

Bernard van Leer Foundation's response to the tsunami

Bernard van Leer Foundation

Together with millions of individuals around the world, the Bernard van Leer Foundation responded to the tsunami of December 2004 by asking how best it might be able to help the millions who had lost homes, livelihoods and loved ones. The immediate response was a grant to an existing partner organisation, the Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI), to support relief work in the Andaman Islands, among the areas closest to the epicentre of the earthquake.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation's Board of Trustees also allocated EUR 1 million in addition to the Foundation's regular annual budget to address issues of longer-term rehabilitation and development in tsunami-affected regions of South and South-East Asia. The Foundation has prioritised the following areas:

- support to parents directly affected by the disaster in their caregiving role;
- support to (para)professionals such as midwives, childcare staff and healthcare staff;
- creating safe and normal environments for young children, such as opportunities for play and social interaction.

Following an exploratory mission to affected countries in April by the Foundation, the Foundation's strategy for disbursing that money is now taking shape.

The tsunami support fund will make grants available to local organisations, some of them existing partners, in India, Indonesia and Thailand. It will not include other affected countries, notably Sri Lanka, not because the need is any less great but because it makes sense for the Foundation to concentrate its resources on countries where it already has strong local knowledge and links with

local organisations. Supporting activities which are in line with the Foundation's mandate and emerging priorities should enable the grants to contribute to improving conditions for young children in the aftermath of a crisis.

The need for an approach that is long-term and takes account of the national situation is informed by an awareness that areas affected in India, Indonesia and Thailand are generally not ones which would previously have been regarded as most disadvantaged: fishing communities tended to have relatively stable livelihoods, while tourism brought cash to many areas not affected by conflict. It will take a long time for the devastated areas to regain the capacity to exploit the natural advantages of coastal proximity, but there is also a risk of other areas of affected countries being left to languish if aid efforts remain highly concentrated on coastal regions for too long.

Grants from the Foundation's tsunami support fund will therefore generally seek to support activities which have the potential to replicate and expand their benefits. Funded projects will commonly centre around social and emotional support, seeking to ensure that the psychological needs of young children and their caregivers are not overlooked.

In **India**, in addition to the collaboration with VHAI, Loyola College is using the Foundation's grant money to provide systematic relief activities including psychosocial counselling, damage assessments for childcare centres, supplementary rations and play activities for affected children. Other existing partner organisations through whom the Foundation will be working include the Forum for Creche and Childcare Services of Tamil Nadu (TN-FORCES), a network of 114 NGOs. With its many

members, TN-FORCES is uniquely well qualified to see the bigger picture and understand where help is most needed in the context of government policies and existing NGO interventions.

TN-FORCES is also in a position to foresee how the response to the tsunami may be finessed into more lasting and widespread benefits for children. TN-FORCES has already had some success in this regard: in the period after the tsunami, its long campaign to improve maternity benefits for informal female workers paid off with a significant increase in the lump-sum paid to all women on the birth of a child. It is hoping that its intention to rebuild the Integrated Child Development Centres (ICDs) destroyed along coastal regions in the tsunami will ultimately lead to improvements in ICDs as a whole in the state, serving as a model to other states.

In **Thailand**, the problem since the tsunami has not been a lack of resources but a lack of overall coordination and overview in allocating them. In some cases, foreigners and benefactors have approached individuals and communities with money; some schools have been inundated with help, while others have received nothing. The Ministry of Education is well aware of the need for coordination and the Foundation intends to cooperate with government plans to help channel its response: the Ministry of Education is already working with the Department of Mental Health on holding child-centred seminars about the effects of the tsunami.

Additional approaches in Thailand will include adapting existing psychosocial support structures set up for HIV/AIDS to deal with the psychosocial aftermath of the tsunami, and working with existing partner the Maya Art and Cultural Institute for Development, which works in affected provinces to provide post-trauma counselling workshops using Arts and Drama Therapy for children and teachers, in collaboration with Educational Zone Offices.



Photo: JIM HOLMES

Supporting parents in their caregiving role is one of the Foundation's priorities

In **Indonesia**, while international agencies have established a forum to coordinate the response, there is still a need for stronger input from local governmental and non-governmental organisations. The Foundation looks to collaborate with Save the Children in Aceh in retraining midwives and promoting birth registration, but will also support Indonesian agencies responding to the needs of children and parents.

This includes supporting the Institute for Women and Children's Studies and Development (LSPPA), which in collaboration with Gadjah Mada University, the largest university in Indonesia, is working to ensure that psychosocial support care programmes do not remain rooted in schools and health facilities but also involve parents – many of whom are themselves suffering severe guilt and trauma – and thereby reach the youngest children. As government structures take shape mandated to coordinate rehabilitation efforts, the Foundation will seek to orient its work to bigger trends.

Generally, the Foundation is seeking to coordinate its efforts with other Dutch and European foundations, through the Dutch Association of Foundations and the European Foundation Centre, and to place those efforts within the larger relief and rehabilitation frameworks being put together by national and international agencies.