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Citation: Jayawickrama, Janaka (2010) Community mental health and wellbeing: a case study. In: Community-University Collaborations: Exploring Models, Sharing Good Practice, 9-10 September 2010, Durham, UK.

URL: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/conferen...>
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COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING: A CASE STUDY

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September 2010

DISPLACED IN SRI LANKA

- Conflict of 30 years of Sri Lanka ended on May 2009.
- More than 300,000 people were displaced.
- Loss of lives, destruction of infrastructure and properties were high.

OMANTHAI – 2009

- A little town in North Sri Lankan district of Vavuniya
- The last Sri Lankan army check point which divided the Government and LTTE controlled areas used to be in Omanthai for many years.

INTERVENTION ORGANISATIONS

- **UNITED NATIONS:** UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, WFP, OCHA and IOM.
- **INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS:** ZOA, World Vision, CARE, UMCOR, ASB, Relief International, DRC, NRC, Mercy Malaysia, Muslim Aid, LEADS, Caritas, JRS, OXFAM (GB), OXFAM (Australia), ACTED, Save the Children, FORUT, ADSL, CORDAID, UMCOR and Medical Team.
- **RED CROSS AND CRESCENT COMMUNITY.**

INTERVENTION ORGANISATIONS

- **NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS:** Sarvodaya, Sewalanka Foundation, RDF and SEEDS.
- **DISTRICT BASED ORGANISATIONS:** FOSDOO, NGAGDO, WDC, ORHAN and VOCOD.
- In addition various GoSL Ministries and Agencies including the Military.

INTERVENTIONS

- Liaison with the Military and the GoSL
- Food and water
- Emergency shelter
- Water and sanitation
- Emergency health care
- Other necessary services

OBSERVATIONS

- Work carried out by humanitarian workers (international, national and local) and Military personnel.
- Displaced communities were not part of the interventions.
- 'Givers' and 'Receivers'.

OBSERVATIONS

As one busload hastened to get their food and lined up in a disorderly mass, a Tamil-speaking man in army attire started beating them with a stick to get them into an orderly line. When a [humanitarian] worker accosted him and protested, it turned out that he was a former-Tiger soldier who told her that such disorderly queues would never have been tolerated in *Thāmilīlam* (or words to that effect).

Roberts, 2010

OBSERVATIONS

When a Sinhalese soldier entrusted with the task of carrying food parcels to one busload of refugees asked for 105 parcels, one of the [humanitarian] supervisors asked him how many that bus carried. He answered sheepishly: “101.” Then added: “*there are four pregnant women and they could do with two each.*” Eminently compassionate and sensible one would think right? But, no, an army officer intervened and chastised the soldier with a knock, with the implicit meaning that it was a legitimate act of punishment.

Roberts, 2010

AFTER ONE YEAR

- Most displaced are re-settled.
- However, they are complaining about the lack of support by the humanitarian agencies and the GoSL.
- Communities are expecting **more and more support** to re-build their lives. Community ownership and responsibility are lacking ingredients.

The Reality

- Communities have been surviving the conflict for more than 30 years.
- They continued with their livelihood regimes and celebrate life.
- In the middle of worse circumstances, they lived their lives and had dreams.

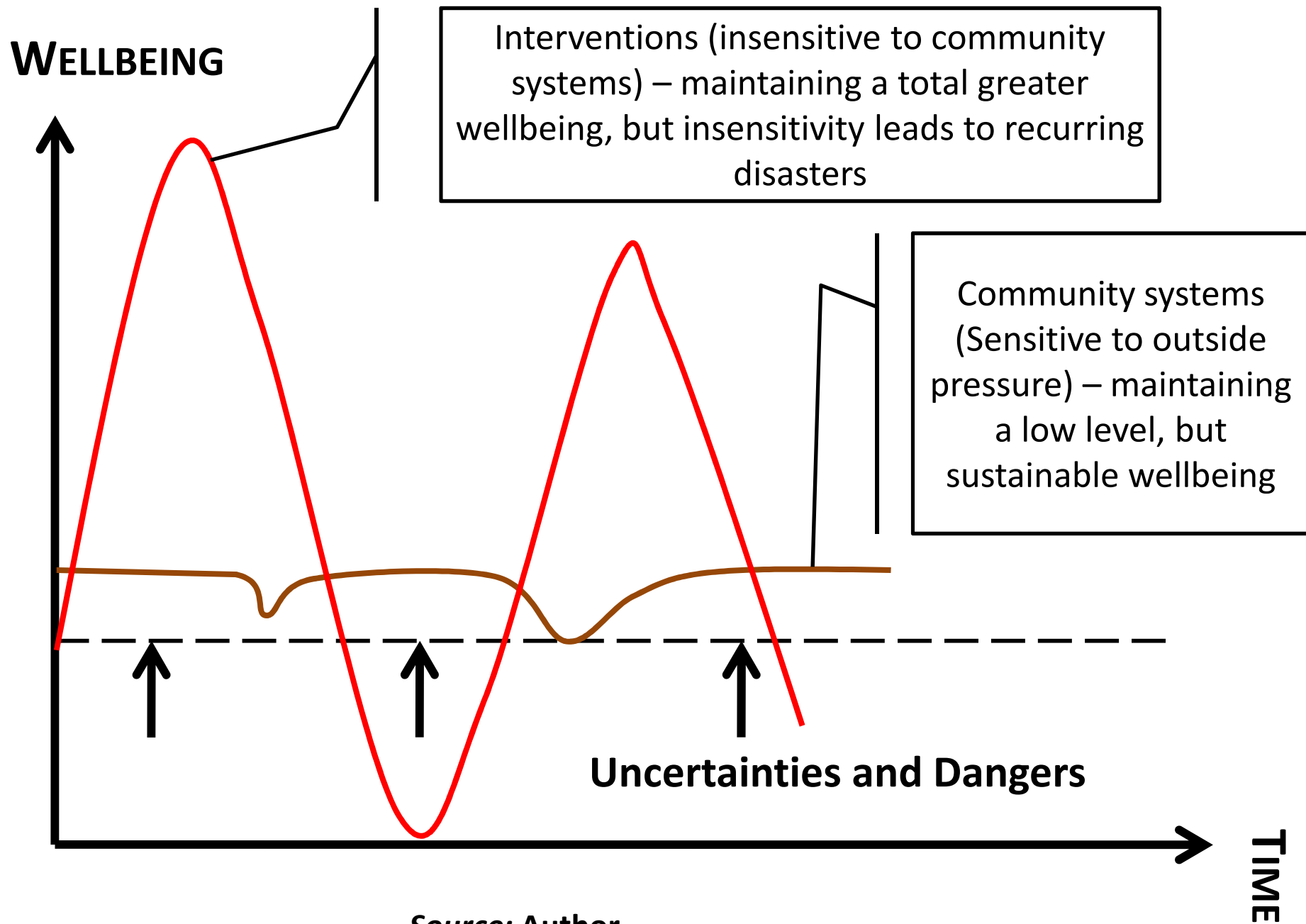
How did they do that?

What is the problem?

The Reality

Traditional intervention approaches (humanitarian and development) are:

- Not sensitive to community mechanisms
- Not sensitive to traditional knowledge
- Mostly follow a top-down approaches



Source: Author

RECOMMENDATION

*“When the Master governs, the people
are hardly aware that he exists.
Next best is a leader who is loved.*

*If you don't trust the people,
you make them untrustworthy.*

*The Master doesn't talk, he acts.
When her work is done,
the people say, "Amazing:
we did it, all by ourselves!"*

*Lao-tzu in Tao Te Ching
Translated by Mitchell, 1998, Verse 17*

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