

AMIC-India – SAMA – FES
Seminar on
“Resettlement and Rehabilitation of Tsunami Victims: Role of
Media”
April 8-9, 2006, Hyderabad-Andhra Pradesh

Report

**Seminar stresses accountability in
Tsunami rehabilitation work**

Hyderabad: Participants at the two-day seminar on “Resettlement and Rehabilitation of Tsunami victims: Role of Media” organized by Asian Mass Communication Information and Research Centre of India (AMIC-India), South Asian Media Association (SAMA) in collaboration with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New Delhi, stressed on the media to act as a watchdog and ensure accountability on the part of Government, NGOs and other social organizations regarding rehabilitation and resettlement work on Tsunami. A galaxy of intellectuals, social activists, academicians from media, non-governmental organizations and officials of research centres and government administration, deliberated the issues in depth and passed resolutions to be sent to the related departments and NGOs who are pragmatically involved in relief and rehabilitation work.

Inaugurating the Seminar, Prof K Purushotham Reddy of Osmania University, who is also Chairman of Citizens Against Pollution, said the government was neglecting the environmental factor while taking up relief measures. He said the collectors who were taking up relief measures were not fully equipped and technically trained. He said that the media had played a significant role in highlighting the Tsunami tragedy while it struck the coast in southern parts of India and even covered its aftermath and the immediate relief measures. But, he lamented that the media gave scant coverage to the situation about the

resettlement and rehab packages that were implemented thereafter, particularly the funding involved and its effects on the victims.

Mr. Rajeshwar Dyal, Media Director, FES New Delhi gave a graphic account of the Tsunami disaster that occurred on December 26, 2004, that hit about half a dozen states in India. He lauded the role of media and stressed the need for accountability and transparency. He said the funds worth crores of rupees were collected but little is known about how they were spent on relief measures. The government and NGOs also took up relief work but the end result and progress were not brought to the notice of the people. He specified the affected areas that did not witness any concrete relief work. The media needs to look into this aspect too, he said.

Ms.Nandini Sahai, Country Manager, AMIC-India, praised the role of media in reporting the disaster and creating awareness among the people but she also found fault with the media for not keeping constant watch. She also spoke of the various AMIC-sponsored Seminars and Roundtables on Tsunami and the role played by the Media. She also assured that AMIC-India intends to bring out an informative manual on Tsunami and other disasters.

Earlier, in the inaugural session Prof Abdur Rahim, former Head, Department of Journalism, Osmania University, who is also Secretary of the South Asian Media Association (SAMA) introduced the participants and spoke about the aims and objects of the seminar. He also recollected the contribution of the seminar on a similar theme held here in March 2005.

The First session on **“Resettlement and Rehabilitation: Current Field Situation”** was chaired by Dr G.R.S. Rao, Chairman, Centre for Policy Research and Management. Mr Ch.Seshasayana Rao, Joint Director, Commissionerate of Fisheries, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, in his keynote address presented details about the various resettlement and rehabilitation schemes launched by the State Government in Tsunami-affected areas on the eastern coast. Mr.D.Roshan Kumar, Guntur, Mr.Mohd. Arshad Hakeem, Nellore and Mr. Thomas Henry, Ongole, gave a graphic description about the present situation regarding relief and rehabilitation in their respective regions. Mr Hadi Raheel, Editor, Pledge Daily, Mr.Kabir Ahmed, media veteran, Dr. T. Shiva Prasad Reddy, social activist, Prof. Dipankar Das, Mr.D.S.N.Raju, Mr.K.Rangarajan, Mr.P.S.Sujit Kumar, Mr.Akiri Ramakrishna Rao, Mr.D.Srinivas and others participated in the discussions.

The Second session on “**Media & NGO interventions in Tsunami Disaster Management**” was presided over by Dr. Yousuf Kamal, former Head department of Geology, Osmania University and an eminent environmentalist. Dr. Kamal pointed out that the Tsunami disaster was a rare tragedy and Indian coastal lines were not Tsunami-prone. But there was need to be alert through constant monitoring of sudden changes in meteorological conditions on the coast. Mr. KB Tilak, veteran film-maker and media personality, commended the role of the media and said what mattered most was the determination of the nation to face and overcome the natural calamities. But he underlined the need for greater transparency and accountability in the relief delivery systems. Representatives of the NGOs, who have undertaken relief work, also took part in interaction along with the beneficiaries. Some participants from the affected areas, who felt that proper relief, expressed doubts that resettlement packages did not actually reach the victims, but were appropriated by middlemen. Dr. M.A.Nayeem, a Shrimp farmer and Mr. S.M.Shaida from Nellore, Mr.G. Satyanarayana Raju, President, Sadbhavana Seva Samiti, Guntur, Mr. S.A. Rawoof from Nellore, Mr.K.R.K.Murthy, Chairman, ARISE, Dr.Akhter Ali, Dept. of Geography, Dr.A.Shiva Kishan, Geophysicist, Mr.Thakur Hridayanath Singh, Mr.B.Bhaskar, Mr.Naseer Siddiqui, COVA, Dr. M.Bhaskar Rao, Head, Centre for Disaster Preparedness, Dr.MCR Human Resources Development Institute, interacted in the discussions. Dr. Pradeep Raj Mathur, Assistant Director (Hydrogeology) Groundwater Dept. Govt. of A.P. presented a descriptive study about the genesis of Tsunamis and its repercussions. An interesting discussion followed the presentation.

Dr. B.V. Subba Rao, Director, Centre for Research Education presided over the Valedictory Session. Draft resolutions were presented and an interactive discussion followed. The participants stressed the need for constant watch by the media, the feed back by the government and NGOs to the press, transparency in the relief process and informative material to be translated into regional languages. The participants unanimously passed the resolutions with an assurance that they would be followed upon by the respective Government, NGO and civil society representatives.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

There have been many post-Tsunami appraisals in the recent past, more particularly and delivery of relief to the victims. The role of the government and NGOs were monitored by different agencies. The significant role of the media in all these efforts was highlighted in all these appraisals. There were recommendations to enhance media's capacity to give wider coverage to the relief operations and resettlement projects and strengthen its role in ensuring greater transparency in the delivery systems. After 16 months of the Tsunami tragedy, a re-appraisal of media's role was made in a Seminar in Hyderabad on April 8-9, 2006. The following recommendations were made at the end of the two-day deliberations:

- Emphasis was laid on the need to improve the co-ordination among the civil society, NGOs and the funding agencies with the media.
- To sensitize and build the capacity of the Panchayats to conduct social auditing and make their assessments available to the people through the media.

- ❑ Media should give more emphasis on follow-up and evaluation. They should evolve a reporting system wherein their coverage leads to logical conclusions.
- ❑ Governments should make available a seed fund to the Panchayats for use during specific crisis or disasters.
- ❑ Media should have a process-based approach with social responsibility in mind.
- ❑ A synergy should be developed between NGO, Govt. and the media for keeping the society informed.
- ❑ As part of sensitizing and awareness programmes, simple training manuals should be brought out in vernacular languages to demystify natural disasters and hazards.
- ❑ An evaluation mechanism should be evolved by the Media.
- ❑ Rehab packages should have a pre-requisite for reviving the environment and ecology.
- ❑ AMIC and partner organizations should bring out a manual about Tsunami 2004 and focus more on the feedback and media coverage.
- ❑ More Workshops for NGOs should be organized to sensitize them about such human tragedies.
- ❑ Training Journalists on Disaster Management.
- ❑ Form a team of Journalists to visit Tsunami affected areas and do a first hand report again.
- ❑ Corporate Social Responsibility by Multinationals.
- ❑ Media should carry a story to its logical conclusion.
- ❑ NGO'S should create awareness among communication about funds.
- ❑ Inter-disciplinary review committee should be constituted to study/review Rehabilitation pockets.
- ❑ After Tsunami damage to soil by the seawater, therefore baseline recording of data should be done.