

**Abstract**

**Population and Sustainable Development Challenges  
on the Nicobars Islands after the Tsunami**

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The paper looks at the pre-and-post tsunami scenario for the Nicobar archipelago in the Bay of Bengal. The tropical islands, inhabited largely by an indigenous community, the Nicobarese, were violently hit by the tsunami of December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004, leading to a high number of casualties, and a complete destruction of villages by the mere fact of their being located along the shores. Prior to the tsunami, the Nicobarese lived on fishing, hunting and gathering and the sale of copra (dehydrated coconuts) in exchange for rice, sugar, cloth and fossil fuels. The tsunami brought the local cash economy to a complete standstill following the destruction of the coconut trees that were invariably planted along the sandy shores. Furthermore, the destruction of the surrounding coral reefs as well as the sinking of the islands by nearly two meters have led to scarce fishing grounds and difficulty in sea navigation. Proposed new settlements are to be on the higher hinterlands of the original village location, sometimes far from the sea. This will have consequences on their subsistence, transport network, and socioeconomic organization. The Indian Government's agenda as well as those of the aid organizations for rehabilitation and long-term development does not necessarily comply with that of the visions of the Nicobarese. While some of the Government programmes must be implemented, the Nicobarese are alongside engaged in the preparation of their own action plan that receives support from the Sustainable Indigenous Futures Fund created in Austria for the next three years. The paper explores, within the framework of an ongoing project financed by the Austrian Science Foundation, some of the current challenges of population and sustainable development in the Nicobar Islands.