

Was Tsunami Aid Well Targeted? An Examination of Disaster Assistance in Sri Lanka

The Tsunami in 2004 devastated Sri Lanka. In its aftermath, followed aid and support from multiple sources. As countries in South Asia ready themselves for climate change and the possibility of increased frequency in natural disasters, it is useful to understand how well post disaster operations work to help victims. It is vital that a country's post-disaster development aid is well targeted and that it achieves its intended objectives. To shed light on this important issue, SANDEE research examines key elements of the development aid effort that followed the Asian Tsunami of 2004. This study is the work of Asha Gunawardena and Kanchana Wickramasinghe from the Institute of Policy Studies in Sri Lanka.

The main finding from this study is that aid designed to help households rebuild their damaged and destroyed homes was better targeted than aid designed to help fishermen whose boats had been damaged or lost. Households who had access to social networks were more likely to receive aid. Regional disparities also played a role in the allocation of aid. The study findings highlight the importance of making a special effort to identify certain sub-sets of people, such as the very poor and other marginalized groups, who can easily miss out on post-disaster aid.

THE CHALLENGE OF TARGETING DEVELOPMENT AID

The frequency of natural disasters around the world has been increasing since the 1970s. South Asia is particularly susceptible to this problem due to its high population densities, its high levels of poverty and the heavy dependence of its various national populations on monsoonal rains. In the

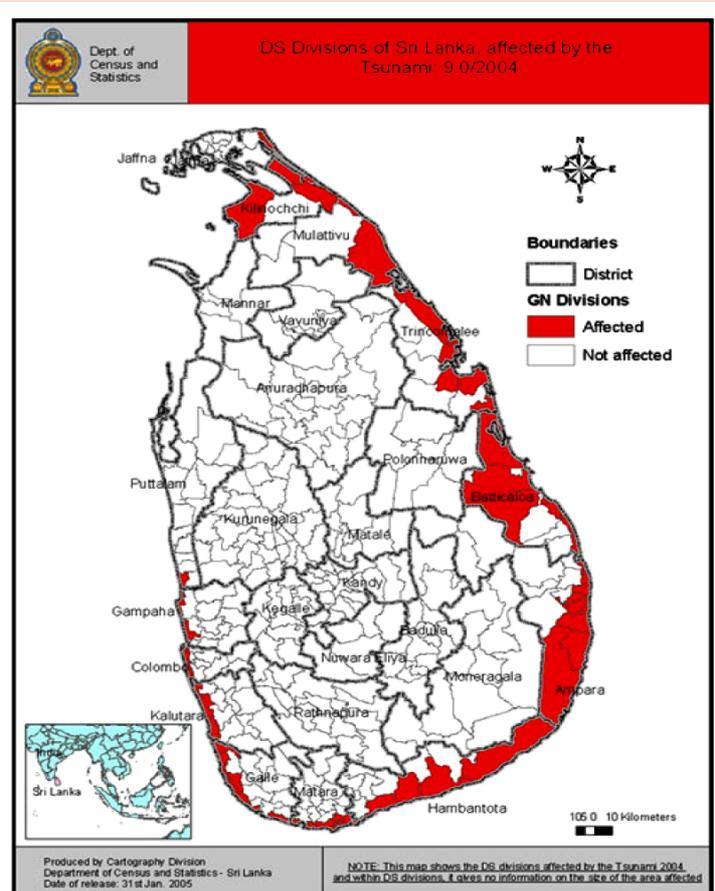
face of this serious challenge, many countries across the region are working to improve the way they help the victims of such calamities. Recent studies have shown that there should not only be a focus on increasing the overall aid effort, but that more should be done to boost 'aid effectiveness' by targeting the right recipients. Targeting specific groups has a number of potential benefits. Firstly, it can maximize the effectiveness of often limited budgets. Secondly, it can help avoid the distortion of local economies that can be caused by universal aid transfers (for example, food-aid distribution can affect local food prices and the allocation of labour). Despite these potential benefits, very few studies have investigated post-disaster development aid in order to determine how effective it has been targeted.

To help fill in this information gap, this study looks at the targeting of two of the main aid programmes that were set up to help households affected by the 2004 Tsunami: One to help households repair or rebuild their damaged or destroyed homes – referred to as 'housing aid'; the other to help fishermen mend or replace their damaged or destroyed boats – referred to as 'boat aid'.

THE 2004 TSUNAMI

Sri Lanka was one of the countries most affected by the 2004 South Asian Tsunami, which was the largest natural disaster in the country's recent history. The Tsunami, which struck on December 26, 2004, resulted in more than 35,000 deaths and injured over 20,000 people. It also displaced several hundred thousand people. The impact on property was equally high. About 89,000 houses were fully or partially damaged, while the number of people who lost their livelihoods amounted to 150,000. The fisheries sector was the most seriously affected part of the economy. About 5,000 fishermen died and roughly 71,500 fisher households were directly affected. Fishermen lost about 16,000 crafts, while roughly 7,000 crafts were damaged.

Map: Tsunami affected Districts in Sri Lanka



Source : *The Department of Census and Statistics 2005*

Following the Tsunami, Sri Lanka was fairly efficient and effective at providing immediate relief to the victims. However, longer-term rehabilitation proved to be more challenging, due to a variety of reasons. Primarily, the delivery of post-Tsunami development aid was not systematic, while planning and co-ordination between the relevant aid bodies could have been better. At the local level there were also inadequate resources to receive and distribute aid.

ASSESSING POST-TSUNAMI AID

To investigate the delivery of post-disaster aid in more detail, the study asks three main questions about boat and housing aid: a) Did the aid make households better off and did it result in a more equitable distribution of assets? b) How effectively was the aid targeted, i.e. did households who lost assets due to the Tsunami receive aid or did aid go to the wrong recipients? And c) what factors determined the allocation of aid at the household level?

Data for the study comes from the Tsunami Census, which was conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics in 2005. The study also draws on a follow-up survey undertaken in 2008 with a sub-sample of fishery households. The study looks at six districts that had been severely affected by the 2004 Tsunami. These were: Galle, Matara and Hambantota from the Southern Province and Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Ampara from the Eastern Province. It assesses 396 fishery households in the six selected districts. A questionnaire was used to get information about issues such as the households' socio-economic status, their access to community-based organizations, and the amount of aid they received (and its sources). Interviews were also conducted with key informants such as government officials and fishery inspectors. Nine focus group discussions were also conducted in each of the selected communities.

HOW HOUSING AID WAS DELIVERED

The study finds that 62% of the households in the study areas had their houses fully damaged by the Tsunami, while the rest of the households had their homes

partially damaged. By the year 2008, 51% of the households had been able to rebuild their houses on their own land, while 40% had relocated to new land away from the sea. Around 6% of households hadn't been able to rebuild their houses on their own land nor to relocate to a new location. Except for a few households, the majority of the households now possess more expensive houses than they did before the Tsunami. For example, in the pre-Tsunami situation, about 75% of the households' houses had a value of Rs 400,000 or less. After the reconstruction and relocation process, the value of the houses went up - now only 30% of households have houses worth Rs 400,000 or less.

Table: Cross tabulation of boats damaged and boat aid received

		Aid Received		
		Yes	No	Total
Boat Destroyed	Yes	74 48%	80 52%	154 39%
	No	49 20%	193 80%	242 61%
	Total	123 31%	273 69%	396

Pearson chi2(1) = 33.9765 Pr = 0.000

There were regional disparities in the allocation of housing aid. Southern districts such as Hambantota and Galle received more aid than other districts. One explanation for this disparity may be the relative proximity of these regions to the capital city of Colombo and the fact that they are more accessible than the other districts because they benefit from better roads and other infrastructure.

THE PROBLEMS WITH BOAT AID

Boat ownership has changed for the worse from the pre-Tsunami period to the present. The percentage of households who now own a boat (or boats) decreased from 46% in the pre-Tsunami period to 38% after. Only 48% of people who owned boats before the Tsunami received aid for their boats. What's more, boat owners who owned less expensive boats before the Tsunami lost out, while boat owners who owned more expensive boats benefited disproportionately. It is also clear that some 'boat aid' was delivered to people who were either not boat owners prior to the Tsunami or whose boats had not been damaged or destroyed. Out of those who did not own boats prior to the Tsunami, 20% currently own boats. Because of this poor targeting, some of the people who owned boats prior to the Tsunami have had to stop being fishermen and change their occupations.

Overall, these findings show that the targeting and allocation of housing aid was better than that for boat aid. In particular, the distribution of houses in the area affected by the Tsunami was more equitable after aid had been distributed, while the distribution of boats was less equitable. However, it is interesting to note that the distribution of 'total assets' (both houses and boats) among households in the post-Tsunami period is now more equitable than it was immediately before the Tsunami. It can therefore be concluded that, overall, the distribution of total assets was relatively equitable.

HOW TO IMPROVE THE TARGETING OF AID?

The difference between the targeting of the two aid programmes can be explained in a number of ways. Firstly, it is easier to prove damages to houses than it is to boats, which made the targeting of housing aid more straightforward than the targeting of boat aid. Furthermore, while there was a government policy on the rebuilding and relocation of houses, there was no specific and clear policy for boats. In addition, a lack of information made the selection of beneficiaries for boat aid more difficult, compared to the selection of beneficiaries for housing aid. Co-ordination was also an issue: the government mainly administered the distribution of housing aid. In the case of boat aid, the main donors were NGOs and there was poor coordination between the government and these groups.

As well as pointing to differences in the delivery of the two aid programmes, the study also shows that access to social networks played a significant positive role in the delivery of aid (especially in the absence of local-level information). Households that had experienced the loss or death of, or injury to, a family member were found to have received less aid. It is possible that these households devoted more time to looking for missing people and helping the injured than on searching out aid. In addition, those who were very poor or marginalized were found to have been less likely to receive housing aid. These findings point to the conclusion that, in order to effectively target post-disaster aid, donors and government agencies should make a special effort to reach marginalized and poor households (which usually do not have access to social networks). The study also recommends that, when it comes to targeting aid in disaster situations, more should be done to focus on households who lose human capital.

SANDEE

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tsunami near Hikkaduwa, March 2006

REBUILDING HOMES AND REPLACING BOATS

Many organizations stepped forward to help the people affected by the 2004 Tsunami. These groups included the Sri Lankan government, multilateral donors, international and local NGOs and the local private sector. However, providing disaster relief and reconstruction aid posed a number of challenges, primarily because of the sheer magnitude of the disaster, the lack of relevant expertise and capacity on the ground and also because there was little coordination and planning. What's more, different donors had different interests, budgets and time-constraints.

Thirty-nine percent of households lost their boats (totally destroyed) as a result of the Tsunami wave, while there was partial damage to the boats of 6 percent of households. The households in the study areas received aid to replace and mend their fishing boats primarily from local and international NGOs and donor agencies. Thirty one percent of households received new boats. Out of this, some 25% of households received new boats from the NGOs, while only 5% received boat aid through the government. The rest were given boats by private/ community based organizations. One of the problems of helping fishing communities recover from the Tsunami was lack of information on the composition of the fishing fleet and of fishery households. Some information had been lost in the Tsunami, but much of it had not existed in the first place. Although the registration of boats is a legal requirement in Sri Lanka, a majority of small-scale fishers had not registered and obtained licenses. It is possible that providing boat aid was seen as a quick fix and a source of publicity for donors who were under pressure to distribute a large amount of funds within a short period of time.

The government led the push to help people rebuild their homes following the Tsunami. The majority (67%) of the households in the study area received housing aid through the government, followed by NGO-assisted households at 65%, with 7% receiving assistance from the private sector and community-based organizations. Most of the households received housing aid from more than one source.

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