

Editorial

The south Asian tsunami and rural and tropical public health

The impact of December 26 2004 South Asian Tsunami is still being assessed months after the natural disaster, which is thought to have killed more than 150,000 people and affected millions (Bloom, 2005). The majority of deaths were a direct result of drowning and traumatic injuries (Bloom, 2005). Infrastructure, homes, medical facilities, businesses and livelihood were washed away by the force of the waves. The public health needs of the surviving population were massive, but consistent with previous natural disasters of this type. The basic requirements were for water, sanitation, food, shelter, clothing, adequate protection from disease, as well as appropriate medical care on the ground and for displaced communities (Van Rooyen and Leaning, 2005). The regions affected included many rural and tropical environments in some of the poorest areas of the Indian Ocean rim in south Asia and Africa. The impact on public health is likely to be felt for years in these areas.

The South Asian Tsunami was one of those disasters that required the mobilization of most or the entire public health workforce in the affected areas, supplemented with the resources of government and non-government aid agencies. Victim identification and the need for forensic assistance was one obvious area requiring international efforts, even in countries like Thailand where there was a good infrastructure to respond to disasters (Ladika, 2005). The challenges of this natural disaster were just as much about logistics as they were about health priorities. Logistics, in the absence of infrastructure – lost during the disaster, is often the domain of the largest government and non-government agencies, such as the military (Van Rooyen and Leaning, 2005). This natural disaster highlights the public health model - a cycle of preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. In the aftermath of the Tsunami, it became clear that efforts had to be made to develop early warning systems in the Indian Ocean in conjunction with development of improved communications and evacuation systems (Van Rooyen and Leaning, 2005). Reconstruction efforts will take years and the continuing engagement of international agencies will also remain a challenge.

The Journal of Rural and Tropical Public Health, formerly the Journal of Rural and Remote Environmental Health, continues to address important issues in public health, with a particular emphasis on rural and tropical regions, in the context of an international networking medium as an Internet based journal. The feature articles deal with practical issues written by professionals working or who have previously worked or researched in rural and tropical areas. The Journal of Rural and Tropical Public Health is continuing to make an important contribution to finding solutions to global problems.

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