

# TourismConcern

## RIDING THE WAVE CONCERNS REGARDING THE DIVERSION OF TSUNAMI REHABILITATION FUNDS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENTS IN KERALA, INDIA

### Executive Summary

*The concerns and recommendations set out in this briefing document reflect those of local campaigning groups in Kerala, including Tourism Concern's partner organisations, the Malabar Coastal Institute for Training, Research and Action (MCiTRA) and Kabani. The Government of Kerala is using substantial funds allocated under the Central Government of India's Tsunami Rehabilitation Programme to fund 20 tourism projects, including the development of tourism infrastructure and beach beautification schemes. Tourism Concern understands that, contrary to Central Government guidelines, these projects are not in tsunami-affected areas. Furthermore, the projects will bring little benefit to local people, particularly marginalised fishing communities, and in many cases will place their land, livelihoods and traditional way of life under renewed threat.*

### Background

The state of Kerala lies on India's south western coast. Its temperate climate and picturesque beaches makes it an increasingly popular tourist destination. Kerala received over half million foreign visitors in 2007<sup>1</sup>, an increase of over 20% on 2006. Kerala is also home to India's largest fishing fleet, comprised largely of small-scale fish workers operating small traditional boats.

The impact of the 2004 Asian tsunami in Kerala was relatively limited, both in terms of loss of life and infrastructural damage. Still, over 170 people died and more than 2,450 were injured. Some 240,000 coastal residents were evacuated to temporary relief camps and approximately 13,000 houses were damaged or destroyed<sup>2</sup>. Kerala's fishing communities suffered the greatest impact, losing homes, boats and equipment vital to their livelihoods.

### Misuse of tsunami funds

In the wake of the tsunami, India's Central Government set up a Tsunami Rehabilitation Programme (TRP) to manage the distribution of funds to affected state-level governments. Funds have been disbursed according to the requirements submitted by the respective governments.

The Government of Kerala has received 14,417.5 million Indian Rupees (almost £170 million) of TRP funds for rebuilding infrastructure and livelihoods in the state<sup>3</sup>. Of this, 850 million Rupees (almost £10 million) have been allocated to the state tourism board, Kerala Tourism, to fund 20 tourism projects<sup>4</sup>. The projects were actually devised before the 2004 tsunami, but were not implemented because of a lack of funding.

However, a study commissioned by India's Central Government of the social and economic impacts of the tsunami, conducted jointly by the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the United Nations, does not identify Kerala's tourism infrastructure as damaged or in need of repair<sup>5</sup>. These findings are reinforced by the media releases issued by Kerala Tourism just days after the tsunami, which declared Kerala as a safe option for tourists and that its beaches were 'open for business'<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, central government guidelines clearly state that TRP funds should only be used for the reconstruction of tourism infrastructure damaged by the tsunami. In direct contravention of these guidelines, the 20 projects cover areas that were not affected by the tsunami.

## **Benefits for all?**

Following the tsunami, Kerala Tourism resubmitted the 20 projects – classified as ‘beach beautification’ schemes - for funding with TRP funds. This prompted protests by local communities and fishworkers, angry that money meant for their rehabilitation will in fact be used to fund projects which will place their land and livelihoods under renewed threat.

Kerala Tourism has since re-labelled and re-launched the schemes as a ‘coastal protection’ project (*Ente theeram* – ‘My Shore’) in an apparent attempt to pacify protesters and appear more in line with funding criteria<sup>7</sup>. However, the coastal protection measures included under the projects are minor compared to the planned beach beautification measures. A consideration of some of the items to be funded, which includes lampposts, flowerpots, plumbing, electricity, kiosks, walkways, stone pergolas and an amphitheatre, casts further doubt on this claim.

Many of the projects will directly conflict with the needs and interests of tsunami-affected communities. For example, it is anticipated that the artificial reef planned for Kerala’s leading beach resort, Kovalam - which the tourism department hopes will transform it into a premier international surfing destination - will put 500 fishermen out of work and see fish breeding grounds used for sport fishing for tourists. Local opposition groups also fear that waves deflected off the reef will cause increased erosion and infrastructural damage to neighbouring fishing communities<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, contrary to Kerala Tourism’s stated objectives of these projects, an opportunity to develop alternative livelihood opportunities through tourism for tsunami affected communities is apparently being missed. Currently, such opportunities are limited to menial, low paid jobs, despite Kerala’s renowned high literacy rates and standards of education. With fish stocks dwindling and increasing pressure on coastal communities to sell their land to tourism developers, the need for alternative livelihood opportunities is greater than ever.

Kerala Tourism contends that the tourism projects will provide large-scale employment to local people through an increase in beach tourism. However, tsunami survivors, particularly those from marginalised fishing communities, say they have not been consulted on the role that tourism should play in the rebuilding of their livelihoods.

## **Consultation and accountability**

Kerala Tourism has been marketing itself as a ‘Responsible Tourism’ destination and has selected a number of resorts to showcase its credentials. One of these specially selected resorts is Kovalam. A Destination-Level Responsible Tourism Committee (DLRTC) has been set up with the remit of helping to improve tourism practices in the area. According to Kerala Tourism’s own responsible tourism guidelines, the committee is comprised of key local stakeholders and is to be involved in the discussion, planning and monitoring of all tourism related activities in their locality<sup>9</sup>.

Despite these commendable objectives, as well as the potential far-reaching consequences of the artificial reef project, Kovalam’s DLRTC has reportedly not been consulted on this or any of the other beach beautification schemes planned for the area.

## **Environmental concerns**

Serious concerns exist over the potential environmental impacts of the tourism developments and questions remain over the level of coastal protection they will provide. Kerala Tourism claims it will use ‘eco-friendly’ methods in the developments. However, the projects will reportedly involve removing trees and sand dunes – both effective natural coastal defences - and erecting hard concrete structures in their place. Such structures have been shown to be ineffective at preventing sea erosion.

For example, in 2007 the Centre for Earth Science Studies identified hard concrete structures built for tourism at Shangumugham Beach, close to the state capital, Thiruvananthapuram, as contributing factors in the heightened sea erosion that has occurred in the area. The structures include roads, walkways and walled parapets. Nearby villages are now under threat from sea erosion, particularly

during the monsoon. In 2007, this caused houses to be destroyed, forcing families to seek shelter in relief camps set up by the local administration<sup>10</sup>.

In some cases, Tourism Concern understands that Kerala Tourism's plans clash with coastal and environmental protection measures being implemented by other state departments, such the forestry department, which has recognised expertise in managing coastal defences. In the resort town of Bekal, local sources have reported that a forestry department eco-fencing and forestry initiative has come into conflict with the tourism department's plans for hard engineering structures<sup>11</sup>.

Despite these concerns, it is thought that the 20 tourism projects submitted for funding under the TRP have been classified by Kerala Tourism as 'Category C' projects<sup>12</sup>. This category is meant for projects that are not anticipated to have a major impact on the environment, so only require the completion of a basic environmental screening form and are not subject to a full environmental assessment.

Meanwhile, other parts of Kerala remain in urgent need of funds to support post-tsunami coastal protection and infrastructural repair. For example, the peninsulas of Allapad and Arattupuzha bore the greatest loss of life in Kerala because there was no bridge linking them to the mainland. Sea erosion is an ongoing problem. Following the tsunami, and after considerable pressure from local residents, the government began building a bridge, but work has since stopped and the planned coastal protection measures are yet to be implemented. Local people feel vulnerable and live in fear of another tsunami. However, those who have protested against the slow pace of work have reportedly been subject to harassment by police and the judiciary<sup>13</sup>.

The existing regulations under the Coastal Regulation Zone notification<sup>14</sup>, which includes provisions for 'no development zones' in order to limit coastal developments and effectively protect land occupied by small-scale fishing communities, have also apparently been ignored in the sanctioning of these projects. All the projects fall within the 'no development zones'.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Tourism Concern, MCiTRA and Kabani, respectfully urge the Central Government of India and the State Government of Kerala to:**

### ***1. Ensure appropriate and responsible use of tsunami rehabilitation funds:***

- Adhere to TRP guidelines by only using tsunami rehabilitation funds for the reconstruction of tsunami-damaged areas and to rebuild and protect the lives and livelihoods of tsunami-affected communities.
- Suspend any tourism projects that do not meet these basic criteria.
- Ensure transparency and accountability in the reconstruction process by implementing a system that will allow members of the public to track how tsunami reconstruction money is being used.

### ***2. Ensure equitable livelihood opportunities and benefits from tourism to all:***

- Consult with local people to ascertain what their development needs are, including in relation to current and future tourism developments.
- Ensuring that these consultations are participatory and involve marginalised sectors of society, including fishing communities and women.
- Ensure that the planning and consultation process is transparent and addresses local concerns, as identified by coastal communities, in a meaningful way.

- Explore opportunities for tsunami-affected communities to benefit from tourism beyond employment in menial, low paid roles.

### **3. Take heed of the legitimate concerns relating to the potential social, economic and environmental impacts of the proposed projects:**

- Initiate a detailed review of each project by an independent, competent authority and, where necessary, resubmit the projects in tsunami affected areas under either Category A or B, where they will be subjected to either a limited or full environmental assessment and forwarded to the respective Coastal Management Zone authority and Ministry of Environment and Forests for clearance, with participation of all concerned stakeholders in the assessment.
- Integrate tourism planning with other relevant state departments, particularly in relation to coastal and environmental protection measures.

### **References**

- <sup>1</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)
- <sup>2</sup> Government of Kerala Tsunami Report, December 2005 (<http://www.kerala.gov.in/whatsnew/tsunami.pdf>)
- <sup>3</sup> *Review of the status of implementation and Quarterly Performance of TRP (sector-wise), ANNEXURE- I*, Government of India; (<http://www.pon.nic.in/tsunami/QPR-310308/QPR-ason-310308.htm>)
- <sup>4</sup> Kerala Tourism website: <http://www.keralatourism.org/news/176/ente-theeram--project-for-beach-conservation-launched.php?issueid=176>
- <sup>5</sup> *India Post Tsunami Recovery Programme: Preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment*; Asian Development Bank, United Nations and World Bank (<http://www.un.org.in/CRZ/india-assessment-full-report.pdf>)
- <sup>6</sup> *Kerala Tourism sees opening in wake of tsunami tragedy*, Financial Express (India), 03/01/2005 (<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/Kerala-tourism-sees-opening-in-wake-of-tsunami-tragedy/121364/>) / *Tsunami spares kerala tourism*, Times of India, 28/12/2004 (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/973610.cms>)
- <sup>7</sup> *Focus on wooing local tourists*, The Hindu, 18/03/2008 (<http://www.hindu.com/2008/03/18/stories/2008031860990300.htm>)
- <sup>8</sup> *Diversion of tsunami funds alleged*, The Hindu, 21/03/2008 (<http://www.hindu.com/2008/03/21/stories/2008032157260400.htm>)
- <sup>9</sup> Kerala Tourism; *Responsible Tourism Structure Development Guidelines Manual* (<http://www.keralatourism.org/announcement/RT/RT%20Manual.pdf>)
- <sup>10</sup> *Sand mining exposes beach to wave fury*, The Hindu, 16/07/2007 (<http://www.hindu.com/2007/07/16/stories/2007071658190300.htm>)
- <sup>11</sup> Pers. Comm., 06/2008, Tourism Concern Tsunami and Displacement Project
- <sup>12</sup> When the projects were first devised by Kerala Tourism (pre-tsunami), they were all submitted as Category C projects. Furthermore, Tourism Concern has seen individual project reports for the majority of the 20 projects, none of which mention of an environmental impact assessment.
- <sup>13</sup> Tourism Concern Post-Tsunami Displacement Project, unpublished report, September 2008
- <sup>14</sup> India's CRZ notification is designed to safeguard the ecology of the coastline by preventing unregulated developments. In theory, it also protects small-scale fishing communities from land grabs. The CRZ notification is soon to be replaced by the new Coastal Management Zone (CMZ) notification, which will remove many of the current restrictions on coastal developments. Kerala Tourism has successfully lobbied to have tourism categorised as an 'area of particular concern', which means the industry is granted special concessions by the Central Government, enabling them to effectively legalise the 20 projects to be funded with TRP funds when the CMZ notification comes into force.