

**PRESS RELEASE, 23 Jan 2005**

from **SOCIETY FOR ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ECOLOGY (SANE)**

## **Good news: the Port Blair government begins to listen**

In contrast to non-indigenous settlers, indigenous tribal communities have shown a greater resilience in response to the grave disaster. They have picked up the pieces of life and started rebuilding without entirely depending on the hard-pressed administration. For example, instead of just waiting for the relief materials, the Onges have already resumed their hunting and the Nicobarese are engaged in replanting their horticultural gardens. This perhaps indicates towards a unique worldview of these indigenous communities in which their understanding of life and death is derived from their lived-in observation of chaos and disorder in nature. This perspective on their natural environment is also evident in the oral narratives and mythologies of Andamanese and Nicobarese indigenous communities.

Following the Tsunami disaster, the Andaman and Nicobar administration was overwhelmed with the task of handling excessive negotiating demands, attention and criticisms put forth by dozens of relief and rehabilitation organisations and politicians which made it difficult for the administration to rely on appropriate co-operations and strategies. As the dust settles, the administration has taken first positive steps by acknowledging the wisdom of the local communities, the resourcefulness and experience of local NGOs and accepting inputs of scientists who have been working in the area for several years.

On 23rd January morning, the Lt. Governor of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, Prof. Ram Kapse, welcomed the proposal of a local NGO, Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology (SANE) and associated scientists whereby the individuals and volunteers of SANE would contribute to the process of rebuilding indigenous lands. The proposal for Nicobars was developed on the basis of an invitation of the Nicobar Youth Association and the Tribal Councils. In the case of Onges of Little Andaman, drawing up a plan would be based on a long standing relationship of Prof. Vishvajit Pandya (DA-IICT, Gandhinagar), an anthropologist working with the Onges for nearly 2 decades. The Nicobar efforts are built on the years of work of Dr. Simron Jit Singh, a human ecologist from the Institute for Social Ecology, University of Klagenfurt, Vienna, who is also coordinating the whole effort. The Nicobar Youth Association has already liaised a group of young Nicobarese volunteers who would assist in the process. This process would involve eliciting community's perception in rebuilding the community with cultural sensitivity and minimum imposition but maximum appropriate assistance.

Says, Samir Acharya, Secretary of SANE, "We at SANE are elated that the administration has decided to put our information and knowledge base with the expertise of our associate scientists to the best interest of the affected indigenous communities".

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