

BY THE BITSUNAMI TEAM, ANURADHA GUPTA ('86 MMS), SANDEEP MUKHERJEE ('95 PHY MECH), LAXMAN MOHANTY ('81 EEE), SRIDHAR NAGARAJAN (AID)

THE REHABILITATION OF TSUNAMI AFFECTED AREAS – A BITS ALUMNI INITIATIVE

To restore and to sustain: Two tsunami affected villages in Tamil Nadu's Nagapattinam district, Naalvedapathy and Pushpavanam, have been adopted by BITS Pilani alumni for rehabilitation within the next five years.

As you're all probably already aware, in December this past year Tsunamis of biblical proportions struck India and several other countries. Sadly enough, this was merely the latest in a spate of natural disasters – adding to the adversity inflicted by the super cyclone that hit Orissa in 1999 and the earthquakes that rocked Gujarat in 2001.

Cities, coastal communities and seaside resorts were devastated. Over 290,000 people lost their lives and thousands others were injured. Several countries including Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand were affected as over a million people were rendered homeless. The World Bank reports that the Tsunami will cost India alone an estimated \$1.2B in reconstruction. And yet again, as we have seen so often in the past, it is in the face of shared adversity that people cast aside their immediate worries and differences and unite with a common goal of making a difference in the lives of those affected. As Shankar (BITSunami team, Sub-Editor – The Hindu), describes it “such cataclysmic events serve not merely as opportunities for resurrection but also as checkpoints to re-examine our own lives, regain a sense

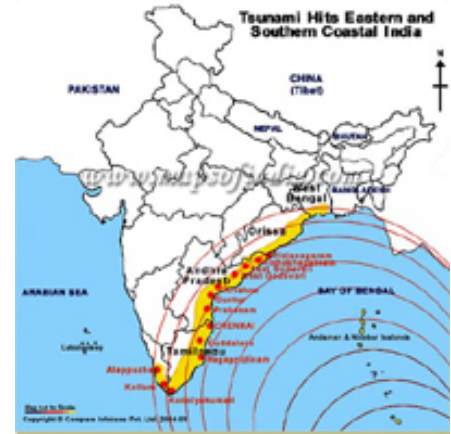
of perspective and give back to our communities.”

In a most touching display of humanity, people all over the world, BITSians included, sent in donations to effect immediate relief, volunteered their assistance and did all that was humanly possible to help.

But it isn't mere charity that's the answer in such situations as Laxman, a member of the Sandpaper team discovered when he visited cyclone affected villages in Orissa. The villagers who used to be relatively affluent explained that they found it hard to accept external 'aid' and instead of rice or items of daily need were more interested in ways to rebuild their local economies and regain their financial self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.

REHAB OR RELIEF?

While many rushed in with relief by way of money and materials, contributions which were certainly appreciated and commendable no doubt, some within the BITSAA community recognized that in the midst of this disaster, there was the need for, and an



opportunity to launch an initiative dealing in longer-term results and sustainable development. Or as our Vice-Chancellor described it, a 'holistic' effort. This notion led to the formation of the BITSunami team.

Close to Ground Zero, a team from BITSAA's Chennai chapter, with members ranging from 25 to 75 years in age, got (and still are) busy putting together a rehab initiative, valued at over a million dollars, and BITSAA chapters across the globe are embracing the project wholeheartedly and with immense pride.

The distinction and rationale for billing the effort as rehabilitation-focused is because it involves integrated development and is comprehensive in nature, embracing all of the following elements:

- **Infrastructure rebuilding:** Houses, community buildings, roads, over bridges
- **Livelihood growth:** Fishing, boats, nets, new techniques.
- **Agriculture:** Land fertility reclamation, cropping pattern, cattle and poultry
- **Health & Sanitation:** Health center, water purification systems, noon-meal scheme for children, medical camps
- **Education:** School renovation, creating endowments etc
- **Trauma Care:** Psychological counseling and rehab to lead a normal life
- **Ecology rehab:** Coastal defense mechanisms

3. The formal involvement of BITS Pilani led by the Vice Chancellor himself. The enthusiastic response from BITSians around the world, a host of corporations of international repute such as Wipro, WeP, HP, Polaris, Infineon and the involvement of a number of non-government organizations.
4. A group of highly committed and qualified professionals who can bring in innovative solutions – read BITSians. This is by virtue of having one of the largest, most collaborative alumni professionals.



Want to lose weight? Join BITSunami

Srikanth ('88 Chemical) found an innovative way of raising funds. His father and he entered into a public pact that for every kg he loses starting March 6th 2005, up to the first 10 kgs his father will donate Rs. 1000/- to BITSunami and Rs.5000/- for every kg thereafter.

5. Overheads kept to a bare minimum with everybody chipping in. Want figures? Just Rs.3K a month for a coordinator at the village

BITSunami Team

- '61 – R Nagarajan
- '72 – Rauf Ali
- '73 – Babu
- '74 – Joseph Antony
- '77 – Gopal Wadhvani
- '80 – K S Venkateswaran (Project Coordinator)
- '81 – Ravin Kurian, Shankar, Parthasarathy
- '82 – Hans Raj Verma
- '85 – Narendran, C Ramesh, Krishna Mudaliar, P K Raghu
- '86 – Sudeep Jain
- '88 – K Srikanth (BITSAA Chennai Coordinator), Anand Rangachary, R Venkatesh
- '90 – Subramaniam, Rajesh Bhaskar
- '91 – Ram Sukumar
- '92 – Harish Lakshman

Thanks also to everyone in the BITSAA Chennai chapter for your support.

level, Rs.10K a month for the overall coordinator based in Chennai. Another coordinator at *Nagappattinam* district in a month or two would cost just Rs.6K per month.

APPEAL TO BITSIANS

The communities need BITS Pilani alumni to prove that we are equal to the task of completely changing the face of two villages impacted by a tragedy *after the NDTV and CNN crews have left*.

Just giving up a minor luxury could mean providing a basic necessity to a villager, as Sudeep Jain, IAS, (BITSunami team member) points out “the equivalent of two cold drinks per day for the duration of the project would be immensely valuable”.

THE VISION

Rehabilitate two villages in the hardest hit areas. *Nagappattinam*, the Tamil Nadu district in which the two villages, *Naaluvadapathy* and *Pushpavanam* are located, was one of the worst affected areas

VALUE

PROPOSITION

The BITSunami effort is distinctive in its approach in the following five ways:

1. The comprehensive nature of the rehabilitation – Integrated Development
2. The incorporation of the knowledge and the involvement of the local populace in executing the project to deliver meaningful results.

Whether you are involved in sending funds, assisting with funding efforts, spreading the word through your network of friends or organizing events, every little bit counts.

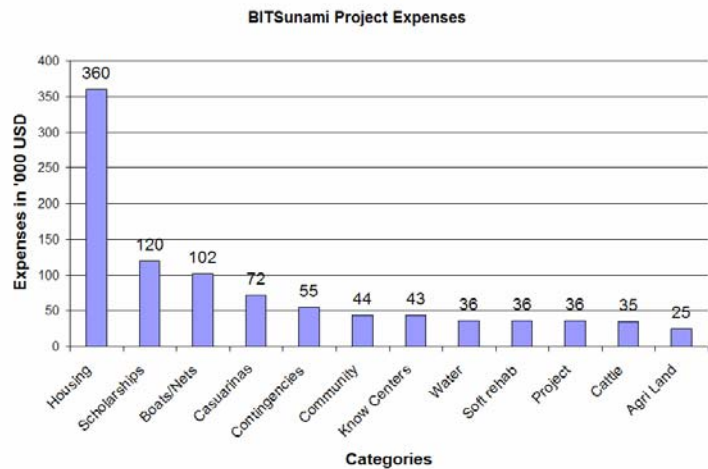
PROJECT DETAILS

The *Nagapattinam* district was one of the worst affected districts in mainland India during the Tsunami disaster. Close to 100,000 have been rendered homeless and more than 6,000 lives have been lost. The devastated villages will require extensive involvement by government, philanthropists and people like you and me to restore a semblance of normalcy.



Two years ago, drought-stricken farmers in a village in Tamil Nadu walked into the Guinness Book of World Records by planting the highest number of saplings in a 24-hour period

Stirred by the calamity, like-minded professionals from Pilani expressed a desire to leverage their technical and networking skills to reach out to and develop these villages.



The entire project is being routed through BITS Pilani Alumni Tsunami Rehabilitation Trust (BITSUNAMI in short) – a trust formed by the alumni in the Chennai chapter. The District Collector of *Nagapattinam* and the District Monitoring Commissioner are also assisting with the team’s efforts.

Partnerships with focused NGOs such as LAFTI, PREPARE, the Indian Council of Child Welfare (ICCW), LEAD, BOBP (Bay of Bengal Project) and MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) are also being established.

The team project will not just create these two model villages but also inspire people around the globe and most importantly, leave a lasting impression in the lives of the villagers for generations to come. The Project will last for five years with a project office at *Nagapattinam*.

An interesting fact about *Naalvedapathy* is that

through the efforts of Sudeep Jain, the village is in the Guinness Book of World Records for the achievement of planting 80,244 trees in 24 hours using a 300-strong volunteer team. How the plantation helped during the Tsunami is reported by Reuters in the excerpt below.

TREES TO COMBAT TSUNAMIS

An extract from a Reuters Report, January 30th 2005

Two years ago, drought-stricken farmers in a village in Tamil Nadu walked into the Guinness Book of World Records by planting the highest number of saplings in a 24-hour period. On December 26, as the killer tsunami struck down thousands of people and homes, the casuarinas and eucalyptus trees, which had been planted to appease the weather gods, saved the lush green village of *Naalvedapathy*. Of the nearly 8,000 people who died in the state, including 6,000

Contributions

<http://www.bitsunami.in/>

For those outside the US/India

Cheques to be made out to (under email advise to bitsaach@yahoo.com) for other currencies, please email bitsaach@yahoo.com

For those in India

Cheques made out to "BITSUNAMI" to be mailed to:

c/o K S Venkateswaran
D-17 Narumukhai Apartments
Brindavan Nagar Extension
Velachery (West) Chennai-600088 India

E-Mailbitsaach@yahoo.com

Contacts

K Srikanth, Tel: +919840155510
R Kurian, Tel: +919840284250
K Venkateswaran, Tel: +919444024583

For those in the US

Send a cheque to "OPEN" with "BITSAA Tsunami relief" in the memo line to the following address:

Kumar Thiagarajan
25470 Gimbel Drive
South Riding, VA 20152

OR

Rajesh Ramadoss
652 Benner Rd Apt 10
South Riding, VA 20152
Allentown, PA 18104

in one fishing village, only seven were from *Naahvedapathy*.

The casuarina trees, which numbered more than 60,000, took the brunt of the tsunami waves as they swept through the area. Sudeep Jain, who led the plantation drive, has started a trust since the tsunami struck to undertake tree plantation along the 1,000-km coast of Tamil Nadu with the help of his engineering school classmates (read BITSians). "We don't need to anymore advertise the benefits of tree plantation... (It) is the

cheapest and best way of rehabilitating the tsunami ravaged coastline," he said.

FUNDING

The corpus of funds the project will need is almost a million dollars, half of which we hope to raise from BITSAA members worldwide and the other half from philanthropists and companies through the efforts of the team and BITSians. We appeal to you to contribute generously to this fund.

Details of the project elements and preliminary budget can be read, not as simple mathematics, but as an indication of how much has been lost and how much can be retrieved through a small gesture on the part of everyone.

Also, anybody who wishes to contribute to a holistic effort at rehabilitation and integrated development of the Tsunami affected area on a long term basis could do so by committing funds in the immediate term and/or also spread their contribution out over the next five years. The team is also expecting corporate sponsorship of project elements in entirety – these are yet to be formalized and committed. Income Tax exemption under Section 80G for contributions from within India has been applied for.

WORLDWIDE EFFORTS

As news of the Tsunami rolled in, the immediate need was to disseminate information to BITSians worldwide on how they could get involved including comprehensive advice from and specific pointers on relief efforts, agencies, contributions and potential matching donations. Several emails whizzed across multiple BITSAA mailing lists as a consequence of which our alumni community's awareness grew dramatically.

A fundraiser, Nrithyanjali was organized in New Jersey with active support from **Pushkala** (95 MMS).

A number of people volunteered and were involved with various non-profit organizations on the ground. **Srinivasa Rao ('78 MMS)**, a resident of Singapore for close to two decades now, was featured on Singapore's Channel News Asia for his exemplary work in this realm. Other BITSians who were actively involved during the Tsunami relief efforts include **Chandra ('91)** and **Smitha Kalyani ('96 Comp Sc)**, active with the Association for India's Development (AID) in Chennai. **Preetish Nijhawan ('85)** is on the Board of the Non Profit *Pratham* and works in Austin, Texas. He went to India subsequent to the Tsunami to contribute not just monetarily but also to volunteer his services.

Ravi Baid ('86) and his non-profit in Delhi, *Roundtable India (RTI)*, were involved in an extensive effort in Tamil Nadu and a few other southern states. RTI was officially approved as an NGO undertaking rehabilitation work and rebuilding infrastructure.



Sea front view after debris was cleared

Sridhar Nagarajan ('94 Phy Chemical), an AID volunteer in San Jose, worked in Chennai and Koovathur in Kancheepuram district for 2 weeks (Jan 9, 2005 to Jan 23, 2005). At the end of his tireless stint – including logistics, material management and rehabilitation – he authored a first-hand perspective on how humanity has come together to the aid of Tsunami victims.

“In summary, the whole world has really come together in support of this initiative. Life in Tamil Nadu in my view is slowly but surely returning to normalcy. The relief workers and the government are doing a great job. Many friends I know have said ‘at the end of all this, most people are going to

feel good' about this. Well, if not that, people need to realize that natural disasters such as this cannot be controlled but at least it is heartening to see that the world is unified in dealing with the aftermath.”

We also thank and acknowledge all of you who have contributed in so many ways that we perhaps are not aware of and please do stay involved...

CONCLUSION

The BITSAA Chennai chapter has taken on this arduous but truly inspiring task upon itself. This gives BITSians as a community a phenomenal opportunity to help and make a difference. Holistic development on this scale involves a firm commitment and one hopes that BITSians and people the world over will continue to extend their support to this noble venture. The exercise will also create a knowledge base that can be used in other villages or in similar situations, god forbid, if it's needed.

Let's all commit to helping in any way we can.



Getting the local community involved...



...and making a difference