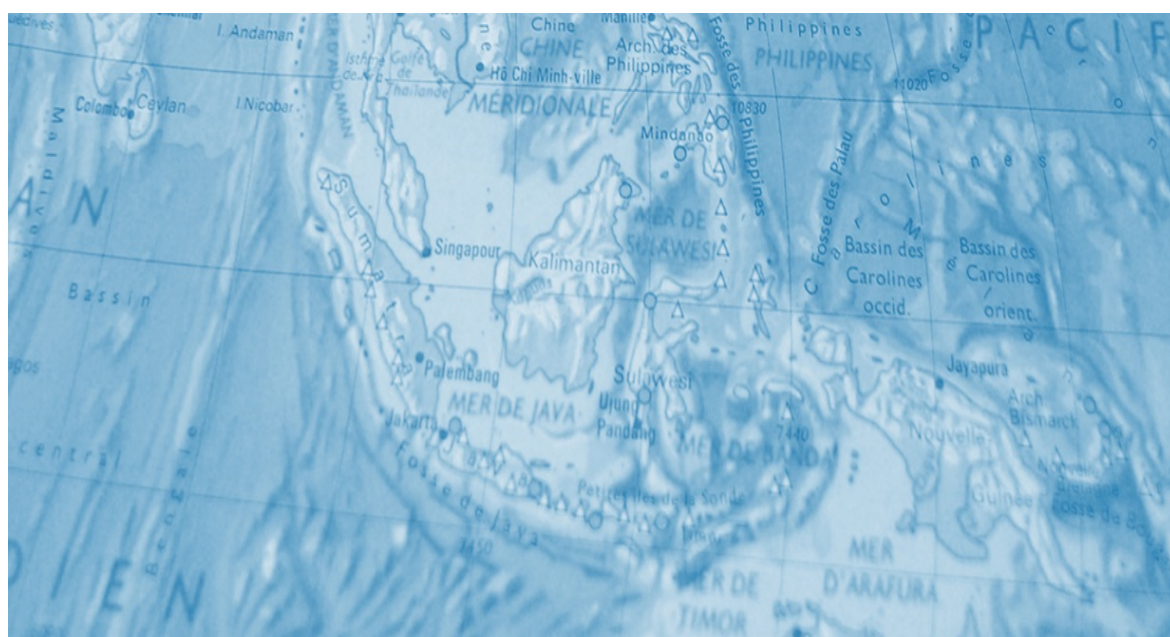


Impact Evaluation of Swiss Solidarity Asian Tsunami Programme

Summary report



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Relocated communities in their new settlement.
Melamanakudy, India, August 2014

Introduction

This evaluation was commissioned by Swiss Solidarity (SwS) to review the impact of the projects funded in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The tsunami caused the deaths of 215,000 people and almost half a million homes were simply washed away.

The general public donated generously, with SwS raising more than 227 million Swiss Francs (approximately 233 million US\$) to support those directly affected by the tsunami. SwS worked quickly to provide relief and rehabilitation by funding projects of Swiss NGOs and its partners in the region.

The aim of this evaluation is to account for the impact of the funds that the public provided to SwS, and to learn lessons for future disaster responses.

This study explores any long-term impacts that SwS funds may have had on the lives of the population, if the support responded to their priority needs, and to see if it helped in reducing poverty or social inequalities in the targeted communities. It covers 29 of the largest projects implemented by six SwS partners (ADRA Switzerland, Caritas Switzerland, HEKS, Swisscontact, Solidar Suisse, Swiss Red Cross) within three areas of activity:

- Housing repair and construction and the related infrastructure,
- Livelihood support,
- Construction of three large schools and a hospital.

The study started with an initial desk review looking at existing literature and the project documentation. It then moved through a phase of qualitative research in the project areas to test the data collection methods and to elaborate the beneficiary survey questionnaire. Then a third phase of quantitative research was conducted by a reputed survey firm. The survey reached 729 households across the three countries of India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. This was followed by the qualitative research carried out by a team of five consultants, including three national experts. Over a two months period the team members visited all relevant project locations where they conducted 374 individual and group interviews.

To assess the performance of the program, the evaluation team defined the *sustainable recovery of the tsunami affected households and communities* as the *de facto* objective of the activities.

The evaluation defined the term ‘recovery’ as a social process that is necessarily broad and influenced by multiple factors, many beyond the control of SwS’s partners. To assess the contribution of SwS to the recovery process, the evaluation required research methods that identified and assessed the different drivers of the recovery process and the ways in which these drivers interacted with the SwS funded interventions. These drivers include social, economic and political developments, for example the interventions of government, other donors and the efforts of the communities themselves.

Main findings

Housing, settlements, connectivity and social services

Findings

Housing was the main area of investment for SwS. The program reconstructed and repaired 23,000 houses in newly established or pre-existing settlements. To a lesser extent it (re)constructed village infrastructure, such as community halls, play and sports grounds, and public gardens.

The homes provided the beneficiaries with comfort, stability and safety, creating a real starting point for the recovery of their lives. They provided a solid base on which the families could build so they could focus on other important aspects of their own recovery. This goes beyond the mere provision of shelter for individuals.

Generally, the settlements benefitted from a good new location, good quality design and construction, good connectivity, and a well thought through process of the allocation procedure for the houses. The large majority of the homes are located in well-functioning and vibrant communities, which give the inhabitants a sense of belonging. In only three of the sites visited for this study, the settlements were found to be less lively and the houses not as well-preserved.

Drivers of change and their interplay

The evaluation team identified that the degree of recovery depends on the interplay of many factors and drivers of change. Some of these were more or less under direct control of SwS's partners such as the construction strategy, design and quality but on other drivers, such as choice of location, and selection of beneficiaries, SwS had partial or no influence.

Many different levels of government played essential roles in the recovery process and many drivers were under their responsibility. It was governments that provided the legal and regulatory frameworks, e.g. with respect to the size of the buffer zones (the land close to the sea where no houses were to be built), and that were responsible for the acquisition of land, most of the infrastructure and services, and coordinated the different rehabilitation efforts. These roles were all crucial in shaping the reconstruction process. As some of the governments also limited the right to rent or sell houses within a certain period, home owners are restricted in their mobility.

The beneficiaries themselves were also key actors in the construction process. For self-constructed houses, they built or managed the construction of the new houses according to their own designs and needs. Other occupants made adaptations and improvements to their turn-key constructed homes after they were handed over, often profoundly changing the appearance of the house, and with this the new settlements evolved.

Other factors also played an important role in the development of the settlements, such as the efforts and resources of other agencies to support the recovery, social services and the private sector, and additional contextual factors, such as conflict or peace, alongside social and economic developments.

SwS funding of homes and (some) community infrastructure was a vital component in the interplay of this multitude of factors that produced the lively communities and provided the residents with the opportunity to re-start their lives and develop their capacities.

However, in some settlements the team found examples of lower sustainability. For example, at one site in India low construction quality in combination with a small plot size and the availability

of a second house in the vicinity led to more empty houses, less maintenance and a noticeable deterioration of the settlement. A similar situation took place in Indonesia due to insufficient protection against flooding, and in eastern Sri Lanka due a lack of economic or development opportunities along with an overall lower construction quality and allocation of houses.

Livelihood interventions

Findings

For most of the families in the rehabilitated or new settlements, the income from employment, or small or home-based businesses showed a noticeable improvement compared to before the tsunami. Although after the tsunami the cost of living increased and the large majority of families survive on low-income jobs, they can meet their basic needs. However, a minority of approximately 10 percent still faces the greatest difficulty to make ends meet.

Despite the massive destruction in the coastal areas, most income earners were able to go back to their original jobs. The main income source for over 50 percent of the families is fishing. This is less than before the tsunami and the sector is changing fast, with lower catches for coastal fishing and an increase in deep-sea fishing. These changes affect both men and women who derive their income from the fishing industry.

After fishing and casual labour, small scale self-employment in micro- and home-based industries is the third main source of income. Only a minority of these business provide an income above the poverty line for a family of four, the large majority provide only a subsidiary source of income for their families.

After losing most of their worldly goods, the provision of a free house and a housing plot helped the beneficiaries and made a major contribution to the recovery of their assets. The housing value for many families, especially in India and Sri Lanka, is still limited as the house cannot easily be sold, rented out or used as collateral, because in many cases the deeds have not been handed over by the government.

Within the supported settlements economic life has recovered. The residents can easily meet their immediate needs within their community from internal suppliers, such as small shops, tailors, carpenters, and child care. The local economies are well integrated in the regional economies, providing fish, other products and services to neighbouring village and towns.

Drivers of change and their interplay

The funding of house reconstruction by SwS was an important driver of the recovery of livelihoods. The evaluation found that by far the single largest contribution to livelihood recovery was the provision of a house. This directly enabled the beneficiaries to concentrate their time and resources on their individual economic recovery instead of having to engage in the long and complex process of saving resources to rebuild their homes. Also, owning a new house reduced many maintenance expenses, for example for those who had previously lived in a house primarily using banana leaves for roofing or wall partitions which required frequent renovation. Further, having a house on a plot of land constitutes a substantial asset base for the beneficiaries. This is especially true in Indonesia, where rules and practices for renting or selling of houses were found to be more flexible, which allowed for the house to be used as collateral for a business loan or providing income in the form of rent or potential profit if it is sold.

As did many other NGOs, SwS's partners also actively supported micro- and home-based businesses/business start-ups or savings and loan groups. The projects started after the homes were handed over and were generally one to two years in duration.

In Indonesia, SwS funding helped to fast track the recovery of small entrepreneurs by replacing the assets they had lost in the tsunami. Most of these entrepreneurs had already re-started their business on a small scale within their own means and the new housing/business assets allowed for their full recovery. This funding effort was successful and reached a significant number of businesses across the province. Through transferring a remaining revolving fund to a local investment fund for medium and small scale industries, the support still continues.

Similarly, the support SwS funding provided to home-based or micro-enterprises in the new or rehabilitated settlements accelerated their recovery. This funding went mainly to women who had previous business experience. Although these businesses mainly provided subsidiary cash income to support their households, it was equally successful.

There was limited success regarding the support to beneficiaries that had no prior experience as entrepreneurs (business start-ups) and for the savings and loans groups. Support to business start-ups targeted either the whole community or poor families and potentially more vulnerable female headed households. It was found that business start-ups often stopped due to the lack of entrepreneurial skills, absence of markets for their products, illness, or a too low return for the business. Savings groups were successful when they were part of a longer-term program under the framework of a local organisation rather than an add-on service activity linked to a livelihood project.

The recovery of incomes was the direct result of the interplay of the assistance by SwS with other drivers. The affected families played an essential role in determining the recovery of their own livelihoods with their skills, knowledge and attitudes all being a powerful driving force. In most cases, they quickly returned to their previous employment or income generating activities after the markets had recovered from the disaster. They often re-established their subsidiary income sources (frequently more than one), and especially in India and Sri Lanka some residents temporarily moved to work to other countries in Southeast Asia or the Middle East to sustain their families or accumulate capital for investment in education, dowries, or businesses.

As over half of incomes come from the fishing sector, the massive support to the fishing industry was an important driver. The location of the new settlements, close to the original sites, facilitated the return to previous economic activities as the markets were mainly untouched, with the exception of a small coastal stretch. The strong economic growth in the first year after the disaster and overall peace in Aceh played a further role in livelihood recovery. In the east of Sri Lanka, livelihood recovery continues to be seriously hindered by access restrictions to the beach, parts of the sea and agricultural land.

Community infrastructures

The third largest component of the program funded by SwS was the provision of two schools and a hospital in Aceh, Indonesia, and another school in Sri Lanka.

In Aceh the education sector was badly affected by a three decades long civil war that ended in 2005 and by the tsunami. This led the government to invest heavily in the sector. In 2008, Aceh had the second highest education expenditure per capita in the country. Examination results are now similar to the national average and this seems to suggest an improvement in the quality of

education¹. After the handing over of the two schools in Banda Aceh to the education department both became “unggalan” or model schools, which is part of the national educational strategy. However, one of the two schools was turned into a boarding school after the completion of the project, which limited access to the school for students of poor families, orphans and the neighbouring community, and resulted in the school being underutilised.

The newly established hospital in Aceh provides care to the entire district. The number of patients is increasing, although the population still prefers the hospital in Meulaboh for more complex treatments. Yet, it should be noted that the hospital is not functioning at full capacity.

In Sri Lanka a new school building was constructed to increase capacity and it attracts students from low-income families. In this geographic area the motivation for education is relatively low, and most students drop out at or before the end of secondary school. The low performance results of the school are gradually improving which, in turn, is resulting in more students enrolling. Yet due to its isolated location it still operates below capacity.

All four projects are relevant when assessed against the district and national sector strategies. They are in line with these policies and strategic priorities. This was confirmed by the relevant district line ministries, schools and hospital personnel, and by observation, as all the structures are well-staffed and, to a large extent, sufficiently funded by the relevant authorities.

However, the projects’ impacts are limited. The buildings are operational and the quality of the education is good to high but coverage of the schools remains low, with two out of the three schools functioning below installed capacity. Short-term sustainability is not a major issue as all schools have funding largely ensured and the schools are well built and robust. The problem of maintenance could arise in the coming years, especially for the structures that are functioning below capacity and may experience difficulties raising funds for the maintenance of large buildings.

This points towards the importance of a good understanding of sector needs and dynamics in the design and implementation process. Increased attention should be given in the funding request, to indicate which strategies will be adopted to achieve long term and specific objectives.

Conclusions

Drawing from an analysis of the findings, the evaluation concluded that the support of Swiss Solidarity (SwS) effectively contributed to the recovery of the livelihoods of the supported families and communities. The beneficiaries have taken ownership of the support, and have used it to shape their lives and communities in their own way according to their own priorities.

The impact of the support provided by SwS was especially felt by beneficiaries of the housing construction and repair projects. The effects of new homes went beyond the mere provision of a living space and the physical reconstruction of settlements, infrastructures and communities. It also made a major contribution to the livelihood recovery at household level as families could devote their time and resources to the recovery of other livelihood functions, such as the household economy.

The impact of the livelihood programs was particularly felt by many small, micro and home based entrepreneurs who with the provision of equipment, stocks, and working capital could

¹ Shah, R. (2014), Education and social change in post-conflict and post-disaster Aceh, Indonesia, Education and International Development Working Paper 19

successfully re-start or accelerate the development of their businesses. The support to the ‘start up’, often vulnerable household, and to the formation of savings and loan groups was largely not sustainable and had minimum long term impact. Addressing these issues requires an in-depth understanding of economic development, the creation of strong linkages with policy frameworks and governance structures, and a long-term commitment that cannot be provided by humanitarian assistance.

The impact of the construction of schools and a hospital was difficult to establish. The projects were all operational and in line with the district and national sector strategies. However, some operated below maximum capacity, served a different target group from that envisaged by the project, and their contribution to the capacity of the sector was difficult to establish within the scope of this evaluation.

The SwS support undoubtedly responded to the needs of the affected people as the overwhelming majority of beneficiaries consistently indicated that the single most important external support to their recovery was the provision of housing.

Reducing poverty and reduction of social inequalities was not an objective of most of the SwS funded projects. Nonetheless, without external support it is most likely that at least a portion of the target group would have fallen into poverty. On the other hand, the specific activities to reduce poverty and vulnerability had scarce impact. With the provision of identical plots and houses, social differences were initially levelled. However, those that were better established before the tsunami recovered faster and differences were re-establishing.

The recovery of the families and communities supported by SwS cannot be attributed to SwS funding alone. It was the result of the interplay of many drivers, some under direct control of SwS partners, while on others they had limited or no influence. However, the funds provided by the Swiss public have made a significant contribution to this success.