From emergency aid to sustainable development

PSK 1.740.400 Kennwort „Indien“
We have lost everything because of the Tsunami, all the homes in the village as well as the boats with all their equipment have been wiped out. Thanks to the assistance from PDA we are now able to begin a new life.”

Anbumani K.

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chilmOn the morning of December 26th, 2004, a tsunami hit the coast of the southern Indian Nagapattinam District, causing devastation of an unprecedented dimension. Tidal waves of up to twelve meters high and of an unconceivable force hit the fishing villages and its people, destroying houses and huts, schools, community centers and fishing boats. Even further inland fields – fertile farmland – were flooded, causing a loss of crops.

Worse than the material damage, is the human loss. Many families mourn their injured, missing or dead relatives. Many women in particular are among the casualties as they were not able to swim or, as the wave broke; they were at home or trying to quickly find their children. The survivors, particularly the children and young people, are completely traumatized. Those suffering the most are the ones who were living in poverty before the Tsunami. Here in the Nagapattinam District, it is primarily the Dalits, belonging to the lowest caste, who are trying to ensure their survival by working as fishermen, day laborers or seasonal workers. Despite the fact that there is no longer a legal basis for the caste system in India, it is still strongly anchored in these rural areas.

Immediate Relief

Only two days after the Tsunami, the solidar India Consortium (=solidar), together with their Indian partner organization PDA, People’s Development Association who are already familiar with the circumstances in the area, are on-site to provide humanitarian aid to those affected: drinking water and relief items such as rice, milk powder, oil, blankets and clothing are distributed amongst the affected families. In community kitchens food is being cooked and distributed. solidar is ensuring that everyone – independent of their caste or religion – is being provided for. The immediate emergency aid includes initial medical treatment of the injured, the recovery of bodies and the cleaning of wells. This contributes to avoiding an outbreak of epidemics and famine and an increase in child mortality. In addition to this, solidar is involved in setting up temporary shelter to provide those who have lost everything with a roof over their heads. Instead of using corrugated metal sheets, these houses are built with local environmentally friendly building materials such as bitumen.

Emergency aid is not enough

At the same time a team from solidar is visiting neighboring villages trying to establish, together with their Indian partners and the affected community, the demand for additional aid. It soon became clear that the emergency aid and reconstruction program had to be transformed into a long-term support. The livelihood of the people should not only be restored but substantially improved.

An extensive reconstruction program started at the beginning of April 2005. It includes the building of permanent houses and schools as well as the rehabilitation of the fisheries, which is the livelihood of the people. Additionally, long-term measures were swiftly implemented, starting with the provision of primary health care for the villagers and projects aiming to assist children, youth and women.

Facts & Figures

- 6,065 casualties in Nagapattinam/India
- 200,000 people affected by the catastrophe
- 9,017 families (more than 40,000 people) receive food and relief items:
  - 1,118,264 kg rice
  - 90,001 l water
  - 16,206 kg milk powder
  - 126,166 kg vegetables
  - 8,000 sleeping mattresses
  - 7,500 saris (clothes)
  - 200 temporary shelter have been installed
"I lived in Vulunthamavadi together with my husband, a fisherman, and our three children. We owned a clay house with a thatched roof. We lost all of our children, our house and the boat – now we have a new house and I am expecting a child again."

Sundari K.

The tsunami tidal wave has destroyed whole sections of the coast, the fisheries and the infrastructure. The damage is not only significant in the coastal regions; it has also affected many regions inland. The houses made of clay and covered by a thatched roof have either been washed away or damaged to such a vast extent that they are uninhabitable.

For solidarity, the reconstruction of permanent houses is an absolute priority. After the catastrophe, homeless families should be able to move as soon as possible from temporary shelter into secure homes.

**Joint planning**

Together with the local population, a “model house” is planned and built. Before, houses consisted of one room without lavatories. Now every house includes a kitchen, bedroom and a living room. Toilets and washing facilities, separated from the living area, are now also available. The women are actively participating in the planning process, advocating for example, that the roof-terraces be built in a way suitable for them to be used for various purposes: drying of fruits, herbs and fish, as a sleeping area or a convenient meeting point. In contrast to the past where the homes were owned solely by men, these homes are now owned by both the man and woman.

Additionally, solidarity is ensuring that discriminated parts of the population, such as widows or single women, are not disadvantaged when it comes to the allocation of houses.

**A new and improved home**

The move into a new home implies a complete new quality of life, with electricity, water and more space available. In some estates water is supplied directly to the houses, in others areas there are public water-supply points. In addition to this, every house is equipped with a drainage pit. The houses are now situated further away from the coast, which is reassuring for the people. Every house is occupied by a family, consisting of at least five people on average. In the newly constructed settlements the residents have adapted their new homes according to their needs. Canopies, expansions made of palm-leaves, fences or small vegetable and herb gardens can now be found. Some have opened a grocery store or a tea shop.

**Community centers – an important institution**

Not only were residential houses destroyed by the flood wave but also community centers. These are an important institution within each village, particularly after catastrophes such as this, when the strengthening of social cohesion among villagers is crucial. This is why solidarity focused also on the reconstruction of community centers. They are governed by a village committee (Panchayat) and offer space for childcare, events and the opportunity to meet and chat. This is of particular importance to women, whose freedom of movement is limited due to tradition and the lack of local transport opportunities.

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**Facts & Figures**

- 297 new homes for 1,500 people
- 4 new community centers for 9,600 villagers
I am a fisherman and have lost my boat and nets to the tsunami. I have worked on the construction of the new boat myself. So I know that I have received a good boat.”

Kanthar M.

Fishing is the livelihood of the majority of the people living in the coastal villages of the Nagapattinam District. The enormous force of the tidal wave destroyed everything – boats, nets, and engines. Families are distressed, as they do not have insurance and most of them are in debt.

The traditional fisheries in India are associated with the fisher caste. These groups are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy (officially abandoned in 1950) and are already suffering from economic exploitation and social discrimination.

Work for men and women

The fishermen in Nagapattinam operate small fisheries – using either wooden catamarans or boats made of fiberglass with an outboard engine. Unlike the wooden catamaran, the crew of a fiberglass boat is able to go further out to sea. Jobs for women in the villages are closely linked to this fishing trade. The trade women wait on the shore for the daily catch, auction the fish and sell it at the next market or door-to-door. This would help explain the large number of female casualties among the victims on the fateful day of December 26th, 2004. The tidal wave hit the Indian coast at eight o’clock in the morning, at precisely the time when the boats had returned from the sea and the women were sorting the caught fish and loading them into baskets.

Increasing Income with new Equipment

The cheapest equipment for a fisherman costs around 2,700 Euros. solidar supports the building and repair of plastic boats to allow the fishermen to pursue their trade. The new boats enable the men to fish further out at sea, which ensures a bigger catch. Additionally, solidar funds the necessary purchase of nets, motors and ice boxes. The boats are built or repaired together with the fishermen in a local workshop. This ensures that the wishes of the fishermen are considered and that they are able to see the quality of the boat for themselves. For solidar this is an important contribution to ensure that the fishermen regain a sense of security as well as trust in their boats and fishing itself.

By water and by land

In India, tricycles are used to transport various kinds of goods, e.g. fish, water jugs, or building materials. They can enter the narrowest roads and do not generate any high operating costs, but their acquisition is expensive leading many into debt. The owner has to pay back the credit rates from his moderate income – often less than one euro a day – leading to dependency on the money lender. solidar not only purchased boats, but also number of tricycles and dispensed these amongst those men who had lost theirs to the tidal wave.

The tsunami doubtless has caused unbearable suffering, but has also provided many fishing families with a chance to substantially improve their living conditions.

Boats and nets fishing as a livelihood

Facts & Figures

• 250 boats built/repaired for 15,000 people
• 427 nets
• 365 outboard motors and
• 815 metal vessels handed out for the transport of fish
• 74 tricycles/bicycles assigned
“The Self-Help-Group has considerably our lives. We now have a bank account and are doing business. In case of any problems we go directly to the village leader. We have our own income and make decisions together with our husbands – none of this would have been possible before.”

Sundari T.

Women have been much more affected by the tsunami than men. For those whose husbands lost their lives in the catastrophe, the situation is particularly bad. Widows live on the edge of society; they are not allowed to marry again or participate in public events, which expose them to even further discrimination.

As a first measure, solidar replaced lost working equipment. In addition to this, it provides courses and training which make work and life easier. Thus some women are able to obtain their driver’s license for motorized three-wheelers. They pool together to operate the wheeler. This makes the transportation of fish and other goods much easier. They are now able to reach more remote areas, where not much fish is sold in general and can therefore ask a higher price, leading to an improved income.

Supported by solidar the project focused on the improvement of the situation of women by setting up self-help groups began immediately after the emergency aid phase and at the same time as the reconstruction process.

Together against poverty and discrimination

In India self-help groups for women are a successful strategy to fight poverty and improve living conditions, particularly in rural areas. Women are able to improve their self-esteem and contribute to a shift in power relations in their favor.

More than one hundred such groups have been formed – among them are female fisher people or farmers, widows or the landless, elderly women as well as many of the suppressed caste of Dalits. Here solidar has made an important contribution to a reduction in discrimination.

Independence due to small loans

In the course of forming a new group, the women have collectively opened a joint bank account. Every month they save an amount related to their financial situation and keep an account of it. Once a specific amount has been saved, they give loans to their members who would have otherwise had to take them out from a local moneylender paying a high interest rate. These credits enable them to pay school fees, medical treatment expenses or a dowry. The money together with the interest rate has to be paid back within ten months. The interest rates are much lower than those asked for by the moneylender, and the women appreciate the un-bureaucratic and swift opportunity to borrow much needed money. Some of the groups have started new economic activities, such as processing and marketing local products with the money they have saved and grants provided by Volkshilfe. Before starting income generating activities, a business plan is developed and discussed together with the group to see whether the planned activity is profitable or not, whether the market is available and to identify the needs of further training. Group members will get skill training and training in project management and a follow-up of the activities will be regularly carried out.

Co-determination in the village council

Being part of a group means that the women can exchange thoughts and ideas and be supportive of each other. Violence against women is no longer just accepted and women are now defending themselves. A further step forward in the support of women is the inclusion of female representatives in the village administration. solidar pays particular attention to

Facts & Figures

- 2640 women organize themselves in
- 132 self-help groups
- 20 small-scale businesses
- 1,950 credits given to women (between 150 – 700 Euros)
- 100% redemption rate

Help for women together towards independence (self-employment)
Trauma counseling for children
schools for a better future

“I enjoy coming to the youth centre. When we are finished with our homework we can decide what we want to do – take part in a play, dance, make music, participate in crafts or sing”
Annakili P., 8 years old

Many children have lost their parents, brothers and sisters, friends and their home to the deadly tidal wave. Many only narrowly escaped death themselves. It is not easy for children who have experienced such a devastating event to find solace. In youth centers, they are able to fight their fears, despair and speechlessness with paint brushes and colors, music and shared events.

Popular meeting point

Assisted by solidar, which has funded in each village a child development center and – animators; children regularly meet here in the afternoon. In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, the children were intensively cared for to help them to cope with the trauma caused by the natural disaster.

The youth facilities have very quickly become a popular meeting spot for children and adolescents. They come to take part in a play, to dance, make music, participate in crafts or sing. Once a year, a large festival (mela) is held, where children are able to perform their acquired skills to an enthusiastic crowd.

In addition to this, the girls and boys also participate in special remedial lessons and are tutored at the youth centre which enables them to re-join regular lessons at public schools.

New schools for every age

In India, the school enrolment ratio has quintupled over the last twenty years, but the dropout rate is still extremely high: While girls make up the majority in the first years of primary school, this changes dramatically in the later forms. They often have to help with housekeeping, look after their younger sisters and brothers or are forced into early marriage. Boys have to help with the fishing or field work from a very young age to contribute to the survival of the family.

Many schools have been completely destroyed or severely damaged by the Tsunami. Therefore, solidar has also funded the reconstruction and rehabilitation of schools; primary, secondary and high schools are being built. This contributes significantly to making higher education more accessible to children from the remote rural villages of Nagapattinam. Since their completion, the schools are back under the district administration that employs the teachers and other staff and also covers the operating costs for the school.

Education for boys and girls

Regular parent-teacher events are organized in order for parents to understand how important education and school attendance is for their children. Many mothers and fathers simply cannot afford to send their children to school, as these children have to work instead. solidar supports parents in purchasing school materials and uniforms to give their children a chance at education. Pupils with a longer way to school are given a bicycle.

Animators and teachers are also supported. They are provided with training courses where they learn new teaching and learning methods and are able to develop new education and remedial material. They are excited to have the opportunity to learn something new which in turn can be implemented in their lessons.

Facts & Figures

- 16 youth centers
- 1,560 children involved in the support program
- 11 schools built or restored for a total of 1,902 children
- 5,870 books and booklets handed out
Hope for young people
professional education as a chance

“My family is poor, they make a living fishing. But now I have the opportunity to be educated as an electrician. This opens up more possibilities for me regarding my professional future.”
Mallaya N.

Emergency aid, reconstruction and the rehabilitation of fishing as a livelihood for the poorest population strata have the highest priority in the aftermath of the tsunami. However, these measures alone are not enough to achieve a substantial and sustainable improvement in people’s living conditions in Nagapattinam.

For this reason, solidar commits itself to contributing to the professional education of young people. A training centre in which young people from the region can be professionally trained is financed with the support of solidar and its partners. This education in a high demand job sector gives the young people a better chance in the labor market and offers them an alternative to traditional working opportunities such as fishing, agriculture or day-labor.

Qualifications with a future

The primary school education in India has improved over the last several years and therefore has made access to education for many children easier. The professional education sector is, however, insufficient. In Nagapattinam, the education system is particularly poor due to the lack of public support and the necessary financial funding. The vocational training center will improve this situation. In order to enable young people from the poorest sections to receive an education, the tuition fees are kept particularly low.

The training center systematically prepares young people for their professional career. They gain professional, theoretical and practical knowledge, which they need to be car mechanics, welders or electricians – knowledge that is currently missing in the region. As a starting point, the young people are required to have a successfully completed school career as a qualification; preparation courses are therefore offered to those who still have to complete their school career successfully.

To ensure an increase in young women receiving professional training, additional computer and fashion design courses will soon be offered too. This will provide them with the opportunity to work in an office or a company or to simply start their own business.

Education on the highest level

The training centre has several classrooms and a well-equipped workshop for each profession. Qualified teaching staff ensures a high level of the vocational training and education; at the school compound a canteen provides tea and snacks in the breaks.

The training centre is officially recognized and the district awards those who have passed the final examination with a diploma. Those young people who have passed their final examinations are optimistic, as having learned a profession implies regular employment or the possibility of starting their own business in the region. In order to ensure that young people in Nagapattinam continue to have an alternative to traditional income opportunities, this project will be continued after the completion of the tsunami reconstruction program.

Facts & Figures

- 700 Euros in annual costs for the education of each student
- 180 trainees per year
- preparatory courses for 250 young people
- 1,500 Rupees in annual school fees per student
I have to pay the doctor in cash when my children get sick. Beforehand, I had to take the long way to the capital. Sometimes I don’t even have money for the bus. Now the mobile clinic comes to our village twice a month and we can visit the doctor there.”

Thangamma P. (single mother with three kids)

The health care system in the remote villages of the Nagapattinam district is completely insufficient. Health care facilities hardly exist and the only hospital is situated in the capital city. At the public health care posts there are rarely drugs available and staff is insufficiently qualified. Private health care is available but not affordable for the people.

In order to ensure primary health care for the population long-term, solidar decided to install a mobile clinic: The “hospital on wheels” started its operation in April 2006.

Help that is well received

The team, consisting of a female doctor, a nurse and a laboratory assistant, visits each village twice a month. The people know when exactly the clinic will be in their village and are already waiting to be treated. The ambulance is equipped with all the necessary devices. The drugs are bought in the Medical Department Store of the Government and are therefore cheaper than on the private market.

The examinations take place either on the ambulance or at the village community centre. Everyone is treated – regardless of the caste or religion they belong to. Respiratory diseases, infections, diarrhea and skin diseases are the most commonly treated ailments. Many women suffer from exhaustion and are looking for advice and support from the doctor. The preventive and curative health care is aimed especially at elderly people, pregnant women and those with children, as the infant mortality rate is particularly high.

Support from next-door

To ensure that the target group is adequately cared for, the medical team of the “clinic on wheels” is assisted by so-called village health-workers. In each village there are at least two women who have been trained as health-workers. They take over the aftercare of patients, control whether the prescribed drugs are taken properly and arrange home visits.

Furthermore, the health-workers arrange weekly meetings, in which a vast majority of women participate, and provide education on themes such as hygiene, healthy food for children, family planning and pregnancy. They also discuss social issues such as their husbands’ alcoholism, high dowry demands, forced marriage of young girls and violence against women.

Besides the treatment of patients, the team of the “clinic on wheels” regularly runs campaigns on blood donation, eye examinations or vaccinations. Here the team is supported by doctors and health officers from the district.

In order for the provision of primary health care to be ensured for the people of the villages, solidar will continue to support the project.

Facts & Figures

- 25,000 people treated annually
- 1,300km traveled every month
- 1,60 Euro costs of a treatment
- 2,000 Euro monthly total costs (incl. medical staff and driver)
- 40 health advisors trained
“The flood disaster is history and victims obtained important support during the difficult aftermath period. We have also promised to help in the future, as there is still plenty to do.”

Univ. Prof. Dr. Josef Weidenholzer, President of Volkshilfe – Austria and of solidar

The solidar India Consortium has financed and executed many projects in Nagapattinam in the years following the tsunami and has contributed to the sustainable improvement in the quality of life for thousands of people. But this help and aid should not stop here. solidar will continue to support women, men and children in Nagapattinam so they are not left alone in their efforts to improve education, the possibilities to follow a professional career, equality and health.

Socio-economic strengthening of women

The existing self-help groups for women will be continuously supported in their economic activities. Operational and financial plans are developed together with the women in order to ensure that the business ideas are profitable. Attention is also paid to ensuring that the new occupational activities will not just be an additional burden for the women. A project aimed at equal social and gender-specific opportunities should contribute to gender equality and the diminishing of discrimination. This project started in July 2008 and will last for three years.

Specific promotion and support for children

The youth centers, which are visited and used by many children, will continue. Girls and boys who need extra tuition, who are handicapped or just want to express their creativity are all part of the target group of this project. The trauma of the tsunami has now been dealt with and the encouragement and advancement of these children is an investment in their chances for a better future.

Vocational and educational training for young people

The continuation and expansion of the professional training centre has highest priority. The courses offered have to be expanded according to the surveyed educational demand in the region. Additionally more students are being accepted into the existing programs. Strategies to ensure the sustainability of the training center will be further developed and implemented. It is therefore important to support and accompany the graduates in the periods where they are seeking employment or looking at becoming self-employed. In the meantime many young men have – like the women – united to improve their living conditions through economic group projects. solidar will also assist these groups by providing revolving funds and skill training.

Sustainable primary health care

The health care provision will continue in sixteen villages. The mobile medical team with its ‘hospital on wheels’ ensures primary health care for the rural population and in particular its availability to the elderly, mothers and their children. Health workers should be trained in villages where these facilities are not yet installed and the cooperation with them intensified. The women self-help groups will play an important role in the future, taking on more responsibility in the provision of health care.

Illness should no longer be seen as an issue of the affected individual. The inclusion of the community (on a village and district level) in solving problems relating to medical supplies is an important factor in maintaining the primary health provision.

To ensure that all these ambitious projects can be continued, the population requires continuous solidarity. Please support the people in Nagapattinam with your donation.

Donations account: PSK 1.740.400

Continuous help sustainable projects
The solidar India Consortium

Volkshilfe Österreich leads the tsunami-reconstruction program and is supported by
• Progetto Sviluppo / Italien
• Arbeiter Samariter Bund / Deutschland
• Solidarité Laïque La Ligue de l’Enseignement / Frankreich
• People’s Development Association (PDA) / Indien

solidar

SOLIDAR is a European network of 47 NGOs and labor movement organizations based in 25 countries. SOLIDAR promotes solidarity, equality and social justice in the fields of social affairs, international cooperation and education. SOLIDAR works towards influencing EU and international policies and links members together to work on common projects and to learn from each other. SOLIDAR member organizations work together on humanitarian aid and international development cooperation projects in India, Sri Lanka, Middle East and Western Balkans. www.solidar.org

Quality standards

The SOLIDAR India Consortium follows the guidelines of the humanitarian Charta and the minimum standards of the Sphere project, an international initiative on the quality improvement of humanitarian aid. Furthermore the Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programs are applied.

Wir bedanken uns herzlich bei den UnterstützerInnen:

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Volkshilfe Österreich …

Univ.-Prof. Josef Weidenholzer
President of the Volkshilfe Austria
President of SOLIDAR

“Particularly after such a devastating catastrophe such as the tsunami, the victims need immediate and targeted help. We are not only concerned with short-term relief activities such as primary health care or food supply – such a catastrophe can provide the possibility of a new beginning, an opportunity to improve the living conditions of poor and discriminated people. Therefore, we thank all of our partners who have supported us in our long-term project work. It is only with their help that we have been able to assist the victims of the tsunami in facilitating a more self-determined life by providing education, credits and health care. There is still so much to do and so many opportunities to help people build better lives for themselves. To ensure that this help is continued in the future, the people in India still need your support and solidarity!”

Univ.-Prof. Josef Weidenholzer
President of the Volkshilfe Austria
President of SOLIDAR

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