

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



Elimination of the consequences caused by a tsunami

GLEN
JĀNIS KĪRPĪTIS



TEACHERS OF ELEMENTARY AND HIGH
SCHOOLS, LOCAL OPINION LEADERS



Jānis Kīrpītis and member of the Sri Lankan parliament Mr. Sajith Premadasa (with the microphone) inaugurate a primary school building (in the background), funded by donations from the citizens of Latvia, in Hambantota province, Sri Lanka, 2006.

At the end of 2004 a tsunami hit Sri Lanka and killed close to 40 thousand people. Recovery from the tsunami was made more difficult by the ethnic conflict and the related warfare in the north and east parts of the island.

The initial goal of the GLEN team was to support a local Sri Lankan NGO, that had initiated humanitarian aid projects. A big part was dedicated to building new houses in place of buildings that were destroyed in the coastal area.

Our team observed that the newly built homes, that were deemed temporary by many, were empty. It turned out that people did not get over the fear of another tsunami and did not want to live in the coastal area. The fear and superstitions of the coastal area citizens caused false alarms and inaccurate forecasts about tsunamis in the local newspapers.

We concluded that the citizens do not understand the causes of tsunamis, that is why we started a campaign to dissipate fear and false information about an approaching repeated tragedy. We also developed a class about tsunami causes. We started travelling to schools on the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka, where we provided classes about the origins of tsunamis to teachers and students.



Later – in 2006 – I was trusted with the donations of Latvian citizens for the elimination of consequences caused by the tsunami in Sri Lanka. From the donations, I organized the construction of two primary schools in the South-eastern province. The primary school buildings are still there, the schools are open and I made sure of it myself when in 2015 I went travelled there as a TV producer to make a movie for the Latvian Television.

The personal gain was experience that was completely unique at the time about the processes and the ongoing issues in a civil-war and tsunami riddled country on the other side of the world. A huge experience was to see how one of the biggest international humanitarian missions was carried out, as well as to see the following long-term development cooperation projects.



Jānis delivering a class about the causes of tsunamis in 2005.



Devastation after the tsunami in the Sri Lankan coast, Thirukkovil village, 2005.



From the international help funds “temporary homes” were built in the tsunami destroyed zones, but many feared living near to the ocean shore. Pictured – the Vavandi family leaving their home in the evening, to stay with relatives, that live further away from the ocean shore.

“ The project carried out by the team of Jānis let us understand the causes of tsunamis, overcoming superstitions. Up until the classes provided by GLEN, superstition took the upper hand over our knowledge and rationality. Even after more than 10 years after the tsunami, teachers still remember the classes, especially when the media spreads rumours about a possible new tsunami. Back then we understood that tsunamis and earthquakes, which cause tsunamis, are phenomena that are impossible to predict.

— Teacher and interpreter for the project
Ms. KAMALA THEVY



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