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After the Tsunami in Cooks Nagar: The Challenges of Participatory Rebuilding

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Abstract

In the context of post-disaster reconstruction, there is growing awareness of the need for more integrated inclusive processes that allow people to retake control of their lives, and that ensure practical responses to local conditions. Yet, a range of pressures and challenges conspire to make these approaches appear unworkable. "Participation" in this context, if it happens at all, is often cursory and superficial, whether it involves children or adults. This paper describes an attempt to respond to these challenges in one small community in Tamil Nadu, India, after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The scope for real involvement on the part of children and their families was limited by a number of factors, but in the end they were able to exercise some genuine control over the reconstruction of their homes and neighborhood. The paper discusses the replicability of this case, and argues for the importance of a process that includes children and adults together.

Keywords: children, community, disaster, housing, children's participation, reconstruction, tsunami, India

Introduction

"You can tell the quality of bricks by snapping them with your fingers," said 13-year-old Priya.

> *They make a certain sound if they're good and hard. You can also soak a few bricks in water for three or four hours. If the water turns reddish, that's not good. It means the bricks are dissolving. If you see that, send them back! It's a bad batch, probably made with saline water.*

I was enjoying a return visit to the small coastal community of Cooks Nagar,[1] several hours south of Chennai in Tamil Nadu, on the southeast coast of India, and several children were explaining all the things they have been doing to help housing construction in their settlement to go smoothly. Not only were they testing bricks—they also counted to make sure that the full order had been delivered. They took charge of the curing process for all new concrete foundations and pads, wetting them down every morning and evening for seven days so that they would dry slowly for maximum strength. They also made sure workers did not get confused by all the individual modifications in each family's house plan.

The children also showed me the piece of land that the community had finally secured for common space. The deal had been closed just the day before, but already a fence was going up around it and all the litter and debris had been cleared out. Plans for the space, developed months before by a group of children and adults, were familiar to everyone and the children, just for fun, were sketching the rough outlines on the ground.

In most post-tsunami reconstruction, these kinds of scenes are rare. New housing has generally adhered to a fixed plan, and most often families have not even known what house they will be assigned until the keys are turned over. Reconstruction is about the production and delivery of identical "housing units," not about individual household needs or the life of a community. Save the Children's Tsunami Rehabilitation Program, based in Chennai, decided to take another approach in Cooks Nagar. They wanted to help rebuild a settlement that would work well for children and agreed that the best way to do this was to consult closely with both children and their families to explore what would make the most difference.

This should not be unusual. Participation, after all, is a mantra in development. Even within the rather different context of disaster response and reconstruction, there is growing awareness of the need for more integrated inclusive processes that allow people to retake control of their lives and that ensure the most practical responses to local conditions. Yet, the pressure to provide immediate responses and the limited time-frame for donor assistance generally overwhelm the desire for a more process-driven, integrated approach. The expectation on all sides is often for

[1] The experience in Cooks Nagar, the principles that informed it and the lessons that we learned there are all described in more detail in a booklet entitled "Making Space for Children: Planning for Post-Disaster Reconstruction with Children and Their Families." This publication will soon be available from Save the Children Sweden (http://www.rb.se/eng/).

quick results rather than long-lasting ones. The irony is that the quick, efficient approach is *not* always that efficient. Two and a half years after the tsunami, the majority of those displaced in the tsunami-affected region still await permanent housing.[2] And many of those new housing units remain vacant as people strive for solutions that reflect their needs better.

This is not a debate about whether participation is a fruitful approach in the context of post-disaster reconstruction. Experience shows how much sense it makes to turn to local knowledge for practical results. This is a brief account, rather, of the challenges faced by one branch of one organization as its staff tried to find practical ways to make this a process that worked for children. Save the Children believes, of course, in children's right to be involved in decisions about their own lives. This is a basic element in their approach to both emergency and development work. But the potential for genuine engagement on the part of children was shaped in this instance (as it almost always is) by a number of very real constraints.

The Constraints

There was, to start with, the centralized, top-down nature of post-disaster reconstruction. After a disaster such as the tsunami, NGOs generally negotiate with one another on where they can work, with government playing a coordinating role. NGOs may end up doing livelihoods work in one place, supporting education in another, and constructing housing units in yet another. There is often limited potential for the kind of integrated response that lends itself best to real engagement with a community. For shelter reconstruction, NGOs may be assigned land and families for new settlements, or existing plots in the case of on-site rebuilding. There are strict standards to adhere to (mostly for future disaster risk reduction), designs must be pre-approved, and NGOs are expected primarily to provide the funds and oversee their proper use. If there is any local involvement, it tends generally to be rather cursory and pro forma—more than anything an acknowledgement of an organization's philosophical or policy commitment to participation.

There is also the fact that Save the Children is not really in the construction business. Although the organization has been involved in shelter provision in the context of other emergencies around the world, this is not a core area of expertise. While the tsunami response program was committed to the notion of creating settlements that work for children, there was no deep institutional understanding of what this actually meant. The natural tendency in this less familiar terrain is often to think in somewhat more superficial terms—ensuring there are playgrounds in the vicinity, perhaps, or involving children in the selection of paint colors.

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[2] According to a report by former President Bill Clinton as U.N. special envoy for tsunami recovery, two years later most of the needed replacement housing remained unbuilt. In Indonesia, only 43,400 of 141,000 destroyed houses had been built; in Sri Lanka, 58,384 of 103,836 houses; in India, 27,845 of 99,290 houses; and in the Maldives, 1,587 of 8,908 houses (http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=35984).

Save the Children works through either partner organizations or contractors that do the actual building. These implementing partners need to deliver a certain number of units on time, within the budget, and according to government criteria. With so many people still unhoused, even partners that are committed to community-building may not feel they have the time to engage in discussions with local people whose homes are being rebuilt. It is natural to feel that participation will slow things down—especially when there is already a working plan. Further, few of these organizations or contractors have any experience with children. Charged with "involving children," they are likely to respond with bewilderment.

This bewilderment extends in many cases to Save the Children's own staff. After an emergency there is a desperate need to scale up quickly and there is often a quantum leap in the number of staff—many of whom will be new to the principles and approaches endorsed by the organization. This can be a training and management nightmare. "Capacity building" is vital, but has to be balanced against the need to get people out into the field.

Another factor is the emphasis on housing units in reconstruction efforts generally, with little attention to the setting in which the housing is placed. Most new settlements consist of tidy rows of identical houses on land that has been leveled and stripped bare of vegetation. The convenience of engineers takes precedence over the quality of life of anonymous future residents.

It was in this context, then, that Save the Children made the decision to support the rebuilding of a "child-friendly" settlement in the small community of Cooks Nagar, drawing intensively on the knowledge, ingenuity and preferences of children and their families. This was to be a pilot effort and also a training experience for their staff and that of their partners.

The Background of the Cooks Nagar Project

Cooks Nagar lies about 300 meters from the sea and is home to a few hundred families who make their living primarily as small traders and day laborers who support the local fishing industry. It was a poor community before the tsunami, but not destitute. Some families lived in small masonry houses, others in more basic palm thatch huts or in some combination of the two. The tsunami destroyed and damaged many local houses, but left some untouched. A local NGO, Society for Education, Village Action and Improvement (SEVAI), provided some emergency support to the community—food and other basic needs, thatch for immediate repairs and loans for community groups, as well as some livelihoods assistance. SEVAI was already a well-established organization in the larger area, and quickly became involved in reconstruction efforts up and down the Tamil Nadu coast, some of them on a large scale.

According to coastal zoning regulations, only those who were titled land owners in Cooks Nagar could rebuild on site. Other households had to move to a resettlement site a few kilometers inland. (Variants on these kinds of regulations have complicated rebuilding efforts in many parts of the tsunami region.) Of those whose houses had been damaged or destroyed, 60 families were found to be eligible for

support for on-site rebuilding. Meanwhile, they lived in temporary shelters or doubled up with other households. SEVAI found funds to rebuild 23 houses, and then approached Save the Children for funding for the remaining 37 houses. There was already an approved house design that had been accepted by community members.

The two organizations agreed to pursue the "child friendly" concept and to explore how the new housing and its surroundings might be modified and improved to become a model for the area. They decided to bring in outside support both to facilitate the community process and, at the same time, to run a hands-on training workshop for staff members from Save the Children, SEVAI and other area partner organizations.

This outside support team consisted of four of us. Gabriella Olofsson came from Save the Children Sweden in Stockholm, where she is the advisor on physical environment. She had been encouraging Save the Children in the tsunami region to give closer attention to the impacts on children of the rebuilding efforts, and her program had funded various efforts in this direction. I was returning to Tamil Nadu after some previous visits to the Chennai office. I had been advising Save the Children Sweden for several years on issues related to the physical environments of children, and after the tsunami the Stockholm office made my support available to their colleagues in the field. Gabriella and I made several visits to the tsunami region, helping staff in different programs think through the practical problems they were facing. We were joined for this Tamil Nadu workshop by Selim Iltus from the Children's Environments Research Group at City University of New York (CUNY). Selim has many years of experience in facilitating community planning efforts. He brought along Anupama Nallari, a graduate student at CUNY with a background in architecture who wanted to volunteer her time in exchange for some hands-on experience in this kind of work.

The Workshop Process

Gabriella and I arrived a week ahead of time in mid-October 2006 to lay the groundwork for the workshop and to develop a realistic plan that would take into account, among other things, people's schedules and general availability. We met with SEVAI staff, were shown around the site by local children, visited with families, and spent time in the houses that SEVAI had already built, a number of which were soon to be occupied. We also spent a lot of time in informal discussion with SEVAI staff, Save the Children's local field staff and community members, and we visited other local sites.

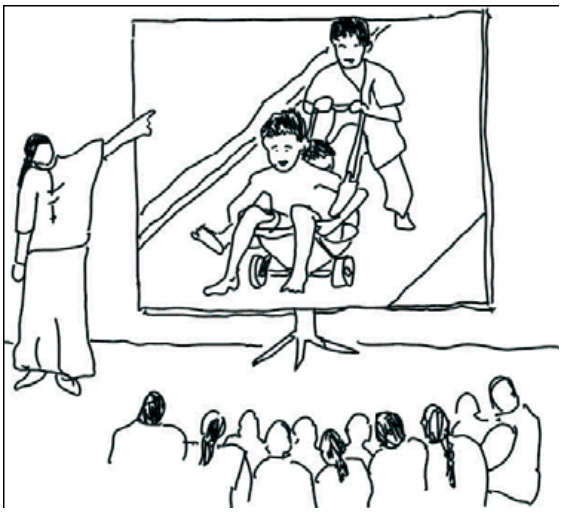
Although most of the decisions on the design of the new housing were already made and accepted, in the course of these informal meetings various concerns began to emerge. The lack of storage space was a major issue for many people, as were considerations about privacy, limited space for larger families, safety issues for children, and toilet access, among other things. In short, there was still room for a number of modifications within this design that would make individual houses more practical and suitable for the families that would be occupying them. SEVAI's

director, Mr. Rajagovinda, was interested and open-minded, and willing to have these concerns explored further with families.

Even more important, little or no attention had been given to planning for the common space within the settlement, and there was good potential here for developing community-wide solutions. Based on these preliminary discussions before the actual workshop, it was decided that the community planning process would focus on developing a list of cost-free or low-cost options that families could select to "customize" their homes, as well as a design for a community space to be developed on a selected site within the settlement, along with attention to the quality of local space generally.

The more formal part of the process began with a big community meeting one evening, after the rest of the team had arrived, along with staff members from Save the Children, SEVAI and a few other partner organizations working up and down the Tamil Nadu coast. This gave both residents and staff participants a chance to meet everyone and to hear about the work that would follow over the coming week. The head of SEVAI and local leaders within the community led this meeting, and introduced the team. A short presentation had been prepared before the meeting, using photographs from around India that highlighted the relationship between the physical environment and children's well-being, pointing especially to the connections between local surroundings, children's opportunities for play and their intellectual development and capacity to succeed in school. This is a critical concern to local parents, almost all of whom were sending their children to extra tuition classes each day which they could ill afford. Mr. Rajagovinda, who had helped me to select photographs, made the presentation to the community, elaborating on each image in some detail based on our discussions. This meant that the presentation could be made in Tamil, but it also contributed to the director's knowledge, interest and investment in the whole procedure.

Figure 1. A presentation was made in Tamil to the community (Credit: Selim Iltus)

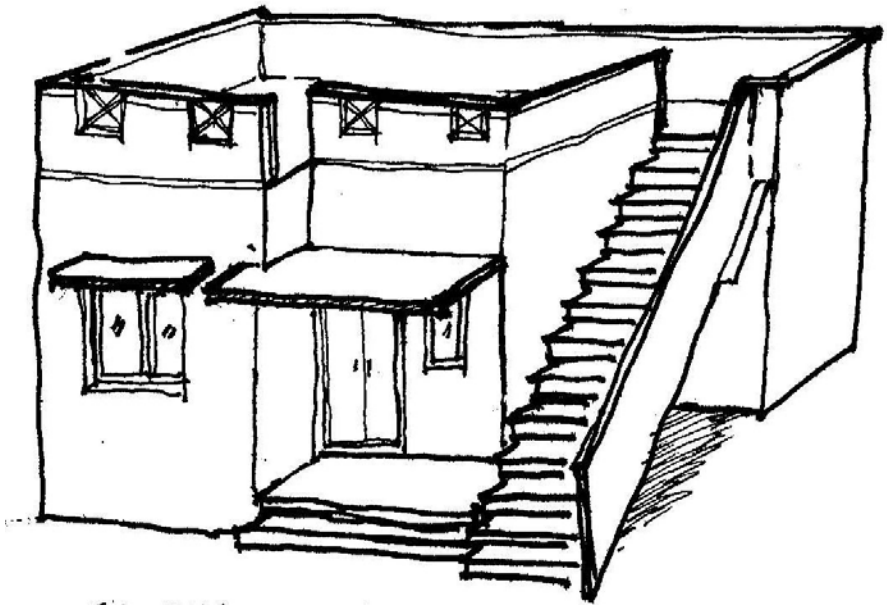


Over subsequent days, staff members spent mornings learning about specific participatory methods, reviewing the previous day's work, discussing issues and implications, and planning for the coming afternoon and evening. Small teams visited households and also worked each day with separate groups—women, men, caregivers of small children, younger boys and girls, adolescent girls and adolescent boys—focusing on daily activities, difficulties, aspirations, and the way these related to local and household space. These groups fluctuated in size according to people's level of interest and availability, but a core of really interested, committed people began to emerge, mostly women, adolescents and children. These "regulars" became the primary planning group, and they started to work with facilitators and staff in analyzing the information that was collected and translating it into design solutions.

Design Solutions

A number of housing solutions emerged quickly after the discussions of the previous week. The basic house consisted of three small rooms—a kitchen, a bedroom and a "hall" or general purpose room, also used for sleep. (People just unroll mats at night to sleep on.) The plan also included a small toilet/washroom, and an external stairway leading to the flat roof.

Figure 2. The basic house (Credit: Anupama Nallari)



Shelving was a high priority for all the women and many children in order to make the best possible use of limited floor space. Some people wanted loft storage around the whole of the one bedroom, others wanted low shelves in the hall that could double as desks for homework, and so on. These shelves could be easily added as part of the basic masonry structure as houses went up. Other storage solutions consisted of rods up high across rooms from which things could be hung.

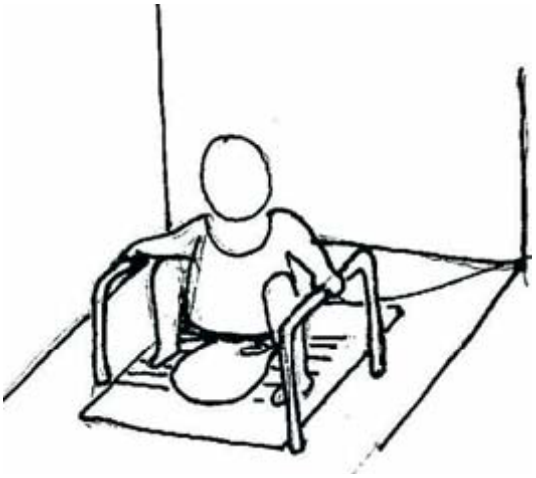
Figure 3. Shelving was a high priority (Credit: Selim Iltus)

Another concern, especially for larger families, was privacy and adequate space for all household activities. Some families with both boys and girls, or with extended family members, liked the idea of dividing the all purpose room; some wanted to eliminate window overhangs at lintel level,[3] leaving reinforcement rods exposed to make it easier to attach a low cost lean-to addition. Another option that SEVAI accepted was to eliminate the expensive weather-course finish on the flat roof of the house and to erect instead a palm-covered roof to provide an extra room at the same cost. This could be used as a sleeping room for older children, quiet homework space, or separate quarters for extended family.

Another concern was the toilet. Many families preferred the idea of a door from the outside to the toilet, a reflection of the fact that an indoor toilet is still an unfamiliar and somewhat distasteful idea for many people in this part of the world. Others, especially with small children, decided they liked the convenience of an inside door. Many adolescent girls also preferred not having to go outside into the dark to use the toilet. Another possible toilet modification was the installation of "handle bars" next to the squat plate—a way to make latrine use less worrying for small children, many of whom are fearful of falling through the opening. This feature was also very appealing to older people with stiff joints.

[3] The lintel is the horizontal member in a post and lintel (or beam) construction, hence at the top of the walls.

Figure 4. "Handle bars" can make a latrine feel safer for small children
(Credit: Anupama Nallari)

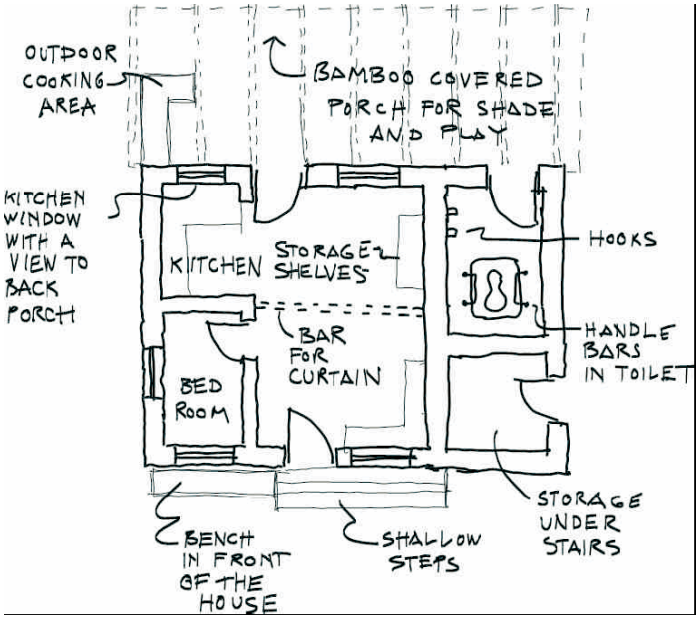


Transitional space was also something that got a lot of attention. The basic plan called for a small covered verandah. People with small children liked the idea of shallower, wider steps leading up to it, both as a safety feature for the children and as a way to increase the amount of useful play space right by the house. Behind the house, another possible modification was the extension of both the steps leading outside and the window overhangs above these steps to create added seating and play space that would stay dry in wet weather. A number of children felt this would be a good place to do homework or hang out with friends.

Several mothers spoke of their anxiety since the tsunami—they wanted to be able to keep a close eye on small children all the time and also to be alert to any forewarnings of disaster. For many of them, cooking outdoors was preferable to being inside in the kitchen. A simple, low concrete wall extending from the back of the house would make it feasible and safe to work outdoors and watch small children as they played.

There were various other modifications as well, but these provide a sense of the kinds of low-cost changes that could make a significant difference to daily family life. SEVAI's director, who had been involved in the provision of low-cost housing for years, expressed his surprise and pleasure at the sheer number and ingenuity of the modifications that the community had identified. Although SEVAI had always considered itself a participatory organization, he claimed that this gave him new respect for what people could actually contribute when their ideas were actively solicited.

Figure 5. The modifications selected by one household (Credit: Anupama Nallari)



The main project for the core planning group was the development of a plan for the shared community space to which people hoped to acquire title. After discussions of all the activities that various groups wanted to see accommodated, a "design program" was developed. They all wanted a building for several reasons—a place where children could do homework (which will be discussed more below), where groups could meet, and where weddings and other functions could be held. They also wanted space outdoors for small children's play near benches where women could socialize, and an area for activities like volleyball. Teenage girls were clear that, while they endorsed the idea of a community space, for themselves they preferred quiet places for sitting throughout the settlement where they could spend quiet time with friends. Cooks Nagar is not short on greenery (unlike many post-tsunami building sites), but both children and adults were adamant that more trees and other plants would be a vital component of the common space they wanted to develop.

Once adults and children had agreed on the basic needs, templates were cut out that represented the various uses and components identified (a building of a certain size, shade trees, benches, open space, sand pit, water faucet, and the like), and the planning group set to work on a large plastic sheet to figure out how to make best use of the available space. The absence in their design of the usual array of fixed play equipment was noteworthy, and was not, I think, just an outcome of the prejudices of our team. In other areas in the region that I have visited, when adults speak of the need for swings and slides, children are generally quick to say they would rather have open space to run around in. Adult assumptions about what children want and need tend to be quite predictable, but this kind of joint planning exercise can challenge these rote responses.

Figure 6. Planning together (Credit: Selim Iltus)

The resulting plan was presented at a community wide meeting by a few of the children and women, along with their rationale for various choices they had made. At the same time, SEVAI's director went over all the housing modifications that various groups had developed, indicating that each household would have a range of options and the chance for children and parents together to work with staff on finalizing the design for their house. There were discussions, too, of the various improvements that people felt should be addressed around the site—waste management and better water quality among them—that they planned to take up with local authorities.

In the course of this whole process with the community, various issues came up that were not specifically related to local living conditions. One involved extra tuition. Paid after-school coaching sessions, often run by the teachers themselves, are common in India even for poor families. Cooks Nagar parents were sure that if they did not pay for this service that they could ill afford, teachers would fail their children. They felt unable to offer much help to children themselves, and knew it was hard to do homework in a busy household with no quiet space into which one could withdraw. Many children walked to attend both an early morning and an evening tutoring session, crowded into a teacher's house with as many as 100 other children. There was little time in their day for play and relaxation, even for children as young as first grade. No one was happy about the situation, but it was accepted as a necessity despite the fact that little learning happened in these sessions. In the course of discussion, it became clear that if there were a space within the community where children could gather, parents would pool their resources and deal with the homework problem more effectively, saving money and allowing children more free time as well. This was one strong incentive, then, for the proposed community building.

Practical Implications

On a number of fronts, this was by all accounts a successful process. Six months later, in the spring of 2007, the houses were close to completion on schedule, people were involved in keeping things going smoothly, they had a clear vision of what they were working towards in their community space and satisfaction was high.[4]

But how practical and replicable is this process? It raises a number of questions. First of all, this is a small community and people live on site. The logistics were far simpler than they would be for a large new settlement, especially with people living at a distance. Even with this small community, the initial process took several days of intensive work, the presence of a trained team, and strong logistical backup. It required a level of flexibility, openness and follow-up on the part of the SEVAI staff that would be unusual in most implementing organizations. Also, Save the Children's Chennai management team believed in the value of the process and was willing to support it, despite the complexities. This was key—and again not all that common.

Why couldn't the process be simpler? Set aside for a moment the matter of rights. Why wouldn't it have been more practical and efficient simply to have one "expert" go quickly through a number of settlements and house plans, pointing out changes that could be made to create a better environment for children? One example should be adequate as an answer. Cooks Nagar is bounded on one side by open railway tracks, within easy reach of any child. My immediate reaction on seeing the tracks was that there should be a fence to avoid catastrophe. Had I been doing a quick evaluation of the settlement, I would undoubtedly have recommended some safety measure, even if I had been told it was not necessary. It took several conversations and some days of observation to convince me that these tracks were in fact an asset for local children. Trains passed only a few predictable times each day, they moved slowly, and could be heard coming for a few minutes before they actually passed by. A lot of children walked home from school each day along the tracks. Far from being a hazard, the rail bed allowed the children to avoid the heavy traffic on the nearby road. They clearly enjoyed walking the tracks, holding hands with friends, talking about their day, trying to see how long they could balance without stepping down—far away from honking cars and clouds of exhaust on the other side of the neighborhood. Local knowledge and experience trumped "expertise" in this case as in many others. There simply *is* no blueprint for a settlement that works well for children. There will always be local realities, routines and preferences that are unanticipated by outside professionals, even those who are from the same area. Without involving the real experts—those whose lives will be affected by the decisions—there is no such thing as a truly "efficient" process.

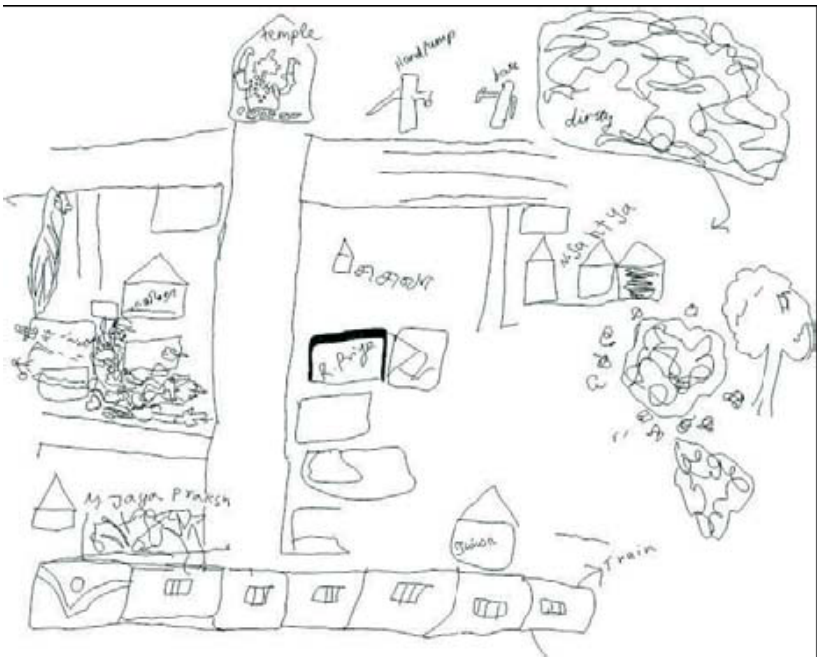
Why, also, could this process not be simplified by involving just children, rather than pulling in adults as well? We know from experience that children are knowledgeable and resourceful when it comes to their surroundings, and quick to

[4] In July 2007, the houses were completed and inaugurated. A news-clip covering the event is available at http://www.tamilvideonews.com/Newspack36.html.

come up with interesting, practical ideas for improving the local quality of life. But there are several reasons why this process, conducted with children alone, would not have had anything like the same value. If this paper has any significant point to make, this is it.

Child participation projects are an indispensable part of the program of most child-focused organizations, valued for their capacity to educate children in active citizenship. Yet, if consultation with children does not involve adults too, even successful interactions can be quite short-lived in terms of their outcomes. When the organization leaves, the project often dies. When children's concerns are dealt with outside the context of more general community efforts, they can become artificially split off from the very processes and people that should sustain them. This is particularly true when the interventions in question involve the local environment, which affects everyone. Children's very common desire for a cleaner neighborhood, for instance, will not amount to much if it does not become part of a community plan for waste management. Children in Cooks Nagar, during their group discussions, were quick to point out that piles of trash throughout the settlement were smelly and nasty, and got in the way of their play. They mapped these piles to help make their point. This could have been followed by a children's clean-up day—and probably by new piles of trash by the following week. It was only through more general community discussion of this concern with adults, who also had the chance to identify and debate the issues, that a decision was made to engage with the local authority about the inadequacy of current local waste management collection. If solutions arrived at by children and adolescents are not integrated into more general plans and solutions, they will probably fail to put down roots. When they are integrated in this way, an interest in young people's views can become a routine part of the local decision-making culture.

Figure 7. Children's garbage map (Credit: Cooks Nagar children)



Not only are issues more likely to be dealt with if adults are fully involved, but this process also changes the way adults see their children. Many parents are proud of their children's intelligence and quick to speak of their success in school. But they still find themselves surprised by the fresh perspective and practical common sense these children can bring to a discussion of local concerns. The process of involving children is more likely to become a routine practice if adults have experienced its practical value. In Cooks Nagar, on my follow-up visit, several parents mentioned that they were far more inclined now to include their children in family decision-making.

There is also the fact that participatory work with children tends for practical reasons to focus on a certain age group—those who are old enough to be articulate about their needs. A lot of children do not fall into this category, and in many ways these younger children are more profoundly affected by their surroundings than any other age group. It can be a nice exercise to get older children thinking about the needs of their younger siblings—but in truth they do not find this very compelling. Children are more eager to grow up than they are to think about what they liked and needed when they were younger. Young children can certainly participate in their own way. A keen observer can watch how small children use space and deduce many of their preferences, and even quite young children in Cooks Nagar were eager to take part in group discussion of their surroundings. Still, there is no substitute for the perspective of the people who take care of small children every day. Aside from anything else, they know exactly what they need themselves to make it possible to provide the kind of care and opportunities their children need. Mothers and other caregivers in Cooks Nagar knew that even an exciting playground would not make much difference if it was not where small children could easily be supervised. They knew that their children's freedom to run back and forth to a neighbor's house would depend on how easy it was to watch them come and go while the mothers prepared meals and did their housework. They understood that three-year-olds would be fearful of using latrines without something to hold on to.

There is another reason, too, why this process should include adults. A disaster like the tsunami reduces people to the status of victims, and this is often reinforced by the way assistance is delivered. The post-disaster "dependency syndrome" is familiar to all who work in that world. On top of all the other losses and confusion that children may be experiencing, being among helpless, depressed adults is uncomfortable and disturbing. These are the people children want to look to for reassurance and security. In this context, for an organization to come in and turn to children to make decisions is a reversal of the normal order, and at a time when the normal order is what people most want. We are quick to see the need for psychosocial support groups for children in the face of emergency and disaster, but we may forget the value to children of seeing their parents and neighbors as competent people who can take an active role in planning their lives and making decisions. In Cooks Nagar, small girls beamed when they saw their shy mothers presenting an idea to a large community group. Involving children and bypassing their elders is not a healthy way to support strong family and community relationships, especially in challenging times.

Any effort of this kind has to be shaped by the situation, and every situation brings its own complexities and constraints. Cooks Nagar itself was a compromise—so many critical decisions had already been made by the time the community became a genuinely active partner in the process. In the best of worlds, community representatives would be involved from the start, helping professionals make practical decisions, and budgets would be transparent to encourage the most resourceful use of funds. Implementing organizations would see themselves as working for people, supporting them in making their decisions and rebuilding their lives, rather than being impersonal housing delivery systems.

Nonetheless, in any situation, however constrained the possibilities are, there is some potential for real involvement and control by local adults and children. Even if it is limited, it has value. It might involve, for instance, just the planning for a small area of shared space. It could mean setting aside some portion of the construction budget so that residents can correct mistakes and oversights after the keys have finally been handed over. It could mean including some community representatives on something as mundane as the organization's procurement committee—this happened in Cooks Nagar, and was an important element in the development of mutual respect and trust. The important thing is that this involvement be genuine, not just a nod towards the abstract value of participation. If it is genuine, it means that the organization has actually been willing to give up control in some area. This is not always comfortable—not for organizations when it involves community people, nor for adults when it involves children. The discomfort lessens as experience confirms the value of the process, not only in terms of practical decisions, but in terms of the significant social effects.

"Things are so different here now," said Mahalaxmi, a Cooks Nagar grandmother who has been very active in the whole process.

> *In the past we didn't really relate to people outside our own family. This has really changed. Through this planning process we really started talking to each other and getting to know everyone. There's a lot of discussion now about everything. We frequently have meetings on our own. When we have the community building, it will happen even more because there will be a real place for gathering. We're all much more concerned about each other now. And we're much more aware about what our children need and how much they can contribute. Planning with our children has brought us all closer together. I'm ready to go show other communities how to work this way.*

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