



# THE TSUNAMI LEARNING PROJECT

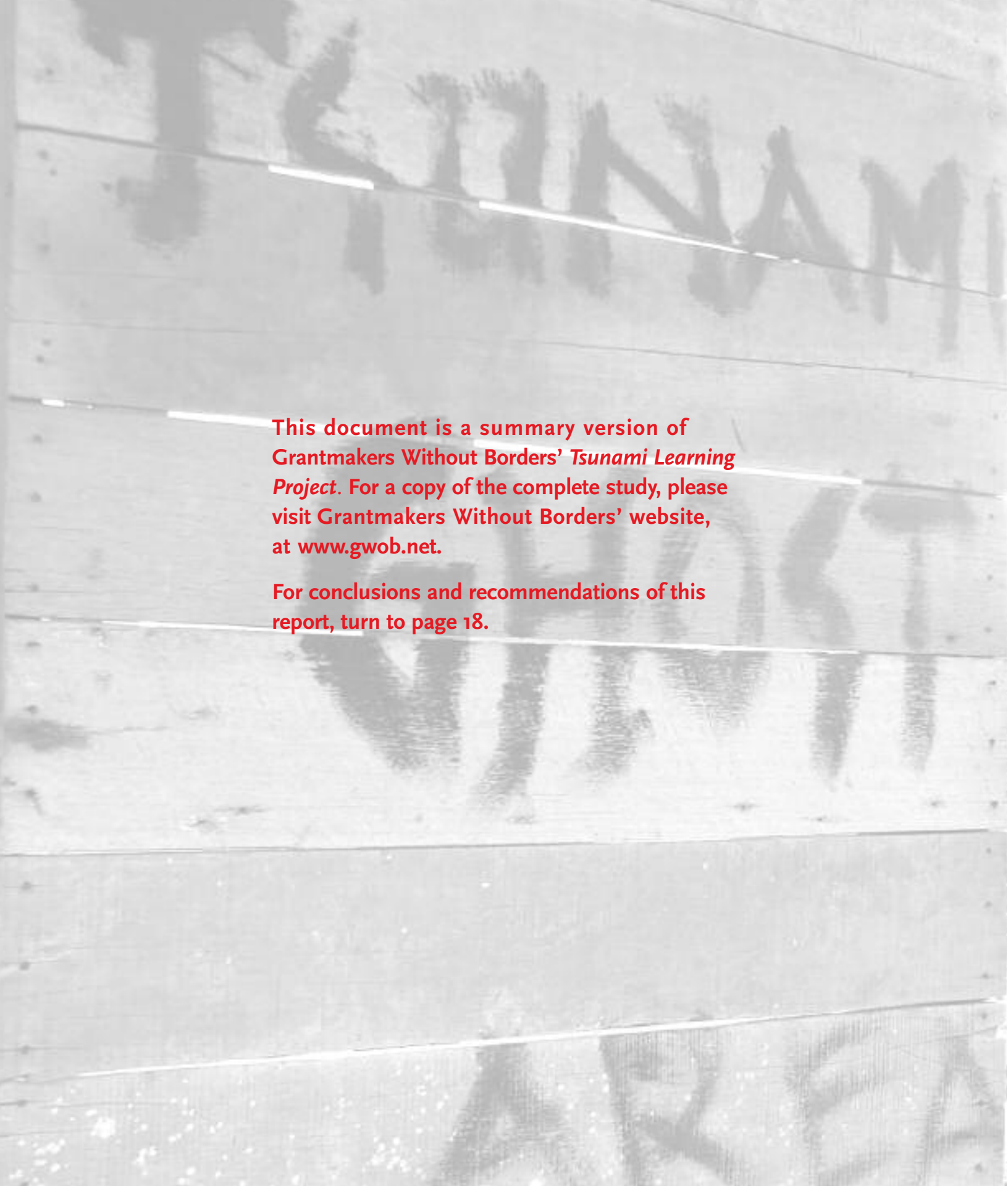
*Lessons for Grantmakers in Natural Disaster Response*

By Laura Roper, PhD

With Emily Utz and John Harvey



**grantmakers**  
WITHOUT BORDERS

The background of the page is a photograph of a wooden wall. The wall is made of horizontal wooden planks. On the wall, there are several dark, shadow-like impressions of people holding hands in a line, suggesting a community or support structure. The shadows are cast from the left side of the frame. The overall tone is somewhat somber and reflective.

**This document is a summary version of Grantmakers Without Borders' *Tsunami Learning Project*. For a copy of the complete study, please visit Grantmakers Without Borders' website, at [www.gwob.net](http://www.gwob.net).**

**For conclusions and recommendations of this report, turn to page 18.**

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*Lessons for Grantmakers in Natural Disaster Response*



American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy www.ajws.org

Fallen temple, Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu, India

By *Laura Roper, PhD*

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## 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.

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 most effectively be placed? 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

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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.**

*Even for the most experienced of grantmakers, the enormous scope of this catastrophe posed an array of decision-making challenges.*

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 that social justice goals can 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.**

## OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY'S METHODOLOGY

To carry out the *Tsunami Learning Project* Grantmakers Without Borders documented the experience of a group of grantmakers that responded to this disaster. All the observed organizations are experienced grantmakers, and they are also active learning organizations. Grantmakers Without Borders relied on documentation provided by each of the observed organizations, reports from grantees covering the first year or more of the response, and interviews with staff members from each organization.

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

### An emerging critique of the tsunami response

In the nearly two years since the tsunami hit, many positive outcomes have been reported throughout the affected regions. Overall, however, the recovery process has been more complicated, costly and contentious than many had anticipated. Nearly two years after the tsunami hit, for example, many survivors are still without permanent housing or viable livelihoods.

Critiques of the global response to the tsunami started to emerge right from the beginning. One major critique has been that coordination among responders was inefficient. Another criticism relates that local communities and community groups were excluded from much of the decision-making that went on by international NGOs, governments, and other major players. Community-based organizations, as is generally the case when disaster strikes, acted as the true first responders after the tsunami hit. In rebel-held areas of Sri Lanka and Aceh, where foreign NGOs couldn't reach in the first days of the crisis, local groups were especially critical to relief efforts. Nearly everyone acknowledges the central role that community-based organizations should play in disaster response. Yet the tsunami response was largely an exclusive process that barred local organizations and communities from involvement in decision-making.



GFW Advisor Lin Chew

Tsunami survivors, Sri Lanka

organizations) or international relief organizations whose programs include significant grantmaking (one of the six observed organizations).

While the observed organizations differ in important ways, including size and geographic spread, they share several key features: a commitment as grantmakers to working through local organizations, to empowering local communities, to promoting the rights of marginalized populations, and to addressing systemic issues.

The grantmaking organizations observed in the *Tsunami Learning Project* were six in number: American Jewish World Service, Global Fund for Children, Global Fund for Women, Global Greengrants Fund, Oxfam America, and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights. Oxfam is an international relief and development organization with grantmaking as a quite significant part of

its program. The other five are grantmaking public charities that re-grant public support to overseas groups.

Of the observed organizations, only two had had significant prior experience in disaster response, American Jewish World Service and Oxfam, while all six had had prior experience in long-term development and/or human rights work in the region. Each responded immediately to the tsunami, quickly developing response strategies consistent with their ongoing missions and organizational strengths. Each organization relied on its existing networks of current or former grantees to shape its response to the tsunami. Global Greengrants Fund, Urgent Action Fund, and Global Fund for Women also relied on advisors and board members based in the affected regions. Oxfam was the only organization that had staff on the ground.

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**American Jewish World Service** funded 55 grantees and 86 different projects: 22 in Indonesia, 19 in Sri Lanka, 8 in Thailand, 28 in India and 9 in Somalia. By early January 2006, American Jewish World Service had made grants in the amount of US\$3.12 million. Besides providing immediate relief, American Jewish World Service provided grants that focused on psychosocial support to survivors, legal access and other resources for the most vulnerable groups, women's participation in decision-making processes, and training and financing for livelihood activities.

*Might there be a unique and important role for small-scale, community-based interventions within the context of broader humanitarian responses?*

**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 Global Fund for Children 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). Global Fund for Children made grants of \$37,500 to 10 grantees in Phase I and \$85,000 to 4 grantees in Phase II, and they have budgeted \$300,000 for Phase III. Supported activities have prioritized children's physical, psychosocial and educational well-being.

**Global Fund for Women** immediately notified grantees in the affected regions that they could reallocate their current grants to emergency response. They then sought guidance from advisors, holding off on significant grant-making to groups engaged in tsunami response until two

weeks after the disaster. Through spring 2006, Global Fund for Women had awarded \$120,000 in 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. Global Fund for Women planned to award at least \$100,000 in additional post-tsunami grants over the next year to continue their support of long-term rebuilding. Global Fund for Women also maintained funding for core programs, tsunami response grants representing additional support for grantees.

**Global Greengrants Fund**, another public foundation that does not traditionally fund relief activities, intervened to "...ease suffering, protect the rights of coastal communities and ensure sustainable reconstruction." In the early days of the crisis, Global Greengrants Fund channeled \$70,000 to local groups for immediate relief. Through spring 2006, Global Greengrants Fund 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. In addition to providing



Activity with children in Belawan

Courtesy Global Greengrants Fund



American Jewish World Service / K. Kroeger, courtesy www.ajws.org

General tsunami damage, Aceh, Indonesia

material goods and supporting livelihood recovery efforts, Global Greengrants Fund supported organizations focused on the environmental aspects of recovery, such as mangrove restoration. Their 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.

**Oxfam America** is a member of the Oxfam International Federation (OIF), which decided to pool the \$278 million it raised from around the globe in order to mount a coordinated response to the tsunami. This money is being invested in Burma/Myanmar, 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. OIF 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.

*How can disaster response grantmaking empower marginalized communities, foster greater equity, and promote human rights?*

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Children studying at a Meushollah (prayer room) and school run by Aceh Judicial Monitoring Institute

American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy www.ajws.org

**Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights** is an activist-led human rights funder that, as the name implies, is accustomed to responding to urgent requests on short notice. With its focus on women human rights defenders in armed conflict areas, Urgent Action Fund was well positioned to respond to the tsunami in Sri Lanka and Aceh, where it already had established networks of grantees and advisors. In consultation with grantees and its Board of Directors, Urgent Action Fund created a funding strategy and provided its first tsunami-related grants to local groups within 72 hours of the disaster. Urgent Action Fund's \$38,000 in grants, ranging in size from \$3,000 to \$10,000, supported a diverse array of grantee efforts such as documenting human rights violations against women during the relief efforts and ensuring a gender perspective in post-tsunami reconstruction.

### A COMPLEX CHALLENGE

**S**ri Lanka, Aceh and Somalia were bogged down in violent civil conflict at the time of the tsunami. These three locations had large numbers of internally displaced people, and tensions arose quickly when they were excluded from receiving aid given to long-term local residents. These locations in particular presented a fragmented, conflicted environment rife with political and logistical barriers for disaster responders.

Throughout the tsunami-affected region, social inequalities and prejudices were long entrenched, especially impacting women, low-income communities, and marginalized groups such as the dalits in India. Where and how resources were allocated had the potential to either improve or exacerbate inequities and prejudices.

## Lessons for Grantmakers in Natural Disaster Response

Lastly, the enormity of the international response was in some ways a double-edged sword. On the one hand it meant that significant resources could be brought to bear on the crisis. On the other, it brought about enormous competition for resources between governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and between and among the many different NGO's that arrived to help and those already on the ground. Also, the arrival of many highly paid foreign staff drove up prices in many places, especially in the housing market.



General tsunami damage, Aceh, Indonesia

American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy www.ajws.org

**Many humanitarian agencies appear to have operated at times under several myths related to the tsunami.**

**Myth 1: The tsunami was a great equalizer.** While the tsunami was even-handed in its destruction, marginalized populations were impacted differently than other groups: They were more physically vulnerable to begin with due to the location and quality of their housing, and they were potentially less resilient due to such factors as poor health, limited education, fewer assets, and less influential social networks.

**Myth 2: Given the scope of the tsunami's impact, governments, the military and large NGOs were best suited to respond.** Sadly, government performance in the tsunami response was uneven at best, characterized by lack of capacity, lack of responsiveness to poor communities and, in some cases, corruption and resistance to outside interference. While international NGOs did mobilize significant resources, they were also influenced by a number of drivers, such as the need to maintain good standing with host governments, donor conditionalities, and complicated relations with the media. These factors sometimes led to responses driven by outside forces rather than by the particular needs of each community.

**Myth 3: 'Recovery' consists largely of logistical challenges involved in providing housing and securing funds to jumpstart livelihood recovery.** This view of recovery meant that there was often an overabundance of resources given to recovery needs such as fishing boats, while profound non-material aspects of recovery such as psychosocial healing and capacity building for organizations were often overlooked.

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### POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT PLAYED A BENEFICIAL ROLE IN TSUNAMI RESPONSE

In analyzing the funding of the six observed organizations, the *Tsunami Learning Project* identified a variety of policies and practices that appeared to have played a beneficial role in tsunami response.

#### Tapping into existing relationships as an invaluable response strategy

Evaluations of the tsunami response describe a severe imbalance in the geographic attentions of many international NGOs. While aid workers from foreign organizations regularly descended on the most accessible communities, with some being visited many times over by different delegations and organizations, less accessible communities were often left completely without aid from these non-local actors. Even given the massive NGO presence in the weeks and months following the tsunami—estimates of foreign NGO presence in Banda Aceh alone range from 2,000 to 3,000—a lack of local knowledge on the part of foreign NGOs often hindered effective and equitable response to all those impacted by the disaster.

In contrast, the observed organizations often had the ability to reach more remote or restricted areas because of their existing relationships with grantees. In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, Global Fund for Children leveraged the expertise of its grantees to ensure that the needs and visibility of children would not be forgotten in the transition from immediate relief to long-term rehabilitation. Their consistent support in an otherwise chaotic environment allowed for a sense of stability within grantee communities as well as a deeper understanding of needs throughout the course of recovery. In Sri Lanka, the social infrastructure that Oxfam had

*The observed organizations largely focused on local grantees that had established relationships with marginalized communities, ensuring that direct aid reached them in the short term and that longer-term recovery efforts took into account their needs.*

invested in for many years meant that it was in a solid position to establish structures and processes based on an inclusive model that deliberately sought to target the most vulnerable.

#### 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 agencies to go through ‘official’ or mainstream community leaders. The observed organizations noted that, while it is important to work through official structures and community level organizations, 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 in India, sex workers in Thailand or widows in Sri Lanka are not typically



Village elders dedicating a children’s play space in one of the baraks (camps), run by Church World Service, Aceh, Indonesia



American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy www.ajws.org

General tsunami damage, Aceh, Indonesia

represented by dominant local power structures. The observed organizations largely focused on local grantees that had established relationships with marginalized communities, ensuring that direct aid reached them in the short term and that longer-term recovery efforts took into account their needs.

For example, American Jewish World Service supported EMPOWER Mae Sai in Phuket, Thailand, which works with sex workers who, though they play a significant economic role in their communities, are largely marginalized. American Jewish World Service reported that both in and around resort sites, sex workers' livelihoods suffered because the number of tourist clients visiting 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." EMPOWER's Live Now Project, which is operating in six Thai 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 to keep local people informed.

Recognizing that many local, community-based groups needed capacity building support in order to respond effectively to the tsunami, American Jewish World Service also funded Dasra, an Indian NGO

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Women activists discuss post-tsunami challenges, Aceh

GFW Advisor Lin Chew

*The observed organizations' efforts... enabled groups to build solidarity with allies... as they worked together towards the common goal of recovery.*

focused on organizational development, to play an important role in strategic planning with grantees, sharing best practices, documenting tsunami activities and disseminating accurate information about government schemes.

### **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 Sinhalese

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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."

### Funding women-led initiatives

Many reports have emerged in recent years revealing that bilateral aid and mainstream funding rarely reaches women-led groups. Despite public assurances that women's needs would be met during tsunami response operations, many aid distribution centers refused to recognize women-headed households. To this day, most emergency kits provided by international NGOs fail to supply such basic provisions as female sanitary supplies. In addition, 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 religious contexts of Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Violence against women also rises during times of crisis due to a range of factors including the breakdown of legal structures and the resulting culture of impunity, the lack of safe accommodations, a rise in



GFW Advisor Lin Chew

Tsunami survivor participating in an economic recovery project, Aceh

the presence of armed actors, and overwhelming unemployment and collective social trauma, which can lead to alcohol and drug abuse.

These issues were of acute concern to the observed organizations and many of their grantees. Supported 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.

### Funding Women's Coalition Efforts

The coalition model provides an important mechanism for grassroots women's groups that do not hold bank accounts or have access to the international community to gain access to tsunami aid. In Sri Lanka, the Coalition for Assisting Tsunami Affected Women (CATAW) formed soon after the disaster. CATAW brings together sixty women's rights groups and represents women from every major ethnic and religious community in Sri Lanka. The Coalition's primary goals are: to advance the protection and promotion of women's rights in the processes of reconstruction and rehabilitation; to identify and formulate programs that strengthen women's initiatives at the community level; to promote the participation and inclusion of women in all aspects of the reconstruction and rehabilitation process; to advocate for gender-sensitive aid delivery; and to strengthen the overall capacity of women's groups in the tsunami-affected areas. Similarly, the Aceh Women's Trust Fund brings together six independent women's organizations to facilitate their participation in the rebuilding of Aceh by promoting women's rights and ensuring women's access to decision making processes and control of resources.

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### Promoting participation and protecting rights

*“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.”*

– Nick Stockton,  
Executive Director of the  
Humanitarian Accountability Project International

Participation is not only a right, but also a prerequisite for establishing a sense of agency among survivors and fortifying the resiliency of disaster-affected communities. Despite stated commitments to participation, genuine accountability to survivors often falls by the wayside during humanitarian emergencies, not only during the urgent and chaotic early days of a response, but even well into the rehabilitation phase.

*Participation is not only a right, but also a prerequisite for establishing a sense of agency among survivors and fortifying the resiliency of disaster-affected communities.*

Examples of such negligence are cited in an April 2005 study commissioned by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), 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.

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.). Similarly, while many fisher folk have benefited from boat repair and the provision of new boats,



Rice and sugar for refugees

Courtesy Global Greengrants Fund

there are many cases where boats provided were not based on traditional designs and therefore were not considered seaworthy. The observed organizations sought to counter this trend by providing funding for local groups to advocate on their own behalf and demand that their rights be respected, and where violations did occur, to document them in the hopes of future redress.



Preparing aid for refugees

Courtesy Global Greengrants Fund

### Giving local people a voice in coordinating temporary shelter

Because so many tsunami survivors were relocated to transition camps or internally displaced persons camps, the issue of participation in camp governance was of particular importance to many of the observed organizations. Oxfam documented a number of accountability and participatory mechanisms that their grantees helped to establish in camps in Aceh and Sri Lanka, including complaint boxes and women's watch committees. In designing these mechanisms, grantees worked from the premise that bottom-up accountability requires three things: knowledge of what entitlements are available to people, the availability of credible grievance and redress mechanisms, and the capacity to access them.

Several of Urgent Action Fund's grantees expressed concern about the treatment of women in camps, especially those with a strong military presence. While documenting the situation, needs and complaints of women, they sought to incorporate women into camp decision-making bodies so that the women could advocate for themselves. American Jewish World Service 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.*



Women at a community meeting organized by ROSE in Tamil Nadu, India

American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy www.ajws.org

*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.*

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### Paying close attention to political situations on the ground

*“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.”*

– Journalist in Aceh

According to numerous independent reports, many of the foreign agencies in Aceh appeared to be totally oblivious to the precarious position of Acehnese NGOs and the ways in which international NGO 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.

Overall, Acehnese NGOs were mostly excluded from response coordination. The observed organizations however, some of which had been supporting Acehnese human rights organizations prior to the tsunami, were sensitive to the full range of issues connected to supporting civil society and focused their grantmaking on grassroots organizations that had a track record of working for human rights, women’s rights, environmental justice and peace.



Relief camp pipeline at a site overseen by Church World Service, Aceh, Indonesia

American Jewish World Service/J. Kroeger, courtesy www.ajws.org

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**Supporting non-material needs: Trauma recovery, legal aid, environmental recovery and more**

*“I have learned from our own experience in the aftermath of the tsunami that it is easier to deal with material assistance than the long-term scars and processes of grieving and healing... and this type of assistance is even more inaccessible if you are poor or marginalized.”*

– Sunila Abeyssekera,  
Co-Founder of the Women’s Fund for Tsunami Relief

While the vast majority of tsunami aid has understandably gone to material needs such as food, housing, boats and infrastructure, the non-material aspects of recovery cannot be overlooked. These

include psychosocial services and healing opportunities for survivors, legal aid, information sharing and documentation, as well as networking and collaboration between affected communities and their allies.

While physical security reduces a great deal of the stress survivors are experiencing, psychosocial interventions in particular help them to overcome the sense of powerlessness and passivity that prevails after a disaster of this scale. For many, the tsunami disaster came in addition to high levels of prolonged stress due to economic vulnerability, minority social status or armed conflict. Few local NGOs were equipped to provide counseling services, and international NGOs tended to approach the issue from the Western therapeutic tradition,

focusing on individuals rather than communities. American Jewish World Service stands out for the number of grantees it has supported that are provid-

ing psychosocial services to women and children such as Komnas Perempuan, the National Commission on Violence Against Women, in Indonesia. After the disaster, Komnas Perempuan launched a Healing House for women 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 also serves as a training center for grassroots groups and activists in order to sustain the critical ongoing work of women human rights defenders as they rebuild their communities.

Another source of emotional and psychological support for survivors has been the networking and exchanges between local and regional NGOs that have occurred both spontaneously and at the encouragement of funders. For example, American Jewish World Service grant-making connected women’s organizations responding to the Gujarat earthquake of 2001

*Psychosocial interventions in particular help them to overcome the sense of powerlessness and passivity that prevails after a disaster of this scale.*



American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy www.ajws.org

Women coir workers organized by Siyath, rebuilding their livelihoods after the tsunami in Galle, Sri Lanka

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GFW Advisor Lin Chew

Tsunami survivor & participant in economic recovery project, Sri Lanka

and those responding to the tsunami in Tamil Nadu province by having women from northern India share their experiences and lessons learned with women along the Southern coast. Another American Jewish World Service grantee, the Rural Organization for Social Education built on the previous experiences of disaster survivors in other regions to organize a disaster preparedness plan, which included the formation of five committees: warning, evacuation, first aid, relief and monitoring. These planning exchanges gave peace of mind that they are now better prepared for emergencies. The women's coalitions mentioned above such as AWAW, CATAW and the Aceh Women's Trust Fund also exemplify the strength found in numbers for many tsunami survivors.

Particularly along the coast, access to housing and land has been one of the major obstacles trou-

bling the recovery process. In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, some governments established buffer zones that frequently extended 500 meters or more inland and prohibited housing reconstruction within those zones. While these buffer zones were ostensibly implemented as a safety measure, many suspected that they were also being used to displace coastal peoples and reallocate prime real estate to the powerful tourist hotel industry. Another widespread challenge to housing provision was that, even in instances where land was available, internally displaced people who could not prove that they had previously owned property found that they were ineligible for housing assistance. Oxfam funded several legal aid organizations or positions within NGOs to help communities address land disputes.

Environmental concerns were also of critical importance along damaged coastlines. Global Greengrants Fund supported many groups working on environmental aspects of recovery including The Puter Foundation in Aceh and the Centre for Environmental Justice in Sri Lanka, which is working with community groups to restore greenbelts and mangrove forests, as well as to mediate land disputes. In Indonesia, Global Greengrants Fund also supported Perkumpulan Telapak to monitor environmental challenges to recovery efforts and facilitate relations between local communities and international agencies. The organizing, education and planning work that Global Greengrants Fund grantees undertook with local communities has provided a firm foundation for rehabilitation and recovery work in these areas.



American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)

Mother and child at a site overseen by Church World Service, Aceh, Indonesia

## **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.

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### 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.

*These 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.*

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. These 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 and 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.



Tsunami warning signs near Galle, Sri Lanka

## 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.

- 1 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.
- 2 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.

- 3 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.
- 4 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.

*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.*

## THE TSUNAMI LEARNING PROJECT



General tsunami damage, Aceh, Indonesia

American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy www.ajws.org

**5** 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.

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

This document is a summary version of  
**Grantmakers Without Borders' *Tsunami Learning Project*.**  
For a copy of the complete study, please visit  
Grantmakers Without Borders' website,  
at [www.gwob.net](http://www.gwob.net).



**Front Cover:** Villagers organized by ROSE in Tamil Nadu India, learning about disaster preparedness techniques. Photo by American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)

**Inside Front Cover:** General tsunami damage and graffiti, Aceh, Indonesia. Photo by American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)

**Inside Back Cover:** Children in Aceh, Indonesia. Photo by American Jewish World Service/K. Kroeger, courtesy [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)

## ABOUT GRANTMAKERS WITHOUT BORDERS

GRANTMAKERS WITHOUT BORDERS, A PHILANTHROPIC NETWORK, is dedicated to increasing funding for international social justice and environmental sustainability and to improving the practice of international grantmaking. Our membership, currently numbering over 300 individuals from over 130 grantmaking entities, includes private foundations, grant-making public charities, individual donors with a significant commitment to philanthropy, and philanthropic support organizations. Availing of this wealth of experience and expertise, Grantmakers Without Borders provides capacity-building support to international grantmakers both novice and experienced. We offer a space for education, community and collaboration among international social change grantmakers. We advocate before policy-makers on behalf of social change grantmakers, and we work to leverage the philanthropic sector to increase funding to the global South. In all our efforts, Grantmakers Without Borders is committed to the ideals of justice, equity, peace, democracy, and respect for the environment. We value and respect the wisdom and experience of local communities in all their diversity, and we are dedicated to amplifying the voice of the global South in international philanthropy. Founded in 2000, Grantmakers Without Borders is a project of the Tides Center.

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