspect the stocks. Similarly, progress reports against agreed plans may be placed before these committees, which would be free to verify, assess, and evaluate.

Every quarter, these monitoring committees should organize a public hearing, or people's audit, in which all adult survivors may be invited, once again taking care to ensure adequate presence of socially excluded and discriminated groups, such as women, dalits, adivasis, aged people and persons with disabilities. In case there are insurmountable cultural barriers to the participation of some of these groups in mixed meetings, or there are apprehensions that their assertion and voice would be constrained or muffled in joint meetings, then separate public hearings may be held with these groups.

In these public hearings, the monitoring committees as well as the aid officials will present their findings and reports, of accounts, expenditure, stocks and achievements and shortfalls against plans. People will be free to examine documents, ask questions and seek clarifications. The findings of the people's audit, along with their recommendations, should be read out and approved by the gathering before the meeting is adjourned.

In the context of the government, the District Collector and for non-government organizations the senior official who is responsible overall for the disaster response work in that district or region, will receive the report of the quarterly public hearings, and initiate appropriate action, which may include

a) redressals of problems, grievances and errors identified in the public hearing;
b) in some cases, further investigation; and
c) in a few cases, initiating penal action.

The action-taken report should be placed in the next quarterly public hearing, and discussed. The feedback and observations of the affected people should once again be recorded, and further action initiated. The reports of people's audits as well as action-taken reports should also be examined by supervisory officials, as well as form part of the documents presented to external evaluation teams. A consolidated summary of these people's audit reports and action-taken reports should also be placed on a website, for the information of individuals and institutional donors as well as other citizens.

The legal and regulatory framework for such transparency system and people's audits for all government expenditure is already place in India through the right to information legislation that has been passed in many states. A strong national legislation for operationalising this right is also currently under the active consideration of the national Parliament. Even in the absence of such legislation, activists campaigning for the right to information maintain that this right is already implicit in the fundamental rights to life and freedom of expression.

There is no reason why all citizens, survivors, donors and others, should not have the same rights to information from non-government funded organisations, as they can legally and morally claim from the state. However, the mandatory duty of NGOs to be transparent about their funds, expenditures and progress reports, is ironically much more contested today than the duty of states. Over time, a suitable legal regime needs to be established for this, that make NGOs genuinely accountable to people, without making them more vulnerable to partisan state pressures. Until this is done, the participation of NGOs in regimes and processes of transparency and people's accountability should be secured through dialogue, moral pressure and public action.

Chapter 2

Defending Justice in Disasters

Following reports that police and state administration in Bhachau town in Kutch have let loose a reign of terror on uprooted poor people affected by the killer quake, demolished their nearly re-improvised huts, lathi-charged them ruthlessly and arrested the seven social activists on 25th January, 2002; People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) Gujarat sent a fact-finding team to find out what happened. The communities affected by the police action are mainly Kolis, Harijans, Khawas, and Dalits. They are the most marginalized communities in Kutch.

In a meeting with women, they testified: "We came from Morbi about 20 years back when the Macchu dam burst. This place was uninhabitable. We worked on it and made it livable. Now, the government tells us that they want the land and they want to oust us from here. We had gone out for a rally, leaving the children behind. In our absence they came and began demolishing our houses. All our houses were destroyed in the earthquake and we had set up makeshift houses. We rushed back to the settlement. The police surrounded us immediately. They told us that their superiors had ordered the demolition and that they had orders to shoot if the people resisted. They suddenly began the lathi-charge. The administration has not allowed any NGOs to give us any relief or do any rehabilitation work here. We have been living in tents for one year. There has been discrimination in relief distribution. We don't want to leave this place; we have made this place habitable. We have proof of residence like ration cards, voter's identity, and electricity bills. But the police did not listen."

Source: PUCL Bulletin, March 2002 Gujarat PUCL Report On Bhachau Atrocities Police and administration's atrocities on quake victims and social activists in Bhachau on january 25, 2002
Kirit Bhatt, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Gujarat Unit, 7 February 2002. (Available at http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Industries-envirn-resettlement/2002/bhachau.htm)

Affirmative action for Vulnerable Groups

There are fault-lines in any society—of injustice, exclusion and discrimination. A natural disaster may superficially seem to be impartial in the target of its fury, ravaging the rich with the poor, women with men, and socially ostracized groups with the powerful.

It is widely (but not universally) accepted that for normal development interventions, a policy of positive discrimination in favour of historically disadvantaged social groups and for impoverished people is both legitimate and appropriate. By contrast, there are many who argue that disaster response should be even-handed in the allocation of relief and rehabilitation resources between various socio-economic and ethnic groups, because all are equally ravaged by the disaster. However, such a view ignores the fact that the aftermath of any disaster hits those who were already disadvantaged before the calamity hardest. Even at the stage of rescue, but even more at later stages of disaster response of relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation, a variety of barriers actively block the access of various disadvantaged groups to the resources, support and entitlements that are essential to enable them to rebuild their lives.

The specific nature of these barriers would differ widely in diverse socio-economic, cultural and political contexts. However, once again illustratively, some of these barriers are outlined:

(i) Contested or unacknowledged legal entitlements:

A major burden of injustice, after a disaster is typically borne by social groups whose legal entitlements are contested by the state even in normal times. Amitav Ghosh in his moving chronicle of the tsunami, eloquently describes how citizens are 'kept afloat on a life-raft of paper: identity cards, licenses, ration cards, school certificates, cheque books, certificates of life insurance and receipts for fixed deposits. The tsunami, in the suddenness of its onslaught allowed for no preparations: not only did it destroy the survivors' homes and decimate their families; it also robbed them of all the evidentiary traces of their place in the world'.[4]

However, the situation is much more desperate for those survivors whose legal entitlements were official denied or withheld by the state even *before* the disaster struck. Tribal 'encroachers' in forestlands, slum dwellers and urban homeless people and pavement vendors are some of those who fall into this category of people. The recent tsunami in India saw fisher-folk who traditionally lived, in the past and right up to the time of the disaster, near coastal shorelines, being denied the right to rebuild their homes close to the sea, with authorities citing coastal regulation rules. A number of those savaged by tsunami waves in the Nicobar Island were illegalized settlers, desperate refugees from poverty in the mainland, whose right to live and work in the islands was legally barred. Their losses are frequently not even acknowledged by the state, which stubbornly maintains that 'illegal people' have no right to relief and rehabilitation services.

These are all categories of people with whom the state is at war even in normal times. The bulldozers, eviction notices and the batons of police, forest and municipal authorities are part of their grim daily existential reality. However, the disaster often accomplishes overnight what the state aspires to do but cannot always achieve in a democratic polity—namely the physical eviction of these illegalized populations from lands to which the state refuses to recognize their legal title.

These groups, who were most vulnerable even before the disaster struck because of their illegalized and frequently criminalized status, are further threatened by the disaster because state authorities, as has been observed in most cases, are most likely to use the devastation of the disaster to permanently evict them, often without compensation or rehabilitation.

Some survivors are also those whose legal entitlements are extinguished by regressive legislation. A widow's or daughter's legal right to inheritance of family property, and the

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[4] Amitava Ghosh, 11 Jan 2005, 'Overlapping faults'. *The Hindu.*

denial of property rights of mentally disturbed people are some instances, where survivors would require strong and alert legal defense.

Tenants of houses that are destroyed, or of agricultural lands that are submerged and salinated, once again are frequently denied the same support that is extended to owners of property. Invisible to policy makers are also casual wageworkers, on farms, fishing boats and mining sites; bidi workers; and artisans.

(ii) Entrenched social discrimination:

The woes of Rina Das, a minor girl, began when her mother died in the cyclone and her father remarried forcing her to take shelter in the residence of her uncle (father's elder brother). Her first cousin, Jahar then intimidated her and forced her into a physical relationship with him.

Jahar continued to exploit the girl without her consent and she became pregnant. She was then taken by her cousin, ironically with the approval of other family members, to a private nursing home in Cuttack city for an abortion.

The girl's nightmare did not end even after the abortion as the youth continued to exploit her making her pregnant again. She was forced to abort the second child too, this time reportedly by a local quack. The quack has also been nabbed by the police. According to Mr S K Palsania, the Superintendent of Police (SP), Jagatsinghpur, a detailed investigation is on and more people may be arrested in connection with the case.

Source: Orissa cyclone victim abused
(available at http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/jun232004/n14.asp)

A second set of barriers to justice arise from deeply entrenched social discrimination, founded on gender, caste, class, communalism and disability.

Patriarchy obstructs women's rights at every stage of disaster response. Even in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, it has been observed that in areas where women are culturally and socially devalued, there is frequently far less urgency in the community, among state authority and sadly even within the surviving families themselves, in ensuring the access of women and girls to medical facilities and food.

Single women or those who have lost their spouses in the disaster are especially vulnerably to sexual and physical abuse. At the stage of relief, as relief trucks gather, women, the aged and disabled, and small children, are least able to access relief materials.

Likewise, in the peculiar cultural context of India, the taboos against handling dead bodies run so deep, that frequently even state authorities think nothing of turning to erstwhile untouchable scavenging dalit castes to alone handle and dispose off the carcasses—on their own. In Orissa, a plane-load of scavengers were flown in from Andhra Pradesh for this socially despised task in 1999. Dalit activists wept with humiliation in Tamil Nadu after the tsunami in 2005 when they witnessed dalits scavengers transported by earth-lifting machines to sites where rotting carcasses lay in salty swamps, with no gloves or masks, while others including family members and student relief volunteers, just stood by inertly.

There are several reports of dalits and minorities having been actively excluded from relief supplies, in Orissa, Gujarat and now Tamil Nadu. These problems are compounded when relief materials are distributed in temples from where both these groups are culturally debarred. There are also disturbing reports of their exclusion from relief camps, and in the delivery of food, water and medical care.

The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) has been closely monitoring the situation in the states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, and stated that: 'Dalits are doubly victimized, firstly by the natural disaster and secondly by human made discrimination'. NCDHR and press reports have highlighted numerous documented instances of discrimination against Dalits since the tsunami struck, including:

Dalits cannot drink water from tanks put up by UNICEF at some relief camps as - other groups say they 'pollute' the water;

Dalits have been excluded from some relief camps resulting in much of the relief materials failing to reach them;

Dead bodies of other communities have been buried in the living areas of some Dalits;

In the Nallukadai Street Relief Camp, cartons of glucose biscuits delivered by a Coimbatore NGO were taken from Dalits who were told: 'these are not for you';

At Puttur Relief Camp when Dalits asked for family relief kits, rice packets and donated clothes and other materials, they were force to spend the night on the road;

At the Neelayadatchi Temple Camp, Dalits were not allowed inside the temple, especially when rice and cash donations were being handed out;

32 Dalit families taking shelter in a girls' school in Thanjavur were asked to vacate the building on the pretext that it was due to re-open just days after the disaster;

Officials have been apathetic about registering deaths among Dalits, establishing the conditions of Dalit victims and have been reluctant to register missing Dalit persons or respond to appeals for relief. The NCDHR described government officials who have a 'caste-oriented' mind set which results in discriminatory and apathetic treatment of Dalits, regardless of the situation. They state that this has resulted in widespread neglect of Dalit victims and even instances of heightened abuse as they are forced to carry out the bulk of the clean up operation. The problems deepen further when rehabilitation development plans are drawn up. Dalits and minorities were often condemned to peripheral poorly located and resourced ghettoes in new rehabilitation sites in Kutch in Gujarat, in officially sanctioned layouts. It is routine to allocate smaller house-sites to dalits, adivasis and other socially vulnerable groups in these lay-out plans.

Minority Rights Group, 'India's Dalits Refused Access to Tsunami Relief'. (available at https://reliefweb.int/report/india/indias-dalits-refused-access-tsunami-relief)

Open discrimination is specially observed with relief groups, which are, affiliated to militant communal organizations. In regions where militant sectarian politico-social organizations enjoy state support, like Gujarat, aid workers from minorities or from secular organizations are actively victimized and harassed, with the tacit support of local police officials.

(iii) Biological and social disabilities:

There are certain groups such as person with disabilities and old people, who suffer serious biological and social barriers to access their legal entitlements. The problem is compounded for those who are disabled by the disaster, or those who lose their care-givers in the disaster.

The peculiar vulnerabilities of widows, single women headed households, orphans and aged people have been dealt with in Chapter 4, as well as some ways that their needs and rights can be secured.

Some women have been forced to deliver their newborns in dark tents without even a bar of soap, using shards of bamboo to cut the umbilical cords. Others have had to walk through miles of jungle for prenatal help. After surviving the tsunami, many women are facing the danger of giving birth alone - a grim legacy of the loss of hundreds of midwives among the disaster's dead.

"It breaks my heart to see mothers forced to cut the cord by themselves," said Fitriana, a volunteer from Solidaritas Perempuan, a women's aid group. "It's very dangerous for the mother and baby because all of the things used are not sterile."

Revita knows the problems firsthand. Two weeks ago, she gave birth to her own child in a dark tent without even a piece of soap - to say nothing of basic obstetric care.

Syukriah used scissors to cut the umbilical cord of her sister's newborn. Other mothers have used bamboo shards.

Source: Pregnant Tsunami Survivors Face Hard Labor,
(Available at http://dailynews.muzi.com/ll/english/1345861.shtml)

Even at the stage of rescue and relief, they are unlikely to be able to reach help. When relief trucks arrive, there is typically a crush of bodies and a desperate scrambling. It is precisely these groups, and women that are least able to reach the front of the line.

Relief camps are very rarely sensitive to the special needs of disabled people. Rehabilitation plans also typically invisibilise disabled persons.

Strategies to Secure Justice

Each form of social discrimination and exclusion would call for a specific response from aid-workers, as would every manifestation of vulnerability. Therefore, it is difficult (and perilous) to generalize a strategy to secure justice in post disaster situations. However, some broad principles for intervention can be developed.

Some specific intervention for community based rehabilitation of orphans widows and their children, and old people without care-givers have been separately outlined in the next chapter. Also the general principles of transparency, accountability and people's audits outlines at the outset apply, with special sensitivity and focus, to each of these disadvantaged groups:

(i) It is advisable for some activist rights-based groups and organizations to consciously choose not to participate directly in relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation activities. These groups should choose instead the exclusive role of active and on-going social advocacy in solidarity with these socially disadvantaged groups at all states of post-disaster response.

In other words they would not themselves organize relief, or rebuild homes and livelihoods. Instead, they would partner with all social groups that are likely to suffer injustice and exclusion, and help them to negotiate with government as well as non-official aid agency officials and workers, to ensure that their rights and special needs are addressed at every stage of disaster response. There will be times when negotiations will fail during which other forms of peaceful civil resistance or legal action may also be resorted to.

(ii) A major role of these social advocacy interventions would be to constantly assess and document the situation, special needs, aspirations, efforts and discrimination that these groups experience. For this, they should deploy participatory tools of needs assessment, social mapping and micro planning and social science methodologies. The findings of these investigations should be widely disseminated and debated, through local cultural instruments and the print and television media as well as in official forums.

(iii) Specialised legal aid cells should be established. Specific legal aid manuals may be drawn up for each of these vulnerable groups, and legal literacy camps undertaken. Community volunteers may be trained as para-legal workers. A panel of committed and competent lawyers may be drawn up for extending legal aid to the vulnerable survivors.

(iv) For many of the most vulnerable groups, including those who are not even acknowledged by the state, which stubbornly maintains that 'illegal people' have no right to relief and rehabilitation services, physical survival may be best secured by an employment guarantee wage employment programme for at least two years after the disaster, to which all local residents would be entitled regardless of their perceived 'legal' status. Similar entitlements should also exist for ICDS mid-day meals and food kitchens. However, in the long run, legal aid workers must contest their 'illegality' imposed by the state, and defend their equal rights to relief and rehabilitation.

(v) For all state entitlements, of shelter house, sites, grants, allocation of agricultural land and other forums of livelihood assistance, the demand should be strongly voiced for joint allocation to the female as well as male heads of households. There should also be civic alertness to ensure that disabled, dalit and adivasi groups are not excluded from these allocations, as also those with illegalized and criminalized status as deemed by state authorities.

(vi) For each of the interventions outlined in the chapter of transparency and people's audits, these social advocacy groups would ensure that all vulnerable people receive and understand all the relevant information about schemes, resources and their entitlements. They must be assisted in all the planning and monitoring activities, and participate in people's audits groups. Special arrangements should be put in place to ensure that the voices, analysis and aspirations of each of these groups are adequately reflected and represented in all these processes.

(vii) It is important to help build organizations of each of these specially dispossessed groups, so that they can depend increasingly on their collective strength and voiceand civic action, to sustainably secure justice. The aftermath of the Kutch earthquake saw the growth of a vibrant Ekal Nari Shakti Manch, an organization of single women, a disabled people's organization, as well as a more broad-based Lok Adhikar Sangh on people's right's organization (see below). These have asserted collectively around various rights issues after the disaster, and as they survive, provide forums for organization and assertion of these vulnerable groups even beyond the issues directly related to the disaster.

Sneh Samudaya established by Action Aid India, demonstrated the importance of building communities organization of marginalized groups like pensions with disability (PWDs). An organisation grew of PWDs in 140 villages and towns—both those who were disabled by the killer earthquake of 2000 and those who were disabled even before its devastation. Many people suffered serious spinal cord injuries and amputation of legs and/or hands in the earthquake. This has led to the loss of their earlier livelihood in several cases and a search for their new livelihood is a great challenge.

They set the ball rolling with a series of street plays about the rights of PWDs, and selected and trained 40 community disability workers or *Viklang Mitras.*

The main areas of thrust are:

Ensuring entitlements for PWDs:

Facilitating public meetings and rallies for demanding compensations for injuries during earthquake and/or other entitlements of the disabled: many PWDs needed medical attention, which was expensive. The state compensation announced for such person was R. 50.000/-. This compensation was highly inadequate to ensure their full rehabilitation.

Many of the earthquake-disabled were left out in disability compensation declared by the Government. Disability workers identified such disabled persons and helped them in getting certificate from civil surgeon and submitting this to TDO office.

Promoting SHGs of PWDs:

This helps them to realize that they are not alone, and promotes important resources for many community-based activities. The groups started with regular meetings, at least once a month. The meetings focus on sharing of personal experiences of families. *Viklang mitras* document minutes of these meetings.

The activities that a self-help group takes up are:

- Bringing current knowledge on issues of PWD and treatment to its members.
- Crisis management through networking with other families especially when there is an acute problem.
- Learning from each other ways of caring for the ill or disabled person.

Awareness campaign on problems faced by PWDs:

They conducted awareness programmes in the community using locally familiar/ popular audio-visual media. Various aspects of disability were covered in these programmes using handbills, video films, wall writing, posters etc. Local organizations such as schools, health centres and so on were also involved in the programmes.

Livelihood support:

These included advocacy with the Gujarat State Finance Corporation, which debars PWDs from accessing loans such as for agricultural purposes and the buying of the livestock.

Shelter and disabled friendly houses to 763 most needy PWDs:

Houses for PWDs are built with barrier-free access, and were disabled friendly.

Providing medical, physiotherapy, psychosocial support to PWDs in need:

Physiotherapists recommend therapy, and trained *Viklang Mitras* to personally follow up on persons who require it periodically. Similar interventions were undertaken for communication and visually disabled persons, with suitable aids and appliances. *Viklang Mitras* were also trained in psychosocial counselling.

Providing aids and appliances to PWDs:

Given the increased magnitude of disabled persons after the earthquake we demanded that good quality and appropriate appliances be made available to the persons with disability that enables their mobility and a life with dignity. Camps were also organized with the support of the PWD SHAGs for this purpose.

Lok Adhikar Manch

Born out of a struggle to claim their rightful entitlements from the government, the Lok Adhikar Manch is a young evolving mass organization in Kutch. After the Gujarat earthquake, the government announced sundry rehabilitation packages—including housing compensation for all those who had lost houses in the earthquake. However, corruption and communal bias of government led to thousands of people, particularly the poor and those socially marginalized sections of the Kutchi society—the dalits, the Kolis, Muslims and to some extent the Rabaris—being denied their rightful housing compensation to rebuild their houses. The economically and socially powerful classes who also had political clout, by and large were able to access their compensation entitlements from the government.

This struggle has thrown up new young leadership mainly from disadvantaged groups in Kutch. As of now there are two thousand members in 150 villages of four talukas namely, Bhuj, Bhachau, Rapar and Anjar.

The Lok Adhikar Manch that has emerged with the possibly emerging as an enduring system, has a promise of being organized as a secular non-party mass organization representing secular alternative politics of working class and poor people which are increasingly threatened in Gujarat.

Whereas it has mainly been fighting for four years for the entitlements declared by govt. after earthquake.

Ekal Nari Shakti Manch

The general condition of women in Kutch has been very vulnerable because of local customs and traditions. The earthquake has aggravated their vulnerability to a large extent. Apart from issues of rehabilitation, denial of their rightful compensation, and property rights, etc., women do face many other critical problems—like loneliness, compulsion to practice local customs and rituals, like *diyarvatu* (practice where widows are supposed to marry husband's younger brother), domestic violence, sexual harassment, mental torture, taking away their rightful compensation by near relatives and so on. These issues have not been addressed adequately by organizations at large, except for a few. Consequently women were also being left out to a large extent even in accessing earthquake relief and rehabilitation services offered by various organizations.

Sneh Samudaya's intervention tried to address these issues shrouded by silence during the initial days after the earthquake. *Sneh Samudaya's* involvement with such vulnerable groups in 150 worst hit villages of Kutch spread over four talukas Bhuj, Anjar, Rapar and Bhachau and helped such women in increasing the awareness of their rights and entitlements and assert many of those rights.

As a result of this intervention, over a period of nearly four years a vibrant civil society group of such women has emerged in Kutch, known as Ekal Nari Shakti Manch. Along with this organization of single women, the Sneh Samudaya partners, who are facilitating the entire process of strengthening Ekal Nari Shakti Manch, have also developed a strong cadre of single women known as Ekal Nari Sanginis. Ekal Nari Shakti Manch operates at two levels. At the village level, it holds regular meetings of single women to make them aware about their various rights, identifies problems and tries to solve those problems. At the district level, it has a very democratic forum wherein representatives from different talukas meet every month and discuss issues and problems and develop strategy for larger advocacy and action.

Ekal Nari Shakti Manch, in last few months, have been able to solve many cases related to violence against women, denial of their rights etc., and has also started interacting directly with the government machinery to get justice for oppressed women. Now, there are more than 1500 single women members of this organization from four Talukas of Kutch.

Chapter 3

Psycho-social support

In any natural disaster, large populations of women and men, boys and girls are suddenly exposed to intense, profound and multiple trauma and loss. In the space of a few minutes and hours, they frequently undergo more suffering than many people experience is an entire lifetime. Loved ones, homes, livelihoods, lifetime savings, dreams, hopes, ways of life, all may be ravaged forever. There may be grave uncertainty and despair about the future

We are on a wasteland--there's no other word for this vast soulless nightmare-scape of rotting slush, debris, mud, nets and dog and cat and human carcasses—in Akkarapettai, outside Nagapattinam. It has taken us over an hour to negotiate the slime and stench to where Dr Lakshmi Narasimhan—a tall, gently-spoken Salem doctor—greets the dusk with his team in the only way that makes sense in this post-tsunami miasma. They pick up and burn the bodies. This is only 500 metres from Akkarapettai—500 hard-earned metres, yes, but a small distance really. But apart from this team—from the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), a CPM-affiliated organisation—nobody is out this far to do this work. Nobody. From what they tell us, there are dead bodies strewn all the way to where the sun finally sets; well, five kilometres in that direction, anyway. Nobody is interested in coming out even 500 metres; what will happen to those other bodies? Just getting here, we've seen at least three bodies on smoking pyres, at least five others just lying around. One's a little form, sex, age and even humanity wiped away, lying in a carton. Sprawled in the muck nearby is another. Brother? Mother? Who? In front of us is a collapsed hut; one body lies on it as if asleep. Two men lift the collapsed thatch roof; there are bodies below. They pull one out—a boy? —and put him on top with the other one. The others are too difficult to extract. Then they set fire to the roof. As we stand in the dusk, slime and stench, Veerappan, his wife Parvati, their daughter Pasupati, their sons Ganesh, Dinesh and Abhi—the names listed in a sodden exercise book at our feet—go up in flames. Dr Narasimhan and his comrades are done for today. They are already planning where in the muck they will go, first thing tomorrow morning. 'The Day After', by Dilip D'Souza. (Available at http://m.rediff.com/%0D%0Anews/2005/jan/27rep1.htm)	

Historically, post-disaster response both by state and non-state actors has tended to lay overwhelmingly greater stress on physical and material reconstruction in the wake of disasters than on mitigating and healing the emotional suffering, and the devastating and disabling psychosocial impacts of the rage of nature.

The neglect of the psychological impacts of disaster is greatest when affected populations are impoverished and socially and culturally distinct. There tends to be greater empathy when the survivors are 'people like us', the policy makers who allocate resources and priorities is disaster response. In India, as also in many countries of the world, there has been a growing awareness of the psychosocial consequences of disaster during the last two decades (WHO, 1992). The understanding of ways to actually intervene effectively in order to extend psychosocial support to survivors of disasters is relatively nascent.

This chapter will attempt to outline the major psychosocial impacts of disasters, and some principles derived from recent experiences for ways to address these. The empirical data is derived principally form an Evaluations Report of Psychosocial Interventions with Super Cyclone Survivors in Orissa undertaken in 2002 by an independent team of Psychiatrists and social workers led by Dr. R. Srinivasa Murthy, Professor of Psychiatry, NIMHANS, Bangalore. The chapter will also draw upon the manual for Psychosocial care in disaster developed by Action Aid India (2000) and by WHO (2005).

No one who experiences or witnesses a disaster can be psychologically untouched by it. The most commons immediate reactions are of anxiety tension and irrational panic. Some are shocked or numbed, unable or unwilling to accept the reality of their monumental loss. Some become euphoric because of their survival, others are racked by guilt. They believe that they are somehow responsible for the loss their loved ones, and are culpable because they saved their own lives.

Some people respond to a disaster by an extreme sense of disorientation, and talk and wander aimlessly, others become extremely withdrawn. Many are unable to sleep, become tense and hyper-vigilant always, interpreting every stirring of nature as the signs of a recurring disaster. Some experience 'flashbacks', reliving the trauma and terror of the disaster.

These responses are normal, and in some form or the other, occur even during individual tragedies in normal times. However, at such times, human social and cultural practices ensure almost universally that family members and friends typically rally around the person who has suffered the loss. There is solace and healing in rituals, religious and cultural practices.

In any major disaster, everyone—family, friends, community leaders—would have suffered; therefore there is usually no-one to extend a helping hand, or offer a shoulder to weep on. There is often no dignity in the disposal of corpses, no rituals, no opportunities and space for individual catharsis. The family as a unit may no longer exist. The unbearable psychological burdens are further compounded by the struggles for food and shelter, particularly if the distribution of relief is delayed, disorganized, inadequate and insensitive.

As the months pass, many survivors are unable to pull themselves out of their grief—losing interest in life, unable to rest to concentrate or summon energy; others seek solace in substance abuse or sex. There are some who become irritable and abusive. The NIMHANS study of Orissa found many victims, especially widows and mothers, hear voices of their dead relatives (especially of husband or children). Some reported their presence around them and even felt their touch[5].

Predictably, the severest impact is on children. They may cry excessively, cling, have nightmares, wet their beds, or withdraw from study, play or friendships. The Orissa study

[5] Evaluation report on Psychosocial Care of Survivors of Super Cyclone in Orissa. Sneha Abhiyan, Action Aid Bhubaneswar, NIMHANS. 2003. Mimeo

reports that children were mostly crying for mothers, fathers (perhaps parents?) and for food. Some were almost always crying. Most were having nightmares and a few had somnambulism. Some children had almost become mute, they were not talking or eating and had socially withdrawal[6].

The NIMHANS Orissa study, conducted two and a half years after the disaster, found that the psychological needs in the survivor community are much greater than in any normal population. This is in broad conformity with meta-analysis globally, that shows that disasters increase the prevalence of psychopathology by approximately 17-20 percent on an average.[7]

Therefore, it is imperative for any disaster response plan to significantly address the enormous mental health needs of survivor populations. The response will contain social elements that have secondary psychological impacts, and psychological elements that have social impacts. These elements are so closely intertwined, that they are referred to as systems of psychosocial support.

Principles of psychosocial intervention

In attempting to address the profound mental health and emotional needs of disaster survivor communities, it may be assumed that the only major resource that is required is of mental health professionals especially psychiatrists, psychologists and psychiatric social workers. Since their numbers in a country like India are chronically short of the needs of the population even is normal times, their availability to directly address the psychological needs of hundreds of thousands of disaster survivors would appear impossible. In this perspective, although psychological burdens of survivors may even be acknowledged, the country currently lacks the technical resources to be able to address these.

What this view neglects is that the greatest resource for healing and restoring the mental health of people affected by disasters of the survivors themselves, and the communities within which they are located. In the end, it is the extraordinary resilience of the human spirit itself that has enabled the human species to endure and overcome the severest of calamities—of war, famine and natural disasters through the centuries.

The fulcrum of our proposed strategies for psychosocial support to disaster survivors is therefore the community psychosocial workers (CPSW), who are lay volunteers drawn from survivor communities themselves. In a situation in which large numbers of mental health professionals are simply unavailable, there is no option except for the primary reliance on such CPSWs. However, it is possible to argue that even if sufficient numbers of mental health professionals were indeed available for direct interventions for all survivors even then for many interventions, CPSWs would be better suited and more effective.

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[6] ibid
[7] ibid

The reasons for this is that the advice and support extended by the CPSWs would be generally culturally more appropriate and acceptable, and would also help rebuild the damaged social fabric.

The effectiveness of CPSWs in reducing the mental health burdens of survivor communities was confirmed by the NIMHANS evaluation of the impact of their work in Orissa in the aftermaths of the super-cyclone of 1999. The study drew samples from both intervention and control villages, and developed standardized tests of psychological morbidity among the respective populations. They found that the severity of symptoms was higher in the control population than in the interventions area. They confirmed also that there is a significant reduction in the symptoms reported in the intervention area, as compared to the control area where no such interventions were undertaken.[8]

However, it would be a grave error to assume that CPSWs can achieve these results without the active enduring support of mental health professionals. Their support is indispensable in two important ways—firstly in the identification and training of CPSWs and secondly, in providing an effective and reliable referral system for severe and persisting psychiatric disorders.

In summary, the potential exists in survivor communities to themselves address, prevent, mitigate and heal the grave psychosocial impacts of disasters. However they can best achieve this in a sensitive and supportive partnership with trained and dedicated mental health professionals.

Features of psychosocial intervention strategies

The experience so far is too limited for a prescriptive design of psychosocial intervention strategies in the aftermath of a disaster. Any such rigid design that is externally imposed would in any case be inappropriate for a strategy whose greatest strength is its cultural appropriateness and sensitivity.

However, some suggestions are outlined based on experience in psychosocial work is disasters in Orissa and Gujarat.

Selection and Qualification of CPSWs

The strategy would require the selection of appropriate CPSWs. The qualification should be people who are observed to have naturally assumed community leadership in the aftermath of the disaster.

a) Their willingness to work despite their own loss
b) Their cultural acceptability, especially with vulnerable groups like single women, dalits and minorities,
c) Natural counseling skills
d) An assessment of their own psychological resilience.

[8] ibid

There should be a preference for women, dalits, minorities and persons with disabilities among the CPSWs.

In post-disaster Orissa and Gujarat, encouraging results were achieved with young CPSWs, both men and women around the ages of 18 to 35 years, mostly educated up to secondary schools. It was found that these young people displayed extraordinary sensitivity, psychological strength and dedication, and many came to be deeply valued by the communities in which they worked. However we should not generalize from this experience, and other models such as of middle-aged non-literate women can be no less effective.

Training of CPSWs

The effectiveness of the CPSW depends significantly on the quality of her training. The training would need to be reflective, interactive and supportive, combining the transfer of counseling skills and technical inputs with social analysis.

The evaluations report of the psychosocial interventions with the super-cyclone survivors in Orissa by the NIMHANS team summarises the process of training CPSWs (or *Sneh-Karmis*: workers in the campaign of love) as follows:

> The mental health team consisting of a Psychiatrist and a Psychiatric Social Worker trained a group of twenty trainers of trainees for a period of seven days in December 1999. The group was first allowed to ventilate their own traumatic experiences with the disaster. This was followed by the understanding of the impact of the super cyclone disaster in terms of the physical, psychological and socio-economic. Subsequently the types of emotional reactions to disasters at different points of time were enumerated. The practical guidelines for psychosocial interventions was given a major thrust through a variety of activities like role play, games and enacting a sequence of occurrence and looking at the psychosocial reactions and help by themselves. This was followed by demonstration of application of skills in the affected community for two days. The practical demonstration at the field level made the trainees to feel empowered/ confident that they can do it. The last session concentrated on debriefing and self care of the volunteer and outlined their specific tasks and roles. The tasks and roles were not specifically to take up psychosocial care independently but as a part and parcel of overall relief; rehabilitation and rebuilding activities.
>
> The base training was followed by specific interventions for the children. A child counsellor trained the group on psychosocial counselling and play therapy for a period of one month. The children-training module consisted of understanding how creative means can be used with children and to develop some relevant material for use in play therapy. The methodology consisted of experiential exercises, examples and presentations of actual use with a child. The process of the training focussed on practical use of various mediums and presentations through charts. Similarly to work with women who lost their spouses a lady psychiatrist trained the volunteers for a period of two days. The training focussed on women and widowhood issues, the need to be acutely sensitive to issues of

participation and empowerment, respecting their space, and avoiding blame. The training should not be a onetime event, but should be reinforced during monthly reviews and with longer inputs, possibly every quarter.

Intervention by CPSWs

Voices of CPSWs:

"Now after the psychosocial training, when I started talking to the people, I found I am able to talk lot more rather than just how is she. I asked many thing like about her sleep, about her health, her husband's behavior, about the future of her children, all of them responded and they felt very good to talk about their concern."

"It is not just giving away things or programme for the community, rather psychosocial work is for making the community to think about the programme about themselves and about their community. We talk a lot about all their concern."

"Psychosocial training is extremely helpful in the work. We have used the knowledge in any interaction. Particularly this has made remarkable impact in the development of the motivation of the women to work and take up challenges after the riot with confidence. This also helped a lot to bring the community together and for binding the bonds of harmony."

Source: NIMHANS/CARE India, Gujarat Harmony Project

Detailed manuals have been developed for CPSWs by WHO (2005) and NIMHANS in collaborations with Action Aid India (2000). These spell out with detail and sensitivity the duties of CPSWs, and this handbook will not attempt to reproduce these here. However, some suggested interventions will be outlined, by way of illustration.

It is precisely because in a disaster, normal family, friends, social and cultural resources may not be available to help survivors deal with their loss and trauma that makes the intervention of external agencies essential. The CPSW becomes a source of individual strength support and healing, as well as a bridge between mental health professionals, government and aid workers.

The nature of support must be that restores the individual's own and family and communities coping mechanisms, rather than build lasting dependencies. The efforts should catalyze the building or revival of a 'caring community' in which each individual is supportive and involved in the well-being of others.

The first task of a trained CPSW would be to visit individual survivors, as well as organize groups meetings. The challenge would be of empathetic listening encouraging people to share their trauma, fears and aspirations. They would assure the survivors that their psychological trauma is normal, and would encourage them to grieve, but also to gradually commence normal activities of routine daily living and to find healthy ways of relaxation and recreation.

The CPSW needs to also work with the family and the local community as units. Apart from collective sharing and grieving, it is therapeutic if several members of community take up a task together, such as of reconstructing a fallen school, teaching children, or taking care of single women and old people.

Voices of Survivors:

"In the group she talks to us all about family, daily life and the worries or about concern. It is not every thing solved, but I feel every one has problem so by talking many other ways of solution comes to me."

"After I started coming to the group meeting many of my family problems I started handling. As by various exercise, I understood I was just worried and dependent for every thing."

"Earlier I was just confused, not able to understand what will happen, always the fear and fear, tomorrow what will happen. I use to cry for half of the day, looking at the empty house. After she started coming to me, I started working. My house is not full but I feel satisfied and confident that I can take care of my children, nothing will happen."

Source: NIMHANS/CARE India, Gujarat Harmony Project

Referrals

The success of the work of the CPSW would be contingent critically also on the strength and reliability of the referral systems. Referrals may be for more tangible material needs such as of shelter, livelihoods, schooling clean, drinking water, sanitation, healthcare and legal entitlements.

At the same time, these may be for emotional and psychological problems that require professional interventions.

The CPSW would be trained to identify psychological problems at an early stage, and to intervene more intensively with such individuals and families. She would also be trained to recognize which persons need to be referred for professional care, and at what stage.

The first referral should be at the level of the primary health centre (PHC). It is highly unlikely that the medical personal in the PHC would have psychiatric training. In the aftermath of a disaster, it is urgent therefore, for a week-long capsule in service training in psychiatry for the doctors in all PHCs in the catchments area of which there has been the impact of the disaster. They also need to be equipped with sufficient psychiatric drugs.

Similar interventions would also probably be needed at the secondary level at the district hospital. Even the tertiary facilities in the medical college would probably require strengthening.

Caring for Carers

Too often do relief workers, especially those involved is psychosocial care take inadequate care of their own psychological needs. It is the paramount responsibility of aid officials at supervisory levels to ensure that this is done; so that especially the front-line workers are emotionally protected, renewed and nurtured, in order to be able to cope in healthy ways with the enormous emotional burdens of their work.

The CPSW would encounter intense human suffering daily as part of her regular duties. The psychological burdens would be far too heavy for anyone, but even more so for a CPSW who has also witnessed or been personally affected by the disaster. If adequate care is not taken, they may find themselves' 'burning out'. Early signs of this are an unwillingness to take a break from one's work even briefly, guilt if one indulges in recreation, disturbed sleep, irritability, crying easily, and depression. Unaddressed, these psychological problems can be compounded.

The solution is not clinical detachment on the part of the CPSW, because it is only the genuine empathy of the CPSW that will reach out and heal. However, care must be taken to ensure that a CPSW takes off at least one day a week for recreation and rest, daily finds time for exercise, books, music, friends, television or anything else she enjoys and shares with colleagues, family and friends.

> CPSW as a tree
>
> Unless the tree has strong roots to support it, the tree will not be able to withstand strong winds or give shade to others. This is applicable to the CPSW too. There must also be some source of sustenance and nourishment in each CPSW's life to enable him/her to be strong and positive. Only then will the CPSW have the energy to support others[9].

[9] Action Aid Manual (2000), pp. 54.

Chapter 4

Community Based Rehabilitation of Widows, Orphans and Aged People Without Care-givers

The preceding chapter outlined broader principles to secure greater equity and justice in post-disaster work for social groups that suffer from discrimination. This chapter will focus on the three most vulnerable groups, namely widows with or without children, orphans, and old people, without care. It will attempt to outline the nature of the vulnerabilities, and suggests ways for their humane protection and rehabilitation within their own communities.

Single Women

In a patriarchal society, single women are frequently most vulnerable to physical and emotional abuse, and exploitation of their vulnerabilities. There are many factors that contribute to this:

a) Lower status and rights of women even in normal times
b) Social stigma and exploitation associated with widows, divorced and other single women
c) Lack of opportunities for independent living outside the household
d) Dependent economic status
e) Greater vulnerability associated with large sums of monetary compensation paid by government to single women
f) Vulnerability to trafficking.

Community psychosocial workers who have engaged intensively with women who were widowed by the Orissa Super-Cyclone and Kutch earthquake report several heart-wrenching and shaming stories of their sexual exploitation by male members of the family on community in the aftermath of the disaster. There are also frequent attempts to defraud them of their property and compensation.

Some single women are able to muster their inner resources to protect their children, but in doing so they fail to address their own emotional needs. Others respond with helplessness, hopelessness, deep depression, physical pains and sometimes reckless and compulsive promiscuous sexual activities.

Orphans

Children who witness or experience the impact of a disaster are in themselves psychologically the most vulnerable to the trauma of a disaster. This is magnified several times for children who lose the protection of their parents and care-givers.

Even more than two years after the passage of the disaster, CPSWs in Orissa reported the continued vulnerability and high residual trauma of orphaned children. ‘Children were missing their parents. In festival days when they were seeing other children with their parents, in new dresses, many orphans would remember the days with their own parents any cry. They are also crying when they were facing hardships in life. Children gradually dropped out of school for work being forced to work for a living or by lack of interest. Some children had shown truancy. Once again large sums of compensation given for the loss of their family members render these children intensely vulnerable'.[10] Distant family members routinely claim these children to their care, and there are many reports of neglect, their exploitation for domestic labour, physical and sexual abuse. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, orphaned children are known to be trafficked, or recruited in war zones as child soldiers, or transported by funded NGOs for orphanages.

Old People

As traditional joint family by bonds and community norms crumble, aged people increasingly suffer from neglect and abandonment, fragile social standing and self-esteem, and threatened physical sustenance. Many of these problems are aggravated if aged people themselves survive a disaster, but lose their care-givers, their spouses or children, their shelters and sources of economic survival.

Thainai, who says she is 70 but looks older, gets hot meals at the Killai camp, where she stays, and the government as well as non-governmental organizations have provided a range of relief materials: clothes, utensils, sleeping mats, buckets, medicines, soap, tooth brushes, stoves, subsidized rice and kerosene.

It turns out, however, that Thainai feels left out amid all the largesse. The relief is distributed to each family rather than to each individual. Thainai is a widow and official records show her as part of her son's family. He has taken his wife and children elsewhere, she says, taking all that was handed out as relief. All that her son left for her, she says, is one straw mat to sleep on.

Source: Abandoned Widows
CARE/David Devadas, Chidambaram, TN, 27/01/2005

Upamma comes up. She looks stoic but her words have the stamp of desolation. "I don't know why I am still living," she says. She is 70 too, she says, and lived alone on the island from which Thainai and she were both saved after the first tsunami struck. A widow with six children, all married; Upamma has no one to care for her. None of her children has been to check whether she is alive. "They may think I am dead," she says, but then adds that, "my son is not bothered about me."

Abandoned Widows
CARE/David Devadas, Chidambaram, TN, 27/01/2005

[10] ibid

Community-based response

One of the major casualties in all stages of rescue, relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation are all considerations of equity. Women, dalits, children, the disabled persons and old people without care-givers are denied their due share, although they are the ones who are most in need. In a patriarchal and feudal society, among those most at risk are widows and single women, particularly from the disadvantaged castes and classes, and orphaned children.

(i) The first principle is that rehabilitation plans must be based on the informed consent of the survivors, including all but the younger children. Subject to their choice and consent, the remaining principles apply

" In one village, a 12 year-old girl was left with two young brothers. They were terrified of being separated. We allowed them to live together in a house we constructed. It was a child-headed household. But they wanted it that way. We can bring volunteers with special experience to help with a similar set-up, and to deal with connecting families."

However well meaning people are, it is proved that a child flourished best in the cultural context he/she has grown up in. To assume that mere affluence gives them a better deal is a predictable but erroneous assumption. Let us look for options for these orphaned children, options that are kind humane and like the ones their parents would have provided. They have suffered enough already.

Source: Mari Marcel Thekaekara

(ii) Existing surviving primary family units, like sibling orphans, or widows and her children should not be separated.

(iii) Rehabilitation plans for institutions or even foster care as adoption should not, uproot them from the cultural, social and geographical roots, except possibly for infants and very small children. Instead, their rehabilitation should as far as possible be done within the same or as close subject to the imperatives of protection from further disaster to the communities, neighborhood and environment as those from which they were uprooted by the disaster.

(iv) Long-term rehabilitation should never be in custodial or semi-custodial institutions, government or private. Based on their informed choice, they should instead be assisted for independent living, in biological or foster family situations, or alone, in independent dwelling units that are located in protected spaces in the core of the newly constructed sites.

For school-going children, it may be necessary to shift them to residential schools, but they must be able to retain contact with and periodically visit their biological or foster families.

The principal responsibility vests with the state to protect the legal rights of these vulnerable groups, we well as to provide economic resources for their sustenance and education. However, local communities would have to be organized to make governments accountable for these duties.

(v) The rehabilitation efforts should also be directed towards strengthening the system of the caring of local communities. Committees may be constituted of youth and women volunteers, and community leaders, who collectively accept responsibility for the protection and development of these most vulnerable survivors. Encouraging results were achieved from such as effort of constituting '*Sneha Samitis'* or 'Committees of Love' for this purpose in post-cyclone Orissa.

Widows who were harassed came for protection to these committees, and the errant men were punished. Committee members would visit orphaned children in their foster families to ensure their well-being. Individual house-sites were built for them in central and protected locations of the village.

Detailed Strategies

Jyotsna and Kajol had been bereaved in the super cyclone and both had come to stay in Mamta Gruha. Both came close together and when they left the Mamata Gruha, Kajol would visit Jyotsna's home regularly without fail. This did irk her son, but she felt happy with the friendship she shared with Jyotsna.

They soon wanted to convert this into a relationship, and Kajol proposed her daughter's marriage with Jyotsna's son. She happily agreed but Kajol stopped visiting her house after they became relatives. Jyotsna noticed this and asked Kajol to take her daughter back if that would make her visits regular. Kajol started coming to Jyotsna's home but without taking her daughter back.

Source: 'Long Term Community Based Psycho Social Care in the context of Sneha Abhiyan – A Campaign of Love, in the Jagatsingpur district of Orissa'

(i) In the short run, the first challenge is to identify and ensure the protection and survival of the widows, orphans and old people without families. Identification may be carried out by government, village reconstruction committees facilitated by local NGOs, local organization like women and youth clubs, or spontaneously by the survivors and by other NGOs.

(ii) The immediate need is to house those in temporary care shelters, where they are protected from exploitation, their physical survival ensured, their psychological trauma attended to and their longer-term rehabilitation planned. For widows in a feudal patriarchal society, their protection from sexual exploitation is also an imperative as also their protection from trafficking, and even recruitment for orphanage by NGOs.

(iii) Initially there may be no surviving public buildings to house these special groups. First priority should be given to erecting tents or bamboo and canvass structures in the shortest possible time. Subsequently, relief funds such as those for food for work employment programme may be mobilized to construct more durable mud and thatch structures to enable them to survive the rigours of hot summers, cold winters and the monsoon.

(iv) Community Psychosocial Workers (CPSWs chosen from the local area, with a majority of women) should be given charge of these temporary care shelters (please see chapter on CPSWs for detail). Given the density of psychosocial problem in this community, the ratio of CPWs should be one for every 20 people.

(v) CPSWs would be encouraged and assisted to commence a series of activities in the temporary care shelters, such as

a) Psychological counseling by the community psychosocial workers who trained as counselors.
b) Legal advice and aid for widows and children to ensure just compensation from the government and that they retain their property rights over land, house and other assets.
c) Self help activities like self-management of temporary shelters, and women's thrift groups.
d) Play and recreational activities for children including songs, dance and regularly organized sports activities.
e) In house tuition so that the children continue their education.

(vi) Some natural leaders would emerge from the residents. In partnership with the CPSWs and senior community and NGOs leaders, they should initiate dialogue which state officials. The major influencing agenda at this stage is to wean away official state policy from its conventional knee-jerk response of establishing orphanages and destitute homes. A second major influencing agenda is to ensure that the substantial ex-gratia grants made by the government to orphans and widows are locked into fixed deposits in the banks for extended periods. This is to ensure that adoption and marriage in order to secure the benefits of what are large sums of money in a poor and rural community are not resorted to.

(vii) In the medium-term, commencing around six months after the disaster, the most difficult challenge is to engage each vulnerable survivor and their families, in planning their long-term rehabilitation.

The process to sensitively assist and empower each traumatized and most vulnerable individual to make choice about their future would be based on the following principles:

a) Choices must be informed and free for all adults and older children.
b) The pace of the process should not be forced or target driven.
c) Siblings must never be separated so that they are not isolated and unprotected.
d) Facilitators should ensure the protection against exploitation of all vulnerable groups.
e) The wider community must actively be encouraged to participate, endorse, facilitate and support the choices.
f) Facilitators must ensure that each choice of each individual has full legal sanction and backing (e.g. legal adoption, legal land titles in the name of the widow and child and so on).
g) There should be no attempt, even unconsciously, to give greater moral preference to living with extended biological families.

h) Likewise, foster family groups do not have to conform to the pattern of heterosexual nuclear families, viz. a married couple, with children, or even a single parent with children. Numerous other possibilities may emerge, such as a group of widows living together with their children, old people living together with young children, as foster grand-parents, or a group of single women without children living together.

Malti (name changed) had lost nine members of her family. Alone in the world her life destroyed, Malati displayed severe signs of psychological distress. She was referred by community workers to a psychiatrist, but did not show marked improvement.

In the same temporary shelter, a group of older orphans became close friends. Suggestions were made that they could live with foster mothers, widows from the shelter, but they emotionally rebelled against the idea. They could not accept anyone else as their parents.

They decided that they would best like to live and grow to adulthood together, as foster sibling. However, they felt empathy for Malti, whom they invited to live with them. Relief workers built them a family home, where they began to live with Malti. Within months, Malti showed marked signs of psychological improvement. The children also had a home of their own once again. Slowly their words healed by the love they gave each other, and Malti.

(viii) CPSWs, with the help of senior facilitators and sensitive women leader of the community, would firstly explain, discuss and develop a consensual list of possible options, with the residents of the temporary care centre.

An illustrative and by no means exhaustive list of possible options is given in the table below:

Serial .No.	Categories	Available Options	
		Social	Economic & Habitat
1.	Orphans with siblings	➢ Rehabilitation in extended families ➢ Live in own house ➢ Rehabilitation in extended families ➢ Foster families	➢ Allocations of house sites on government land, if available, or purchased land if necessary ➢ Livelihood support to relatives ➢ Support to the older child to support the siblings with a widow paid as a house-mother in their neighborhood. ➢ Assurance of monthly stipend to the widow who chooses to be a foster mother

			➢ House in own land
2.	Orphans without siblings	➢ Rehabilitation in extended families ➢ Foster families	➢ Same as above
3.	Widows without children	➢ Adopt one or more orphan children from the same village & set up a new family ➢ Remarriage ➢ Set up a new family with an old couple ➢ Live alone in her own house	➢ Monthly stipend for each child ➢ Skill development/vocational training ➢ Allocations of house sites on government land, if available, or purchased land if necessary.
4.	Widows with children	Live with her children in her house.	➢ Livelihood support ➢ Skill development/vocational training ➢ Allocations of house sites on government land, if available, or purchased land if necessary.
5.	Aged people with relatives	Live with relatives	➢ Livelihood support ➢ Skill development/vocational training ➢ Allocations of house sites on government land, if available, or purchased land if necessary.
6.	Aged people without relatives	Live with single widows Adopt an orphan child & set up a family	➢ Livelihood support ➢ Skill development/vocational Training ➢ allocations of house sites on government land, if available, or purchased land if necessary
7.	Divorcees with children	Live with her children in her house	➢ Livelihood support ➢ Skill development /vocational

			training ➢ Allocations of house sites on government land, if available, or purchased land if necessary
8.	Divorcees without children	➢ Adopt an orphan child from the same village & set up a new family ➢ Remarriage ➢ Set up a new family with an old couple ➢ Live alone in her own house	➢ Livelihood support ➢ Skill development /vocational training ➢ Allocations of house sites on government land, if available, or purchased land if necessary.

(ix) The same group would hold detailed counseling sessions with each resident and assist each of them to reach a decision about how best they would like to rebuild their futures.

(x) The group would then seek the support of local government officials and staff NGOs to take early steps to implement, with the backing also of professional lawyers, the choice of each resident woman, man and child of the temporary care centre, for long-term rehabilitation.

(xi) The properties of many widows and several children are likely to be legally disputed. They should be extended full legal support in order to ensure that they secure their legal rights. However, this is likely to be a long-drawn process and it is not fair to expect the widow or child to await the final legal outcome before they are rehabilitated. Therefore, in all such cases, state authorities would be requested to provide 0.04 acres of land as dwelling sites to each family. In case suitable government land is not available, aid agencies could, as a last resort, purchase private land.

(xii) A major concern in the design of the programme is whether a widow, single destitute woman, old person who chooses the option of becoming a foster care given to one or more orphaned children, should be given on-going support for bringing up the child. It is our position that for these destitute adults who opt for the humane responsibility of fostering the orphaned children, this should be seen both as source of emotional rehabilitation as well as a livelihood option. This is, for example, the approach in SOS International. Therefore, each woman or aged person would be assured until the boy reached majority and the girl begins to work or is married, a monthly allowance of Rs.700/- for each child, preferably from the government. This would be a major influencing agenda with state authorities. However, if it fails, non-official funding should be mobilized.

(xiii) Major influencing agendas:

a) Government would pro-actively secure land rights, both over dwelling sites and agricultural land, for widows and orphans.
b) All widows, orphans and the uncared-for aged should be incorporated into the official list of persons who are below the poverty line in order to ensure eligibility for benefits under anti-poverty schemes. Antyodaya to make them eligible for subsidized good grains; and mandatory enrolment security pension schemes and Annapoorna.
c) District authorities and banks should be directed to give highest priority to the most vulnerable survivors for benefits under these schemes.

(xiv) The long-term success of this entire programme is dependent on the collective responsibility for the protection and sustained rehabilitation of the most vulnerable members of any village community being accepted by the youth, women and respected elders of the same community, we have already outlined the mechanism to establishing ‘caring committees’ in each community of youth and women volunteers, and community leaders, who collectively accept responsibility for the protection and development of these most vulnerable survivors. It is hoped that mechanism helps ensure that the community actively protects and assists these individuals who are most at risk.