

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This article is the first in an occasional feature article series on international development and international higher education. Each article will focus on one kind of international development work.



NATURAL DISASTERS KILLED

more than 200,000 people in 2008, making it one of the most devastating years on record, according to a December 2008 report by the Agency France Presse Deutschland (AFP) news agency. Although the number of natural disasters between 2007 and 2008 decreased, the catastrophes that did occur were more destructive both in terms of the number of victims and financial cost, according to Germany-based Munich Re Group, a global insurance and reinsurance provider.

Disaster relief and disaster reconstruction have historically been seen as international development issues, with organizations such as The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), CARE, UNICEF, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), providing policy advice, technical assistance, loans, and disaster recovery aid.

More recently, however, higher educational institutions, faculty, and students have been getting involved in international reconstruction efforts, from short-term programs designed to provide immediate relief and reconstruction to more academic efforts with the goal of nurturing long-term sustainable development and disaster management expertise.

After natural disasters, universities are reaching out to help victims in many parts of the world to rise from the ashes of calamity. Reconstruction efforts have been formed in many different ways that connect international education: education abroad programs, international partnerships, new degree programs in international disaster management, and scholarships for international students from affected areas to study in the United States

By Darlene Bremer

Fledging

Tide of Hope—Response to the Sri Lankan Tsunami

One of the places hardest hit by the 2004 Southeast Asia tsunami was the Galle province of Sri Lanka. Betty Webb, director of international programs at Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina, and her husband had left that area the day before the wave hit. “The tsunami destroyed local communications, causing friends, family, and colleagues great concern about our welfare and causing my husband and I to develop a personal connection to the event,” Webb recalls. Upon returning home, Webb was determined to do something to help the Sri Lankan tsunami victims.



Meredith College did not have an international reconstruction program in place but was more than willing to support Webb’s efforts. “The college president appointed a committee, called Tide of Hope, to shape and direct the college’s response to the tsunami,” Webb says. Fundraising efforts began in January 2005 and almost \$126,000.00 was raised for the three-year project through campus-wide, student organization-sponsored events and from the general community. The committee also worked with the North Carolina Sri Lankan Friendship Association to learn about the country and to help guide its efforts in navigating the inevitable bureaucracies.



the Phoenix

BACKGROUND PHOTO: TOM HAASE. INSET PHOTO: MEREDITH COLLEGE



Launching a Reconstruction Project

The first trip to Sri Lanka was made in March 2005 by Webb, her husband, a professor of social work, the vice president of academic affairs, two students, and one recent alum, with the goal of determining what kind of humanitarian support would be appropriate and that could be performed by faculty and student volunteers. "Another goal was to give students a learning opportunity on how to provide effective disaster relief," Webb adds. It was decided to adopt the Pelena School for two or more academic years, the Samanala Orphanage (which was destroyed by the tsunami), and a small fishing village and to provide cash and supplies. In addition, two education-abroad programs were established. The first one, which took place over the first anniversary of the tsunami, lasted 14 days, with visits made by 14 Meredith students, two alumni, four faculty and staff, and three local Sri Lankans to the places being supported by the college. The second was in the summer of 2006 and included one ESL and one social work professor from Meredith and nine students, with the goal of spending 10 days at the Pelena School working with local English teachers and their students to teach English and to learn about Sri Lankan culture. Although no partnerships were formed with a Sri Lankan university, the Tide of Hope Committee worked with the Catholic Sisters of Charity in Galle, who were a reliable source of local knowledge and need. "In deciding who we should partner with, we spoke to both the local Buddhist and Muslim communities, and they indicated a high level of trust in the organization," Webb explains.

Nicole Molesti was one of the Meredith College students that became involved in the school's efforts. "When I heard that Dr. Webb and the college were working on the Tide of Hope, I just knew I had to be involved," she recalls. Molesti, who received her bachelor of arts degree in international relations and Spanish and who is now working for SBM Offshore in the Monaco office as a market analyst, says she was raised with a moral obligation to volunteer. "The aftermath of the tsunami was an opportunity to put those values [moral obligation] into action, and the program really allowed participants to make a difference," she says. Interestingly, although Molesti has traveled extensively and is from a multicultural family, while in Sri Lanka she found herself automatically applying her Western values to this particular situation. "I learned I need to be careful of that, especially since the experience further shaped my desire to continue to perform humanitarian work on the international level whenever possible."

Another institution was also motivated to become involved in the international reconstruction efforts of Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami—the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL). Jody Miller, associate professor of criminology and criminal justice has extensive ties to the country, both professionally and personally. She'd studied in Sri Lanka as a Fulbright Scholar and her husband is from there. The end of 2004 was the first time in several years that the couple had not been visiting; unfortunately, several good friends were caught in the tsunami, and one died. "It was the personal sense of devastation, and feeling of helplessness, that pushed me to want to do something," she recalls.

The university had no program in place to deal with reconstruction needs, so Miller and the administration worked together to create what became known as the Tsunami Reconstruction Project. Joel Glassman, director of UMSL's Center for International Studies (CIS), and the staff handled the bureaucratic issues involved in obtaining permissions, setting up accounts, etc., while Miller identified an agency in Sri Lanka that the school could partner with and determined the scope of the project. "The project was designed to be an educational opportunity, as well as an opportunity to have a hands-on role in making a difference in addressing global problems," she says.

Originally, UMSL partnered with the Sri Lanka Library Association and targeted two schools with initial donations. Unfortunately, political instability made it impossible to support one of schools. "However, at Andaragasyaya Vidyalaya, on the southeast coast, we were able to develop a long-term project," Miller says. Through fundraising efforts, the project installed a library, assisted

with training, supported numerous art and music workshops, and provided school supplies to each student. "As a result of our efforts, the association secured a large grant from an international agency to continue the project, and we then turned our attention to identifying a new education project," Miller states. To date, funds have been raised for the Macaldeniya Tamil Vidyalayam School, located in the tea plantation community, to install a school playground, provide food, hire an additional teacher, establish a computer room with five computers, provide uniforms, and begin a dental hygiene program. UMSL students have been involved in the project in a vari-



Meredith College student Kelly Jones in March 2005 talking with children displaced by the tsunami in Sri Lanka.



Meredith College student Laura Williams in March 2005 serving a meal in a temporary camp near Matara in Sri Lanka.

ety of ways, including raising funds and generating ideas on how best to spend the money. “Unfortunately, the ongoing civil war has prohibited us from bringing UMSL students to work directly at the school sites,” explains Miller. What UMSL students have been doing is sponsoring campaigns to raise money, including an “Adopt a Student” program, a self-portrait student art workshop at the Macaldeniya School, pen-pal programs, and guest speakers, such as the Sri Lankan Ambassador to the United States.

Amy Razeghi is one of the UMSL students who was drawn to the project. “Dr. Miller was an instructor of mine, and I was inspired to make a difference in a country with a rich culture that was undergoing political upheaval, by the photos of the Sri Lankan children, and by her efforts to build a school and a nurturing environment,” she says. As part of the team that organized one of the fundraisers in St. Louis, Razeghi was gratified to learn that there are some “wonderfully generous folks out there.” Razeghi is a graduate student at UMSL pursuing a degree in women’s and gender studies as well as a master’s degree in library science and, after becoming involved with the project, she is moved to focus on cultural literacy. “I hope to visit the Macaldeniya School after I graduate and learn more about the Sri Lankan culture. This experience has made me question what real wealth is across cultures and has motivated me to learn more about the country’s political struggles,” she says.

According to Miller, the project is now in the process of opening a library and pre-school at the Macaldeniya location. “We are also sponsoring the training of a young woman from the tea plantation to run the preschool, and we will have our third Sri Lankan children’s art exhibition on the UMSL campus in December 2009,” Miller adds.

CapAsia—Planning- and Building-to-Learn

In 1999, Nihal Perera, associate professor of urban planning at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, established an immersive learning program called CapAsia that was designed to expand college field trips, challenge students’ intellects, and transform them into better global citizens. “We wanted the program to be immersive and developed an itinerary, curriculum, collaborative projects, readings, lodging arrangements, home-stays, and assignments that promoted academic depth with a focus on south Asia and how they build the way they do,” explains Perera. The emphasis of CapAsia is on learning-by-doing collaborative projects. While they learn about people and cultures in south Asia during the 11-week field components (including both a seven-week Planning-to-Learn and a three-week Building-to-Learn section), participants develop a critical understanding of their own cultures and the ability to locate themselves within an increasingly globalized world. CapAsia is an interdisciplinary program that cuts across social sciences, humanities, and design professions and enables students from different schools to engage in the experience. About 15 Asian faculty, researchers, professionals, and experts work with CapAsia participants during each field study.

Plans for CapAsia IV in spring of 2005 were originally for participants to study the design and construction methods in Kerala, India, developed by the Center of Science and Technology for Rural Development. Just weeks before the participants were to leave, the tsunami hit. Because Perera’s research has addressed international development and the question of urban construction for decades, and he grew up in Sri Lanka, he and Wes Janz, CapAsia’s co-director, instead examined conducting the Building-to-Learn component in



a way that would be useful for the tsunami survivors and that would provide real experience for students. “Building on our previous construction of two pavilions in Sri Lanka during CapAsia II in 2003 and the connections we developed, we opted to get involved in tsunami reconstruction,” Perera recalls.

Because mainstream education is about achieving objectives, Perera and Janz wanted to help students question design and planning approaches so that they could ask themselves what they’d learned about their own education, professions, and about themselves as individuals. “This way, upon arrival in Kalametiya they were prepared to help people clean up the lagoon, dig the ground, and build their houses, and be a catalyst for the local people’s own recovery process,” Perera states. One participant, graduate student Mathew Hart, said in an article printed in the Ball State Daily News in 2005, that reading about the country before going enabled participants to better understand the Sri Lankan culture and how they build. “Instead of figuring out things from our standpoint, we needed to learn how they viewed things.”

During CapAsia V in 2008, participants studied the recovery process in five Sri Lankan villages hit by the tsunami, including Kalametiya. “The purpose was to identify the people’s recovery processes as distinct from what the government, the NGOs, and the architects have done,” says Perera. Students carried out a series of projects, from finding sources of funding to building a bridge. In addition, a workshop was held that focused on progress being made and on empowering the people to become less dependent on outside agencies.

“We also built a bus stop in Hambantota and showed people how to collect water into cisterns,” Perera recalls.

The Planning-to-Learn and Building-to-Learn approach of CapAsia is designed to allow students and faculty to participate in others’ processes, and to rethink one’s place and fundamentally question how one chooses to engage the world. “As we learn from each other, we have been able to be a catalyst to their development processes and, at times, enhance them,” Perera adds.

Scholarships for Chinese Students to Study in New York After Earthquake

In mid-May 2008, a 7.8 earthquake struck the area around Chengdu in the western part of China’s Sichuan province. As reported at the time, destruction was significant, with a massive loss of life and a complete disruption of normalcy. Also threatened was the ability of many college-age students in the area to pursue their studies in either a normal or timely manner. In the spirit of contemporary efforts to expand U.S.-China economic development and political cooperation, the State University of New York (SUNY), in partnership with the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC), offered 150 Chengdu students the opportunity to continue their studies in New York state. The SUNY-China 150, as the program was named, was created to help fulfill a humanitarian need and to provide an opportunity for Chinese students directly affected by the earthquake to gain international experience and develop leadership skills. “One goal,” observes Seth Gilbertson, assistant counsel in the Office of University Counsel

Scholarship students from the SUNY China 150 program, which provided funds for Chinese students to study in the United States after their higher education was interrupted by a devastating earthquake.



COURTESY OF SETH GILBERTSON



Tom Haase and Mohammad Bagus Adityawan at the Institut Teknologi Bandung (Bandung Institute of Technology), Bandung, Indonesia.

Communities exposed to the risk of flooding in Jakarta, Indonesia.



ate the chance to study in the U.S., where you are exposed to other people and can broaden your cultural experience and learn how to better communicate” she observes. Tang came to the United States with plans to continue majoring in accounting. What she has learned about the United States and about herself, however, is helping her to change course. “Strangers are friendlier in the U.S. than at home, there is much more interaction between students and professors here than in China, and U.S. students work harder than I thought they did,” she admits. Tang adds that her time in the United States has given her more confidence, that the collaborative atmosphere on campus has made her less nervous, and that SUNY’s networking and leadership programs have been very helpful in her developing a potential career path. “Although I’d always planned on getting my master’s degree in the U.S., I’ve been considering different fields of study so that I can help rebuild tourism in Deyang,” she explains.

at SUNY, “has been to develop a group of young Chinese leaders who could return to the region to help in the reconstruction process.”

SUNY’s response to this particular disaster was based on a need, as well as the educational system’s long history and relationship with China. “We consider that relationship an important component of SUNY’s offerings, and we wanted to show appreciation of that relationship in a humanitarian way,” Gilbertson says.

By July 2008, the 150 sophomores and juniors were chosen out of more than 2,000 applicants. Students chosen had to demonstrate academic achievement and English proficiency. Because the program was capable of making an enormous impact on both the students and the 22 SUNY campuses they would attend, it was important that they be appropriately diverse. As a result, 98 were female, and more than 12 percent represented ethnic minorities. “All 150 students, who should graduate from their home universities within a year or two, have pledged to perform a year of community service in Sichuan province upon their return in May 2009,” says Gilbertson.

The result was overwhelmingly positive. Despite culture shock, language difficulties, and homesickness, many of these gifted Chinese students finished the fall 2008 semester at or near the top of their classes. “The 150 students have been appreciative of the opportunity and have taken full advantage of it. They have demonstrated great resilience and have been impressive personally,” Gilbertson observes. The U.S. students have befriended the visitors enthusiastically, including immersion in the culture of the typical “American holiday season.”

Xuewen Tang, who is from Deyang, found her home on SUNY’s Plattsburgh campus. “As an international student you really appreci-

International Partnerships and Programs in International Disaster Management

In the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) at the University of Pittsburgh, Professor Louise Comfort is the director of the new Center for Disaster Management. Established in January 2009, the center is working with Kobe University, Japan, Karlsruhe University in Germany, and several international funding organizations to develop an International Program in Disaster Management (IPDM) that would enroll students not only from GSPIA, but also from developing countries. Comfort began studying government reconstruction response in California, where major cities are all located on top of earthquake faults and where mitigating losses is a major public policy issue. As an individual researcher, Comfort has responded to 17 major disasters in 13 countries.

Comfort began focusing on developing the IPDM partly because of the increasing number of students interested in the field. “Twenty percent of my students are international and widely diverse in where they come from,” she says. Although the University of Pittsburgh does not have a specific program in place to address international reconstruction issues, it has supported Comfort’s research with supplementary travel funds and graduate assistants who eventually became involved in reconstruction efforts as part of their study programs. Six GSPIA doctoral students have worked directly in disaster environments for their dissertations, and three of them were international.

“One student completed her Ph.D. on Thailand’s response to the 2004 tsunami and returned to Bangkok to become the director



of the first program in disaster management at Phammasat University. Another student, who completed his dissertation on hurricanes in the Caribbean, is now a consultant at the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA). A third student performed a summer of field service in India in response to the 2004 tsunami, and a fourth is just beginning her dissertation research comparing responses to the 1999 Taiwan and the 2008 Wenchuan earthquakes," Comfort says.

Tom Haase, a doctoral student in the GSPIA, spent a month in Indonesia in 2008 working on his dissertation on the 2004 tsunami response. "The scope and scale of the tsunami was so large, it challenged traditional understandings as to how to respond," he recalls. After the tsunami, Indonesia was flooded with both government and non-governmental agencies and organizations, all of which had to learn to operate in an unfamiliar environment that lacked a formal response structure. "Indonesia was completely unprepared for a disaster of the tsunami's scope," Haase observes. During his time in Indonesia, Haase performed fieldwork that focused on understanding the difficulties and challenges of response and reconstruction after a disaster and in identifying how to improve response capabilities. "I became interested in international disaster management when I realized there is not enough capacity to handle large, multi-jurisdictional

natural disasters," he explains. Haase plans to use his degrees to conduct research on reconstruction and to teach. Although his fieldwork in Indonesia did not change his outlook or plans, it did convince him that his life and career are headed in the right direction and that reconstruction is a field that he can contribute to in the long run. "I met hundreds of people in Indonesia from different socioeconomic, educational, and cultural backgrounds and developed a network of relationships that will help me develop future friendships and collaborative research projects," he adds.

As of April 2009, the IPDM included a joint-degree program between Kobe University and the University of Pittsburgh in a number of subjects, including international development and urban planning and disaster management. "The goal is to develop professionals in the field who are able to function across borders and work with NGOs and governmental agencies in disaster reconstruction preparedness and response," says Comfort. In the future, Comfort hopes to continue talks with Chinese researchers and develop an international exchange for students and faculties with several Chinese universities.

David Dowall, professor of city and regional planning at the University of California (UC), Berkeley began working on international urban development issues as a consultant and researcher by examining how large urban areas cope with rapid growth. "I've always been struck by the lack of local urban planning expertise and the corresponding educational opportunities in developing areas overseas," he says. So, after the 2004 tsunami, Dowall worked with the university and with the Thai Public Policy Foundation to develop a joint studio in which Berkeley and graduate students from Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok would work collaboratively to study how southern Thailand could best respond to the tsunami and to future natural disasters. "UC Berkeley has always been interested in post-disaster, post-conflict response issues, but by 2004 did not yet have specific courses or activities that focused on this subject matter," recalls Dowall. The first Thai Tsunami Studio's goal was aimed at designing a plan for developing sustainable tourism in Thailand's Krabi province and to reveal strategic weaknesses in the region's economy and environment. "Krabi province was chosen because the governor was the most responsive to having a program in place and to begin the process of developing a sustainable tourism strategy," Dowall says.

Graduate students with an interest in urban, environmental, or post-disaster planning were invited to apply for the Thai Tsunami Studio, which consisted of two weeks in the field with Thai and UC Berkeley students collecting data, performing environmental studies, and interviewing residents to get everyone's viewpoint, and then two weeks at Chulalongkorn University where the data were processed and appropriate strategies to improve sustainable tourism development were made. Then U.S. students returned to California for the fall semester and continued to collaborate via video conferences with Thai team members to refine the analyses and to produce a report written in both English and Thai that was delivered to UC Berkeley, Chulalongkorn University, the Thai Public Policy Founda-

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tion, the province governor, and any other stakeholders. "The field work allowed U.S. and Thai students to work on something practical while enhancing their cultural sensitivities," Dowall observes.

Two more studios were subsequently completed in which post-tsunami environmental surveys were made that uncovered specific threats degrading the environment and that have helped an island community in the Krabi province set up, over time, an indigenous task force to start solving these problems. "The task force has been given the field data and a road map that demonstrates effective solutions that the community could undertake," explains Dowall. The fourth studio was scheduled to commence in May 2009 and would begin to move away from the effects of and reconstruction from the tsunami, although it will still focus on environmental issues.

Andrew Marx, who graduated from UC Berkeley's Department of City and Regional Planning in 2006 with a master's degree in city planning, was a member of the first Thai Tsunami Studio. "It was an excellent opportunity to work with Dr. Dowall, who has extensive development experience, and to perform on-the-ground, post-tsunami work," he says. Marx's relevant expertise was in geospatial analysis and modeling, as well as previous overseas experience. The fieldwork involved examining conditions, meeting with local stakeholders, and helping to plan reconstruction efforts, according to

Marx. "Even though the trip occurred about a year or so after the actual tsunami, we had to be sensitive to the personal painful stories while still helping the community to move forward in creating sustainable development strategies," he recalls. Marx had traveled to Thailand before and he has learned that, to be productive, Americans need to modify their behavior to meet Thais halfway. "The Thai culture is not very confrontational," he says.

Rethinking Higher Education's Role in International Development

Whether it is a tsunami, earthquake, or other natural disaster, higher education institutions are willing to lend a helping hand in other parts of the world. Faculty and students who immerse themselves in reconstruction after such disasters bring home knowledge that could prove useful after future cataclysmic events. Through international development reconstruction efforts, this real-world education and international collaboration to help others reveals that higher education is thinking beyond the ivory tower and instilling the values of global citizenship.

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