Tsunami Evaluation Coalition

Coordination of international humanitarian assistance in tsunami-affected countries

Evaluation findings

Sri Lanka

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Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries

Evaluation Findings

- Sri Lanka -

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I. Introduction

The tsunami of December 26, 2004 was the greatest natural disaster ever to befall Sri Lanka. There are a couple of brief references in Sri Lanka's historical literature to the "flooding of the sea," but there is no evidence as to the scale of such disasters when they did occur. Until the tsunami hit, Sri Lankans were quite complacent in the belief that major natural disasters were a concern for other countries but not for their own island nation. Just in the previous year, the government rejected a comprehensive piece of legislation on disaster management, which would have been useful on December 26th, when the tsunami killed at least 30,000 people, left 500,000 homeless, and damaged and destroyed property worth at least $1.5 billion including 100,000 homes.[1] This case study examines how coordination, or the lack of it, had an impact on the Tsunami response in Sri Lanka.

In our review of coordination of the Tsunami response in Sri Lanka, we will consider those elements and interventions that fostered disaster management as appropriately coordinated ones. The central report defines coordination as "a process, the orchestration of effort towards appropriate, effective, efficient and coherent delivery of humanitarian services." During the immediate response phase following a large-scale disaster, coordination is generally the most difficult and intense due to the sudden presence of many new actors and the weakened communications infrastructure (at least initially). Recovery begins towards the end of the response period, and involves transitional housing and minimal basic infrastructural repairs necessary to support the population. The time associated with recovery is variable as it depends on the speed and complexity of activity. The final phase is rehabilitation, characterized by the construction of permanent housing, a return to productive livelihood and income-generating activities. This return to a normal state is again a moving target in that it often exposes and amplifies problems of development and population vulnerability that existed before the disaster.

Permanent reconstruction work was undertaken even in the first six weeks, one of the best examples being the rehabilitation of the 99-mile Colombo-Matara railway line that was extensively damaged in places; likewise, relief work with those still under canvas or in need of psychosocial counseling continued even into the tenth month. The response-recovery-rehabilitation continuum thus contains a number of overlaps. Two other issues must be borne in mind: the first is the internal preparation of the government at all levels, specifically with respect to national and local coordination of disaster response. In the case of natural disasters this means observing how national and local disaster response agencies were organized and what (if any) early warning systems were in place and functioning before and after the event. The second area of inquiry has to do with what we will refer to here as vulnerability reduction. Have the response and recovery efforts meant

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[1] National Council for Economic Development, Millennium Development Goals, Country Report 2005, Colombo 2005, pp.101-120; ADB, Rebuilding Sri Lanka: Assessment of Tsunami Recovery Implementation, Civil Society Post-Tsunami Steering Committee, Asian Development Bank, Colombo 2005.

that the number of persons at risk in the event of a similar future disaster is fewer than, equal to, or greater than before the event? This issue is closely tied to the broader issues of general development and local capacity building and is intended to raise the question of coordination for disaster response or for development, an issue that is increasingly important in understanding later-stage post-Tsunami events in Sri Lanka.

II. Tsunami Impact

The tsunami devastated approximately 1,126 km of Sri Lanka's coastal belt. The number of dead and missing on the island amounted to 35,262.[2] About one million families (5% of the population) were affected and approximately 500,000 people were temporarily or permanently displaced. Approximately 100,000 houses were destroyed or required repair. The total property damage was estimated at $1.5 billion, but some estimates suggest that the replacement cost could be as high as $3.5 billion. Around 127,000 livelihoods were lost as a result of the devastation to fisheries, tourism, and a variety of other industries and businesses. Thirteen of the 25 administrative districts in the island were affected by the tsunami. The most intense destruction and loss of life occurred in the eastern district of Ampara and the northern district of Mullaitivu. Of the total number of lives lost, about 6,500 and 3,000 occurred in these two districts, respectively where the majority of victims were Tamils, followed by Moors.[3]

Immediately following the tsunami, many survivors took refuge in public buildings such as schools, temples and mosques. In mid-January, the newly established Centre for National Operations (CNO) decided that people should be moved into tents in order to reopen the schools[4] and begin re-establishing normal routines. This was quickly followed by the transitional shelter programme, allowing people to build (or repair) their own houses so long as they were 100m from the sea in the western and southern districts and 200m in the eastern and northern districts, or alternatively to be given a transitional shelter on government allocated land. By May, about 70% of the affected population were housed in this way, with the remainder still in tents.[5] Approximately 127,000 people lost their livelihoods, mainly in fishing. It is believed that about 7,500 of those who died were fisherfolk. The industry also lost an estimated 23,000 boats that were destroyed and/or damaged according to FAO.[6]

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[2] USAID, Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunamis: Fact Sheet #38, Fiscal Year (FY) 2005, Washington: United States Agency for International Development. 6 May 2005.

[3] Rebuilding Sri Lanka, op cit. Note: Unless other wise stated all figures in this text are from: ADB, Rebuilding Sri Lanka: Assessment of Tsunami Recovery Implementation, Civil Society Post-Tsunami Steering Committee, Asian Development Bank, Colombo 2005, and data released from: Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation (TAFREN), Colombo 2005.

[4] The chairperson of the national CNO in charge of the response to the disaster was the Secretary (Chief Administrator) of the Ministry of Education.

[5] DFID/CHAD, Review Mission Report, Sri Lanka, July 2005 (Unpublished Manuscript).

[6] Other data published in the literature include: 250,000 tsunami-displaced people in shelters, 26 Sept 2005 (OCHA); 70,000 persons in unsatisfactory housing, 17,000 in tents, 40,000 in sub-standard transitional shelters, 20 Jul 2005 (IASC); 50,000 temporary shelters for IDPs but fewer than 5,000 permanent houses have been completed as of 6 Sept 2005 (Reuters).

One of the industries that suffered most was tourism, which brings in about $450m per year, or about 2.5% of total GDP. After 20 years of civil war, Sri Lanka tourism had begun to pick up following the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in February 2002. In 2003, the industry welcomed more than 500,000 tourists, the highest number ever. When the tsunami struck, the industry was at its peak, with registered hotels reporting full occupancy for their combined 14,000 rooms.

The casualty figure for foreign tourists in Sri Lanka was low compared to other tsunami-affected countries like Thailand. In Sri Lanka, only about 100 tourists were reported dead, with a similar number reported missing. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, more than 90% of planned travel to the country was cancelled. The tsunami damaged 48 of the 215 hotels that are officially registered with the government; of these, seven were severely damaged. The hotels lost a total of 4,000 rooms, or 30% of total rooms. To this must be added smaller unregistered hotels and guest houses that were damaged or destroyed.

III. Emergency Phase

1. National Coordination

a. Government Coordination

The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) was caught totally off-guard by the disaster. Although a National Disaster Management Centre existed under President Chandrika B. Kumaratunga, it consisted of little more than a few officials with a couple of telephones in a small government building. As noted above, the government had not acted upon a *Disaster Counter Measures Bill* that had been prepared by the previous administration. All Government officials interviewed indicated that the first hours of the Sunday that the wave struck saw senior government officials returning to the office and trying to respond as best they could.[7]

President Kumaratunga quickly took full control of official relief and rehabilitation operations. She established a new set of bodies including a Centre for National Operations (CNO), Task Force for Relief (TAFOR), Taskforce for Rebuilding the Nation (TAFREN) and Task Force for Logistics and Law & Order (TAFLOL) to handle the official response to the disaster.

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[7] Early confusion has also been documented by CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005, p. 47; WFP, Full Report of the 'Real Time' Evaluation of the WFP's Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami, September 2005, p. 36; Fritz Institute, Lessons from the Tsunami: Top Line Findings, September 2005, p. 4.

Our interviews with individuals within and outside of the Government and the UN and international NGO community suggest that the capacity of the newly formed national entities to manage disaster response was inadequate in that untrained and inexperienced personnel were placed in important decision-making roles and the newly-formed entities had no command and control structure at the district level.[8] The GoSL is said to be highly centralized; yet the evolution of events suggests that entities such as CNO and TAFREN would have functioned better under a decentralized model had coordinated prior channels of communication been in place.

Assessments of activity on the ground suggest that decentralized response was the modus operandi, in spite of centralized coordination mechanisms. With thirteen districts affected, it was as if there had been thirteen separate disasters, each of a scale warranting a major response. Initially, coordination took place at a district level.[9] Government agents interviewed during our field visits to the Galle and Ampara districts who were in place at the time of the event explained that the response in the first hours and days depended primarily upon their own organization and reactions, rather than on actions taken at the central level. In both cases, local military were coordinated through the government agents (GAs), and much of the initial response came from local private individuals who, organized as they were through social and religious groups, began to appear almost immediately with food and shelter items to help those affected.

> **The GoSL's coordination of the tsunami response was highly centralized. Yet, in the early phase of the emergency, local initiative and adaptation was crucial. This dilemma created an environment where the international community was somewhat constrained in dealing with local government because decisions on resource allocation were constantly referred upwards.**

CNO was disbanded on February 4, leaving the remaining government bodies to handle all tsunami functions. The President also declared a state of emergency in the tsunami-affected districts, giving her special powers over security and related matters.

> **The establishment of a central coordinating body, the CNO, in one building in Colombo and under strong government leadership was much applauded. Unfortunately, its abrupt closure was premature, particularly in view of the unclear and poorly coordination delegation of responsibilities immediately following its closure.**

Almost all interviewees lamented the early closure of CNO, which had the advantage not only of strong government support and senior leadership, but also the practical benefit of

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[8] However, a straightforward and efficient response of the GoSL after the initial chaos was noted by WFP, Full Report of the 'Real Time' Evaluation of the WFP's Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami, September 2005, p. 36; CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005, p. 44.

[9] A lack of district level planning, coordination, communication and transparency has been observed by RedR-IHE, Final Internal Evaluation Report for the First Phase of the RedR-IHE/CHA Learning Support & Capacity Building Programme in Sri Lanka, August 2005.

everyone being in one building. Between its closure, the passing of responsibility to the Task Force on Relief (TAFOR)[10] and subsequently to the Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation (TAFREN) there were delays, bureaucratic confusions and a dissipation of what had previously been effective government-led coordination.

> **Because the GoSL's post-tsunami ad hoc coordination bodies were headed by political appointees, there remained some uncertainty over their continuance and sustainability in the post-November election period.**

b. LTTE Coordination

In sections of the North and East territories controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) took the lead. TRO is associated with the Tigers and has had control over all such welfare and relief activities in the LTTE areas for the last several years. The LTTE forces in the North and East, according to all of the key respondents, provided extremely efficient and focused leadership and support to the relief effort in their areas.[11] Interviews with UN and Government officials lead us to believe that the TRO collected a very substantial amount of money from abroad for tsunami work. We have been unable to verify this from any official source. TRO also works as an implementing partner with several international NGOs (INGOs). The LTTE claim that Colombo has not been fair in the allocation of tsunami resources to Tamil areas, an allegation the government denies.

From the beginning, the LTTE attempted to control all tsunami aid for areas under its control. From a political perspective, control of tsunami resources would constitute a further step in the LTTE's quest for legitimacy and was met with government resistance. One attempt to resolve the impasse came through the Norwegian facilitators in the peace process. They proposed, with the consent of LTTE, a Government-LTTE joint mechanism called Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS). However, the activity has met bureaucratic and political challenges that resulted in slowed expenditure of funds. The P-TOMS agreement was challenged in the supreme court and for all practical purposes implementation is now considered to be off the political agenda. A new mechanism for aid delivery to the North and East is now only likely to be achieved through the upcoming peace talks in February 2005.

2. International Coordination

a. United Nations Coordination

Initial Response

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[10] TAFOR's office was in the Ministry of Defense, not easy for INGO access.
[11] A similar view has been expressed WFP, Full Report of the 'Real Time' Evaluation of the WFP's Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami, September 2005, p. 36. The effective coordination in the LTTE areas is also mentioned CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005, p. 4.

In Ampara, the government agent was clear that it was a UNICEF representative who was on the scene by accident who began immediately to coordinate the distribution of resources from WFP and UNDP that were already stockpiled in the area. In Hambantota, a UNDP disaster planning project was already working in coordination with the GA; with the assistance of UNVs, situation reports were issued from this office. In Galle, an area affected by earlier floods, the GA indicated that previous flood response had been good training for the tsunami disaster and had helped him to know what to do and how to respond.

> **The defining element for immediate response from the UN or INGOs was physical presence prior to the disaster, and resultant local knowledge that enabled their staff to respond quickly.**

HC/RC, UNDA, UNJLC, and OCHA

The UN's Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator (HC/RC) was variously tasked with liaison with government, presiding over a rapid scaling up within the UN Country Team, showing leadership to the wider humanitarian community, receiving many high level visitors and managing the host of teams and management 'tools', from UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) through Joint Logistics Centre (JLC)[12] to Humanitarian Information Center (HIC).

The scope of the management task here was immense and increased as more and more individuals entered the country. All indications are that the UN coordination effort might have been better served through a dedicated Humanitarian Coordinator under the RC with responsibility for managing human resources as a whole. This would have left the RC with more time to focus on coordination and timely response issues.[13]

> **A dedicated UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the tsunami response would have relieved the pressure from the RC/HC office, and far greater emphasis should have been given to deploying senior, well-equipped coordinators to provincial levels, not only to assist the GoSL but also to enhance inter-agency coordination in the field.**

A useful intiative from the United Nations RC/HC was the setting up a Strategic Issues Working Group from February-April (UNICEF, WFP, IOM, OCHA, two INGOs, TRO and CHA). It started as a daily meeting, then weekly. Before that working group was formally established, coordination took place via Country Team meetings in conjuction with meetings called by other concerned entities, notably the Asian Development Bank and USAID. From key respondents' reactions in Colombo, there was no shortage of national-level coordination meetings. What was lacking was the ability to execute in the field and assess what was happening. The later establishment of the Strategic Issues

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[12] A comprehensive evaluation of UNJLC is found in UNJLC, Review of the UNJLC IOT Operation, Volume 1 – Lessons Learnt – Final, September 2005.

[13] The point is reiterated in the internal DFID/CHAD Review Mission Report made available to the team, and by UNHCR, Risk Assessment of UNHCR's Tsunami Relief Operation in Sri Lanka, Audit, 31 August 2005.

Working Group was to complement the much larger CNO meetings, by identifying strategic decisions and approaches that the international community should be taking to the government.

Key players including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the RC/HC office heavily relied upon and interacted with the central government, recommending that GoSL delegate responsibility down to provincial and district levels. Field visits and interviews indicate that there has been little senior expertise or deployment to enhance local government (at district and division levels) beyond the secondment of a handful of United Nations Volunteers (UNVs), who without disaster management experience did not have a great impact. At most, the UNVs gathered and disseminated information – a valuable service where it worked - but many simply became extra secretarial staff. In such a difficult coordination environment, what was needed was the facilitation of information, standards and advice between central and district levels, as well as practical advice on how to coordinate humanitarian actors.

The UNDAC team arrived in Sri Lanka on December 30th. At the field level, there was little mention of its presence. Again, coordination was a task undertaken by UN representatives who were already on the ground. One of the most notable findings in this evaluation from individuals who were in place at the time of the Tsunami was the lack of knowledge/awareness among the local government agents of the existence of UNDAC.

OCHA's capacity to assist national coordination and to deploy quickly throughout the country has been weak[14] for various reasons – lack of experienced senior staff in the field, slow deployment of longer-term staff, and insufficient resources available for even basic administration[15]. This points to a fundamental issue of the difference between OCHA's mandate for rapid 'coverage' and 'deployment' and its operational capacity to fulfill this mandate. OCHA's late deployment created no easy transition from UNDAC to an effective and equipped UN coordination office. The OCHA office in Colombo was already overstretched and unable to provide consistent support to the field. Although UNDP's DAD database was brought online within the government in August, this was obviously too late to avert the confusion of contradictory data circulating in the first months.

> **OCHA's claim to national 'coverage' (five officers deployed across the country) means little unless these persons are adequately supported, equipped and trained.**

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[14] The RC/HC himself has intimated that he did not find the necessary support and assistance from within the UN family.

[15] The OCHA staff member deployed in Galle, for instance, had to use her own laptop and own money to purchase stationery in the first month because no administrative budget lines had been set up. Moreover, little appreciation was given to the fact that daily Situation Reports were expected from her when the only communications she had were at the local Internet café.

In all interviews GAs commented on the sporadic nature of field staffing for OCHA positions[16]. In the particular case of Ampara, the GA noted that someone had been there to help but that person disappeared and only some months later did another person arrive.

However, it should also be noted that the UN was resourceful in hiring individuals at the national and district levels, who had been in-country for a number of years and had the knowledge and the context necessary to get things done. Coordination in the first days depended mostly on the efforts of these individuals, a small number of persons who exhibited extraordinary leadership and devoted long hours to response efforts.

OCHA assigned one senior member of staff exclusively to NGO liaison, and while this role took a few months to become established, the role has proved successful. The officer supports several key sectors: shelter, water & sanitation, and housing and uses the sectoral coordination meetings as a vehicle for communicating key messages, latest developments and building positive relationships between the government, UN and NGOs. The NGOs support the role because the liaison officer provides information and linkage between sectors and between the various 'constituencies', i.e. government, UN, INGO and NGO. Few, if any other individuals participate in this broad spectrum of information, coordination and policy making meetings and therefore the role ensures that information and decisions are communicated across all groupings.

Extremely important in the coordination and networking role were basic managerial skills. This seems to have been a hit-or-miss affair, particularly in view of the fact that none of the OCHA field personnel interviewed indicated that they had received any formal training in these skills. One OCHA field coordinator in the South particularly impressed the evaluation team with her interpersonal skills and ability to proactively lead a meeting with multiple stakeholders. However, in Sri Lanka, as elsewhere, the team notes that even the rudiments of how to chair and run a meeting or other skills and competencies in coordination are not part of the training of OCHA staff. This was confirmed in New York leading to the suggestion that OCHA should provide both *ad hoc* and regular training in the skills, knowledge and competencies of coordination, as well as technology-assisted short courses in these subjects for those cases where the urgency of recruitment and response make traditional training impossible.

Information Structures

All of the government agents interviewed indicated that the critical gap in the days immediately after the event was information.[17] Constant flows of verbal reports, often inconsistent and with no real means of verification meant that many decisions were made without sufficient data.

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[16] High staff-turnover also was a problem in other international agencies as, for example, described by CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005, p. 4.

[17] Bilateral Donor Group, Bilateral Verification Missions to Tsunami Affected Districts in Sri Lanka, March 2005, p. 8.

In general, the district administrations were overwhelmed by the demands imposed on them by the tsunami response. The capacity of district administrations to cope varied significantly from district to district. From our observations in the field , the war-affected districts in the East had less capacity than those in the South.

The Sri Lanka HIC[18] was established in Colombo on January 13th, 2005 at the request of the HC in response to the South Asia Tsunami[19]. The persons in charge of the Humanitarian Information Center (HIC) in Galle were actually World Vision employees unaware of UN protocols and with no prior disaster training or experience. They were technically quite competent but would have been more useful if:

1. They had prior training on disaster response information systems,
2. Had direction and a way to train locals for capacity building within and without the UN system, and
3. Had the stability of a longer term relationship with the UN or their hiring agency so that a certain amount of job security was available.

The outputs of HIC Sri Lanka do not seem to have aided coordination greatly either, despite a high output and a large amount of visitors to their website recently. One reason for this may be their late start – HIC did not get its budget approved until four months into the response and is only now deploying to the districts.

The quantity of required data available through the government to inform the design of the tsunami recovery was inadequate and its quality quite weak. All sites visited lacked integrated population information and, although secondary data was available from census and other sources, this had not been included in the local information. A concerted effort is being made to rectify the situation; however, a lack of technical direction and local capacity hampered this effort. The situation was further complicated by the high rate of turnover among local staff and the lack of training.

For example, HIC event reporting in Ampara and Galle lacked cross-referenced population data. Denominator information would have made any number of tasks easier if known. Even UN and GoSL official websites have inconsistent and somewhat tenuous tsunami data. No systematic effort to categorize and or classify data for validity and quality was encountered in a written fashion. There was knowledge among the interviewees as to the importance of such an activity but no evidence of implementation. For instance, no standardized definitions were found in the field for different categories of housing or individuals impacted.

In Ampara, there was also some evidence cited by UN and INGOs of a seeming lack of consistency in support from Colombo to the HIC field offices. Apparently, the first

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[18] Humanitarian Information Center (HIC) has been defined by OCHA as "a semi-permanent facility established by OCHA in cooperation with other agencies and NGOs during a complex emergency that serves as an information and data resource and provides infrastructure and professional services to humanitarian organizations as they implement relief and rehabilitation projects."
[19] HIC, Humanitarian Information Centre Sri Lanka Strategy Paper, January 2005, p. 1.

OCHA representative did not support HIC involvement and it was only considerably later (in May) that a unit could be actually established once that individual had departed.

Overall, the role played by OCHA, particularly in coordinating recovery later in the disaster's first year, was substantial. The only universal critique aired by all of the host country national respondents interviewed (see attached list) was that the HIC's information coordination role came too late in the process. It was felt that these critical functions were needed much earlier in the disaster response effort.

In contrast to the Banda Aceh facility, the HIC in Sri Lanka was, in the first few months, very much centered in Colombo where staff were expected to provide capacity building with government as well as feed information to Geneva and New York. The constant demands from the local press were characteristic of Sri Lanka, and caution was exercised in determining precisely what information should be released. The HIC staff also worked with the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA), but found the 'skill transfer' impaired not only by lack of capacity but also by lack of priority accorded to the task.[20]

Strategy and Resource

Based on the number of UN personnel listed in the local contact directory maintained by HIC Sri Lanka, the United Nations presence in Sri Lanka was relatively low until mid-March at which time it began to grow, led by UNDP and UNICEF, for just about every organization. In terms of meeting schedules, briefings for new staff, increasing fiscal resources and the quest for integrated programmes, the coordination challenge obviously increases with time as the sheer number of personnel and agencies on the ground increases.

Of course, the magnitude of the tsunami suggests that it is special, in particular with reference to the outpouring of resources from public and private sources. The delayed process also may reflect a slow-reacting and cumbersome bureaucracy trying to respond to an emergency situation. In any case, it seems that more resources would need to be made available sooner in order to adequately respond to the emergency response phase of such a major event. After all, few of the workers at the district level saw much sign of UN personnel except those that were already working with them until well into the disaster period. The reaction of the local and the combined local-international NGOs was clearly key to the immediate response. Given the cumbersome nature of the United Nations' ability to respond quickly it may mean that we rethink the role of OCHA and the UN to not only coordinate but immediately transfer funds to local NGOs or INGOs with an ongoing local presence.

The government received a total of about $265m to $315m in immediate relief assistance from international donors. This consists of a commitment of $165m from the UN and another $100m to $150m from other sources. This year the government also expects to have $500m to $700m in usual balance-of-payments support and budgetary support from

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[20] Interview with OCHA/HIC staff assigned to Sri Lanka.

the Paris Club. For long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction, the government is hoping to have another $1.5bn from the donors.

The Paris Club and IMF have further eased the budgetary constraints of the government with a moratorium on debt repayment for at least this year. The Sri Lanka government is taking advantage of this concession. The government is not concerned that the moratorium may damage the nation's credit rating at least temporarily. The moratorium has allowed the government to defer repaying about $441m in debt for 2005.

At the recent consortium meeting in Washington, the then President of Sri Lanka mentioned that there had been a gap between pledges for assistance and actual money received. Although data from the donor study suggests that this may not be the case, there is often a gap between what is committed at donor meetings and what is actually delivered. In the case of Sri Lanka, an additional constraint is its tendency to underutilize donor money. In recent years, the percentage of assistance actually utilized has been as low as 25% of what has been made available suggesting that the capacity of the Government to absorb funds is highly limited.

The UN itself accounts for only about 14% of tsunami money regionally, with even less in Sri Lanka according to HC/RC and Flash Appeal figures.[21] These sources tend to underestimate total flows while tracking most or all of the UN flows, which suggests that the UN's global share may be only 10%. The breakdown of figures is further complicated by the fact that several agencies (UNDP, WFP, UNEP, for instance) have regional budgets only, whereas some have distinct national budgets, and in the recovery phase, several tsunami initiatives are encompassed within regular country development programmes with commensurate additional funds.

b. NGO Coordination

Local NGOs

Note: A more comprehensive overview of coordination among NGOs, local and international, is annexed as a commissioned report (ANNEX 1).

In the first 72 hours of the disaster, coordination took place almost entirely at a local level and involved mostly local first responders and citizens.[22] From all reports in the field, Sri Lanka's civil society and private individuals reacted quickly to help with relief supplies for their fellow citizens suffering from the Tsunami. This was one instance when ordinary Sri Lankans forgot ethnic and religious differences and helped each other. The tsunami did not reach very far inland, so large portions of the population were relatively untouched and therefore able to assist fellow citizens.

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[21] Figures from RC/HC Colombo and Flash Appeal.
[22] The importance of local actors has also been described by ACT International, "Real-Time" Evaluation of ACT International Tsunami Disaster Programs Appeal, June 2005, p. 22; Fritz Institute, Lessons from the Tsunami: Top Line Findings, September 2005, p. 3.

> **As with other tsunami-affected countries, one should not understate the enormous contribution made by local people, particularly in the first 72 hours, without which many more lives could have been lost.**

Many of Sri Lanka's estimated 5,000 NGOs and CBOs mobilized to collect relief supplies and rush to the rescue of those who were in distress. The largest programs that accounted for a substantial share of the assistance in dollar terms were mounted by the Sarvodaya and Seva Lanka, which are the two largest Sri Lankan community service NGOs with a wide network of branches in most areas of the island. One state television channel and one private channel together with their respective sister radio stations immediately mounted massive relief operations. Like in the case of INGOs and UN agencies, the pre-tsunami presence on the ground and familiarity with local conditions made a significant difference to the coordination success of the activities.

International NGOs

The international community, especially INGOs, soon arrived *en masse* with assistance. USAID Colombo estimates that INGOs have raised about $1 billion for Tsunami assistance for Sri Lanka. The GoSL, through Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, did take steps in late January to regulate the plethora of INGOs active in the government-controlled areas (mainly through registration process and/or customs taxes)[23]. Interviews with Government Agents and UN personnel present in LTTE areas suggested that guidelines were established very clearly and INGOs or IOs had far less latitude to diverge from the set rules.

The INGOs have been a major presence in the tsunami relief and rehabilitation programme of the island. Most of the existing literature observes poor coordination between INGOs and the national government and civil society actors as well as among INGOs themselves[24]. This has been associated with language barriers, competition and the fact that many agencies were not fully operational in the early stages of the crisis.[25] In addition, while coordination of several hundred INGOs would have been challenging under any circumstances, the problems have been exacerbated by confusing and changing government policies.

According to an OCHA official, in transitional shelter the needs were relatively clear. Approximately 55,000 shelters needed to be built and approximately 55,000 shelters were built within an acceptable time frame. A percentage were constructed below standard but

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[23] This was done through the Centre for Non-Government Sector (CNGS).
[24] See for example CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005, p. 47; Medair, Real Time Evaluation of Medair's 'Tsunami Emergency Response' Programme in Sri Lanka, June 2005, pp. 4, 13 RedR-IHE, Final Internal Evaluation Report for the First Phase of the RedR-IHE/CHA Learning Support & Capacity Building Programme in Sri Lanka, August 2005, pp. 10-11.
[25] Competition between INGOs is reported by Medair, Real Time Evaluation of Medair's 'Tsunami Emergency Response' Programme in Sri Lanka, June 2005, pp. 4, 19. Language barriers are reported by RedR-IHE, Final Internal Evaluation Report for the First Phase of the RedR-IHE/CHA Learning Support & Capacity Building Programme in Sri Lanka, August 2005, p. 11.

generally it has been considered a success story. Conversely, in housing there have been a range of policy confusions/problems relating to the buffer zone, acquisition of appropriate land, names of beneficiaries, and standards/quality that housing should reach. This has resulted in significantly slower progress than should have been expected. Accurate information on policy has been difficult to find, and as this is one of the key foundations to coordination, it has resulted in weak coordination and actors drifting away from the coordination process.

On the other hand, efforts to cooperate clearly were made and there are examples of effective coordination.[26] At an early stage, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) took the initiative of setting up a donors coordination meeting in Colombo with weekly meetings, and appointed a donor representative to the CNO. Three NGOs – Oxfam, Sarvodiya and Seva Lanka – attended. Meanwhile, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) convened the Reconstruction Steering Committee attended by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and bilateral donors.

The Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) has drawn a large numbers of INGOs and some NGOs together weekly since the Tsunami for an operational update meeting. While this is not coordination *per se,* it is a forum for information sharing and a forum to raise issues upon which CHA can undertake advocacy work. This has enables CHA to keep communication channels open with both the old and new NGOs. CHA has raised and campaigned on SPHERE principles, security and other key issues in addition to basic support to NGOs regarding Sri Lanka administration, terms and conditions for employing local staff, etc. Both OCHA and HIC have provided considerable support to CHA and other sectoral mechanisms through provision of information, tools and personnel to support policy development, meetings and workshops.

A number of the larger NGOs and agencies have implemented their own coordination mechanism. The federation of the Red Cross for instance has more than 20 member countries agencies that arrived post-Tsunami and they have greatly improved their own internal coordination mechanisms. There are OXFAMs from six countries in the country and over the months their internal coordination has become much stronger. Most of the large INGOs, which are responsible for the vast majority of the reconstruction effort, are within coordination mechanisms.

It should also be noted that some INGOs that have become frustrated by constant policy confusion, have just begun implementing their own programs though they have tried to limit the risk that a future change in policy will undermine their efforts. Thus even INGOs who are not so active in coordination mechanisms are actually delivering positive results and do provide information on their programs.

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[26] Care, Oxfam and World Vision criticize their own performance but also highlight efforts to cooperate in CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005, p. 47. The Fritz Institute reports high levels of cooperation between INGOs and NGOs with more than 85% of the agencies that were interviewed indicating collaboration in some way with another agency in Fritz Institute, Lessons from the Tsunami: Top Line Findings, September 2005, p. 4.

There have been tensions between INGOs and local government and civil society actors. The Marxist southern political party, JVP, and its allies have been critical of the presence of a large number of INGOs in the country. Some of the INGOs are viewed with suspicion by some parties because they are seen as supporting the LTTE. The JVP has gone to the extent of claiming that INGO activities were a threat to national sovereignty. While there seems to be little foundation to support this impression, it has resulted in a parliamentary sub-committee being established to investigate the role of NGOs.

Another concern sometimes voiced is that some INGOs have evangelical backgrounds. For a period of time pre-dating the tsunami, some sections of the Buddhist community even accused evangelical INGOs of "unethical conversion" meaning alleged conversion of Buddhists (and Hindus) using financial and material inducements. This allegation is now directed towards some INGOs engaged in tsunami work. However, our field visits showed no trace of conversion activities introduced as part of the relief effort, although only the larger INGOs participated in coordination meetings.[27] We did find evidence of small groups of NGOs operating entirely separately from official channels suggesting that there could have been unrecorded activity present.

3. Civil-Military Coordination[28]

a. National Military Response

Prior to the Tsunami, despite the ceasefire and possibly because of increased internecine Tamil strife, tensions had been growing in the North and East of Sri Lanka. The LTTE held sway in the north, apart from in the highly militarised Jaffna Peninsula where some 40,000 Sri Lankan security forces are stationed. In the more disputed areas on the north-east of the country the Police Special Task Force (STF), a paramilitary and elite organisation reputed to be well equipped and disciplined was, and remains, the dominant security presence. With bunkers every 100 metres or so along the coast and camps (where the main supply routes are located) both STF and Sri Lankan military personnel suffered deaths, casualties and loss of assets. The Sri Lankan Navy, based in Trincomalee and protected by the large natural harbour, escaped the main force of the waves - but a static Naval Defence Base in the east was less fortunate. In the north it was anecdotally reported that the LTTE, and the Sea Tigers in particular, suffered considerable loss although command and control systems remained strong and intact.[29]

Local reaction to the tsunami from across Sri Lanka was spontaneous and generous. This response also included military forces from all sides who worked at a local level -- in some cases together -- to relieve the suffering of fellow countrymen and to assist in

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[27] Similar problems have also been described by WFP, Full Report of the 'Real Time' Evaluation of the WFP's Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami, September 2005, p. 36; ACT International, "Real-Time" Evaluation of ACT International Tsunami Disaster Programs Appeal, June 2005, p. 27.

[28] This research was limited by time, access and thus an inability, despite attempts, to meet senior representatives of the Sri Lanka Armed Forces or their equivalents in the LTTE. Thus what is reported is based primarily on interviews with civilian government officials, donor, agency and NGO (both national and international) representatives and a number of Defence Attaches.

[29] These loss estimates were provided by those familiar with force dispositions in the country.

search and rescue operations, body recovery and camp management.[30]   This new interface between forces was viewed with considerable optimism by local communities who supported and respected this unexpected but welcome process of co-ordination and co-operation.[31] Sadly this initiative was short-lived. Once the immediate life-saving tasks had been accomplished, national forces reverted to their previous stance.   This 'breakdown' is attributed by some to the GoSL suspicion, based on previous experience, that the Tamil Tigers would take advantage of any Sri Lankan Force diversion from insurgency operations to relief and, to LTTE concerns that Government Forces were gaining support from the population by an effective 'hearts and minds' campaign.

In the south of the country Sri Lankan Police and Army forces acted quickly to prevent looting. Despite the opposition of many (but notably not all) in the international humanitarian community the Sri Lankan military was assigned control of IDP camps. As reported by an international humanitarian worker who had visited some of such camps in the east, the military, in contrast to the local government officials with whom they worked, had the capacity to ensure more effective camp management systems including the provision of kitchens, latrines, accurate record keeping and tracking of ration distribution[32]. More importantly however, their presence, according to a senior UN staff member present at the time, assured a degree of protection to camp residents, in particular protection from child recruitment in some areas and rape in others. Eventually, under pressure from the international community, the Sri Lankan military relinquished its role in the camps. This in itself caused problems: No single government body was assigned to camp management, so NGO bodies stepped in. But they worked to different standards[33] which, given that there were separate settlements for each ethnic group could have led to accusations of discrimination by the humanitarian community, as it did in the Balkans in the nineties.

b. National-International Military Coordination

The relationship between indigenous forces and the humanitarian community is hard to gauge. Certainly there are reports of goods being stopped at checkpoints and searched and claims that either the LTTE (through the TRO) or the Sri Lankan military forces took credit for the distribution of assistance actually provided by others. In LTTE areas there were also complaints by assistance organisations of attempts to direct aid according to LTTE priorities.   But none of this was apparently so serious that it could not be resolved by mediation between senior officials. Access for international organisations was certainly much easier in GoSL-controlled areas than in the LTTE area; the latter strictly controlled all registration and movements of NGOs and agencies, whether national or international, and thus its coordination task was much easier, albeit more directed.

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[30] Saag.org – paper 1213; UK Military Liaison Officer report on visit to Trincomalee; and participant's comments TEC Workshop Colombo.
[31] TEC Workshop participants' comments.
[32] Again there are reports, not necessarily substantiated, that cite instances of IDPs being required to stay in camps or risk losing benefits (Ketel) and discrimination in food distribution along ethnic lines. The former may be explained by the reported emphasis on aid distribution on camps and not on host families.
[33] Interview international NGO representative, Colombo.

c. International Military Response

Initial news reports on the devastation caused by the Tsunami focused on Thailand and Indonesia. Unlike Thailand, Sri Lanka immediately requested international assistance. Some 27 military forces[34] responded to that request; from within the region, India dispatched assistance within hours despite having suffered considerable loss and damage itself, and Pakistan also mounted a quick response. The bulk of US Forces in the region was initially directed towards Sri Lanka although, as events unfolded, many were reassigned to the more inaccessible Indonesian province of Aceh.

Beyond the initial search, rescue and evacuation operations and delivery of relief supplies, forces arrived with engineering and medical resources and personnel. The former were used to clear roads and rubble and repair bridges, and some military forces engaged in well clearance, water and power restoration and indirect livelihood restoration.[35] Most of the latter, as articulated by nearly all interlocutors – civilian and military - were surplus to requirement given the nature and geography of damage caused by the tsunami and the abundance of civilian medical personnel in the country.[36] Despite this adequate national provision, foreign military medics continued to work in coordination with local civil and military authorities and, certainly in the case of one military contingent (Pakistan) with an international NGO, to provide medical services to the population in established hospitals and health centres or through mobile clinics – e.g. in relief camps. This medical assistance was not limited to those directly affected by the Tsunami.

The high costs of using military versus civilian assets in disaster relief operations are often cited. In exceptional circumstances, where lives may be lost or suffering prolonged without their rapid employment, these costs are generally deemed acceptable.[37] But the continued use of military assets beyond the immediate emergency phase is considerably more difficult to justify on cost grounds, particularly when local labour may be available. In Sri Lanka, international offers of military assistance were made, for the most part, prior to the extent of devastation being fully appreciated and the scale of potential support known. Offers were made and accepted bilaterally and, on arrival, assets were directed to those areas and tasks deemed important by the national military command.[38] Even were these assets **not** regarded as vital to the relief effort by the GoSL, it would have been difficult to have refused their employment given the donor nation expense incurred in

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[34] This figure is somewhat misleading as it includes some nations that sent either very small contingents (and no assets) or single Liaison Officers. Nonetheless there were in excess of 1,500 troops operating on Sri Lankan soil.

[35] For example Pakistani troops, at the request of local community representatives, cleared salt flats supplying 60% of Sri Lankan salt to enable that work upon which the local community is dependant to start again. Interview Defence Attaché, Pakistan High Commission, Colombo.

[36] As had been said many times in previous disasters, military medics are better equipped to deal with trauma injuries. Beyond the first few days of a crisis, the requirement is more towards the restoration of primary health care provision more appropriate for delivery through national bodies and/or the civilian assistance community. The exception to this may be earthquakes when trauma victims may remain inaccessible for days – e.g. Kashmir.

[37] Numerous guidelines including the IASC endorsed "Oslo Guidelines".

[38] Meeting with Officials of the Joint Operations Headquarters, November 2005.

their deployment.[39] Thus international military forces engaged quickly in tasks that could have been done (more slowly) by civilians – notably rubble clearance and road repair. In those areas where they were not deployed, rubble clearance, for example, continued for some months and was undertaken by NGOs and those areas which had not received international military assistance even questioned why and suspected deliberate discrimination in their deployment.[40] According to an international NGO long active in the North, the LTTE were said to have been upset that international military assistance was offered only through the Government, which they then had to refuse.

d. Civil-Military Coordination

Although the initial military reaction to the Tsunami was a local and not national one[41], shortly after the Tsunami a Joint Operations Centre (JOC) was established in the Sri Lankan Military Forces' Headquarters in Colombo. It undertook the coordination of foreign military forces arriving in the country. Strong links to the newly formed Centre for National Operations took slightly longer to establish possibly because as a new body, the CNO's initial operations were rather disorganised whereas military forces working through their own networks (including effective command and control systems) and assets were able to direct and use those resources without reference to the CNO[42]. Eventually senior Sri Lankan military representatives were placed in the CNO some week after its establishment to act as liaison and military focal points. But all military tasking continued to be run through the Joint Operations Centre, though with considerable input with regard to the tasking of international militaries from Defence Attaches (DAs) stationed in Colombo and from donor bodies. Another forum for military to military coordination at international level was through the US Joint Task Group for Sri Lanka – but still in consultation with the Government.

> **As in Aceh, foreign militaries were praised by civilian government interlocutors for their respect for Sri Lanka's sovereignty and for their acknowledgement of Sri Lanka's lead role in response – something apparently less obviously demonstrated by counterpart foreign civilian organisations – including the UN.[43]**

Military to military cooperation remained strong – the tasks assigned were primarily infrastructure based – road and bridge clearance and repair and rubble removal[44]. Some deployed foreign militaries, however, did not bring the equipment required for the tasks assigned (e.g. engineering heavy lift). In such cases, the daily meetings became a forum for mutual exchange of equipment. That said not all military to military co-ordination ran smoothly: There were some issues of note such as military flights arriving without prior authorisation or unloading assistance items both by air and sea without the

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[39] Civilian participant comment – TEC Workshop, Colombo.
[40] Ibid.
[41] According to both CNO (TAFREN) and Sri Lankan military interlocutors.
[42] Evaluator opinion on reason for weaker initial links based on views generally expressed in interviews.
[43] Meeting with TAFREN representatives, Colombo, October 2005.
[44] Not all rubble removal was done effectively with one foreign military force merely relocating rubble/rubbish to a school playground before departure – leaving the real removal to others later.

necessary formalities – e.g. customs clearance. In the field, military-to-military communication was difficult due to incompatible equipment which resulted in delays. Thus, according to the Joint Operations Headquarters, there is a need for more training on disaster relief operations with foreign military counterparts and enhanced communications systems.

UN representation at the daily military meetings was also eventually established -- some weeks after the Tsunami -- but its presence at these meetings was inconsistent. It was generally felt, by a core group of military DAs (from India, Pakistan, the UK, Canada and the USA) active both in promoting greater military to military coordination and the inclusion of civilian (primarily UN) advice on military plans, that greater civilian input into these meetings would have been helpful.

> **Pakistan and India – plus US troops in the vicinity, played a significant role – highlighting again the importance of regional response mechanisms and the utility of links through joint exercises and shared training and Staff College education. This will only however work effectively if the civilian component of response (National Disaster response organisations, the UN, Red Cross Red Crescent movement and the NGO/CBO community) is also fully involved, if not in the lead during some of these exercises. It may be that SARC, like ASEAN, will take on this disaster preparedness role in the face of an apparent increase in natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes.**

e. Civil-Military Response Mechanisms

Despite a nominal presence in each others' 'camps' - i.e. the UN in the military coordination meetings and military representation at the CNO - real civil military co-operation appeared to take place more informally either through donor organisations (at least two of which seconded staff to work alongside and advise their forces) and Embassies/High Commissions, or at a local level with the GA staff and with local NGOs or UN field offices. Having been allocated specific tasks or geographic sectors to work by the JOC, the foreign military forces (at one time some 27 nations[45]), then liaised with those directly involved at the district level.

Two UN Civil-Military Coordination (UNCMCOORD) Officers were deployed in early January and were present in the CNO, but it has been difficult to identify what their function was. That there were in essence two parallel national co-ordinating bodies – one on the civilian side (the CNO) and one on the military (the JOC) with liaison links between them, would have made it more difficult for the CMCOORD officers to have carved out a niche. And donor humanitarian advisers played a civil military coordination role with their own militaries, so with those militaries there was perhaps no immediately

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[45]Coates, Jeff, Matthews-Sterling, Maya, Assessment of Food Aid Distribution Post-Tsunami for Trincomalee District: World Food Program's Emergency Operation 10405 in collaboration with the Government of Sri Lanka, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy, Sri Lanka, and Payson Center for International Development and Technology Transfer, Tulane University, New Orleans, August 2005 (Unpublished Manuscript).

obvious role for such UN individuals to play. Nonetheless, there would have been a need to convey the views and concerns of the UN (and through it the humanitarian community more generally) to all military forces. Certainly interlocutors on the military side did see the need for such a function as long as it carried credibility within the UN system, could represent it, and the individuals assigned to the function were proactive.

No mention was made of CMCOORD officers by UN representatives (or other humanitarian organisations) interviewed on civil military issues by which one can assume that their visibility to the assistance community generally was limited. Thus at a national level very little civil-military coordination occurred outside the CNO and JOC. At the local level it did occur; military forces worked with Government Agents, UN Agencies and NGOs. However, based on discussions with national and international civilian and military actors, neither the national nor local civil military approach appeared to be strategic in nature.

UNJLC was present in Sri Lanka but also appeared to have little contact with either the CNO or JOC. They were based at the airport and spent the majority of their time coordinating logistics on behalf of the humanitarian community rather than playing a civil-military logistics coordinating role. Unlike in Aceh, military assets were not vital in delivering relief to affected populations and so the emphasis was more on civilian capacity and in facilitating customs clearance, etc., for the flood of organisations and individuals that arrived – with or without notice – at Colombo airport. That the government eventually restricted access to ports because of growing security concerns reflects the difficulties the JLC and counterpart government officials faced.

In summary, despite the suspicions of some in the population[46], the contribution by international military forces was much appreciated[47]. What was noted on several occasions was also the duration of stay – military forces came in, performed their tasks and departed – thus fulfilling one maxim for perceived success - "leave whilst the audience is still applauding". Although foreign military assistance was appreciated, as most of the infrastructure remained intact and the bulk of the population unaffected and thus able to respond, it was not, bar initial search and rescue operations, vital. None of this was visible in the very early stages when governments first offered military assistance to Sri Lanka. Had the damage been as extensive and incapacitating to the country as had originally been portrayed in various media and other reports, it is likely that these forces would have played a much more prominent role.

4. Coverage

a. Sectoral Coverage

UN 'lead' agencies were varied in taking full responsibility for 'their' sectors in the first months. Taking a lead on shelter, UNHCR had ambitious targets, which proved difficult to meet. It had, by mid-May, completed 252 shelters against the projected figure of 6,550

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[46] UK DA interview; Meeting with TAFREN officials.
[47] OCHA Sri Lanka Lessons Learned Workshop.

(4%), with firm plans in place for 3,850 shelters. The target was later revised downwards to 4,000 transitional shelters and the replacement of 400 emergency shelters.[48] Even so, the UNHCR received much praise for its coordination role in reviews of the effort. The RedR-IHE evaluation records the praise given for UNHCR's coordination role in shelter.[49] Difficulties are to some extent echoing the situation in Aceh, Indonesia, the apparent problems of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to respond effectively was used to justify the gaps and the failures. This said, UN lead agencies cannot formally be more than facilitators. Having not had their lead role endorsed as policy by the GoSL, their efficiency and added value merely depends on individuals in Colombo or in the districts.[50]

Again, on shelter provision, the TAFREN web site indicated that 35,193 shelters out of the 53,000 committed by the assistance community were completed at the end of July 2005. The same source indicates that 90% of the GoSL targeted 47,000 shelters are actually completed or being completed. The confusing data reflects coordination problems, and might also hide the large disparity in building techniques as well as the remaining high estimates of people not adequately sheltered. The evaluation team noted, for instance, several unregistered one-off international 'donators' from abroad who handed their money directly to a Sri Lankan contractor whose building was, presumably, not coordinated with any other agencies.[51]

Inter-sectoral coordination was also difficult to document. It was not until the end of June that the shelter and water/sanitation groups met in the south, resulting in some expensive last minute solutions to water provision in new settlements, such as trucking in tankers on a daily basis.[52] The logistical capacities of the country were severely overstretched in the early stages of the crisis further adding to the slow delivery of goods and services.[53]

b. Geographic Coverage

The evaluation team visited three communities (Galle, Ampara and Hambantota) and spoke directly with two government agents who were present at the time of the disaster (in Galle and Ampara). Basic information on Galle and Ampara districts are presented in the Table below.

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[48] UNHCR, Risk Assessment of UNHCR's Tsunami Relief Operation in Sri Lanka, Audit, 31 August 2005.

[49] RedR-IHE, Final Internal Evaluation Report for the First Phase of the RedR-IHE/CHA Learning Support & Capacity Building Programme in Sri Lanka, August 2005.

[50] One district head of UNHCR lamented the fact that even as late as July 2005 the central government required the district administration to get permission from Colombo to initiate house construction in the district.

[51] The team came across an incident in Hambantota where an Austrian town had donated $64,000 for 40 houses and representatives were coming in October as tourists to inspect progress. The GA's office knew nothing of this.

[52] For problems in the water/sanitation sector see WHOa, The Drinking Water Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami, April 2005, p. 19. Also interviews with GA's in those sectors.

[53] See also Fritz Institute, Lessons from the Tsunami: Top Line Findings, September 2005, p. 3; CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005, p. 210.

Table: Tsunami Impact in Galle and Ampara

	Galle	Ampara
Land area sq km	..	4,431
Coastline km	73	..
Population	1,000,000	600,000
Percentage		
• Sinhalese	94	39
• Tamil	2	19
• Muslim	4	42
Deaths	4,218	10,436
IDPs	127,754	73,324
Houses	11,491	27,572 (27,605)
• Damaged	5,966	10,455 (8,628)
• Destroyed	5,525	17,117 (18,977)

Sources: Department of Census and Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Sri Lanka (Annual), Colombo (No date); ADB, Rebuilding Sri Lanka: Assessment of Tsunami Recovery Implementation, Civil Society Post-Tsunami Steering Committee, Asian Development Bank, Colombo 2005.

Note: The population figures are from the 2001 Census. The tsunami figures are as at end of October 2005. For Ampara, the figures given in parentheses are those estimated by the LTTE Needs Assessment. For Ampara, there are two more alternative sets of figures. The donor community through its Joint Needs Assessment estimated 29,097 houses as being 'Fully damaged'. This number is close to the sum of 'Damaged' and 'Destroyed' houses estimated by both government and LTTE.

From a coordination perspective, it is important to note the ethnic composition of the respective populations, and whether the district is in the conflict zone or not. Government confidence in areas of former conflict is weak and credibility is low. Ampara is located in the conflict zone. Thus, the tsunami coordination effort has been complicated by issues arising from the conflict, such as IDPs and ethnic tension. Moreover, 20 years of conflict in this district has had a negative impact on development and administrative structures. Above all, it divided control of the land between the government and the LTTE. Galle has been free of these complications, which are reflected in the differences that we observed in tsunami coordination.

Galle is relatively close to Colombo - 119km – and relatively easy to reach. The district is a primary site of foreign beach-related tourist activity. It has a relatively large expatriate community with strong ties to international entities. Several international NGOs have been long-time actors in the region. As a result, most of the early response activity involving international or UN entities occurred in Galle. The number of those impacted was lower in Galle than in Ampara due primarily to the nature of the coastline and the relatively less vulnerable nature of construction near the coast. It was therefore much easier to get logistical and operational response units to Galle reflected in a faster response. The Galle GA in place at the time of the event also commented on the fact that Galle, as a primary tourist area close to the international airport in Colombo was visited by all the dignitaries and international leaders which contributed to the more rapid response.

Ampara, on the other hand, was one of the hardest hit areas in terms of deaths and IDPs. It is also an eight-hour drive from Colombo over poor roads and has no regular airline service. It includes relatively large areas under the direct influence of LTTE and is still

considered a UN Phase 3 security area. It also has an ethnically mixed population. About 41% Muslim, 39% Sinhalese, and 19% Tamil. The relations between Tamils on the one side and the Muslims and the Sinhalese on the other have been strained for over two decades. From March 2004, the LTTE in the Eastern Province split into two warring factions (LTTE accused the Government of supporting this division) that further complicated the situation. Partly as a result of these issues of isolation and security, the disaster response in Ampara arrived later than it did in Galle. The ongoing LTTE issue of Sinhalese being better treated than Tamils of course underlies all of these charges and counterchages. Nonetheless, the responses given by individuals interviewed in Galle and Ampara were more similar than different with respect to issues of response and coordination.

In both Galle and Ampara, transition shelter runs the risk of becoming permanent shelter due to the slowness of land allocation for permanent housing. Government officials in all three districts cited slow government action due to problems of land acquisition including multiple and inaccurate lists of beneficiaries and a slow response period in getting resources to purchase land.

c. Gender Issues and Vulnerable Groups

Research shows that some, especially women and vulnerable groups, have fallen through the cracks in relief and rehabilitation programs.[54] Gender issues were not separated out in the urgency of the moment as deserving of special attention. Many - perhaps the majority - of tsunami victims felt that there was insufficient consultation, or even communication when decisions were taken by officials on their behalf. It was felt to be a 'top down' approach.[55]

> **The number of women and children killed in the tsunami seems to be disproportionately high. More than 900 children have become orphans or separated from their parents.[56] These children, along with widows, single-headed households, elderly, and disabled people comprise especially vulnerable groups in terms of psycho-social distress, restoration of livelihoods, and legal and protection rights.**

On behalf of the UNCT, UNFPA coordinated the Gender-Based Violence and Psychosocial sectors. As the focal agency responsible for coordinating gender sensitive disaster response, UNFPA supported the setting up of a Gender Desk at the National Committee for Women and continues to support efforts to monitor and ensure that gender is mainstreamed in reconstruction activities. UNFPA chairs both the UN Gender Working Group as well as the recently initiated Gender-Based Violence Forum. Similarly, UNFPA supported the setting up of the psychosocial desk at the Center of National Operations and continues to chair the Psychosocial Forum.

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[54] ICES, op cit.
[55] ICES, op cit.
[56] World Bank/ADB/JICA, Preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment, January 2005.

UNFPA as the chair of the UN Gender Working Group convened a meeting on 10 January at which the immediate need for gender disaggregated data was identified as being critical to effectively address the concerns of women and girls at every stage of the relief and re-construction effort. The group also noted the importance of verifying reports of gender-based violence so that these incidents were neither sensationalized nor trivialized. UNFPA went on to support a coalition of women's NGOs that shared information and strategized on how effectively to address women's concerns, particularly gender-based violence.[57]

5. Transparency and Accountability

Coordination faces another major challenge, that of accountability. The opposition parties wanted all tsunami donor money to go into a special fund, preferably established by an act of parliament. But this has not happened and probably will not happen unless there is pressure from donors. The opposition fears that some of the tsunami funds will be spent outside tsunami areas for political reasons. LTTE and TRO in particular have shown little openness towards transparency and accountability. The UN, perhaps through caution over their current status in the country, seem not to have taken on the challenge of coordinating or providing advocacy for questions of accountability. Undoubtedly, the UN audit currently in progress will add to that issue.[58]

VI. Recovery and Rehabilitation Phase

1. National and International Coordination

GoSL began to try to take leadership in the early stages of the disaster and of the recovery process through TAFREN, with coordination mechanisms evolving between various government bodies, line ministries and district offices. TAFREN engaged several external consultants to help it develop a comprehensive recovery programme.[59] However, the government still required support in cross-sectoral coordination and strategic planning. Coordination varied regionally, with relatively stable mechanisms in place in conflict areas in the east where humanitarian actors had had a longer presence. In the south, by contract, the rapid influx of new humanitarian actors made coordination a greater challenge.

Even during the rehabilitation phase (last quarter of the year), the international community was faced with an unclear link between the four key 'themes' of TAFREN – Housing, Back to Work, Education and Infrastructure – and sectoral work in line

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[57] UN, Situation Report, No.18, United Nations, 14 January 2005; Fisher, Sarah, Gender-Based Violence in Sri Lanka in the Aftermath of the Tsunami Crisis, University of Leeds, Leeds 2005.
[58] Questions of accountability have also been addressed by UNICEF, Documentation of UNICEF's Response to the Tsunami Disaster in South Asia, September 2005, p. 18; Institute for Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), Listening to those who lost: Survey and Analysis of Rebuilding and Relocation, August 2005, p. 10.
[59] Cf. the forthcoming McKenzie Report.

ministries through which most agencies were now working. The confusion was compounded by the uncertainty about TAFREN's and TAFOR's future following the November presidential election. Both task force heads resigned after the presidential election in November 2005 and TAFOR was disbanded.

After the election, a new agency was created, RADA, the Reconstruction and Development Agency. The idea behind RADA was to bring all tsunami functions under one authority. RADA thus incorporated all of the ad-hoc agencies that were created for the purpose of Tsunami rebuilding. As of the time of this writing, RADA's authority and powers had not been confirmed yet. Once passed through parliament, RADA would change from an agency to an authority and have considerable powers - something that TAFREN has lacked. In addition, RADA has been created directly under the president so de-facto operates with presidential approvement.

Perhaps the most important observation one could make with respect to Tsunami administration was that the highly centralized disaster management and rehabilitation program that the government has been trying to run from Colombo is not very efficient and effective at the periphery. Centralization hampers quick decision-making. It also largely ignored the concerns of the local community and the local reality. As mentioned above, one consequence was that local authorities took charge in spite of the centralized response, though quite often found their hands tied when it came to decisions regarding spending large amounts of money committed by donors.

A serious coordination issue is that of building consensus and the institutional capacity to effectively manage the transition from relief/recovery to development. The evaluation noted, for instance, that just as an agency capacity reaches its optimum, it was then required to transfer the function to the government or another more sustainable entity. In OCHA, the HICs were in the process of just coming on line in a credible fashion by mid-2005, by which time efforts were needed to move the tools and knowledge to local institutions. This transfer in itself demands skills not necessarily present among more technical staff.

2. Coverage

a. Sectoral and Geographic Coverage

Shelter

The variability between districts is further complicated by the consequences of conflict in the East and North. Here there were more than 300,000 IDPs prior to the tsunami. There is a strong belief among some NGOs and other actors that both categories of IDPs should be helped in the reconstruction effort.[60] The earmarking of funds is one issue, but huge disparities in compensation exist between grants pledged prior to the tsunami for IDP and

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[60] This view has been expressed for example by CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005, p. 41; ACT International, "Real-Time" Evaluation of ACT International Tsunami Disaster Programs Appeal, June 2005, p. 31.

post-tsunami to those affected (IDPs as well as others). The issue of equity was further exacerbated by differences in grants according to the extent of damage as well as government grants. Tsunami victims were also receiving in-kind assistance from NGOs, increasing the ill-feeling between sections of the population. Moreover, there was increasing sensitivity over 'class' issues: was it fair that previous squatters in poor dwellings should now be in receipt of equal housing to those who lost substantially larger dwellings?

The quality of the transitional shelters vary a great deal depending on the area and who built them.[61] There is no single completely standardized model for permanent housing, even though many agencies were aware of SPHERE standards. Overall, INGOs tended to spent between $250 - $1,000 on transitional shelter (generally $600 - 700). The government recommended figure was approximately $500. The standard was 200 sq ft. Many agencies built smaller, perhaps 150sq ft. Many of these were extended later, when standards were better understood. [62]

Regarding permanent housing, the standard is 500 sq ft. Some shelters have been built a little smaller, 350sq ft, many are larger than 500sq ft. Costs have varied and increased with inflationary activities - large building activity versus limited supply - and standards increasing. A rule of thumb on costs for this type of housing was $10 per sq ft. Thus housing is meant to cost a maximum of $5,000 (500sq ft x $10), the reality has been that housing is costing between $4,500 and $12,000. The majority of houses seem to be costing $7,000 to $8,000 (500sq ft x $15). These houses are mainly being built by contractors. The government now wants more self-help programmes to reduce labour costs and contractor profits in order to significantly reduce the costs. [63]

In Hambantota in the south, GTZ and CARE lead an initiative to register and coordinate agencies involved in livelihood and shelter programmes, but noted that housing meetings were attended by only about 25% of agencies involved in the sector – those outside regular coordination mechanisms were often private sector, foundations or religious groups, sometimes actually funded through government channels. The Friends of Hambantota - a quasi-governmental agency that led most of the reconstruction programme in the first 6 months - buoyed by high-level government support, issued 'requirement lists' rather than beneficiary lists, ensuring that almost twice as many new houses were pledged than were actually needed according to registered Tsunami victims. Much of this activity was accredited in local interviews to the presence of the then Prime Minister's house in the area. Many non-NGOs worked to this brief, producing what appeared to be surplus housing. However, that oversupply has now been reduced and the government says that MOUs for houses have been directed to areas of greater need. Current statistics show Hambantota's need as 3,107 houses, versus completed 2,154 and under construction 1,404. This picture means that there is only 451

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[61] For example, shelters constructed by Oxfam have been found of higher quality than shelters constructed by other INGOs. See CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005, p. 29.
[62] Information provided by David Evans, UN OCHA Sri Lanka, March 2006.
[63] Information provided by David Evans, UN OCHA Sri Lanka, March 2006.

too many houses or slightly less than 15% oversupply [64] Until October, NGOs failed to receive from the local government a workable definition and criteria for who should and who should not be in receipt of new housing.[65] One can only conclude that the Tsunami presented an opportunity for the local government to accelerate development in this relatively poor district.

The shortage of land has been a severe problem for housing in the more densely populated coastal areas in the south and the east. The 100m buffer zone in the south and the 200m buffer zone in the north aggravated this problem. Under public pressure in October 2005, the government relaxed the rule and scaled down the buffer zone to about 50m, but especially in regard to commercial construction and operation the 100 meter buffer rule was enforced in an inconsistent manner. In Galle, much activity was noted in the buffer zone while in Ampara, enforcement had been much more uniform. During the presence of the evaluation team in country, newspaper and radio broadcasts announced changes in making the buffer districts larger, however, personnel in the districts interviewed at that time had no official confirmation of same.

Land shortage aside, the limited capacity of the construction industry has severely hampered the construction of permanent shelter. However, unlike in Banda Aceh in Indonesia where an estimated 100,000 are still living in tents, the vast majority in Sri Lanka have secured temporary transitional shelter.[66]

Water and Sanitation

Research shows that apart from dwellings destroyed by the Tsunami and livelihoods lost, most of the other community priorities are those that existed prior to the tsunami.[67] These problems are tied to poverty and lack of development. Examples include severe water scarcity, general unemployment especially among youth, and poor educational facilities. In Ampara, for example, the local water commissioner noted that the number of houses with access to potable water within the house now exceeded the percentage that existed before the disaster.

Shelter and wat/san sectors have not planned well together. The preference among many NGOs for constructing permanent shelters, and the increasing costs associated with this (mainly because construction was outsourced to highly-sought construction companies), meant that agencies such as UNICEF were (two examples from interviews) faced with

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[64] Information provided by David Evans, UN OCHA Sri Lanka, March 2006.

[65] The evaluators attended a general coordination meeting in October in Hambantota (co-chaired by OCHA) at which figures were presented – 2,535 houses fully or partially damaged; 833 now handed over to beneficiaries; a total of 4,000 planned to be built.

[66] Other estimates that have been published include: 250,000 tsunami-displaced people in shelters, 26 Sept 2005 (OCHA); 70,000 persons in unsatisfactory housing, 17,000 in tents, 40,000 in sub-standard transitional shelters, 20 Jul 2005 (IASC).

[67] ICES, Research Report on Tsunami Community Priorities for Long-term Recovery, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy, Sri Lanka in collaboration with World Vision Sri Lanka and the Payson Center for International Development and Technology Transfer, Tulane University, New Orleans, September 2005.

inflated costs for complementary wat/san inputs precisely because the 'outbidding' among NGOs had *exceeded* minimal standards. Indeed, some NGOs who promised houses found that the wat/san component was no longer affordable. Although wat/san common services are the responsibility of local government, they often were not in a position to meet these new costs.[68]

Livelihoods

Only in housing was the government controlling the beneficiary lists; agencies working in health, education and livelihoods have had far greater flexibility in defining a client group. In the north-east, for example, this can include host populations, conflict IDPs, etc. Yet livelihood restoration has proceeded at an uneven pace. Notably, in some areas too many boats have been distributed and in other areas too few.[69] The quality of some of the boats has also been questioned in Sri Lanka and other Tsunami-impacted areas. Again, inter-agency coordination would have ensured even distribution, standards, and equity. However, there was a huge divergence and discrepancy between resources available for relief and development, and livelihoods programmes were the first to suffer from limited funds.[70]

b. Gender Issues and Vulnerable Groups

Sri Lankan women have stressed the need to address access to recovery programmes. Although they received relief supplies in the form of goods, in many instances they were not able to get access to recovery grants since these were only provided to men as heads of households. Many also complained of a lack of access to information, and the threat of losing land or property rights given the loss of deeds and personal documents during the Tsunami. In the east, Women are particularly concerned that customary laws that give women equal rights to land and inheritance may be lost in a new legal regime currently under design.[71]

> **There are outstanding concerns over equal access for women to recovery grants and land rights. The lack of baseline data prevents issues such as these being dealt with in other than a piecemeal fashion.**

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[68] Interview with UNICEF, October 2005.

[69] In our interview with DFID, the example was given of a fisherman in Batticaloa who, having lost his sole small boat to the Tsunami, was now in receipt of three boats and even a new motor boat, each from a variety of agencies.

[70] Point highlighted by the RC/HC in interview. Quality has been questioned in India (RedR-IHE, Final Internal Evaluation Report for the First Phase of the RedR-IHE/CHA Learning Support & Capacity Building Programme in Sri Lanka, August 2005, pp. 20, 113). References to low quality boats in Sri Lanka can be found in some of the Galle OCHA sitreps including Weekly Humanitarian Overview - Galle District 18 - 24 Jul 2005. There was an FAO Colombo press release on October 17– "The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations says that safety standards for fishing boat construction and operation must be improved to safeguard lives of Sri Lankan fishers".

[71] 'UNIFEM calls for greater role for women in recovery and reconstruction work', UNIFEM press release, 22 June 1005.

An inter-agency set of Guiding Principles regarding equity, gender sensitivity, protection and assistance to Tsunami victims, and derived from the World Bank/ADB/UN needs assessment was issued in March. Though having no statutory basis, they were broadly consensual, discussed extensively by government bodies in Colombo and are now being used as a framework for the 1-year Progress Report. As a consultative document, the Progress Report itself has been one of the few opportunities for a dialogue between the international community and the government over the relative weight given to sectoral coverage in the recovery. Interestingly, it also provoked debate over how 'honest' the appraisal should be.[72]

3. Evaluation Methods Issues

There has been too great an emphasis on outputs, rather than outcome and impact. Although some interesting individual agency work is recorded – for example, CARE's early interventions in debris clearing through cash-for-work, Oxfam's emphasis on community processes in non-food relief items in Ampara and World Vision's child friendly centres[73] – the monitoring/reporting formats used by all the agencies concentrated mostly on physical distribution. The result has been that outcomes on the lives and livelihoods of people were not tracked systematically. In general, there was an underestimation of the amount of management capacity and leadership needed in the coordination activities.[74] Frequent changes in team leaders and focal persons who liaise with government and other coordination mechanisms caused problems in continuity. To a certain extent this assessment shares some of these shortcomings.

Some reviewers have noted that this report has been dependent too much upon secondary data sources and has a United Nations bias. We concur with this statement and advise readers to consider same. Secondary sources were used to collect most of the data in that only about 15% of the individuals interviewed were present in Sri Lanka at the time of the event. This means that even the majority of the interviews were reports of reports of others and not direct observations. Exceptions were Government Agents in Ampara and Galle and a small number of UN and other Ex-patriate employees who had been present at the time of the event.

This assessment was an UN-financed operation, coordinated in country by the UN agencies involved, and in most instances with an UN employee present during the interviews. Without a systematic framework of key actors from which an appropriate sample could be drawn and objectively contacted and interviewed, it is highly likely that a UN bias is present at every stage of the review. This does not regulate the utility of the results or findings but should be taken into consideration by the reader.

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[72] The TEC findings were a source of worry for some who felt that contradictory messages with the 1-Year Progress Report would provoke unwelcome press scrutiny.

[73] CARE/Oxfam/WorldVision, Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, July 2005.

[74] Joint After-Action Review of our Humanitarian Response to the Tsunami Crisis: Report of Workshop Proceedings, April 7-8, 2005, Bangkok

V. Conclusions

Coordination remains a major issue in the complex political and economic environment of Sri Lanka. The official line accepted according to our interviews at the national level by the United Nations is that coordination is primarily a national issue. In our three district visits, however, it seems that important work is being done and appreciated at the local level. A key issue was the amount of resources and the timing of those resources that needed to be coordinated. Some local actors want the infrastructure damaged or destroyed by the Tsunami to be substantially upgraded, presumably in line with President Clinton's 'build back better' entreaty. On the other hand, the opposition United National Front (UNF) in a six-point programme for using donor money is insisting that priority must be given to 'humanitarian' assistance for the victims of the disaster. It is strongly opposed to using funds for grandiose infrastructure projects. Government policy is not clear-cut. It appears that it would like to modernize infrastructure if the funds are available. The volatile situation in the Batticaloa district in the East where the Northern and Eastern factions of the LTTE are at war has further complicated Tsunami rehabilitation in that area.

Several projects currently undertaken by UNDP and UNICEF seem integral to long-term development and capacity building. Specific reference is made to the HIC units, which, although late in coming on line, are universally regarded as much needed. The UN's influence on GoSL policy is thus important.

Finally, the Tsunami, though a major disaster by any reasonable measure, affected only about 5% of Sri Lanka's population. The remaining 95% have their share of problems ranging from high cost of living to unemployment and deficiencies in education, health and other services. A strategy for Tsunami recovery that leads to benign neglect of this 95% is not a viable strategy. The best way to ensure success in tsunami recovery is to integrate it into a broader sustainable development framework. The role of coordination and the UN in the transition from disaster response and recovery to development is critical but requires a consistent project management and implementation strategy.

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