

Tsunami

18 Months After



Foreword

The past 18 months have been particularly difficult for Plan's operations in Asia. In addition to the tsunami, we have had to contend with a series of natural and man-made emergencies in that same timeframe: the earthquakes in Pakistan and Indonesia, and the political turmoil in Nepal, Sri Lanka and more recently, Timor Leste.

At the same time, a succession of smaller incidents, like those in Java and Sulawesi, has highlighted how vulnerable and unpredictable the region remains.

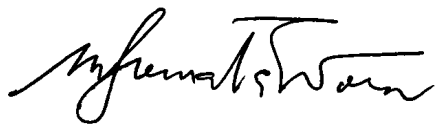
Yet despite dealing with the increased pressure and varied demands produced by these events, our regular programmes have continued, and our emergency operations have already shifted into long-term development programming.

As we look to the future it is clear: we live and work in a volatile region, and emergencies and disasters are fast becoming a regular part of our work. But despite its high profile, emergency response is only a small part of disaster work.

All too often we talk about responding to disasters while ignoring disaster preparedness and risk reduction. In a vulnerable part of the world, building the ability and resilience of communities to survive, or limit damage, is a far greater investment than any response. And it is development programmes that provide the capital for that investment.

Plan has built its development programmes around community involvement, and that principle has become the cornerstone of our emergency work.

As a responsible development organisation we are accountable to our donors, but just as important, we are also responsible to the children and communities we support. We work in their interests, not ours, and it is their right to demand that we respond to their priorities.



Myrna Evora
Regional Director
Plan Asia

Accountable to whom?

After the high visibility one-year anniversary the tsunami has gradually drifted from the public glare. For those not directly affected by the disaster, declining media attention means few reminders of the event, and even fewer reminders of the reconstruction.

But for the families and friends of the 227,000 killed, and the 1.7 million displaced, the efforts to rebuild a 'normal' life – the sense of self, family, and community, the secure livelihood and homes, and the safe schools with engaging classes – continue come what may. For many, the cameras may have gone, but their lives and their stories continue to evolve.

Plan, too continues to evolve. Our transition from relief to recovery has been more visible over the past 6 months as large construction projects have finally picked up pace. Many projects which started as emergency responses (e.g. child care centres in India and Aceh, and “happy sad letterboxes” in Sri Lanka for example) have received strong backing and support from the authorities and communities and are now part of our long- term activities.

After 18 months, we are beginning to see the long-term effects of our programmes on children. In Aceh, micro nutrient distribution drastically reduced the incidence of diarrhoeal disease, and early childhood care and development activities, also in Aceh and India, provided ideal space for children to recover from the shock of the tsunami.

This is what Plan is all about. We are not primarily a disaster relief organisation, but rather a development agency that works on disasters as part of our overall development strategy. As such our focus is long-term by definition as many of the problems on which we work can only be adequately addressed over the longer term.

When we started our work in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, we never promised quick solutions indeed, we have always made it clear to both our donors and the communities impacted by the tsunami that when given the choice between a quick or quality solution, we would always opt for the latter. Therefore, while others have already issued final reports on their tsunami work, for Plan this is an interim report on a continuing commitment to address the long-term effects of the tsunami.

Our emphasis on getting children back to school during the emergency phase saw many creative solutions develop such as school classes via radio in Sri Lanka and a back-to-school drive for drop outs in India. Meanwhile the construction and renovation of school buildings has incorporated many ideas from children on how their ideal school should look, something new in many tsunami-affected areas. And the movement from temporary shelters to permanent houses is underway as construction projects are gradually completed.

Our relationship with the children we work with has also bloomed. Children now trust us enough to express their fears and ideas for improving our activities through casual chat, discussions and/or helplines, and do so regularly. As our relationships have bloomed, so too have the children. Their

creativity and resilience is endless, and they now use child clubs, theatres, photos, drawings, and movies, as a way of coping with the tsunami.

Across India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand we continue to support more than 350,000 children and families living in 500 tsunami-affected communities.

Accountability to affected people

But with that responsibility comes accountability. The media has been critical of the ineffectiveness, inefficiency and the unfairness of aid, while agencies themselves have conducted thorough, soul-searching and self-revealing assessments.

The largest, and most recent of the international community's self-reflections was the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition's (TEC) report. It reinforced the importance of supporting the communities' own relief and recovery priorities rather than aid agencies deciding the type and scale of response.

The same points have been repeatedly highlighted in other evaluations, including Plan's "Children and the tsunami." As we talked with the communities, we were constantly reminded of the gap between what aid agencies thought was best for the communities, and what the communities thought we should be doing. At the end of the day, it's the affected children and adults who must have the final say in whether or not what we did, or did not do, was of use or of help to them.

To improve our transparency and responsiveness to the needs of affected peoples, and to check the relevance of our projects, Plan took part in various coordinated inter-agency evaluations including the TEC evaluation mentioned earlier.

In addition, Plan is actively contributing to the study commissioned by UN special envoy and former US President, Bill Clinton. The study evaluates 5 critical challenges facing international humanitarian agencies: consultation, communication, and accountability to affected people, enhancing local capacity, professionalism of aid agencies, coordination, and human rights. Plan's US office is co-chairing the entire process with Deputy UN Special Envoy Eric Schwartz.

Plan has also been co-leading the discussion on issues of professionalism in Aceh, with World Vision. Plan's Aceh programme manager, Richard Sandison, remarked, "There is now more focus on NGO accountability to the communities in which we work. We need to learn a lot more about the most effective means of communication - is it having staff live in these villages, or notice boards for people to read? There is also a huge disconnect between communities/local staff, and international humanitarian staff on the understanding, relevance and application of international humanitarian standards. If you ask local communities what their definition of quality programming is they'll mention NGOs not breaking promises and NGOs communicating more with them."

Plan in Aceh is now undertaking research on a community-based perspective focusing on accountability and effectiveness of NGOs.

Internal process control

The benefit of internal control on financial and programming processes cannot be underestimated if we are to remain truly accountable. When it comes to the financial transparency of NGOs, public scrutiny is high. Media reports concerning missing and poorly accounted for donations have seen some of our peers subjected to very thorough investigations and a great deal of adverse media attention. No organisation can be completely immune from such risks, but Plan has invested in a variety of measures to mitigate bad practices. Financially, Plan continues to conduct regular financial audits of tsunami related funds. Here are some examples of how we keep up with our commitment to accountability and quality programming.

Housing

In Sri Lanka, Plan has two types of housing projects: 'individual housing' and 'settlement housing.' In the former, the construction process is totally managed by the individual family, whereas in the latter, the process is managed by Plan and carried out by a construction company.

When a family is in charge of building their own home, they have a greater sense of ownership. Plan's role is to provide funding and some technical support but the families manage the local labourers who do the work. Plan releases funds in instalments based on work carried out.

The only real risk associated with individual housing is double funding or mis-allocated funding: Beneficiaries may seek funding from more than one NGO or private donation (harder to prevent or identify due to proliferation of private donors in aftermath of tsunami). Or we may mistakenly identify those who are ineligible as beneficiaries. Plan has developed a series of procedures to minimize these risks: An agreement is signed between the family and Plan, family houses supported by us bear a small logo, and the full lists of home owners are available to other organisations.

By contrast, settlement housing faces greater challenges. Without direct involvement in the location, design, or construction, as well as no financial obligation, future occupants are less likely to view the new house as a home or investment.

The ever-changing buffer zone policy also meant that families legally forced to move, suddenly had an option of returning to the site of their original home. In addition, the government's allocation of housing projects to aid agencies was greater than the number of families actually needing them.

Plan had to shelve two settlements last year for these precise reasons. It was a difficult decision, but we are accountable to the communities we support. If they don't want to live there, it is their choice. We want children and their families to live where they feel most at home, not where we think they should be.

Plan constantly kept all our donors informed and updated of the changing situation. We are grateful that they understood the human context and supported our decision.

Boats

The over supply of boats and nets to the fishing community has received a great deal of attention. Plan too was involved also in the distribution of boats and nets in India. Aware of the duplication risk, we established a system of community involvement and cross checking. Fishermen were consulted on the reputation of the potential suppliers, and it was left to the communities to identify the recipients. However, as a precaution, we referenced the community list against the government-provided lists. All tenders were solicited in leading newspapers. As an additional safety measure, the process was checked by more than one Plan office, and Plan's regular supplier selection process was strictly adhered to.

It is crucial to emphasize the role that the fishermen played. Plan and its partners linked fishermen and suppliers so that they could discuss details directly. Not only did the fishermen have a say in the specifications and dimensions of their boats, but also monitored the manufacturing. This helped suppliers too, as they could then claim transparency in their work.

Professionalism

One of the criticisms of the post tsunami operation was inexperienced or unqualified staff without local knowledge being deployed by aid agencies to lead the activities on the ground. Plan's general principle in disaster response is to do what we do best in the specific country. Good programmes in normal times come with strong in-house technical capacity and links with other crucial players in the sector. In Thailand, education is one of the strongest Plan programmes. Our effective relationship with the Ministry of Education was crucial in our programme decision in the tsunami response. Since Plan did not work in the affected area prior to the tsunami, it was especially important to work closely with the local office of the Ministry, so as not to make it a makeshift, Plan-led, short-term response.

Plan committed itself to providing the same quality of education programmes in the tsunami hit southern provinces, as its regular programmes in other parts of the country. To realise this, Plan's experienced partners in education and early childhood care and development were asked to work with us in the affected area. Together with the partner organisations, Plan deployed trained Thai staff, originally from the affected area, to maximize our technical and local knowledge.

In the best interests of children

As Plan supports the rights of children, we wanted to know if what we do was actually in their best interests. And the only way to do that was to listen to them. So over the past 18 months, we have been listening to those children affected by the tsunami and piecing together their impressions of post-tsunami activities.

What we learned was that most of all, children wanted to overcome the memory of the tsunami, return to a “normal life”, and be informed and involved in the efforts to do so. (Please refer to our “Children and the tsunami” report published in December 2005.)

A selection of their stories are outlined below.

Struggling to overcome the memory of the tsunami

“We talked with everyone in the camp about what happened. But we did not talk with them about our fears. When we were sad about losing our relatives and our possessions, we talked with our mother “ – Hambantota, Sri Lanka” (Children and the tsunami)

In India, four-year-old Raghu and his brother Rakin (5), still miss their elder brother Ranjith. Ranjith was snatched away from them by the tsunami on that December’s day. He was just 7 years old. “That morning, Ranjith was playing on the beach. My mother saw the big wave, and rushed to bring him back to the house. My mother tried to save all three of us, but Ranjith got washed away by the waves and drowned. I still remember it.” says Rakin.

Since then, Rakin has been attending evening school, and Raghu childcare centre through REAL-Plan’s programme. In class, they play games with other children. The activities are specifically designed to help them overcome the shock. While Rakin seems to be putting his shock and painful memories behind him, his younger brother is still not entirely over the distress of losing Ranjith. Yes, Raghu goes to school regularly, but he still doesn’t mingle with his friends and wants to spend all his time with his teacher. He doesn’t speak much either, and uses gestures to put his points across. It’s the same situation at home, if not a little more grim. Though all the family members try their best to reach out to him, he prefers sticking with his mother.

In all our discussions with children, one thing stood out. They all wanted to talk about their fears with their mothers or others they trusted, not skilled professional strangers sent by aid agencies. Care, love and appropriate support from parents and caregivers of children like Raghu and Rakin is therefore crucial.

However, Raghu’s mother, Thilaga, needed time for herself to come to terms with the loss of Ranjith. For a long while she blamed herself for not being able to save him. She’s had to recover from her shattered confidence and guilt. She joined one of the women’s Self Help Groups run by

REAL-Plan to distract herself from the past and start something constructive. She has since set up a small shop selling sweets and biscuits. “It has slowly helped me to get over the sorrow of losing Ranjith and give my attention to the other two children, especially Raghu,” she says. His father also plays a part by taking both sons to the beach and playing with them.

Raghu’s care centre teacher received training on the care for children like Raghu after the tsunami. She gives him a great deal of attention and encourages him to get involved with the others.

Raghu and Rakin’s story is not unique. Plan’s ninety Child Care Centres, set up with partners after the tsunami, continue to support around 3000 children. At the same time, our support for women’s Self Help Groups continues.

In Sri Lanka, psychosocial support for children in schools took the form of “happy sad letterboxes”. The letterboxes have helped teachers, counsellors and Plan to address many issues facing children across the district. A concern raised time and again by children through the letterbox was the desire for a school ‘happy day’, a time when they could break from formal education and spend time playing and enjoying other activities such as drawing, drama, music and sports. The therapeutic benefit of the ‘happy day’ for children recovering from the tsunami cannot be underestimated. The schools took warmly to the idea, and Plan has since been supporting ‘happy-day’ activities in tsunami-affected schools throughout Hambantota District.

The project has now developed from a psychosocial tool for tsunami response, to a common tool for listening to children. Many issues are raised from abuse or neglect in the home or school, to lack of basic services and violations of children’s rights. Based on the experience of this project, Plan is now establishing a children’s telephone hotline with Child Helpline International. The ‘happy sad letterbox’ will continue to be used in areas lacking telephone networks.

Thailand’s psychosocial support has adopted a more mobile approach. During its first year of operation, trained staff with 3 brightly coloured minivans have visited 28 primary schools and interacted with over 2000 children. The project has so far identified 162 children needing more individual attention – whether medical or social – and referred them to appropriate institutions for treatment. Plan and other child protection organisations also assist the provincial Social Development and Human Security offices in strengthening “one stop crisis centres” in the project areas, with special emphasis on protecting children. Now children and adults alike can report any case needing attention, or simply consult professionals with worries and concerns that they might have.

In Aceh, children experiencing family problems, child abuse, violence, or other concerns, already have a 24-hour telephone hotline that lets them talk to someone about their issues. Children who feel they have nowhere else to turn can call the toll free number where trained, experienced and compassionate staff will comfort and advise them. The hotline is supported by Plan and a range of other organisations, and is an effort to boost a protective environment for children living in the post conflict and post tsunami surroundings.

Back to a 'normal' life - in their own homes

"Nothing will be like before until we move into our own house. As long as we live in a hut, we will remember the tsunami and what happened." - From Ampara, Sri Lanka (Children and the tsunami)

House construction, one of Plan's major responses to the tsunami in Sri Lanka, may on the face of it seem unrelated to children's wellbeing. However, when asked, most children we talked to wished for a safe home with privacy.

With a glut of agencies providing temporary shelters, Plan immediately opted for permanent housing and community rebuilding, as part of an overall response package designed to help as many children as possible return to normalcy.

We are currently helping hundreds of families rebuild and replace their destroyed homes, which translates into new bedrooms, clean toilets, smoke free kitchens, and safe places to do homework or play with friends for children – all very real impacts on the lives and wellbeing of children.

It was not however an easy process, and there were difficulties along the way. In late 2005, problems arose in some houses at the largest settlement, Yayawatta. A number of the newly built homes developed cracks even before families moved in. There was enormous pressure to complete the construction as quickly as possible. However, we refused to compromise on the safety issue and had the bricks replaced. The contractor has subsequently rebuilt some 60 unacceptable properties, which are now ready for occupying. In Hambantota and Galle districts, an additional 450 properties are under construction of which 250 are nearing completion.

In India, too, permanent housing is now in full swing. But once again there was a delay in starting construction due to the result of indecision in several critical areas such as land allocation, construction specifications, and coastal zone regulations, combined with a lack of available skilled labour.

After much frustration, construction of 617 homes has finally begun in eight locations. Discussions with our partners and communities about the construction of a further 186 new homes are continuing. We are also renovating several hundred mud-wall and thatched roof houses in 'second line' villages (villages away from the coast with mostly government-ignored lower caste communities). Meanwhile the upgrading of about 1393 temporary shelters set up during the relief phase is complete.

In Aceh, Plan's contribution to permanent housing was to fill the gaps left by others. Initially, the only projects in the sub district of Leupung we planned to provide were school constructions as it appeared housing had been taken care of by other NGOs. However, in some case, the construction never started. Plan is currently building 162 houses in the district with a partner, Habitat for Humanity.

Children want to be informed and involved

As we listened to the children, their strong dissatisfaction with adults emerged. They felt we had failed to inform them of what was happening, involve them in the recovery, or to acknowledge their ability to cope. Their frustrations were compounded by what they perceived to be the unfairness of aid, and the fact they had no way to bring this up.

“For different people, caring was different. For Burmese, assistance was small, possibly because they were illegal immigrants.” - Framo Ban Nam Khem, Thailand (Children and the tsunami)

For Thai children, the exclusion of migrant workers and minorities in Thailand was one of the biggest perceived failures of post-tsunami aid. The children knew why; the migrants were not considered Thai. To the Thai children there was not, and should not have been, any distinction.

Plan’s earlier decision to carry out school-based activities inadvertently excluded the children of migrant workers and minority groups unable to attend official Thai schools. However, as part of our commitment to act on children’s recommendations, we have started to address this. We now support 9 learning, and 2 pre-school centres in Thailand catering to 335 Burmese children with a Myanmar NGO, the Grassroots Human Rights Education and Development Council.

In addition, Plan works with the Thai Law Society and Ministry of Education to promote and achieve the Thai Government’s recent policy of providing access to education for migrant children and others. Hopefully this policy and campaign will start to bear fruit so that migrant children will receive a proper education in emergencies and normal times alike.

In India too, children expressed empathy toward lower caste children who suffered in the tsunami, but received little attention or assistance. Plan has experience with marginalised groups and works with partners that fully understand the situation of their communities in their struggle with the Indian government for equal rights.

In Aceh, where health issues in temporary shelters remain a great concern, Plan has adopted a successful system of children’s engagement in public health issues practiced throughout other regions of Indonesia. In Mesjid Raya Sub-District, school based health promotion is underway with one hundred and twenty students in 6 primary schools already trained as junior medical doctors.

In all 4 countries, Plan started a child media project to let children voice their opinions. Child media projects bring together children and media makers for the production of relevant and appropriate materials for children. Through the process, children learn to access information, screen it, analyze it, form their opinion about it, and express it. Twelve-year-old *Suriya* (boy) from Kamala Village, Thailand said, *“It was an amazing opportunity. We had an intensive training course, and learned how to use digital and video cameras. Not only that, we also learned how to organise our thoughts into something that other people could understand. We then prepared short scripts for video and films.”*

Walking through his village and his school, Suriya pointed out reminders of the tsunami. *'We took photos of these places and made post cards out of them, too. The photos were for us to keep, but now we can tell the outside world what has happened and what we have been doing,'* Suriya added.

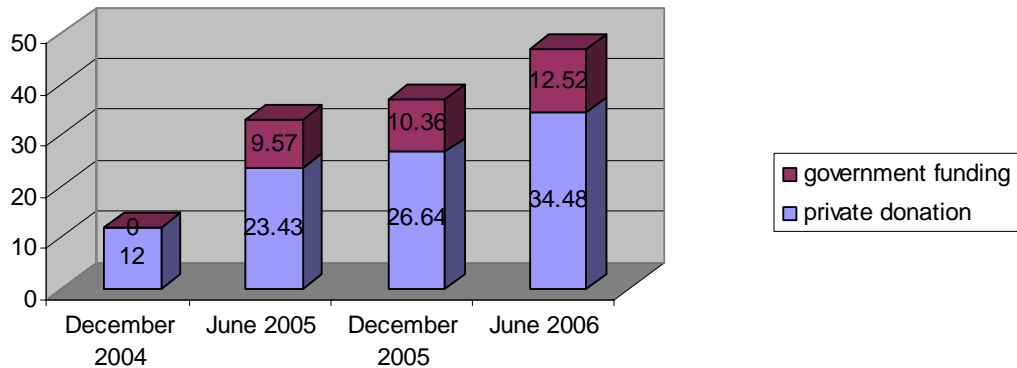
There are other problems that children indirectly associate with the tsunami. They say that after the tsunami, incidents of drug abuse, child abuse, and littering, in their communities increased. Children like Suriya think they can help solve these problems by using the media project as a starting point.

Expenditure and Funds Received

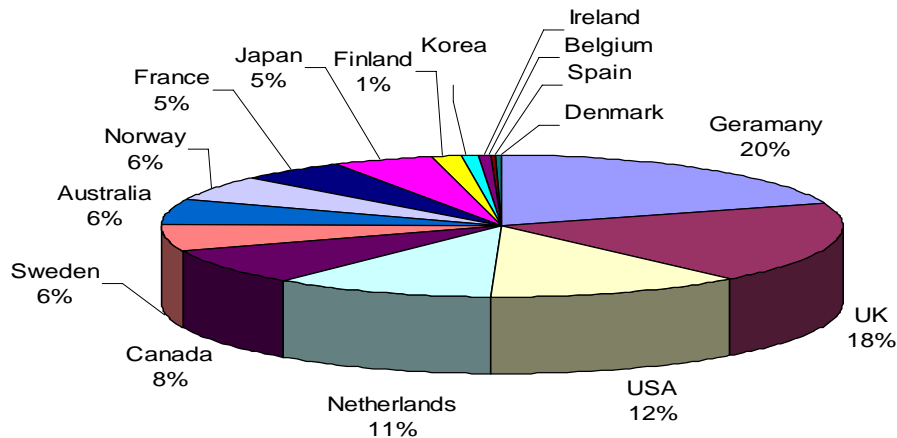
All our activities were made possible through the donations that we received.

By the end of June 2006, Plan had received donations and firm pledges of US\$ 47 million for its post-tsunami emergency and longer-term rehabilitation activities. A total of 73% of Plan's tsunami income has come from individual donors, private companies, groups and foundations. The remaining 27% is from bilateral and multilateral government funds. Plan is grateful for the generosity of a multitude of donors. We cannot recognise every donor here, but we appreciate every donation.

Funds received

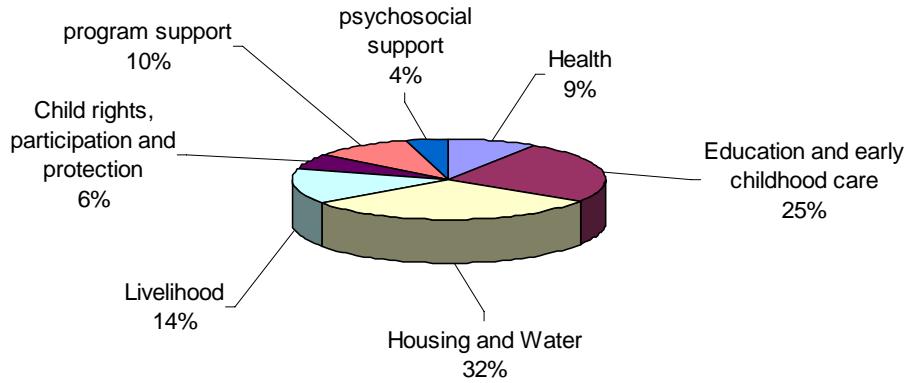


Donations by country

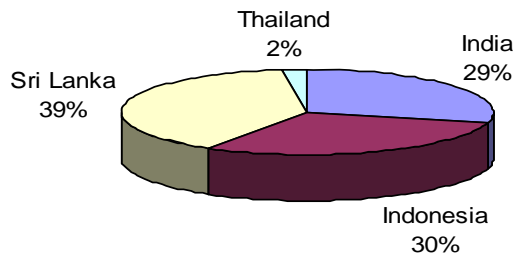


To date, Plan has spent over US\$ 22 million in the tsunami-affected countries (46% of funds raised). In the past 6 months, expenditure has accelerated as large construction projects have picked up pace. As the construction continues, we expect an additional US\$ 6 to 10 million to be spent before the end of December 2006. We are proud that the pace of our expenditures has been done with one consideration in mind: how to deliver the best product to the most children in need. We have found that there is a huge difference between spending quickly and spending wisely.

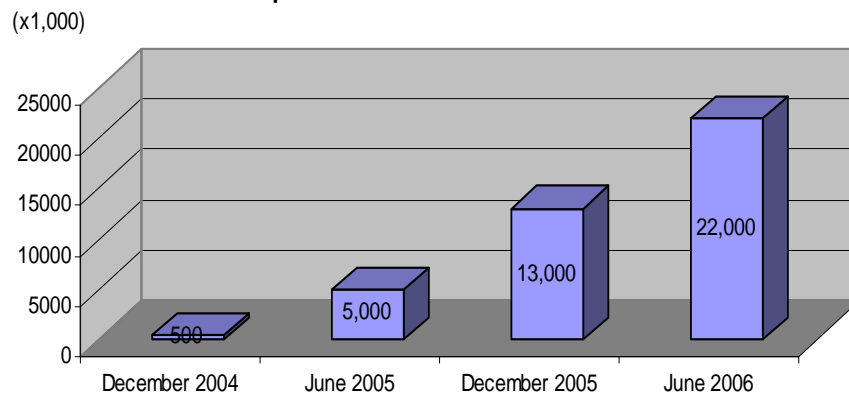
Distribution of expenditure per program domain



Distribution of expenditure per country of operation



Expenditure trend over 18 months



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