
AIDMI's Tsunami Response: Sphere in Action

At the heart of AIDMI's response to the December 2004 Tsunami were Sphere Standards. With these in mind AIDMI set about providing quality relief that would increase the living standards of beneficiaries and not create any further hardship.

The tsunami that devastated the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu on December 26th 2004 ranks as one of the worst natural disasters in modern times. It caused huge damage and loss of life along the East Coast of India, affecting the states of Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Pondicherry, stretching from the Chennai district in the north to Nagapattinam in the south. According to the government of Tamil Nadu, over 8,000 lives were lost and approximately 3,500 were injured. Over 125,00 houses or huts were destroyed or damaged. In total, almost 1 million people were affected.

The experience AIDMI gained in mitigating against disasters throughout India and the close association AIDMI has with the Sphere Project was of huge importance when it came to the tsunami relief operation. With the Sphere Standards central to the relief work AIDMI was able to provide relief that was effective and appropriate to the local communities.

AIDMI brought this valuable experience, along with the view that disasters are an opportunity for development, to the tsunami relief operation. The immediate relief operation involved providing basic emergency aid to the victims, further relief came in the form of developing community based rehabilitation and long-term risk reduction programmes.

AIDMI sent four senior team members to Chennai the same day as the tsunami. This team arrived in the predawn hours of December 27th. A meeting with Tamil Nadu officials was held to gain a better understanding of

the affects of the tsunami and where and what type of immediate relief was needed. The AIDMI team then visited sites in Chennai and conducted a preliminary damage assessment. Areas south of Chennai were then visited and an official damage assessment report from the government of Tamil Nadu was received on the 28th of December.

Within three days AIDMI had conducted site visits and began to provide immediate relief to fill the gaps in assistance that government agencies and other NGOs had just started to provide. For example, it was determined that basic food was being



AIDMI supported temporary shelters in Tamil Nadu.

supplied but milk and biscuits, needed for children were not being given. These supplies were purchased locally by the community and delivered to three villages by local leaders. In one village AIDMI supported community provisions of breakfast, lunch and dinner to 163 families for three weeks. It also became apparent that water vessels were lost in the tsunami and 575 vessel kits were delivered to four villages. AIDMI's experience in responding to previous disasters and their approach of asking the community itself what was needed directed these demand driven activities. The tsunami

emergency response team's efforts were co-ordinated through government organisations and took Sphere Standards as a benchmark for the quality of relief work throughout. Technology was used to create a database of 1,300 beneficiaries in 15 villages covering basic food, water, education, shelter and livelihood related data on those that took part in the 'cash for work' programme. Also, Geographic Information System maps of 6 villages have been made while work continues on a further 9.

The most significant effort that AIDMI was involved with in the first stages of relief and recovery was the provision of temporary shelter. The first site of temporary shelters was completed in the first week of January 2005 and within 15 days of the tsunami 2 temporary shelter sites had been completed. In total, 1,383 families were supported with temporary shelter. A 95% occupancy rate indicates the efficiency and appropriateness of the response. Under the cash for work programme 1,200 families were covered for more than one week, with 80% of the beneficiaries being women. In terms of AIDMI's community based approach, the success of the operation can be measured by the fact that the community managed all the accounts of the 'cash for work' and 'alternative livelihood' programmes. Indeed, the community has led the entire procedure. What is even more remarkable is that all this was done with an AIDMI team of only six members. This was possible as AIDMI were able to use the local labour force to implement their own recovery plan. ■