USAID | ASIA
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

U.S. Contribution to the
Indian Ocean
Tsunami Warning
System

US IOTWS Small Grants Program
Community Provides Model Approach
COASTAL COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING IN COASTAL HAZARD ANALYSIS, MITIGATION AND PREPAREDNESS, AND DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

SEWALANKA FOUNDATION

Children in tsunami-prone villages enjoy fun activities while learning about disaster preparedness at the "Fun Bus".

Mock drill in Kudapayagala

U.S. Agency for International Development
www.usaid.gov

US IOTWS Small Grants Program
The US Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System (IOTWS) Program has funded 17 small grants in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand as part of its $16.6 million two-year effort to support the development of an end-to-end warning system in the region. The grants program catalyzed and promoted pilot activities that contribute to community and bottom-up results in disaster mitigation, preparedness, and response.

Strengthening Coastal Community Resilience in Sri Lanka
When the tsunami struck the coastline of Sri Lanka on 26th December 2004, the total damage and loss was immense. It was not possible to prevent the tsunami, but the total impact and the total loss of life could have been significantly lowered if the community had the tools it needed to respond safely and effectively to such a disaster.

Sri Lanka has suffered from a number of both man-made and natural disasters in the past, especially over the past decade. Often rural communities live in fear for their lives, and welcome the input of knowledge and training. The nonprofit foundation, Sewalanka, worked with two Sri Lankan communities—Kaluthara and Hambantota— to educate them on potential risks to coastal hazards so that they are better prepared. The project took a multi-hazard approach, not just exclusively focusing on tsunami, emphasizing more likely and immediate coastal hazards and dangers.

Project Achievements
The project successfully established an active and well functioning Village Community Disaster Management Committee (VCDMC) in each of the communities. The VCDMC took special notice of the most vulnerable members of their community (woman, children and the disabled) to ensure their safety and has developed excellent relations with relevant agencies in the area to guarantee ongoing support. Sewalanka and the VCMDC implemented a community early-warning system and organized mock drills to fully prepare the community for an evacuation should the need occur. Trainings and workshops were held regularly to reiterate and reinforce the emergency preparedness plans and to answer questions and concerns from the community.

The VCDMCs have also been working with the National Disaster Management Center (DMC). These villages are now connected to the national warning system and lessons learned from this project can be applied to future village-level preparedness projects across the country.

Children's preparedness workshop

Lessons Learned

The most important lesson learned from this process was that one year was not a sufficient amount of time to train two entire communities in disaster preparedness—a completely new and unique subject for both villages. The religious diversity of the community also posed a scheduling problem (due to religious holidays), as well as the main livelihood activity, fishing, as few men participated at the beginning of the project due to fishing season.

The project was to include a savings plan for the next disaster; however, village members living just above the poverty-line cannot afford the luxury of putting money into savings. The importance of a savings plan was presented to the community and it is well understood to be an important part of their emergency plans, yet funding for such a savings plan is unavailable at this time. Finally, the intensive nature of activities planned through the large number of NGOs created a sense of exhaustion in the community—these efforts should be better coordinated in the future.

Next Steps

Sewalanka had established community based organizations in these communities prior to this project and had been actively working there. This work will continue beyond the life of this project. The DMC is interested in continuing to work with Sewalanka to ensure the disaster management training continues. DMC has received funding for community- level disaster preparedness and would like to use this funding to support Sewalanka's work in these two villages and surrounding villages. Due to Sewalanka's long-term presence in the area, the end of a grant cycle does not mean the end of a project to the community members. Sewalanka will continue to respond to all requests for additional trainings or materials.

About Sewalanka Foundation

The mission of Sewalanka Foundation is to enhance the capacity of rural communities to democratically identify and address their own development needs and to provide services that contribute to economically viable, socially just and ecologically sustainable development of Sri Lanka. We work with the poorest communities to take them from relief aid to a long term program of sustainable development.

For more information on activities or partnership opportunities with Sewalanka Foundation, visit www.sewalanka.org.

About the US Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System (IOTWS) Program

The US IOTWS Program is part of the international effort to develop tsunami warning system capabilities in the Indian Ocean following the December 2004 tsunami disaster. The US program adopts an "end-to-end" approach—addressing regional, national, and local aspects of a truly functional warning system—along with multiple other hazards that threaten communities in the region. In partnership with the international community, national governments, and other partners, the US program offers technology transfer, training, and information resources to strengthen the tsunami warning and preparedness capabilities of national and local stakeholders in the region. For more information please visit **www.us-iotws.gov**.

U.S. Contribution to the
Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System

U.S. Agency for International Development
www.usaid.gov

October 2007