
**MAINSTREAMING DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM
AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF HUMANITARIAN
WORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

A CASE STUDY FROM DHAN FOUNDATION

DHAN Foundation, Madurai

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HUMANITARIAN WORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY – A CASE STUDY FROM DHAN
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1. Preamble

The December 2004 Tsunami was an opportunity for DHAN Foundation to initiate the process of development in the coastal context. The process of relief, restoration and rehabilitation was done with difference. The difference is that it was planned and implemented by and through the community and community organisations leading to quick recovery, restoration and sustenance of livelihoods of the coastal community. In simple terms, it could be termed as *Development in Fast Track*. The experiences gained through the programme reiterates the point that *post disaster recovery has to be planned as long term development programme in-order to build a resilient society*; through the short term interventions the status quo can only be restored but it is not possible to address the risks and vulnerabilities holistically. The post tsunami programme of DHAN – *Enabling Livelihood Restoration* – is a typical model of evolving a long term development programme starting with post disaster recovery. This paper highlights the model adopted, families reached and impact created by DHAN in the coastal areas.

2. COMMUNITY DRIVEN MODEL - Disaster Recovery to Long Term Development

With years of experience in coastal areas (Gulf of Mannar under the UNDP GEF funded project) DHAN had a thorough knowledge on the risks and vulnerabilities of the coastal communities. It believed that sustainable development in coastal areas can only be achieved by organising the unorganised coastal community, enabling them for entitlements and facilitate for a better access to mainstream resources. Hence post tsunami, DHAN adopted a community driven approach. The prime focus in its approach was organising the affected communities as institutions at three distinct levels of hamlet/village, panchayat and block and build their capacity to address their development needs. The federations that are promoted at the block level collaborate with the other development agencies to mobilise resources and other services for its members. The approach of DHAN was that of facilitation so that the communities could prepare themselves for the long-term reconstruction with enabling process. The initiatives in the disaster-affected areas were taken in three distinct yet overlapping phases.

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- **Phase I : Strengthening and supporting relief operations (3 months)**
- **Phase II : Restoring Livelihoods through collective action (2 years)**
- **Phase III : Building self-reliance and Coastal Resource Conservation and Management (5 – 6 years)**

The **first phase** of 3 months focused on filling the gaps in relief, reaching the un-reached, and to cover the vulnerable and marginal sections in the relief net. The communities were involved in ensuring equity in relief distribution. Innovative methods of household card were distributed to avoid confusion and duplication.

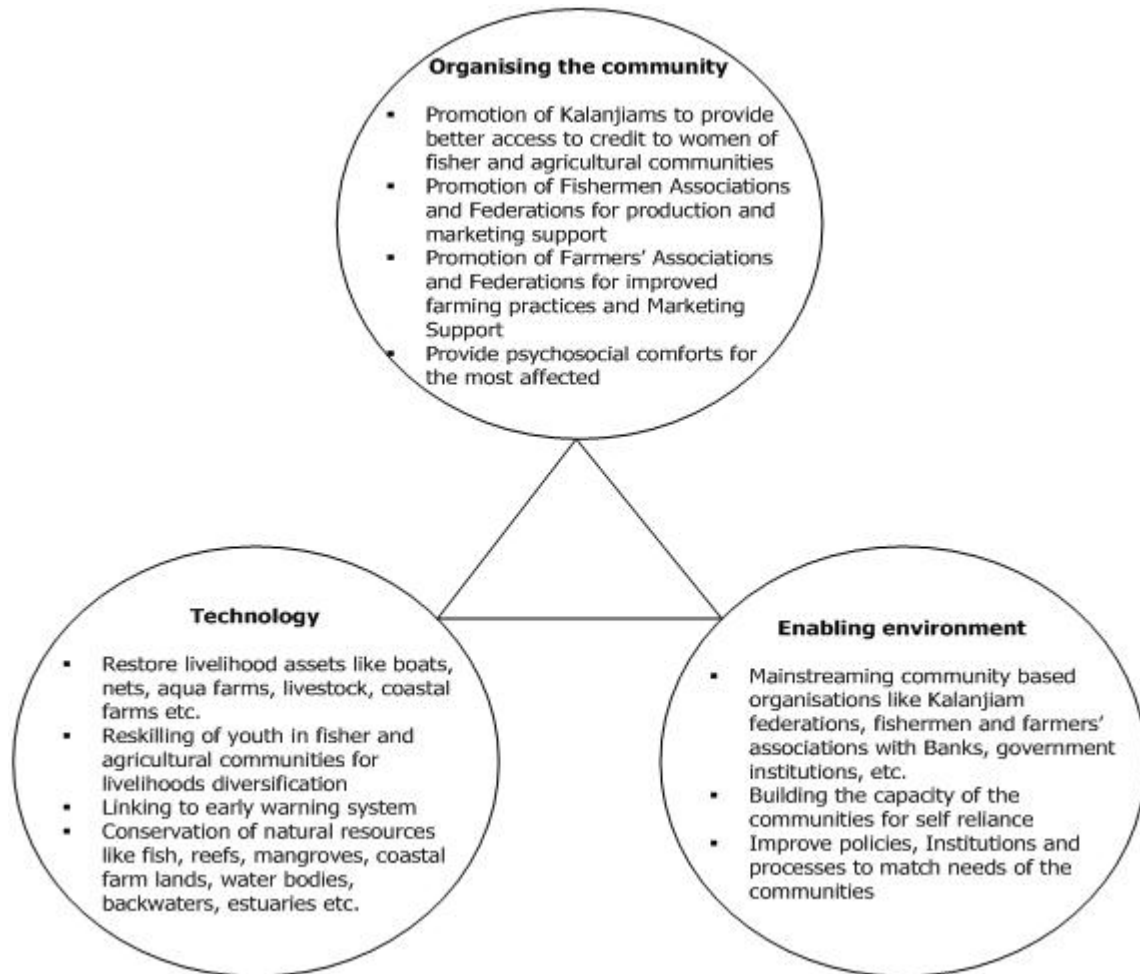
Renovation of livelihood infrastructure such as water bodies, drainage channels, boat repair etc., were taken as part of food for work programme in the relief phase itself. DHAN adopted the following approach in its relief phase:

- Initiate immediate relief in the 290 affected villages identified
- Identifying and intervening in the villages which are not supported / reached by other NGOs
- Filling the gaps in relief interventions in all the villages
- Field Level Assessment on damages with the support of professionals
- Participation of the community while assessing the damage
- Convergence with other institutions for implementing the relief activities
- Involving the community leaders in serving the community
- Identification of the affected people with the support of local community
- Involving community in the purchase and distribution of relief materials
- Avoiding duplication in the execution of relief

In the **second phase** (2005 - 07), the focus was on organising the community and restoring livelihoods through the people institutions. The vulnerable and marginal sections in the coastal areas were given exclusive focus. The intervention also had special focus on the women in coastal areas and thematic institutions for the development of women were evolved. The programme resulted in organising **70,113** poor families in 330 coastal villages into **4049** primary level people institutions. About Rs.250 M were routed through these people institutions for restoring the livelihoods.

The **third phase** starts with stabilising the interventions made so far in the coastal areas during which all the planned programme interventions are in place and the organised people institutions (*41 federations*) equip themselves to restore, conserve and manage the coastal natural resources.

DHAN's Community Driven Model for Post Tsunami Recovery



3. Sectoral focus

The community in the coastal areas are involved in a variety of livelihood activities that include marine and backwater fishing, coastal agriculture, salt pan, sea shell and chunk collection, palm based activity etc., The risks and vulnerabilities of these communities



also vary widely. To address the issues in each of these sectors DHAN promoted exclusive people institutions in the coastal areas. Thus the women of in coastal areas were are organised as *Kalanjams* (Women SHG's), the marine and backwater fishers as *Meenavar Kalanjams* (men SHG) and the men and women of coastal agriculture together as *Vayalagam* SHG. This helped in prioritising and addressing the

livelihood issues exclusively but collectively. So far, DHAN was able to *organise 31,044 women as Kalanjams, 26,230 fisher folks as Meenavar Kalaniam and 12,839 men and women as Vayalagams.*

Fisheries: In fisheries sector the focus was on traditional fishers who are involved in fishing using country crafts. DHAN made exclusive focus to include the backwater and backwater channel fishing communities most of whom come under the economically weaker section category. In view of the dwindling near shore fish stocks in the country DHAN decided not to provide new boats but to repair / replace the existing ones. The asset less were provided with alternate livelihood options like inland fresh water fishing, ornamental fish stocking and trading, mud crab culture etc., Mainstreaming the communities with banks helped in reducing their vulnerability to local money lenders (exorbitant interest rates). In addition, DHAN also facilitated better access to markets by organising the fisher folks as *Kalanjia Meenavar Sangam*. About Rs. **70 Millions** worth of business transactions were facilitated between the fishers and fish markets.

Coastal Agriculture: The coastal agriculture sector is unique but one of the neglected sectors by the mainstream. It is infested with declining productivity, slow rate of technology transfer, increasing soil salinity, exploitative agriculture produce marketing. Adding to the woes are the frequent drought and floods that jeopardize the livelihoods of the farming community. The invasion of marine soil on the agriculture fields still aggravated the situation. DHAN was one among the first to respond to this sector and brought in state of the technologies (Wageningen University) to grass roots in reclaiming the affected fields. The farmers were exposed and trained on the latest farming techniques through the extension centers – Coastal Agriculture resource Centre. The organised communities were facilitated for better market linkages for seed and fertilizer procurement and also in marketing their agriculture produce. **More than 300** tonnes worth agriculture produce have been handled by the community organisations so far.



Marginal Sections: In addition to fishers and farmers there is a wide spectrum of livelihood activities in which the coastal communities were involved which includes salt pan, backwater / backwater channel fishing, sea shell and chunk collectors, palm based activities etc., The intervention reached such communities also and their needs with respect to livelihood restoration and strengthening have also been addressed through the enabling model. More than 40% of the total beneficiaries covered under the programme will fall under this category.



4. Transition – Livelihood restoration to sustenance

Three years post tsunami, DHAN was able to organise the community, build institutions, restore and strengthen their livelihoods. In order to sustain the livelihoods it is imperative to conserve and manage the coastal resources in an effective way. DHAN is of firm belief that the coastal natural resources can be effectively managed by the community through the people institutions and through cooperation and partnerships. Its experience in creating such systems in the Vayalagam programme has been very effective, time tested and found successful. The community driven model evolved by DHAN for effective management for natural resources (small scale water bodies) hinterland provides the basis for implementing similar systems in coastal areas also. It is proposed to integrate the existing institutions at the hamlet level and evolve exclusive institutions to focus on restoration, conservation and management of coastal natural resources. The community institutions would be facilitated by DHAN to mobilise resources internally and from mainstream to effectively manage the resources. In a period of 5 – 6 years, DHAN has planned to evolve a coastal community resource management system.

5. Initiatives in mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

In the process of livelihood restoration DHAN mainstreamed the concept of DRR through the following initiatives:

a. Community Owned Recovery: The organised community were enabled to restore and as well as initiate new livelihood activities. The financial support was routed through the people institution as a grant to the group and interest free loan to the member. The repaid amount to the people institution is stocked as risk reduction fund to meet any eventualities in future.

b. Self help with savings: The members of the people institutions were inculcated with the habit of savings. The amount and period of savings is decided by the members of the SHG. The savings generated within the group is used by the members for internal lending thus meeting their emergency requirements. Self help and mutuality is habituated through the micro finance activity. *A community inculcated with the concept of Self help and Mutuality can react and respond much better at times of disasters thus reducing the overall impact of the disaster.* So far about **Rs. 122 Millions** have been mobilised as savings from the community. The internal savings also helped in mobilising **Rs.120 Millions** from mainstream financial institutions.

c. Partnerships for stabilising livelihoods: The organised communities were enabled to establish partnerships at different levels. ***Partnerships were forged with Government, Banks, Corporates and Research Institutions for improved skills, better access to resources and hence stabilised livelihoods for the affected community.***

d. Social Security: Realising the need and importance of extending social security for all the communities who are exposed to maximum no. of natural disasters, DHAN started extending life coverage for its members. ***So far, about 34,482 poor families have been covered under life insurance.*** In addition to the coverage extended to the members, their spouses were also enrolled covering about **17,039**. The total number of insurance claims made was 86 and an amount of **Rs. 2.34 Million** claimed as compensation.

Through the programme – Enabling Livelihood Restoration – DHAN was able to effectively restore the livelihoods of about 68,000 families in the tsunami affected coastal areas. The success of the programme lies in the community driven model adopted by DHAN. The model has been proven successful with the affected communities participating in the entire process of restoration in a disaster context.

6. Way Forward

The interventions made so far by DHAN helped in reducing risks and vulnerabilities of the coastal communities and improve their income at household level. Through the programme, livelihoods of 60,457 coastal families have been strengthened and stabilized. Organising the community as institutions and routing the restoration through the institutions is the key in this entire process of disaster recovery and development. The approach builds the concept of self help, mutuality and senses of togetherness and thereby the resilience of the coastal community.

In 4 years down the line, DHAN was able to build the institutions with systems in place for their effective functioning and self management. In the next phase, the institutions will be made aware on the need to conserve the coastal natural resources which they depend directly for their livelihoods. DHAN would facilitate the institutions to evolve village level management plans so as to conserve and manage the coastal resources. The sustenance of coastal livelihoods depends on well managed coastal resources which will be the focus of DHAN in its next phase of development.