



THE JOURNEY BEYOND THE WAVES



Community health approach in response to disaster affected communities

SOCHARA has a long history of responding to disasters starting from student days of the co-initiators. Beginning from the Bangladesh refugee camp, SOCHARA has responded to many major disasters in the country and has supported the relief efforts. In 2004, SOCHARA responded to the tsunami disaster and unlike other disaster responses it decided to stay for a longer time based on the needs of the community and requirements among the civil society organisations.



Relief phase

SOCHARA worked in Chennai, Chidambaram, Cuddalore, Kanniyakumari, and Nagapattinam during the relief phase. It mobilised medical teams and medicines from Bangalore and worked along with Association for India Development, Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF), Action Aid, Jain Association of Sirkazhi, Oxfam GB, New Entity for Social Action (NESA) and with few other local groups. In the very early days of the disaster, SOCHARA worked deeply in Kottaimedu, Maduwaimedu and Keelamoorkarai villages of Sirkazhi Taluk, Nagapattinam. Medical relief, psycho social support, coordination and networking, and community building were the major support provided during the relief phase.



Feasibility study

Following a feasibility study done to assess the need for continuation after the relief phase and with internal assessment SOCHARA decided to stay in Tamil Nadu for long term of rehabilitation activities. Chennai and Tiruvallur districts were the two long term intervention areas. Two of SOCHARA's team members started working in these two districts.



Networking

Chennai NGO Coordination Council (CNCC): Among the 13 coastal districts of Tamil Nadu, Chennai was the only district where NGOs were not given enough space to rehabilitate people with the Government directly taking over through its machinery. SOCHARA took the lead role in formation of CNCC to initiate discussion on various issues including ensuring the accountability of the government. The council intervened in getting proper shelter for the

Kargil and Kannagi Nagar residents who were living in temporary shelters which were twice damaged by flash floods and a major fire accident. A documentary film “Living on the Edge” was produced by the SOCHARA’s Academic Research Council (ARC) to support the council’s efforts. The Council successfully lobbied and built semi-permanent shelters at Ernavoor. SOCHARA continued its community training and psycho-social counselling in these shelters till mid-2006.

Pazhaverkadu Action Network (PAN): In Pazhaverkadu, Tiruvallur district the team took the lead initiative in forming PAN with 18 member organisations with aim of being accountable to community and to avoid duplication of work. PAN worked on the long-time pending developmental issues including construction of bridge for the island, resolving the community conflict and strengthening of Pazhaverkadu Government hospital through sub committees. The network did in-depth work on developing community’s skills on Community Based Disaster Preparedness activities.



Creating community health work force:

Based on the interest and need expressed by various NGOs from Pazhaverkadu region, SOCHARA initiated a series of sessions that provided inputs on community health for a few selected NGO staffs. In order to develop the trainees, who are local residents, as nodal persons for health in their villages weekly trainings were conducted on 24 topics including broader concept of social determinants of health, child health

management, women’s health, public health system etc.

Countervailing power of youth groups: In order to strengthen the understanding of the Pazhaverkadu youth on various issues including people centred development, alternative media, culture, literature, arts, globalisation and secular thinking, SOCHARA team brought together college students of the region under “Pazhaverkadu Student Club” and conducted indepth weekly discussion sessions for them. From 2005 to 2009 most of the students in the region were mobilised and motivated to take part in the program. Various resource persons, in house and external, were brought into the program that held discussions with student community on a regular basis. Developing critical analysis skill, questioning spirit and volunteerism among the youth was in focus. In later years the motivated and conscious group took lead role in campaigning for regularising the Public Distribution System, for allotment of free housing by local Panchayats and against water privatisation. They also volunteered to clean the hospital and library.

Solidarity support by People’s Health Movement (PHM): In April 2005, the PHM held a solidarity dialogue with Tsuanmi victims on “Humanitarian aid to community development” in Chennai. PHM delegates from all over the globe had participated with the SOCHARA team hosted the dialogue.