

CONSRN: A Consortium for a Cause

The December 2004 tsunami not merely shocked and devastated coastal economies and populations of several countries, it also spurred several co-operation initiatives. One of these is CONSRN, the Consortium to Restore Shattered Livelihoods in Tsunami-Devastated Nations.

Partners of the Consortium are the FAO, through its regional office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok; the BOBP-IGO, based in Chennai; NACA, the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific, based in Bangkok; SEAFDEC, the South East Asian Fisheries Development Centre, based in Bangkok; and the World Fish Centre (WFC), based in Penang, Malaysia. Interested NGOs include the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (APDC), the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), and the International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF).

CONSRN was conceived on December 31, 2004, and initiated at a meeting on 11 January, 2005. It is a forum for sharing information,

assessing needs, developing strategies, coordinating assistance, supporting governments in enabling rehabilitation.

Why a consortium? Won't it merely generate more talk and more reports when what people want is more action? What can a consortium without infrastructure, staff or funds do that governments and large established international and national entities cannot?

The rationale for agencies like CONSRN is that governments and local authorities are often more effective at immediate relief than long-term rehabilitation. Relief calls for instant assessments and instant action, something akin to fire-fighting. But what after the fire has been put out? Rebuilding and rehabilitation require strategising and planning based on a clear vision, long-term principles and sound policies. The opportunity for building a new order that's better than the old must be seized.

CONSRN has a role here, because of the experience and expertise of



its member-partners. At a 3-day Workshop in Bangkok (28 February-1 March, 2005), the Consortium formulated a vision for fisheries and aquaculture. It should help alleviate poverty; it should ensure sustainable livelihoods and food security; it should be based on sound regulation and good governance, it should use appropriate technologies; it should enable holistic management; it should put in place a well-integrated supply chain from harvest to consumer.

The Workshop also set out guiding principles toward the vision: Put people first, with a livelihood-focused approach; rehabilitate the whole production and marketing chain; let rehabilitation effort be consistent with international agreements and guidelines.

Specific policy guidelines are to be drawn up for several aspects of post-tsunami fisheries and aquaculture development by various Consortium partners on the basis of their expertise. Examples:

- 1. Boats vs livelihoods.** Coastal communities and small-scale fishers have been hit badly by the tsunami. Is providing boats the best way of easing the hardships of these fishers? The World Fish Center has already

Fishermen with their damaged boats in Nagapattinam, India.



drawn up a set of guidelines on addressing livelihoods concerns.

2. **Optimal fishing capacity:** We must ensure a fishing capacity commensurate with the resource; and a balance between artisanal and industrial fisheries. We must understand the dynamics of both the resource and those who tap it. Guidelines will be formulated by the FAO.
3. **Safety at sea:** Much needs to be done in this critical area. For marine fisherfolk, the sea (*kadalamma* or the Sea Mother in Tamil language) is their provider and saviour, but they must not take it for granted, they must follow the right norms and practices, use the right equipment. The BOBP-IGO will draw up guidelines.
4. **Non-destructive fishing gear:** Gear provided to fisherfolk during relief and rehabilitation ought to be non-destructive, else it will accentuate the problems of everyone who taps the marine resource.
5. **Co-management of resources:** All stakeholders must be involved in policy formulation and decision-making. Management should be based on full participation, the right representation, and the best scientific information available.
6. **Aquaculture and the environment:** Guidelines are needed on how aquaculture can pursue environmentally sound management practices that do not pollute, do not damage habitats or cause irreversible harm.
7. **Sustainable aquaculture technologies:** The aquaculture industry should adopt technologies and farm management practices appropriate for rural populations

From top to bottom: Repair and restoration of fishing boats in Maldives, India and Sri Lanka.



with limited resources. It should support farmer organisations, follow fair trade practices, develop regional and international partnerships, facilitate dialogue and experience-sharing. NACA will develop guidelines on aquaculture development.

8. Markets and trade for aquaculture practices: Fish handling practices at sea and infrastructure on shore must ensure high food quality and safety. Practices in post-harvest processing and marketing must ensure food safety, add value and minimise wastage and loss. Policies must be informed by sound understanding of markets and production chains and ensure access to small-scale producers.

9. Disaster preparedness: We must reduce the risks coastal communities face from natural disasters. Efficient design and location of infrastructure and protection of the coastal zone environment are two of the issues.

10. Reduction in livelihood vulnerability of coastal communities: Guidelines are needed to identify coastal communities (or sections among them) who are most vulnerable, understand their livelihoods, address their key risks and devise coping strategies through social safety nets or empowering mechanisms.

11. Putting people first: A favourite buzzword! But how do we ensure that we put people first? Stakeholder consultations to ascertain their problems and viewpoints, respect for their access rights, ensuring adequate labour standards, ensuring access to land, equitable distribution of benefits, assistance that is dictated by need rather than by legal status – these are some of the principles and practices to follow.

12. Coastal zone management: Rehabilitation measures should conform strictly to coastal zone management norms. Decisions should be based on scientific merit and people's need. What is in their best interest, and the best national interest, should be the overriding criteria for development.

13. Alternative livelihoods for fishers: This has been proposed by many tsunami rehabilitation agencies. But what and where are the alternatives? Experts at national and local levels should study and identify livelihood options for coastal communities, including those that do not depend on natural resources. The support needed from national governments and local institutions should be spelled out.

Six key strategic elements will form the basis for CONSRN activities.

- Improve policies, institutions and processes,
- Provide physical assets,
- Restore the natural environment,
- Provide appropriate financial mechanisms,
- Build human capacity to improve community livelihoods and

responsible coastal resource management, and

- Rebuild and enhance the social assets resources and networks in affected fishing and aquaculture communities.

Details are provided in two publications – FAO/RAP publications 2005/05 and 2005/09.

CONSRN's assistance for tsunami rehabilitation has thus been in the realm of ideas, plans and strategies so far. The Consortium needs money to provide more direct and substantive help. Donors, please note!

A BOBP-IGO video film captures the destruction caused by the Tsunami and the on-going reconstruction processes

A 20-minute video film shot by the BOBP-IGO captures the unprecedented destruction to life and property caused by the 26 December 2004 tsunami and the reconstruction processes initiated by the government and non-governmental agencies. The film will be released during December 2005.

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