

DOCTORS AND PEDIATRICIANS REQUIRED

We are just back from our assessment visit to the earthquake affected areas. We were in Bhuj and we were informed by "Abhiyan" that they are setting up over 23 "health/vigilance" centres.

Each centre will be the base from where health issues will be taken care. Individual medical care and preventive and promotive care will be the focus. Each such centre will be run by a three member team that consists 3 of the following professionals :

- (1) General physician
- (2) Gynecologist
- (3) Community medicine expert
- (4) Pediatrician
- (4) Nurse
- (5) Lab technician

Abhiyan needs support from the Bangalore group. Will it be possible for the Bangalore Response or any one here in Bangalore to mobilize upto 5 teams who could work in the above mentioned centres for the next three months starting from next week (Feb 26th onwards).

- 1) The three member team may comprise of any of the three professionals out the above mentioned five.
- 2) Only Hindi speaking people are required.
- 3) Each team may have to spend atleast one month continuously.

Ps: These centres may be endorsed by the government as their referral centres. They are awaiting conformation.

Message from Dr. P.V.Unnikrishnan (OXFAM) 19 Feb 2001

GUJARAT SHATTERED BY A KILLER EARTHQUAKE:

Long-term rehabilitation is a challenge for the survivors and the humanitarian agencies.

OXFAM INDIA'S LONG TERM INTERVENTION STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME

(Strategy note dated Feb 15th).

Responding to the immediate relief needs of the earthquake- devastated people in Gujarat was/ is a daunting task for relief agencies and the government. The first two weeks witnessed overwhelming relief assistance. However, we also found how some remote places were neglected. The scene is changing fast.

Oxfam India responded to some of the very basic survival needs like food, warm clothes, temporary shelter and specialised medical assistance in some of the neglected pockets. It also facilitated the organisation of response in Bangalore and Mumbai. It also highlighted critical issues in the media to facilitate appropriate relief and advocate humane policy directives.

RAPID NEED ASSESSMENT BY A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY PROFESSIONAL TEAM:

Oxfam India also put together a multi-disciplinary team to conduct a rapid need assessment of the earthquake-affected areas to develop our long-term interventions strategy.

The multidisciplinary comprised of

- **Dr. Jacob VC, Mumbai.** He is lead physiotherapist and Vice President of *Indian Association of Physiotherapists*. He has experience of working in Latur.
- **Mr. Santosh Kalyane, Latur.** He is an engineer and development resource person who has worked with communities and women's groups. He is associated with *Swayam Sikshan Prayog*, an organisation working in Latur for the last 7 years.
- **Mr. Gabriel Britto, Mumbai.** He is a social scientist and is also the director of *Development Resource Centre*.
- **Ms. Philomina Christi, Ahmedabad.** She is a gender activist associated with *St. Xavier's Social Service Society*. She has worked on gender, rights and dalits issues.
- **Dr. Unnikrishnan PV, Bangalore.** He is *Oxfam India's* co-ordinator for Disasters & Emergencies. He is a medical doctor working on health and humanitarian issues, both at the policy and field implementation levels.

Note- 1: Inputs from a specialist mental health team from *National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, Bangalore* and other experts who are currently in the area are also incorporated in this note.

Note-2: Inputs of the teams from *Swayam Sikshan Prayog, Mumbai; Peoples' Science Institute ; Dehradun* and *Anandi, Bhavnagar* are also incorporated especially on sections related to reconstruction, information dissemination and exchange programmes.

METHODOLOGY:

The team visited the affected areas and hospitals in Ahmedabad; remote and other villages; spots where the disaster affected displaced people are located at present, make shift health centres and relief tents. The team also had extensive interviews, interactions and focussed group discussions with affected people- mainly women, children, elderly, ignored sections of the community and other vulnerable groups such as migrants, dalits, minorities; NGOs and international agencies, government, army, medical and health experts, and others working in the area.

THE RAPID ASSESSMENT SUGGESTS THE FOLLOWING INTERVENTIONS. (FOR DETAILS, PLEASE READ THE FULL REPORT).

One: Interventions to provide Community Based Rehabilitation for the disabled.

Paraplegics and those with limb, multiple and spine injuries, fractures and other disabilities will need physiotherapy assistance to get their lives back into action. Without this intervention and assistance of physiotherapists, the paraplegics and the like will end up their lives in wheel chairs. This service may be required for the next 6 to 12 months and that too at the doorsteps of the needy people as they are immobile and can't commute to hospitals.

This is not a visible agenda for NGOs and government at this stage. Even after 8 years, there are over 20 paraplegics still awaiting rehabilitation in Latur, where a killer earthquake (of a less devastation) struck in 1993.

We need to act fast. Oxfam India is committed to take up this challenge and is finalising a work plan in collaboration with the experts associated with the Indian Association of Physiotherapists. We are also working out the details of setting up a rehabilitation centre at Ahmedabad in association with St. Xavier's Social Service Society, Ahmedabad.

Two: Intervention to provide psychosocial support for the earthquake affected people who are under shock and trauma. Left unattended initial trauma develops into manifestations that have a long lasting negative impact. School children drop out, increased incidents of divorce; alcoholism and even suicides are some of the manifestations. Moreover, Post Trauma Stress Disorder is common amongst disaster-affected people. Oxfam India's assessment also confirms the increased incidence of premature deliveries in the area.

There are a considerable number of children who have been affected. A specific case is of a 12 year young Nancy Takkar (from Anjar), the only survivor when the killer quake killed over 300 of her schoolmates. She is seen smiling and doing routine regular work! Mental health professionals who have been assessing the psychosocial implications reiterate that her smile is a short-lived phenomenon. They say that she is passing through what is known as the "heroic phase". The survivors need assistance to overcome the trauma and psychosocial problems they face.

The assessment and observations by expert and experienced mental health professionals call for a long- term psychosocial intervention for the disaster affected. This service may be required for the next 6 to 12 months and that too at the community level. This is not a visible agenda for NGOs and government at this stage, especially in some of the remote and *"not-so publicized"* villages. Even after 8 years, in Latur, the incidence of mental health problems is upto 30 % according to recent scientific reports.

Armed with experience of dealing with such situations in the past, Oxfam India is working out a community-based intervention programme to address the psychosocial needs of the survivors. We are working out a collaborative work with mental health professionals in NIMHANS.

Three: Awareness campaign to provide appropriate information. Accurate and scientific information will go a long way in rebuilding the lives and homes that the earthquake shattered. Unfortunately need based appropriate information is not available easily. The situation calls for an information and dissemination campaign to meet this urgent need, especially when the reconstruction phase begins. Information regarding earthquake resistant houses will be one focus.

Oxfam India is working towards a strategy to take up this issue actively in select pockets. We are associating with institutions and experts who have experience on this issue. We will bring out information materials like posters, leaf-lets, video films and others in local language. We are working out the details with other organisations such as (a) Development Resource Centre, Mumbai; (b) Swayam Sikshan Prayog, Mumbai; (c) Peoples' Science Institute, Dehradun and (d) Anandi, Bhavnagar.

Four: Building community centres and people-exchange programme. There is wealth of knowledge in pockets affected by past earthquakes like Latur. Ordinary people and communities have a wealth of knowledge that can go a long way to improve the rehabilitation process. We are keen to facilitate an exchange programme between people, especially women, masons from other earthquake-affected areas of India and Gujarat.

We will facilitate the building of a multi-purpose community centre with the active participation of the local people. This activity will also will be a demonstration to train the people in building earthquake –resistant houses and other structures.

We are joining hands with organisations like Swayam Shikshan Prayog (Mumbai) to facilitate this.

Five: Basic Rights Campaign: Earthquake affected people have basic rights. When agencies and NGOs move in a charity mode, they tend to ignore that disaster relief and long-term assistance is a basic right. Rights related to health, education, rights of children and women are issues that Oxfam India will highlight in its basic rights campaign. This will help the communities to be aware of their rights and thus work towards to achieve this.

Six: Advocacy and lobbying for a disaster management policy and preparedness programme. Looking at the fact that an earthquake hit Gujarat this year; a devastating cyclone in 1998 and an ongoing drought in certain pockets, Oxfam India realizes the need to respond to disasters in a holistic way. We will work towards to develop and lobby a people-centric disaster management policy for the state of Gujarat. We will also work with institutions and NGOs to develop preparedness programme.

The interventions are designed in such way that the local skills could be used to its optimum levels and external interventions minimized. An owner-driven approach, with the active involvement and ownership of local communities will be the spirit of the programme.

Notes:

Apart from the organisations mentioned specifically in each section, we have an understanding with Action Aid to collaborate on some of the above-mentioned issues. The details will be worked out soon.

We have also had discussions with other NGO networks such as "Janvikas/ Janpath Citizen's Initiative", Ahmedabad and Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan, Bhuj the need and our limited support to develop an intervention plan for some of the above mentioned activities. More directly we work with our partners like Samerth, Gujarat jana Jagaran Sangh, (GJJS), and Manav kalyan Trust(MKT)for integrated work relating to most of the above interventions particularly in Bachau and Rapar blocks. Such activities will be taken up jointly on a case- to- case basis. Details are still to be worked out.

We are also discussing our initiatives with other agencies that have been part of a co-ordinated relief response at Bangalore and Chennai, especially professional and other organisations. We will be able to make a statement about this, once we work out the details. However, Oxfam India is committed to go ahead even if the response for long-term work from these agencies (in Bangalore and Chennai) is not encouraging.

(Note prepared by Dr. Unnikrishnan PV, Co-ordinator-Disasters & Emergencies, Oxfam India, Bangalore, in consultation with the director and other colleagues in Oxfam India, assessment team and collaborating agencies.)

An update from the field ..

The Earthquake: An update The situation as on 15 Feb.

Overview:

Life in the quake-hit devastated regions of Gujarat is returning to "normal" amazingly fast. People still live out in the open, with usually not more than a plastic sheet to protect themselves, but have tried to make the best of what structure was left standing to shelter themselves. Small trade and transport, and agricultural work, where irrigation is available, are all in full swing. All kinds of relief material and supplies have reached all affected areas, although in uncertain quantity and quality. People do complain, but a sense of hurt pride is unmistakable in having to accept alms, and the legendary warm hospitality of Kutchis continues to flow from their hearts despite the monumental tragedy that has befallen them: milk, buttermilk, tea, and even food is offered to anyone who shares a moment of concern with them. As the first wave of grief ebbs slowly away, they face up to the daunting task of piecing their lives together once again, with considerable apprehension, but determination. At many places we were told, "it is only circumstances that have made us extend our arms to take what is gifted, but we are not beggars". As a village wit put it, (aptly at Dholavira village, on the edge of a once magnificent Harappan city), "the real beggars are those who run these [charity] organisations - they beg for ever!". Insecurity stalks the survivors in their makeshift shelters, particularly at night: peaceful sleep is still uncommon. Continuing aftershocks contribute to a feeling of uncertain future.

The flood of relief flowing in has slowed. Many groups leave once they see that immediate relief has reached. The government functionaries in the field are somewhat better geared now, with fairly substantial cash doles reaching most villages at least once so far, and the supply of essential commodities beginning to reach some places through the public distribution system. Telecommunications and power supply are largely restored, though still overburdened. Government health staff remain active, though at times they appear overwhelmed by the earnestness of voluntary health teams doing rounds of the villages, more than by the situation itself. Veterinary staff has been kept more than busy by focal outbreaks of epidemics in cattle. The revenue officials have "completed" an assessment of the damage and this assessment has been used by the government to rig up and announce a "package" for rehabilitation surprisingly earlier than expected. At these higher levels, confusion reigns, a result perhaps of politicking and leg-pulling, and a lifetime habit of reducing everything to ritual. There is virtually no coordination between the four major districts affected (Kutch, Surendranagar, Rajkot and Jamnagar) - each of them speaks only with the state capital (if at all).

Within Kutch district, however, the administration is performing rather well in some areas at least. Senior most bureaucrats hold a common meet with all agencies - NGO and transnational - once everyday to review and plan all aspects of relief operations and reconstruction work. Decisions are made and implemented swiftly, within several limitations.

Relief

Mal-distribution of available resources continues to be a major problem, but given the tendency among villagers to share, one can be fairly certain that no community will starve. Save some honourable exceptions, there is no record of which family has got how much, since all material relief (and there is virtually no exception to this rule) has been thus far distributed by non-government agencies. The plan now (at least in Kutch district) is to slowly wean off non-government agency-driven relief distribution, and replace it with a vigorous PDS-driven distribution, overseen by NGO-run monitoring teams. (No one is able to understand why the government had not distributed any relief material whatsoever in the first two weeks: perhaps it was content to observe other agencies, including the RSS, doing the needful.)

How long will relief work need to continue?

Some items needed to be given once only - blankets, canvas / plastic sheets for shelter, utensils for cooking and storing (foodgrains and water), etc. Most have by now received these, but gaps have to be looked for and filled. If some needed items are not available stored somewhere in the vicinity, they will need to be requisitioned. These operations are not happening uniformly everywhere, and systems that are being set up will have to organise themselves for this work.

Since the area was in any case facing severe drought, items like foodgrains and water were in short supply even before the earthquake. In many villages, existing meagre stocks have been ruined in the rubble. Most places will thus need a steady supply of foodgrains till after the rain-fed crop arrives about 6 months from now. Cash-doles being given by the government should help people buy what they need, provided inexpensive grain and other commodities are supplied through mobile fair-price shops. In this case, cash doles will need to be given regularly, or people will need to be provided sufficient gainful employment immediately (for which reconstruction work is an attractive proposition).

The alternative is an ongoing free distribution of foodgrain - a logistical nightmare. NGOs probably need to do both - push for resuming a vigorous PDS, while being prepared to continue to distribute grain to communities which receive nothing.

Water continues to be supplied by tankers - and there are no quick alternatives in sight.

Cattle fodder is another item in severe short supply, resulting in cattle owners letting their cattle loose in large numbers, to fend for themselves. Fodder is being organised from many places by the government and NGOs alike. The requirements are huge, however, and at least I have no idea how sufficient quantities will be provided.

The damage:

Virtually every group and organisation that is out in the field has its own assessment of the extent of loss of life and damage to property, based on surveys of varying degree of rapidity and depth. Most of these are naturally not detailed household studies, but one or other kind of "gross" estimates. Error is added to by varying informants - a lot of the population in villages is currently "floating", since people movement in and out for various reasons, and families have moved out of main villages to the fields.

The figure of the dead is fairly certain for the villages - around 6000, according to an independent survey. Estimates for mortality in the badly affected towns - particularly, Bhachau, Anjar and Bhuj - are difficult to put, at best:

there is no record of the number of cremations in the first few days,
an unknown number of bodies are yet to be found from beneath the debris,
most families have gone away and are not available for giving information, and some are perhaps totally wiped out.

The government figures stand at around 18,000 dead, overall. Many observers estimate the actuals to be at least twice that figure.

One factor that caused high deaths in some areas was the congestion - closely packed buildings around narrow lanes: those that escaped their own roofs were buried under their neighbour's walls. And one frequently heard reason why survivors survived was that they were out in the open celebrating Republic Day - one never realized this celebration was so popular in the villages!

The figure of the injured is another riddle, again in the case of townspeople. A few hundred paraplegics have been counted lying in various hospitals. One can only extrapolate from this to estimate the extent of less severe trauma.

The damage to houses and other structures has been very severe. The government has come up with its own assessment, which says that 229 villages in Gujarat are severely affected - to the tune of more than 70% of the houses being irreparably damaged. It proposes total relocation of these villages. NGOs have begun contesting this number - as being too small. The apparent reason for the underestimate being that the government revenue officials have only considered houses that were reduced to rubble as totally damaged, whereas, a large number of houses, though partly standing, are uninhabitable, and will need to be redone just as much as those totally destroyed. It is unclear yet what will come of this.

In an area relatively far from the epicenter, Surendranagar district, an NGO estimates the number villages that will need to be completely rebuilt as being at least twice as many as government estimates. One can predict chaotic times ahead. Apart from the extent, what was it that caused so much damage? For an untrained eye, it is difficult to come to a generalization. Every type of construction, traditional and modern, using cement or otherwise, of every shape and design, seems to have been badly damaged at one place or another. One possible explanation has to do with the soil the buildings were built on - those built on rocks have withstood the quake better.

Experts say that at some places it is traditional earthquake-resistant designs that have survived. What is clear, however is that such designs were nowhere near widely used, even in old 30-40 year old structures. Particularly pathetic are the stone walls in village homes - virtually, piles of rough-hewn stones with thin layers of ordinary sand and mud to cement them. They stood no chance. About the only structures as consistently damaged as these poorly-strung stone walls are structures built by the government - schools, hospitals, health centers, electric substations, administrative offices at all levels (including the collectorate), and staff quarters of all departments - each and every one of these that we saw in Kutch district were either rubble or damaged badly enough as to be unusable. A large number of government employees and their family members were killed or grievously hurt when these buildings collapsed. If this can be confirmed by a systematic survey, there is a good case for prosecuting the Public Works Department as a whole - being professionals, they have much to answer for. The upshot of this for the moment is that virtually every government department in the region is functioning out of a tent.

Organising for the next phase: Reconstruction

The task ahead is benumbing: rebuilding thousands of villages and many towns. I do not know if there was ever a need on this scale in history. Where are we to find so many masons and carpenters? The money? The material? At the moment, no one knows. There are many groups working out designs and offering technical assistance. The government has in principle accepted responsibility for rebuilding everything, and has announced a set of four "package deals" each for a different location and extent of damage. It has also in principle agreed to involve NGOs in the process, and to take all assistance that comes. At a meeting in Ahmedabad recently, few NGOs or corporates came forward to take up villages for reconstruction: they are probably suspicious of the government's integrity, but also unsure of their own capacities. The government has issued directives to districts to initiate relocations and reconstructions in conjunction with village-committees. The administration has reportedly begun going about this in its usual ham-handed way, and may end up causing more harm than good.

The ray of hope lies in a continuing NGO effort at the grass-roots. A federation of NGOs in Kutch district (called Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan) is attempting to set up a network of decentralised village clusters having 10-20 villages each, manned by a group of NGO coordinators who will oversee all work in that area. These "subcenters" will channelise and coordinate all help through democratically functioning and well-represented village committees. There is also a move to constitute village endowments, out of which families will be given soft loans for rebuilding, so that at the end, the village is left with a large fund that can be utilized for further development in the long run. Large scale training programs for masons and other artisans are being planned. Similar schemes are being worked out in other districts. How well these schemes work will depend to a large extent on what kind of people are available to man the "subcenters" and organise the effort. And it is going to take a hell of a lot of time. A lot should become clear in the coming days, but more of that later.

From Sridhar - Medico Friends Circle. Dated 18 February 2001

Gujarat Earthquake

Strategy Building for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction: A Preliminary Appraisal

The Gujarat earthquake has left a trail of devastation and death. It has also generated tremendous sense of generosity from people of all walks of life. The initial phase of relief inspite of all its limitations has helped the people to tide over the situation. The next phase of rehabilitation and reconstruction is the demand of the hour. All those individuals and the organizations that were involved from the day one are raising questions about the process and the perception that need to be kept in mind during the phase of rehabilitation and reconstruction. What is presented here below is a preliminary appraisal of some of the areas that need our attention in terms of rehabilitation and reconstruction. This is only a preliminary appraisal aimed at initiating a broader discussion and deliberation so that we arrive some common thrust that is beneficiary to the affected people and in a special way the marginalised groups in the society.

1. **Semi-Permanent shelters:** Due to the consistent work of many groups and individuals most of the affected people have 'tents' which at present serve as temporary shelter. But those who are aware of the situation of Kutch would realize the seriousness of the matter with regard to shelter. This is the third consequent year of draught. The scorching heat is already felt in the noontime though this is only the second week of February. The whole summer is still ahead. Just after summer the monsoon is expected. Hence, the urgency to build the houses in the traditional models based on the experience of the people. If that is not forthcoming then the other alternative of semi-permanent shelters has to be constructed to manage the summer and the monsoon. This would mean a seven months of waiting for the people for a permanent home. While doing this, the Latur experience -both positive and negative- need to be kept in mind. The positive aspect of Latur experience is that the traditional construction means, methods, and material was brought to the fore once again. These came to be forgotten with the anvil of modern construction technologies and material. The negative aspect of Latur experience is that even here the socio-cultural and economic aspects seem to have been overlooked. Hence, it is imperative that one looks at the design, cost, and material to be used with the environmental and socio-cultural aspects.
2. **Legal provisions and awareness:** there is a need to identify the loss due to the devastating earthquake in all its totality.
 - People lost;
 - People wounded - whatever nature of the injury may be;
 - Lose of property;
 - Lose of working days/earning of all the members of a family.

The means to identify these areas has to be seriously thought of and simplified. But to insist on documents like ration card etc would be inflicting greater pain on the affected people, who will look at the debris for documents.

Land for housing also needs to be kept in mind.

-those who have land;

-those who do not have land.

Agricultural and allied activities. The capitals lose as well as capital investment needed to begin the process again.

3. **Land for Reconstruction of Houses:** the houses have been turned into debris. Now debris are being removed and dumped in open spaces. But most of the people are saying that they do not want to build their houses where their relatives have been 'buried alive'. They are also saying that it is not good to remove the debris and dump it on open spaces. Hence, it has to be worked out with the people in each village and a one to one policy need to be worked out.
 - In many villages the marginalised communities are living in the tents erected on the lands of landed castes. Since this is not the agricultural season, it is allowed or even tolerated. But once monsoon comes and agricultural activities begin then those who lost the only household land they had will be displaced. This would lead to conflicts in villages, which is already struggling to cope with the trauma of the earthquake. Hence, on priority basis identify land for reconstruction of houses for those who do not have household land.
 - With regard to agricultural land, the media is trying to project that one of the after effects of the earthquake is the new springs that are found in some places. This is a welcome sign in a region that has witnessed successive draughts. But this can have evil consequences especially on the marginalized communities. Most of the people living on some of the uncultivable land or barren land or people from deprived section of society. They tried to get some agricultural output from this land. But with the media hype on new springs, there could be mad rush to grab this land. This would lead to social conflict.
4. **Sneha Samuday or Community Centre:** Based on the experience of relief and rehabilitation after the Orissa super cyclone, some of the NGOs are trying to set up sneha samuday for those who are dispossessed. The idea behind this concept is providing a space for the dispossessed (single women, children who are orphaned by the earthquake) to come together and grieve over the death and destruction and find strength to carry on their lives.

The concept in itself is a progressive one from the earlier idea of opening up orphanages for those who were affected the most by the disasters. But one needs to broaden the concept to make this sneha samuday as centre for multi-pronged activity centre. The immediate economic need like food, water, clothing also needs to be addressed by the sneha samuday. It also should be an information centre primarily to these sections of people but also for the entire village.

Here information on matters like compensation announced means and place where these can be obtained from etc need to be provided to all. This would also serve as a legal aid centre especially in terms of land to be provided protection from land alienation etc.

This centre also has to provide space for cultural activities, which would also revive the energy and the spirit of the people.

Above all the centre will function as an 'empowerment' place for the dispossessed people of all the communities, the marginalized social groups like the Dalits, the Kolis, the Rabanis, the Muslims, the most backward castes and the poor among the backward and upper castes in the order of priority. This can not be achieved unless village and if need be *tola* or hamlet level meetings are not conducted.

This calls for a discussion on the location of the sneha samudaya. In a caste society, this issue of location of the centre needs to be kept in mind.

If this has to be done, the officials, agencies and organizations need to train their volunteers not for relief alone but for rehabilitation and reconstruction. They have to be in a sense bare-foot counselors, bare-foot legal advisors, bare-foot mobilisers. This would also demand a short-term training or initiation into the entire dynamics.

5. **Correct Information:** Rumours are spread about water level rising in Kuchch, epidemics spreading, snatching of food and other material in the area. When one verifies these rumours often they are false. Hence, through handbills, posters, slogans correct informations need to be circulated and wrong informations need to be condemned or disproved. Handbills also need to be printed for passing information about relief package, rehabilitation plans, and availability of various services at different places.
6. **Compensation Package:** At present the following agencies are involved in relief and rehabilitation activities: the affected people themselves, the government, the NGOs, corporate sector, trusts, individuals and international agencies. The relief operation will have to be phased out, except continuing it for most vulnerable and dispossessed groups in the rural areas. Leaving this out all the above mentioned agencies have to put their heads together to work out a 'Relief Package'. One of the most important criterions for relief package is to insist on the principle of 'Replacement Value'. The government can not work out its compensation package on the basis of the money and the material at its disposal but it has to take into the account this fact of replacement of the entire loss. Unless this is done rehabilitation and reconstruction will only be a slogan. At the most by doling out something we would have arrested only the discontent of the people.

7. **Relief Code:** The devastation caused by the earthquake is extensive. But the generosity shown by everyone has also been overwhelming. Due to the fighting spirit of the people of Kuchich and other districts and due to the generous support and empathy shown by people from various walks of life, the disaster affected people are slowly but steadily limping back to normal life. At this stage it is imperative that a Relief Code be envisaged and the government be pressurized to enact and enforce it with utmost political will. It is only by this we will be able to pay homage to many of our brothers and sisters who lost their lives in this tragedy. And it is only in this way we can stand by those who lost their near and dear ones, property and above all continue to suffer the trauma. Few areas that need immediate attention are:
- In relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction the socio-cultural aspects of the people affected by the earthquake should be kept in focus. Otherwise it will be a rehabilitation of our own conscience and not being part of the struggles of those who are affected;
 - The dignity of the people affected by the earthquake also should be kept in mind. It is only because they are affected by the earthquake that we are trying to be part of them and not because they are 'victims'. This should colour our entire thought, word and action;
 - While carrying out relief and rehabilitation the government should be pressurized to come out with a Replacement Value package and not be determined by the amount of relief supply it has at its disposal. If there is political will the government will surely find the necessary means.
 - Every Taluka should have committed IAS/GASA officers directly incharge of relief and rehabilitation operations. They should be given the necessary official permission to assess the situation, plan out strategy and to carry out the operations.
 - Every village should have bare-foot officer who like the Taluka level officers take care of the assessment of the situation, plan out tragedy and to carry out the operations. One of their primary jobs would be to form village level committees, tola level committees so that the entire process is streamlined, wastage is avoided and speedy and smooth operations take place. Since this involves round the clock work they should be given special provisions. A network should be worked out with the district level officials, Taluka officials and the village level officials and the NGOs.
 - If the above two actions are taken care then all the relief material should be brought to base camps set up at Taluka or panchayat levels and from there they should be dispatched to different hamlets, villages, and places where people have taken shelter temporarily. This would avoid duplication, saturation of relief material and rehabilitation processes and would greatly enhance equitable distribution of all types of resources. This would also ensure the maintenance of dignity of the people who are trying to emerge out of the trauma of a massive nature.
 - People affected the earthquake are refusing to rebuild their houses in the same place where their home was once. Their sentiment is that 'We can not rebuild our house on the same location where our near and dear ones were 'buried alive' in front of us". This sentiment of the people should be respected. If this has to be kept in mind, land for reconstruction need to be identified in every locality, village and hamlet. While doing this few important facts need to be kept in mind.

- Common Property Resources should not be touched at all. Because these are the property which is the central focus of all the villages. Efforts should be made to maintain intact all the common property resources. Only as a last resort these should be taken for reconstruction of houses.
- The government has to seriously consider and plan to take hold of ceiling surplus land and redistribute it among all the people who have lost their house. If need be the government has to enact new legislation in this regard.
- There is rumours spread around that in Kuchch region the water level has gone up and new springs have come up due to earthquake. This needs to be verified. But the most important fall out of this type news is that land grabbing would become a common phenomenon. Sale and purchase of land often forced by powerful and dominant section of society will become an uncontrollable development. Hence, the government has to enact legislations to prohibit land alienation, sale or transfer of land for the next two years. Exception: sale, transfer of land should be allowed only for reconstruction of houses for the people affected by the earthquake.

The above presented observations and observations are preliminary in nature. They could be simplistic or based on naïve understanding of the situation. Yet they are presented for generating wider discussion and deliberations so that all the efforts are geared to rebuild the earthquake affected people to spring back to life.

Note: The state government was supposed to announce a relief package on the 12th. But this did not take place though a press conference was held by Mr.L.K. Advani. Instead of announcing the package, Mr.Advani announced that he has asked the state government to work out a comprehensive relief and rehabilitation plan. Even before the central or the state government comes out with any such package, it may be appropriate to present a comprehensive plan to the public so that those who are affected by the earthquake and the people in general exert pressure on the government to keep people in focus when they work out a plan.

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13.2.2001

Gujarat - 21 Days Later

RELIEF:

1. OVERALL:

From most accounts, the RELIEF phase is almost over--the Collector of Kutch and the NGOs may officially say so in a day or two. No more supplies lying on the roads; material is beginning to reach interior villages; and the government's Public Distribution System (PDS) is finally about to kick in, we are told. Janpath's warehouses have been emptying out almost as quickly as supplies come in from different parts of the country. Abhiyan volunteers, some of whose family members were among the dead and injured, are planning to take a couple of days off to be with their families, prior to getting back to work on the Rehabilitation phase. (Most people seem to feel the necessity for a physical break between the Relief and the Rehab phase. "Otherwise, the relief operations could go on for ever," said one volunteer.)

2. PROBLEMS:

This does not mean that everyone has received sufficient food and shelter--at least, not yet. There are still problems. From most newspaper accounts, and our first hand look at one relief camp, there are still fissures along caste and class lines. We are not suggesting overt discrimination by relief organizations, but local customs and power structures may be complicating their work. In some villages, local leaders are apparently determining the distribution of supplies. Also, the reluctance of the middle class to stand in relief lines with the "lower classes," and the reluctance of Dalits to stand in lines with the "upper classes," has been an issue. (When asked why they were personally delivering supplies to the middle class, one volunteer said something like, "You know how proud these people are, they won't stand in lines. The poor people, on the other hand, they can always come to our camp and collect supplies." Notwithstanding these problems, we are convinced that between the government, the NGOs and the religious sector, short-term food supplies will indeed reach most people soon.

3. JANPATH/ABHIYAN/SEWA:

From our own observation, these organizations have done an exemplary job in providing relief, under the circumstances. This sentiment was echoed by several international agencies as well. This is because these organizations have been working in the affected area for years, especially among the poor. Their volunteers know each household in their villages by name, and we were told that Janpath volunteers are physically delivering the One-month Ration Kits to each family on their list. To all those who so generously contributed to the Ration Kit Initiative supported by Indians For Collective Action, California and The Bhoomika Trust, Chennai: contrary to press reports which talk incessantly of relief not reaching the poor, Geetha and I have every confidence that our rations have or will soon reach the needy families.

4. HOW CAN YOU HELP?

We are told that tents, especially larger tents for schools and community centers, are still in **SERIOUS SHORT SUPPLY**. People are already tired of staying under tarps; they are unable to get schools started; and some of them do not have access to larger spaces for community meetings. **ANY ONE WILLING TO PAY FOR or DESPATCH SUCH TENTS** (poles can be procured locally), dhurries and chatais (bamboo mats) **ARE ENCOURAGED TO DO SO IMMEDIATELY**. PLEASE CONTACT SEWA (they need about 50 large tents) and UNNATI at the numbers given below. Suggestions: a. Foreign donors, please do not ship expensive tents. Coordinate with an Indian NGO to purchase canvas tents locally and ship them ASAP, b. If you can't ship tents, ship double-layered canvas cloth, and local NGOs such as UNNATI can have tents custom-stitched in Ahmedabad (provides employment), c. No more tarps, as they won't survive the monsoon! [BHOMIKA TRUST and ICA California: After paying for the 1,000 ration kits from Chennai (approx Rs. 10 lakhs), we will have Rs. 5-6 lakhs left. Should we invest part of it in supplying tents? We can discuss this later among our e-groups. Also, we can coordinate with the Indian Express people and the Round Table to see if they want to help ship tents.]

5. LESSONS LEARNED FROM RELIEF OPERATIONS:

Know the local culture before shipping relief supplies. a. People affected were not looking for cooked puris and chappathis from Tiruchi, or for CARE food packets beyond one or two days! They were looking for foodgrains and water so they could start cooking their own food ASAP, b. Old clothes, definitely a NO, NO. As for new clothes, miniskirts, jeans and sarees, for people who wear gagra/cholis? We were told that boxfuls of inappropriate clothing were still lying in warehouses all across Gujarat (some may have even found their way to markets in Mumbai.)

REHABILITATION

While a sense of **URGENCY** was important to the **RELIEF** phase, most NGOs and the local government are urging patience while rehabilitation plans are worked out in the coming days and weeks. For those of us from the outside, our appeal is to **WAIT**, but **NOT FORGET** (there are a few areas in which we can help immediately, see below).

Most of the NGOs are beginning to seriously look at plans for long term rehabilitation of the affected people. While there is recognition that only the government and international agencies can come up with the level of funds required for long term rehabilitation, they are at the same time very very skeptical that such aid will reach the needy in a timely or appropriate manner. They point to the experience of Latur and other disasters overseas where it took years before providing permanent houses to the affected.

Nonetheless, they are continuing to work closely with the government, while working out their own plans for the rehabilitation phase. Here are some highlights from our conversations:

1. ORPHANS/CHILDREN:

NGOs, international organizations such as Save the Children, and the RSS, each for their own reason, are asking people to place on hold the rush to seek out kids for adoption! Adoptions are NOT a priority. The focus is to provide trauma counseling, and bring back a certain routine in the lives of the kids, IN THEIR OWN ENVIRONMENT. There seems to be plenty of professional guidance in the area of psychological/trauma counseling (e.g. NIMHANS, Bangalore), however, the need for more Gujarati-speaking counselors has been expressed by several NGOs. (Let us remember that our help in procuring large tents, already mentioned, can directly help the communities restart classes for kids ASAP). Also, SEWA is asking for help in procuring simple playthings such as, play dough, scribble chalk & boards, simple toys, etc. for their 2,000 kids. This can be in cash or kind, but please no barbie dolls or other high-tech dolls. Most of what they need can be procured right here in Ahmedabad.

2. ADOPTING VILLAGES: NO! NO!! NO!!!

As one NGO put it, all the affected villages have been "taken," with more "adopters" than eligible "adoptees." The notion of adopting villages is being decried by the NGOs as well as the Collector. For one, it is very condescending, implying long term dependence, whereas most villagers want to get back to a routine quickly, and want gainful employment. Secondly, it is obvious that the concept of "adoption" is ready-made for all the publicity hogs, who are falling over each other to "adopt" villages, without a clue as to what it is supposed to mean. In our opinion, long term partnerships with local NGOs, who are focusing on livelihood issues, is a more sound concept (see SEWA's priorities below).

[Exception: "adopting" a village may be OK if the adopting organization has deep roots in the village, is adopting it with the blessing of the village, and has a clear plan on what they plan to accomplish there.]

3. LIVELIHOOD SECURITY:

SEWA is not an NGO in a strict sense, but is a Women's cooperative consisting of over 60,000 women. Most of their members have been severely affected by the quake. Nevertheless, their focus today is how they can move their membership from a relief mode to an employment mode. This week, they are providing craft kits to their members, most of whom are craftspeople, so that they can get back to embroidery and start marketing their products ASAP. While it may be hard for many of us to imagine that women who have been so traumatized by the quake would want to be sitting in their temporary shelters knitting all day long, this is EXACTLY what they want to do. Another example of a livelihood security issue is helping salt workers rebuild their damaged salt pans (approx Rs. 30,000 per family of capital expense involved, we are told.) Whether they are craftspeople, or laborers, or salt workers, all they want to do is get back to work. Volunteers who have been wanting to come here in large numbers and "help" should keep in mind that a better option may be to provide moral and financial support from where they are to the large labor pool right here. We don't want to put them out of work, do we? For anyone wanting to focus on long-term livelihood issues, SEWA or UNNATI or ABHIYAN are good places to start. (We are carrying a paper by SEWA on this issue, if you are interested.)

4. PERMANENT SHELTERS:

The government apparently approved a plan by one group two days ago to put up a large number of shelters, with corrugated iron walls and roof-in a place where the temperatures in summer can reach over 130F degrees! NGOs are aghast but not surprised that such things happen, and hence they are taking their own initiative in designing low income, earthquake-resistant structures quickly. We met several knowledgeable people working with the NGOs on this issue. Support to these efforts will go a long way in getting people into more permanent houses. We will provide details of these later. (We are carrying a proposal on shelters from Abhiyan/Janpath if anyone is interested--the plan emphasizes use of local labor in areas such as casting tiles, etc.)

SUMMARY:

NEED:

More tents (especially larger ones); dhurries/chatais; support for livelihood security (e.g. crafts, salt pans, local labor opportunities); expertise in low-income e/q resistant housing; and MONEY to local NGOs to support these initiatives. [Some NGOs are already seeing the initial hype of financial help fade quickly, with very few checks actually received to date.]

DO NOT NEED (for now anyway):

More village adoptions, general-purpose volunteers, medical supplies, food, doctors, etc.

Impressions from Raju & Geetha Rajagopal dated 18 February 2001.