

In the morning of 26th December 2004, a devastating Tsunami of incredible magnitude struck 12 countries in South East and South Asia, East Africa and the Indian Ocean. This natural disaster caused varying degrees of damage to lives, livelihoods, infrastructure and economies in India, Indonesia (Sumatra), Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Somalia and the Seychelles. The countries worse hit were Indonesia and Sri Lanka; India and Thailand also suffered significant damage. The incident, which occurred for only a few minutes in each country, took more than 290 000 lives and devastated many fisheries and coastal aquaculture in all the affected countries. Reports indicate that in Sri Lanka over 70 percent of the coastal fishing capability has been lost, and in Banda Aceh in Indonesia, besides serious damage to fisheries, almost 50 000 ha of aquaculture facilities have been destroyed. The Thai and Indian marine cage culture and shrimp aquaculture (including hatcheries) sectors have also suffered significant damages.

The loss in human life is staggering and can never be adequately compensated, but rebuilding the fisheries and aquaculture sector is possible and necessary. In partnership with other agencies, FAO is helping affected countries by providing emergency assistance for relief, rehabilitation, planning and rebuilding of the fisheries sectors under an agency-wide, multilateral assistance programme supported by many countries and development agencies. In doing so, FAO will ensure that the relief and rehabilitation efforts will improve the capacity of the local people to be better prepared for similar natural disasters. The assistance programme is implemented in accordance with the national rehabilitation and rebuilding plans, and in collaboration and consultation with the stakeholders. The programme also address the possibilities of adopting a better livelihoods approach to development that couples rehabilitation and reconstruction with appropriate reforms.

In most of the affected countries, there are opportunities for integrated planning and rebuilding, recognizing that the livelihoods of fishers and fish farmers are not only multidimensional but also have strong socio-economic linkages to other activities and communities close by. The Fisheries Department of FAO is now working closely with several affected governments in providing the required technical assistance.

Visit <http://www.fao.org/tsunami/> to learn more.

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*Cover photo courtesy of Md. Ghulam Kibria:
A view of ethnic minority households along
with VAC farming, Viet Nam*

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