

SYNGENTA

Hands-on house-builders keep helping '04 flood victims

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Syngenta runs programs with rural communities worldwide. Employees across the company also get involved in social projects outside their daily work. Today's example in our series comes from Sri Lanka, struck by the tsunami flood wave in late 2004.



The name "Tsunami Handaid" says it all. The organization based near Basel continues to help villagers in Sri Lanka rebuild their houses and communities. Founded by teachers at the city's International School, Tsunami Handaid will be running its seventh phase of construction this April. In hard "hands-on" work together with local inhabitants, a group of volunteers aims to build a further 10 to 15 houses.



Syngenta employee Siriol Steiner* knows what awaits this Easter's band of helpers. Siriol, who works in Group Financial Controlling, has helped build Sri Lankan houses in the past. "It is tough manual work", she says, "which is quite a change from an office job! But teaming up to help villagers, and seeing the results of our efforts, is all immensely rewarding."

Smaller teams complement major relief efforts

When the tsunami devastated coastal areas of Sri Lanka and other Indian ocean countries in 2004, Syngenta was quick to respond. David Scott from Product Stewardship coordinated a major effort which also involved numerous local employees. After the initial emergency aid, Syngenta concentrated its support in the area of its special expertise, agriculture. Major international relief organizations played a further key role in helping survivors rebuild their livelihoods. "All these efforts nonetheless left special niches for smaller charities to make a difference as well," comments Siriol.



That was the idea behind Tsunami Handaid. Its work has meanwhile impressed, among others, the development organization Basaid**. This is financed and run by employees from Basel's life science industry. Basaid has made a generous grant towards the Sri Lankan work. Committee member

Sasank Mohanty from Syngenta has kept a particular interest in the activities of Siroli and her co-helpers. Sasank works in EAME Compliance, but has been at his own expense to see the progress in Tsunami Handaid building projects.

Volunteers meet a real need

“The point about ‘at one’s own expense’ is very important”, Siroli Steiner emphasizes. “Tsunami Handaid is a charity. Whether we build 10 or 15 houses this April depends entirely on the funds we receive. Volunteers dip deep into their own pockets for flight, accommodation and other costs. And not everybody who participates is as lucky as the employees from Lonza. The Swiss chemical company pays for their involvement in the project”, Siroli comments.



The tsunami struck over four years ago. Since then, scores of other humanitarian disasters and challenges have hit the headlines. So why is an organization like Tsunami Handaid still important? “All this time later, thousands of Sri Lankans still live in appalling conditions in refugee camps”, Siroli explains. “At the same time, many skilled workers are jobless. Tsunami Handaid tackles both problems at once. We pay our local craftsmen colleagues a wage, and help them regain pride, as well as providing proper housing at last for more and more families.”

Pride, pay and proper housing

Tsunami Handaid and the Sri Lankans build solid brick houses. They all have two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and toilet. “And of course, we don’t just leave it at that”, Siroli adds. “Our support also enables access to proper water and sewage services, and to electricity.” Each house currently costs well over 8000 Swiss francs to build (approx. \$7500), so donations are always greatly appreciated.



Siroli is unable to join the volunteers flying to Sri Lanka’s capital Colombo this April. “That’s sad,” she says. “But I look forward to future opportunities. And there is always plenty of work to do here in Switzerland, supporting the charity in other ways.”

Employees interested in volunteering, now or at a later stage, are extremely welcome. For further info, contact Sujeewa Fernando via the Tsunami Handaid website: www.tsunami-handaid.ch.