

Policy Analysis of Tsunami-impacted areas in India

WWF-India in association with local partners analysed existing policy framework on three specific issues:

1. Sustainable fisheries
2. Coastal defences
3. Reconstruction and rehabilitation

WWF-India has identified three main policy issues to be addressed:

1. Ensuring sustainable fisheries to support conservation and livelihoods.
2. Ensuring that coastal defences, particularly shelterbelts, do not adversely impact coastal ecology and livelihoods.
3. Ensuring that post-tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation is environmentally sensitive in terms of structure and location.

Working Together

Through partnerships with two prominent NGOs - Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) and Foundation for Ecological Research, Advocacy and Learning (FERAL) - current policies of government, donors and NGOs were analyzed.

Policy findings

Some of the main findings from the policy analyses made by CAG and FERAL are summarized below.

Fisheries

The study found a big increase in the number of fiberglass boats in place of catamarans and a resultant increase in fishing capacity as a result of tsunami relief. A major recommendation was the need to improve regulations regarding delineation of fishing zones for artisanal fishermen and commercial trawlers, regulating the mesh size of nets, the age and the size of fish caught and the number and size of boats in different areas.

Another important suggestion was regarding the need to support appropriate alternative livelihoods for fishing communities, ideally based on diversifying the fisheries sector and on adding value to existing fisheries products.

Coastal defences

The study found that a well-designed shelterbelt could reduce coastal erosion, reduce wind speed and thereby prevent evaporation of soil moisture, help in sequestering carbon and provide a habitat for wildlife. But the study also stated that bio-shields are ineffective against tsunamis and that the communities and other stakeholders should be clearly informed about the role of shelterbelts. Casuarina is the most successful species due to its low palatability and little need for after care but communities do not welcome dense planting in front of habitations as it blocks their line of vision of the sea. This defeats the purpose of shelterbelts as protection for communities from high winds.

The study says that there has also been extensive planting on sand dunes, which impacts the integrity of the natural ecosystem, and this should be definitely avoided. Another recommendation is that mixed species of economic value that can generate income for local communities should be preferred, in order to provide an incentive for managing such plantations sustainably. Also, policies with clear tenurial arrangements are needed to ensure long-term community involvement.

Reconstruction

The study found the reconstruction effort to be non-participatory. Also, most of the newly constructed toilets are based on the leach pit design and improperly designed septic tanks and cause fecal contamination of drinking water. Existing toilets should therefore be switched to more environmentally sound systems and appropriate technologies should be worked out to properly dispose of domestic sewage. Both eco-san as well as Dewats systems needs to be promoted. On the social side, there is an urgent need to increase awareness among

communities about sewage and sanitation problems, and provide them with practical options to deal with them.

The study also recommended a rapid assessment of heavy metal contamination of water sources. In several places it was found that sand was being removed from coastal dunes for construction of houses. It was suggested that contractors should extract sand only from legal sources and illegal sand mining should be immediately stopped. Reconstruction sites should be selected carefully following the CRZ notification and avoiding floodplains and low-lying areas.

Green Coast partner WWF India organized five Road Shows to present the policy research findings and seek suggestions from the local communities through NGOs and CBOs.