

Project Update - Visit to Sri Lanka, May 2005



Destroyed settlement in Moratuwa. Most refugees in the camp had lived here.



Tents and temporary wooden shelters near Bentota (west coast)



Tents and temporary wooden shelters near Bentota (west coast)



Tents and wooden shelters under construction in Moratuwa

In February 2005, **SECONDAID** started its first livelihood recovery projects at two sites, a refugee camp in Moratuwa, near the capital Colombo and at the south coast town of Tangalle. In both locations, government and NGOs have provided some food, living allowances and temporary housing. Yet, there has not been any support to livelihood recovery. As a result many displaced families, who are in camps or stay with relatives, have nothing to do. To fill this need, our local partners first surveyed then prioritized the needs of families with small businesses, compiled "shopping lists" of necessary items, purchased the materials locally, distributed them directly and followed up with the recipients. To date our donations of needed goods have helped approximately 100 families to resume their work, with typical amounts of \$100 per family. Examples are fishermen, merchants, wood workers, tailors and food vendors.

In early April, during a business trip to Sri Lanka, **SECONDAID** team members Gero Leson, Bernd Frank and Gordon de Silva, who with his daughter Sonali had made the contacts and initiated the work, visited our project sites to see for ourselves whether our work has been effective and to discuss next steps. We were very impressed with the work our partners have done so far with limited funds and under difficult circumstances. We were also pleased with how effective our simple concept has been in allowing people to resume their work. We now feel confident that we can expand our work to include larger items and enterprises with our remaining funds and with future donations.

1. Refugee Camp Moratuwa

The refugee camp in Moratuwa, about 30 km south of Colombo, was set up in a school right after the tsunami. It hosts local villagers who owned simple buildings on a stretch of coast, which was almost entirely destroyed. Fortunately, almost no lives were lost in the area. People live in one of the school buildings and in tents. NGOs have set up tents and are now building simple temporary houses. Since most people did not own the land they lived on and since the government wants to prevent building within 100 meters of the coast, they won't be able to return to their former location. Yet, the government can't easily find land to rebuild the village elsewhere and realistically, people will stay in the camp for another year or two.

The government provides rice and lentils and a monthly allowance of \$50 per family. However, other than **SECONDAID**, nobody gave the minimal funds needed to resume their work. Since early February, our team members have worked with the camp administrator to provide livelihood support to 25 families. Our team member Sonali Desilva Pandithasekera, whose university had asked its students to support tsunami victims made the initial contact with the camp administrator. Since Moratuwa is a center of carpentry, many of the victims were in that trade. Others were tree fellers, food vendors, plumbers, and fishermen.

During our visit in early April we met with many of the displaced and the camp administrator. Apparently, with our support in equipment and tools, more than 80% of the recipients had resumed their work and were able to make a living of it. Good



Tangalle Methodist Church



Reverend Fernando and Hasantha Hewahasanni distribute wheel barrows to building supply shop.

Tailors in Tangalle with new sewing machine.



Discussion of needs with displaced guest house owners in Tangalle



Household utensils distributed by Methodist church



Distribution of sewing machine

examples were two vendors of chickpea snacks and of ice cream who had lost their vehicles and were able to rebuild them. Tree fellers and carpenters also were busy. One carpenter had set up his workshop in the camp and was making cabinets. The seamstress had, with her new pedal-driven machine, sewn school uniforms for kids in the camp. Some of the recipients did not feel like going back to work, and instead relied on the meager government support. As this will be phased out in a few months, they will at least have the means to resume their work. We are now working with a few families who would like to purchase larger items, such as a chain-saw or set up a new food stall. Because it would be unfair to the other families, support of more than \$100 will be given as a “soft loan”, i.e., free of interest and with lenient repayment conditions. Since our team members can easily reach Moratuwa, we will continue to closely watch progress and offer needed support.

2. Tangalle

The south coast town of Tangalle was hit very hard by the tsunami. About 1,000 of the population of 8,000 lost their lives, 90% of the local fishing boat fleet of about 150 was destroyed and so were many homes and small guest houses right on the beach. The displaced, many of whom are fishermen, -merchants or food vendors, now stay in temporary shelters or with relatives. Devastation is extensive in the port and along the beaches while just 100 yards inland, no impacts are visible. Gordon de Silva knew that the local Methodist church had started their relief program for a mostly Buddhist population immediately after the tsunami. Funds from the church’s headquarters allowed them to provide food and kitchen utensils when there was initially no government support. They also ran an orphanage but did not have the funds to support the recovery of small businesses and were pleased to work with us.

Initially, an interdenominational committee made up of Reverend Fernando, a local Buddhist monk, a school teacher and our team member Hasantha Hewahasanni surveyed the most affected parts of town, established a list of priority needs and purchased the selected items. Again, in order to reach as many families as possible and to avoid the appearance of favoritism we limited the support to about \$100 per family.

Since mid March we have supported about 65 families/businesses in Tangalle. One distribution of- goods took place during our visit in early April. Many families received bicycles to give them back the mobility they need in their trade business. Others received sewing machines for the commercial sewing and repair of garments. We also helped a bicycle repair shop, a supplier of building materials, and several small restaurants. We visited several recipients who were using their sewing machines and bicycles from the first distribution in March. Particularly fish merchants, who buy fish right on the beach when the catch comes in need bicycles and cooling boxes to distribute the goods. Fish is available locally, brought in by the few boats, which survived the tsunami or by lagoon fishermen who require only small canoes.

In the next phase, we will support existing businesses with larger needs and start-up companies, such as a newly formed cooperative of four families, which needs equipment to make cement blocks for house construction. The needed funds of \$500 will be part donation and part soft loan. Another example is a heavily damaged beach guesthouse, run by an extended family with an unbreakable determination to start back up. With the large number of homes destroyed, the market obviously exists.

To date we have not supported the replacement or repair of damaged fishing boats – even though there is a big need. The high cost of about \$3000 for a typical motor-



Destruction near beach in Tangalle



Distribution of cooker for "string hoppers" at Tangalle Methodist Church



Bicycle for fish merchant family in Tangalle



Moratuwa carpenter who, with our help set up shop in the camp, his son and one of his cabinets



ized boat, the concern among fishermen that repaired boats may -not be safe and unrealistic promises by the local government of giving new boats to everyone make the situation unstable. Thus, we decided to spread our funds to a larger number of recipients, of course including fishing nets and small canoes.

While it is frustrating that government and other NGOs so far have given very little livelihood support, we were very glad to see first hand that our concept of providing specific needed items directly to people who request them works. Even people traumatized by such a horrific event do want to start their lives back up and, if asked what they require, generally come up with their own ideas, most of them rather realistic, since they know their markets best.

Upcoming Projects

In addition to continuing our work in Tangalle and Moratuwa we will now also support the recovery of small businesses in the Sri Lankan coconut fiber (coir) industry. Several SECONDAID team members have worked with that industry, which employs some 30,000 people in Sri Lanka's coastal area and has lost much of its capacity in fiber production and yarn spinning in the South. Several donors, including the International Erosion Control Association (IECA) have requested that their donations be used to help that industry. SECONDAID now prepares a livelihood recovery project in cooperation with Coir Council International and REVIVE, a relief program by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Donations

Your donation will allow us to directly help tsunami-affected businesses and families to resume their livelihood. All donations are tax deductible in the U.S. Fiber Futures, www.fiberfutures.org, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has kindly agreed to act as our "fiscal agent" and allows us to use its tax-exempt status. Please make your checks payable to "Fiber Futures," and reference "SECONDAID." Fiber Futures will mail an acknowledgement letter to you.

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