

ABSTRACT FOR PANEL DISCUSSION

Process and Methodology for Regional Development

December 2004 Tsunami provided a classic case study of the regional cooperation. I will discuss some of the success stories as well as failures, with a view to overcome them in the future. International cooperation with regard to funding could be cited as an example of both strength and weakness of the system. As at June 2006, total amount pledged was US\$2.8 billion of which US\$ 2.3 billion was allocated for 718 identified projects. Due to the inability of the Project Management Authorities to prepare project documentation, only US\$ 1.2 billion were disbursed. The amount expended was a meager US\$0.8 billion, which is less than 30% of total amount pledged even after 11/2 years from the tragedy. This shows that contrary to the common belief, funding was not the constraint for restoration of Tsunami damage. It is the inadequacy of project planning and implementation skills and the public sector administrative system that have caused the delay.

As for the success stories; the tourist industry could be cited, where the complete restoration happened within six months period using private funding and own reconstruction efforts. The fishing industry where 70% of the fleet damage was restored using donor funds with project management help from the Postgraduate Institute of Management and boat building skills provided by foreign experts. Restoration of drinking water was done at several stages. Originally there were large amount of bottled water flown into the country and was produced by local soft drink manufacturers. During the second stage, many companies that are developing membrane filters for extracting potable water from saline water installed their machinery in various affected locations. While providing drinking water to the population, those developers were able to test their plant and machinery at the field level. As a permanent solution nearly 700,000 shallow dug wells were cleaned using pumps provided by the foreign parties. International Water Management Institute whose headquarters is located in Colombo provided valuable assistance by providing expert knowledge by determining the pumping intensity to avoid the disturbance of fresh ground water aquifers.

Sri Lanka, which is a part to the global network of seismic information systems, has its own seismic monitoring location in Pallekele. Although the occurrence of the earthquake was known to international community within fifteen minutes, using the signals generated by the seismic monitoring stations, the system failed to inform the coastal population in Sri Lanka who were hit by Tsunami only after 21/2 hours of the earthquake.

This was partly due to non-availability of Tsunami detecting device in the Indian Ocean. Even then, the Tsunami was known after it hit Banda Aceh of Indonesia. However, there was no focal point in Sri Lanka or India to communicate such information. Even if they communicated, there was no mechanism to disseminate same to the masses. Even if it was disseminated to the masses they would not have taken it seriously or they would not have known how to react in such a situation in the absence of a proper preparedness.

The major engineering activities however were attended to with international experts and local experts working in unison to restore railway, bridges, electricity, health facilities, telecommunication, etc. Above is a brief discussion of some of the major areas where regional cooperation has worked very successfully but also has failed due to the inability of the receiving countries in making use of such cooperation.

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