

Revisiting Communities after the 2004 Tsunami

Participatory Rapid Appraisal

Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, India



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OXFROD BROOKES

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RCPDS

Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to the two communities, Gramathu Medu and Vizhuntha Muvadi for their hospitality, friendliness and openness during our visit. Thanks goes to the communities of Vagiriyar Colony and Nahbikai Nagar for enlightening us to their experiences and for welcoming us to their village. The team is also thankful to RCPDS and their facilitators and in particular John Devavaram for their assistance and for the organization of our visit. We would like to thank M. Seshathri, I. Jerry Philip Anand and Maria Dinesh. A. from the University of Chennai for their help in their role of facilitating and translating in order to communicate with the communities. We are also grateful to Annie George for giving up her time to visit us and making us aware of some of the issues related to the area of Nagapattinam and problems that occurred after the tsunami. In addition we would like to thank KNH for their partnership with RCPDS.

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About the Report

This field assessment reports on the impacts of the 2004 Tsunami on Gramathu Medu and Vizhuntha Muvadi. This report will discuss lessons learnt, the communities current concerns and priorities for the present day and for their future.

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Acronyms

CCFC	Christian Children Fund of Canada
DPG	Development Promotion Group
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KNH	
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PDA	People's Development Association
PRA	Participatory Rapid Appraisal
RCPDS	Resource Centre for Participatory Development Studies
SHG	Self-Help Groups
SNEHA	
SPEECH	Society for People's Education and Economic Change

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Executive Summary

This report is the culmination of community engagement research, carried out by students from Oxford Brookes University and the University of Georgia in collaboration with RCPDS and rural communities in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, India. The focus of our research was the response and recovery following the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Nagapattinam was the worst affected region in India, accounting for 76% of deaths within Tamil Nadu. To quantify the impact of the tsunami, 6065 people lost their lives and approximately 40,000 houses were destroyed.

The objective was to formulate six recommendations in accordance with the Terms of Reference given.

Terms of Reference

1. The relative success and effectiveness of the response and recovery following the tsunami regarding the communities themselves and the work of external actors including NGO's, the Government and others. How are the inputs and items being used now and what could have been done better?
2. Levels of vulnerability today to critical issues and factors – What are the issues today and how do people cope?
3. What are community priorities for the next 5 years? What are the critical external factors that will affect these priorities?

The cohort were introduced to a number of Participatory Rapid Appraisal tools. Three local interpreters helped the group overcome the language barrier along with visual exercises. Two villages were visited, Gramathu Medu, an agricultural village for two days, and Vizhuntha Muvadi, a fishing village for one day. After completion of the PRA tools the findings were presented back to the villagers to ensure our interpretation was accurate. To support the findings, a presentation to a number of local NGOs involved in the post-tsunami recovery was carried out. Through this process six recommendations were produced, encompassing the communities' recommendations, the research conducted by the cohort and endorsed by the NGOs.

1. Strengthening local civil society groups to enable participation in government and NGO assessment planning and preparedness to ensure long term sustainability.
2. Efficient and accessible local Early Warning Systems.
3. Continual preventative mental and physical healthcare and evaluations.
4. Fair and rapid compensation for losses in livelihoods, assets and incomes ensuring less visibly damaged areas are recognised.
5. Ensure resilience within new infrastructure as the community expands.
6. Skills and training provided for disaster response and preparedness.

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Research Approach

The cohort were introduced to a number of PRA techniques as an approach to developing an understanding of two communities severely affected by the 2004 tsunami. Each of the tools were evaluated for their appropriateness to specific terms of reference. Such exercises recognise local communities as experts in their own particular needs, concerns and circumstances. PRA tools offer an invaluable insight into the livelihoods of communities that are otherwise difficult to represent. The group divided into four teams to focus on specific terms of reference, each accompanied by a translator. The groups worked with a number of representatives from each community, selected to give a cross section of perspectives. Physical Mapping, Transect Walks, Timelines of events, Seasonal Calendars, Daily Activity Schedules, Dream Mapping, Venn Diagrams, Matrix Ranking, Chippati Diagrams and Semi-Structured Interviews were all utilised within facilitated group discussions to build a picture of the communities' livelihoods. After each PRA session findings were presented back to the community themselves for confirmation in order to ensure accurate representation of perspectives, thus ensuring legitimacy and a sense of ownership.

As the vast majority of the team had little or no experience of PRA, the initial session with Gramathu Medu presented an opportunity to test the appropriateness of different tools and build rapport. There was some time before conducting sessions with the second village, Vizuntha Muvadi to reflect upon the process and identify scope for improving our approach. Our findings, along with a number of recommendations were presented to representatives from a small number of NGOs for triangulation. These recommendations were debated and voted upon to determine the most accurate reflection of the communities, the cohort and the NGOs perspectives.

There are a number of barriers inherent within PRA. Although each group had a dedicated translator it is inevitable that some meaning and expression can be lost. Furthermore, the majority of the team were relatively unfamiliar with the cultural context within which they must operate prior to the visit. Although the process revealed invaluable information within the communities, this represents a mere fraction of the available information and thus an inherently incomplete understanding of the situation.



An interpreter helps to communicate a PRA technique to one of the community members.

Context

In December 2004 a tsunami hit the South East coast of India. In the state of Tamil Nadu many coastal towns and villages were affected by the disaster. Many of these areas lost members of their communities and experienced destruction to their homes, land and livelihoods. The local and international communities have since been working with these people to support them in rebuilding their lives.

In Gramathu Medu village, two people were killed and field salinization has had devastating effects on local livelihoods. The total population is x , comprised of x households. A large proportion of the community make their living from agriculture, therefore, the effects of salinisation were widespread. The use of land for Prawn Hatcheries is becoming increasingly common due to this and as a result is causing a decrease in the amount of land owned by community members.

Vizhunthe Mavadi is a fishing village and is comprised of 145 families. The total population is 700, comprised of 120 households. During the tsunami, twelve community members died. The community's livelihood depends on fishing, although three of the families practice farming. Because of the impact of the tsunami, the community was not able to fish for 3 to 4 months afterwards. Before the tsunami, the community would save money from the most profitable time of year to compensate for the periods when harvests were minimal.

Both communities were heavily dependent on relief distribution and temporary shelter. Today there are still concerns that have yet to be resolved.

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The relative success and effectiveness of the response and recovery following the tsunami regarding the communities themselves and the work of external actors including NGO's, the Government and others. How are the inputs and items being used now and what could have been done better?

GRAMATHU MEDU

Our research was asset based, structured to discover what was lost by the community and the ways in which they recovered from the natural disaster.

Response

Aid Distribution

External actors, including NGOs and the Government, began to arrive three to five days after the tsunami, when people started to return to the village after fleeing their homes. According to the community, relief packages contained; 10kg of rice, 1kg of dahl, one litre of oil, one sari, one bed sheet, one mat and one bag of bread. Villagers explained that their priorities were food and women's clothing. As such, the package delivered once a month for two months did not provide enough food or saris and the mat and bed sheet appeared unnecessary.

Whilst this aid was extremely helpful, one major issue was that there were not enough supplies for everyone in the village, which brought with it challenges in distribution. This was co-ordinated through a first come first served basis, which was recalled as a problem for the elderly villagers due to their lack of mobility decreasing their access to aid. This indirect discrimination was highlighted through the use of a timeline specifically targeted to hear the voices of the reserved elderly members of the community.

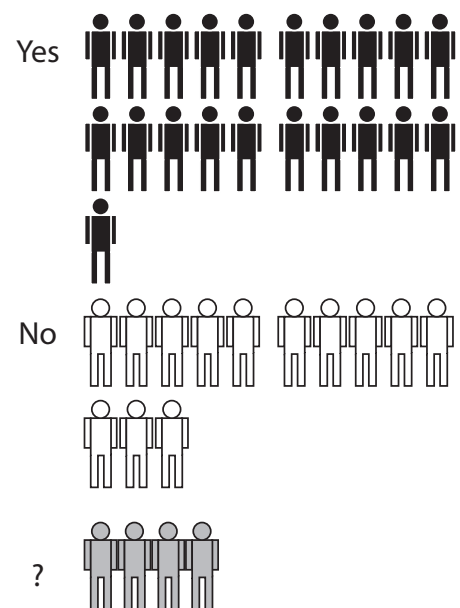
The aid was distributed as one bag per family regardless of the number of people in the household, resulting in inequality, especially when many families are not all located in the same house. One positive recollection was that the local government-run Ration Shop continued the distribution of aid; 20kg of rice was given to people below the poverty line, 35kg to the widowed and elderly and subsidised prices for all others.

Community Support

There was great support within the community in terms of helping members that were severely affected, for example; provision of clothes, shelter, food and social support. The community stated that cash would have been beneficial following the tsunami in order for them to purchase additional food, clothing and other necessary items. The community felt that the amount of agricultural compensation was inadequate in terms of covering cultivation costs. Access to water in the village was also stated as a high priority, the community wanted reliable, clean, safe and salt free sources of water.

Recovery

Both the Government and international and local NGOS were involved in the rehabilitation of Gramthu Medu. One of the main issues was that the village was not seen as a priority area by external institutions, as the visual impact was not as great as in many other areas. Few lives were lost and houses were not destroyed. However, the effects on the village were profound in relation to the community's assets and livelihoods.

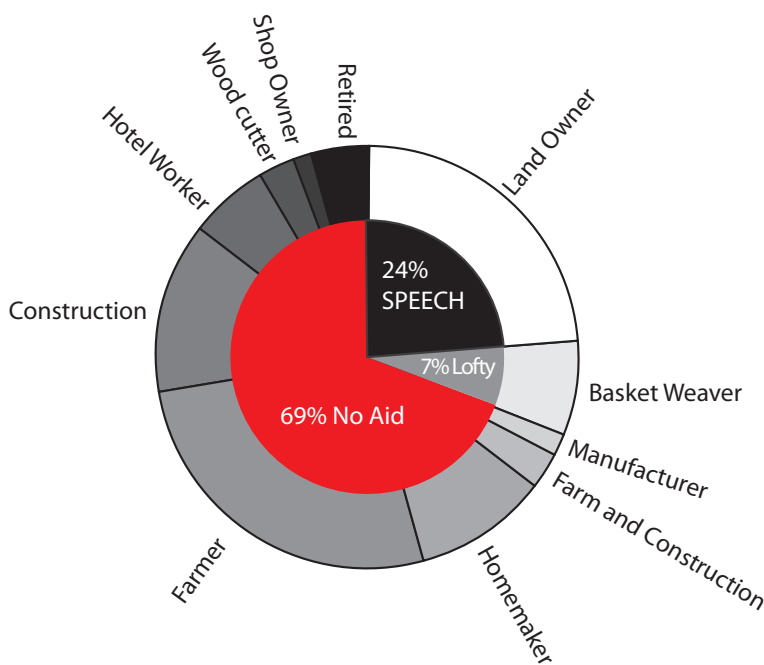


The chart above indicates those who received immediate aid. One person on the chart represents one household.

Alternative Livelihoods

The salinisation of agricultural land meant that traditional livelihood practices became invalid. Two alternative livelihoods were developed to compensate for the two years that the farming land became unusable:

- Shrimp farming became a regular practice because it uses salt water. This was positive in terms of identifying alternative livelihood options, however, in the long term it had negative effects on the community and reduced the chances of the recovery of original livelihoods in which community members are most skilled. Water from the shrimp farming further salinated the ground and made it less suitable for agriculture. Moreover, it salinated areas that had previously been unaffected by the tsunami.
- Villagers sourced alternative employment as labourers in neighbouring towns. Whilst this provided an income, transport costs and commuting time decreased profits and productivity.
- Many of the women in the village are basket weavers and they lost almost all of their business after the tsunami. The fishermen who made up their entire market no longer required the baskets as they did not go out to sea for five months following the tsunami. Several women spoke of an international NGO called LOFTY, which gave business and marketing advice to the basket weavers in the community. This was aimed at widening the market from just fishermen. LOFTY also provided loans which were often used for other ventures, for example, one woman used the money to buy cotton crops which are more profitable.



The chart above illustrates the effectiveness of outside aid to a section of the Gremathadu Farming Village.

Livestock Replenishment

A major loss for the community of Gramathu Medu was their livestock which consisted of goats and cattle. It took four years before individuals could begin to rebuild their herds. Given that goats and cattle were a major source of food and income, such a loss had a considerable effect on the community's ability to recover from the tsunami. Efforts to assist in the restoration of livestock could have helped the community to recover from the disaster more swiftly.



Students are working with community members to draw a map of their village, showing the effected agricultural lands.

Self Help Groups

Self Help Groups initiated and organised by the women of the community provided them with a platform from which to voice their needs and concerns. Through these SHGs the community were able to apply for loans from SPEECH or the Government depending on their needs.

Insurance

Farmers who insured their land received Rs 3,000 in compensation for the salinisation of their land. However this was not enough to cover cultivation costs for the two years that the land was un-productive. Rs 10,000-15,000 was stated as the minimum needed to cover production if a profit was to be made from the sale of goods. Thus the compensation was felt to be inadequate by the community.

Savings Plans

Financial disaster preparedness has become ingrained as a part of the communities financial planning. Community members save between January and September which are the productive months of the year. This allows them to sustain themselves financially in the 3 month cyclone season from October to December. During this time they may be vulnerable to loss of livelihoods, shelter and other important assets. Whilst the savings they make may not be enough to cover extreme losses during a disaster, they will make a considerable contribution to small scale losses and aid early recovery of basic food and clothing.

Desalinisation of agricultural land

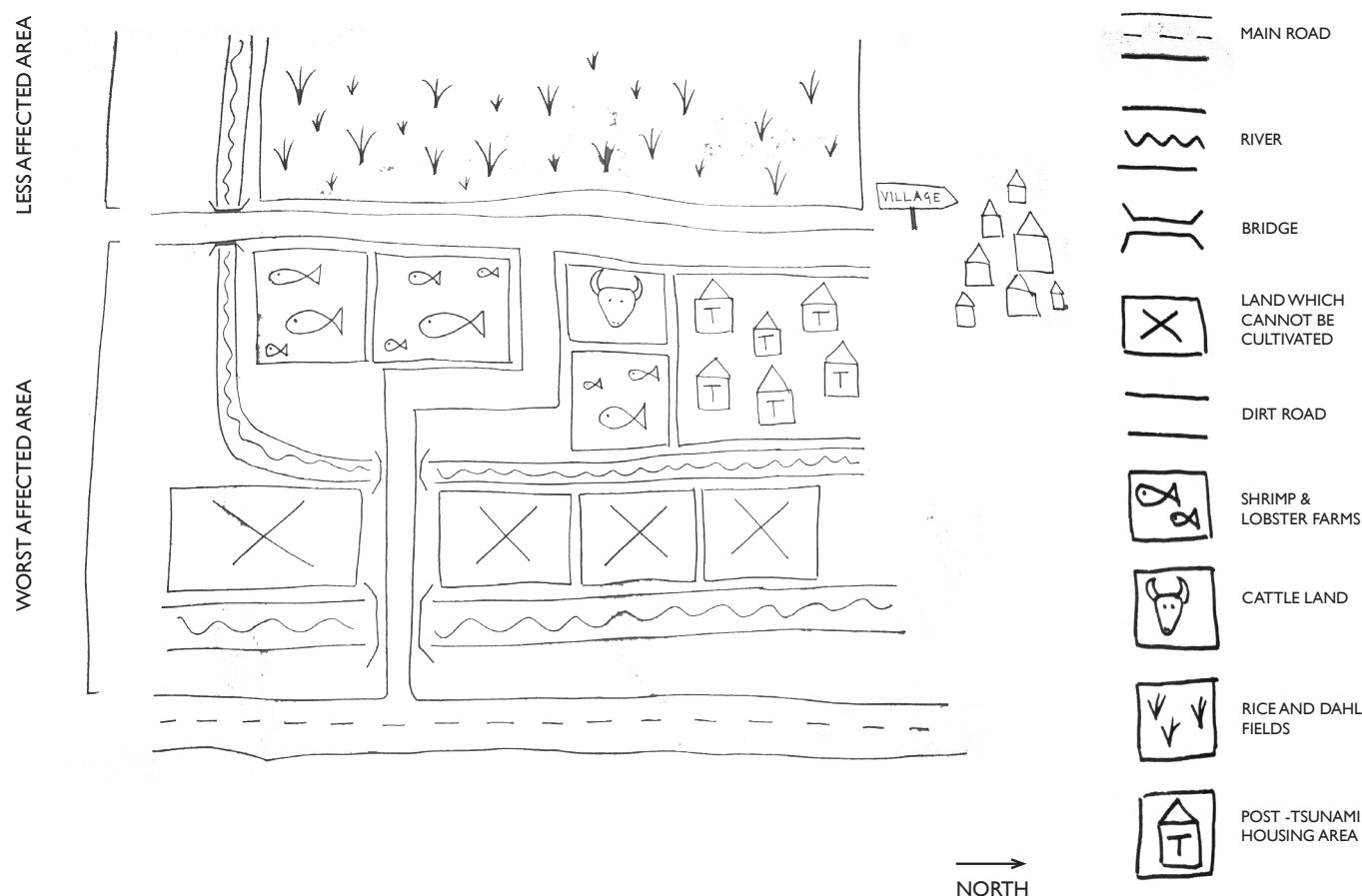
Local NGO SPEECH were involved in providing assistance to land owners through desalinisation techniques. These were taught through the use of worms, composting and manure. The techniques were effective in bringing the land back to a productive state, and whilst roughly half of the land is still unsuitable for agricultural, the techniques taught are still being utilised. The farm labourers were not given any direct aid, however, when the land did recover, their livelihoods were able to be reinstated. Moreover, SPEECH funded some of the local SHGs in the village, facilitating the labourers in finding other forms of income.

Training

In 2009, an NGO introduced a tailoring programme to women teaching them how to make their own clothes. Clothing was a major concern following the tsunami and this programme ensured the dignity of the women in the community. It also allowed them to become self-sufficient in providing clothing for their children in order to save money.

Access to Health Services

The Government constructed a hospital in the village two years after the tsunami. This was of huge importance to the community. However, it is not being fully utilised, as only a doctor's assistant and nurse are available one day a week. This is extremely limiting in terms of the hospital's effectiveness, as the need for a permanent doctor within the village is of great significance.



The map above is representation of a drawing done by members of the Gramathu Medu community showing gricultural lands of Gramathumedu and post tsunami land allocation.

VIZHUNTHA MAVADI

The tsunami hit in December, traditionally, the most profitable fishing period. This, combined with the inability to fish for several months after the disaster, and reduced catches since the tsunami, have all contributed to a reduction of the community's assets.

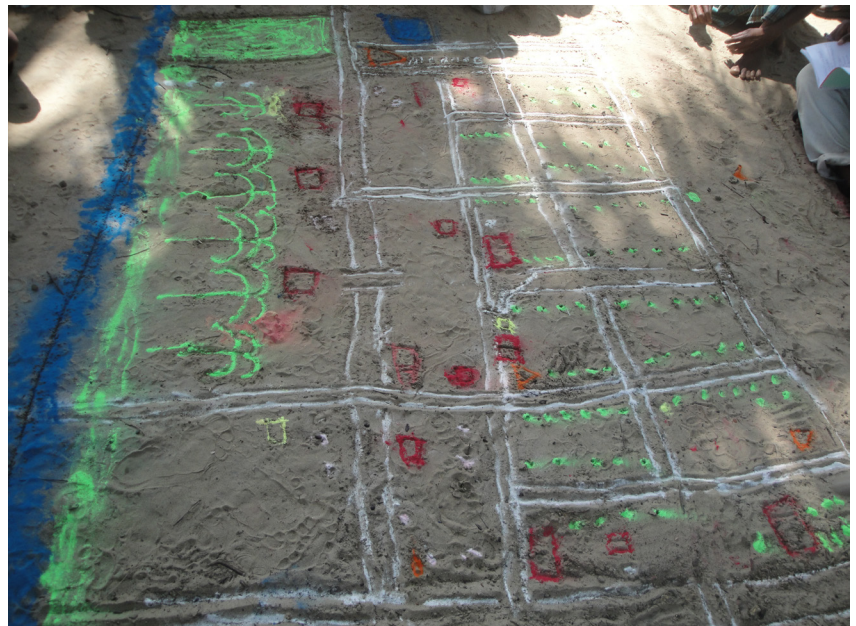
Immediate Response

Villagers moved into a cyclone shelter which was provided by the government immediately after the tsunami and remained there for one week. There they were given emergency food, which was supplied by the local Panchayat. It was readily available to all families.

Temporary houses were established on the outskirts of the village by the Government; the structures were established rapidly which the villagers resided for almost two years. Due to the temporary nature of the shelters coupled with the length of time they were occupied they were not of a standard or size the villagers were accustomed to in the long term. For the first month that they were living in the temporary structures the villagers were provided with food by the Ghandi G trust which was accessible to all and distributed evenly. DPG operated in the village for one year and provided rice and household goods during this time.

An INGO provided household items such as tables, chairs, ceiling fans, sleeping mats and bed sheets, clothes, and cooking items, many of which are still in use.

The government provided Rs4000 per family immediately, and continued to provide Rs3000 per month for a few months. The cash allowed villagers to retain a sense of autonomy by enabling them to provide food and supplies for themselves. A point to note is that the distribution of cash, was provided per family independent of family size.



Community members draw a map of the village on the sand, illustrating the structures the survived the tsunami in red, and the new construction in green.

Students and volunteers arrived at the village and worked to clean up much of the destruction including fallen trees, livestock, fatalities, boats, and houses. Additionally students and social workers, nationally and internationally provided psychological support in the form of counseling, yoga and meditation. The villagers spoke very highly of this form of support.

The members of the community as well as members from surrounding villages acted quickly to aid the village. Within days of the tsunami, neighboring villages brought water and porridge. Community members also acted quickly to clean up the village, and sanitise the area.

Recovery

Distribution of Aid

Aid organisations provided the community with new boats and an equitable solution was reached for their distribution. In comparison, before the tsunami, one person would own a boat, after the tsunami four people jointly owned a boat. This communal sharing of their most important asset provided for a more equitable distribution, allowing a greater proportion of the community to benefit.

In addition, the community worked in partnership with NGOs to ensure adequate aid was received. They put together demographic information on their village and information regarding their needs to enable the fair distribution of aid.

Self Help Groups

After the tsunami, SHGs grew from 2 groups to 9. The SHGs participate in raising community awareness surrounding key issues such as rights and financial planning. SHGs are able to open bank accounts and access loans which some women would otherwise not have access to. Furthermore, following the tsunami the groups participated heavily in community work involving a village clean up and continued maintenance of the affected areas.

Basic Needs and Facilities

Much of the immediate response was centered around taking care of the basic needs of the villagers. However, long term responses included medical aid, water provision, a nursery school, and finally permanent homes.

Medical aid was provided to the village by PDA immediately and was maintained until 2011. Doctors assistants and nurses conducted weekly health screenings, which were appreciated by the villagers as they now have to travel over two kilometers to the nearest health center.

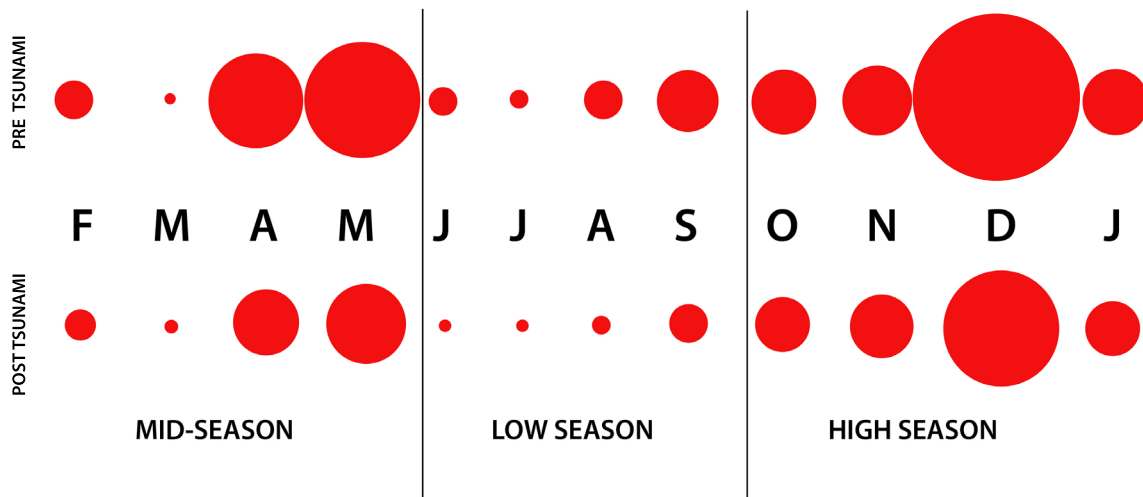
An NGO also provided a water filtration system to the village which provides clean drinking water free of charge, necessary due to the salinisation of the water wells following the tsunami. The filtration system is frequently in disrepair, as a result the villagers purchase drinking water from a nearby area. This could be avoided by providing maintenance training to local villagers upon installation of the filtration system.

In 2008, a new nursery school was built by SNEHA, which provides education for very young children, however there is no primary or secondary school available in the village. Additionally, SPEECH constructed a community center at this time. In 2009, CCFC constructed the building for the ration shop which supplies food at no cost or a subsidised rate to local villagers. Before this was constructed, the women had to travel over two kilometers to the nearest ration shop.

After one and a half to two years the permanent homes were constructed and the villagers could leave the temporary structures. The land that the houses were built on was provided by the government and the materials for the houses were given by an NGO. The villagers were pleased with the quality of the materials to build the houses but communicated that the construction was of poor quality which resulted in problems such as roof leakages. Again, had proper training been in place this problem may have been avoided.



One group, comprised of men in the village, created a chart illustrating the relative sizes of the fish catches during each month of the year (right). The graph below is a reproduction of this. The circles on the top row represent the sizes of the catches during the year prior to the tsunami, while the circles on the bottom row represent the average relative sizes of the catches each month since the tsunami.



Livelihoods

Vizhunthe Mavadi was particularly vulnerable post-tsunami because unlike Gramathu Medu, they had no training in other trades aside from fishing; however there was a strong preference to remain within the fishing industry. The support received that helped to return the villagers to their livelihood was extremely valuable; Vizhunthe Mavadi was one of the first to return to fishing after the tsunami.

DPG provided tailoring training to many of the women in the village, and has proved to be a sustainable approach. In contrast, less successful training schemes were also implemented such as training females to become auto-rickshaw drivers.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Prior to December 2004 there was minimal disaster preparedness however the communities have now voiced that they do feel more prepared for future occurrences. Following the tsunami, students and international aid organisations provided training for an emergency situation. Despite an increase in confidence they are still cautious about their lives as fishermen. The community is encouraging their children's education and alternative career choices due to varying vulnerabilities experienced by the fishing community

SUMMARY

The communities themselves alongside external actors worked to recover the villages following the tsunami. One of the key features in the response within each village was community efforts and the SHGs which were either utilised in terms of the disaster response or were created as a part of it.

In Gramathu Medu the primary external actors were NGOs and local and national Government. The residents of Gramathu Medu highlighted that during the immediate response suitable items could have been better provided including a larger number of saris and additional food. In terms of the long-term response to the disaster, the lack of free drinking water could have received greater attention. Lastly, this village felt that they did not receive priority status as they were not visually affected in the way that other areas were. As a result, identification of affected areas could potentially have been done better.

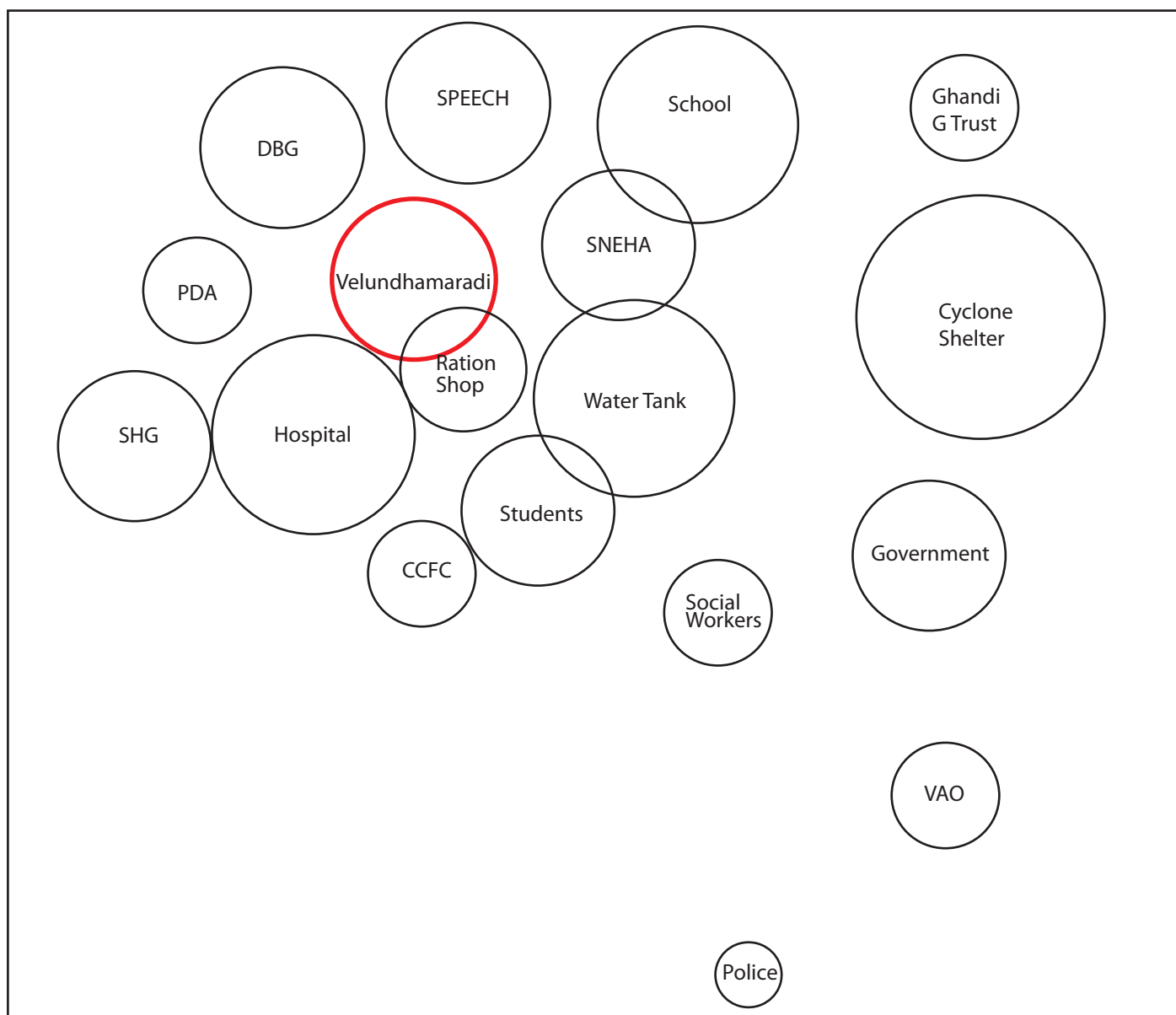
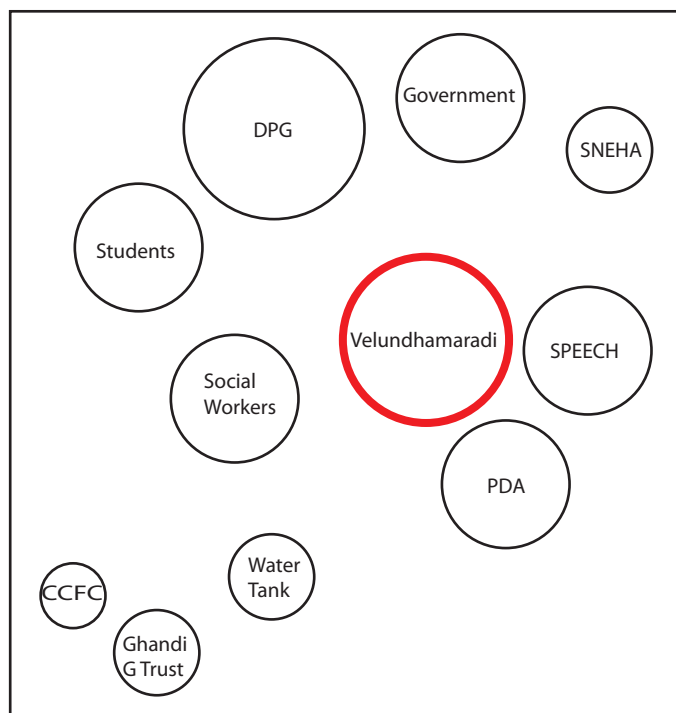
Due to the direct impact faced by Vizhuntha Mavadi, a number of external actors were involved in the response including; local NGOs, INGOs, the Government, students from India and abroad, volunteers, social workers and neighboring villages. From the research it was noted that the provision of a full-functioning medical center is necessary as well as a primary and secondary school. This could improve the quality of life in this village immediately as well as in the long-term.

Overall, it is evident that both the internal and external actors have been vital in the rebuilding and the development of these communities. Without the inner strength of the community members and the generosity and resourcefulness of NGOs, the Government and outside individuals, the community could be in a very different position today.

Priority Diagramming in Vizhuntha Mavadi

These diagrams were completed by the community to illustrate their collective priorities. The relative size of the circle indicates the importance of the item listed while the circles' proximity to the center illustrates its accessibility to the community. The men and women of the village both depend on fishing as a livelihood but perform differing tasks within the community. They were asked to complete separate Venn diagrams that reflect their opinion on the importance and accessibility of the NGOs following the tsunami. For example, in the illustration to the right (completed by the women), SPEECH is depicted as both accessible and of high priority. Conversely, CCFC is depicted as a lower priority and less accessible.

The illustration to the right was completed by women of the village, while the illustration below was completed by the men.





Levels of vulnerability today to critical issues and factors – What are the issues today and how do people cope?

GRAMATHU MEDU

The main vulnerability of Gramathu Medu is the lack of preparedness for future natural hazards. The villagers' capacity to recover from these shocks is uncontested and promising. The community has been capable of turning disaster into opportunity, noted through the creation of women's SHGs, as well as positive adaptations such as the re-construction of disaster-proof houses and the diversification of livelihoods. However, the most significant vulnerabilities that are evident within the society are the chronic and increasing economic problems, slow and inadequate external reaction as well as an inability to prepare for future hazards.

Difficulty in Accessing Facilities

The habitants of Gramatha Medu identified their lack of access to facilities as a key vulnerability. The difficulty in accessing banking and loan facilities prevents these individuals from acquiring savings, both to increase assets and to prepare for disasters. Access to other facilities such as education and a hospital are constrained by unreliable transport. This once again increases their vulnerability due to the lack of both healthcare and education.

Livelihoods

Gramathu Medu was identified as a predominantly agricultural village. Their main livelihood, farming, is highly dependent upon climatic conditions. Increasingly reoccurring climatic events are reducing the productive potential through salinisation of the land and damage to crops. Promising attempts to diversify livelihoods have been noted, such as construction work, basket weaving and shrimp farming according to seasonal patterns. Evidently, these decrease the villager's vulnerability as they are less reliant on productive yield. Nonetheless these alternative livelihoods do not adequately protect Gramathu Medu villagers for future disasters.

Finance

Finance was identified as a key issue in Gramathu Medu. Inadequacies in compensation in relation to loss of assets, livelihoods or incomes from natural hazards were highlighted by the community as well as the speed of response. In terms of vulnerability, this means that the villagers may rely upon high interest loans from private vendors or informal loans from family, which can create chronic debt.

Resilience and Preparedness

The specific lack of preparedness for disasters amounts to the biggest vulnerability. The lack of a safety shelter was noted as a vital issue for Gramathu Medu villagers. Alongside this, the lack of an adequate early warning system supported by knowledge of evacuation procedures and training prevents the community from escaping in times of hazard. It was noted that building upon the community's strong faith could present an opportunity for increased community preparedness in times of disasters.

Recovery

Despite these inherent vulnerabilities, the village of Gramatahu Medu has succeeded in building capacity within the recovery from each successive event. A clear example of this is the increasingly resilient housing and infrastructure. Additionally, their adaptation to a changing climate through the use of different fertilisers for increasing productivity decreases their vulnerability. However, a number of dwellings within the village are yet to be upgraded to resist tsunamis or cyclones due to social inequities.

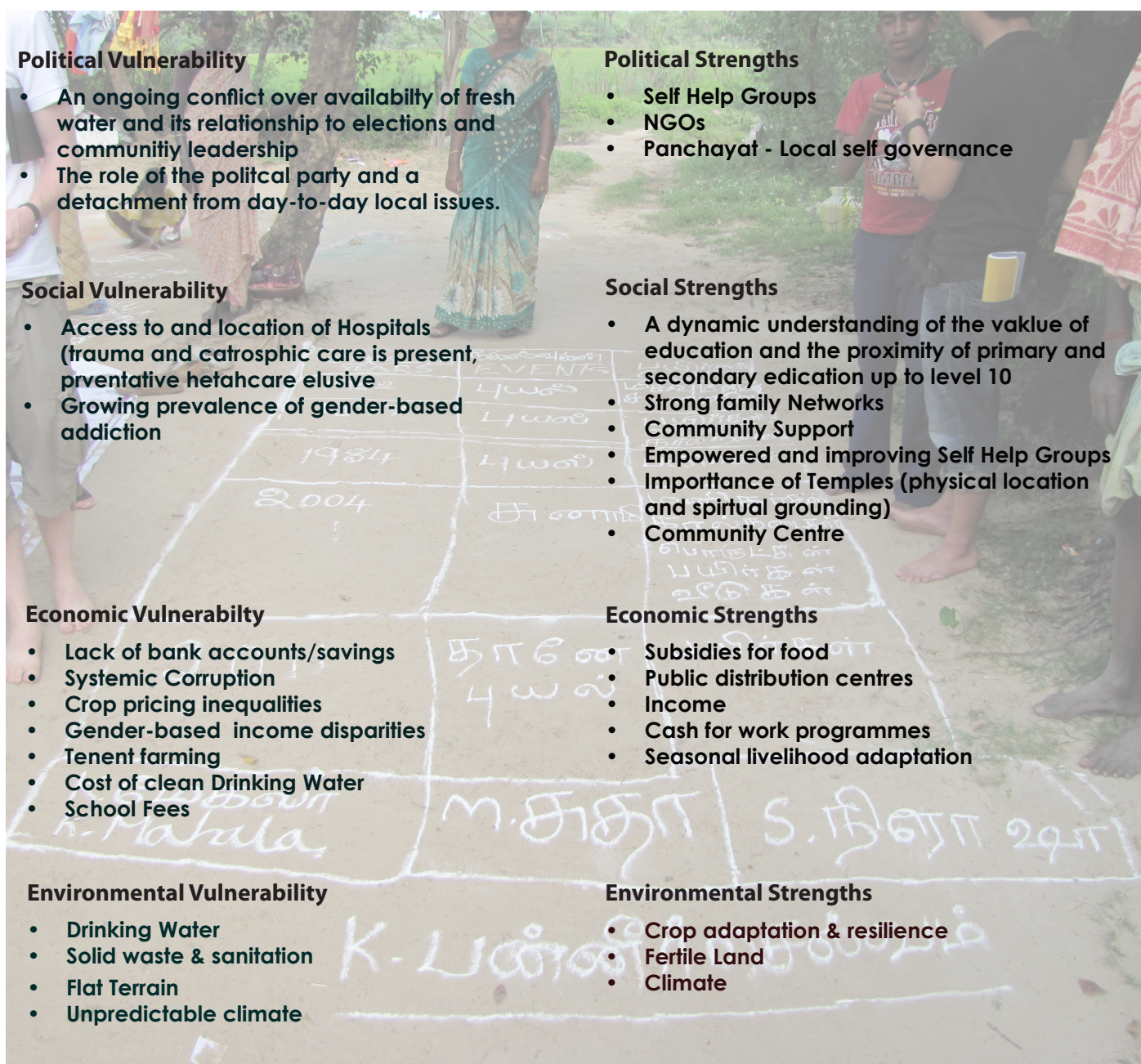
Issues that bring strength, create dependance or decrease resilience based on events, policies and processes of life in the Village

Community Security

- Improved powerful and effective Self help groups
- Ownership of disaster resistant houses
- Government compensations and forgiven loans in times of disaster
- Increased resilience to disasters from lessons learned in past events
- Community diversification and greater variety of skills

General Vulnerabilities

- Early warning system in place but appropriate reactions are to warning are unknown by many villagers
- A system of over compensation by government warnings results in a cry-wolf syndrome from village inhabitants
- Unpredictable environmental changes
- Lack of research & development
- Rapid reoccurrence of disaster At sea level
- Lack of preparedness



Political Vulnerability

- An ongoing conflict over availability of fresh water and its relationship to elections and community leadership
- The role of the political party and a detachment from day-to-day local issues.

Political Strengths

- Self Help Groups
- NGOs
- Panchayat - Local self governance

Social Vulnerability

- Access to and location of Hospitals (trauma and catrosphic care is present, prventative hetahcare elusive)
- Growing prevalence of gender-based addiction

Social Strengths

- A dynamic understanding of the vakuue of education and the proximity of primary and secondary edication up to level 10
- Strong family Networks
- Community Support
- Empowered and improving Self Help Groups
- Importance of Temples (physical location and spiritual grounding)
- Community Centre

Economic Vulnerabilty

- Lack of bank accounts/savings
- Systemic Corruption
- Crop pricing inequalities
- Gender-based income disparities
- Tenent farming
- Cost of clean Drinking Water
- School Fees

Economic Strengths

- Subsidies for food
- Public distribution centres
- Income
- Cash for work programmes
- Seasonal livelihood adaptation

Environmental Vulnerability

- Drinking Water
- Solid waste & sanitation
- Flat Terrain
- Unpredictable climate

Environmental Strengths

- Crop adaptation & resilience
- Fertile Land
- Climate

The image above was produced by the small group of villagers who worked closely with the vulnerability team to create an event timeline. The sequencing of events has a direct correlation to development succesfull adapation strategies and the ebb and flow of emergency situation, recovery and increased resiliency.

Vizhuntha Mavadi

During the field visit, the group found a village of great strength, humour and resilience. We spent time with a group of thirteen women during the morning following a thorough and insightful village tour that included the tsunami memorial. We found the women to be open and in most cases proud of what they were telling us, as shown through a series of quotes collected throughout the session.

"The sound of the waves and each storm bring reminders of 2004. We are worried each time our men go to sea."

We learned that the damaged suffered post-tsunami was not only physical but also psychological – many of the women said the memories were still as vivid to this day as they were seven years ago.

In terms of livelihoods, changes in the ocean after the tsunami have meant that the fish have been in short supply. The women also highlighted their concerns over whether the men will return after a fishing expedition. This was further emphasised by the apprehension to fish during the winter, through fear of not knowing what the weather will bring.

Further early warning systems have been put in place, such as television and radio broadcasts, to warn the fishermen of any potential danger.

"Our boats are our assets."

After brief discussions regarding livelihoods, fishing emerged as the communities strongest asset, however, some villagers claimed they are now unable to fish for half the year. In response to this, the Government have begun to compensate these fishermen for the effect this has had on their livelihoods.

"We women have been given the freedom to make life better."

With the men having to travel further to fulfil the fishing requirements, women became more important in everyday life. They told us that before, they did not feel comfortable speaking with officials, however, today, they feel that they can speak freely regarding most concerns they might have.

"To help us be more prepared for the future, we need a lighthouse and a safe harbour."

It was apparent that the life the community have now is much better than before the tsunami, but the women said the psychological effects will always remain.

When asked to make a list of what was important to them, the group immediately listed desirables. Included in this list were; a lighthouse and a safe harbour, both of which the women regarded as vital to maintaining and protecting their greatest asset.

"When we beat Sri Lanka at cricket, their Coastguards took out their anger on our fishermen."

Concern for their livelihoods and assets became a general theme in our discussions. The capacity to be able to maintain and hopefully improve their lives stood out as highly important. Any threats towards hindering or destroying their only income were strongly voiced.

The community highlighted the Sri Lankan coast guard as the biggest perceived threat at this time. The changes, post-tsunami, regarding the ocean and consequently an increase in travelling has meant that fishermen have been crossing into Sri Lankan waters. This has resulted in hostility towards the fishermen. The women said five men had been killed in disputes with the Sri Lankan Navy. A reoccurrence of the tsunami was another worry.

Further changes post-tsunami and lessons learnt

In response to the tsunami, the village now has a raised marriage/community hall as well as approximately 120 new houses, which have roof access. As a result the community would now be able to escape to higher ground in the case of an emergency.

Aspects such as beautiful exterior decoration, outdoor family private space showed a great deal of pride in their lives and contributes towards recovering and improving standards of living post-tsunami. It was also evident that the strength of the community had progressed physically both in terms of infrastructure and the surrounding environment and emotionally since the disaster.

SUMMARY

Both Gramathu Medu and Vizuntha Mavadi have progressed well since this 2004 tsunami. Villagers in Gramathu Medu have been extremely resilient; they have been flexible and opportunistic in adapting their livelihoods. However, a lack of preparedness for future climatic events was discovered and, therefore, they could still be vulnerable in the case of another disaster. In Vizuntha Mavadi, women have appeared to cope with the disaster remarkably well. Among other factors, they have achieved this through the formation of self-help groups, enabling them to increase their participation in rebuilding the community and decision making. The positive attitude of these women shows strong resilience and adaptability and it is clear that they are consistently thinking about and planning for the future of their community.

3

What are community priorities for the next 5 years? What are the critical external factors that will affect these priorities?

GRAMATHU MEDU

In Gramathu Medu, drinking water was a major priority for all participants. According to the community water is currently too expensive and inaccessible, with households spending up to 30 rupees per day to buy water privately (in a neighbouring village) and waiting 7-10 days in-between functioning of the government piped water system – one to two hours of water at one tap for the whole village. Salinised groundwater restricts the use of bore holes. The participants stated throughout the appraisal that they consider uninterrupted drinking water facilities a high priority. The Government appeared to be the strongest external actor in this issue – villagers mentioned that during elections officials distribute free water, only to withdraw this afterwards. The price of fuel also appears to have affected the price of water; villagers mentioned that the price of private water had tripled recently as a result of rising fuel prices.

The lack of housing able to withstand cyclones was a prominent community concern. Although some houses were made of concrete (which were used by others as cyclone shelters), many families still live in houses made of mud brick and thatched roofs. The priority given to this issue seems to represent unity around community safety. The villagers recognised the benefit of concrete construction in minimising the impact of cyclones and strong storms. Moreover, concrete houses can assist access to drinking water through having rainwater collectors installed. Villagers explained that the government will only give them financial support in the form of compensation for building new homes – but most lack the money necessary for construction. With regard to this issue NGOs can be a potential source for greater support.

Toilet and sanitation facilities are a key priority for the village. Although this problem directly affects women more than men due to their daily schedules, all groups gave it a very high priority. No external actor was given direct responsibility for solving this issue.

An increase in the number of privately owned shrimp farms is a very serious concern in the farming community. The hatcheries, which began around 20 years ago, have grown substantially and are blamed for the salinisation and subsequent ruin of the soil for rice farming. Villagers explained that the increase is due to the salinisation of neighbouring paddies, whose owners then sell their “ruined” land to the hatcheries. This trend has led some farmers to feel pessimistic about the future.

There were several other issues which were significant priorities. These include: the lack of doctors in the hospital and local family health clinic; the lack of teachers; the poor transport (road and bus) links with nearby towns and villages; the exorbitant interest rates and abuse imposed by moneylenders; the impact of disease that is spread by insects attracted to waste dumped at the Vailankanni pilgrimage site; and unemployment as well as under-employment. During a dream mapping exercise, children identified a library, computer centre, schools, and a playground as important to them.

Issues Raised in Gramathu Medu

CATEGORIES	ISSUES	MEN	WOMEN	OLDER WOMEN	CHILDREN
Social	Alcoholism		X	X	
	Theft		X		
	Domestic Violence			X	
	Marginalization/Abuse Towards Single Women, Widows, and Elderly Women		X	X	
	Links to Other Towns and Villages	X	X		
	Reduction of Cultivable Lands due to Prawn Hatcheries	X	X		
Financial	Higher Living Costs			X	
	Problems with Loans (Interest/Abuse from Lenders)		X	X	
	Pesticide Expenses	X			
	Crop Insurance	X			
	High College Fees		X		
	Corruption			X	
	Crop Loss due to Cyclones			X	
	Lack of Jobs and Underemployment	X	X	X	
Infrastructure	Lack of Creche Building		X		
	Road Maintenance	X			
	Lack of Playground	X	X		X
	Lack of Street Lighting	X			
	No Marriage Auditorium	X	X		
	No Library and Computer Center	X	X		X
	No Cyclone Shelter	X	X		
	No House to withstand Cyclones	X		X	X
	Garden				X
Institutions	Hard to Access Government Welfare Schemes			X	
	Poor Communication with Government			X	
	Lack of Government Presence Locally and Rurally			X	
	No Local Medical Facility		X	X	
	Lack of Teachers	X	X		X
	Lack of Doctors	X	X		X
Services	Sanitation/Toilets	X	X	X	
	Drinking Water	X	X	X	
	Irrigation	X	X		
	Pond Maintenance		X		
Health	Disease from Insects Attracted to Waste		X		
	Insufficient/Imbalanced Food	X	X		

KEY

High
Intermediate
Low

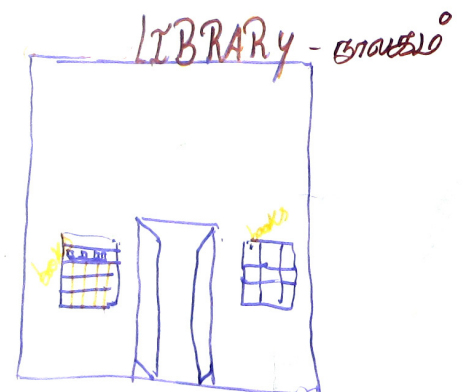
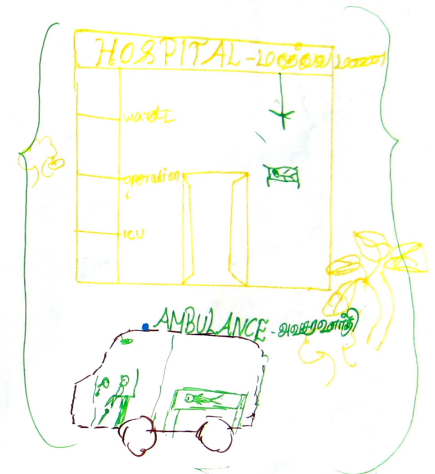
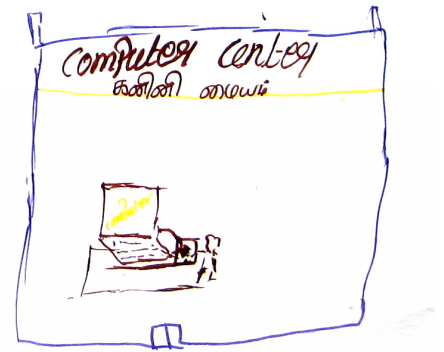
Issue Level

VIZHUNTHA MAVADI

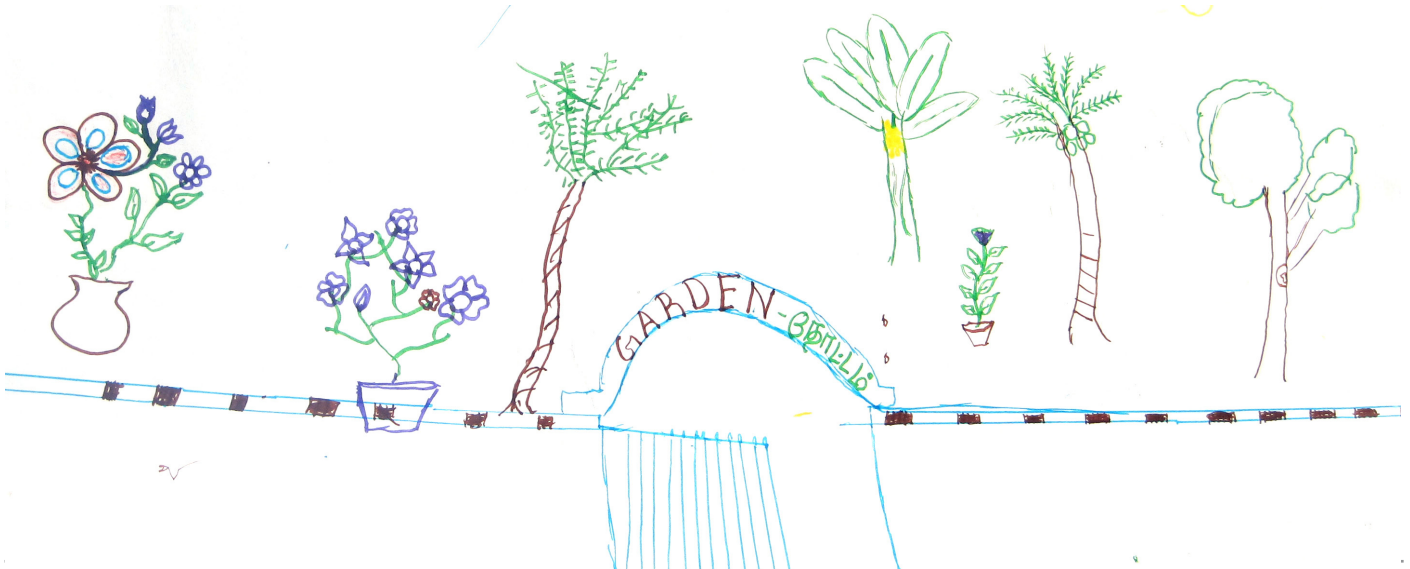
Both men and women were concerned for the safety of the village, in particular for the fishermen. Streetlights were identified as a key priority for the community. In addition, lights on the shore, a lighthouse, and GPS systems were all suggested as means of improving safe navigation for fishermen. With regards to livelihoods the women identified the need for access to transportation as an immediate concern so that they would not have to carry the fish themselves when going to sell it. Another immediate priority was deep freezers and a machine to produce ice to preserve the fish, as buying it in small blocks is costly. Longer term goals included new nets and hooks for fishermen, as well as bigger boats made of steel. However, the community raised concerns about the negative environmental impact of mechanical boats including pollution and over fishing.

Participants agreed that the existing cyclone shelter which was built after the tsunami by a German NGO, DPG, is impractical for use due to its location close to the sea. The alternative for the community is to travel three kilometres to a neighbouring village when a cyclone approaches. Although 121 concrete houses were built after the tsunami, 24 families in the village still do not have housing that would withstand a cyclone or do not have housing at all. Furthermore, the concrete housing that was built was too close to the shore and would be extremely vulnerable in the case of another tsunami. These were all identified as immediate priorities.

Other priorities for the community include; drinking water, improved maintenance of water tanks, improved electricity supply, and a local medical facility or hospital. Similarly to Gramathu Medu, participants recounted their problems in accessing pensions. Wider social issues such as dowries were also mentioned as contributing to financial vulnerability. Villagers also revealed the need for community facilities such as a women's committee hall, a playground and a crematorium in the short term, and a library, a fish processing plant, a supermarket and a secondary school in the medium term.



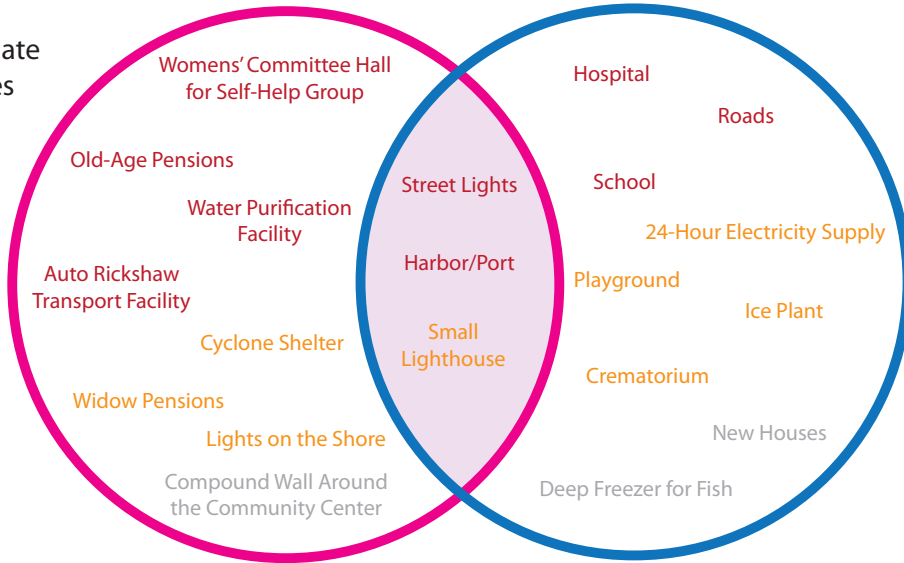
The drawings to the right and below were done by children in the community, who were asked to illustrate their dreams for the future of their community.



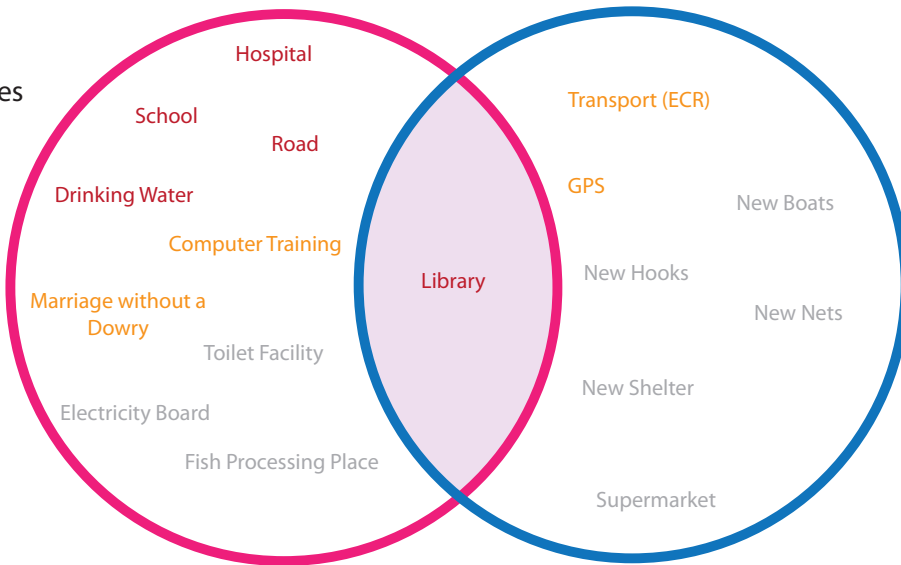
Priorities Identified in Vizhuntha Mavadi



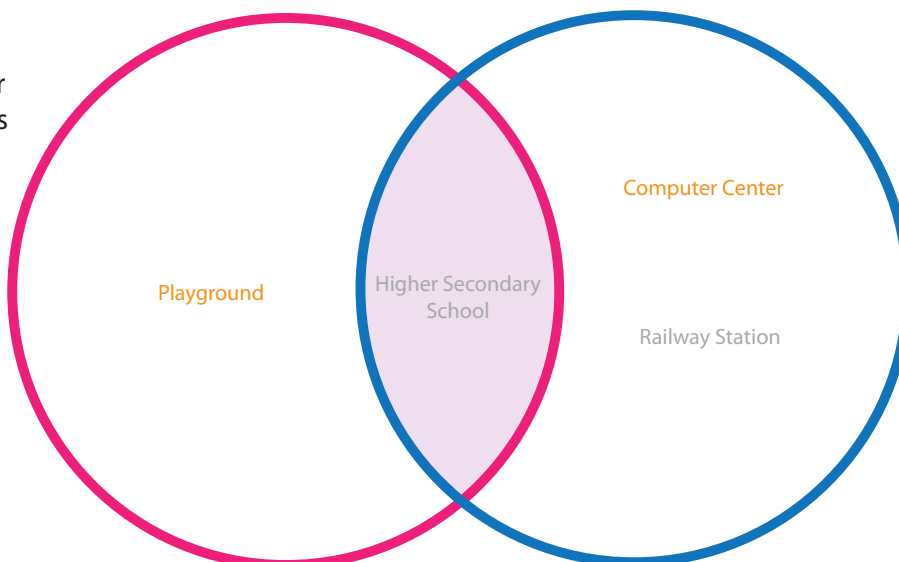
Immediate Priorities



5-Year Priorities



10+ Year Priorities



KEY

Female Responses

Male Responses

Shared Responses

High
Intermediate
Low } Priority Level

SUMMARY

In Gramathu Medu and Vizhuntha Mavadi the communities appeared to be recovering effectively from the 2004 tsunami, particularly in terms of reducing their vulnerability. However, there is still progress to be made. In Gramathu Medu, major priorities were shared across gender and age these included; toilet and sanitation facilities and a solution to the issue of encroaching shrimp farming. However, in Vizhuntha Mavadi, there were greater differences in priorities among the participants and between genders. Both communities prioritised water, transportation, cyclone resistant housing and shelters, and village facilities. The two communities also identified the challenges in accessing schemes such as pensions. From the PRA activities it was clear that both communities are thinking about what they want and need in the future. Further mobilisation of SHGs and an increase in community advocacy in partnership with NGOs or other actors could contribute towards the development of these community goals.

Vagiriya Colony and Nahbikai Nagar

During the field trip the group was able to visit two villages of marginalised groups, nomads and widows. Although no PRA was carried out at these places, the experiences within these communities gave us a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by marginalised groups post disaster.

Before the tsunami in 2004, Vagiriya, a nomadic community was living behind a hotel on low-lying land near Nagapattinam. They did not have permanent homes, did not own the land they were living on, and would sometimes be forced to live on the streets. During our visit, community members recalled their experiences after the tsunami, explaining how they were not eligible to receive aid from the government due to not possessing identity cards. Eventually they were helped by the NGO SPEECH, who made a case to the District Administrator for the community to be fully



Women of the Vagiriya Colony demonstrate their jewellery-making techniques.

recognised by the government. Working in partnership with Christian Children's Fund of Canada (CCFC), SPEECH were successful in helping the community to obtain government ration cards, identity cards, gain ownership of land and build concrete houses. Although this has led to a lifestyle change for the nomadic community, they are thankful that they have permanent housing which they feel gives them status and acceptance within society. The women in particular feel safer now and described how they lead "a peaceful life". In addition a women's SHG has been formed, which has permitted some community members to obtain bank accounts, providing them with both pride and a wealth of new opportunities. High illiteracy was identified amongst the community members, however, the change in lifestyle has allowed the first generation of children to now receive an education from a new school centre within the village. With regards to livelihoods the women make jewellery to sell, while the men hunt animals during the night. Community members revealed that they wish to expand their livelihoods further, which they have already begun by making nets for fishermen and selling plastic toys, which they buy at wholesale price.

SPEECH have also been working in partnership with Christian Aid for the past four years to help another marginalised groups, following the tsunami. Nahbikai Nagar, or Hope Colony, is a community which consists of widows who lost their husbands during the tsunami and subsequently faced rejection from their previous villages. On our visit, the widows explained how they became ostracised by their families due to the superstition that widows are traditionally regarded as unlucky. Similar to the nomadic community, these widows were left out of the immediate disaster response, due to the fact that they were not regarded as home owners. With help from both these NGOs, the widows, who originally derived from separate villages, have formed a new community and have been donated permanent



Members of the Nahbikai Nagar community.

concrete houses. They have received recognition not only from the government, but also from their relatives who now visit them occasionally. The women depend upon each other for support and have formed a SHG, enabling them access to small loans, which are supplemented by undertaking 100-day employment schemes. The empowerment of these widows has led to their feeling of freedom and social inclusion.

These two communities truly highlighted the inequalities and discriminations with regards to disaster response in the area. Policies should address response within a wider perspective, ensuring that all groups of societies are equally included in response and recovery.