



Executive summary

The overall objective of this evaluation is to find out how operations and roles of the various actors were governed by ideas and practices regarding the linking of relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD), and to assess what consequences those ideas, practices and subsequent actions have had or may in future have for the affected population.

The tsunami had an immense impact on development processes, conflicts, patterns of risk and poverty in the affected areas. So also did the subsequent relief and development efforts. This evaluation looks at how affected populations in Aceh and Sri Lanka have coped with the disaster, and also how they have coped with the aid industry. It looks at how aid response has addressed (and often ignored) what was happening in Sri Lanka and Aceh before the tsunami. These were countries and communities dealing with conflict, chronic poverty and weak respect for human rights before 26 December 2004.

Over-fishing was a problem before, as was inequality, as was internal displacement. The disaster changed the rules of the LRRD game, but the game had started long before. It is important to stress this as the

agencies involved in the tsunami response deserve neither the full blame nor the full credit for performance in linking relief, rehabilitation and development. LRRD must be analysed from the perspective of how the aid response has related to the ongoing political, economic and social processes that enable and constrain affected populations as they rebuild their lives.

Aid agencies initiated a range of relief and rehabilitation activities right from the start. The need to proceed with relief and rehabilitation operations simultaneously was recognised and acted upon. The gap between relief and rehabilitation that commonly appears in disaster response was avoided due largely to access to un-earmarked publicly raised funds and donor flexibility. The aid community ensured that affected populations obtained the means to live with a modicum of dignity during the early rehabilitation phase. This has provided them with the security that they have needed to start rebuilding their homes and livelihoods. The humanitarian system has initiated early support for livelihood rehabilitation in the form of distribution of assets, such as small boats and fishing nets, and as cash-for-work.

The shift to rehabilitation has been much slower in the housing sector, where an unacceptably large proportion of the affected population is still living in deteriorating tents over a year after the disaster. Early promises were made that tens of thousands of houses would be built in a few months time. These promises demonstrated arrogance and ignorance regarding what should have been the self-evident challenges of recovery programming. Building communities takes much longer than building houses. Issues of land rights, environmental impacts and links to services and jobs inevitably take time to be effectively addressed, but this was not acknowledged in LRRD plans and declarations. As a result, construction of transitional housing has been delayed and insufficient, especially in Aceh. Disaster-affected people have shown a readiness to be patient in waiting for permanent housing, but they have been angered by false promises and the failure to plan for an inevitably protracted transitional period. This state of affairs is a reflection of how agencies' struggle for 'turf', by making grand promises, has superseded accountability to the affected populations.

Even though they moved rapidly into rehabilitation, most aid actors have demonstrated a limited understanding of what kinds of interventions may eventually prove sustainable with respect to livelihoods, community development and resource management. Standard packages, such as small boats, do not necessarily contribute to rebuilding a fishing industry, nor do they encourage the wider private sector development that is needed to support the livelihoods of people living on the coast who are not smallscale fisherfolk. Narrow and inaccurate conceptions of how best to promote equity (perceived of as being tied to own-account farming, fishing and trading) have stymied the search for how employment opportunities can be expanded in small- and medium-sized enterprises.

The tsunami devastated the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people. Economic activities stimulated by the tsunami have also created hundreds of thousands of new livelihood opportunities. The aid community has not assumed a strategic stance regarding how to add value and fill gaps between these two processes. The link between rehabilitation efforts and wider development trends has not been sufficiently thought through. There is therefore a risk that some rehabilitation efforts may prove ultimately ineffective and unsustainable. Furthermore, some of these poorly conceived interventions may actually undermine future development as they encourage over-fishing, damage the credibility of microfinance institutions and create dysfunctional communities through insufficiently planned resettlement.

A lack of information to affected populations about reconstruction plans greatly limits their capacity to proceed with their own LRRD projects. People need to know where they will live and what they will receive in order to make informed decisions about their own future plans and livelihoods. Information is power, and the people affected by the tsunami do not have much of either. This failure has led to distrust toward aid providers and the government. Participation is important, but information about aid and development plans is the starting point for people to decide for themselves how they wish to get on with their lives. It is also their most basic tool with which to hold their governments and aid providers to account for making links between relief, rehabilitation and development that are relevant to them.

The importance of government and community ownership of the recovery process is acknowledged by almost the entire aid sector, but there have been frustrations and delays in anchoring tsunami response in Sri Lanka and

Acehnese institutions. Genuine LRRD requires attention to how to align programming with the policies, capacities and actions of national actors, be they governmental, civil society or the affected populations themselves. The weaknesses in national and local institutions are considerable, so alignment may need to be a protracted process, but the overall direction needs to be maintained. There are indications that this is beginning to happen, but in some areas significant damage has already been done due to poaching of staff and insufficient attention to pre-existing policy frameworks. Most agencies have shown an ignorance of the historical trends in the two countries and of how aid programming could avoid repeating past mistakes and contribute to prevailing development opportunities. The aid community and governments have experienced a difficult and time-consuming process in achieving consensus on complex trade-offs between speed and quality of response and in deciding where people should be encouraged to live so as to reduce risks from future disasters. Discord and confusion regarding the buffer zones have distanced the aid community from national political processes. An unfortunate outcome of this has been a lack of attention to issues of risk reduction.

It is difficult to assess the impact of aid on the conflict trajectories in Sri Lanka and Aceh. The tsunami did not help to bring peace to Sri Lanka. It did, however, at first have a modestly positive effect, perhaps due to both genuine altruistic urges after the tragedy and also the military losses due to the tsunami. After the initial emergency phase, the patrimonial struggle to control aid resources became a point of contention rather than an incentive to cooperation. The increase in violence occurring at the time of writing this report (December 2005) cannot be verifiably attributed to the tsunami response, but the competition over aid flows and subsequent

distrust can be assumed to have had some negative impact.

Indonesia has had a very different trajectory. The rapidity with which the conflict in Aceh is being resolved was not expected before the tsunami. Although any inference of attributed causality between the aid response and the peace agreement should be treated with caution, most Acehnese see the opening up to the international community and the aid presence as a significant factor supporting this sudden change. In addition to the tsunami having a positive impact on the dynamics of the conflict, the peace agreement has had a number of other positive knock-on effects that may be even more important than the reduced violence in itself. Informal taxes by warring parties have been reduced, access to fields has been improved, rules on public gatherings have been relaxed, allowing a resurgence of civil society, and a generally more positive outlook has emerged.

LRRD is not a set-piece process. It demands knowledge of the political economies of the countries and communities affected by the disaster. It also demands capacity and readiness to learn at field level. Agencies have been insufficiently proactive in building their contextual knowledge and relationships with local institutions. The unprecedented quantity of funding available has carried with it a tendency to worry more about how an activity will appear 'back home' than about its relevance for affected populations. The overall implication for the future is that there is a need to break out of the project-focused concentration on aid provision in order to acknowledge that the most significant links between relief, rehabilitation and development are those that are made by affected populations themselves and by the national public and private institutions on which they depend for jobs, services and human security. The

people affected by the tsunami are getting on with their lives regardless of the sometimes chaotic and ill-conceived programming of the aid community. Improving LRRD programming is thus not a matter of agencies becoming better at 'doing livelihoods' or even building houses. It lies instead in deeper analysis of how 'our' meagre efforts can better contribute to supporting 'their LRRD projects'.

Attention to 'their LRRD projects' leads inevitably to greater engagement in micro- and macro- political processes. This creates a well-justified unease among some humanitarian agencies concerned about how to maintain adherence to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. Indeed, effective LRRD does demand close engagement with local institutions, with a consequent loss of independence.

Weakened adherence to some aspects of humanitarian principles can nevertheless be balanced by political savvy, clarity of commitment and contextual awareness so as to ensure impartiality and neutrality in conflict situations and amid political efforts to influence resource flows. Geographic imbalances in provision of rehabilitation support (especially in Sri Lanka) raise questions about the ability of many agencies to maintain humanitarian principles in their overall portfolios. The predominance of staff with limited experience in Sri Lanka and Aceh raises concerns that they may not have the necessary skills to manoeuvre amid the micro-political realities of LRRD.

The concerns expressed in this evaluation point toward two overall conclusions. First, for LRRD to become more effective, the aid industry needs greatly to increase its capacities to engage with local and national development processes. This is reliant on a humble acknowledgement of the enormity of the tasks of reconstruction and a more proactive search for ways to work

constructively with institutions at national and local levels. Second, many agencies evidently lack the capacity to take on sizable LRRD engagements in an effective manner. National authorities and donors should work together to ensure that agencies are not allocated responsibilities that are reliant on skills they obviously cannot muster.

Recommendations

LRRD must be more firmly rooted in national and local contexts and processes. A bridging of the current divide between aid programming and the initiatives of affected populations will require a reconsideration of how aid contributes to or hinders the LRRD agendas of national authorities, local officials, NGOs, businesses and the affected populations.

Links between relief and rehabilitation have been achieved, but greater attention needs to be paid to the implications of programming for longer term development. Aid has not been the only, or even the primary, motor for re-starting economic activities. It is therefore important to be cautious about attributing either the successes or the failures of development to aid interventions. However, the viability of many of the livelihoods supported by aid programming is questionable. Shelter has frequently been addressed in a narrow perspective, without sufficient concern for the functionality of the communities being rebuilt and created. There are many examples of where the implications of these programmes for sustainable natural resource use, conflicts and disaster risks have been inadequately assessed.

For poverty alleviation, interventions need to be better related to ongoing poverty alleviation trajectories. Effective LRRD manifests itself in a judicious balance of efforts to tackle both

chronic and transient poverty. Progress has been rapid in alleviating much of the transient poverty that was created by the tsunami. However, there is now a significant proportion of people whose tsunami-related destitution has effectively placed them in the ranks of the chronically poor. They are unlikely to be helped by small asset-replacement initiatives. Their needs are best addressed by economic development and/or social protection. Neither of these elements has been thus far effectively integrated into the tsunami response.

More consideration needs to be given to reducing risks of natural disasters, and anchoring such strategies within national structures of social protection.

Despite additional international attention and funding for early warning, risk reduction has not been mainstreamed in recovery programming. There is a need for deeper and more evidence-based assessment of the impacts of aid programmes on environments and natural resources. Given prevailing risks, there is a need to consider how national structures can re-shoulder responsibilities for social protection to deal with various forms of shocks from natural hazards, conflicts and other factors. Aid needs to be refocused in order to support governments as they reassume responsibility for ensuring the safety, survival and dignity of their citizens.

Links to the LRRD efforts of affected populations should be improved through strengthened information flow. Disaster-affected people need information about the aid they will receive so they can decide how best to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. This is more important than 'participation' since participation in aid projects is secondary to the efforts of affected populations to get on with their own LRRD projects. They have not received

sufficient information and they are justifiably angry, frustrated and confused. Provision of better information can make a modest but important contribution to strengthening the clout of affected populations in influencing the LRRD agenda.

Links between policies and programming should be made by sector and through support to national and household efforts to bring together relief, rehabilitation and development.

The international community and the individual agencies involved in tsunami response do not have a comprehensive master plan for linking relief, rehabilitation and development. They do not need one. Their responsibility is to ensure that aid supports the efforts of national and local actors to make these links. The fragmented nature of recovery aid and weak coordination mean that many agencies have no choice but to concentrate their LRRD programmes within specific sectors in which pressures for moving from relief to development are clear and results measurable. Since the primary concerns of the disaster-affected population are shelter and livelihoods, the potential for LRRD aid reform is greatest within these sectors.

LRRD is best served by greater transparency about who is able to do what, and when. The problems that have emerged in LRRD often relate more to agencies having promised too much than to them having done too little. Agencies, donors and government authorities have felt pressured to make commitments that are far beyond what they can actually accomplish. Criticism should therefore not necessarily be directed at their failures to achieve these objectives, but rather at the ways in which these claims have led to unfulfilled promises to affected populations and to dysfunctional shortcuts in development planning.