Disaster recovery from above and below:
Reflections from India

Dr Chandni Singh
Indian Institute for Human Settlements
csingh@iihs.ac.in

iihs ®
INDIAN INSTITUTE FOR
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Relocation colony in South India
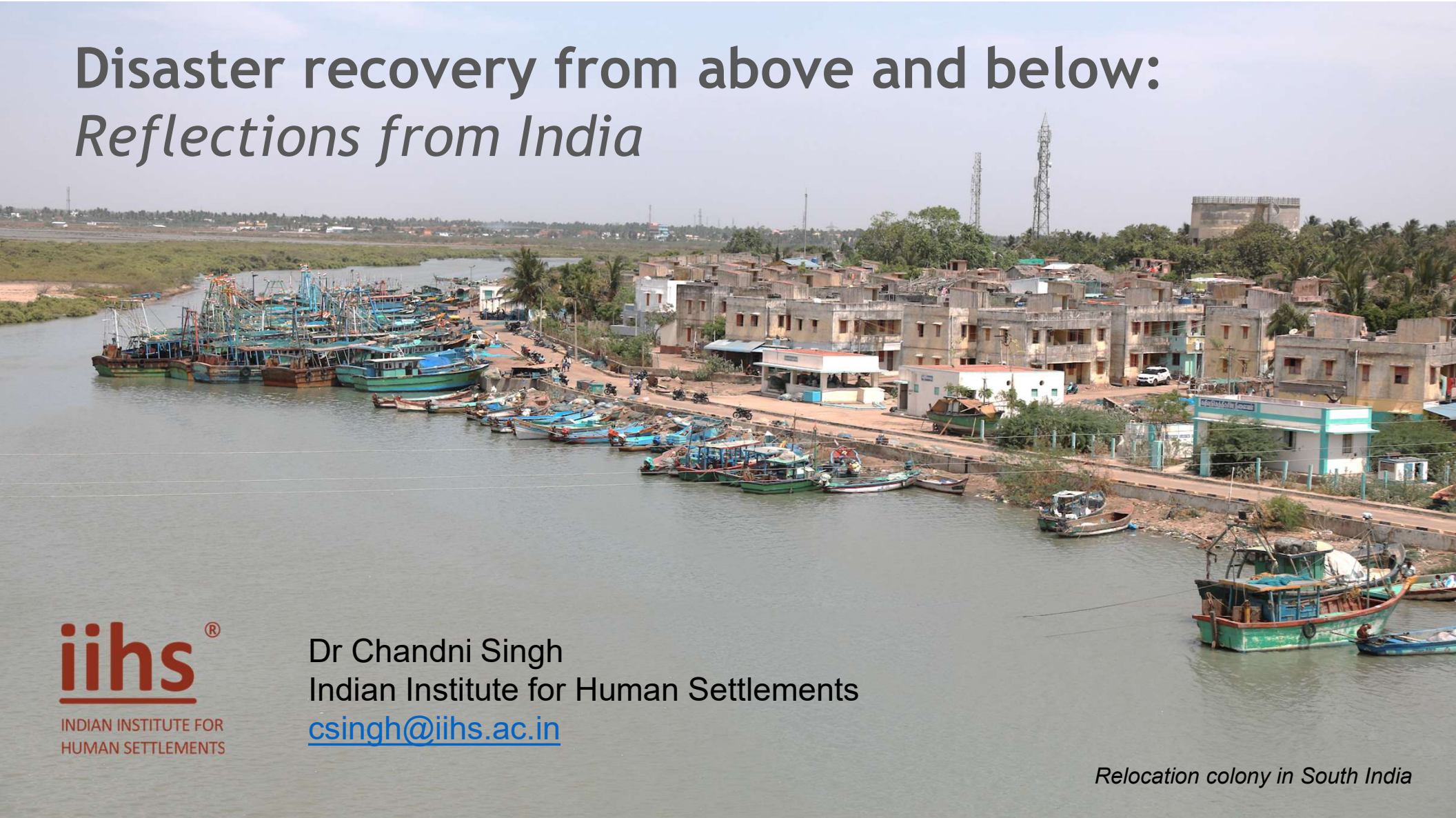
Disaster policy evolution in India

- **Colonial era:** Paternalistic state; relief-oriented, hierarchical between the relief recipient and relief provider

- **Post-independence:** Focus remained on relief; Inadequate state capacity for preparedness

- **2000s**
  - 1999 supercyclone, 2004 tsunami: rupture leading to Disaster Management Act (2005), which mandated setting up National Disaster Management Authority as apex body (federated disaster governance, districts)
  - 'Zero causalities approach'
  - Global changes: Four priorities under Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: understanding disaster risk; strengthening disaster risk governance; investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience; and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.
  - Domestic, global shifts led to more preparatory approach; operationalised through planned relocation, investment in early warning systems, community awareness

Resettlement housing in Odisha, east India. Photo by Zohrab Reys Gamat

2004 Tsunami and institutional shifts in disaster management

- Influx of funding and attention led to massive reconstruction projects funded by multilateral agencies + NGO engagement

- Recovery measures focussed on **reconstruction** (houses and public infrastructure, **relocation** (risk reduction), and **rebuilding** (fishing livelihoods and infrastructure)

- Several community-based interventions on capacity building (e.g. emergency warnings, evacuation drills).

- Less attention to psychosocial recovery and agriculture/farmers

Fishers in Nagapattinam, stone barrier to reduce storm surge in the background. Photo by Y Udupa

(Un)planned relocation and shifting risk

2004 Indian Ocean tsunami resettlement

2015 South India Floods

2010 onwards Recurrent cyclones

Multiple waves of relocation

Resettlement colonies in Chennai, built on wetlands and prone to flooding, livelihood loss

Post-tsunami resettlement colony in Chennai, built on wetlands and prone to flooding. Photo by C Singh

Outcomes of relocation

- Strong houses
- Less exposed to hazard
- Lack of choice and autonomy in post-disaster resettlement
- Loss of political agency and fishing identity
- Inappropriate infrastructure causing long-term resistance to change
- Early settlers lost out → mistrust

Table A24: Reasons to move back and staying in the relocation site

GO BACK/STAY HERE – REASONS	KNG-F	PMB-F	KNG-T	SMY-T	TOTAL
Go back	4	11	18	8	41
Better life and facilities	1	5	3	1	10
For jobs	1	3	6		10
This place is far from the city		1	1	2	4
Unsafe here	1		2	2	5
Only if they give us a house		1	2		3
Community			1		1
DKCS		1	3	3	7
Go back if provided with all facilities	1				1
Stay here	1	5		8	14
Got used to the place / made this home				4	4
No place to go back		2		1	3
Safe here	1	2		1	4
Better life and facilities here		1		1	2
DKCS				1	1

https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/10840IIED.pdf

Making sense of disaster recovery and the role of planned relocation in it

How are disaster _events_ represented?

Army out as worst rain in 100 years
batters Chennai

Cyclone Gaja live updates | Gaja makes
landfall near Vedaranyam, leaves a trail

Disasters as unprecedented events and
unknowable vs recurrent, man-made

EMBER 15, 2018 07:53 IST

MBER 16, 2018 20:59 IST

Urban planning in denial: Why Chennai gets unbearably flooded and
what can be the solution

That Chennai's waterlogging is now on the brink of being beyond redemption and is a man-made disaster can be illustrated by one fact: The
city's largest mall is on a lake-bed

How are disaster-affected <u>people and losses</u> represented?

Tsunami rehabilitation pegged at $1.2 billion

Rs. 5,025 crore sanctioned for tsunami rehabilitation:

*"The **psychological stress** of what people being evicted are fa... **especi...** differe... how p... Chennai (2019)*

Loss in terms of economic impacts, infrastructure losses, in aggregates

Reaching out to the tsunami-hit
Peer groups counsel fishermen to remove the fear of sea

'Community counsellors key to Gaja-hit overcoming stress'

Cyclone Gaja: TN CM hikes compensation for damaged fishing boats to Rs 1.5 lakh

How does all this lead to certain types of <u>recovery interventions?</u>
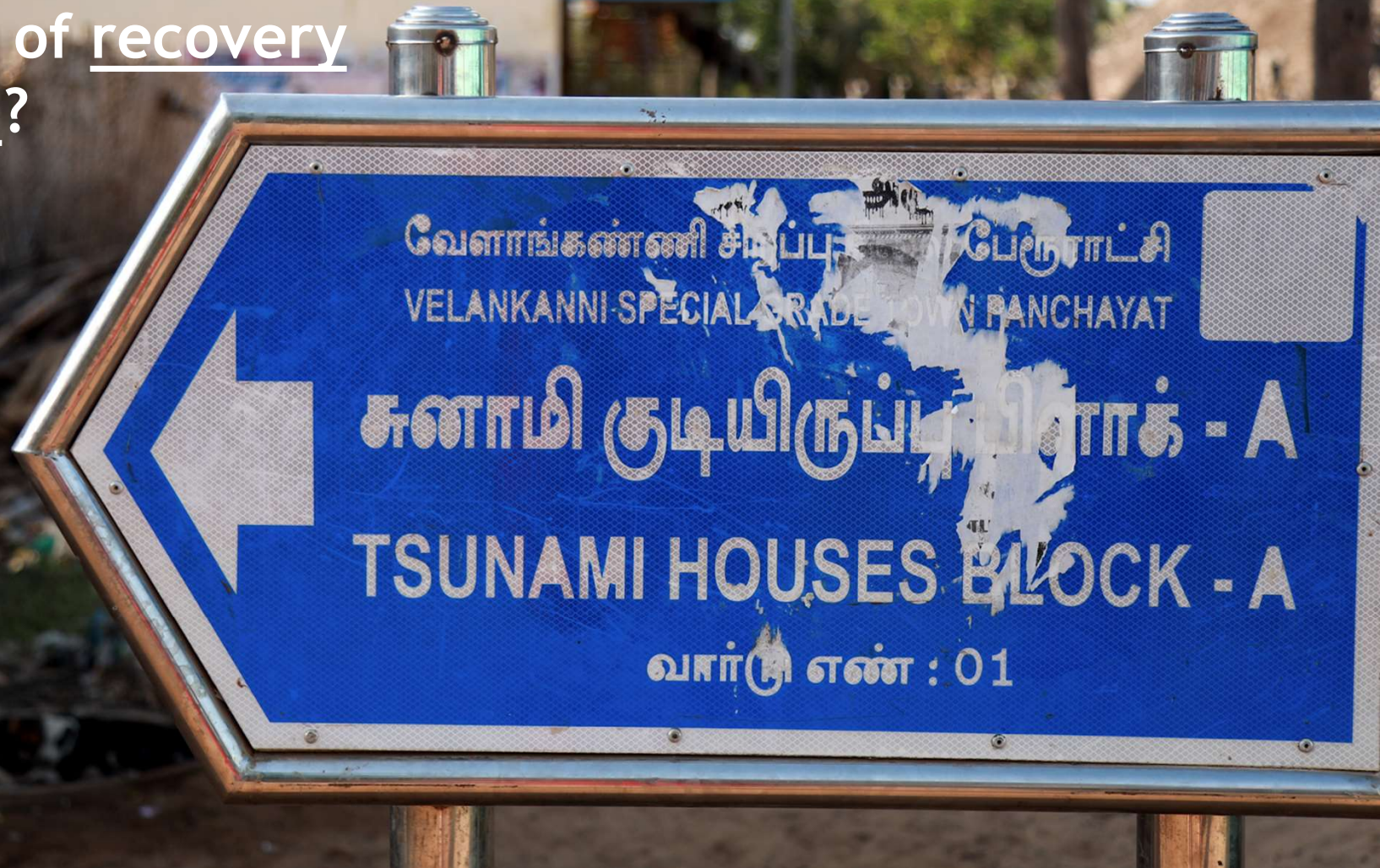
Recovery as...rebuilding, repairing, relocating

- Focus remains on infrastructure at the cost of intangible recovery interventions

- Secondary focus on repairing or strengthening lives/livelihoods

- **Build Back Better is difficult in situ so rebuilding in new sites, BBB for whom?**

- Infrastructural interventions have high visibility and better M&E potential

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU
TRUTH ALONE TRIUMPHS

STATE DISASTER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY · TAMIL NADU

State Disaster Management Perspective Plan
2018 - 2030

Build Back Better strategies. The process of "Building Back Better" starts with the commitment to deliver the best with the available resources and also by accessing international funding & implementing the Projects within specified time limits. The Build Back Better strategies adopted by Tamil Nadu instil confidence in the communities which were psychologically traumatized and economically devaStated due to unprecedented disasters. The

BUILD BACK BETTER

Recovery as…relocation and one-time

Permanent shelters ready for tsunami hit

Slum Clearance Board has completed construction of 5,000 houses at Semmanchery

Ground report: Chennai slum erupts in anger as govt forcibly shifts them to distant colonies

Most of the people living here are daily wage workers and work in this area.

Chief Minister inaugurates housing for tsunami-hit

Project to provide permanent shelter for victims unveiled

Placing The Poor In The Flood Path: Post-Disaster Slum Resettlement In Chennai
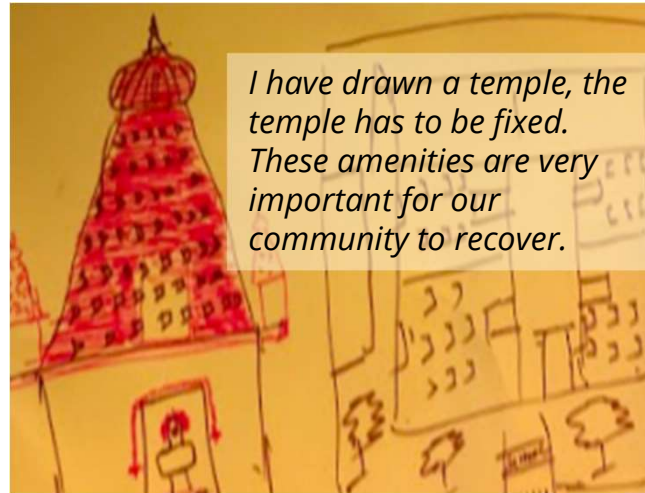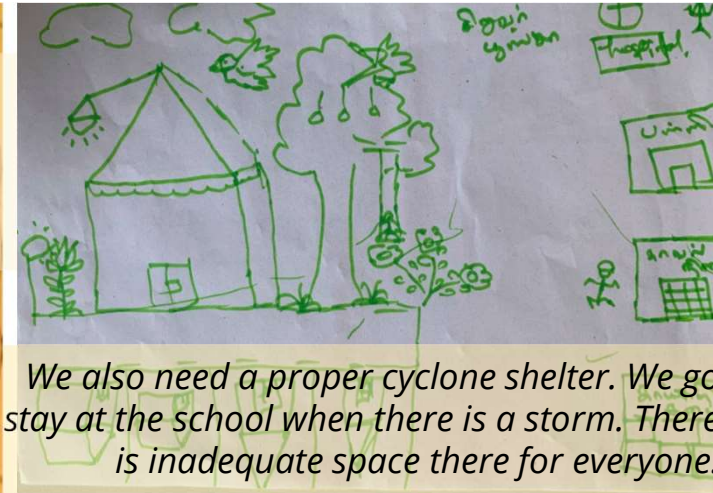
KAREN COELHO

04 January 2016

Recovery as... multiple things, ongoing

*For us, our houses, being able to fish is important.*

I have drawn a temple, the temple has to be fixed. These amenities are very important for our community to recover.

We also need a proper cyclone shelter. We go stay at the school when there is a storm. There is inadequate space there for everyone.

During Cyclone Gaja a lot of trees were lost. Barely any trees left, I even struggle to find shade these days.
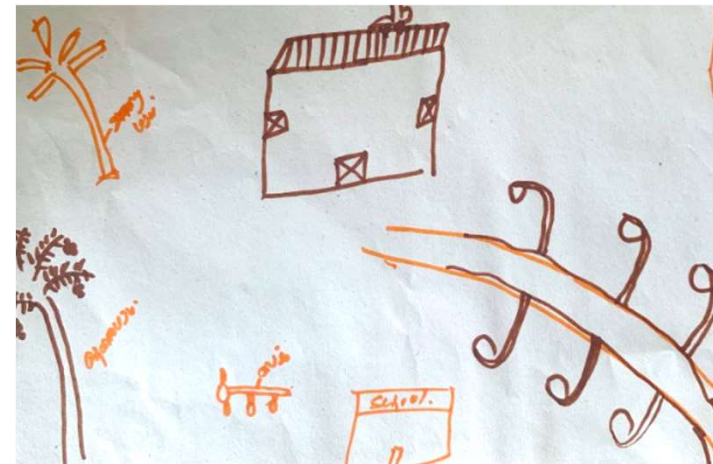
Conclusion

Takeaways

- Relocation and resettlement has always been taking place and will contribute to be one of the solutions to increasing extreme events
- Disaster **events** are moments of socioeconomic ruptures → narratives of unprecedented, natural events vs. predictable, man-made events
- Disaster **impacts and losses** are material and non-material but focus remains on aggregated, tangible impacts
- **Disaster recovery** envisaged as "build back better" and often infrastructural → leading to rebuilding, repairing, relocating
- Need to pay attention to the conditions under which and into which people relocate, focussing on social, economic, and ecological outcomes over time.

Dr Chandni Singh
csingh@iihs.ac.in

More at: https://recoverywithdignity.iihs.co.in/