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THE TSUNAMI LEARNING PROJECT
Lessons for Grantmakers in Natural Disaster Response

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1. Introduction

The Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of December 2004 was the deadliest natural disaster in recorded history, with twelve countries directly affected and over 225,000 people dead or missing. Two of the hardest-hit areas—Aceh on the island of Sumatra and Eastern Sri Lanka—were immersed in violent civil conflicts, adding additional obstacles to an already complex crisis.

The world's response to this tragedy was unprecedented, and donations from all public and private sources topped US$13.4 billion. US-based private foundations and grantmaking public charities were among the many donors to step forward with financial support. Yet even for the most experienced of grantmakers, the enormous scope of this catastrophe posed an array of decision-making challenges. Where could financial resources be placed most effectively? What kinds of strategies would likely have the quickest and most valuable impact? What criteria should be used to evaluate potential grantees in this complex and unprecedented situation?

With the *Tsunami Learning Project*, Grantmakers Without Borders sought to find answers to these and other questions. Natural disasters are a tragic fact of life—and may become even more so as populations rise and as the planet warms. Grantmakers will no doubt be called upon again and again in the future to respond.

Grantmakers Without Borders' goal with the *Tsunami Learning Project* is to offer new tools for grantmakers when responding to natural disasters.

Sometimes it seems as though we are living in an age of the mega-donor, yet the vast majority of grantmakers and donors don't have the billion-dollar resources of a Gates or a Buffett. What role can funders with more modest means play in disaster response? Can small grants make a difference in complex emergencies? Might there be a unique and important role for small-scale, community-based interventions within the context of broader humanitarian responses? The *Tsunami Learning Project* sought to explore the question of the role of small grants in disaster response.

While many grantmakers in their everyday work strive to engender social justice in our world, during a natural disaster this goal is often pushed aside in the rush to save lives. Yet is it possible for social justice goals to be met in disaster response? How can disaster response grantmaking empower marginalized communities, foster greater equity, and promote human rights? The *Tsunami Learning Project* sought to explore what a social justice or rights-based approach in disaster response grantmaking might look like.

1.1 Methodology

To carry out the *Tsunami Learning Project*, Grantmakers Without Borders documented the experience of a group of grantmakers that responded to this disaster. Six organizations in total were studied: American Jewish World Service (AJWS), Global Fund for Children (GFC), Global Greengrants Fund (GGF), Global Fund for Women (GFW), Oxfam America (Oxfam) and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAF).

Although the observed organizations differ significantly in terms of size, focus, and approach (see Box 1, next page), they operate with a shared set of commitments, including:

- ❖ providing funding to local organizations that are trusted and knowledgeable members of their communities;
- ❖ ensuring that assistance reaches the most vulnerable communities and/or individuals within them;

❖ strengthening community, organizational, and individual capacities so that survivors are better equipped to act as primary agents in their own recovery;
❖ addressing structural problems that hinder rapid, effective responses to humanitarian crises, such as large populations with marginal economic and political status or environmental degradation of coastal areas;
❖ promoting recovery efforts based on empowered communities, the reconstruction of social networks, and individual psycho-social well being;
❖ approaching their work with a strong normative commitment to human rights and social justice.

All the observed organizations are experienced grantmakers, and they are also active learning organizations. The majority did not have prior experience in this type of disaster response (GFC, GFW, GGF, UAF). Nevertheless, these organizations responded immediately to the tsunami, believing that the above principles pertain as much to disaster situations as their ongoing work. AJWS and Oxfam, both of which have extensive experience in humanitarian response, have long argued that the principles of good development programming apply to disaster response as well. All of the observed organizations relied on their existing networks of current or former grantees to shape their response to the tsunami, while GGF, UAF, and GFW also relied on advisors and board members based in the affected regions. Oxfam was the only observed organization that had staff on the ground.

This report is based on documentation provided by each of the observed organizations and a number of reports from grantees covering the first 12-14 months of the response. Interviews were conducted with staff of the observed organizations in March and April 2005, as well as early 2006. The observed organizations reviewed early drafts of the report and met for a half-day in Washington, D.C., where they strengthened the analysis and developed a series of recommendations for the philanthropic and humanitarian communities.

The organizations observed in the *Tsunami Learning Project* are grantmaking public charities. Though publicly supported, their role as *grantmakers to overseas groups* directly parallels that of many private foundations doing similar direct overseas grantmaking and is therefore of meaningful relevance to all types of cross-border grantmakers, both private and public. Their experiences are also of value to donors and funders whose disaster response grantmaking is done through US-based organizations, whether they be "re-granters" (five of the six observed organizations) or international relief organizations whose programs include significant grantmaking (one of the six observed organizations).

Box 1: Organizational Responses

American Jewish World Service has a history of disaster response and was able to mobilize quickly in the aftermath of the tsunami. It is funding 86 projects that are being implemented by 55 grantees – 22 in Indonesia, 19 in Sri Lanka, 8 in Thailand, 28 in India and 9 in Somalia. By early January 2006, AJWS had already made grants in the amount of $3.12 million. Besides providing immediate relief and helping to restore livelihood activities, AJWS is focusing on efforts that provide psychosocial support to survivors, ensure that particularly vulnerable groups gain access to resources (including *pro bono* legal services), promote women's participation in decision-making processes and offer training and financing for alternative livelihood activities (*www.ajws.org*).

Global Fund for Children explicitly states that it is not a relief organization, but due to the scope of the tsunami and its impact on core GFC grantees, the organization quickly developed a three-phase response to the emergency: immediate relief (December 26, 2004 – January 7, 2005), rehabilitation (January 7 – March 30, 2005) and long-term recovery (April 2006 – June 2007). GFC made grants of $37,500 to 10 current and past grantees in Phase I and $85,000 to 4 grantees in Phase II. They have budgeted $300,000 for Phase III, of which $50,000 had already been committed at the time of this writing. Phase II activities included the restoration of families' livelihoods as an essential element in enhancing children's well being, as well as replacing school supplies and providing counseling and other healing activities for traumatized children. Phase III recovery efforts will focus primarily on children's physical, psychosocial and educational well being (*www.globalfundforchildren.org*).

Box 1: Organizational Responses (cont.)

Global Fund for Women is committed to promoting women's human rights and addressing critical issues such as increasing girls' access to education, gaining economic independence and eliminating violence against women. Immediately following the tsunami, GFW notified grantees in the affected regions that they could reallocate their current grants to emergency response. GFW then sought guidance from its advisors, holding off on significant grantmaking to groups engaged in tsunami response until two weeks after the disaster. At the time of this writing GFW had awarded $120,000 through 19 grants to 18 women-led organizations – $31,000 to groups in India, $56,000 to groups in Indonesia, $22,000 to groups in Sri Lanka and $11,000 to groups in Thailand. GFW planned to award at least $100,000 in additional post-tsunami grants over the next year to continue their support of long-term rebuilding. GFW also maintained funding for core programs, tsunami response grants representing additional support for grantees (*www.globalfundforwomen.org*).

Global Greengrants Fund is another small public foundation that does not traditionally fund relief activities. However, it was evident that GGF could play an important role in the region to "…ease suffering, protect the rights coastal communities and ensure sustainable reconstruction." In the early days of the crisis GGF channeled $70,000 to local groups for immediate relief. At the time of this writing, GGF had made 23 grants totaling $208,250 – $18,250 to 3 grantees in India, $163,000 to 18 grantees in Indonesia and $27,000 to 2 grantees in Sri Lanka. As with other organizations, a good deal of GGF funding went to providing material goods and supporting livelihood recovery efforts in coastal communities. In addition, GGF supported organizations focused on the environmental aspects of recovery, such as mangrove management. GGF's grants all sought to enhance the capacity of communities to identify their priorities and advocate for themselves with authorities, as well as to coordinate the activities of local actors (*www.greengrants.org*).

Oxfam America is a member of the Oxfam International Federation (OIF). OIF decided to pool the funds it raised from around the globe in order to mount a coordinated response to the tsunami. While Oxfam America raised $30 million dollars, collectively the 12 Oxfam affiliates raised $278 million. This money is being invested in seven countries: Burma, India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Oxfam Great Britain, known for its logistical capacity to meet the needs of displaced people with emergency kits and water systems, has done so on a significant scale. Oxfam International Federation has supported a wide range of livelihood recovery programs; entered into housing provision on a much larger scale than ever before; and is supporting the rights of women, minorities and those in disputes over land through advocacy and legal rights programs. It has also made a noteworthy effort to be open and accountable to stakeholders, publicly critiquing its own tsunami response efforts (*www.oxfamamerica.org*).

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights is an activist-led human rights funder that provides Rapid Response Grants to enable women human rights defenders to undertake strategic interventions in situations of armed conflict, escalating violence or politically instability. As the name implies, UAF is accustomed to responding to urgent requests on short notice so, although it is not an emergency response organization in the commonly understood sense, UAF was well positioned to respond to the tsunami, particularly in the conflict-affected regions of Sri Lanka and Aceh, where it already had established networks of grantees and advisors. UAF's tsunami response was grounded in the findings of its recently published research on women's rights activism in conflict, which underscored the 'first responder' role that women activists play in any crisis situation, regardless of the usual focus of their work. In consultation with grantees and its Board of Directors, UAF created a funding strategy and provided its first tsunami-related grant within 72 hours of the disaster. UAF's $38,000 in grants – ranging in size from $3,000-$10,000 – supported a diverse array of projects from documenting human rights violations against women during the relief efforts to ensuring a gender perspective in post-tsunami reconstruction (*www.urgentactionfund.org*).

2. An Important Context: The Humanitarian Field at a Time of Self-Reflection

The tsunami struck at the end of a decade-long period of critical reflection within the humanitarian community – a reflection in large part stimulated by the tragic failures of response efforts in both Rwanda and Somalia during the mid-1990s. The challenges posed by an array of complex emergencies throughout the globe further signal the need for sector-wide evaluation and reform.[i] Humanitarian crises in recent years have clearly demonstrated the ways in which relief organizations can become implicated in conflict situations, and where a commitment to 'saving lives' can inadvertently benefit or be manipulated by armed actors.

This ongoing process of reflection within the sector has led to a number of initiatives to improve humanitarian practices, many of which are focused on developing codes of conduct and standards for best practices. Such initiatives include: the Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IFRC) and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the Sphere Project's Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), and, more recently, the establishment of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP-I).

Substantial agreement on two points has emerged from these various processes: minimum standards for service provision should promote human dignity and equal access, and the participation of affected communities in shaping humanitarian response should be a central concern. The largest international agencies (e.g. Oxfam, Care, World Vision, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, etc.) have been the most visible in the effort to establish and implement new standards for themselves and their grantees, including local organizations, host governments, the United Nations (UN) and other multilaterals.

Both Sphere (because of its foundation in the Humanitarian Charter) and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (through its International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles Programs) emphasize the central role that governments should play in response efforts, as they are the main duty-holder and protector of rights under international humanitarian law. This emphasis is particularly timely, as governments are likely to assert increasing levels of control over incoming aid resources through regulatory and coordinating measures. In reality, bilateral donors are often reluctant to fund governments directly due to high levels of corruption, poor human rights records and/or inadequate capacity and financial controls. International agencies often spend enormous amounts of time trying to work around government limitations as opposed to pressing for greater accountability.[ii]

The 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and subsequent tsunami created an opportunity for humanitarian agencies – and the funders and donors who support them – to apply lessons learned from past experiences and test the applicability of new standards. In addition, given the huge influx of both public and private donations, international NGOs (INGOs) found themselves in the unusual situation of not being hindered by resource constraints. Despite the enormous scope of the disaster, this created an environment of some optimism, where relief organizations believed that they could 'build back better' on a large scale. Their success would be measured not only by how many lives were saved in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, but also on longer-term reconstruction efforts designed to address the full range of issues that had made communities so vulnerable to begin with, such as insecure livelihoods and weak, unresponsive governments.

As the humanitarian community entered into the second year of dealing with the tsunami's aftermath, a number of documents were published that reflected on relief efforts thus far. These reports fall into three main categories, the first of which is informational, largely positive accounts by humanitarian agencies

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[i] A complex emergency is one that is either caused or complicated by armed conflict. The epicenter of the Indian Ocean earthquake of December 2004, as well as the areas hardest hit by the tsunami, were all entrenched in ongoing internal conflicts, presenting major challenges to supporting civilian populations.
[ii] The Reality of Aid: An Independent Review of Poverty Reduction and Development Assistance's website offers a wealth of information on these issues: www.realityofaid.org.

themselves, directed primarily at their donors.[i] The second category, in which reports are less numerous, consists of critical external evaluations of specific agency responses. Many of these documents can be found on websites such as ALNAP. A third and rapidly expanding category includes critical assessments of the failings of the international response originating from within the sector itself, from academia or from the NGO community at large. Two publications in this final category are ActionAid International's *Tsunami Response: A Human Rights Assessment* (January 2006) and "Post Tsunami Issues and Challenges," from the journal *Reality Check* (June 2005). Both reports focus on the failure of governments to address the needs of the hardest-hit and most vulnerable populations.

Several recurring themes emerge from the literature, regardless of the orientation or source of the publication. These are:

1) The recovery process has been much more complicated, costly and often contentious than originally anticipated, leading to long delays in meeting the housing and livelihood needs of many under-served communities and populations;
2) Contextual particularities have influenced responses in profound ways, and relief interventions have influenced local contexts in varied ways, both anticipated and unanticipated;
3) Coordination was a major problem in the early phases of the response, and was complicated by the sheer numbers of NGOs, from extremely large, well-established organizations to small 'shoestring operations' (so-called "suitcase NGOs"), many of which had little or no experience in the affected country and/or in emergency response;
4) Analysts, almost to a person, acknowledge the central role that local organizations do and should play as mechanisms for ensuring local participation. Most observed, however, that grassroots participation in the tsunami response has been insignificant, forcing local organizations and communities to compete for resources and recognition. This 'lesson' can be found in almost any review of any disaster response, yet it is one that aid organizations seem to have a great deal of trouble learning (i.e. changing their behavior based on the evidence).

Nick Stockton, executive director of the Humanitarian Accountability Project International, stated, "While humanitarian strategies go on being designed and implemented without the informed consent of those whose lives are the object of the humanitarian endeavor, the prospects for good humanitarian outcomes are deeply compromised."[i] The participating organizations resonate strongly with statements such as this, which are grounded in empirical evidence from many disaster response efforts Hurricane Mitch, the Gujarat earthquake, various emergencies in the Horn of Africa and now the Indian Ocean tsunami.

Box 2: Sri Lanka and Aceh: Armed Conflict and Post-Tsunami Dynamics

The disaster response in both Sri Lanka and Aceh, Indonesia was complicated by the fact that both areas have undergone years of armed independence struggles. The governments of both countries initially resisted a large international presence and insisted on the militarization of aid delivery, suggesting that INGOs would face similar challenges in both countries. This did not, however, turn out to be the case. The nature of each conflict, the geographic areas impacted, the characteristics of the military and government in each country and their attitude towards civil society shaped not only the disaster response, but also prospects for peace in each country.

Aceh, an Indonesian province on the island of Sumatra, has been fighting for independence under the leadership of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) since 1976. Aceh has been governed under martial law since 2003 and in 2004 was declared to be in a state of emergency by the Indonesian government. An estimated 10,000 Acehnese people have been killed by the Indonesian military (TNI) over the last 20 years. Foreign NGOs and journalists have been barred from Aceh since 2003.

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[i] These reports can be found by visiting the websites of humanitarian organizations.
[i] To read Nick Stockton's full comments, see: http://www.hapinternational.org/pdf_word/506-The accountable humanitarian.pdf.

Box 2: Sri Lanka and Aceh: Armed Conflict and Post-Tsunami Dynamics (cont.)

When the earthquake and tsunami struck, the GAM decided to lay down its arms and dedicate itself to the relief effort. As one fighter stated, "[With all the deaths] there was nothing, no one, nothing left to fight for." After initially blocking humanitarians from entering Aceh, the government accepted a massive influx of foreign aid and aid workers in Aceh, recognizing the intervention as an opportunity to negotiate an end to the draining conflict. Both parties went to the negotiating table, where GAM formally agreed to hand over its arms and the Indonesian government agreed to withdraw 20,000 soldiers from Aceh. The rebels, who had never managed to establish a strong territorial claim in any part of Aceh, gave up their struggle for independence in return for significant political autonomy and seventy percent of the revenue from Aceh's significant mineral extraction industry. A European Union-funded international team is monitoring the implementation of the agreement.

Sri Lanka's civil war, on the other hand, has been raging for almost twenty-five years, although it was somewhat in abeyance under a four-year old ceasefire agreement until recently. The Sri Lankan conflict is fueled by competing interests between the country's Buddhist Sinhalese majority and the Hindu Tamil minority. The armed Tamil separatists, known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), are seeking independence for the northern and eastern Tamil-dominated regions of Sri Lanka – areas of much more strategic importance to the Sri Lankan government than Aceh is to the Indonesian government. The conflict has been extremely violent, with death tolls estimated between 65,000-100,000. Both sides have been widely implicated in civilian deaths and disappearances. Due to the violent and unpredictable nature of the war, there is an extremely low level of trust between Tamil and Sinhalese Sri Lankans. The LTTE controls large swaths of territory – complete with border guards and tax collectors – while the Sinhalese government is divided on how to handle the conflict.

Unfortunately, the Sri Lankan authorities and the LTTE were never able to reach an accord on tsunami aid distribution, which seriously hindered the ability of INGOs to work in rebel-controlled areas, which, incidentally, were the hardest hit by the tsunami. Part of the difficulty in negotiations stemmed from the fact that the LTTE's initial tsunami response was more effective and organized than the government's response. After five months of negotiations – during which time civilians were left largely without aid – the government and LTTE did come to an agreement on the sharing of tsunami aid resources. However, this agreement was later overturned by the Supreme Court, which refused to legitimize the LTTE as a governing body. Government-LTTE relations deteriorated further with the election of a new president in November 2005 who suspended all collaboration on aid delivery and retrenched the 'unified Sri Lanka' stance. Significant splits have also occurred within the LTTE over the past few years, further complicating negotiations. Finally, tensions in Sri Lanka developed quickly between communities that had been displaced by the tsunami and groups of internally displaced peoples (IDPs) uprooted by the ongoing conflict, many of whom had already been living in camps for years. In short, Sri Lanka presented a highly complex, fragmented, and conflictual environment rife with political and logistical barriers for the humanitarian community to overcome.[i]

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[i] For more information on the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Aceh, and their effects on aid distribution, see the chapters on Sri Lanka and Indonesia in *After the Tsunami: Human Rights of Vulnerable Populations* (Fletcher, et al., eds.), the International Crisis Group's *Asia Briefing #44,* and *Between Conflict and Peace: Tsunami Aid and Reconstruction in Aceh* (Schultze).

3. Policies and Practices that Played a Beneficial Role in Tsunami Response

Going beyond a basically pragmatic approach to participation, the observed organizations have made a commitment to a rights-based, social justice approach grounded in realistic and political analyses of aid delivery. In the approach adopted by the organizations in this study, local communities were not treated as passive recipients of aid, but rather as active participants in the recovery process, who were aware of their basic human rights and who actively sought to have those rights respected. The *Tsunami Learning Project* highlights how foundations and donors can address issues of justice, equity, gender and basic human rights in their humanitarian response grantmaking. The study also highlights the vital role of small, community-based interventions in order to prove that targeted small grants can have a significant impact even within vast humanitarian response operations. Such initiatives have the potential to reach the most needy; be driven by what communities need rather than what large organizations are geared up to deliver; be more sensitive to the range of issues that emerge in the aftermath of disasters; and build on existing social capital to sustain relief and recovery efforts over the long term. In addition, the strong interest of the observed organizations in equality, rights and sustainability serves to promote a social justice agenda that can have knock-on effects in terms of strengthening civil society and improving government/civil society relations.

3.1 Tapping into existing relationships as an invaluable response strategy

As the world began to grasp the scope of the tsunami disaster, the observed organizations were galvanized into action by their local grantees, advisors and donors. This was true of AJWS and Oxfam, which already had a history of responding to natural disasters, as well as GGF, GFC, and UAF, which had not historically funded disaster relief but which were urged to do so by their advisors, grantees and donors. Only GFW decided to hold off on an immediate response so that it could step in later to 'fill gaps', a strategy based on the advice of its field advisors.

A number of evaluations have noted that, as large scale response mobilized, aid workers descended on the most accessible communities, with different delegations and organizations visiting the same places many times over. In contrast, in large part because of their existing on-the-ground relationships, the observed organizations often had the ability to reach more remote or restricted areas, well off the beaten track of the average international aid worker. This deeper access was particularly important in Aceh and Sri Lanka, where the capacities of responders were limited by prolonged armed conflict. Even given the massive NGO presence in the weeks and months following the tsunami (estimates of foreign NGO presence in Banda Aceh alone ranges from 2-3,000) a lack of local knowledge hindered effective and equitable response to all those impacted by the disaster. Again, thanks to their local connections, the observed organizations were able to more effectively respond in these difficult environments.

In most areas – with the notable exception of Aceh – the damage, while catastrophic, was limited to one or two kilometer-wide stretches of coastline. This meant that neighboring communities retained functioning markets, transportation and government offices. Many of the observed organizations' early grants consisted of providing funds for buying supplies inland and transporting them to affected communities, and their on-the-ground existing relationships assisted them in this line of grantmaking. The strong relationships that the Global Fund for Children had with local organizations meant that, in the areas where they made grants, the needs and visibility of children would not be forgotten.

3.2 Focusing on marginalized groups and strengthening their capacities

While international organizations were genuinely committed to reaching all survivors of the disaster, the urgency of the situation created a reasonable tendency for relief missions to go directly to 'official' community leaders. The observed organizations note that while it is important to work through official structures and community level organizations (such as fishing cooperatives), they do not necessarily represent the interests of all population groups in a community or region. The needs and priorities of marginalized groups such as *dalits,* or 'untouchables', in India, sex workers in Thailand or widows in Sri

Lanka are not typically represented by local power structures. The observed organizations' approach relied on local grantees that had established relationships with marginalized communities, ensuring that some direct aid reached them in the short term and that longer-term recovery efforts took into account their needs.

While many of the observed organizations' grantees supported restoration of the fishing industry, they were also among the first to raise the concern that fishing was not the only livelihood that had been undercut by the tsunami. Tailors, craftspeople, barbers, carpenters, workers in local industries such as ice and cement factories as well as the full range of workers who service the tourist industry, including sex workers, all lost their incomes, but humanitarian agencies and the media tended to overemphasize fishing. Oxfam was quick to implement a wide range of cash-for-work schemes aimed at empowering survivors, rather than making them long-term recipients of handouts.[i] All of the observed organizations funded a range of income-generating activities, including alternative livelihoods.

In Thailand, AJWS supported EMPOWER Mae Sai in Phuket, which works with sex workers. They reported that in resort sites, sex workers suffered because the number of tourist clients to the area plummeted. According to EMPOWER, "There were some suicides after the tsunami because long-term clients didn't come. Also, many of these women are repressing trauma – there is a lack of hope."[ii] Because EMPOWER already had established relationships with the sex workers' community, it was in a good position to assist this hard-to-reach population. EMPOWER's Live Now Project, which is operating in six provinces, provides relief to tsunami-affected workers in the entertainment and tourism industries. Their mobile units provide income generation workshops, legal advice and a community newsletter.

From the perspectives of equity and need, local grantees' access to communities further inland was important, because at the time of the tsunami these communities tended to already be poorer than coastal areas, where the fishing and tourist industries were based. In fact, beachfront villages received a disproportionate influx of aid. [iii]

After delays of approximately one week, supplies from the outside flooded into affected regions despite the fact that there often was no coordinated plan for distribution. Local grantees were often highly resourceful in transporting goods beyond the most accessible communities. As GGF notes in a personal communication, "There was an overflow of goods, blankets, and clothes that were rotting and unable to reach [remote] destinations. GGF-funded volunteers supplied labor to do the distribution and assisted recipient communities in planning their options."

Local grantee organizations, which often had better access to information about relief distribution than individuals, helped communities identify sources of assistance and also helped them cope with conflicting information and rumors that complicated recovery. People whose boats could be repaired were immediately put at a disadvantage compared with those who had lost their boats entirely because donors, in large part, focused on providing new boats rather than boat repair. Dasra, an Indian intermediary organization that had been working with both AJWS and GFC grantees on capacity building prior to the tsunami, encouraged boat repairs over replacement whenever possible in local fishing communities.[iv]

Building the capacity of local organizations was a part of many of the observed organizations' grantmaking. AJWS, for example, funded Dasra to play an important role in strategic planning with NGO grantees, sharing best practices, documenting tsunami activities and disseminating accurate information

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[i] Cash-for-work schemes are controversial. They risk undercutting traditions of mutual self-help if, for example, people are paid for things they would traditionally have done on the basis of reciprocity, such as helping neighbors repair or rebuild their homes.

[ii] Taken from an AJWS trip report (internal document), August 2005.

[iii] In emergencies, there is often an 'over-response' in favor of what is relatively easy, concrete and visible – such as boats. Some communities remained underserved, while others had unused boats stacked on top of each other over a year after the tsunami. Another impact of the surplus of boats was increased competition among fishermen, as many who used to work on a relative or neighbor's boat now had their own.

[iv] Dasra builds sustainable nonprofit organizations in India by providing technical assistance to improve organizational capacity. It also offers managerial support to enable organizations to create lasting social change.

about government schemes, following the tsunami. This involved visiting multiple grantees for several days each to study their operations as well as conducting joint site visits with local government officials in affected villages. For each grantee, Dasra

> …documented various aspects of the NGO's programs, including community selection, activities undertaken, lists of relief efforts by other NGOs in the same village, the unique approaches used to tackle rehabilitation issues, the impact of their rehabilitation programs, key lessons and future plans.[1]

While small NGOs do not usually have the logistical capacity or the reach of larger organizations, they always bring other assets to the table, such as an understanding of the local context and experience working directly with local marginalized communities. Thus, for grantmakers interested in reaching the most marginalized groups, working with small, local NGOs and providing capacity-building support is absolutely critical.

3.3 Building solidarity across social divides

The observed organizations' efforts in many cases enabled groups to build solidarity with allies, including some otherwise unlikely ones, as they worked together towards the common goal of recovery. For example, Equal Ground, a Sri Lankan NGO that advocates for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people, provided counseling and economic re-development for women and children post-tsunami, with the support of both Global Fund for Women and American Jewish World Service. Equal Ground believes that its involvement in the relief effort improved its standing within an otherwise homophobic community and helped to reinforce its belief that a future is possible "…where people from different backgrounds, ethnicities, sexes, religions, sexual orientations and gender identities work together to rebuild the nation."

Another Sri Lankan NGO, the Association for War Affected Women (AWAW) was able to make unexpected progress in their ongoing peacebuilding efforts post-tsunami with the support of Urgent Action Fund and Global Fund for Women. AWAW is comprised primarily of mothers of both Singhalese and Tamil soldiers who have been either killed or disappeared. Their mission is to promote reconciliation and peaceful co-existence between the Tamil and Sinhalese populations. AWAW's tsunami response was focused on a small fishing village called Kokkilai, which it planned to rebuild as "…a model for future coexistence between Tamils and Sinhalese [where] women play a vital role in decision making on reconstruction efforts, giving priority to women's needs in the entire process."[2]

3.4 Funding women-led initiatives and promoting gender equality

Disasters have gendered impacts, meaning that they affect men and women differently. At the most basic level, it is estimated that three times as many women died in the tsunami as men. Despite years of experience and stated commitments to ensuring that women's needs would be met during response operations, in the aftermath of the tsunami many aid distribution centers refused to recognize women-headed households. Most emergency kits provided by INGOs failed to supply such basic provisions as female sanitary supplies. Temporary housing – usually in the form of internally displaced persons camps – is notorious for its lack of adequate cooking facilities or privacy. Initially, the vast majority of camps set up for tsunami survivors did not have separate latrine and shower facilities for women, a particularly troubling issue within the sex-segregated Muslim context of Indonesia and even more pronounced in Aceh, where *Shari'a* (religious law) is in effect. Violence against women – including domestic violence, violence related to relief distribution and armed violence related to the ongoing internal conflicts in Sri Lanka and Aceh – was of acute concern to women in these camps. In general, women were excluded from camp governance structures unless they organized and demanded representation. Even then,

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[1] From an unpublished report by Dasra.
[2] Quoted from home page of *www.awawsl.org* in March 2006.

women activists often had to focus on addressing basic survival issues, as opposed to equal treatment and safety. Finally, lasting psychological and emotional trauma due to the loss of loved ones and the disintegration of social support networks continues to hinder the recovery process for many women.[ε]

These failures to implement a gender-sensitive response to the tsunami are especially tragic and inexcusable given the decades that women's organizations have spent helping to sensitize mainstream NGOs to gender issues – and given that the plethora of experienced women's organizations that could have effectively navigated these issues were largely under-resourced and were not consulted by many of the larger responders. As UAF argues, women's rights organizations are often particularly well equipped to develop 'in context' emergency responses, which are more effective not only in serving the most vulnerable populations, but do so in ways that promote rather than thwart women's rights. Because UAF's grantees were already operating in areas of outright or escalating violence prior to the tsunami, they were in a state of 'chronic emergency'. UAF was able to successfully apply many of the lessons they had learned from grantees about operating in conflict zones to their tsunami response. UAF has published the recommendations of women activists for supporting women's rights in conflict/disaster response in two reports: *Rising Up in Response: Women's Rights Activism in Conflict* and *Voices of Solidarity: International Women Activists Share Their Perspective on the Katrina Disaster.*[ὴ]

All of the observed organizations prioritized women in their responses, in large part using a sound gender analysis. In other words, interventions were not limited to meeting women's physical needs, but also attempted to address power disparities within the household, at the community level and in engaging with the government. Support for women has included: publishing research and analyses of the impact of the tsunami on women; a wide range of direct support for education, housing and livelihoods; organizing women in IDP camps and communities to advocate for more effective response; and coalition building. It should be acknowledged, however, that consistent application of a gender-sensitive strategy in an organization as large and diverse as Oxfam International Federation remains a work in progress with some programs, such as those in Sri Lanka, placing more emphasis on gender equality than others.

Moving beyond the tsunami experience, AJWS, Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood (GROOTS International) and the Huairou Commission are collaborating to apply lessons from previous disaster experiences to decisively shift disaster response from an emergency to a development perspective, creating new protocols for grassroots communities and local women's groups to take the lead in post-disaster planning, implementation and monitoring. They are establishing a fund and global association of partners who are committed to supporting women-led, accountable, development-oriented recovery efforts.

GFW was well positioned from the outset to fund organizations that could intercede on behalf of women, who were made particularly vulnerable by the militarization of aid distribution in Sri Lanka and Aceh. Many affected women were also experiencing the multiple oppressions of gender discrimination and minority status, such as being Burmese refugees in Thailand.

Box 3: Grantmaking to promote the rights of women

In the first weeks following the disaster, Oxfam published a briefing paper on gender aspects of the emerging responses, calling on international funders and governments to be sensitive to women's needs – particularly in transitional settlements and militarized zones. Oxfam's strongest gender-sensitive work may be in Sri Lanka where nearly half of their 35 grantees have a stated gender mandate.
All the observed organizations working in Aceh are funding women's rights and advocacy organizations such as Flower Aceh (AJWS and GFW grantee), which focuses on women's empowerment in conflict

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[ε] For a detailed discussion of this issue see the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development's report *Why Women Are More vulnerable During Disasters: Violations of Women's Human Rights in the Tsunami Aftermath.* For a shorter treatment, see Lin Chew and Kavita Ramdas' *Caught in the Storm: The Impact of Natural Disasters on Women.*
[ὴ] These reports are available in multiple languages by contacting Urgent Action Fund: *www.urgentactionfund.org.*

situations. Flower Aceh led a local effort to form a coalition of women's NGOs to monitor and coordinate tsunami relief efforts in the region and to create a collaborative and mutually supportive network of local women's NGOs.

GFW has been supporting Yayasan Keulama, which formed immediately after the tsunami to ensure that emergency aid reached women and children in Aceh. As the recovery effort unfolds in the new political context, Yayasan Keulama will use GFW funds to challenge what it describes as the unquestioned and increasingly strict application of Islamic, or *Shari'a,* law. Specifically, the group will host public discussions on various interpretations of *Shari'a* law and the repercussions of its application, educational workshops on women's rights within Islamic law and a public campaign on governmental reform.

GFC has supported the Association for Community Development Services in India to provide childcare for women who are participating in livelihood reconstruction programs. Along those same lines, Oxfam has insisted that women and men be paid equally and in cash in its work programs.

GFW has supported the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, which has closely monitored the gender impacts of the tsunami and has facilitated exchanges between women's groups throughout the region. AJWS supported an Indian group that is facilitating similar intra-regional exchanges, connecting women who survived major earthquakes in Gujarat and Maharashtra to women in Tamil Nadu trying to recover from the tsunami. This support extended to setting up five community resource centers and providing funding for microcredit programs for women in Tamil Nadu.

AJWS, GFW and Oxfam have all supported grantees working with women in the sex trade and are attempting to reach Burmese migrant workers in Thailand whose vulnerability was increased post-tsunami by the loss of both income and identification documents.

In Sri Lanka, Viluthu reported that it established study circles and women's groups in IDP camps to reduce women's sense of isolation. Gradually the groups will take on a broader array of activities such as securing assistance to start income generation projects and pressuring camp management to address women's concerns.

AJWS funded a Bombay-based organization, Dreamcatcher Foundation, to share its Waves of Life Program with three grantees in Tamil Nadu. The efforts began with a focus on children, but in response to requests from village women, expanded to include them as well.

Some grantees took on a decidedly spiritual approach, such as the Sri Lankan group Siyath Foundation (AJWS and GFW grantee). In its quarterly report, Siyath states:

From the day that the unexpected tidal waves broke savagely in our costal villages, Siyath has maintained a close rapport with the community…listening patiently to the experience and need of the people…We have made it a point to make them understand it is only…the firm holding of hands which would result in the unbreakable strength to fight the ocean or any other calamity.

In addition to providing material support and legal services, Siyath seeks to foster a broad sense of community. The group organized a celebratory march on International Women's Day (March 8th) and also joined members of tsunami-affected communities in the chanting of Buddhists *sutras* (sacred texts) in a night of remembrance.

In Indonesia, Komnas Perempuan, the National Commission on Violence Against Women, (AJWS grantee) launched a Healing House for women's human rights activists suffering from tsunami- related trauma. Working with two local women's groups in Takengoon (a mountainous region of Central Aceh), the Healing House seeks to holistically address psychological traumas and serve as a training center forgrassroots groups and activists in order to sustain the critical work of women human rights activists as they rebuild their communities.

3.5 Promoting participation and protecting rights

It is a truism in the field of humanitarian response (and development in general) that community participation is essential for mounting and sustaining successful efforts. Commitments to participation are codified in various humanitarian response standards (such as those of Sphere and IFRCRC). Yet community participation and genuine accountability to survivors often falls by the wayside, not only during the urgent and chaotic early days of a response, but even well into the rehabilitation phase. Examples of such negligence are cited in an April 2005 study commissioned by the <u>International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)</u>, which contained pointed criticism by local NGOs in Banda Aceh who felt they had been sidelined in coordination meetings, both because they had difficulty gaining access and then found that the meetings were conducted exclusively in English.[ii] There are also many accounts of temporary housing being 'thrown up' without any consultation with affected peoples about design, location, needs (such as sanitation, space to conduct small enterprise, school and community buildings, etc.).[iii] Similarly, while many fisher folk have benefited from boat repair and the provision of new boats, there are many cases where boats provided were not based on traditional designs and therefore were not considered seaworthy.[iv] More important than simply avoiding costly errors is the recognition that participation is not only a right, but also a prerequisite for establishing a sense of agency among survivors, thereby fortifying the resiliency of disaster-affected communities.

Even where participatory mechanisms are present, INGOs and governments often view local participation as a mechanism to ensure 'buy-in' and improve the efficacy of an intervention rather than as a form of community empowerment. In this scenario, participation can actually become a burden on communities, which are sometimes treated as cheap labor. By contrast, the observed organizations view participation as a right and a *sine qua non* for ensuring responsive institutions. This perspective has proved to be particularly crucial within the context of conflict situations and for marginalized communities affected by the tsunami.

Just how crucial became clear in <u>ActionAid</u>'s 2006 report, *Tsunami Response: A Human Rights Assessment.* Amidst a litany of rights violations and flawed responses by governments in affected countries, the report identifies numerous instances where local NGOs intervened to improve the response. Referring to 'land grab' efforts in Thailand, the report notes, "Only with the help of local NGOs were they [gypsy fisher folk] able to reoccupy their land after three months of displacement (18)." Later in the report ActionAid writes:

> Many of the problems associated with housing could be avoided if the practice adopted by the government and an NGO in Nellore District…was replicated. After consulting residents on design and quality, and seeking their help in monitoring building work, the NGO is constructing housing on land provided by the government (31).

3.6 Giving local people a voice in coordinating temporary shelter

In a briefing note, Oxfam publicly critiqued its own early response to housing needs, both transitional and permanent. It noted that, after having constructed a number of transitional units to the specifications of the Indian government

> Oxfam found that the people living in them did not think they were dignified, even though they met the size standards specified by Sphere. The answer to the problem was advocacy: NGOs came together and helped advise the government on design changes.[v]

Oxfam Australia documented a number of accountability and participatory mechanisms that grantees helped to establish in transition camps in Aceh and Sri Lanka, including complaint boxes, camp committees and women's watch committees. In designing these mechanisms, grantees worked from the

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[ii] See Bill Canny's "A Review of NGO Coordination in Aceh Post-Earthquake/Tsunami," commissioned by ICVA.
[iii] For additional examples, see housing reports from Oxfam International Federation, CARE and World Vision.
[iv] This finding was cited from John Cosgrave's *Monitoring Mission Report: Use of DEC Asian Earthquake and Tsunami appeal Funds in Indonesia,* commissioned by the Disaster Emergency Committee.
[v] From an Oxfam International *Briefing Note,* December 2005.

premise that bottom-up accountability "…requires three things: knowledge of entitlements, availability of credible grievance and redress mechanisms and empowerment to access them."[i]

Several of UAF's grantees expressed concern about the treatment of women in camps for internally displaced people (IDP camps) – especially those controlled by the military or with a strong military presence. While the groups did document the situation, needs and complaints of women, they did not limit their response to influencing the authorities. Rather, they sought to incorporate women in camp decision-making bodies so that they could advocate for themselves. AJWS grantee Viluthu Centre for Human Resource Development played a similar role in IDP camps in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. They wrote:

> In Trincomalee, in each camp 4-5 groups with 7 members [each] have been formed. Now there are 17 active women's groups in welfare camps of Trincomalee…Many [women] have now come forward to get assistance for self-employed income generating projects, either as a group or individually. They are now geared to pressurize the camp management to heed their problems and take measures to solve them. When any form of violence takes place the women show their protest, whether inside their camps or outside.

3.7 Paying close attention to political situations on the ground

Indonesia provides a good illustration of the human rights issues at play. Many Acehnese NGOs hoped that the presence of international funders and aid agencies in their military-controlled province would help to expand the political space in which they could operate. One ICVA report noted:

> [Local NGOs'] greatest concern is that the international NGOs will, in order to stay present and active, not exercise strategies for protection in their responses to the tsunami disaster. They fear they will line up behind a distrusted government and military and will not sufficiently ensure that communities have access to adequate information and participate in the decision-making process regarding resettlement options and plans. They expressed concern that the rights of the tsunami-affected population would not be protected under relevant international law, particularly the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and that the international NGOs would break their vows not to be 'silent witnesses' to human rights violations. [ii]

This fear was not unfounded, and another analyst reported that there was indeed a great deal of mutual suspicion between NGOs and the military:

> INGO-military relations during relief efforts in Aceh bordered on outright hostility. The TNI [Indonesian army] was suspicious of the INGOs from the outset, seeing them as spies and supporters of Acehnese independence….Most INGOs, in turn, saw the TNI as the main cause of conflict and human rights abuses in Indonesia. They did not approve of the TNI's involvement in relief efforts but were even more concerned that some troops were continuing with counter-insurgency operations [under the guise of tsunami relief efforts]….[iii]

This created a situation where Acehnese NGOs were initially excluded completely from the response. One journalist observed that, during January 2005,

> Attending a UN coordination meeting in Banda Aceh is like stepping into a parallel universe: it's as if no Acehnese remain alive to do anything. The big agencies divide tasks among themselves, with little apparent attempt to coordinate with local groups…In the long run, the internationals will leave. It would be a great irony if one of their legacies was a depopulated civil society.[iv]

According to numerous independent reports, most – though not all – of the international players appeared to be totally oblivious to the precarious position of local NGOs in Aceh and the ways in which INGO

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[i] From Roche, et al., 2005.
[ii] From Cany, 2005, p.7.
[iii] From Schulze's *Between Conflict and Peace: Tsunami Aid and Reconstruction in Aceh*, 2005, p.7.
[iv] Ibid, quoting Aspinall, "Paranoia and Politics in a Disaster Zone," *Sydney Morning Herald,* 3 February, 2005, p. 12.

behaviors (such as deferring to the government, bypassing local NGOs, 'poaching' local staff and failing to incorporate local NGOs into coordination meetings) not only threatened individual organizations, but the Acehnese civil society movement as a whole. The observed organizations on the other hand were sensitive to the full range of issues connected to supporting Acehnese civil society and gave priority to local NGOs that had a rights-based and gender-sensitive approach. The observed organizations supported a range of grantees in Aceh, many of which were founded by human and women rights activists with a history of persecution by the Indonesian military. As Kate Kroeger of AJWS observed:

> When the tsunami struck, [Acehnese] NGOs naturally turned themselves to the task of rebuilding their communities. Many of them renamed themselves or their 'humanitarian wing' in order to be able to act more collaboratively with the government's reconstruction department, the BRR [Aceh and Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency] or simply to avoid persecution and be allowed to operate openly. Funders' support enabled this transition and also allowed these NGOs to conduct relief operations with a human rights perspective. [Grantees] included a radio station, an organization with a history working on land disputes even prior to the land issues raised by the tsunami, several legal organizations that monitored violence and the equity of aid distribution, coordinating coalitions as well as organizations providing direct services (see Box 4). It is difficult to say (without more research) how important this kind of support was for achieving the peace agreement between GAM and the government, however certainly the dynamic between the government and NGOs changed in the course of implementing the emergency response, despite the fears of local NGOs and the missteps of members of the international community.

Box 4: Grantmaking in Aceh

GGF funded The Puter Foundation, which helps mediate conflicts over land issues and organizes communities to advocate with the Indonesian authorities for adequate assistance.

Oxfam funded Solidaritas Gerakan Anti Korupsi, which translates into the Anti-Corruption Solidarity Union and that advocates for the rights of internally displaced people in Banda Aceh.

Oxfam made a grant to <u>Free Voice</u>, which supports the reconstruction and capacity building of local radio stations in Aceh.

Oxfam made a grant to Kati Hata, an information clearing house on recovery efforts for civil society organizations.

AJWS funded the Aceh Judicial Monitoring Institute, which monitors the distribution of emergency relief and rehabilitation assistance and advocates for people's rights to such assistance.

AJWS funded Kontras, the Commission for Disappearances and Victims of Violence, a human rights NGO that, among its many other activities, is investigating allegations of violence against women during the process of aid distribution.

GWF provided support to the Aceh Women's Trust Fund, which brings together six Acehnese women's organizations to promote women's human rights and facilitate their participation in the rebuilding of Aceh's community by "ensuring women's access and control of resources to support initiatives and participation of women in all sectors of life." It works collectively to balance the disparities between communities with ample resources and groups in remote areas that face a scarcity of resources for post-tsunami rehabilitation.

Box 5: Three Myths About the Indian Ocean Tsunami

Myth 1: The tsunami was a great equalizer.
While the tsunami was even handed in its destruction, disadvantaged populations were more physically vulnerable due the location and quality of their housing, and they were potentially less resilient due to poor health, limited education, fewer assets and less extensive and diverse social networks. Women's particular disadvantages are well documented at all stages of disaster: onset, immediate aftermath and recovery. Conversely, better-off and better-connected individuals often manage to access a disproportionately large share of recovery resources, while also being able to tap into savings, insurance and other assets.

Myth 2: Given the scope of the destruction, governments, the military and large INGOs were best suited to respond.
Both governments and large INGOs had key roles to play in responding to the tsunami disaster. Indeed, a rights-based approach would ensure that governments meet their obligation to protect citizens. Sadly, government performance in the tsunami response was uneven at best – characterized by lack of capacity, lack of responsiveness to poor communities, corruption in some cases, concerns about outside interference, etc. INGOs were able to mobilize significant resources, but were also influenced by a number of drivers such as the need to maintain good standing with host governments, donor conditionalities, public expectations, a competitive fundraising market and complicated relations with the media. These factors sometimes led to supply-driven responses, rather than calibrating the response to the particular needs of each community. In addition, the presence of large foreign agencies tended to distort the local housing and labor markets; drive up prices; and 'skim off' the most skilled employees from local organizations – meaning that in some cases INGOs inadvertently undermined the communities they ostensibly sought to support.

Myth 3: 'Recovery' consists largely of logistical challenges involved in providing housing and securing funds to jump start livelihood recovery.
Emergency response is – in essence – a series of resource allocation decisions made by people who control resources on behalf of disaster victims. Decisions around housing all have significant political content, such as: who gets housing and to what standards? Is it temporary or permanent? Where is it located? Who gets construction contracts? Such questions – particularly around disputed land rights – have significantly slowed housing construction in tsunami recovery efforts. Other questions such as: Which livelihoods are supported in which communities? Who get employment opportunities and under what conditions? Is funding in the form of grants or loans (and at what rates of interest)? all have implications for shaping local economies and power dynamics within those economies. The employment of a simplistic view of recovery needs (e.g. fishing boats) resulted in other livelihoods not receiving recovery funding, women's employment being largely neglected (as most people who fish for a living are men), inland communities being neglected and heightened competition for labor and fish stock due to the surplus of boats. Finally, while a focus on housing and livelihoods was and is essential to the recovery effort, there are also profound psychosocial dimensions to recovery, which have broad and sustained impacts that must be addressed.

4. Impact: Beyond the Basic Measurables

While the observed organizations can point to many examples of material steps towards reconstruction – boats purchased and repaired, children back in school with new supplies and uniforms, livelihoods restored or new livelihoods established – the less tangible aspects of recovery are equally, if not more, important. These include:

- communities organizing to plan for their own recovery and build their capacity to negotiate with international NGOs and government agencies;
- internally displaced persons, particularly women, organizing within camps or temporary housing projects to demand improvements and safe living conditions;
- grantees' increased ability to work with and leverage resources from other NGO and government sources;
- women developing alternative livelihood and life options so that they can avoid forced marriages, forced prostitution, domestic violence and other forms of exploitation;
- the strengthening of existing organizations or fostering of new coalitions between and among grantees;
- Long-term and new grantees approaching relief and recovery from a social justice, rights-based and/or environmental perspective, enhancing their own capacities to be more effective development actors in tsunami-affected and other communities.

The observed organizations saw the achievements of their grantees as important, but sometimes felt they were dwarfed by the ongoing challenges that communities still face in the recovery process. They also acknowledged that much of their data is anecdotal and that their grantees have experienced their share of missteps and setbacks. Overall, what they have observed has led the observed organizations to strengthen their commitment to a social justice and rights-based approach to disaster response – which, in some fundamental ways, is simply an extension of their ongoing development and human rights work.

5. Conclusions of the *Tsunami Learning Project*

The *Tsunami Learning Project* set out to explore the role of small grants in disaster response and to describe what a social justice or rights-based approach in disaster-response grantmaking might look like.

Based on the experience of the six organizations that were observed in the study, Grantmakers Without Borders concludes that, indeed, small grants can play a VERY important role within the broad context of disaster response. Among the observed organizations, only Oxfam made large grants. Urgent Action Fund, Global Greengrants Fund and the other observed grantmakers focused on small grants, ranging in size from a few thousand dollars to roughly $20,000. These small financial interventions—small perhaps in our Western minds but not to the grassroots groups receiving them—resulted in many positive outcomes that are likely still reverberating today.

The *Tsunami Learning Project* also surfaced some of the elements one might include in a definition of social justice or rights-based approach to disaster response. These include:

- focusing on support to grassroots, locally managed community groups;
- reaching out to support the most marginalized and underserved communities;
- paying special and close attention to the unique needs of women and girls in disaster contexts;
- helping to build the capacities of local organizations to respond to the current crisis and better prepare for future disasters;
- protecting and promoting people's rights as they struggle to recover and rebuild;
- paying mind to the complex range of impacts a disaster has, going beyond people's material needs to support their emotional, psychological, social and cultural well-being;
- promoting the participation of local community members at all stages of disaster response and recovery and giving them voice to shape the future being constructed all around them;

- striving to ensure that aid brings about greater equity within local communities than had existed prior to the disaster.

The *Tsunami Learning Project* underscores how a focus on these important goals can lead to appropriate, sustainable outcomes, even in adverse contexts. Local organizations provided with timely funding, even in small amounts, played an essential role in meeting the immediate needs of survivors and helping to get local communities on a track towards recovery, all the while addressing fundamental issues as dignity, rights and agency.

6. Recommendations for grantmakers

The above conclusions offer a range of best practice suggestions for grantmakers responding to disaster, either for application when making cross-border grants to local organizations or as a lens for selecting US-based international organizations responding to a disaster.

The *Tsunami Learning Project* surfaced some additional ideas for funders to take into consideration when funding disaster response.

❖ In the aftermath of the tsunami, many brand new organizations sprouted up to respond, while many preexisting organizations also stepped into the arena, though they had little or no prior experience in the region, and little or no prior disaster response experience. However well meaning their efforts, newcomers often lack the experience, on-the-ground contacts and other necessities to respond effectively in complex disaster situations. To be most strategic, grantmakers would do well to seek out 1) organizations that have had broad and extensive experience with many different types of disasters and 2) organizations with deeply rooted long-term development experience in the affected region. Certain international NGOs best exemplify the first type, while many locally based NGOs exemplify the second. Grantmakers Without Borders and the International Programs team at the Council on Foundations are two organizations able to help funders navigate this landscape and search for potential grantees.

❖ In the weeks after the tsunami, many public foundations and other non-profits that do international work were inundated with calls from their donors, asking them, sometimes urgently, if they planned to respond. These organizations' impulses to raise funds sometimes outweighed their good judgment on their capacity to use the funds wisely. International organizations, including public foundations, need to resist the temptation of accepting funding that is beyond their experiential or logistical capacity to spend well, and they should be willing to make well-researched recommendations to their donors for alternative places to fund. Foundations need to be cognizant of this dynamic as well and avoid putting pressure of any kind on grantees unable to manage disaster response funding.

❖ Grantmakers should be aware that people in the affected areas are often already living with the effects of poverty and conflict. Those not directly affected by the disaster are also in desperate need of aid. Humanitarian response efforts must take into account the wider socioeconomic context in which the response takes place and ensure that communities living alongside the disaster-affected areas are also receiving support.

❖ When funders have existing grantees in a disaster-affected region, they should be flexible in allowing those grantees to reallocate funds for emergencies. At the same time, they should help grantees focus on their long-term viability and mission by replenishing funds for core expenses and programs and offering capacity-building support.

❖ Funders wishing to make cross-border grants for a disaster in a region they are unfamiliar with should seek out local advisors to help. Grantmakers Without Borders is one organization that can help in this regard.

❖ Coordination with other grantmakers can be quite beneficial, helping donors coordinate funding opportunities and better ensuring an equitable spread of resources among affected communities.

❖ Genuine participation at all stages of a response – from needs assessment, to planning, through implementation and evaluation – gives survivors a sense of agency that is necessary for effective and sustainable recovery to occur. The excuse that there isn't time to foster participation, which is often used long after the critical first week, is negated by the reality that often the only thing survivors have in abundance is time. Funders should look carefully at the ways in which potential grantees are building genuine participation.

❖ It is *very* possible to implement an appropriate gender-sensitive response to disasters. Funders should work extra diligently in seeking grantees who can do so, seeking in particular to support capable women's organizations in the affected area.

❖ To address the vulnerability and limited resilience of poor communities, funders should consider prioritizing investment in disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

The *Tsunami Learning Project* uncovered a number of other recommendations of greatest relevance to the humanitarian response community as a whole. These are contained in the Appendix of this report.

7. Challenges moving forward

There are a number of challenges that participating organizations and their grantees have identified. These include:

❖ The continued lack of clarity on and/or disputes over access to coastal land. Some grantees are placing a greater emphasis on legal aid and land rights advocacy towards government officials in response to this issue;

❖ The slow pace of economic revitalization and the disparities in level of investment (i.e. tourist areas v. remote fishing communities, government-controlled v. rebel-controlled areas, inland v. beachfront, etc.);

❖ The reality that people may be in transitional housing for two or more years. Oxfam recommends that INGOs and governments be much more realistic in their projections, more transparent with families waiting for homes and commit to producing quality housing that merits the wait;

❖ Dealing with the fact that communities displaced by the tsunami have received significantly more international attention and assistance than IDPs who lost their homes as a result of the protracted conflicts, many of whom have been languishing in camps for years in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Somalia. In general, the relatively small-scale and rights-based approaches with which the observed organizations were operating enabled them to avoid exacerbating these tensions. The one exception in terms of scale is Oxfam, which is mindful of these tensions and argues that its commitment to supporting a wide range of organizations and building social capital has spillover effects that help to ameliorate these tensions to some degree. Oxfam has also adjusted its funding strategies to address this disparity more directly when necessary;

❖ The need for funders to reinforce strategies that empower communities and help civil society organizations work with their governments to hold them accountable for meeting people's long-term needs. There have been positive trends in this direction as both INGOs and governments (notably Indonesia and Thailand) publicly reflect on the adequacy of their emergency responses;[*]

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[*] See the reports from the Thai and Indonesian governments on 'Best Practices Workshops' conducted with the United Nations in 2005.

- ❖ The reality of gender disparities pre- and post-disaster, and the difficulties that female-headed households face in securing land, housing, livelihoods, health, educational and psychosocial services. Women's security and incidents of abuse and exploitation are, at best, being addressed in pockets or in a piecemeal fashion;

- ❖ Coordination of emergency response efforts, although somewhat improved, remains a major challenge. A better analysis and understanding of the complementary roles that major actors (local community groups, the various levels of government, INGOs and the private sector) can play is essential throughout all stages of the recovery including immediate response, relief, reconstruction, and longer-term development and preparedness work;

- ❖ The need for donors to ensure equitable and holistic coverage by better distributing their support across multiple issues (i.e. gender, counseling, education, etc.) and geographic regions.

8. Conclusion

Readers familiar with the development of the humanitarian sector over the past decade may read this paper and think, "There is nothing new here." In many respects, this is true. The lessons and recommendations found in this report, while sound, are for the most part not new (and often border on the commonsensical). Despite notable improvements in the humanitarian sector in terms of establishing and complying with higher standards of performance and accountability, the fact that the same critiques and recommendations appear again and again is evidence of a serious learning deficit among aid distributors as 'learned lessons' are repeatedly not put into practice. As one ICVA evaluation on temporary housing construction states

> It is ironical that both CARE and World Vision, which have huge experience in post-disaster housing all over the world, failed to take into account the umpteen empirical evidences which show that permanent housing usually takes about or upwards of 2-3 years, during which time the displaced need to be housed in transitional accommodations.[a]

There are various countervailing forces that pose challenges in changing the behaviors of aid organizations – competition amongst INGOs for donor dollars and expert staff; the exigencies for immediate action v. the time needed for community-based responses; conflicting philosophies/approaches/values amongst key actors such as governments, NGOs, private sector, social justice movements, etc.; a media that alternately extols and excoriates aid agencies, and so on. Under the best of circumstances, changing the behaviors of huge organizations is difficult, which is why it often takes spectacular failures such as Rwanda and Somalia to instigate reform. The international response to the tsunami was comparatively good, especially given the unexpected advances in Aceh's peacebuilding process. It also needs to be emphasized that aid organizations were often working in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, made even more challenging by government/military policies and behaviors.[b]

That said, organizations involved in the tsunami response are well aware of the need for much more pronounced improvement. The challenge is not a lack of recommendations, but overcoming learning blockages. The observed organizations suspect that many stakeholders know *what* they should do, but not *how* to go about it. Through this exercise, Grantmakers Without Borders hopes to demonstrate that change is possible and in some cases it is a matter of 'just doing it'. At the same time, organizations cannot do 'it' (i.e. develop local contacts, identify like-minded organizations doing difficult, transformative work, build trust with communities, create a sense of agency in marginalized groups, etc.) in the midst of an emergency response effort. The funding community has a very important role to play in helping the

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[a] The intent here is not to single out Care or World Vision, but to illustrate the nature of the problem and they should be commended for making this critical evaluation public.
[b] For a detailed analysis of the challenges, see *After the Tsunami: Human Rights of Vulnerable Populations* by Laurel Fletcher, et al (eds.).

entire sector to overcome its learning blockages. This role might be summarized as providing funding for *demonstrating or modeling* best practices, *documenting* both positive and problematic experiences and *disseminating* (through publications, workshops, exchanges, etc.) information with a spirit of transparency and collaboration.

APPENDIX 1: Additional Recommendations [5]

On human rights

- ❖ Ensure that there is a human rights perspective firmly embedded at all stages of the response by all actors.

- ❖ NGOs should set a precedent in respecting human rights standards.

- ❖ The international community, including international financial institutions, must integrate human rights into their humanitarian donor policies.

- ❖ UN agencies and NGOs should take into account the prior human rights context of the particular country in their aid and reconstruction policies and programs.[5] All non-state actors carrying out relief and reconstruction work should take into account the pre-existing human rights vulnerabilities of groups due to armed conflict, legal status, caste discrimination and/or general restrictions on civil and political rights.

On gender and women's human rights

- ❖ Gender-based violence (GBV) violates multiple international conventions and declarations on human rights. The international community and humanitarian organizations must take steps to protect women from GBV in all humanitarian disaster situations.

- ❖ Ensure equal aid distribution. Women and children account for more than seventy-five percent of displaced persons following natural disasters: in addition to providing safe temporary housing, permanent housing and land rights must be secured for displaced women.

- ❖ All service-delivery programs designed for the internally displaced should be sensitive to women's needs and concerns and adopt a rights-based approach. Women in displaced communities must be brought into a consultative process; be actively involved in decision-making, implementation and monitoring of relief and service delivery activities over both medium and long-term reconstruction.

- ❖ It is absolutely necessary that women be a part of the administrative structures that are established to deal with displacement and other problems faced by those who have been affected by the tsunami at every level – from the camps right up to the national operations committees.

- ❖ It is particularly important to organize gender experts – bringing them into crisis areas where necessary – to report back on women's priorities from a human rights perspective rather than a 'relief mindset'.

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[5] These recommendations are drawn from a wide array of sources (see References), but were only included if they appeared in multiple documents.
[5] For the most part, international humanitarian aid providers did not take this into account in carrying out their activities in tsunami-affected areas; as a result, aid providers often unintentionally compounded human rights concerns.

On strengthening the role and capacity of local groups/stakeholders

❖ Strengthen the capacity of local groups and ensure that they are in the lead. In many conflict and crisis situations international organizations become involved and – intentionally or not – take over relief management, monopolizing limited local resources and undermining the capacity of local groups who know the community and the culture much better.

❖ In preparing for future disasters, it is critical that there be an accurate assessment of the local capacity to handle disasters, as well as collaboration among the various stakeholders (e.g. NGOs, local government, private enterprise, etc.) in disaster response planning. One of the lessons from the tsunami is that relief and recovery take place mostly at the local level, and local capacity and preparedness are the keys to effective humanitarian response.

On enhancing the voice and agency of affected people

❖ Access to information is vital to ensuring that affected populations have a voice in recovery efforts. This should include a range of information about property and housing rights, people's entitlement to relief and benefits, re-establishing identity for those who have lost their documents (or for those who may have been living outside of the 'system', such as undocumented immigrants or homeless people).

On equitable response

❖ Be aware that people in the affected are often already living with the effects of poverty and conflict. Those not directly affected by the disaster are also in desperate need of aid: humanitarian response efforts must take into account the wider social and economic context in which the response takes place, and ensure that communities living alongside the disaster-affected areas are also receiving support.

❖ Conducting rapid needs assessments is crucial in order to provide government and aid agencies with a clear picture of the loss caused by a disaster. Communities need to be involved at every step of the process to ensure that data is accurate and that goods received were actually needed/appropriate.

On transparency and accountability

❖ States should improve the accountability and transparency of public and private aid providers. In the case of the tsunami, there were no accountability mechanisms to address reported irregularities in aid distribution, corruption or failure to ensure that basic necessities were provided to tsunami IDPs in a manner consistent with minimum international standards.

❖ There is a need to prepare 'dos and don'ts' for NGOs and the donor community in order to avoid undermining social networks or creating cultures of dependency.

❖ There is an urgent need to develop mechanisms that ensure transparency and accountability in the disbursal of funds; that allow monitoring of all actors involved in post-disaster relief and reconstruction; that enable survivors to participate in reconstruction planning and implementation; that ensure women's equal right to land and housing in resettlement efforts; and that provide access to grievance and justice systems.

APPENDIX 2: ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

Observed Organizations

American Jewish World Service:	*www.ajws.org*
Global Fund for Children	*www.globalfundforchildren.org*
Global Fund for Women	*www.globalfundforwomen.org*
Global Greengrants Fund	*www.greengrants.org*
Grant Makers without Borders:	*www.gwob.net*
Oxfam America	*www.oxfamamerica.org*, also see *www.oxfam.org*
Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights	*www.urgentactionfund.org*

Humanitarian Agencies and Networks

Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance	*www.alnap.org*
Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International	*www.hapinternational.org*
International Crisis Group	*www.crisisgroup.org*
International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Code of Conduct	*www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct*
Relief Web	*www.reliefweb.int*
Refugees International	*www.refugeesinternational.org*
Sphere Project	*www.sphereproject.org*
Disaster & Emergency Committee (UK)	*www.dec.org.uk*

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