FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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BUILDING BACK BETTER LIVELIHOODS IN TSUNAMI-AFFECTED COUNTRIES

Principled assistance to the most vulnerable

Rapid assessments immediately after the tsunami confirmed that the fisheries sector was hit worst by the disaster. Crops and livestock as well as coastal ecosystems, including mangroves and tree crops, also suffered serious damage. The brunt of the killer waves was felt mainly by the millions of fishers and farmers living in coastal communities. Reconstruction efforts offer an opportunity not just to restore livelihoods and rehabilitate ecosystems to pre-tsunami levels, but to "build back better," thus improving the well being of the poor and vulnerable communities affected by the disaster. To do so requires adherence to a set of principles that build on extensive experience in fisheries and agricultural development and should be at the core of all reconstruction activities.

- Focus on poverty alleviation: this includes promotion of equitable access to land, capital, natural resources, and improved technologies. The goal is to create sustained employment-intensive activities, which benefit especially the most vulnerable and marginalized.

- Reconstruction efforts must be market-led and economically sustainable: rehabilitation of fishing and farming must be in line with the realities of local supply and demand of related inputs and products. This will provide real incentives and opportunities for people in coastal communities to develop sustainable livelihoods that will also benefit the local economy.

- Environmental sustainability must underpin reconstruction strategies: to ensure the health of local ecosystems, which in many cases had been suffering from overuse. Coastal communities are particularly dependent on the health and diversity of local ecosystems for their economic well-being.

- Be integrated and holistic, as such approaches are particularly important in the coastal zone and for poorer coastal communities: Coastal areas tend to be fragile with a complex set of ecological interactions taking place. The economic well-being of the community depends on maintaining a variety of ecosystems around them.

- All approaches need to be participatory and consider the real needs and capabilities of local people. Local leaders and community organizations should be fully engaged in all reconstruction efforts, in particular in assessing the relevance of the activities. Community-led initiatives promote ownership, empowerment and improved relations.

FAO's role in "building back better"

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) plays an integral role in protecting and re-establishing agricultural and fisheries production in the aftermath of natural disasters and conflicts. FAO's strategy is to save, restore and enhance agriculture and fisheries based livelihoods to reduce vulnerability, increase self-reliance, and enable an early exit from dependency on external assistance.

As the lead UN standard bearer in agriculture, fisheries and forestry, FAO's role is to provide the countries affected by the tsunami with technical and policy guidance to plan and coordinate all rehabilitation efforts in these sectors with the aim of optimising sustainable outcomes. Vulnerable fishing and farming families have suffered most from the devastation, thus FAO's emphasis is on rebuilding their livelihood opportunities to enhance their food security and incomes, with an eye to ensuring that capacities are rebuilt in accordance with the requirements of sustainable resource use and improved environmental protection. Affected communities must be empowered

through the development of more diverse livelihoods, with greater productivity, more income and less stress to the environment.

Coastal fisheries and aquaculture communities in Indonesia and Sri Lanka have suffered disproportionately from the tsunami, though there is a risk of neglecting the impact of the tsunami on communities in the other countries. The killer waves have taken thousands of lives, together with productive assets, infrastructure, and other means of survival to an extent never seen before. Rebuilding affected communities is a major challenge given the variety of fishing inputs and level of technical expertise required. FAO's "building back better" strategy in the reconstruction of the fisheries sector is based on use of appropriate technology, adherence to basic quality and safety standards, and natural resource conservation and management. For example, damaged fishing vessels must be repaired to meet minimum specifications of seaworthiness. Perhaps more importantly, fisheries-related ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reef and seagrass beds must be protected through zoning (e.g. restricted-use and non-use) and through fisheries management tools to prevent over fishing. There is also a need to encourage sustainable use of resources through certain types of mari-culture such as fish pens/cages and seaweed culture. Furthermore, fishing gear and practices must be compatible with responsible fisheries, thus avoiding overcapacity and ensuring sustainable long-term fisheries production.

Coastal agriculture and the communities dependent on related livelihoods have also been adversely affected by the tsunami. The emergency situation has required interventions aimed at baseline activities – the immediate recovery of food production and supply. The resumption of sustainable agricultural activities and restoration of crop production in the affected areas, however, is dependent on the rehabilitation of damaged agricultural areas and infrastructure, reclamation of salt-affected soils, appropriate land use planning and the strategic adjustment of cropping systems. The coastal zone accommodates a complex mixture of many activities including agriculture, fisheries, forestry and tourism. Agriculture and home gardening are major activities but cannot be isolated from others. Full consideration should be given to integrated multi-sector approaches balancing increased productivity and resource preservation.

Forests and trees. Many farmers and fisher folk in tsunami-affected areas are dependent on forests and trees for their livelihoods. Efforts to rehabilitate mangrove forests, to plant coastal shelterbelts, and to replant timber and fruit trees would serve to protect human lives and inland assets, and improve household economies. Furthermore, the restoration of small timber milling facilities would provide local employment and increase wood processing capacity. Many non-governmental organizations are ready to support large scale mangrove afforestation. However, unless these efforts are properly planned within the context of an integrated coastal area management programme to take into account local social, economic and ecological conditions, they could have significant negative effects on the local people (dislocation, restricted access to coastlines by fishers, occupation of farmland) and on the environment. Moreover, the huge demand for wood for reconstruction may trigger over-harvesting and illegal logging of forests in some affected countries. For example, indications are that illegal logging is on the rise in Aceh Province where the estimated volume of wood needed for reconstruction is eight times the amount of wood harvested legally each year.

The effect of the tsunami on agriculture, fisheries and forestry has been well-documented, with the weight of the disaster borne disproportionately by the vulnerable coastal communities whose livelihoods depend on these sectors. While the challenges ahead are great, the response of the international community suggests that they can be overcome. What is of utmost importance at this stage is that the tremendous amount of resources that have been marshalled be directed responsibly and reach those most affected. Communities must be built back better to ensure their resilience and productivity for generations to come.

FAO's role as the lead UN agency in the rehabilitation of the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors of tsunami-affected countries must be advocated. FAO's mandate is built on years of practical experience in these fields, and its comparative technical advantage can be brought to bear in a holistic and integrated manner, thus ensuring the food security and livelihoods of the vulnerable farmers and fishers whose interests the Organization serves.