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**Activity: The Asian tsunami: what next?  
Further information related to  
classroom activity.**

### **Develop a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean**

There is an international warning system that is designed to alert nations that potentially destructive waves may hit their coastlines within three to 14 hours. It was started the year after tsunamis struck Alaska in 1964 and is administered by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Funds from member states keep it going, including all the major nations around the rim of the Pacific in North America, Asia and South America, as well as the Pacific islands, Australia, New Zealand and Russia.

In Japan, a network of fibre-optic sensors records any seismic activity and passes that information to a powerful computer which estimates the height, speed, destination and arrival time of any tsunamis. Within two minutes of the quake, the agency can sound the alarm.

However, the Indian Ocean countries affected by the tsunami are not members of any international group and are not as well off as their Pacific neighbours. As a result of the Asian tsunami disaster richer countries have pledged to help fund a new early warning system for the area though what priority should be given to such a system is questioned.

#### **See:**

BBC report <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4149201.stm>

### **Cancel all the debts owed by governments in tsunami countries**

Shortly after the disaster a moratorium on the debt payments of the countries worst hit was agreed to free up money for reconstruction. However, this is not cancellation – merely postponement. The G8 countries (the richest eight) agreed to the debt freeze for affected countries which together owe \$272bn (costing about \$23bn a year to service). Debt campaigners were unimpressed. They hoped that rich countries would make an exceptional move and agree to cancel significant proportions of debt for those countries devastated by the tsunami.

#### **See the following links:**

BBC report <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4145007.stm>

Jubilee debt campaign <http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk/?lid=167>

Jubilee debt campaign background information and facts and figures

<http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk/?lid=98>

CAFOD fact sheet for KS3 & KS4

[http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/schoolsteachers/factsheets/debt\\_ks3\\_ks4](http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/schoolsteachers/factsheets/debt_ks3_ks4)

CAFOD overview

[http://www.cafod.org.uk/get\\_involved/campaigning/campaign\\_issues/debt](http://www.cafod.org.uk/get_involved/campaigning/campaign_issues/debt)

### **Make the rules of trade fairer so tsunami countries can sell their products easier**

The 48 poorest countries in the world, home to 10 per cent of the world's citizens, have seen their share of world exports decline to a tiny 0.4 per cent over the past two decades. In comparison, the US and EU contain roughly the same number of people, yet account for nearly 50 per cent of world exports. The European Union failed to agree on a proposal earlier this year which would have lowered tariffs for textile imports from some of the countries badly affected, especially Sri Lanka. Some European countries were worried that such a move might result in a flood of cheap textiles from the Far East. Yet such reforms can often have a much greater long-term impact on a country's prosperity than relief aid.

'Free trade' is supposedly in the interests of increased competition, but when multinational companies are able to benefit from subsidies and protections denied to small economies this competition is unfair.

#### **See the following links:**

CAFOD overview

[http://www.cafod.org.uk/get\\_involved/campaigning/campaign\\_issues/trade](http://www.cafod.org.uk/get_involved/campaigning/campaign_issues/trade)

CAFOD fact sheet for KS3 & KS4

[http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/schoolsteachers/factsheets/trade\\_ks3\\_ks4](http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/schoolsteachers/factsheets/trade_ks3_ks4)

### **Governments must deliver fully the money they promised**

There is concern that the \$3.5 billion dollars pledged by governments may not actually translate as real money. Previous examples give rise to this fear:

- In 2004, a major earthquake destroyed the city of Bam in Iran. Only 1.7% of the money pledged by governments for that disaster has so far been received.
- Only one-third of pledged funds were eventually received for relief work after Hurricane Mitch struck the Caribbean and Central America in 1998.

#### **See:**

BBC report <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4152285.stm>

### **Rich nations to double the amount of money they give in aid**

It has been calculated that if the world is to meet the Millennium Development Goals for eradicating global poverty (targets set by the UN and agreed by virtually every nation) an additional £50 billion a year will be required until 2015. That is double the current aid levels but is well within the means of the world's governments.

The destruction caused by the tsunami was in origin a natural disaster, but it was greatly exacerbated by the poverty and marginalisation of the people in the area. The poor are always the worst affected by disasters: their housing is less well built and in dangerous areas; their livelihoods are wiped out more easily; they do not have insurance; they have no personal reserves to help with reconstruction. They live in regions that lack early warning systems, have dilapidated infrastructure, weak communications, and poor health services.

The UK Government, along with other developed countries, has a long standing promise to give 0.7 per cent of the country's wealth each year to overseas aid but currently gives around half that target. The US gives just 0.1%.

#### **See the following links:**

CAFOD fact sheet for KS3 & KS4

[http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/schoolsteachers/factsheets/aid\\_to\\_poorer\\_countries\\_ks3\\_ks4](http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/schoolsteachers/factsheets/aid_to_poorer_countries_ks3_ks4)

CAFOD fact sheet on Millennium Development Goals for KS3 & KS4  
[http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/schoolteachers/factsheets/millennium\\_development\\_goals\\_ks3\\_ks4](http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/schoolteachers/factsheets/millennium_development_goals_ks3_ks4)

### **Support and fund the recovery of the tourist industry**

Not all the countries affected are in urgent need of outside financial help. The Thai Prime Minister has said that Thailand, a major tourist destination, does not need foreign aid to help it recover and can afford to pay for its own relief and reconstruction with government spending and domestic donations.

A key question is: How can tourism be redeveloped in an ecologically and economically sustainable way? There is concern from communities in affected regions of Thailand for example that large multinational companies will be given the best beachfronts to build luxury hotels and resorts, leaving local people, who would naturally build something smaller and less intrusive and damaging, excluded.

In Sri Lanka on the other hand locals are openly defying a government ban on rebuilding hotels and tourist facilities within 100 meters (110 yards) of the sea. They could eventually find that their new buildings are bulldozed.

### **See the following links:**

BBC report <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4371493.stm>

BBC report <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4361541.stm>

Alertnet report <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/COL73485.htm>

### **Stop the destruction of natural barriers: coral reefs and mangroves**

Coral reefs are the equivalent of natural breakwaters, providing a physical barrier which causes waves to break offshore thereby allowing them to dissipate most of their destructive energy before reaching the shore. In the Maldives, it is estimated that the damage from the tsunami could have been much worse if the government's policy of protecting the network of coral reefs that buffer the islands from the open sea had not been so vigilant.

It has also been argued that mangroves (tree formations found along tropical and sub tropical coastlines) act as natural shock absorbers, soaking up destructive wave energy. Places that had mangroves along the coastline were far less badly hit than places where mangroves had been ripped out and replaced by beachfront hotels and prawn farms. Mangrove damage and destruction, as a result of prawn farming, has for years been shown to lead to exposed and vulnerable coastlines. Mangroves are important feeding and breeding grounds for a number of fish and shellfish and so are important for human livelihoods and food security. Mangroves also provide timber, charcoal and medicine and absorb large amounts of carbon dioxide, so helping to prevent climate change. In 1960, a tsunami wave hit the coast in an area where mangroves were intact. There was not a single human loss. These mangroves were subsequently cut down and replaced with prawn farms. In 1991, thousands of people were killed when a tsunami of the same magnitude hit the same region. Had the mangroves remained intact, the damage from the tsunami would have been greatly minimised.

### **See the following links**

BBC report [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/4269847.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4269847.stm)

Guardian newspaper report

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/life/feature/story/0,13026,1383844,00.html>

### **End all civil wars and conflicts in the region and bring about peace**

The tsunami struck in two regions that have suffered from civil war for many years. Rebel groups in the Aceh province of Indonesia and the north of Sri Lanka have long running disputes with their governments. The tsunami has forced the governments in both countries to try and find ways of addressing these conflicts and to reach peaceful solutions. In Sri Lanka a deal is being negotiated which would share \$2 billion in pledged aid with the Tamil Tiger rebels who control parts of the north and east of the island, including several regions devastated by the tsunami.

In Aceh, the disaster has opened up the region to the media and so exposed to the world a bloody civil war between government forces and pro-independence fighters. This exposure and the huge financial aid pledged to Aceh could put pressure on both sides to resolve the conflict or it could further tensions because of arguments over how aid money is spent.

### **See the following links**

BBC news <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4157393.stm>

Alertnet report <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/COL199570.htm>

### **Provide education and greater power to girls and women**

Up to four times as many women as men died in some regions according to Oxfam. The reasons vary, but among the common factors is that many men were out fishing or away from home, so had more opportunity to flee the tsunami. In general, men could run faster to escape the water and those caught in the sea used their greater strength to survive by clinging on to debris.

In Sri Lanka, researchers found few women could swim or climb trees. Many delayed their potential escape trying to rescue their children.

Oxfam warns of significant social disruption and exploitation of the women who remain in the affected communities. For example, earlier marriages would invariably mean loss of education, pregnancy at a younger age and more pregnancies. Also those who have survived have to plug gaps left by women who have died, while at the same time are prevented from taking on roles previously played by men. Men are also finding the gender imbalance difficult. Many have lost wives and are struggling to rebuild a domestic life, while unmarried men are worried about how they will find a wife.

### **See the following links**

Guardian newspaper report

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tsunami/story/0,15671,1445967,00.html>

Oxfam

[http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/issues/conflict\\_disasters/bn\\_tsunami\\_women.htm](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/conflict_disasters/bn_tsunami_women.htm)

### **End quote**

"One month ago the world responded to the Tsunami with an unprecedented aid effort. [However,] the issues of conflict, debt and trade have not yet been adequately addressed by the international community. Unless they are, the victims of the Tsunami will never escape poverty." Barbara Stocking, Director of Oxfam Great Britain