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## PLANNED RELOCATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF NATURAL DISASTERS: THE CASE OF SRI LANKA

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Front Cover Photograph: Resettlement housing in Kananke Watta, Sri Lanka (Danesh Jayatilaka, March 2015).

## **THE AUTHORS**

The Centre for Migration Research and Development is a nonprofit company based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Its purpose is to build knowledge and understanding of the interaction between migration and development, especially in the context of Sri Lanka.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ACRONYMS	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
I. INTRODUCTION	10
Background	10
II. THE DECISION TO RELOCATE	15
III. THE PHYSICAL MOVE	19
IV. THE RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE	22
V. LONGER-TERM ISSUES	26
VI. ASSESSMENT	30
What Worked Well? What Did Not Work Well?	30
How Could the Process Have Been Better?	31
Other Observations	31
VII. LESSONS LEARNED THAT MIGHT BE RELEVANT FOR OTHER CONTEXTS	33
REFERENCES	34
APPENDIX	36

## ACRONYMS

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<b>CMRD</b>	Center for Migration Research and Development
<b>DD</b>	Donor-driven
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
<b>INGOs</b>	International non-governmental organizations
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-governmental organizations
<b>OD</b>	Owner-driven
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USAID</b>	US Development Aid Agency

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This is a case study about the relocation experience of 18 families that were resettled in Kananke Watta, in Matara District, Sri Lanka, following the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. Sixteen of these families originally lived very close to the sea. They were relocated to Kananke Watta, a bare land located in the interior, which was converted into a resettlement site after the tsunami. The remaining two families moved in later, one having bought property there and the other renting it from the original owners.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the displaced families were moved to evacuation shelters for their safety. The families took shelter in Punchi Pansala, Talalla, where they received food and clothing, initially from the host community, and later from many local and foreign donors.

The journey to relocation was two-phased. Following a three to four month stay at the village temple, which served as an evacuation center, the families were moved to a site near Talalla Rural Hospital, where transitional homes were constructed for them. Compared to life in the temple, the transitional homes were better as people had the freedom to cook their own meals and enjoy more privacy.

The resettlement of families displaced by the tsunami was a top priority for the government. However, the task was complicated by the implementation of a 'buffer zone,' which prohibited construction within 100 meters of the coastal line in order to protect inhabitants from a repetition of the disaster. In an effort to resettle these 18 families, the government purchased a 1.75 acre plot of land in Kananke Watta that was located 1.5 to 2 kilometers inland from the pre-tsunami homes of the displaced families. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) drew up housing plans for 46-square meter houses, conforming to the minimum requirements set by the government. The houses included two rooms, a living hall, kitchenette, and a bathroom complete with electricity and water supply. After government authorities approved the plans, a private firm that had won the contract through a bid request from the IFRC carried out the construction.

Beneficiary selection for the new housing was carried out by the government, primarily by the Grama Niladhari, the local government official on the ground in Talalla Central. Designation of beneficiaries was based on three criteria: 1) whether the house was completely or partially damaged; 2) whether the house was within or outside the buffer zone; and 3) if the house was in the buffer zone, whether the displaced family owned another piece of land. Based on these criteria, the 18 families qualified for donor-financed housing in Kananke Watta. Families that had experienced loss of family members and those whose homes had been located within 30 meters of the coast were given priority in the beneficiary selection process.

The project at Kananke Watta was a donor-driven housing scheme and thus experienced several weaknesses that did not occur in owner-driven approaches. In donor-driven schemes, the potential home-owner was, to a great extent, excluded from the decision-making process, while in an owner-driven system, the home-owner played an active role. Although the government was able to swiftly identify land for the relocation site, the IFRC believed that the land was not suitable for the construction of houses. The process of upgrading the land ended up consuming a significant portion of

the IFRC budget allocated for the project – funds that could have been applied to the construction of houses had the land been readily usable.

The beneficiary selection process also appears to have been flawed, as the government relied heavily on the then-Grama Niladhari for information on displaced families and for making decisions about who should be relocated. This over-reliance on a single official created an opportunity for him to play favorites, resulting in an abuse of power. Even when the displaced families were at the temple, Punchi Pansala, the then-Grama Niladhari had influenced the distribution of aid by the head priest of the temple so as to prioritize support for those families he identified. Both the host community, who are mostly neighbors of Kananke Watta, and the relocated families at Kananke Watta agreed that the lack of direct contact between the affected families and government officials of higher rank was the main reason that the Grama Niladhari was able to have such a free hand in the beneficiary selection process.

Of the 18 families selected for the Kananke Watta site, 16 had been neighbors before the tsunami. Housing was distributed on a random basis with beneficiaries drawing lots for specific sites. This process enabled an objective distribution of housing, randomizing who got a house closer to the main road and who did not. The families who had been engaged in fishing at night were most dissatisfied with the resettlement. Although their resettlement homes, according to both the host community and local government officials, were a marked improvement over their pre-tsunami dwellings, these families found it inconvenient to maintain their livelihoods from their resettlement location. They also felt socially excluded in comparison to the way they had lived before the tsunami. However, families not engaged in night-time fishing did not have many complaints about being relocated to an inland site.

One of the main policies that baffled the Kananke Watta residents was the government's decision to change the buffer zone from an initial 100 meter to 200 meter reference line down to one measuring only 35 to 55 meters. This change meant that some families were now eligible to own two homes: their original pre-tsunami home (or at least the land upon which it had been built) and a second donated home located outside the buffer zone. This meant that some beneficiaries were better off after the tsunami, creating feelings of unfairness among the displaced families.

All of the relocated families were unhappy with the low quality of their new houses, which they blamed on shoddy workmanship and sub-optimal material used by the contractors who built the houses. Although the IFRC addressed some of these issues during the first year of resettlement, the houses were far from solid. The lack of communication between the displaced families, the government, and the IFRC was identified as a primary cause of the inferior quality of housing in Kananke Watta.

Overall, the Kananke Watta experience offers many insights into factors that are important to consider when approaching the issue of relocations following disasters. One of these insights is recognition of the importance of communication between different stakeholder groups, not only to ensure better decisions but also to make everyone feel included in the decision-making process. Consistency in decision-making is important to minimize confusion and resistance to change. The availability of credible data also allows for transparency in decisions about resettlement, and prevents reliance



on a single source that may not be accurate and objective. The importance of objective criteria and consistent implementation in beneficiary selection cannot be over-emphasized. When selection is seen as subjective, the resettlement system is undermined. Most importantly, there should be long-term monitoring mechanisms put in place by the government to support and sustain those families resettled as a consequence of disasters.

## *Background*

The aftershock of an earthquake on December 26, 2004 in the Indian Ocean, which registered 9.3 on the Richter scale, generated a mammoth tsunami that caused widespread destruction, loss of life, and havoc in at least eight countries. The wave, which was estimated to have been as high as five to ten meters above sea level, crashed against the southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka claiming over 30,000 lives.<sup>1</sup> In addition to causing widespread deaths and injuries, the tsunami displaced 480,000 individuals in the north, south, east, and parts of the west of the island.<sup>2</sup> While the effects of the tsunami on livelihoods and loss of income have been difficult to measure due to the scale of the calamity and the multifaceted nature of its impact, the physical losses have been conservatively estimated at approximately USD 1 billion, or 4.5 percent of the country's GDP.<sup>3</sup> In response the government and donors, together with intergovernmental organizations and NGOs, carried out large-scale resettlement programs in the aftermath of the disaster. This report presents the findings from a case study investigating the experience of one small community that was relocated, assessing the results ten years after the relocation. The study sought to analyze the success of the relocation and to describe the problems that were encountered. In addition, it examined the planning and procedures followed as well as the various actors involved. The study sought to learn from the experience in Sri Lanka and to generate lessons on the long-term impacts of relocating people away from areas considered unsafe.

The study focused on a sample of 18 households that were resettled into a hamlet called Kananke Watta, which was created after the tsunami disaster. The methodology used for the research included five site visits, in-depth interviews, key informant meetings, and small group discussions with a range of stakeholders including beneficiaries, community leaders, government officials, NGOs, and donors, totaling 30 interviews. Eighteen semi-structured interviews carried out with the entire recipient group at Kananke Watta formed the core of the study. These interviews informed the

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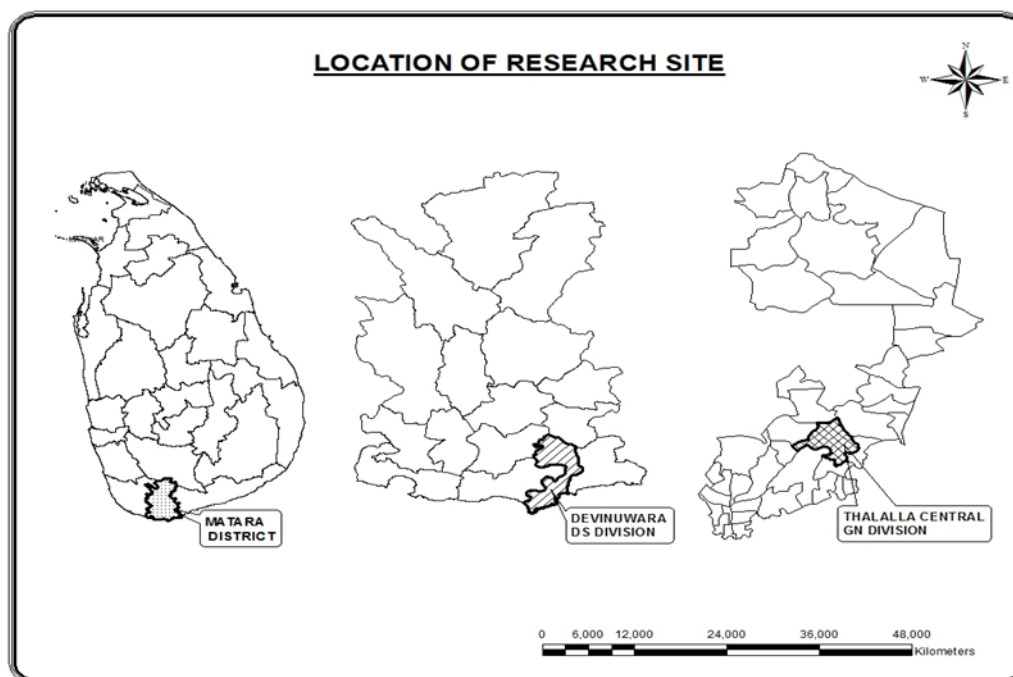
<sup>1</sup> Although there is no common consensus on the actual number of deaths, most reports indicate death tolls in excess of 30,000. In a joint report by the government and the UN, the numbers were 35,322 dead, 21,441 injured, and 516,150 displaced. See: United Nations Office for the Consolidation of Humanitarian Affairs, *Consolidated Appeals Process: Indian Ocean Earthquake- Tsunami* (2005), 117, [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/2094\\_VL108902.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/2094_VL108902.pdf); ADB Institute, *Tsunami: Immediate Impact and Response* (2005), <http://www.adbi.org/discussion-paper/2005/11/10/1491.tsunami.sri.lanka/tsunami.immediate.impact.and.response/>; World Bank Group, *The World Bank in Sri Lanka: Country Brief* (2005), <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSRILANKA/Resources/LK06.pdf>; "Tsunami 2004 Facts and Figures," Tsunami2004.net, accessed October 27, 2014, <http://www.tsunami2004.net/tsunami-2004-facts/>.

<sup>2</sup> The tsunami affected 14 of the 25 districts in Sri Lanka.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, *Children and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Evaluation of UNICEF's Response in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Maldives (2005-2008), Overall Synthesis Report* (2009), i, [http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/Sri\\_Lanka\\_Tsunami\\_Synthesis\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/Sri_Lanka_Tsunami_Synthesis_FINAL.pdf).

other meetings that were conducted. In addition, a literature review was carried out to look at laws, regulations, and policies that had implications on the relocation.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1: Site Description**



Kananke Watta, a sub-village unit, is located in the Talalla Central Grama Seva Division of Talalla which is a village in the Devinuwara Divisional Secretariat of Matura District in Sri Lanka, on the landward side of the Tangalle Road, about 30 meters above sea level, and at least 2 kilometers inland from the sea. Prior to the tsunami, Kananke Watta had been an abandoned piece of land and was later used exclusively to house the resettled people. As illustrated in Figure 1, the location is situated in the south of Sri Lanka, which was one of the areas most severely affected by the tsunami.<sup>5</sup> Of the 18 families now residing in Kananke Watta, 16 had lived near each other before the disaster, while two families had moved into Kananke Watta from outside the area. One of these latter two families was originally from Gandara, a village about 4 kilometers away from Talalla, and the other was from Negambo, which is in the western part of the island.

All of the inhabitants of this community had been victims of the tsunami. Their houses had been located within 100 meters of the sea and were thus either completely destroyed or significantly damaged. There was one death among the group: a family

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for the list of interviews.

<sup>5</sup> Seventy-two out of 201 *Grama Niladhari* divisions were affected; 1,667 fully damaged houses; and 4,571 partially damaged houses. See: Department of Census and Statistics, *Preliminary Statistics of the Census of Population and Buildings of the Census Blocks Affected by the Tsunami – 2004: Matura District* (2005), <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Tsunami/census/affected%20matura%20gn.pdf>.

which had lost a son to the tsunami. Community members had different occupations. The main livelihood of four of the families was fishing, a traditional livelihood in the area and one that relied on close proximity to the sea. The primary occupations in the other families included jobs such as security guards, machine operators, vehicle mechanics, or temporary laborers. In one household, the main income earner was the wife, who worked as a private cleaner. In another household, a retired army soldier supported his family through his retirement pension. None of the households lost the main income earner due to the disaster.

**Table 1: Profile of Displaced Families at Kananke Watta**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Family characteristics</b>
<b>Overnight fishing (3 families)</b>	8-12 members per family, including extended relatives; at least 2 members born after the tsunami; living on a day-to-day subsistence level; living with extended family; females dependent on male income earner; male head of household tends to abuse alcohol; children have dropped out of secondary school; females are now completely dependent on male income earners, unlike before tsunami
<b>Deep sea fishing (1 family)</b>	3 members; owns a boat; unwilling to disclose income level; male head of household goes away for 5-10 days at a time for deep sea fishing
<b>Monthly income earners (7 families)</b>	3-6 family members on average; generally only nuclear families; in some families parents, unmarried siblings of head of household and/or wife stay with them intermittently; females employed in 2 families; monthly income averaging LKR 15,000-25,000; lifestyle similar to host community
<b>Pensioner (1 family)</b>	Head of household retired army officer; nuclear family only; monthly income of approximately LKR 20,000
<b>Widow (1 family)</b>	Husband died after tsunami; wife lives on the Widow and Orphan Contribution from her late-husband; daughter is a graduate (with the highest level of education in Kananke Watta); daughter and son planning to move to Japan for a few years
<b>Daily income earners (7 families)</b>	4-6 family members; mostly only nuclear family; does not keep track of income; main asset is house in Kananke Watta;

	head of household tends to abuse alcohol
<b>Primary earner – female (1 family)</b>	Formerly an unskilled housemaid in Middle-East; now working as a cleaner in a private firm; 6 family members; stay-at-home husband who looks after 4 children

The educational levels of the families were quite low, with a few people having completed only basic education. The most highly educated of the group was a young mother, who holds an external degree from a local university. Two of the families were newcomers to Kananke Watta, as the original owners of the resettlement homes had subsequently moved out, one having sold their house to a younger family, and the other having rented theirs to a relative. The socio-economic status of the families studied fell broadly into two types: those who enjoyed better living standards before the tsunami but whose quality of life deteriorated after the resettlement, and those whose living standards remained largely unchanged or even improved after the resettlement.

Prior to the tsunami, the fishing community had lived mostly in shanties, which qualify as semi-permanent houses at best.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes, up to three families had lived in rickety houses made of wood and tin sheets, which lacked basic and sanitary facilities. Fisherman earned their income on a daily basis, which often sufficed only to cover basic necessities such as food and clothing. Nearly all of the fishermen, who were the income providers for their families, abused alcohol, which meant that only residual income was available to meet day-to-day expenses. The other families, which depended on monthly wage earners, had better living standards than the fishermen’s families. Their homes, while not always larger than the fishermen’s, were more solidly constructed and included luxury assets such as televisions, VCR players, and DVD players.<sup>7</sup> However, the family that claims to have had the largest home before the tsunami earned their income from fishing, indicating that occupations, incomes, and housing standards are not easily generalizable.

The government classified all of the 18 houses as fully damaged.<sup>8</sup> However, while some houses had been completely washed away by the tsunami, leaving only the foundation, other houses retained an intact wall or two, which later helped the owners temporarily use the building during daylight. None of the families managed to save any of their household items, which meant that in a matter of minutes they lost everything they owned, including documentation (identification, proof of ownership, birth and marriage certificates, etc.). Except for the two families that moved into the area after the calamity, all of the other families at Kananke Watta claimed that their only possessions after the disaster were the clothes that they had been wearing when the tsunami struck. While fighting to survive the wave, they had had to let go of all of their belongings.

After the tsunami, 13 of the 16 affected families lived in tents and transitional homes for one and a half years. They initially stayed at the Punchi Pansala (Small Temple) in

<sup>6</sup> This was a claim by the host community, which was corroborated by other stakeholders.

<sup>7</sup> According to the families in Kananke Watta and other villages, additional luxury items might have included such assets as stereo systems, small refrigerators, sofa sets, etc.

Talalla and after that on land near the Talalla Rural Hospital. In June 2006 they were relocated to Kananke Watta and resettled into new homes. The other three families did not use the initial relief assistance and chose to stay with friends and family during the transitional phase.

## II. DECISION TO RELOCATE

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The period between the disaster and resettlement in Kananke Watta was a difficult one for the displaced families. Temporary tents were initially set up at the temple and the school, both of which are located approximately 1.5 kilometers landward from Tangalle Road. The head priest of the temple offered to look after approximately 200 displaced families from two *Grama Niladhari* ('village officer') divisions. The government had started responding immediately after the disaster by distributing food to the displaced people in Talalla village. As the road connection was severed and it was difficult to reach the area, inhabitants from inland Tallala came forward to help, including members of the Youth Corps from Kurunegala District and members of the United People's Freedom Alliance, specifically the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna*.

Government officials visited the temple on January 1, 2005, six days after the tsunami hit Sri Lanka. International and local NGOs such as the IFRC, Save the Children, Farms Lanka, and *Sewa Lanka*, as well as the US government aid agency, USAID, started programs to meet the educational needs of children and to provide psychological support for the victims. Although the emergency situation was stabilized, many problems emerged in managing the hurriedly established camp, such as tensions over allocation of roles, food distribution, payment of utility bills, as well as domestic quarrels and conflicts among the displaced, particularly within the fishing community. According to the government, there was an additional concern that many of those living in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, including the one at Punchi Pansala, were likely to become dependent and complacent. Furthermore, feeding the nearly 200 families living in tents on temple grounds had become an increasingly laborious task.

These difficulties led the priest to write to government authorities, asking them to identify a plot of land where these families could move. A vacant plot of land adjacent to the Talalla Rural Hospital was identified where transitional accommodation was set up in the form of semi-permanent lined houses, which is a row of semi-permanent dwellings, along with common kitchens. Each common kitchen was equipped with a gas cooker, a gas cylinder, and cooking utensils. Families that chose not to move to the transitional complex did not receive any form of aid at all, including such assistance as dry rations, clothing, medicine, household goods, etc. The IDPs would remain in these temporary homes for another year and a half before they moved into newly built houses in Kananke Watta.

The Kananke Watta housing project was intended to be a permanent solution for the displaced families and was fully funded by the IFRC. This project was particularly important for the IFRC for two reasons: 1) it was the first undertaking by the organization for the resettlement of tsunami victims anywhere in Sri Lanka; and 2) the Kananke Watta project would be an important experience in shaping the work of the IFRC's other eight projects in the Matara District.

While the IFRC supported the construction of houses on the relocation site, responsibility for decision-making lay with the government, which had decided to

declare certain areas near the coast as ‘no construction’ zones.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, because the IFRC is a foreign donor, they lacked local knowledge of Talalla, which may have prevented them from making effective decisions.

For the government, the tsunami was a serious challenge, not only in terms of the immediate emergency response but also in terms of long-term development.<sup>10</sup> The government was the primary disaster responder, but also had the responsibility to mitigate the risk of subsequent disasters and their potential damage to lives and property. Thus, the resettlement of the displaced communities was not merely an issue of building new houses, but also of doing so in a safe location. Concerns about safety prompted the government to enforce a buffer zone where no construction was allowed. This policy of establishing a zone approximately 100 to 200 meters from the coast, within which houses could not be rebuilt, became the main criterion in the resettlement decision-making process.<sup>11</sup>

Decisions about resettlement were based largely on assessment of damages. A house that was not in a condition to be occupied was classified as fully damaged, while those that were damaged but had a wall or two intact were classified as partially damaged. Although the government had commissioned the University of Ruhunu to carry out a full survey of the damage in the southern coastal belt, the actual classification process was conducted by the *Grama Niladhari* at the time, as mandated by the Divisional Secretariat.

Families with partially damaged houses were given a total sum of LKR 250,000 (approximately USD 2,450<sup>12</sup>) to rebuild if their houses were beyond the ‘no construction’ zone stipulated by the government. If houses were fully damaged, the compensation was LKR 500,000 (approximately USD 4,900).<sup>13</sup> For houses within the ‘no construction’ zone, if the family had a plot of land outside of the zone, the government would grant LKR 500,000, so that the families could build their own house on their own land. If the family did not have land elsewhere, the government would have a house constructed for

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<sup>9</sup> “Developers Guide for Development in Coastal Zone,” Coast Conservation and Coastal Resource Management Department, accessed October 29, 2014, <http://www.coastal.gov.lk/downloads/pdf/Permit%20Guideline.pdf>; National Housing Development Authority and Ministry of Housing and Construction, *Guidelines for Housing Development in Coastal Sri Lanka: Statutory Requirements and Best-Practice Guide to Settlement Planning, Housing Design and Service Provision with Special Emphasis on Disaster Preparedness* (2005), 9, [http://www.humanitarian-srilanka.org/new/Tsunami\\_Meeting/12Jan06/Guidelines%20.pdf](http://www.humanitarian-srilanka.org/new/Tsunami_Meeting/12Jan06/Guidelines%20.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> IFRC, *Tsunami Two-year Progress Report Sri Lanka* (2007), 2, <http://www.ifrc.org/Docs/Appeals/04/2804srilankapr.pdf>; “Devastation and Reconstruction: The Situation in Sri Lanka After the 2004 Tsunami,” UNU-EHS, accessed October 17, 2014, <http://www.ehs.unu.edu/article:209?menu=73>.

<sup>11</sup> Government of Sri Lanka and Development Partners, *Post Tsunami Recovery and Reconstruction: progress, challenges, way forward* (2005), 10, available at: [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/1591\\_9792.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/1591_9792.pdf).

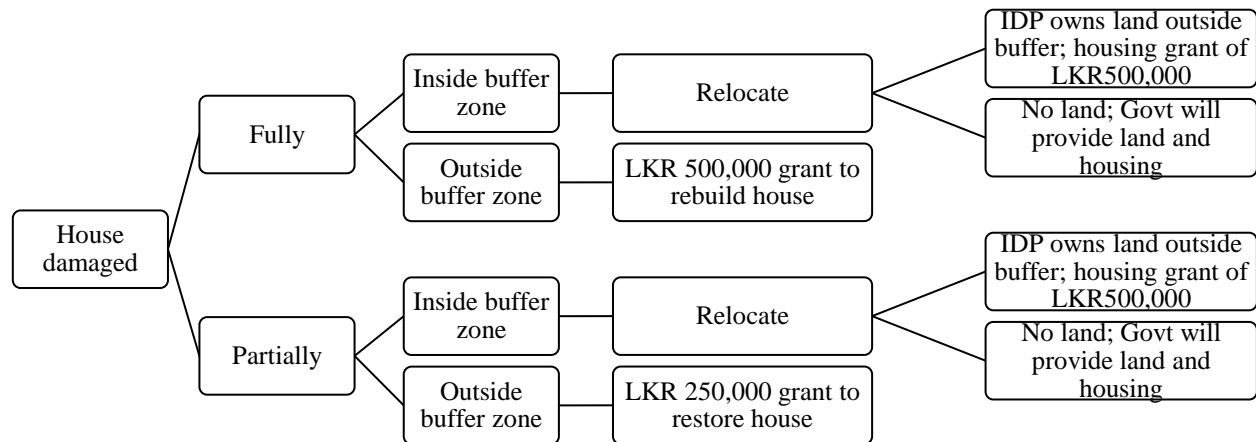
<sup>12</sup> Equivalent USD value based on 2005 year-end exchange rate of USD1:LKR102.12.

<sup>13</sup> The government disbursed the grant in stages, after each phase of construction, instead of providing a single lump sum.



them in an area selected by the government.<sup>14</sup> Thus, a key determinant of the process was whether an affected family had a plot of land outside the buffer zone.

**Figure 2: Relocation Decision Tree<sup>15</sup>**



In terms of support for housing reconstruction after the tsunami, there was a working policy at the time addressing two main approaches: owner-driven (OD) and donor-driven (DD).<sup>16</sup> In the OD approach, construction only occurs when the house is built on land owned by the victim (if they have land outside buffer zone) or when their original house is being rebuilt (if the original house is outside the buffer zone). Also in an OD approach, the disaster victims guide the house construction, with the government and other agencies providing financial and technical support for the task. In contrast, in a DD approach the donor agency (the government or an external organization) leads the construction process, with minimal or no participation from the disaster victim. The implementation of the buffer zone meant that many displaced families were not allowed to go back to their original land, which was located adjacent to the sea. Therefore, all of the families that originally moved to Kananke Watta as part of the resettlement process qualified as beneficiaries of a donor-driven approach as the people were inside the buffer and all their houses were damaged and they did not have land outside the buffer zone.

The displaced families were allowed very little involvement in the relocation decision-making process. While some families claimed that they were not consulted at any point, others argued that even if they had been asked for input, they were not in a state of

<sup>14</sup> The allocation of new land for IDPs was the primary responsibility of the government, while a multitude of donor agencies were ready to construct houses for the IDPs. See Danesh Jayatilaka and Kopalapillai Amirthalingam, *The Impact of Displacement on Dowries in Sri Lanka* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2015), 11, [www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/02/04-dowries-displacement-sri-lanka/the-impact-of-displacement-on-dowries-in-sri-lanka-feb-2015.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/02/04-dowries-displacement-sri-lanka/the-impact-of-displacement-on-dowries-in-sri-lanka-feb-2015.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> In this hierarchy of relocation decisions, the families with partially damaged houses and fully damaged houses inside the buffer zone benefited after the buffer zone limits were relaxed in early 2006.

<sup>16</sup> "Post Tsunami Recovery and Reconstruction: Progress, Challenges, Way Forward: Joint Report of the Government of Sri Lanka and Development Partners" ReliefWeb, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AAE71FDFCCB2306FC12570E400452DD5-govsri-sri-27dec.pdf>.

mind to give constructive views, owing to the havoc in their lives. The government officials agreed, that unlike the owner-driven approach, in which relocation was spearheaded by the potential homeowner, the donor-driven approach meant that homeowners were largely excluded from the decision-making process. In fact, during the initial projects, the decision-making took place at the National Housing Authority level, and decisions were passed down to the Divisional Secretariat level. As a result, even local government officials, who were aware of dynamics on the ground, were unable to give their input on the plans that were drawn up at the central level. Pressure from families, villagers, and opposition parties to expedite resettlement also meant that local government officials had to balance various interests on different occasions.

The main point of contact between the government and the displaced families was the *Grama Niladhari* of Talalla Central. The *Grama Niladhari* is the grassroots level government official with the closest link to the community, and is therefore in the best position to liaise with the IDPs on behalf of the government. Although the then-*Grama Niladhari* claims that he went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that the interests of the displaced families were safeguarded, the host community and the relocated residents at Kananke Watta disagree. In fact, they argue that the devolution of authority gave the *Grama Niladhari* unprecedented power over tsunami victims, creating circumstances for favoritism, corruption, and other abuses of power.

The Tsunami Housing Reconstruction Unit, set up by the government specifically to handle tsunami resettlement projects, employed Technical Officers who collaborated with the donor, the IFRC. According to several Kananke Watta residents and villagers from adjoining areas, these partnerships took place without the Technical Officers ever having visited the site. These agencies then worked with the Urban Development Authority (UDA) in passing or approving housing plans. Although the housing plans were approved for construction, there was no proper methodology put in place to handle the subsequent complications after the houses were handed over to the displaced families. This was mainly due to the fact that the situation on the ground at the relocation site was detached from the agencies that devised plans and procedures for the resettlement project.

### III. THE PHYSICAL MOVE

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The starting point of the physical relocation was the selection of beneficiary families. The government had put in place a comprehensive filtering process to identify the order in which affected families would be granted housing. The *Grama Niladhari* and other lower-ranking government officials (such as the Agricultural Officer, in the case of the Devinuwara Divisional Secretariat) were the primary agents gathering information on the displaced families. To identify the order of priority for providing housing, the ranking of families was done in the following manner:

- Level 1: Families that had lost an immediate family due to the disaster
- Level 2: Families with fully damaged houses
  - Level 2.1: Families whose houses had been within 30 meters of the sea
  - Level 2.2: Families whose houses had been at least 30 meters from the sea, but less than 100 meters from the sea
- Level 3: Families with partially damaged houses

The list of beneficiaries prepared by the government was supposed to be cross-checked with the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) to ensure that correct data had been captured. This was an important aspect of the relocation procedure, as decisions were dependent on what data was collected after the disaster. Therefore to cross-check data against a pre-existing database on population and housing, or data collected from a reliable secondary source, was important to ensure that deserving victims were not falling through the cracks due to poor information.<sup>17</sup> The data collection was also conducted rather hastily, as the relocation decision-making depended on information gathered quickly from the field, which meant that there were occasional errors and omissions. Once the data collection procedure was completed and beneficiary lists were prepared, fully constructed houses were then donated to the beneficiaries in the order they were ranked on the list.

Once the list of recipient families for houses in Kananke Watta was finalized, a member of each family, usually the head of the household, was asked to come to the Devinuwara Divisional Secretariat where the allocation of specific houses was decided by drawing lots. This random selection method most likely prevented tensions, such as disputes over particular plots of land and their commercial values in relation to proximity to roads, placement within the resettlement community, and other issues that could have come up.

Almost none of the families in Kananke Watta had any physical belongings to take with them to their new homes. Nearly all of their wealth and assets had been washed away in the disaster. Possessions that had somehow withstood the wave were generally

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<sup>17</sup> The importance placed on the *Grama Niladhari* for data collection and the lack of cohesion in the process with higher level government authorities (such as verification of data by a secondary officer) created room for favoritism, abuse of power, and nepotism, and the resultant manipulation of data (under-reporting or over-reporting damage).

beyond use. When the IDPs took shelter in emergency camps immediately after the disaster, they had no possessions with them. Therefore, the move from the temporary lodgings to their new homes was perhaps the least complicated part of their resettlement process.

The move from the transitional shelters at the hospital to the new homes in Kananke Watta was at most 200 meters, much less than the earlier move from their temporary site at Punchi Pansala to the transitional homes. The fact that the families had no household items to be moved (except for two or three plastic chairs and a few cooking utensils that had been donated to them during their stay in transitional accommodation) meant that the move was not complicated either in terms of time, labor, or transportation expenses.

**Figure 3: Houses at Kananke Watta<sup>18</sup>**



The non-availability or limited supply of household necessities, however, made it difficult for many of the families to start a normal life, even though they had moved into new houses. As the IFRC commitment was only to assist in construction of the houses, the provision of household supplies was outside the scope of their mandate. As a result, many families relied on relatives, friends, and/or other donors to provide the goods necessary for them to resume their lives and make their houses into homes.

The host community at Kananke Watta<sup>19</sup> was not engaged in fishing, which meant that their ways were quite different from those of the large number of fishing families that were displaced by the tsunami. Rather, people in the host community were either engaged in paid full-time employment or in agriculture. In comparison with the fishing community, they were used to having more privacy, in terms of interactions with neighbors, as well as a more secluded and quieter life and saw themselves as having a

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<sup>18</sup> These photographs were taken on October 23, 2014 by Ranmini Vithanagama. They present a front and side view of a typical house and give an indication of the distance between one house and another. The first photograph shows a wall between the two houses and the second does not. Separation walls were built at the discretion of the home-owners and were not part of the IFRC's commitment.

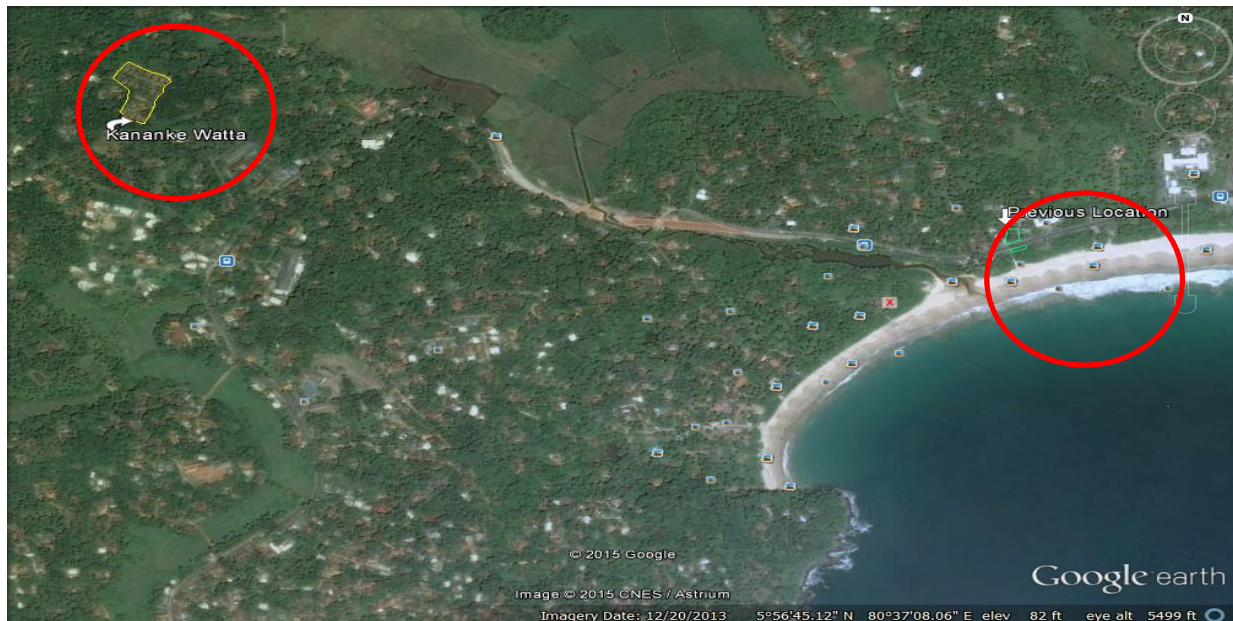
<sup>19</sup> The host community refers to the people living in the vicinity of Kananka Watta.

superior social status. However, the new Kananke Watta community was a heterogeneous group, with a mix of families engaged in fishing (four), families with monthly incomes (seven), and families subsisting on daily incomes from non-fishing employment (seven). This meant that the families neighboring the community of Kananke Watta were not highly concerned about competition from the newcomers and had fewer concerns than was the case in other resettlement locations, which were dominated by families also engaged in fishing. The host community did face issues, however, when some members of the relocated families got into fights while under the influence of alcohol. Although there were occasional difficulties, by and large, the Kananke Watta host community, despite their initial reservations, did not have a negative experience with the newcomers in their area.

## IV. THE RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE

The government's establishment of a buffer zone had serious implications for the displaced families, especially for those who were engaged in fishing. The state officials interviewed for this study claimed that the government took every possible measure to ensure that the negative impact of resettlement on those relocated was minimized to the extent possible. However, the goal to minimize disruption added pressure on the government to identify a piece of land located far enough from the sea to be safe from another tsunami, but not so far as to jeopardize the income-generating activities of the targeted families. As a result, the government made all possible efforts to relocate the affected families no further than two to six kilometers from the sea.

**Figure 4: Map of Resettlement<sup>20</sup>**



The process of acquiring land was as follows. The Devinuwara Divisional Secretariat had secured information from the then-*Grama Niladhari* that there was a 1.75 acre (approximately 7,082 square meters) plot of land available in Kananke Watta that might be suitable for resettlement. The property was land-locked on three sides, with the front end opening to a by-road that eventually connected to the Tangalle Main Road. When the Divisional Secretariat office contacted the landowner and communicated that the government was interested in buying the land for resettlement purposes, the owner agreed to sell the land to the government. The landowner also visited the Government Secretariat in Matara to express his willingness to sell the property so resettlement houses could be constructed for the relocated families. Thereafter, government officials, together with technical officers, visited the site to assess the land. After the completion of formalities, the government acquired the property. By purchasing this parcel of land

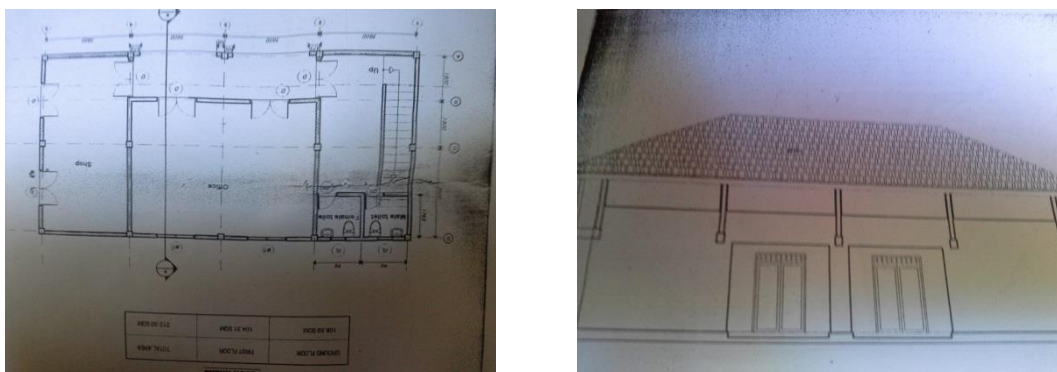
<sup>20</sup> This map is a Google Earth view of Kananke Watta and the surrounding area.

for the resettlement community, the 18 families eventually moved 1.5 to 2 kilometers inland from their pre-tsunami habitations.

The plots of land within the Kananke Watta resettlement project were blocked out in such a way that each household ended up with a total of 7 perches (approximately 177 square meters). It was not in the IFRC's mandate, however, to build walls separating the plots of land from one another. As a result, the displaced families either had to set up their own fences to demarcate their area of ownership or live without a distinct boundary marking their property. A one-meter wide tar-surfaced road was laid to facilitate movement within the hamlet. A large playground, set up for recreational purposes, was also installed for the Kananke Watta community.

All of the houses in Kananke Watta were roughly 46 square meters, built according to a uniform plan: a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchenette, and a bathroom.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the modest houses were given reasonable outdoor/compound space for use by the household. The IFRC devised the plan, which was then submitted to the relevant government authorities, specifically the UDA, for evaluation and approval. The UDA's expectation was that every house would be built in such a way that the available land was optimally utilized. In addition to getting the UDA's approval, the IFRC also obtained the Certificates of Conformity from local authorities. These legal documents attest to the fact that the construction conforms to the local authority's regulations.

**Figure 5: Architectural drawing of a house in Kananke Watta<sup>22</sup>**



The construction of the housing in Kananke Watta appears to have been heavily flawed. The researchers observed some ominous looking cracks on at least one wall in three separate houses. Additionally, almost every house had at least one hairline crack in its walls. According to the families in Kananke Watta and villagers in the neighborhood, these cracks had occurred mainly because the contractor had not taken into account

<sup>21</sup> The minimum square meterage required in the Revised Tsunami Housing Policy (2006) prepared by the Reconstruction and Development Agency (RADA). Additional requirements include at least one lockable internal room, internal or external kitchen, internal or external toilet with sanitation facilities, windows, doors, electrical fittings, and a rainwater harvesting system where applicable. See also Centre for Policy Alternatives, *Landlessness and Land Rights in Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka* (2005), 23, [http://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/8/IFRC\\_land\\_study.pdf](http://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/8/IFRC_land_study.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> These photographs were taken on October 23, 2014 by Ranmini Vithanagama; reproduced with the permission of the home-owner. The first photograph shows the plan of the house and the second photograph is a drawing of the front of the house.

that there was a large layer of granite underneath the surface of the soil in several parts of the construction site. This oversight corroborated government officials' earlier comments that the donor-driven approach was largely a top-down exercise that was disconnected from local government officials who had better knowledge of the resettlement site.

The IFRC initially made an effort to implement a bottom-up approach to the construction by requesting that the beneficiaries form four-member committees to monitor and oversee the construction of the housing. The actual construction of the houses, however, was done by private contractors, who the displaced families believed to be associated with the government through personal contacts. According to the villagers, although the committee members visited the sites and lodged complaints with the IFRC about the inferior quality of work being done by the contractors, new contractors brought in by the IFRC did not perform any better than those they replaced. The information officer from the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (the local coordinator for IFRC) indicated that contractor selection was based on a bidding process through which the contract was awarded to the private company that offered the most competitive quotation. The construction difficulties could be attributed to choosing the least expensive bidder, although such problems could also have resulted from undue outside influences on the process, a general drop in the quality of work being done in the industry, a weak monitoring and follow-up process, or a combination of several of these factors.

The contractor was given 95 percent of the total payment for construction at the beginning of the contract, and the remaining five percent was to be paid out a year after the housing project was completed. Additionally, the IFRC warned the resettled families that the organization would only provide a one-year warranty on the rapidly built houses. The subsequent legal aspects of the housing project, such as the handing over of legal titles to the families, were handled completely by the government.

In its post-project evaluation, the IFRC had also observed several faults in the construction activities at Kananke Watta. In one house, a septic tank was substituted with a simple hole in the ground, because digging for the tank was too difficult due to the layer of granite underneath the surface. The ensuing overflows of toilet waste permeated the entire hamlet with an offensive odor and contaminated nearby ditches. The IFRC did take corrective measures and installed a septic tank. However, after the lapse of the one-year warranty period, the families were responsible for all needed repairs.

The IFRC stated that the land in Kananke Watta was a very challenging construction site as it was located on a slope and the ground, due to the layer of underlying granite, was very hard. Moreover, because the land had been vacant, it was covered by a thick growth of trees and shrubs. According to the IFRC, simply preparing the land for the construction of houses used up a significant portion of the funds allocated for the housing project. This forced the IFRC to restrict costs on later activities. The IFRC has indicated that had the government acquired land more suitable for construction, money could have been saved on site preparation costs and used instead for building better houses.



The Kananke Watta community has access to clean tap water, private bathing, and electricity. For the families earning incomes from fishing and temporary labor jobs, these facilities have helped improve their standards of living in terms of health, hygiene, cooking, privacy, security, and leisure. Additionally, the facilities allow them to use electronic items and save time on a number of household tasks. Compared to their pre-disaster dwellings, which were devoid of these facilities, the families' new homes in Kananke Watta have made their lives more convenient and have improved their quality of life.

The host community and the *Grama Niladhari* both stated that compared to other resettlements in Talalla Central and Talalla, Kananke Watta enjoys a superior advantage in terms of location. The Kananke Watta resettlement is within close proximity to the Talalla Rural Hospital (only 200 meters away), and brought the affected families about 1.5 kilometers to 2 kilometers closer to Matara town, as compared to where they had lived before the tsunami. This has improved their access to services, including many national schools, government administrative offices, and the general hospital, all of which are located in Matara. The distance to the Talalla South Secondary School, however, has increased by about 1 kilometer. The biggest constraint was the distance of their resettlement site from the Tangalle Road. After their resettlement, people had to walk about 200 to 300 meters to get to the main road from Kananke Watta, whereas before the tsunami they had lived adjacent to the road.

Due to Kanake Watta's hybrid semi-urban/rural setting, resettlement has meant an improvement in the security of the relocated families in several ways, including security against a repeat disaster, the security of a permanent house as compared to some of the community's pre-disaster ramshackle shanties, the security of faster access to health care providers, and the security of a decent host community. According to the neighboring families and a teacher from Talalla South Secondary School, however, the security and peace of the host community was occasionally affected by the new inhabitants of Kananke Watta due to the fact that there were some troublemakers among the relocated population.

Although there are several housing projects in Talalla dominated by families engaged in fishing, Kananke Watta has an interesting mix of households, only four of which make their livelihoods through fishing. However, it was these fisher folk who were the most challenged by the relocation to Kananke Watta, as the new location was further from the coast than their original residences. Proximity to the sea was important to the fisher folk for several reasons: convenience, the ability to keep an eye on their boats, ample space on the beach to mend their fishing nets, and additional income that women could earn from drying fish, etc. In contrast, for those engaged in paid employment and taking up temporary labor to earn an income, there was no strategic disadvantage in the relocation. Those who had had paid employment had to travel a little further but were generally able to keep their jobs while those working on a temporary basis found it advantageous to be closer to Matara town.

## V. LONGER-TERM ISSUES

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Almost all of the NGOs/INGOs completed their respective tsunami-related projects during two to five years after the tsunami. At present, a local NGO called Institute for Development and Community Strengths (INDECOS) operates in the area. It is the only entity that is actively engaged with the Kananke Watta community. It runs a microfinance program aimed at supporting tsunami-affected women in the Matara District. Additionally, there is a house that was converted into a cottage industry for manufacturing coir (coconut fiber), where local women can engage in gainful employment. This project was established by an NGO called Farms Lanka to create income-generating activities for women.

The government, despite its prominent role in the emergency and resettlement process, has not been able to provide long-term development support to the displaced families beyond the provision of housing and the quality of life improvements that came with it. Although the government had implemented several cash and non-cash support measures,<sup>23</sup> most of the measures were limited to six months at most, in the period immediately after the disaster.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, according to most of the families at Kananke Watta, recipients did not receive these grants for the full six months. Furthermore, some community members reported that they were disturbed by the activities of certain NGOs. These concerns included 'overt' and 'covert' agendas on the part of some agencies to spread their religion along with humanitarian assistance. In one instance this included the construction of a worship house close to Kananke Watta.

The relocated families strongly felt that significant errors had occurred throughout the entire relocation process. They believed that the then-*Grama Niladhari* was overly empowered by the government as the main contact point between higher government officials and the displaced and affected communities. This meant that the *Grama Niladhari* was able to abuse his role, succumbing to favoritism in selecting who would receive aid and how to distribute it. This favoritism gave him subjective control over a variety of issues ranging from provision of dry rations and other essential goods to the allocation of housing. It even affected social issues such as the level of attention given to displaced families' complaints and special needs. Both the displaced families and host communities stated that during the families' stay at Punchi Pansala, some families were given dry rations, clothing, and medical supplies during the night, rather than during the daytime, which is when such activities were usually conducted. They believed that these nighttime provisions were supplementary to those being given to the rest of the families. Furthermore, they believed that the *Grama Niladhari* persuaded the temple priest in some way to ensure that the *Grama Niladhari's* favorites received additional assistance.

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<sup>23</sup> These included the following: (1) a payment of LKR15,000 for death in family; (2) an allowance of LKR 5,000 for every displaced family up to three to four months; (3) a cash grant and food basket worth LKR4,000 per person for about six months; (4) LKR2,500 for cooking utensils; (5) micro and SME credit on concessional terms; and (6) temporary housing and grants for individual house construction.

<sup>24</sup> Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation, *Rebuilding Sri Lanka Action Plan* (Colombo: Department of National Planning, 2005), <http://tsunami.icsf.net/images/stories/sri0206.pdf>.

As an extreme example, one head of a household said (and this information was corroborated by the SLRCS information officer and several members of the host community) that there was an instance in which a *Grama Niladhari* showed a newly-laid house foundation to government officials and convinced them that it was the foundation of a house that had been washed away by the tsunami, thus securing a new house.<sup>25</sup> They added that the ranking of the housing beneficiary list was, at times, changed by the *Grama Niladhari*. A direct communication link between senior government officials and displaced families could have diluted the *Grama Niladhari*'s autonomy at the time and prevented such abuses of power.

Respondents identified another problem as the change in the buffer zone in early 2006, when the government reduced the buffer from the original 100 to 200 meters down to 35 to 55 meters. This resulted in some families ending up with two houses, or a house and a plot of land, one of which had been in the original buffer zone. This made those families markedly better off than they had been before the disaster both in absolute terms and relative to their neighbors. The revision of the buffer zone prompted one household to sell their home in Kananke Watta and purchase a plot of land closer to the sea, which would better support their fishing activities. The four households engaged in fishing were particularly indignant at the adjustment to the buffer zone and believed that the government's political and broader economic considerations had been given priority over grassroots level livelihood concerns of vulnerable people such as themselves. Although these fishing families still owned their land near the sea, their income levels did not improve significantly after the tsunami due to the fact that the location of their new houses created difficulties for maintaining their livelihoods. Additionally, despite being able to retain their land close to sea, they have not succeeded in rebuilding their homes in their old plots of land nor selling them or monetizing them in any other way, augmenting their sense of failure.

The families who were relatively better off before the tsunami and had been living in bigger houses felt that the resettlement process was unfair to them, while it had been generous to people who had previously been living in shanties. By giving both types of families, the rich and the poor, uniform housing, and clustering them together into one resettlement project, they believed their living standards and social standing had been degraded by the relocation.

Those who were the happiest about the resettlement and its outcomes were the families that had had no permanent source of income and were quite poor before the tsunami. In these families, the head of the household often looked for temporary labor jobs, even on a day-to-day basis, to produce income for the family. These families generally had very few assets and struggled to repay recurrent debts owed to nearby shop owners, family members, or neighbors. For them, the donated houses in Kananke Watta were assets that they could not have built for themselves. The deeds to the land were handed over

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<sup>25</sup> This occurrence, however, was not in Kananke Watta. A house that had not washed away in the tsunami was nevertheless identified as one. Because it was classified as a fully damaged house inside the buffer zone, the government approved the disbursement of LKR 500,000 for a new house to be built.

to the head of the household (as indicated in the electoral register), thus giving them legal ownership to the new properties. The new houses were of a far superior quality to their pre-tsunami housing in terms of size, material, layout, and facilities. Receiving the house constructed for them had positive implications for their comfort, wealth, social standing, dowry, etc. Thus, their views on the resettlement are largely positive. Furthermore, their job-seeking activities were not impacted positively or negatively by the relocation.

When comparing their new location to their old one, the residents of Kananke Watta had different views on how the resettlement had impacted their lives. Families engaged in fishing felt that their new lives were lonely and bitter in comparison to their pre-tsunami days. To paraphrase them, when they lived near the sea, “they enjoyed life, loved to feast when possible, and experienced vast space.” In comparison, their lives in Kananke Watta were quiet, constrained, and inconvenient. The detachment from the sea made them nostalgic, and the fishermen admitted that the culture shock of moving inland was something they still had not overcome. Living in a heterogeneous neighborhood, where people have various occupations and were used to the privacy of their households, was and still is fairly alien to these families.

Negotiating the 1.5 to 2 kilometer road in the dead of the night or early morning to go fishing and return home was a challenge for the fishermen. One family bought a three-wheel scooter to help them save time and energy that would have been spent walking the greater distance to the sea. This purchase, however, created additional burdens of paying for fuel, repairs, leasing payments, etc. Women in these families also spoke of lost side incomes, money they used to earn by drying fish on the beach and selling them to local shops. In the new settlement, they could not contribute to the family income and had to rely on the males', mostly the husbands', single income to feed, clothe, and school the family. On the other hand, the families who had no particular livelihood before the tsunami were quite satisfied in their new homes. Many of them cited the sense of freedom they felt in moving away from the sea, which they had in any case never been happy living near. The better housing at Kananke Watta further cemented their views that life in the resettlement location was much improved over what they had had before the tsunami.

As noted above, families who had a superior social status before the tsunami, due to their occupation, income, education, size of their house, or even caste, believed they were worse off after resettlement. Their smaller housing, compared to what they had had before, greatly affected their impressions of the resettlement. They reported feelings of having 'lost more,' although their livelihoods had not been challenged by moving inland to Kananke Watta.

The families in Kananke Watta were reluctant to share information on their continued connections to their previous land and dwellings. Only one family, engaged in fishing, agreed to discuss the matter and explained that they shuttled back and forth between their original home and the new home in order to support their livelihood. The interviewees for the study from the host community stated that most families had either

sold their original land to foreigners, local buyers, or businesses that had purchased them for commercial purposes. Some families had set up temporary houses near their former residences where they would spend a night or two during the week in order to maintain their claims to the property. Other households with extended families split into two groups, one occupying the new house and the other the original, in order to prevent possibilities of encroachment.

The desire of the Kananke Watta families to be discreet about their continued connections with their original land and housing could be due to deep concerns of provoking the host community and disturbing the fragile balance that is currently in place. Some members of the host community were very vocal in asserting that the tsunami had benefited the displaced families and made them wealthier. Another reason could be that they were trying to build their case for financial support to repair the damages that have appeared in their resettlement houses in Kananke Watta, despite various requests to government authorities earlier having been unsuccessful.

## VI. ASSESSMENT: WHAT WORKED WELL? WHAT DID NOT WORK WELL?

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In general, the Donor-Driven approach to resettlement has yielded less impressive outcomes than the Owner-Driven approach in relation to speed of completion, quality of housing, sense of belonging and ownership in the resettlement, and subsequent agency after the completion of the relocation program.<sup>26</sup> For example, in one study, the satisfaction level of homeowners of the owner driven approach, fared much stronger compared to the donor driven approach.<sup>27</sup> Although the resettlement was only 1.5 to 2 kilometers away from the sea, the move affected the fishermen's livelihoods. However, overall, the new locality provided the families with a location that was quiet and peaceful, with ample compound space. The families appreciated the convenience of access to the hospital and the shorter distance to Matara. Furthermore, they were not concerned by the fact that their children had to travel one additional kilometer to get to school.

The land selection process was fairly well coordinated and the acquisition of the land happened quite fast. However, lack of communication with the beneficiaries about the land and the subsequent revisions to the buffer zone left many families embittered. But, as a government official put it, it was not possible to "please everyone" in the resettlement process.

The selection criteria set forth by the government to ascertain who should be provided with housing was successful in targeting the most vulnerable families. A lack of transparency, however, appears to have allowed the *Grama Niladhari* to tamper with the list of beneficiaries as he willed. The displaced families did not have an effective communication channel with the government to report such incidents during either the emergency or resettlement period.

During the construction phase, the IFRC's efforts to involve the community using a four-member committee helped the donor actively monitor the construction. But, the committee felt discouraged and powerless when their feedback about sub-par building material and construction crews being used in Kananke Watta failed to be taken into account.

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<sup>26</sup> Institute of Policy Studies, *Post Tsunami Reconstruction and Rehabilitation – Household Views on Progress and Process* (2006), 3, [http://www.ips.lk/news/newsarchive/2006/0\\_122006\\_ptr/full\\_report.pdf](http://www.ips.lk/news/newsarchive/2006/0_122006_ptr/full_report.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Gayan Ratnakaye and Raufdeen Rameezdeen, "Post-Disaster Housing Reconstruction: Comparative Study of Donor-Driven and Owner-Driven Approach" International Recovery Platform, accessed on March 22, 2015, <http://www.recoveryplatform.org/assets/publication/sri%20lanka%20comparision%20of%20owner%20driven%20and%20donor%20driven%20shelter.pdf>.

## ***How could the process have been better?***

A stronger connection between all the stakeholder groups – displaced families, the government, donor agencies, and the host community – could have helped avoid some of the complications of the resettlement. Even if the displaced families' and host community's views had been largely ignored, it is likely that if government officials (other than the *Grama Niladhari*) had contacted them from time to time in some systematic way, there would have been a marked improvement in these constituents' psychological adjustment to the relocation.

The relative passivity assumed by the IFRC in this project (versus some of their other projects in which delegates were present at the site nearly every day) resulted in diminished standards of quality. Although the IFRC took some corrective measures within the first year, the resettlement houses in Kananke Watta have continued to become structurally weaker over the years.

Additionally, if measures had been taken to bridge the physical distance between the new homes and the sea, (for example, by provision of motor bikes or other transport), the fishing families would have perhaps adjusted better to the resettlement site.

## ***Other observations***

Although the resettlement of IDPs topped the government's post-tsunami priority list, constraints such as limited access to available land and the development of a buffer zone left the government with few options. Nevertheless, the government officials involved with the relocation such as the then Divisional Secretary, the *Grama Niladhari* and the Land Officer believe the government did its best by acquiring land for resettlement that was not too far removed from the sea. However, the government and its officials have faced criticism since early 2006 due to the relaxation of the original parameters of the buffer zone, which, according to the displaced families, was done because of political considerations. Since the construction at Kananke Watta was already half-way completed by the time the change was made to the buffer zone, the Kananke Watta families had no other option than relocation.

Relocating the community closer to the sea would have helped the fishing families in particular, as such a location would have provided easier access to livelihoods and income-generating possibilities for the women in these households. However, it is unlikely to have helped their psychosocial recovery from the disaster. Further, the Kananke Watta group was not entirely composed of fisher folk. There were others who were glad they had been relocated away from the coast and did not face challenges to their incomes due to their relocation. There was also a sub-group that considered the new housing an improvement in their lives because of their earlier impoverished conditions. In hindsight, it appears that the relocation itself was not the problem, as there was a pressing need for such a move and the affected community understood this. Rather, it is the way in which the relocation was handled that created discontentment for the different stakeholders. In particular, consideration of the group

members' livelihoods should have been given more prominence in the resettlement equation. A greater attention to this matter may have made the relocation more effective, particularly for the fishing community.



## VII. LESSONS LEARNED THAT MIGHT BE RELEVANT FOR OTHER CONTEXTS

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**Communication:** The many perspectives of the different stakeholders discussed in this study highlight the importance of communication in planning and undertaking a relocation. Even if it may not be possible to address everyone's views, a proper channel of clear communication between local constituents and government authorities at various levels of decision-making would at least temper resistance towards change and help provide those affected with explanations for actions planned and executed.

**Decision consistency:** Initially, the 'no construction' zone ruling was a key factor in the delay in the relocation process.<sup>28</sup> The subsequent change in the buffer zone clearly left many displaced and affected families confused and critical of the government's role in their resettlement. While the displaced families felt they were 'forcibly' removed from their homes, the host community believed that the implementation of the buffer zone had been unfair to them as some of the IDPs ended up with two houses. The paradox was that some of those most affected by the tsunami were left better off after the disaster, thus making the tsunami a wave of both disaster and fortune, depending on a complex array of factors such as differences in losses, types of occupation, forms of housing, land tenure, personal connections, etc.

**Importance of data and statistics:** Many resettlement decisions were based on data and statistics applicable to the affected area. Much of the data was generated rapidly and therefore may not have been completely accurate. Therefore, the government, the community, and supporting agencies would be well served by investing in reliable data and statistics on hazard-prone zones as a form of disaster preparedness.

**Unified criteria for beneficiary selection:** Ambiguity in selection criteria can confuse funding agencies and empower individuals who may seek to profit from such emergency situations. Clearly laid out selection mechanisms would create a feeling of equity among stakeholders.

**Need for long-term monitoring strategies:** There should be a long-term plan in place to help the affected families through a period lasting longer than six months to twelve months. Even if the presence of such a monitoring strategy might not result in concrete improvements, its absence may make people feel that the government is apathetic towards their tragedy, thereby negatively affecting their resettlement experience.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW LIST

	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Stakeholder type</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
01	Former Government Agent, Matara; Advisor to former President Mahinda Rajapaksha – Mr. Gamini Jayasekara	Government officer (Senior)	November 7, 2014
02	Agriculture Officer – Devinuwara Divisional Secretariat – Mrs. I.G. Maala	Government officer (Junior)	November 15, 2014
03	Land Officer – Divisional Secretariat, Devinuwara) – Mr. N.R. Yapa	Government officer (Junior – village level)	November 15, 2014
03	Grama Niladhari – Tallala South (438) – Mr. G.G. Priyantha	Government officer (Junior – village level)	November 15, 2014
04	Teacher, Talalla South Secondary School – Mr. Jayantha Jayasundera	Teacher	November 15, 2014
05	Chief Incumbent of Punchi Pansala – Rev. Talalle Wimala	Religious leader	November 15, 2014
06	Justice of Peace, All Island, and Retired Officer (Ceylon Transport Board) – Mr. Handy Soyza	Community leader	November 15, 2014
07	Neighbour of Kananke Watta – Mr. Sudath Lal	Host community member	November 16, 2014
08	Neighbour of Kananke Watta - Mr. Sarath	Host community member	November 16, 2014
09	Neighbour of Kananke Watta - Mr. Karunanayake	Host community member	November 16, 2014
10	Former proprietor of Kananke Watta – Mr. D.L.C. Wickrama	Land owner	November 16, 2014
11	Coordinating officer, Red Cross Society (Sri Lanka Red Cross Society ), Hambantota Branch – Mr. Namal Jayantha	Donor agency representative	November 20, 2014
12	Consultant to Institute for Development of Community Strengths (INDECOS) – Late Dr. P. Ekanayake	NGO	November 5, 2014
13-30	18 Families of Kananke Watta	Displaced families	November 8 – 9, 2014

*30 interviews conducted in total*

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