

Tsunami Relief Work in TN – A Report

Dear Friends,

First of all - Thanks for your wonderful response and the help you have been offering.

It is now 6 days since the Tsunami struck – to all of us it seems more like 60! At the AID office and in the PSF office, and in Relief offices and camps there are no days or nights – people are working round the clock. There is hardly any time to sleep even a few hours.

After helping organize the relief coordination in Chennai on Monday and Tuesday, I left for Cuddalore and Nagapattinam on Tuesday night with 5 truck loads of relief materials. I just got back yesterday with a plan to sleep a few hours and then write up a detailed report of what is happening on the field and in Chennai. But both were impossible! First there just is no time – so many things happening at the same time. But finally as I manage to wriggle out some time to send you this email – I realize there is another problem – where to start, what to write?

There is so much going on all around – so much positive energy in this period of massive destruction – a wonderful sign of hope. It is this hope and this positive energy that makes me wish you all a Happy New Year.

Structure of the Relief Effort in TN

As I mentioned in my earlier report, the relief work is planned in 3 phases:

- (1) Immediate Relief – dead body and debris removal, food, clothing, blankets, temporary shelter, medicines and health camps for emergencies and epidemics
- (2) Second Level Relief – Construction of huts and houses and health needs
- (3) Third Level Relief – Livelihood needs for the families affected – forming cooperatives and providing livelihood support like boats, nets etc.

To understand the scope and scale of our work, I will first give you the organizational structure of the relief efforts in TN that has been set up over the last few days. One must understand that the biggest problem during such times is in coordination. There is a large amount of goodwill and response to this disaster – lots of volunteers, donations, relief materials, etc. Without a proper structure, there is a chance that these will not be used effectively. While others were working on the actual relief collection, and distribution, my focus on the last 6 days was setting up this coordination structure. This coordination structure has been evolved after looking at the status on the field and our strength and the local needs. Let's take a few minutes to understand this:

1. **Coordination with the outside world:** AID Office in Chennai is coordinating with people outside to collect and send materials, funds, volunteers. We have 4 teams here
 - a. **Collection Team:** To contact people, coordinate with people who want to help, collect relief materials, donations, inform people about what is going on and what is needed, send out emails and news releases, establish contacts, etc.
 - b. **Allocation Team:** To find out what materials need to go where, divide up the materials, sort them, pack and put them into trucks, distribute volunteers in the trucks and send them to Cuddalore, Nagai, Kalpakkam and Kanyakumari (and of course places in Chennai).
 - c. **Field Team:** Who stay in field areas and coordinate work there (more on this below).

- d. **Volunteer and Work Coordination Team:** There are a large number of volunteers who are coming to help (and more are needed) – but figuring out the best way each one can help is itself a huge task and we have a team for this.

To really appreciate the above, you must come to the AID office and see for yourself! I had gone to Nagai and got back and was shocked. The AID office has literally taken over the entire street. About 150 new volunteers are landing up at the office everyday, helping with materials purchase, packing, loading, etc.



Every day we have 5-6 loaded trucks leaving the AID office for Nagai and Cuddalore. With the trucks leave about 6-20 volunteers who are staying back and working on the relief efforts. The above photos don't show the volunteer team – you get a feel only when you come to the office and see it for yourself. Companies, Alumni Associations, College Students, working professionals, architects, engineers, doctors, volunteers from across the world are calling up with offers to help in new and creative ways. To make sense of all this and to allocate work and coordinate all this is the major role the AID Chennai office is geared up to play. In addition, we are also coordinating with other groups and organizations that are collecting and sending relief materials. I also met the relief commissioner and the special government officer in charge and we are now also working with the government machinery.

Apart from all this in Chennai, we have a team of AID volunteers in Bangalore and the Bangalore Citizen's Initiative which is sending us volunteers and relief supplies – either through Chennai or directly.

2. **Intermediate Coordination Center in Pondicherry:** To help the coordination between Chennai office and the field areas, the Pondicherry Science Forum office is functioning as the intermediate coordination center. A lot of field planning is done here. Volunteers and trucks come to Pondy from

Chennai, take a brief nap and get up to date on the various immediate needs and then are divided into small group and sent to various villages with the trucks – where they take up various tasks.

(Note: Some people have been wanting to go directly to Nagai – because this is projected as the most affected district in TN. But Cuddalore and Nagai is actually just a single long stretch with no real break! It is just that there are more areas in Nagai affected – but all are affected almost equally. People have also wanting to go straight to Cuddalore – but it is only half hour from Pondy and it makes sense to get briefed in Pondy before proceeding further. The pondy team will also brief the local volunteers on how your help can be used. This will prepare the local teams in the villages to use the volunteers effectively. So please don't insist on going straight to the village without stopping at Pondicherry – the couple of hours extra are worth it!)

- 3. Area Coordination Office and Stock Points:** We have set up 5 area coordination offices in different villages. This is where the field volunteer teams stay and coordinate the relief efforts. Direct distribution in camps and villages is a huge mess – we have learnt this the hard way! It leads to a lot of rush and wastage. So to make the relief supplies more effective we have set up stocking point in these 5 areas. The needs in the camps are changing every day – food, medicines, etc. At that time it is not possible to start collecting and sending stuff from Chennai. From the stock points to the local villages the supplies are transported on need basis immediately. And the trucks from Chennai replenish the stock points over the next two days.

The above is the overall coordination set up. To understand the Area coordination office work and the stock points, let's now understand the situation in Cuddalore and Nagai.

Situation in Cuddalore and Nagai and the Work in Progress there

Across the belt – along the coast – in every village within 1-2 km of the sea, entire villages have been washed away. In some of the villages I went to, out of 900 people 400 are dead. In many villages about 100-200 people are dead – every family has suffered a loss. People are without a house, without any belongings or hope for the future.

People have run away from the villages are now living in relief camps – that the government has taken over later. In many places there are no camps – in the day people go back to their villages and at night come and stay in the neighboring village in houses and outside. Lots of people have gone away to relatives houses.

In a typical camp you will find people from different villages. And from a typical village people are living in several camps! They are not even clear yet about who is lost and missing, who is dead and who are the people who are living in other camps. In many villages there has been a lot of looting – people searching for valuables from the destroyed villages and stealing them. Some of the villagers have started a vigil so that this does not happen.

In towns and bigger villages where a lot of damage has been done, the government has come in a big way and helped in clearing the debris and removing and burying dead bodies. Political leaders are coming and going to these areas regularly to make their presence felt! A large number of local groups and organizations have come in to help. Unfortunately often they are just collecting loads of material and providing it at the relief camps – without a plan. Some places and sometimes there is excess of food, other places and times people go hungry! Coordination is of critical need and that is our focus now.

Clothes – a huge amount of old clothes have been given and rejected by the people. This is seen by the media and the government and many relief workers as “people have enough clothes”. I spent quite a bit of time talking to women about clothes.



Most of the people affected are fisher people – they are not “poor” in the sense of the word. One woman said “We may live in huts – but you should have seen the inside – it was full of stuff – we had men working in dubai and we had motor boats, TV, VCRs, jewellery and pattu podavais. All that is now gone.” Outside the camp was a huge bundle of old clothes without people going near them. And inside the camp one woman said “People have given us torn clothes – we are not poor, we don’t mind used but good clothes – but we can’t wear torn clothes. I have been wearing this same sari for the last 5 days”. A young girl said “We can’t wear saris – no one has given us chudidars.” Another woman said “We have saris but no in-skirts or blouses – how can just wear the saris?”

The clothes problem is just one illustration of what is going on – chaotic relief without sufficient planning or consideration for the people affected. The need as I have already emphasized is good coordination.

While the bigger villages have government machinery working on clearing debris and helping the victims in relief camps, the entire coast is dotted with a lot of small village where the dead bodies have still not been removed – and hardly anyone is working in these areas. The whole place is rotting with bodies (particularly of children and women) and is smelling even from a distance. Without clearing work, people cannot return to their villages or start their normal lives again.

Most people don’t want to touch the dead bodies – or even go near them. We have now got about 350 volunteers from nearby districts to help with the body removal work. For the last few days this work has been going on in 7 villages – slowly expanding to more villages. Each village has 30-50 volunteers and the local people from the village. We provide the gloves and materials needed to start the clearing work. The first day 46 bodies were removed from one village. Many volunteers vomited and then we treated them and are now doing it by rotation. Two days ago, when volunteers began lifting bodies, the head and the hands from the corpses began to come apart! Many corpses are stuck under nets and it is difficult to remove these.



A dead child our volunteers were trying to pull out from the debris in Chinankudi village yesterday and the force with which the Tsunami uprooted a concrete structure in Nagapatnam.

The force of the tsunami was so much that concrete structures were uprooted from the area. Lots of dead bodies are therefore buried under the sand and under the collapsed houses and nets and boats.

Now we are trying to arrange earth moving machines – both from the government and from private companies to help us clear the bodies.

What is amazing is the commitment of the volunteers – both local volunteers and some of the volunteers from Chennai and Bangalore who are involved in this task! This is the primary task for the next week – to clear up the dead bodies and debris in the 7 villages and to expand this work to the villages around.

The second main job is relief and rehab work in the relief camps (and wherever people are staying) – we have been coordinating relief material supplies to the camps. We now have volunteers going and doing preventive health work in the camps. But this is tricky – you can say they must boil water – but how? So we are giving stoves and vessels and then saying boil water at least for the children.



Volunteers being briefed about what preventive steps to do in the relief camps around Nagai

We are starting temporary toilet construction – just a long pit with “olai” (thatch) walls and planks. These will be used for 2 days and then the next toilet needs to be constructed. This is needed for some initial sanitation. People are “fed up” with the stale and tasteless food the govt is supplying – we are now trying to shift to community kitchens – then slowly to individual family kitchens at the next stage.



Make shift clinics being run for children and women

We have doctors starting OP clinics – for children and women. We are trying to ensure that people with chronic diseases (BP, TB, Diabetes, etc) – continue taking their medicines.

The third kind of field work is assessment of damages and needs. Volunteers (from Chennai and Bangalore) are visiting all the villages and camps in the areas around the “cluster village” to estimate the damages and needs. They are finding out who lives where and what is needed and also collecting information for long term relief and rehabilitation. They are also finding out what kind of support is currently needed in various villages and who are the people providing help now.

The fourth kind of field work is coordinating with a number of small organizations and individuals locally who are working with the victims. They have no contact with the outside world and have a shortage of funds and materials. We have a few volunteers in each Cluster traveling to different villages to identify these groups and are now sending them relief materials and supplies and funds from the stock points to help them in their work. This is a tricky business – one must do this with a lot of sensitivity - without threatening the smaller groups. Calling for big coordination meetings in the first stage is of little use – it only takes away people from the field work they are doing and also threatens them with bigger groups “trying to take credit for their work”. So we are starting with helping these groups in whatever they need. At the next stage we will work on evolving with everyone involved a synchronous plan that all groups can jointly implement. These groups are now slowly calling up the local stock coordinators to send them relief materials and funds everyday.

At this point I would like to add that the enormity of the problem is so much that one **must** try and work with **every** sincere group that is doing work on the field – whether NGOs, Govt, local unions and organizations, or other youth and women’s organizations and even groups that might have some political affiliations. One cannot afford to be fussy about working with different groups (as long as they are sincere and work efficiently). What matters now is reaching relief and rehabilitation to all those who need it.

The fifth kind of field work is overall office management in the stock point villages. (This critical area is in short supply – people in the field want to do ‘real field work’!) To coordinate smooth flow of relief supplies and funds and to coordinate and manage the whole thing locally – we need “office managers” in each area office – to take stock, to send supplies to needy camps and orgns and villages, to call up the PSF and AID Chennai offices for the next round of supplies needed, to identify new needs in advance and intimate people to start collecting these, to allocate volunteers for various tasks and to document the whole work going on and also to inform the coordination team in Chennai and Pondicherry about the daily happenings so that they can keep people informed. Given current local abilities of the volunteers in the area and the fact that they are needed for so many things, the office coordination work is basically

done by responsible people from outside. We need many more people in this category – desperate and critical short supply here!

To summarize, the field work in Cuddalore and Nagai can be divided into 5 parts:

1. **Dead Body and Debris Clearing work** – in the villages destroyed
2. **Relief Camp work** – toilet construction, preventive health, organizing OP clinics for children and women, identifying needs and supplying relief materials, starting community kitchens, starting temporary shelters, etc.
3. **Assessment and Survey Work** – Visiting villages and camps to assess the damages, needs to help us plan what to do in the short and long term.
4. **NGO Coord - Identifying all the groups working in the area and providing them help** – Visiting them, sending them supplies and volunteers, coordinating with them to find out their needs and helping them. Basically setting up an efficient relief supply-demand chain
5. **Area Office and Stock Point Coordination:** Managing the flow of volunteers and supplies and funds.

We have divided up the Cuddalore-Nagai belt into 5 Areas where we have started work.

1. Panjampukkam Area in Cuddalore Dist
2. Parangipettai Area in Cuddalore Dist
3. Killai Area in Cuddalore Dist
4. Tirukadaiyur (near Tarangabadi) in Nagai Dist
5. Nagapattinam Area in Nagai Dist

We are also trying to start work in two more areas:

6. Devanampattinam Area in Cuddalore
7. Near Velanganni in Nagai Dist

In each area the plan is to start immediately on all the five work components mentioned above. In some areas like Nagapattinam and Tirukadaiyur all the components have started, in others some components are active and we are trying to start the other activities.

Each area is divided into a number of cluster villages (right now 1-3 but slowly expanding to about 5-7 cluster villages in each area). Cluster villages are the ones that need dead body removal and debris clearance work (and therefore lots of volunteers). Around each of these cluster villages we are trying to work with about 5-6 camps and villages which need rehab work. So each area will be ultimately working with about 20-30 villages and totally we will be working in Cuddalore Nagai belt with about 150-200 villages (and more with other organizations).

In each area we have key AID coordinators from Chennai stationed there who are working with and guiding the local volunteers and the volunteer teams landing up from Chennai and Bangalore. These coordinators call up the office every day with a list of needs and report back on what work was done and how things are currently – so that we can give a feedback to people supporting the efforts.

I am going back again to Cuddalore and Nagai tonight – with more relief materials and volunteers. I will be focusing now on ensuring the starting of all the activity components in all the area coordination centers and also on identifying some of the bigger needs – particularly for the medium term. These are things like temporary shelter construction, preventive health programmes on a larger scale, shifting of people back into villages, expansion into newer areas, coordination with other groups, etc.

The above then is the work happening in Cuddalore-Nagai Belt. We decided against working in Pondicherry and Karaikal now – because the government there is doing a really good job (at least as of now).

Work in Other Areas

1. **Chennai** – Here AID and TNSF volunteers have established contacts with the people in slums affected – they have managed to establish a personal rapport with the people and have been supplying relief materials regularly. We have volunteers staying in the areas and helping with the relief camp work as well as rehab work in the slums.



Volunteers in Chennai surveying in Relief Camps

2. **Kanyakumari** – MALAR is very well organized here and is doing the relief coordination effort in the area. A number of NGOs have formed a network there and the government is working closely with this network. We have sent some funds and are now starting to send relief supplies to the area as well from Madurai and Chennai. I am going back to Nagai tonight and from there will be going to Kanyakumari to look at the needs there.
3. **Kalpakkam** – The level of destruction here is much less and more dispersed. But because not many people have been coming and helping in these areas, there is still a need for people to visit and help. Some AID and TNSF volunteers have done one round of visits to these areas to identify the villages that need help. Starting today, they are starting area coordination offices and stock points in two locations – and will be starting substantial relief work within a couple of days.

Medium and Long Term Plans

I initially thought that we might have to work in the area for 6-8 months. After visiting the areas I now realize the gravity of the situation – we will have to work for at least 2 years to get things back to normal. In the medium term, we will have to set up shelters and shift to house construction, set up cooperatives and provide livelihood opportunities (boats, nets, etc) through these cooperatives. In the long run we will be working towards overall development in the area.

The government has approved Rs. 500 crores towards the relief and rehab work – short, medium and long term. Even this is not enough – but more important is the question of how this money will be used. All NGOs and peoples organizations and individuals together will be able to work only on a small fraction of the government's budget and scale. But we have a critical role to play – to work on immediate short term relief where it is not reaching and in the medium and long term to develop models for rehabilitation that are effective. If we can present a united picture of what is needed and can be done within a small budget, then that will influence the government to also spend the relief budget according to what models we set up. This is also part of our medium and long term plan for the areas affected.

This completes this interim report of some of the work going on and being done by AID along with TNSF, Pondicherry Science Forum and a number of groups in Bangalore (AID, Citizen's Initiative and CHC) and Chennai (Bhoomika) and many local organizations in different areas (Vidyarambam, Sneha, CSG, Fishermens Society, Panchayat presidents, etc).

Below are some of the things that are needed. The AID office has a complete list of the needs – this is updated every day based on inputs from our people in the field. So if you call the AID office you will be able to get a clearer picture of today's needs.

Not everyone can help with the special needs listed below. But if you can do call me or Ravishankar immediately. General Help is listed after this.

Special Help Needed

1. A house/godown in Chennai to stock materials. A godown/house in the different areas in Cuddalore/Nagai areas.
2. Free/low cost trucks for transport
3. Free/low cost rental/low cost purchase of used Vans, Jeeps, etc to be stationed and used in the cluster villages.
4. Earth moving machines
5. Chemicals for decomposing bodies and technical people to help guide volunteers in coating dead bodies with the chemicals.
6. Office Managers willing to stay in the Area coord office and manage things there!
7. Preventive health doctors, paramedics and health activists
8. Teams of doctors – particularly women doctors who can do OP clinics for women. Doctors for OP clinics for children.

General Help Needed

Material Needs

- ☞☞ Gum boots, Thick Gloves, Shovels, pick axes and shoes – for volunteers clearing up the debris
- ☞☞ Medical equipment – BP apparatus, stethoscopes, etc.
- ☞☞ Small FM Radios for volunteers working in the affected areas to hear local and emergency news.
- ☞☞ Cameras – regular and digital – for documenting the work locally.
- ☞☞ Cell phones with chargers
- ☞☞ Water packets
- ☞☞ Blankets and Mats (Pai)
- ☞☞ Soaps and Detergent, toothpaste, toothpower, brush, bleaching powder
- ☞☞ Dry Rations - Food – rice, wheat, dal, cooking oil – as grains for cooking in community kitchens – no cooked food please. Milk powder for children.
- ☞☞ Stoves and vessels for cooking (Kerosene needed but ill try to arrange locally).
- ☞☞ Clothes – no more old clothes – focus on new in-skirts (petticoats), new blouses, almost new children's clothes (0-5 age group), good chudidars for young girls, sanitary pads.
- ☞☞ Medicines – a list is available at the AID office and on the web – www.aidindia.org

Volunteers Needs

- ☞☞ People experienced in emergency relief work – debris and dead body removal etc.
- ☞☞ People who can spend at least 10 days and are good at taking charge and coordinating local volunteer efforts in the offices in the area centers.
- ☞☞ Documentation – people with cameras and video cameras – to travel and document the work.
- ☞☞ Volunteers who can work in the AID office in Chennai and Pondicherry Science Forum Office in Pondicherry – coordinating things, going out and collecting things, meeting people etc.
- ☞☞ Large number of volunteers who can help with debris and dead body clearance.

☞☞ Volunteer teams who can help with assessment surveys

Funds Needed

☞☞ Many of the local groups have been working with very little funds in hand – so the pace of the relief work was initially very slow. They didn't even have money for bus tickets and traveling. With donations from lots of people we have been able to really speed up the process. We still need a lot more funds for both immediate and medium and long term relief efforts. So do keep collecting funds from your friends, individuals and organizations and groups you know. Cheques can be made in the name of AID-India and sent to:

AID-India
Old No 132, New No 242,
Avvai Shanmugam Road
Gopalapuram, Chennai – 600 086

(In the US – collections are being done by AID-US – you can contact www.aidindia.org for online donations or 1-888-TALK-2-AID or 301-422-4441 or 240-393-4368 for more details. Vibha, ICA and Asha are also doing collections for this.)

Please also forward the above report to all the people who know who would be interested.

Important Contacts you may need

AID Chennai Office – 044-28350403, 55615629 (Kalpana, Prabha, Bharati, Smitha)
AID's Relief Coordination Office in Chennai
Old No 20, New No 34, Rathinam Street (Near Besant Road)
Gopalapuram, Chennai – 600086

Information Team in Chennai

Kalpana/Bharati/ Smitha/ Prabha –	044 – 28350403, 55615629
Prabha –	98403-51132
Smitha –	98401-73800
Vibha –	98402-63275
Srivaths –	94443-19635
Lokesh –	044-28115058

Overall Coordination Team in Chennai

Ravishankar – ravia@alumni.cmu.edu	94440-84910, 28350403
Chandra – chanvish@yahoo.com	9382330752, 044-28350403
Smitha Kalyani - smithakalyani@yahoo.com	98401-73800
Vibha - vibha_ravindran@rediffmail.com	98402-63275
Kalpana – kalpa@vsnl.com	044-28361033

Pondicherry Coordination Team

Pondicherry Science Forum
46, Vinayakar Koil Street, PR Gardens, Reddiarpalayam, Pondichery – 605010
Phone: 0413-2290733, 2290908

PSF Contact People:	Raghu –	94432-25288
	Senthil Babu	94432-58998
	S. Ramachandran -	94430-69075
	R. Dakshinamoorthy	94432-34522

Field Contact Persons:

Nagai	Charles/Devraj	098411-62323
Killai	Damu/Malavika	094442-41918
Tirukadaiyur	Jagadish	098655-61131
Parangipettai	KPN/Shakila	098425-29056

Overall Coordination Team

(This is a moving team – call only if necessary for coordination)

Balaji Sampath	94440-61033
Senthil Babu	94432-58998
Ravishankar	94440-84910

Thanks once again for your help. We need your continued support and help.

Bye,
Balaji Sampath