

## Crossing oceans

### An in-depth case study from the Andaman Islands,

#### 1. Summary

A co-ordinated and comprehensive response, involving the local church and three external agencies, delivered effective relief to 500 internally displaced people, and provided 350 temporary shelters, in the Andaman Islands following the tsunami in 2004.

#### 2. Level of intervention

This case study is focused primarily on the local church level, and at the level of NGO interaction with local government.

#### 3. Prospective users

1. NGOs interested in knowing the opportunities and challenges they might face if they were to join with other NGOs in providing a combined relief operation.
2. Churches that have no experience of serving people in physical and emotional stress, who want to learn from the experience of those who have taken that first step.

#### 4. Problem addressed

The core problem that this intervention addressed was challenging organisations about their traditional way of thinking when faced with a disaster. For the NGO, the instinct is to work alone and retain full control over its operations on the ground; for the church that may have a theologically traditional background, the instinct is to avoid committing to practical help for those in need.

#### 5. Purpose of the intervention

To deliver effective relief and rehabilitation support to displaced families, with the help of a local church, by providing:

- 500 people with emergency food and non-food items in Port Blair (South Andaman)
- 350 temporary shelters in Hut Bay (Little Andaman)

#### 6. Context

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are Union Territories of India and lie 1,450 km east of the mainland in the Indian Ocean. The archipelago consists of 5,500 islands and has a small and vulnerable indigenous population. Since it was used by the British as a penal colony, the majority of the population are descendents of immigrants from mainland India. The fact that the islands are remote and are also the site of a strategic Indian naval base makes the authorities cautious about organisations wishing to work there.

On 26 December 2004, at 09.30 IST, a huge wave hit these islands. The toll was 3,500 reported dead and around 40,000 missing. This is half the estimated total losses recorded by the Indian government, which include casualty figures for mainland India. There was widespread damage to infrastructure up to 500m inshore. It was not possible to understand the impact immediately after the tsunami, due to the remoteness of the islands.

#### 7. History and process

The Disaster Co-ordinating Committee (DCC) was formed in 2002 in recognition of the need to learn from experiences in the response to the Gujarat earthquake in January 2001. The committee was organised by three Christian NGOs: the Evangelical Fellowship of India's Committee on Relief (EFICOR), The Discipleship Centre (DC) and The Emmanuel Hospital Association (EHA), all based in Delhi, North India. EFICOR and DC have worked in relief operations throughout India for more than 30 years. EHA, whose core work is running hospitals and community health projects, have also built up experience of responding to disasters over a number of years. Before the tsunami, the DCC had done no more than joint assessments in the aftermath of a disaster. The DCC assisted 4,000 displaced families in the tsunami response on the Andaman Islands.

## Case studies in depth

One of the organisations with which the DCC worked was The Pentecostal Mission (TPM), a network of churches with members throughout the world. There is one congregation in Port Blair with approximately 400 members: their pastor comes under the authority of the chief pastor based on the mainland in Chennai. TPM is theologically traditional, with a suspicion of outside influences. Members are encouraged to live separately from 'the world'. This makes their involvement with the DCC quite significant.

### 8. Steps in implementation

#### Pre-tsunami

**NGOs:** The three NGOs making up the DCC had all been involved in the Gujarat earthquake, and the learning from this prompted the three Chief Executive Officers to look at how they could complement each other's work in future disasters. Their aim was to achieve greater effectiveness and minimise duplication, and it was something their donors were also encouraging them to do. To this end, they held several meetings in Delhi and drew up a procedure for working. At this stage, however, the idea of working together under one command was not seriously considered.

#### Post-tsunami

##### a. Relief

**NGOs:** When the tsunami struck, a meeting of the DCC was arranged in Delhi, but the three organisations moved separately to the south of India to assess where and how they could respond. However, when news arrived that the losses in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were even greater, and given the remote and restrictive nature of the location, they decided to approach the authorities there together, as the DCC. On 29 December, a team of six people (two people each from EFICOR, DC and EHA) flew into Port Blair. They were met by an engineer who was leader of a group of campaigners formed to protect the rights of the islanders, and was also a member of The Pentecostal Mission Church. He introduced the team to the Lieutenant Governor of the islands and other senior officials. The DCC representatives were given permission by the Lt Governor to work in and around Port Blair, but nowhere else. That evening a meeting of the Christian Forum was called: this comprised representatives from the main churches in the islands. It was decided that church schools and premises should be opened to people coming on boats to the harbour at Port Blair. Some days later, an NGO meeting, which included organisations such as Oxfam and Action Aid, was called to share information and to begin co-ordinating the work they were doing on the islands.

##### *The Pentecostal Mission (TPM)*



Having been offered premises to run feeding camps in Port Blair, the DCC looked for volunteers and equipment. A DCC member met the assistant pastor of TPM who, despite the doubts of the central pastor, went out of his way to provide church cooking utensils and other equipment to feed over 500 people at the Middle Point School camp. However, volunteers were also required to buy, prepare and cook food that internally displaced people (IDPs) from Hut Bay island would be willing to eat. The assistant pastor thought it unlikely that any of the women from the church would volunteer, but eventually six did. As TPM's congregation is very private it was arranged for the women to work separately and out of sight of the IDPs, On 31 December, they cooked their first breakfast. The women organised themselves into shifts to cover the day's meals. Once a routine was established the

women volunteers began to mix and talk with the women and children in the camp, as they shared their experiences. Over time, up to 50 volunteers from the church offered to help in the camp kitchen. They covered a cross-section of young and elderly, both men and women. Their contribution lasted a month before the camp had to move to another location and the Middle Point School needed to reopen at the start of term.

##### b. Rehabilitation

Later, the DCC was given permission to build 350 temporary shelters on Hut Bay, a 12-hour boat journey from Port Blair, where most of the Middle Point School IDPs had come from. One of the contractors who bid for this work was connected with the assistant pastor. He arranged for a number of TPM members, both paid and voluntary, to come and help the Hut Bay islanders construct temporary homes.

### 9. Duration

26 December 2004 to January 2005: Relief work at the Middle Point School IDP camp.

February 2005 to April 2005: The first phase of the temporary shelter construction on Hut Bay.

## 10. Resources required for the practice

Budget: £315,000

## 11. Indicators for monitoring

### NGOs:

- Regular, good and open discussions at the NGOs' board and senior management levels about the implications of joining together in a relief operation.
- A clear set of procedures outlining line management authority, decision-making powers, roles and responsibilities to be followed in the event of a joint response.
- Logo, letterheads and bank accounts for this independent organisation.
- Project tracking processes so that different donors know where their grants are being used.
- Front-line staff briefed and clear about their new identity.

### The church:

- Leadership committed to allowing members to join the relief effort.
- The number of people volunteering and other types of contributions.
- Practices and routines of church life altered as a result of the intervention, and in particular, whether they help people in distress.
- The absence of conflict within the church as a result of involving members in this new activity.

## 12. Impact

- The DCC took the lead role, in the first few days, bringing together the other NGOs – Oxfam, Action Aid, CINI, Goal, etc. It was appointed by the island authorities as the Lead Agency in Shelter in the NGO Coordinating Committee.
- A larger response was achieved than if the three organisations had worked separately.
- TPM met the food and shelter needs of 500 people in the camp and it made a significant contribution towards building 350 temporary shelters on Hut Island.
- TPM's experience of working with the DCC and the IDPs increased their understanding of what it meant to be 'church'. The following comments were made by members as they reflected on that experience and indicate the impact it had on their lives:

'We felt our service to the tsunami victims was our service to God.'

'It gave us a chance to cultivate brotherhood amongst our people.'

'We learnt to render service without expectation.'

'Our deeds were the real epistle – we can show the love of God through our deeds – the living epistle!'

'By being involved as we were, we had a burden of prayer for them which we did not have before.'

'We extended our help out of what was in our hand.'

## 13. Challenges

### Government

- **Control.** Permits were required before travelling outside a restricted zone. On a practical level this delayed movement, but it also created an atmosphere of suspicion, with NGOs being seen as intruders rather than partners with the government in responding to a disaster. Restrictions were also placed on the type of materials that could be used, the design of buildings, and the selection of beneficiaries. Official procedure prevented the government from giving the support it had promised in time.
- **Poor Communication.** The Territories are administered between the central government in Delhi and the island authorities. Communication between the two was poor, as well as between government departments on the island. Officials transferred regularly between posts which made communication even more difficult.

### Location/infrastructure

- **Distances.** The distance between the islands and the mainland, and between the islands themselves, meant that the supply routes were long. It took 12 hours to transport materials by boat from Port Blair to Hut Bay.
- **Transport.** Sometimes equipment and materials could not be transported because there were no ships with the right specifications be able to carry the loads. Harbours could not be entered because of debris and changes in the tides.
- **Amenities.** Accommodation for staff was poor and lacked basic amenities, such as electricity and drinking water on Hut Bay.

### Time

- There was pressure to complete temporary shelters before the rains in April but administrative delays slowed down the work. This proved a significant challenge.

### Working together

- **Identity.** It took time for the DCC staff, seconded from their parent organisations, to work together as a unit. In the initial stages, they appeared to compete with each other. Also, one of the three organisations began to support other organisations doing similar work, because it needed to search for additional work outside the camps. Over a period of time, this led to it being separated from the main focus of the DCC's work.
- **Communications.** As with the government, it took time for the decisions made in Delhi to be communicated to those in the field. There was also a temptation, especially when under pressure, for front-line staff to bypass the project line management and seek decisions from their own previous bosses in Delhi.
- **Operations.** Managing the logistics, recruitment, funding and financial reporting systems of one's own organisation in a disaster response is a challenge in itself. To do so efficiently with other stakeholders in place was an even greater challenge.

### The church

- **Partnering.** When the DCC met with church leaders on the first day, it was difficult to know which church to partner with. The Church of North India (CNI) would have been the natural link but it was well supported by other donors and its congregations were largely scattered around the Nicobar Islands, an area inaccessible for the DCC. Partnering with TPM in Port Blair worked well, mainly because of the enthusiasm of the assistant pastor.
- **Others benefiting.** The main challenge for TPM was to be involved in an activity that benefited other people, not their own – although they were quite accustomed to feeding large gatherings of people during their own celebrations.
- **Time demands.** A significant amount of voluntary time was given by members of the church. This also called them away from their established routines and priorities.
- **Leadership support.** The enthusiasm of the assistant pastor was sufficient to make up for the uncertainty of the pastor. This situation had to be handled with care.

## 14. Critical Issues and lessons learnt

- **Access.** First and foremost, if the three agencies had not combined to form one entry point into the Andaman Islands, it is possible that one or other of them would not have been given permission to work. The authorities preferred one big agency, offering a range of expertise, to three smaller ones.
- **Difficulties reduced.** The DCC faced many complications and frustrations, such as the workings of the government, distances to travel, transport arrangements and facilities for staff. All these would have been multiplied by three, had they not joined together into one operation.
- **Preparation.** It is worth the DCC senior management meeting regularly to set out protocols to cover a range of options for future co-operation. This could cover a number of scenarios, from sharing information while operating independently to delivering a single-unit response, as in the Andaman Islands.
- **Line management.** Inevitably, the natural response of personnel under pressure is to seek guidance and decisions from those they would ask during normal operations. This should be discouraged by their organisational line managers. They should refer staff back to their new line management structures.
- **Donors.** It is easier for donors to fund one operation than three. Monitoring funding is easier. Establishment or fixed costs are significantly reduced, by up to one third.
- **Church.** As a local organisation, the church has significant resources and abilities to offer as part of an effective response to a disaster and can be put to immediate and practical use:
  - **Premises and equipment.** Buildings can provide quick and accessible shelter for traumatised people. The compounds in which they are located also offer added protection. Equipment and utensils, used to feed large numbers at weddings or celebrations, can be used to feed the displaced families.
  - **Volunteers** provided by the church know where to obtain large quantities of food and other items at competitive prices; they are able to cook local food that people will eat and monitor distributions within the camp.
  - **Authority structures** that are part of church life can mobilise people at times of crises into responding speedily. This is complemented by the church members' instinctive desire to help people in need, an outworking of the Christian command to "love your neighbour".
  - **Established relationships** that church members have in the community can introduce outsiders such as the DCC to administrative, political and business persons who have authority and resources to help in the relief effort.
  - **Local knowledge and language** are important assets that can help at critical moments in a complex social environment that is under stress.

### 15. Potential for replication

The approach outlined in this case study can best be replicated in contexts where:

#### **NGOs**

- The relief agencies share a similar operational philosophy.
- The NGO Chief Executives know and trust one another.
- The NGOs have previous experience of co-ordinating work together.

#### **Church**

- There is a champion from within the church leadership advocating involvement in such work.
- The tasks being asked of the church are ones that fit with its skills and outlook.

### 16. Sources of information

1. Disaster Coordinating Committee's Final Report on the Tsunami Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation Programme, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, January – June 2005.
2. Disaster Coordinating Committee
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  - John Finch - Former Project Director, DCC
3. The Pentecostal Mission (TPM)
  - Pastor Luke, Assistant Pastor, TPM, Port Blair, Andaman Islands
4. Tearfund
  - Rachel Stevens, Projects Officer, Tsunami Response Team, Tearfund
  - Prince David, Regional Advisor, India, Tearfund

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