National Policies Go Local

ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS ON NATIONAL POLICIES AND MEASURES TOWARDS DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION

Hand-made drawings for the Local Disaster Preparedness Manual

Top: Community meetings on disaster preparedness planning

Middle: Local institutions conducting resource inventories

Bottom: Relief distributions following natural disasters

US IOTWS Small Grants Program

The US Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System (IOTWS) Program has funded 17 small grants in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand as part of its $16.6 million two year effort to support the development of an end-to-end warning system in the region. The grants program catalyzed and promoted pilot activities that contribute to community and bottom up results in disaster mitigation, preparedness and response.
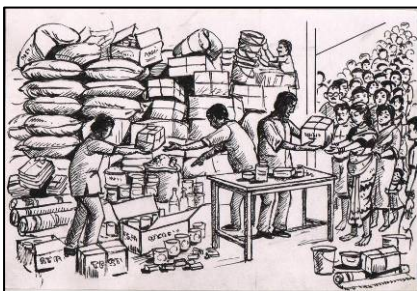
Assessment of Local Institutions on National Policies and Measures towards Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation

Following the 2004 tsunami, national policies and legislation were brought into effect very quickly, particularly in India and Sri Lanka. In both of these countries, local institutions such as government agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) play a critical role in ensuring equitable services to the affected community. Researchers from the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) investigated how national disaster management policies support local institutions in providing preparedness and post-disaster services; the quality of those services; and local officials' and CBOs' understanding of disaster management policies. Finally, the gaps between national policies and local response were identified and shared with project partners. The project was implemented in Nagapattinam, India, and Hambantota, Sri Lanka.

Project Achievements

Approximately one hundred participants from government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, participated in project activities in India and Sri Lanka. Members of some of the most vulnerable groups in the two communities contributed to the development of a manual for disaster preparedness that will assist local institutions in identifying and reducing disaster risks. The manual incorporates local expertise and knowledge on disaster management and also outlines how local institutions can increase their effectiveness regarding community preparedness, relief, and rehabilitation.

The local disaster preparedness manuals are unique in that they are specifically targeted for use by members of the community to enhance household resilience. It includes hand-made sketches from community members and a section for the most vulnerable populations. It also describes the minimum standard of shelter, water, and sanitation, as agreed by over 400 humanitarian organizations, that should be upheld in disaster relief operations. Government officials and CBO members alike are generally aware of existing national policies; however, the specific actions mandated in the policies have not been adequately shared at the district and village levels. This

project was one step in building a culture of preparedness for disaster management planning and implementation at the local level.

Lessons Learned

Local institutions have grown into some of the most important players in disaster preparedness and response in India and Sri Lanka. Government agencies and NGOs at the local and district levels have often taken different approaches to disaster management, which has sometimes resulted in large gaps in coordinating activities to secure future preparedness. However, the recent emergence of grassroots organizations after the tsunami and the efforts of international agencies on local governance have opened new opportunities and new mechanisms for enhancing community resilience.

Traditionally, the key disaster management-related agencies in both countries have paid greater attention to relief and rehabilitation rather than preparedness. There is an earnest need to develop local institutions' disaster management capacities, particularly to more closely link post-disaster efforts with longer-term development planning. In this regard, small and medium-sized organizations can play a larger role because of their long presence in the community and understanding of local circumstances and needs.

Next Steps

Grassroots organizations with strong linkages in Nagapattinam and Hambantota will carry on the preparedness efforts launched under the grant program. The organizations, such as Sevalaya, can also assist in bridging the gaps between disaster management policies and responses on the ground. In support of this, AIT and Sevalaya have been collaborating on applied research initiatives for disaster risk reduction, such as through a grant from the Provention Consortium. A major upcoming activity will be to assess the training and other human resource development needs of grassroots organizations regarding risk reduction.

About the Asian Institute of Technology

AIT promotes technological change and sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region through higher education, research, and outreach. Established in Bangkok in 1959, AIT's mission is to develop highly qualified and committed professionals who play leading roles in the region's sustainable development and its integration into the global economy.

For more information on activities or partnership opportunities with AIT, visit www.ait.ac.th.

Community women outlining the local institutions

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About the US Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System (IOTWS) Program

The US IOTWS Program is part of the international effort to develop tsunami warning system capabilities in the Indian Ocean following the December 2004 tsunami disaster. The US program adopts an "end-to-end" approach—addressing regional, national, and local aspects of a truly functional warning system—along with multiple other hazards that threaten communities in the region. In partnership with the international community, national governments, and other partners, the US program offers technology transfer, training, and information resources to strengthen the tsunami warning and preparedness capabilities of national and local stakeholders in the region. For more information please visit **www.us-iotws.gov**.

U.S. Contribution to the
Indian Ocean
Tsunami Warning
System