

## **IWMI'S TSUNAMI RELIEF EFFORT IN SRI LANKA**

### **Sri Lanka hit by largest ever natural disaster**

A nation mourns as the catastrophic results of the massive tsunami which pounded the coastal regions of Sri Lanka on the 26<sup>th</sup> December, continue to unfold. This is the most devastating catastrophe the island has ever faced in its long history. The official death toll to date is reported at 30,178. UNICEF estimates 40% to be children. In many cases entire families have been swept away to sea. IWMI has confirmed that, despite some extremely close calls, all members of staff and their immediate families are safe and accounted for.

Many of us know of, or experienced first hand, the massive devastation to both life and property the tsunami caused. Many of the less affected, in a bid to help, traveled to remote coastal areas carrying emergency aid like drinking water, medical supplies and food to those that survived. There are many, many heart wrenching stories being told. Those who escaped with their lives were relieved to be alive, but utterly traumatized and shocked - just beginning to comprehend the magnitude of the disaster from which they would undoubtedly take years to recover. Fishermen described their horror when they saw the waves approaching them and how they ran literally for their lives. Some spoke of their fear of ever going out on a boat again. Many families especially those whose houses were closer to the sea lost all their possessions and their houses had been totally destroyed. There is also obviously the loss of life. In some families many family members had died including young children. Horrifying stories were related of children being snatched out of their parents' arms due to the force of the water, and others of entire families being washed away to the ocean. Entire fleets of fishing boats in remote villages all around the south and eastern coastlines have been destroyed by the tsunami and with that the livelihoods of many of the families that were dependent on fishing as their primary source of income.

The number of people displaced by the tsunami is reported to be over one and a half million. The Sri Lankan Government declared a state of national emergency and is struggling to cope with the enormity of the destruction left behind by this natural catastrophe of such mammoth scale. What is becoming increasingly clear by the moment, however, is the humanitarian crisis which now confronts us. The world has come together and responded to the crisis in a way that has almost certainly never been seen before. Aid is starting to get through to some of the more remote parts of the area destroyed by the tsunami.

### **IWMI's Contribution**

IWMI's headquarters have been hosted in Sri Lanka since its inception (1984). IWMI has worked in many of the affected areas for at least 15 years. This both gives us strong motivation to try to help the people we have worked with and has also given us expertise that can be put to good use. Therefore to support current relief efforts underway in our host country, IWMI has planned its efforts in three phases:

#### **1) Immediate emergency relief:**

IWMI sent emergency supplies through six missions starting on December 27<sup>th</sup> to affected areas in the east and south of Sri Lanka (including Galle, Batticaloa and Ampara). We also transported victims back to safe areas. Given the aid now coming into the country our contribution to emergency relief has been completed.

#### **2) Launching an IWMI and CGIAR System wide appeal to support rebuilding of communities:**

Today, the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2005 IWMI is launching a CGIAR system wide appeal. The money raised through this appeal will support at least two coastal communities, one each on the south

(predominantly Sinhalese and Muslim) and east (predominantly Tamil and Muslim) coasts of the island. The money raised through this appeal will be used to re-build and re-develop the communities; we are in the process of identifying them.

### 3) Action based on institutional capacity:

IWMI will try to contribute to specific activities where we can use our experience and expertise. The primary effort to date is in the area of remote sensing and GIS. The IWMI GIS/RS unit is working with an UK based NGO, MapAction, in preparation of situation maps that are updated twice a day. The 11 strong MapAction team is based in the [Coordination National Office](#) (CNO) attached to the Presidential Secretariat. They specialize in provision of mapping in disaster situations.

IWMI GIS staff are working in shifts to give 24-hour coverage. IWMI has provided two vehicles for GPS survey teams and has provided hardware and software. The IWMI team is acquiring free high-resolution imagery from the Indian National Remote Sensing Agency. Other data sets are being collected and processed.

IWMI is assessing opportunities to provide technical expertise related to water quality monitoring, assessing water infrastructure damage and post-disaster rapid rural appraisal techniques.

In addition, IWMI will host a team of 15 from the World Food Program (WFP) at its headquarters and the IWMI Embilipitiya field station has been made available to the UNHCR. IWMI field staff, equipment and vehicles are made available to relief agencies.

We thank you for all your messages of support and prayers. It is a very hard time for the whole region and your support will be greatly appreciated, especially in raising funds for the appeal that we are launching today. If you, your colleagues, families or friends wish to contribute to the appeal please send donations to the following accounts. Further updates on IWMI's relief effort will be posted on the IWMI web site

### Contact Person for the appeal:

Gerard O'Donoghue, Deputy Director General. [g.odonoghue@cgiar.org](mailto:g.odonoghue@cgiar.org)

#### For international contributions in US\$:

Name of Account:	International Water Management Institute
Name and Address of Bank:	Citibank, N.Y., 153 East, 53 <sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, 10043, USA
Account Number:	10910235
ABA Number:	021000089
Swift Code:	Citius33

#### For contributions in Sri Lankan rupees:

Name of Account:	International Water Management Institute
Name and Address of Bank:	Hatton National Bank Limited, 1424, Kotte Road, Rajagiriya, Sri Lanka
Rupee Account No:	036-0005267CU
Swift Code:	HBLILKLX