



Supporting communities to rebuild in Sri Lanka



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The International Federation's Global Agenda (2006–2010)

Over the next five years, the collective focus of the Federation will be on achieving the following goals and priorities:

Our goals

Goal 1: Reduce the number of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.

Goal 2: Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.

Goal 3: Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.

Goal 4: Promote respect for diversity and human dignity, and reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion.

Our priorities

Improving our local, regional and international capacity to respond to disasters and public health emergencies.

Scaling up our actions with vulnerable communities in health promotion, disease prevention and disaster risk reduction.

Increasing significantly our HIV and AIDS programming and advocacy.

Renewing our advocacy on priority humanitarian issues, especially fighting intolerance, stigma and discrimination, and promoting disaster risk reduction.

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Summary

When the Indian Ocean tsunami struck on 26 December 2004, large areas of the coast of Sri Lanka were devastated, with massive loss of life and damage to property. The survivors were faced with the trauma of losing their homes, livelihoods and, in some cases, their loved ones. In addition to the large-scale relief operation launched in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has made a significant contribution to the recovery effort through the construction of new housing for tsunami survivors.

A buffer zone was initially put in place by the government to prevent rebuilding too close to the shoreline. Some families who had previously lived in these areas had to be moved to safer areas and new locations found in which to construct houses for them. In one such case, the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS), in partnership with the Spanish Red Cross Society, carried out an integrated community resettlement programme at Lagos Watta in the Kalutara district. The beneficiaries were 93 families who had lost their homes inside the buffer zone and as a result had suffered considerable hardship.

The primary aim of the programme was to improve the families' living conditions by providing them each with a decent house in a reasonably developed urban community. While the initial focus was on housing, supporting tsunami survivors in regaining or establishing livelihoods was part of the broader strategy of the Spanish Red Cross in Sri Lanka. Therefore, once a suitable place to live had been provided, the SLRCS, with the support of the Spanish Red Cross, initiated a livelihoods programme not only for its housing beneficiaries but also for vulnerable members of the host community.

There were some unforeseen difficulties and delays owing to the arrival on the scene of a new local NGO which sequestered some of the land allocated by the government to the programme. This resulted in the reduction in the number of planned houses from 93 to 68. The first houses were handed over in September 2006, and 39 families had taken up residence in their new homes by the end of the year. The full complement of 68 houses was delivered by May 2007.

Key to the success of the programme were: the existing close partnership between the Spanish Red Cross and the SLRCS; the good relationships established both with the beneficiary community and with local government officials at every level; thorough advance planning and assessment; and the active participation of the beneficiaries, who were consulted and kept informed throughout most of the resettlement process.

There were also aspects of the programme that could have been improved or that could have been done differently. Even greater beneficiary participation from the outset would have been desirable, and a better understanding of the pressures of local politics might have averted some of the difficulties encountered. Problems that arose between the beneficiary and host communities are being addressed through a new livelihood and community development phase of the programme.

The present document describes the housing component of the SLRCS/Spanish Red Cross programme.

Background

On the morning of 26 December 2004, a massive earthquake registering between 9.1 and 9.3 on the Richter scale occurred off the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. The earthquake triggered a series of tsunamis that radiated through the Bay of Bengal at a rate of more than 500 km per hour, affecting the coastal areas of 13 countries around the Indian Ocean rim. One of the worst hit was Sri Lanka.

The tsunami that struck Sri Lanka is widely acknowledged to be the most devastating natural disaster in the country's history. Two hours after the earthquake occurred, the tsunami engulfed the coastal areas across 13 districts, including Jaffna in the north, the eastern and southern coasts and parts of the west coast. Loss of life and damage were extensive: 30,000 people died and over a million were displaced or otherwise affected. Coastal infrastructure, including buildings, roads, railways, fishing ports, power supply, communications, water supply and sanitation facilities, all suffered extensive damage. The tsunami also took a heavy toll in the north and east of Sri Lanka, areas already affected by a prolonged civil conflict.

In response to the government appeal for donor support, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation), together with the SLRCS, pledged to help the national reconstruction process through initiatives in housing, health, and water and sanitation. Over 25 Partner National Societies (PNSs) arrived to assist, an unprecedented response.

As part of the tsunami response, the government of Sri Lanka initially created a buffer zone to prevent rebuilding too near the shoreline in case there was another tsunami. It also requested donor support to provide permanent houses for families who had previously lived inside this zone who would now have to be relocated. Initially, only families who had owned homes were included as beneficiaries, but support was later extended to squatters as well. Many of these people were living in camps, in temporary shelters or with family or friends.

The housing programme was part of a post-tsunami integrated community resettlement programme implemented by the SLRCS, in partnership with the Spanish Red Cross, at Lagos Watta in the Kalutara district near the south-west coast of Sri Lanka. The objective of the programme was to improve the living conditions of 93 families who had lost their houses inside the buffer zone and to provide them each with a house that met agreed standards in a reasonably developed urban community in a new location.

In Kalutara district, the tsunami had caused extensive damage. This was mainly because of its low-lying location and the poor quality of housing of low-income families. The number of houses severely damaged or destroyed in the district was estimated at 2,898.

The Spanish Red Cross was already present in Sri Lanka before the disaster, having first arrived in 2001 to assist people affected by the conflict. It had also been working in partnership with the SLRCS to strengthen the disaster management capacities of communities and to help people affected by flooding in 2003.

The information in this case study was gathered from programme documentation and by conducting interviews with key individuals from the SLRCS and Spanish Red Cross, local government and the beneficiary community. A half-day session was also held with eight members of the beneficiary community in which they recalled past events and outlined their hopes and desires for the future.



The programme

The majority of the houses in the Lagos Watta settlement were to be built by the SLRCS, in partnership with the Spanish Red Cross, on a site where a local NGO had also been allocated space to build houses for tsunami survivors. Infrastructure, such as roads, water and electricity supply to the site, would be provided by the government. The SLRCS, supported by the Spanish Red Cross, was responsible for some associated structural work, such as the laying of pipes that would supply water, sanitation and electricity to the houses within the site.

Allocation of land

The Sri Lankan government and its local representatives took charge of the allocation of land and identification of beneficiaries. Approximately 5 acres were identified in Kalutara district on which to build 93 houses (150 square metres per housing lot). The government acquired the land and did the preparatory work, including obtaining the necessary legal permits, establishing ownership, and making sure that the site was suitable and complied with urban regulations.

The land was assessed and pronounced suitable for construction. The water table was found to be of a depth that would not affect the buildings' foundations, yet could be reached by wells or boreholes. The roads needed upgrading, although they could be used in the meantime by construction vehicles. Health and educational facilities existed but needed to be enhanced and expanded to cater to the increase in population.

Selection of beneficiaries

Households from one area of Kalutara (Good Shed Road) were identified as potential beneficiaries of the programme by the divisional secretary of the local government and approved by the local government agent with responsibility for tsunami recovery. The beneficiaries had to be tsunami survivors whose houses needed replacing. Other factors taken into consideration were the households' level of vulnerability and the presence of disabilities. Priority was given to people living in temporary shelters.

The provisional list of beneficiaries was handed over to the SLRCS, which in turn shared it with the Spanish Red Cross, which then carried out its own verification process to ensure that the families were genuinely entitled to receive a house under the government policy. This meant checking that each family's previous house was indeed located in the buffer zone, that it had not already received a house from another donor/aid organization and that it had not received a government grant to rebuild a house on other land. Police reports, tsunami registration cards and tax bills were also consulted. A meeting was then held to inform the beneficiaries that, in addition to the housing, the Spanish Red Cross would support the community in other areas, such as community development and livelihood generation.

The pre-tsunami livelihoods of the beneficiaries ranged from junior staff positions in the local council (such as roadsweepers and sanitary workers) to delivery drivers and sellers of products, such as fish, vegetables, fruit, cashew nuts and cloth.

Assessments

A series of thorough assessments was carried out before construction started, including:

- borehole and penetration tests, analysis of soil samples and ground water levels, and soil filtration rates;
- an environmental impact and clearance assessment;
- a detailed analysis of risks, such as possible increases in the cost of building materials; and
- a survey of beneficiaries.¹

After the beneficiaries had moved into their new houses, further assessments were conducted, including:

- a survey of the host community;² and
- an assessment of the impact of the move on the beneficiaries.

SLRCS volunteers carried out the interviews with the beneficiary and host communities, following a one-day training course. The volunteers also took part in data verification.

Information was gathered on the gender, ages and number of disabled people among the beneficiary population. This was used to identify and plan for any special needs of female-headed households, the elderly and the disabled in housing and livelihoods programme.

Importantly, the results of the preliminary assessments were not just collated but were used in the design and planning of the programme. According to a Spanish Red Cross delegate, "this led to different thinking", that is, decisions were made based on proper baseline information rather than automatically adopting established ways of doing things. The results of the surveys conducted after the beneficiaries moved in to their new homes were used to plan the next stage focusing on livelihoods.

House and urban design

The land was divided up in the fairest way possible given the limited amount available. Two households were specially allocated houses at each end of the plot, with the agreement of the other beneficiaries. They needed the extra space; one for raising chickens and the other for running a carpentry business. The beneficiaries decided that the remaining houses should be allocated through a lottery system.

¹ Data collected included number of families, gender balance, civil status, ethnicity, religion, health, place where health treatment was obtained, places where water was obtained and stored, sanitary habits, personal hygiene, education levels, physical or mental health problems, life and personal skills, income, livelihood and state of house post-tsunami.

² Data collected included gender, age category, income, livelihood, education, length of time living in the village, and the impact of having beneficiaries moving into the area.



Patrick Fuller/International Federation

Most of the land had to be devoted to housing, with minimum space for communal areas. The houses were designed bearing in mind the previous lifestyle of the occupants. The basic design provided for a living/dining room, two bedrooms, an indoor kitchen and a separate bathroom and toilet. Fresh water and electricity were to be supplied.

The urban plan included the installation of basic infrastructure, such as a rainwater drainage system, water distribution network, power supply and roads. Once built, these would be maintained by local public and private suppliers. Areas of common concern, such as garbage disposal, were to be managed by the local community through the formation of committees, each with a specific responsibility, and by fostering a sense of ownership of and care for shared assets.

Hiring of technical staff

The choice of the architect and the building contractor was made through a comprehensive and careful tender process, initiated by the SLRCS and carried out jointly with the Spanish Red Cross. Detailed terms of reference and contracts were issued, signed and implemented fully. There was good communication and liaison between all parties during construction. The building contractor took a personal interest in the beneficiaries' well-being, for example, by providing a free lunch for them when they came to help clear the site and by employing some who had done a painting and decorating course arranged through a complementary International Federation-supported livelihoods programme.

Beneficiary and community involvement and engagement

The SLRCS employed a beneficiary and community liaison officer, who commenced work early on in the programme before the technical staff were hired. She organized the surveys and set up a community involvement structure. Meetings were held at regular intervals to consult the beneficiaries on various aspects of the programme and to keep them abreast of progress. At times, SLRCS staff members also acted as facilitators and educators in efforts to curb domestic violence.

Five working groups were set up, each one dealing with a specific issue: health, including garbage collection; women and children; livelihoods; gaining access to other local civil society and government organizations; and water and sanitation. A mutual benefit society was established at the request of the community, one of whose aims was to provide financial support to bereaved families.

Five community leaders (three men and two women) were elected by the community to represent them in the context of the programme. The leaders described their role as “collecting the beneficiaries together and building relationships”. They facilitated two-way communication between the programme team and the beneficiaries and organized shramadana³ days for communal tasks such as clearing the site.

One community leader added that it was also his task to remove the “empty ideas” that some of the community had about the Red Cross. Some people believed that the Red Cross had taken sides in the conflict. They had heard media reports about the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to assist people affected by the conflict and had mistakenly assumed that this meant that the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement had lost its impartiality. A local education campaign on the principles and work of the Red Cross Red Crescent helped to dispel these misconceptions.

SLRCS volunteers helped in the preparation and facilitation of meetings and also participated in meetings with local government staff.



³ Shramadana is a concept developed by Mahatma Gandhi and adopted in Sri Lanka. It involves contribution of voluntary labour and sharing of resources for the benefit of the community.



Implementation of the programme

Following completion of the programme, eight members of the community were asked to write down how the programme had unfolded in their eyes. They came up with the following “sequence of events”, unaided by the programme staff. They then drew a community map of the area and pointed out what other facilities they would like to have. Spanish Red Cross staff then verified the information, which they found to be accurate. It is an indication of the extent to which the beneficiaries were kept informed and involved.

Stage one

April–November 2005

Preliminary and preparatory work was carried out to ensure that all the necessary permissions and agreements were in place.

- Memoranda of understanding were signed and all approvals obtained.
- A preliminary list of beneficiaries was drawn up by the local government.
- Land was set aside for the programme and all legal permits obtained.
- The architect and contractor were hired; land clearance began.
- 93 households were selected from the preliminary list of beneficiaries by the divisional secretary.
- A beneficiary survey was conducted.
- Beneficiaries visited the proposed site accompanied by the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society and Spanish Red Cross.
- A model of the proposed scheme was shown to beneficiaries along with an explanation of the housing structure.
- Beneficiaries suggested amendments to the house design.
- Community leaders were elected by the beneficiaries, and five working groups were formed.
- The foundation-laying ceremony was held.

Stage two

December 2005–March 2006

This stage should have focused on construction and programme implementation, but problems arose because some of the land intended for the programme was reallocated by the local government to new local NGO.

- The new NGO sequestered part of the land. In the process, preparatory work, such as the marking out of plots, was damaged. The new NGO erected a warning sign.
- The beneficiaries launched a campaign to prevent the new NGO taking the land: letters were written to the president of Sri Lanka and local government representatives. No answers or solutions were forthcoming.
- The Spanish Red Cross and the SLRCS lobbied on behalf of the beneficiaries.
- The programme suffered a four-month delay because of this problem, as various groups tried to find a solution.
- The SLRCS was finally asked by the local government to reduce the number of houses from the originally planned 93 to 68. Some of these houses had previously been allocated to yet another NGO. New land was promised for some of the Red Cross houses that could no longer be built on the site.

Stage three

April–September 2006

The programme resumed and land clearing and construction started again.

- Beneficiary numbers for the first phase were fixed at 39 households (list generated by the divisional secretary). The names of the 39 families were publicly announced.
- As proposed by the beneficiaries, lots were drawn to allocate the houses.
- A mutual benefit society was established at the request of the beneficiaries. There were nominations for office bearers and the constitution was drafted.
- A voluntary labour campaign (*shramadana*) to clear the site was organized.
- All beneficiaries participated in regular meetings held by the SLRCS and the Spanish Red Cross.
- Awareness training in waste management was conducted.
- Applications to local government suppliers for infrastructure, e.g. roads, water and electricity, were made.

Stage four

October–December 2006

Resettlement finally began and the first beneficiaries moved into their houses.

- Resettlement of the first 39 households on the site took place.
- A temporary water supply was provided by the Spanish Red Cross while awaiting installation of permanent water infrastructure.
- Alternative systems for garbage disposal were introduced.
- A health and water and sanitation awareness programme was conducted by a public health educator.
- Beneficiaries took part in evaluations, including a mid-term review carried out by an independent team commissioned by the International Federation.
- Beneficiaries began to “point out small shortcomings of the houses, e.g. removal of concrete slats in the living room and replacement by windows”.



Programme outcomes

By December 2006, 39 houses of a good technical quality had been completed and handed over, and a further 29 were in the final stages of construction. Of these, 23 were handed over in March 2007 and the remaining 6 houses were handed over in late May, bringing the total to 68 houses.

The SLRCS played a key role in procurement and the identification and hiring of the contractors. Its volunteers were instrumental in carrying out the various surveys and organizing community meetings.

The original objective of constructing 93 houses with accompanying support for the community was partially achieved. The full complement of houses could not be built owing to the appearance on the scene and actions of the new NGO, which took over some of the programme. The NGO is now building the remaining houses, which are different in design from the Red Cross houses. The new NGO also plans to erect fences to separate the communities. These factors could lead to future problems between the two communities. The key lesson here is that despite all the necessary steps being taken and procedures followed, the impact of local politics cannot always be anticipated.

The houses built by the SLRCS in partnership with the Spanish Red Cross, were said to be “neat”. Many people have commented on the high quality, including features such as the high roofs, which allow better circulation of air. Some suggestions from the beneficiaries regarding the house design were taken into account by the architect. For instance, the space between houses is as they requested. Some beneficiaries had expressed concern that the number of planned gables, doors and windows was unlucky, but as no one knew what the appropriate number should be, no decision to change them could be made.

“As we have come from separate villages and resettled at Lagos Watta, we are not used to living as a “village” together. We need to get used to becoming village members.”

Elected community leader

The beneficiaries would have liked to have been more involved in the design phase. At that stage, they could have said that they preferred a different style of window and that external kitchens were more appropriate for them as they cooked with wood. As it happens, most beneficiaries have since built or are building an external kitchen and are using the internal kitchen for other purposes. The Spanish Red Cross is running courses in how to build a safe and healthy kitchen, thereby increasing the beneficiaries’ capacities.

The community is being supported to take responsibility for the management of any local problems that may arise, for example a temporary loss of water supply, as happened recently.

The beneficiaries have developed good relations with the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in the course of the programme. The SLRCS and Spanish Red Cross acted as facilitators to help resolve community problems, a role that was greatly appreciated, and plan to support community empowerment activities to help the community to address its own difficulties.

Efforts are under way to improve relations between the host community and the beneficiaries, a need identified in the surveys carried out after the beneficiaries moved in. For example, some members of the host community felt that their children’s behaviour had deteriorated since the arrival of the new families and that this had been detrimental to the community as a whole.

Despite the hurdles encountered, the SLRCS and the Spanish Red Cross remained focused on the programme’s objectives as the work progressed. They made use of appropriate planning tools, such as budget charts and logical frameworks, and set up a clear and regular reporting system.

The appointment of a community liaison officer to engage with community members and local government officials was a successful strategy. She understood the cultural aspects and ways of working of the local government. She was persistent in sticking to the original beneficiary list, despite outside pressures, and followed up with the local authorities when necessary, for example, to obtain signatures. She used locally acceptable ways of bringing the community together, such as *shramadana*.





Lessons learned

Lesson 1: Taking more time at the beginning to ensure beneficiary participation may have led to a more thoughtful response.

There was a tendency to respond to the pressure to build quickly and to the competition between aid agencies for programming space. At the time, it was feared that beneficiary participation in the early stage would take too long and delay the start of the programme.

Lesson 2: Greater beneficiary involvement in housing design also would have been desirable.

Thorough planning and a clear implementation schedule, a good choice of architect and contractor and some involvement of the beneficiaries all contributed to a successful outcome. However, there should have been more formal involvement of beneficiaries in the design of the houses, which lacked certain features they would have liked, even though they were structurally sound.

Some of these design faults, identified in a mid-term review, are now being addressed. The longer-term commitment of the SLRCS and the Spanish Red Cross to support the recovery of these communities has made such corrective action possible.

Lesson 3: It is vital to build good working relationships with local government officials at all levels.

Good relations with local government officials meant that programme staff were able to approach a senior person when someone more junior was being unhelpful, such as trying to change the beneficiary list because of pressure from local politicians. However, some differences of opinion could have been averted had it been realized that government staff were also being lobbied by local interest groups and politicians.

Lesson 4: Be flexible, as problems are bound to arise.

Staff were flexible enough to deal with problems as they arose. They adjusted to the change in the number of houses allocated and responded helpfully when the local temple was flooded. They handled the situation well with the new NGO and the subsequent four-month delay. They kept the beneficiaries regularly informed of changes or new developments.

“The pressure affected how I worked. We focused on construction and not on beneficiary issues. We tended to concentrate all our efforts on technical matters.”

Delegate, Spanish Red Cross

The way forward

The needs for the next four to five years identified by beneficiaries in the interviews conducted for this case study are different from those identified by those outside the community, such as local government staff. Most beneficiaries would like simple additions or changes to their homes, such as drainpipes, external kitchens, and windows rather than concrete slats in their living rooms. They would also like designated areas for a children's playground, a sports centre for older children, and a compost site. They want the area protected from erosion, for example by the building of retaining walls. They have also requested some furniture for their homes.

Some beneficiaries said they would like help in finding livelihoods that would generate a better income. One person asked for a sewing machine. Others expressed interest in training in a range of skills. The programme did not initially focus on livelihoods but on resettlement. The next phase, however, will aim to help beneficiaries regain or obtain meaningful occupations.

This programme has highlighted a need to continue to support the community to address social issues such as alcoholism and domestic violence.

On the government side, an official has requested the construction of a small local shopping centre, as residents currently have to travel into Kalutara town for food and other essentials. The need for a public health facility has also been identified to facilitate the local population's access to doctors and midwives.

The SLRCS, with the support of the Spanish Red Cross, is currently implementing a livelihood and community development programme in the area. Half of all members in the programme committee will be women. A vulnerability and capacity assessment⁴ (VCA) will be carried out, and the data collected used to plan the work. The aim of this programme will be to support the entire community, both tsunami-affected households and residents of the nearby village. This includes improving relations between the beneficiary and host communities through extension of the programme to vulnerable members of the host community. The ultimate goal is to achieve integration between the host community and the initial programme beneficiaries, as well as to contribute to the overall socio-economic development of the area.

⁴ VCA is a participatory method of investigation into the risks that people face in their community, their vulnerability to those risks and their capacity to cope with and recover from disasters. *How to do a VCA, International Federation, 2007.*

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



PROTECTING **HUMAN** DIGNITY **+** **☾**



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people.

By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

The International Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.