

**District level Supreme Court Hearing on Right to Food Security for Tsunami Affected:  
Chennai and Thiruvallur districts.**

**Organised by:** PUCL  
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**The Panelists:**

1. **Dr. Kothanda Raman, Advisor to the Supreme Court Commissioner on Right to Food (Andhra Pradesh).**
2. **Dr. Anant Maringanti, Ph. D. Candidate, Department of Geography, University of Minnesota.**
3. **Sudha Ramalingam, Advocate**

At the start, facts and figures of the rehabilitation work carried out by the Chennai District administration was presented by the Chennai District Collector, Mr. S. Chandramohan.

The following issues then came up for discussion:

**1. Relocation:**

*a. Authorities:*

- i. There are still issues on relocation and resettlement on whether to relocate the people from the beach or not. For this the Collector said that the enumeration would be done to identify fishing and non-fishing families before finalizing a resettlement policy.

*b. Community representatives:*

- i. Community representatives present said that they were very sure that they did not want to move away from where they were earlier, as their livelihoods would be affected. They told the authorities to find alternative ways to ensure their safety.
- ii. Community representatives were very clear that they would relocate only after all the big villas and building on the coast were relocated. They said that danger from a tsunami is the same, whether in the case of big villas of the rich or small huts of the poor fisherfolk.

**2. Loss of livelihoods:**

*Community representatives:*

- i. Many petitions came from inland fishermen living along banks of rivers, whose houses had been left unharmed. They emphasized that they had lost their livelihoods due to the loss of nets and boats in the rising waters, thus losing their livelihoods. They said that while they had received household items like the food grains and other material aid, compensation in the form of cash is yet to reach them.
- ii. Petitions also came from those who were working in the Chennai fishing harbour, whose numbers it was said amounts to about 3 lakhs (includes fishermen and other fishworkers). They pointed out that for the last 85 days all of them, in fisheries and allied fields, had gone without work and wages.
- iii. Members of the Carpenters Welfare Association members also claimed that their livelihoods had been affected as their tools had been badly damaged. They said they were still without job a even after 85 days of tsunami.

### 3. Method of enumeration:

#### a. *Community representatives:*

- i. Commenting on the method of enumeration adopted by the government, community representatives said that authorities had started doing the survey from 28/12/04, soon after the tsunami. At this time many people had moved away from the nearshore areas, fearing another tsunami. Thus, the enumeration captured only those remaining in the village, representing only a fraction of the original population. Subsequently, all relief material was provided on the basis of this list. Even though people have given the actual list to all authorities concerned and the officials in charge, nobody has yet taken any appropriate action to address their grievances.
- ii. Some community representatives complained that no enumerators had come to their villages to do the survey.
- iii. Villages with no damage to houses or lives are considered to be tsunami- unaffected regions by the government, even though they have suffered other forms of damage.
- iv. Several community representatives also said that neither the revenue officer, nor the fisheries officer has actually visited the villages to assess the situation directly.
- v. People also complained that relief was distributed according to the list of members in the fishermen's cooperative societies.

#### b. *Authorities:*

- i. On the issue of the credibility of the list the government was using to distribute relief, the concerned officials said that for all allocations, except the boats, they were using the *panchayat* list.
- ii. Referring to the many applications that are coming in asking for relief, they said that all these would be individually assessed and relief provided.

### 4. Compensation:

#### a. *Community Representatives:*

- i. There was much unhappiness about disparity in the distribution of the money that came in for catamaran repair. Compensation was distributed only to those whose names were registered in the fishermen's cooperative societies, it was alleged.
- ii. It was reported that the deserving were left behind without any compensation while this reached the less deserving ones in time.
- iii. Most of the people said that they were not appropriately compensated for the repair of boats.
- iv. It was also said that relief material reached each house according to the house number given by the Municipality. The house numbers were given long back and, since then, many of the children had got married, and had continued to stay within the same house (they did not separate from their parents). As such, each house had more than one family in many cases. In such cases the relief materials, including the provisions given, were insufficient, sometimes leading to fight in the family.
- v. The issue of compensation to be given to missing people also came up.

#### b. *Authorities*

- i. It was clarified that for fishing craft, the assessment of loss/ damages to both FRP boats and kattumaram is now being carried out, and that when the process is over, necessary action would be taken.

- ii. It was further said that even though the compensation money has been released to every one who was on the government's list, there are still applications coming in from people. These applications would be verified and checked, and deserving people would be given the compensation.

**5. Women's issues:**

*Community representatives:*

- i. It was stressed that women, in many cases, are major contributors to family income. Women's needs have to be specially addressed as they also have lost their livelihoods. Women who are traders, or those who engage in the fish drying business etc., whose livelihoods have been affected, should also be compensated.
- ii. Women raised the issue of the male bias of bureaucrats. They complained that when they went with petitions they were shown the door and were told to bring their husbands to lodge a complaint.
- iii. Women also complained about the liquor shops that were opened immediately after the relief money was distributed. They demanded that the liquor shops should be closed down.
- iv. They further demanded that widow's pensions should be given without any hassle.
- v. Women requested that women's cooperative to set up wherever possible. It was further suggested that there should be special schemes for widows for income generation.
- vi. A woman from Kasimedu asked that if the authorities are going only by the list of the society members, how would widows (forming 25% of the total families) and women rejected by their husbands (another 25%) be considered and compensated?
- vii. One fisherwoman came up and said that widows who are still with the husbands' family really suffer a lot. Relief materials are distributed as one package for each household irrespective of the number of members in the household, as well as the type of members in the joint family. Widows in such joint families often suffer. Neither the government nor their family considered them.

**6. Schools:**

*Community representatives*

- i. Community members suggested that not only government schools but also the private ones should adopt the measure of exempting tsunami-affected children from paying fees.
- ii. Special coaching should be given to tsunami-affected children

**7. Credit:**

*Community representatives*

- a. They said that it has become difficult for them to get money from banks and other informal sources due to the lack of any collateral to be mortgaged.
- b. People requested some immediate steps to be taken so that banks could release loans at a low interest rates.

**8. Other issues:**

- a. The government was accused of working with the election motive in mind.
- b. According to the community representatives, corruption was widespread. They demanded that officers involved in corruption should be suspended.

- c. There was also discontent in the counting of the dead. It was said that in one of the villages, of the 84 bodies recovered only 57 were entered in the list of dead while the rest of the people were still in the list of missing persons, and thus not compensated.
- d. Some complained of the temporary shelters that were constructed without any care for basic amenities.
- e. Some participants also complained about NGOs who, with their relief activities, were really harming the community harmony rather than helping them. The main reason cited for the same was the unequal distribution of relief materials.

The panellist Dr. Kothanda Raman, Advisor to the Commissioner to Supreme Court on Right to Food for the State of Andhra Pradesh, appointed by the Supreme Court to hear the grievances of the tsunami affected people in Tamil Nadu, pointed out three main issues of concern, as follows:

- f. The credibility of the method/ survey used to identify the tsunami-affected people.
- g. Discrepancies in the distribution of relief
- h. Vagueness of plans for the long-term resettlement.

Apart from a large number of fishermen representing Chennai and Thiruvallur districts of Tamil Nadu, there was a large representation from the state and the district administration. The list of the state and district level administrative officers present at the hearing, is given below.

1. S. Chandra Mohan, District Collector, Chennai district
2. C.Ganesan, Assistant Collector, Thiruvallur district
3. K. Sathya Bhama, District Employment Officer, Chennai district.
4. Malathi Helen, District Social Welfare Officer, Chennai district.
5. R. Bhuvaneswaram, Tahsildar, Mylapore, Chennai
6. SPS Sivakumar, Tehsildar, Fort
7. V. K. Ramakrishnan, Tahsildar, Mambalam – Guindy.
8. D. Selvamethukumarasami, Inspector Fisheries, Ponneri
9. R. Ponnuchami, Inspector Fisheries, Chennai
10. M. Gunalan, Assistant Director of Fisheries, Thiruvallur and Chennai district, Royapuram, Chennai
11. Mary Varghese, Department of Social Welfare, Thiruvallur Collectorate.
12. M. Chandran, District Disaster Rehabilitation Officer, DMS Complex, Teynampet, Chennai