

Abstract

This study attempts to develop a set of measurable criteria that will define sustainable settlements in the context of donor-built housing for tsunami victims in coastal districts of Sri Lanka. The second part of the study involve developing a weighted scoring system based on identified indicators to ascertain the level of compliance to these criteria as a means of cross-referencing and comparison between resettlement sites.

Data collection was done through field visits, observation of conditions at resettlement sites, analysis of site plans and house designs, sample household surveys in selected resettlement locations. In this study we are narrowly confined to a single tsunami-affected district- Kalutara- and four relocation sites within that district, for data collection and site surveying.

The results of this study indicate a low level of environmental compliance to criteria such as solid waste disposal, energy efficacy, erosion control, thermal comfort, and disaster mitigation. Of the four sites studied, three performed badly against these criteria. A quick cross check of Central Environmental Authority's "*Environmental Guideline for post tsunami reconstruction*" issued at the beginning of reconstruction also show that site planners have demonstrated a clear lack of consideration to this guideline. Two of the sites scores at levels denoting unacceptably low levels of compliance/need for urgent adjustment for a majority of criteria. The one site that consistently scored above the line of acceptability was designed as a pilot ecologically conscious settlement by the donor and cannot be considered the norm in tsunami resettlement.

While it has been difficult to draw general conclusions about the condition of tsunami resettlement projects through this study of a small sample of four sites (there were at least 300 tsunami resettlement projects in the 13 coastal districts); the results and information gathered from other studies lead us to conclude that;

- Tsunami housing in general does not conform to sustainable settlement planning principles
- Many of the pertinent environmental guidelines and directions issued by the authorities were not mainstreamed in to the construction industry and they still remain peripheral to this day
- There has to be a mechanism to rectify certain chronic problems manifest in these sites due bad planning
- It is imperative that the local authority is involved in developing this redress mechanism and through it develop service linkages (waste disposal/sanitation maintenance) with the resettled community

Although tsunami relocation housing sites are the major focus of discussion here; the same environmental concerns lie common with urban/semi-urban settlements that are the common housing development feature in most parts of the country. Smaller housing plots and congested settlements are becoming the norm due to high cost of land/ housing. The criteria developed in this study is therefore not confined to post-disaster resettlement projects, but is common to housing settlement planning in normal times.