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Recent Tsunami Disaster Stricken to Sri Lanka and Recovery

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Abstract

Sri Lanka is a relatively small country with 9 provinces and an estimated population of 19.35 million. Tsunami disaster 2004 which devastated two-thirds of Sri Lanka's coastline with wave heights up to 12 metres was the worst natural disaster ever experienced in Sri Lanka. The word 'tsunami' was unheard by most Sri Lankans. It affected 1,000,000 people, killed 35,322, injured 21,441 and left 1500 children without parents. It destroyed or damaged 75% of fishing fleet, 98,000 houses, 72 hospitals, 182 schools, 53 tourist hotels and lost 150,000 livelihoods. 50,000 water connections were damaged and drinking water wells contaminated. About 415km of national roads, 1500km of provincial and local government roads, 23 road bridges, coastal rail track and rolling stock were damaged. Social networks were disrupted. Electricity supplies and communication were severely affected.

Recognising the magnitude and the urgency, individuals, groups, religious organisations, universities, the media, private sector, government and non-governmental organisations all rushed to provide relief on a scale never known before demonstrating human solidarity and kindness in an exemplary way thus preventing further loss of lives due to possible deterioration of sanitary conditions, lack of clean water, medical supplies and shelter. The government and LTTE cooperated to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided for those in need. Foreign assistance was outpouring. The President established an institutional mechanism to effectively co-ordinate assistance by creating three task forces: Task Force for Rescue and Relief (TAFRER), Task Force for Law and Order and Logistics (TAFLOL), Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation (TAFREN). A Centre for National Operations (CNO) established with state of emergency co-ordinated relief operations, gathered and disseminated vital information. Within two months provision of immediate relief was streamlined and relevant government officers at national, regional, local and village levels began to play key roles. CNO was disbanded in February 2005 when TAFRER and TAFLOL were merged to form Task Force for Relief (TAFOR) to look after the well being of affected people.

Government has projected a period of 3-5 years to fully restore the services and livelihoods with an estimated cost of US\$2.2 billion. International community committed US\$2.1 billion and an estimated US\$0.6 billion has already been disbursed. Rebuilding the nation is co-ordinated through TAFREN under four distinct programs: Getting people back into their homes; Restore livelihoods; Ensure health, education and protection for all; and Upgrade national infrastructure. Satisfactory progress has been made in all four fronts often meeting the targets. The experience so far has highlighted the need to address equity issues, improved co-ordination, enhanced government level capacity, improved communication to all stakeholders, more effective monitoring of progress and a sound strategy to integrate tsunami initiatives to national development and the peace process.

It is expected that the program would be accelerated through the new Reconstruction and Development Agency (RADA) established recently under the President's direct supervision amalgamating TAFOR and TAFREN. Furthermore, a legislative framework for more proactive disaster risk management has been enacted and the Disaster Management Centre established to make Sri Lanka a safer place.