

REPORT 3
1215/52/IM

OPTIONS FOR PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO SRI LANKA FOLLOWING THE 2004 BOXING DAY TSUNAMI

1. Purpose of Report

To set out a range of possible options for assisting with the recovery efforts in Sri Lanka following the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami (the 'tsunami').

2. Executive Summary

In addition to the huge international aid effort, several New Zealand councils have responded directly to the plight of countries adversely affected by the tsunami. This has ranged from direct funding a specific project, to co-ordinating community fundraising activities, to supporting fundraising efforts.

At the request of the Social Portfolio Chairperson, research has been undertaken into what assistance could possibly be provided by Wellington City Council and what likely benefits might accrue. There are several options which the Council could pursue including co-ordinating community fundraising efforts, providing technical assistance and undertaking a fact finding mission. The potential benefits of these options could be investigated by a small working party and reported back to the Committee before any final decision is taken.

Apart from any benefits for communities in tsunami affected areas, some potential benefits to Wellington City Council and the local community could include the opportunity to learn firsthand about emergency management and recovery and to raise public awareness regarding civil defence issues.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1. Receive the information.*
- 2. Note that a number of Councils have taken a pro-active role in providing assistance to the recovery efforts in tsunami affected countries, principally North Shore City Council and Hamilton City Council.*
- 3. Agree to establish an officer working party to explore possible initiatives that Wellington City Council could undertake towards providing assistance to tsunami affected areas.*

4. *Agree that the working party will report back to this committee in September 2005.*

4. Background

4.1 The Tsunami

The Indian Ocean tsunami on Boxing Day 2004 resulted in nearly 300,000 deaths in the following countries – Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India (including the Andoman and Nicobar Islands), Malaysia, Maldives, Burma, Bangladesh, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and The Seychelles. Many people are still missing and communities are still struggling to rebuild.

To date, New Zealand has donated \$94 million towards the relief and recovery of those countries affected (\$26 million from private donations and \$68 million from Government pledges). International aid has largely assisted with short-term needs of emergency food and water, shelter and medicine. The estimated reconstruction costs for the countries affected are in the billions of US dollars, and to date, only a fraction of this has been pledged. There is still an on-going need for aid in the medium and long term.

4.2 Assistance provided by local authorities

In addition to the huge international aid effort, several New Zealand councils, including Wellington City Council, have responded directly to aid efforts, mainly in relation to Sri Lanka. Activities have ranged from direct funding a specific project, to co-ordinating community fundraising activities, to supporting fundraising efforts.

Each council has taken the best approach to fit its own circumstances and legal advice given. The summary of assistance is provided here;

North Shore City Council

North Shore City Council has taken a proactive role towards providing assistance. Initially, a small officer working group was established and given \$25,000 from Council funds as a project budget. North Shore has been investigating the following assistance projects;

- Agreement in principle to partner with Sarvodaya – a Sri Lankan based Non-Government Organisation (NGO) - to sponsor a housing reconstruction project which would be adopted by North Shore
- Investigation of the feasibility of working with the Ministry of Housing and Construction in Sri Lanka to allocate an area of land for the construction of 25 homes. North Shore City Council would sponsor this project which would be delivered by Task Force to Rebuild the Nation (TAFREN)

The Council has also organised various staff fundraising events for tsunami relief.

Hamilton City Council

One of the Hamilton City Councillors, supported by the city's Mayor, has set up 'Operation Phoenix'. The initial focus was to be on establishing a relief fund and

donating this to a known NGO. The Councillor visited Sri Lanka and decided that a reconstruction project would be a more practical course of action.

He placed an article in the local paper asking for cash, donations of building materials and tools, and for volunteers with building expertise. To date around \$117,000 has been raised (including cash and other donations) and a party of volunteers from the Hamilton community has spent around four weeks rebuilding the Sri Lankan village of Seeingama.

Auckland City Council

The tsunami was the trigger for setting up 'Partnerships for Progress', which aims to look at the wider issue of global poverty and what role Auckland City Council has, through its community leadership role, in eradicating it. The Council has undertaken a lot of research and held workshops on whether there is any scope to establish an Aid Relief Board. The Council has had discussions with NZAID (the Government's overseas aid agency) and the Council for International Development (CID) to see whether the Council could become a co-ordinating entity within the community to tackle global poverty.

Discussions are still on-going. The Council has not contributed any funds, but several Council officers have spent a significant amount of time researching ways forward.

Gisborne District Council

The Mayor has given his support to community fundraising activities led by a Gisborne resident of Sri Lankan descent. This person has also been working with the local Lions Club. Mayoral support has given the project more status and accountability. The Mayor has attended all of the fundraising events.

Council staff have had limited input e.g. one member of staff has helped to co-ordinate one of the fundraising events. The Council has not contributed any funds to the appeal. The amount raised to date is \$40,000 (including the government \$1 for \$1 donation).

Wairarapa Tsunami Response

The combined Lions Clubs of the Wairarapa are planning a major fundraising event during May 2005, which will allow the community to contribute through a telephone appeal. Members of the community can also make donations at Masterton, Carterton and South Wairarapa District Council offices.

All funds are being handled by Lions International who will not deduct administration fees. Local community organisations are also being asked to support the project. Two representatives from the Lions Club will travel to Sri Lanka to visit the town of Magella which will be the recipient of the funds raised.

Wellington City Council

A few days after the tsunami, the Council's call centre arranged to take the overflow calls from the Oxfam call centre in Lower Hutt. Call centre staff took donations on

behalf of Oxfam whilst still maintaining their own business operations. It is not possible to determine the amount of additional funds raised for the tsunami appeal, but there were limited costs to doing this, in terms of a small amount of overtime paid to staff.

Summary

These initiatives demonstrate that local authorities have considered it appropriate to respond in some way to the plight, although the extent of involvement has been varied.

It is understood that most of these councils, if not all, have decided to assist Sri Lanka, for reasons outlined below.

4.3 Why Sri Lanka has been supported by Councils

Indonesia and Sri Lanka were the two worst hit countries in terms of victims and loss of infrastructure. In the Aceh province of Indonesia (which was closest to the epicentre of the earthquake which triggered the tsunami) at least 126,000 people died, at least 37,000 are missing and around 800,000 are homeless. Sri Lanka suffered considerable losses, with its southern, eastern and northern coastlines hardest hit, destroying homes, crops and fishing boats. At least 40,000 people are known to have died, more than 10,000 are missing and around 1 million people have been displaced.

Although Indonesia suffered the worse losses, and needs more assistance, advice suggests that it is the more difficult of the two countries to work in, primarily because of the civil war in Aceh. Post-tsunami, the situation between the government forces, separatist rebels and the aid agencies is delicate, making that region unstable and potentially unsafe. Assistance is being provided by experienced aid agencies and the government in Aceh. Efforts are still focussing on the short term emergency relief, as the region was so badly damaged.

Despite its own legacy of civil war, Sri Lanka is more stable than Aceh as there has been a ceasefire in place for some time. The United Nations and other agencies are working to distribute food, shelter and supplies in these districts and the government is set to begin rebuilding seaside towns as part of a US\$3.5 billion reconstruction drive.

The councils who have supported Sri Lanka have done so because it is the more accessible country, particularly for involvement with specific re-building projects. Council representatives who have visited Sri Lanka report that there is still a desperate need for on-going assistance in the short, medium and long term.

4.4 Community Activity

Although it cannot be quantified, it is likely that many Wellington residents will have made a financial contribution to the tsunami appeal. It is known that at least two of the Wellington-based Sri Lankan groups (United Sri Lanka Association (USLA) and the Wellington Tamil Society) have undertaken a significant amount of fundraising for towns and villages in Sri Lanka. A representative of USLA has also visited Sri

Lanka to determine where best to channel funds raised. It can only be assumed that other individual and group efforts have either taken place, or are planned.

5. Discussion

5.1 *The benefits of getting involved*

The primary beneficiaries of any assistance provided by the Council will be those in the tsunami-affected areas. However, in providing assistance the Council and the local community has the potential to receive some direct and indirect benefits, in the following ways:

- Developing council and community awareness and learning for civil defence disaster readiness and relief and reconstruction for disaster events which may occur in Wellington. For example, working to assist Sri Lanka also provides an opportunity to publicise the tsunami risk present in Wellington City, or could assist training for officers who have responsibilities in the area of emergency response.
- Developing a sense of social and global responsibility in Council for those affected by a disaster.
- Enhancing a sense of community responsibility in assisting another nation and being 'global citizens'.
- Further fostering of community spirit and social belonging of Sri Lankan and other ethnic groups with other Wellington city residents.

5.2 *Options Available to Council*

If the Council wishes to take a proactive approach to providing further assistance then officers recommend it set up a small officer working party. This group could consider initiatives set out in this report, and other proposals it might identify. The officer working party could consist of representatives from;

- Community services
- Wellington Emergency Management Office
- Infrastructure
- Marketing/External Communications

The working group could explore the following options, amongst others:

5.2.1 Co-ordinate Community Fundraising

The Council could use its community leadership role to facilitate, administer and market fundraising activities across the city in partnership with groups such as the Lions and Rotary clubs, local press, schools and businesses, to raise funds for an identified project, such as an 'Adopt-a-Village' scheme¹. All funds would need to be

¹ Aid agencies report that public interest in sponsoring appeals for natural disasters usually drops off after the first year, so there is a real challenge to sustain fundraising efforts in the longer term. Local communities adopting villages could help to sustain interest.

channelled through a reputable NGO in order to monitor progress and ensure appropriate use of funds.

An appropriate NGO called Sarvodaya is Sri Lankan based and non-partisan working with Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim communities. This has been the preferred NGO for North Shore City Council and local Wellington Sri Lankan community fundraising events.

5.2.2 Provide Technical Assistance

Council technical expertise could be utilised in Sri Lanka to provide some support to the relief and redevelopment work underway. If such an approach was undertaken, the "hands on" presence and experience for staff in the contribution of technical assistance at the disaster site could provide some reciprocal benefit to Wellington City. The learning experience from being in a real situation, and the benefits gained are emphasised from a civil defence point of view. Planned civil defence exercises, although advantageous, could not match the benefits of assisting with and observing recovery in real situations, which would assist in the city's preparedness for a possible emergency situation.

The Council could provide technical expertise to NGO staff in the field in the following areas;

- Sewage, water, stormwater
- Project management
- Building
- Roothing
- Civil Defence
- Solid waste and recycling
- Design

5.2.3 Use Existing Information

The Council could use information gathered from North Shore City Council, Hamilton City Council and USLA's own fact finding missions to Sri Lanka to help determine the best approach, for example to assist in identifying a possible village to adopt, or other project to support.

5.2.4 Visit Sri Lanka

A representative(s) from Wellington City Council could undertake a fact finding mission to identify a potential project and to learn first-hand challenges regarding emergency management / civil defence work relevant to Wellington City.

5.3 Funding /Resources

In setting up a working party, the primary resources utilised would be that of officers' time. Any recommendations arising from the working group would be reported back to the Committee setting out any future resource implications for the Council.

5.4 Compliance

Under the LGA 2002, the Council must exercise its functions and powers and use its resources in a way that benefits Wellington City (that benefit can be a current /future

social, economic, environmental or cultural benefit). The Council would be legally able to provide any assistance which might be proposed by the working party, if it decided that the assistance would principally be for the benefit of Wellington City (the benefits are set out in section 5.1). Legal advice suggests that it is not appropriate for the Council to directly give a donation of funds to a project of this kind².

Advice from Local Government New Zealand is that each case must be considered on its merits and Councils need to be able to show that they have considered the degree to which their own residents have benefited from the decisions and to have a record of those considerations, before making the decision to commit resources.

6. Conclusion

Several New Zealand councils have got involved in assisting the recovery and rebuilding efforts of tsunami-affected countries. Most of these councils have decided to support Sri Lanka rather than Aceh, Indonesia as it is more politically stable and safe. Sri Lanka also needs assistance to start rebuilding.

There are several ways in which Wellington City Council could take a more proactive role, such as co-ordinating community fundraising activities, providing technical assistance to NGO staff in the field and undertaking a fact finding mission. It is recommended that a small working party could further research these, and other options, and report back to the Committee.

In getting involved, the Council and the community could receive some direct and indirect benefits. The key benefits are the opportunity to learn firsthand about emergency management and recovery, and to raise public awareness regarding civil defence issues, especially the tsunami threat to Wellington.

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² Other local authorities have become involved in providing similar relief e.g. Manukau City Council has provided support to Nuie after the cyclone devastation and North Shore City have donated \$25,000 for their own tsunami relief project.

Supporting Information
<p>1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome <i>Proposals which a working party might come up with at some future stage could contribute to the Council meeting the outcome of safeguarding communities by potentially gaining firsthand experience of emergency management and reconstruction and with the opportunity to promote the tsunami risk to Wellington (see Outcome 2.7 Safeguarding communities).</i></p>
<p>2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact <i>The working party would be funded from current business unit budgets (i.e. through officer time). No additional funding is currently being requested.</i></p>
<p>3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations <i>There are no Treaty of Waitangi implications to consider in this submission.</i></p>
<p>4) Decision-Making <i>This is not a significant decision.</i></p>
<p>5) Consultation</p> <p>a) General Consultation <i>There has been some internal discussions with officers and with some external groups. Further discussions and communication would be undertaken by the working party.</i></p> <p>b) Consultation with Maori <i>Not required.</i></p>
<p>6) Legal Implications <i>Council's lawyers have been consulted during the development of this report. The legal implications are outlined in section 5.5 of the report.</i></p>
<p>7) Consistency with existing policy <i>This proposal would not be inconsistent with existing Council policy.</i></p>