

Reconstruction of a tsunami damaged village in the south of Sri Lanka

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The village in this study was selected by chance and can be considered to be typical of similar villages in the south. Sixty families were selected as recipients of resources. The observation of helping the rebuilding process and the interactions between the two field workers (one, a sociologist/counsellor and the other, a teacher) and the recipients, made the author examine the process from sociological and psychological perspectives.

A village is a part of the society in its entirety and it is possible to study the structure of society at the same time as the lives of its individuals. An attempt was made to study a village that had suffered trauma of the tsunami at individual and social levels, and to examine the processes in relation to society as a whole. The main objective of the project was to help rebuild and stabilise the 60 families that were affected by the tsunami. Great care was taken to minimise the effects on the individuals and social structure by this intrusion.

The research methods selected were participant observation, questionnaire and interviews. Notes were made with each visit and a questionnaire and interviews were used to assess the effectiveness of the work done and its underlying effects on the individuals and community.

Financial constraints dictated the progress of project implementation. Since the primary need was the psychological recovery of the villagers, it was found after consultation with them that they required the basic household implements that were washed away to restart the income generating activities. These consisted of large pots and pans for making 'string hoppers', 'kalu-dodol' etc. for the local shops and garden implements to restart small market gardens. These were supplied once they had prepared the gardens for the plants and seeds. The physical activity of preparation and the restarting of various domestic economies had a positive psychological effect as indicated in the responses to the questionnaire. The gardens which the tsunami had devastated began to have a cared for look. It was felt that from this point, they had begun to 'move on' with their lives, and hence it was decided by the team to step back, providing support as and when required, such as a temporary medical clinic, painting and craft classes for children etc.

In conclusion, at a time when many similar villages faced destruction, the attempt made was to help rebuild a self sustaining way of life that has survived and helped them to survive for many centuries with little damage to the environment or to themselves.

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