

Switzerland's commitment in Indonesia following the tsunami



Over 150,000 people died in the province's capital city of Banda Aceh alone and 400,000 became homeless as a result of the disaster. © SDC

Context

At the end of 2014, it will be ten years since a tsunami devastated large parts of the coast in Southeast Asia and Africa on 26 December 2004. The disaster cost the lives of more than 225,000 victims. Millions of people were affected in the 13 countries located along the Indian Ocean coast, from Indonesia to Somalia. Following the tsunami, the world witnessed a remarkable surge of solidarity for the victims. In Switzerland, private and public donations amounted to more than CHF 300 million. This sum enabled support to be given to emergency actions and reconstruction programmes for victims of the tsunami in Thailand, India, Indonesia, Somalia and Sri Lanka.

North of the Sumatra/Indonesian coast, the earthquake's magnitude was 9.3 on the Richter scale, setting off a tidal wave which brought death and destruction to Aceh Province, already suffering from civil war. Over 150,000 people died from the tidal wave in the province's capital city, Banda Aceh, alone and some 400,000 lost their homes in the disaster. The damage caused is estimated to be equal to the province's economic output for a whole year.

During the first weeks following the quake, Swiss Humanitarian Aid provided emergency relief to the Banda Aceh and Meulaboh region. In a second phase, reconstruction work was set in motion in Banda Aceh. The drinking water purification plant was repaired and the water supply partly re-established.

Since 2004 the country has suffered further natural disasters: Switzerland provided help to the Indonesian government following the eruption of the mud volcano in May 2006, the floods of February 2007 in Jakarta, and the earthquakes of May 2006 in Yogyakarta and September 2009 in Padang.

SDC emergency aid

After the 2004 tsunami, Swiss Humanitarian Aid sent a rapid response team (RRT) to assess primary needs and initiate relief operations. The team was comprised of roughly forty medical, logistics and water specialists from the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA).

The following emergency measures were carried out at a cost of approximately CHF 11.3 million:

- Transport of 160 tonnes of relief supplies to the town of Medan (north Sumatra) and distribution to the population in need
- Coordination of emergency medical aid, establishment of an information system in Banda Aceh's two hospitals and organisation of urgently needed medical supplies for the hospital in Meulaboh by five SHA doctors in cooperation with the World Health Organisation (WHO)
- Support for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) transport logistics in Sumatra with 50 military personnel and 3 Super Puma helicopters
- A one-off payment of CHF 120 to 7500 families who provided shelter to the homeless in Banda Aceh and the vicinity
- Cleaning 600 drinking water wells and drilling eight emergency wells in the Meulaboh region
- Financial contributions to the emergency activities of multilateral partner organisations (IFRC, ICRC, WFP, OCHA)



One of the priorities of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit sent to Indonesia after the tsunami was to guarantee the population access to drinking water. © SDC

Purification of drinking water

Water is a key factor after a disaster, for both health and economic reasons. Following the SDC's relief operations, the water purification plant was restored in the devastated provincial capital of Banda Aceh. To this end, water

and hygiene specialists from the SHA and the Swiss Red Cross (SRC) worked closely with the local authorities.

With the technical support of Geneva Industrial Services (SIG), the large drinking water purification plant of "Lambaro" in Banda Aceh, which provides water for 250,000 people, was completely restored. As the waterworks in Banda Aceh (PDAM) had lost numerous workers and specialists in the disaster, the training and appointment of new staff played a key role. Relations were also established with the city's authorities, the mayor's office and the provincial civil engineering department in order to ensure complete political support for the project.

The restored water purification plant was inaugurated on 10 February 2007 by the Governor of Aceh-Nias Province and the then Swiss president, Micheline Calmy-Rey. This coincided with the official transfer of the project to the PDAM and the city of Banda Aceh.

Technical support and dialogue with the local authorities

Over the following five years (2007-2011), SDC's Humanitarian Aid Department provided occasional managerial and technical support to the PDAM of Banda Aceh in order to ensure the sustainable operation of the plant. The aim of this was to generate new solutions for the production of water in the face of growing needs.

Seven years after the restoration, results are encouraging and to a large extent can be attributed to the five-year project of the SDC. Today the plant of Lambaro supplies approximately 62,000 m³ of clean drinking water a day. The water quality meets Indonesian quality standards in both the water purification plant and in the 116 distribution points across the whole supply network.



The restored water purification plant in Lambaro (Banda Aceh) supplies the inhabitants with drinking water. © SDC

At present it is hard to assess exactly how long the plant will be able to continue producing water in sufficient quantities to meet the needs of Banda Aceh population. This is why the SDC, in its support for the PDAM, also wished to include the planning and development of new solutions for the city's water supply. The mayor's office recognised the need for reform and decisive improvements with regard to water management and is working on alternative solutions which have an influence on the development planning of Banda Aceh.

The SDC's contribution to the reconstruction and technical support for Banda Aceh's water supply amounted to a total of CHF 1.5 million. A further CHF 3 million was funded by Swiss Solidarity and the Swiss Red Cross.

Facts and figures

CHF 12,848,000: Total SDC aid budget following the tsunami in Indonesia

7500 families in Banda Aceh and the surrounding area who gave shelter to the homeless were given direct financial support from the SDC after the tsunami

62,000 m³ of drinking water produced daily in the Lambaro water purification plant

Precarious water supply in Indonesia

In Indonesia, only a limited percentage of the population has access to the public drinking water network. Faced with a growing population, it is hard for the network to keep up with ever-increasing demand. As a consequence, the majority of Indonesians are forced, when they can, to buy water rations from private vendors. Those who cannot afford to pay draw their drinking water from illegal connections which multiply at the same rate as water-borne diseases.



Further information

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