

TSUNAMIupdate

A PUBLICATION OF THE ASIAN COALITION OF HOUSING RIGHTS

JUNE 2006

18 MONTHS LATER :

What has happened where people have been at the center of the reconstruction process?

A year and a half has now passed since the Asian tsunami hit 3,300 coastal settlements with waves the height of a coconut tree and the force of a bomb, killing some 350,000 people and leaving another 2.5 million homeless. In Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand, there are considerable differences in the degree to which things have returned to normal after the disaster. But in all these countries, there are stories which describe how in many different ways, the communities which bore the brunt of the killer waves have taken charge of rebuilding their own lives and settlements.

In the conventional relief formula, all kinds of agencies descend upon the disaster scene, all with their separate objectives, styles of working and time frames, with very little coordination. All their efforts may come with the best of intentions, but more often than not, they create additional troubles for the survivors, instilling as they do a culture of passive dependency. In this formula, the victims of calamities are considered to be helpless "target populations", and rehabilitation is something that is to be done for them, not by them.

It turns out that ordinary people – even those most badly traumatized – are not so helpless after all. When space is created for them to come together as communities and to take a central role in all aspects of reviving their lives and settlements, the quality of that rehabilitation is inevitably much higher, more appropriate, more efficient, more inexpensive. And when this happens, rehabilitation becomes just step one in a long, long process of development, in which communities reclaim their collective capacity to solve whatever serious problems come their way, and keep growing. It's no ghoulish claim to say that disaster rehabilitation can be an opportunity.

There is much in these people's stories that is worthy of careful examination and discussion, so their lessons can be learned from and passed on to other disaster situations, and so that policies which support people-driven rehabilitation can be mainstreamed. Especially as the earthquakes, mud-slides and hurricanes mount up around the globe, each dragging along its train of goof-ups, scandals, manipulations and tragically misdirected resources. In this brochure, we take a very brief look at how some of the initiatives, that were described in ACHR's August 2005 tsunami newsletter, are going.



SECURING LAND TENURE THAT WAS THREATENED :

Instead of waiting for anybody's permission, indigenous communities have been going back after the tsunami and rebuilding their settlements - with or without title papers. For many, this is an obvious response to a visceral need to reclaim their own land. But when others dispute their rights to that land, going back can be a powerful negotiating move.



REBUILDING COMMUNITIES THAT WERE DESTROYED :

The tsunami is bringing fishing communities all over Asia into a new understanding of what they are capable of - especially when they put their heads and hands together in the enormous task of rebuilding villages that were almost completely wiped away by the waves, and doing so in ways that revive long traditions of gently occupying their fragile coastal environments.



RESTORING LIVELIHOODS THAT WERE WIPED OUT :

For hard-working people used to doing for themselves, the loss of the means of earning a living after a calamity like the tsunami can be one of the most galling of all losses. The livelihood projects being supported by community loan funds and savings group federations are tackling this problem by giving people the tools to fish, vend, sell, make or serve again.



REVIVING CULTURES THAT WERE DISAPPEARING :

The waves were not the only thing that threatened the ways of life in Asia's coastal fishing communities. Tourism, development, market forces and globalization have all taken their toll on the delicate and richly varied indigenous cultures that still exist. Here's news of groups taking steps to hold on to and bring back to vivid life those cultures.

THAILAND

LAND TENURE :

The post-tsunami land-grab isn't over yet, but Thailand's embattled coastal communities have cause to be optimistic . . .

The battle for Thailand's lovely coastlines has been going on a long, long time, but it's been a low-key battle, staged in many, quiet, isolated skirmishes that almost nobody noticed. The losers, of course, have almost always been poor seaside fishing villages, who have been no match for the powerful commercial interests and their political allies ranged against them. Nobody knows how many have been dispossessed over the years to make way for the tin mines, shrimp farms and tourist resorts.

The tsunami didn't stop this battle, but it brought it out into the open like never before. The scenes of loss and suffering in the newspapers and on TV generated a new awareness of all the country had lost in its rush to turn its Andaman coast to profit. When stories emerged of politicians and prominent businessmen using the crisis to grab village land that had been cleared by the waves, traditional land rights versus commercial exploitation became a prominent point of public discussion, and sympathy was squarely on the villagers' side.

It didn't take long for Thailand's battered coastal communities and their supporters to realize the tsunami represented an opportunity for them as well. Despite having lived there for decades or even centuries, many of these villages remained messy patchworks of uncertain land status, overlapping ownership claims and tenurial vulnerability: evictions just waiting to happen. Here was a chance to use the crisis, the aid resources, the public spotlight and the momentum of reconstruction to secure their land and reverse the gears of cultural marginalization that were making their way of life an endangered species.



These communities have been living there for many generations, but without any land title or papers to prove the land belongs to them. After the tsunami, they went back to their own land and started constructing houses right away - whether they had the legal rights or not. If they didn't go back and occupy that land, it would probably be seized by powerful state and private sector forces. People knew this, so going back and rebuilding was an important step in negotiating for their land rights.

Maitree Jongkrajug, a community leader from Ban Nam Khem

Tsunami-hit communities with shaky land status get busy . . .

13 communities have got long-term tenure 76 communities are still working on it

Land quickly emerged as one of the most serious and complicated issues in tsunami reconstruction in all six affected provinces. Of the 418 affected coastal villages, about 89 had extremely shaky land status. Of these 89, about 32 communities found themselves embroiled in very nasty land conflicts soon after the tsunami. In the past year and a half, through energetic mobilizing, community reconstruction planning, negotiation and hard work, 13 of these communities (comprising 1,039 households) have managed to resolve their land conflicts and get secure, long-term land tenure through a variety of means. These breakthroughs didn't come like a shaft out of heaven, though. Even as they were still reeling from the trauma of the tsunami, these intrepid communities set to work on several fronts to build land tenure security for themselves, where none had existed before the waves hit :

- **Reoccupying old land** : In many conflict cases, people decided not to wait for permission from anybody but to quickly reoccupy their ruined land and start rebuilding their houses. This led to some tensions, but so far, none of these communities have been evicted.
- **Mapping old settlements** to begin compiling a record of what, who and how much was there before the waves hit, and to provide a base plan for their subsequent reconstruction planning.
- **Researching land history** and ownership, gathering a variety of documents which establish proof of long-term occupancy and determine the exact village boundaries, for land negotiations.
- **Surveying communities** : With support from community networks, NGOs and relief organizations, most affected communities (in both camps and villages) began gathering detailed information on their families (surviving and lost), condition of houses and settlements, employment and lost ID cards, as another important tool in their planning and land negotiations.
- **Preparing redevelopment plans** : With help from architects, most communities very soon began designing new layout plans and affordable house-types which met their needs. The plans and models that came out of this process proved to be powerful tools in subsequent land negotiations.

Stopping evictions before they happen :

Tsunami - affected communities with precarious land tenure (or embroiled in all-out land conflicts), in the six Andaman coastal provinces hit by the waves :

Land owner :	Conflicts solved :	Conflicts not yet solved :
■ On National Forestry and Marine land	9 communities (842 households)	43 communities (3,358 households)
■ On Treasury Department land	0 communities (0 households)	4 communities (186 households)
■ On land under Local Authority	3 communities (174 households)	5 communities (866 households)
■ On land claimed by private land-owners	1 community (23 households)	24 communities (771 households)
TOTAL	13 communities (1,039 households)	76 communities (5,181 households)

Help from the new land committee :

In January 2005, a month after the tsunami, a special high-level committee was set up to deal with the more serious land-conflicts in tsunami-hit areas. For the first three months, this committee, which included officials from all the key departments and ministries relating to land, social development, natural resources and environment (including CODI), was a champion of the land-rights of the affected fishing communities and helped negotiate pragmatic solutions in several "red-hot" conflict cases which allowed people to redevelop their communities on the same land - or on land near by.

A new land committee has now been set up under the National Poverty Reduction Program, and is taking over where the original committee left off. The Thai Community Foundation and CODI are both linking with this new committee, which is now gathering documentation on several of the outstanding land conflict cases in tsunami-hit areas to begin negotiations to find solutions.

TENURE OPTIONS:

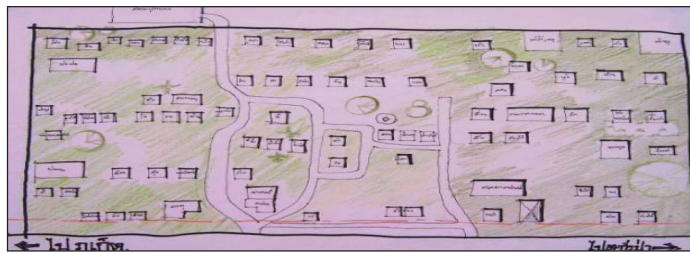
How these 13 villages have secured their land in the long term...

The 13 tsunami land conflict cases that have so far been resolved are part of a growing repertoire of strategies for how disaster-struck villages with insecure tenure can be rehabilitated with long-term tenure security and in ways which allow people to plan, construct and manage the process by themselves, through a redevelopment process which strengthens their way of life, instead of erasing it. Drawing on the community upgrading experiences around Thailand and help from Baan Mankong, a range of practical solutions have been worked out in these 13 cases, which fall into roughly three categories:

- **Reconstruction on the same site**, with long-term lease or user rights.
- **Resettlement to nearby private land** which the community purchased and holds title to.
- **Resettlement to nearby public land**, with long-term lease or user rights.

Collective land tenure:

Most of these first 13 communities have obtained tenure terms that are both long-term and collective. As long as market forces determine land use, the voice of money will probably always be stronger than those of equity, culture, environment or history in any contest involved in Thailand's development. Because of this, poor fishing villages will always be vulnerable to displacement, no matter how air-tight their leases or title deeds may be. So one way to strengthen their hand in future tenure struggles (*which will come without any doubt!*) has been to push for collective leases, collective title and collective user rights, which cannot be sold off individually, bit by bit. Collective land tenure makes the community the unit of security, which is much harder to manipulate than individual families.



◀ BEFORE

Before the tsunami, the Tung Wah village occupied 4.16 hectares of land along the main coastal highway.



◀ AFTER

Tung Wah gave 38% of the land (1.6 ha) to the Provincial Authority and kept 62% (2.56 ha) to rebuild their village and houses.

LAND SHARING continues to be one of the most pragmatic strategies for resolving land conflicts...

Land-owners in most of these conflict cases, whether public or private, usually claim the villagers are squatters and have no rights to the land. They show papers which supposedly prove their company or department is the real land owner. The validity of these papers may be questionable, but the reality is that it could take years to dig down under all the layers of shady deals and overlapping claims to find out who really does own the land or has the right to use it, and would almost certainly involve court cases. During that drawn-out process, the villager's lives would be in suspension, while the speculators would be unable to make any money on the land anyway, so everyone would lose.

One way of resolving such stand-offs is to set aside a portion of the land and allow people to rebuild their houses there (with legal, secure rights to the land) and give the rest to the land-owner to develop commercially. That's land sharing, when the disputed land is *shared* by both parties. Land-sharing has proven to be a practical compromise solution in many urban land-conflict situations in Thailand, and has now become an important strategy for use in resolving tsunami land conflicts.

The land sharing case at Tung Wah: The land sharing agreement that was reached at Tung Wah, a village of sea gypsy fisher folk that was totally destroyed by the waves, has become one of the most inspiring compromise solutions to a serious land conflict. When the District Authority tried to seize the villagers' ruined land after the tsunami, supposedly to build a public hospital, the community reoccupied the land they had lived on for generations and considered their own. With help from architects, they developed plans for rebuilding their community which called for keeping part of their original land for their houses, and giving part to the District. This land sharing proposal was accepted only after some very difficult haggling, but as part of the agreement, the villagers could then regularize their tenure status under a long-term communal land-lease.

What about renters and landless tsunami victims?

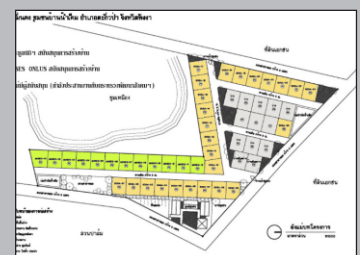
Special land and housing project allows 105 poor, landless tsunami-hit households to escape the cycle of exploitative rents with a place of their own...

Ban Nam Khem, the worst-hit settlement of Thailand's worst-hit province, is a maze of unclear and overlapping tenure claims and dicey land status, with disputes and court cases abounding. There is one group of survivors, though, who had no claim to anything, since they'd been living in cheap rental rooms when the waves hit. Among the village's poorest residents, they lost loved-ones, jobs and possessions like everyone else, but because they did not qualify for the government's housing compensation or relocation schemes, and are not part of any village reconstruction projects, there was no place for them. They had been organized into a group, though, and had begun to discuss possibilities.

In April, 2005, families in this situation got an unexpected boost when a US\$300,000 donation from Denmark's Crown Prince was used to set up a special fund to assist Ban Nam Khem's poorest survivors.

With support from CODI and NGOs, 105 renter families staying in the Bang Muang relief camp organized themselves and began discussing what to do. After forming a cooperative and identifying two plots of land just a half-kilometer down the road from Ban Nam Khem, the group bought the land and worked with architects to design houses and community layouts.

50 houses on the first site are now nearly finished, and work on the remaining 56 houses on the second site is about to begin. The new community used the Danish fund to pay for the houses and subsidize their community labor, and took out a CODI loan for the land, which was purchased collectively, through their new cooperative. The roads, drains and basic services in the two settlements are being developed by the people, using the Baan Mankong Program's US\$625-per-family infrastructure subsidy.



All these activities have been deliberately organized to get people to work together, plan together, build together - and forge ties where there had been none before.



The company's "No Trespassing" sign-board in Laem Pom.

THAILAND

THE TOUGHEST FOES :

Communities on land being claimed by private sector entrepreneurs face some of the most difficult tenure battles of all ...

Of the remaining 76 tsunami-affected communities on the "uncertain land status" list, the most acrimonious are those disputes involving private sector entrepreneurs who are claiming ownership of the villagers' land.

In the early 20th Century, a lot of these coastal lands were concessioned out to tin mining companies, even though many had already been occupied by villages and fishing communities for ages. When the mining concessions expired in the 1960s, the land should have reverted to public control, but a thousand shady land dealings have facilitated the transfer of huge amounts of this public land (both occupied and unoccupied) into the hands of a new generation of entrepreneurs and speculators.

Huge amounts of money in land values and potential profits from tourism and fisheries are at stake, and the beneficiaries of these questionable land deals are not about to give up their golden goose. Many of these villagers, by the same token, have likewise dug in their heels and are clearly willing to fight to keep their ancestral land, using a range of "people's" strategies and more formal measures :

1 Reoccupying their land and start rebuilding houses immediately, to prevent others from seizing their land and to symbolically stake their claim to it. In fact, not a single community using this strategy has so far been actually evicted.

2 Preparing their cases by gathering documents, aerial photos, and village records which determine the land ownership and establish the community's length of occupation.

3 Networking : Residents in all these tsunami land conflict communities now have their own network which meets regularly to share ideas and news and strategies for dealing with the legal aspects of their land struggles.

Three communities fighting private land-owners :

1

47 families at BAN TAP TAWAN

Tap Tawan is a small Sea Gypsy fishing village in Phangnga's Takua Paa District. All 47 houses were swept away by the tsunami, but most of the coconut trees planted by earlier generations survived. Tap Tawan was the first village in Thailand to use the strategy of "invading" their own land, to defy claims of ownership by a rich landlord, who appeared right after the tsunami with spurious title deeds. They were also the first to start building permanent houses on their land, without asking for anyone's permission, which ended up strengthening their claim to that land. The beautiful timber and bamboo stilt houses they have built, using private donor funds and help from volunteer architects, stand as a defiant statement of possession. Their case is now one of several being forwarded for help to the national tsunami land tenure committee.



2

20 families at BAN NAIRAI

This Muslim fishing village in southern Phangnga is in a coastal area of tourist resorts and deep pits left over from tin-mining days. Nairai's original settlers were mining laborers, but their grandchildren now work as fishermen or boat-hands. The tsunami destroyed most of the community, but when the people came back, a rich factory owner appeared with title deeds, claiming to have bought 120 hectares of the land (almost the entire village!) at auction 40 years

ago. He got the police to try to stop people from rebuilding and filed a court case. Eventually, a group of 20 families decided to quickly reoccupy a small portion of their old land and start building modest wooden houses, designed with help from architecture students. Nairai's struggle against eviction has been supported by the 4-Regions Slum Network and volunteers from many parts of the country. The community is now preparing documents to submit their case to the national land tenure committee for help. So far, land records, old aerial photos and the community's research have called into question the legality of 18 of this land-owner's 23 title deeds.



3

30 families at BAN LAEM POM

Laem Pom, a seaside community of fishermen and laborers, was also settled by tin mine laborers on public land when the concessions expired in the 1970s. The land conflict dates back three years before the tsunami, when a powerful national politician showed up with land ownership documents and ordered the people to leave, so his company could turn the village's 67 hectares into a golf course and luxury hotel. As Rattree Kongwatmai, Laem Pom's determined leader, puts it, "How could this state land become somebody's personal property unless there was some fishy business involved? If anyone should have the right to stay at Laem Pom, it should be the villagers who built this community." Even after the tsunami wiped out the whole settlement and killed nearly half its residents, the company, with the support of local authorities and land department officials, continued to intimidate the villagers with barricades, armed thugs and bulldozers. But two months after the tsunami, all thirty surviving families defied the threats and returned to reclaim their land. The atmosphere was full of exhilaration as the villagers helped each other

clear the debris, set up tents and a communal kitchen and begin rebuilding their homes. In subsequent months, the case won national media attention. Volunteers and community people from many parts of the country came to help rebuild and support this tiny village's struggle against big money. With help from the Thai Community Foundation, the people have gathered documents about their land's history and aerial photos which prove how long they've occupied it, to strengthen their legal right to stay. They've also petitioned the National Human Rights Commission and the Senate Committee on Social Development and Human Security to investigate the legality of the land title documents in an effort to disprove their dubious claims.





Networking between affected communities, within provinces and between ethnic groups has given tsunami-ravaged community people innumerable chances to compare notes, share stories, join efforts and borrow strategies for rebuilding their lives.

THE POWER OF PEOPLE'S NETWORKS:

Vulnerable communities find that linking together in different ways allows them to do all kinds of things they could never do in isolation

From the day after the waves hit, the experience of tsunami relief and rehabilitation in Thailand has provided one of the most vivid illustrations yet of the power of community networks. People-helping-people in innumerable ways, and according to a bewildering variety of groupings and overlappings, has streamlined and humanized almost every aspect of the long task of rehabilitation. It is one of the peculiar aspects of the Thai context that different groups doing different things are able to link their activities and learning with each other quite smoothly, when it's useful to do so. That way, if one community or one province does something interesting, other communities can know about it immediately - through the meetings, seminars, exchanges and sharing that happens almost automatically through the larger platform which networks create. This is especially important during a crisis, when you have to move fast and when ideas and developments have to be shared quickly. Once this larger platform is in place, it can become a balancing and mediating force between groups.

1 Networks in tsunami areas : Each province has a network of tsunami-affected communities, and these networks link with each other in many ways. Community leaders know the problems and know how to push the problems to the government and tell what they need - all this comes from the network. Networks allow people to help themselves, to know what to do, to help other communities, to even manage their own funds.

2 Networks of mutual assistance : The Community Planning Network, which is very active in southern Thailand, was one of the first community groups to come offering help in tsunami-hit areas. They helped with relief operations, brought in large teams of community volunteers to build temporary houses, organized communities to negotiate against eviction, helped set up boat-building workshops and supported "horizontal learning" between tsunami-hit communities, which is a big feature of their own network's mode of operation.

3 Boat-building networks : Exchanges between the first community boat-building groups inspired the setting up of similar groups in other villages, showed skeptical fishermen that they too could build and repair their own boats and get back to sea, instead of waiting for government compensation. Soon, the growing number of boat yards became a network, helping each other negotiate, revive boat-building skills and provide moral support.

4 Networks of sea-gypsy communities : These indigenous Andaman fishing communities, which were badly hit by the tsunami, never used to link with each other, and their struggles to retain their land and their culture were waged in isolation. But since the tragic crisis of the tsunami, they link constantly and have forged bonds which are now a source of "sea gypsy pride."

5 Networks of communities with land conflicts : Networks have also become a political tool, when communities with precarious land tenure begin sharing strategies with each other and negotiating as a large block with the government on land rights issues.

6 Networks of communities in special tourism zones : Communities in places where government has plans to turn their constituencies into special tourism development zones also now have their own network, which shares information about all the government plans and projects which affect their traditional communities. If people are aware of the potential benefits and drawbacks of these projects they can fight them together.

LIVELIHOOD FUNDS:

Community-managed revolving loan funds help survivors get back on their feet economically . . .

By mid January, 2005, there were some 4,000 people living in the sprawling tsunami relief camp at Bang Muang, in Phangnga's worst-hit Takua Paa District. Though they had lost everything and were traumatized and bereaved, most of these hard-working people were acutely uncomfortable finding themselves in the role of dependent aid recipient, and were itching to get back to work. Loss of livelihood was one of the biggest problems survivors in Bang Muang faced, and so setting up income generation projects to help them regain their self-sufficiency became a top priority.

A number of government agencies, NGOs and relief organizations were helping to set up various kinds of income generation projects in the camp. The camp's community committee decided early on to link all these efforts and organize them under a single revolving livelihood fund, which would support these various occupation groups with loans, financial and accounting assistance, skill training, and marketing help. The new fund was established with an initial capital from CODI, and from the very beginning was managed entirely by the affected community members themselves. Savings groups were also established within all the various occupation groups, as a strategy for getting people back into the mode of managing their own finances, as a group. A headquarters for the new fund and all the livelihood activities was set up at the center of the camp, in space borrowed from the District Authority. Similar livelihood funds were soon operating in other camps, and in many of the tsunami-hit villages.

Skilled Workers Group

boat building, boat engine repair, house construction work, masonry

Food / Handicraft Group

handicrafts, souvenirs, sweets, frame-making, batik, artificial flowers, tailoring, weaving

Services Group

traditional massage, laundry, motorcycle taxi

Revolving Fund

Traders Group

fish selling, coffee stalls, vendors, 3-wheeler transport

Agriculture Group

catfish farming, fish raising in tanks, mushroom growing

Fisheries Group :

net making, big net fishing, crab fishing, sea fishing





THAILAND

CULTURE AS GLUE :

Here's a case where something much deeper than relief and rebuilding is being used to help local people retake control of their island's destiny ...

In February 2005, Koh Lanta Island, in Krabi Province, became an important test case for an unusual kind of participatory, post disaster planning process, through a special program developed jointly by the island's local communities and administrative authorities, the Thai Community Foundation, CODI, Chulalongkorn University and UNDP.

The waves were much less destructive in Lanta than elsewhere, so here was an opportunity to plunge right into some deeper development issues, without getting too caught up in emergency relief and reconstruction. As Pi Duang, Chumchon Thai Foundation's director puts it, *"In Phangnga, we had to begin with house building, but here we could focus on building the people's process first."* This ambitious program is taking post-disaster rehabilitation a long way past conventional relief and reconstruction, using the tsunami as a spring-board for a much wider, island-wide process of reviving Koh Lanta's indigenous communities, its culture, its environment and its economic autonomy. The program operates on two important principles :

- **Collaboration between local stakeholders is a must :** The program brings together all the local stakeholders (communities, fishermen, local authorities, merchants, NGOs) to sit together, talk about their island, identify problems and begin framing a shared vision of how to safeguard its assets and guide its future development.
- **Local communities are the prime movers in the process :** The program then provides space and resources for local groups to initiate a wide range of projects to address these problems, in all of which *people are the key actors*.

For some very good reports on the Koh Lanta and Koh Mook projects, please visit the website of UNDP-Thailand (<http://undp.or.th>).

KOH LANTA: Using the crisis of the tsunami to spearhead a whole island's cultural revival

Over the past two decades, Koh Lanta island, which is just two short ferry rides from the mainland, has been developing into another tourist destination for the beach-seeking set, with resorts, guest-houses, restaurants and boutiques springing up along the island's sandy western beaches. The eastern side of the island, however, retains the sleepy, local ambience of the island's long history before the tourist boom. Over here, water buffaloes graze along the quiet roads between fishing villages, with mangrove forests and rocky beaches on the shore-side, and glimmering rice paddies and coconut plantations inland.

When the tsunami struck, the waves left the touristy side untouched, and struck only a few parts of this quieter side of the island, where houses and boats in two villages were particularly damaged. The Lanta program covers the whole island - not just these damaged communities - but the tsunami was the catalyst that opened up issues which had been brewing since long before the tsunami: the cultural marginalization and precarious land tenure of Lanta's original communities, environmental degradation, rampant commercialization and increasing control of the island's development by outside commercial interests and government tourism development schemes. The problems were not huge yet, but everyone could see the storms coming.

The program covers issues of land, housing, development, tourism, livelihood, natural resource management and environment, and gives a great deal of freedom to local groups to develop their own projects. Environmental management on a small island like Lanta is a delicate issue, so some projects are focusing on solid waste management, creating garbage-free communities and organic farming. But the overwhelming majority of projects focus on reviving cultural practices of Koh Lanta's indigenous Muslim, Sea Gypsy, Buddhist and Chinese communities, and involve master craftspeople, artists, builders, dancers, musicians, fishermen, boat-builders, chefs, clothing makers, herbalists, story-tellers, farmers and many others. All these activities are creating new strength among the communities and boosting their confidence in dealing with local authorities, which earlier were reluctant to go along.

COFFEE COUNCILS : Many activities initiated as part of the program turn conventional planning practices on their head. For example, public forums that include community organizations, academics, traders, fishermen, women's groups, NGOs, district officials and the Mayor are now a regular feature of island life. Dubbed "coffee councils" in the local language, these forums are now an official decision-making ritual in Koh Lanta, in which everyone is encouraged to contribute, everyone allowed their say.

FIRST JOINT PLANNING DECISION : All 13 traditional communities on Koh Lanta get secure land tenure with long term leases ...

Work in Koh Lanta began with the rebuilding of boats and houses in the two fishing villages which bore the brunt of the waves. Both the Muslim fishing village of Ban Hualaam and the Sea Gypsy village of Ban Sang Ka U have occupied their shoreline land for over a century. At first, the district agreed to let the people stay and rebuild *in situ*, but later tried to get them to relocate to inland resettlement sites. The authorities even went so far as to start building some new houses on a hill nearby, but the people refused to leave.

On Lanta Island, there are 13 old communities whose land tenure has been similarly precarious, even before the waves hit. Some years ago, the land most of these villages occupy was reclassified as public land, under control of the Department of Forests. In all 13 cases, however, the villagers had used the land with great respect and gentleness for generations, for their modest fishing, farming and living purposes, since long before the Department of Forests was ever established. To prove this long occupation, the villagers have learned to collect evidence like anthropologists, using oral histories, tree ring analysis, identity cards, aerial photos



and old village revenue records.

In one of the first and most significant joint decisions made in this unprecedented new island-wide joint planning process, all the local groups and local authorities agreed that every single one of the island's traditional fishing communities would be allowed to stay, with long-term secure land tenure, through collective land leases. Meanwhile Ban Hualaam and Ban Sang Ka U villages have been completely rebuilt.

An island like no other in the world :

Rediscovering those things which make Koh Lanta so much more than just another generic tropical paradise . . .

As in so many parts of Thailand, tourism is in danger of reducing Lanta to just one more generic tourist paradise, with palm fringed beaches and sea-front condos that could be anywhere. In a globalizing world obsessed with perpetuating sameness, the very old and unique traditions of Koh Lanta's original occupants may indeed seem irrelevant and therefore ripe for the rubbish bin. But as they began digging down into their history and cultural practices, the islanders found more and more to be proud of. And as they did so, the more they realized how powerful culture can be, as a kind of glue which binds people together and makes them feel part of a larger whole. So what are some of the things that only Koh Lanta people do?



1 Reviving the Sleeping on the beach festival ("Non Haat")

In this very old festival of Koh Lanta's indigenous fisher folk, which is neither Buddhist nor Muslim, families gather on the beach to make offerings and negotiate favors from the sea spirits. Thatched shelters are put up along the beach, and for three celebratory nights (during one auspicious full-moon each year, using the Thai lunar calendar), the fisher folk cook together, meet their relatives, watch the moon, pray, romance and generally have a good time.

2 Bringing back the Boat Launching Ceremony ("Loy Reua")

This twice-yearly *Ulak Rawoy* Sea Gypsy festival is rich with tradition and symbolism, and is also being revived. A balsa tree is cut down and on the first day and fashioned into a beautiful model boat. On the second day, this boat is festooned with flowers and candles and on the third day set afloat, with prayers for good fishing and fair skies during the coming fishing season. In between all these rituals, there is of course plenty of food and rice wine and merriment.

3 Restoring the island's old wooden "Long Houses"

For over 500 years, Koh Lanta's seaside dwellers have built long, narrow wooden houses at right angles to the shore, with their front-sides facing markets or roadways inland, and their back-sides built on stilts, right over the water, where their boats can be tethered. In the island's fishing and market settlements, many of these *long houses* survive, of one, two and three stories, and between 30 and 50 meters long. Many feature beautiful wooden fretwork and carved ventilating panels. In one project, many of these houses are being lovingly restored.

4 Opening a Koh Lanta History Museum

In another project, the old City Hall in Ban Koh Lanta, which long ago was a port-of-call on the southeast Asian trade routes, is being converted into a museum of Koh Lanta's history and culture. Gathering oral histories, photographs, artifacts, old fishing gear, historic maps, family genealogies, and lore for this museum has since become an island-wide obsession.

5 Learning to build wooden long-tail boats again

With support from boat-making workshops in other tsunami-hit areas and fisher folk from across southern Thailand, boat yards have been set up in villages around Koh Lanta to repair or replace the hundreds of boats destroyed by the waves. In recent decades, Lanta's fishermen have begun buying their boats instead of making them, so skills have gotten rusty, and these boat yards are doubling as training sites for reviving the craft of building these beautiful wooden boats.

6 Reviving ancient rice species and occupations of all sorts

Several livelihood projects have also been launched to beef up islanders' earnings. In one, a women's group is producing handicrafts, souvenirs, household products and clothes using coconut byproducts and other local raw materials. In another, an island-wide rice bank has been set up, while several agricultural projects are reestablishing traditional crop-rotation and chemical-free farming practices and reviving lesser known local rice species.

The importance of community networks :

Community network-building is an important part of Koh Lanta's revival program. In many of Thailand's prime tourist areas, like Koh Lanta, the government is forever tabling bills to create "*special economic zones*" or "*sustainable tourism blueprints*", which basically take planning and development decisions out of the hands of local constituencies and provide a framework for the fat cats to displace communities and bypass local planning procedures and environmental regulations in developing their resorts and prawn farms. These bills are often fiercely opposed, but tourism is big money in Thailand - communities fighting alone against these forces don't stand a chance. But when they link with each other into island-wide, province-wide, and national networks, or build information-sharing and mutual support links with communities in other tourism hot-spots, they can begin to deal with the more destructive aspects of these forces in a more organized, collective and effective way. And when these networks develop joint-venture projects in their own constituencies, with their local authorities, it's a partnership builder of the best sort, and can be a powerful antidote to top-down planning.



THAILAND

KOH MOOK ISLAND :

Another island-wide post-tsunami rebuilding experiment that focuses on tenure and environmental sustainability . . .

Koh Mook is a tiny and very beautiful island just a few kilometers off the shores of Trang Province, at the extreme southern end of Thailand. There is only one community on the island, but it is divided into six clusters of houses, each organized around its own small bay, all a short walk from each other. There are a total of about 400 families living in the Koh Mook community, with a population about 2,000. Most are Muslim fisher folk who for centuries have fished and cultured pearls for centuries. This is the kind of place where everyone knows each other here and live together like members of a big, extended family.

Koh Mook island was one of the most badly devastated areas of Trang Province. Since most of its residents live very close to the beach, just about everyone on the island suffered some loss of life, boats or houses when the tsunami struck.

The island is the target of another post-disaster community planning and revival program, being jointly organized in four badly hit communities (along with Tung Wah Village in Phangnga, Taa Chatchai Village in Phuket, Sai Dam in Ranong) as a collaborative venture by the local people, the Thai Community Foundation, CODI and UNDP. The project on Koh Mook is similar to the one on Koh Lanta, involving house repair, settlement upgrading, land tenure regularization, cultural and environmental revival, sustainable tourism and environmental management, but is much smaller in scale.

**Collective tenure rights :**

The 194 households which will continue living on public land in Koh Mook will be given long-term user rights which allow them to live there more-less forever – but these user rights are collective, and belong to the village as a whole (not to individual families), to protect from buying and selling in the future.

Developing intricate, island-wide solutions which ensure **EVERYONE** gets secure land and housing :

Even though it's very small, Koh Mook has got very big land tenure problems. More than half of the island's households live on land belonging to private sector or government landowners, most without any papers. After the tsunami, there were some serious troubles when several government and private land owners tried to use the crisis as a chance to evict families from their land, whether their houses were damaged or not.

With support from the Thai Community Foundation, Save the Andaman Network (SAN) and the UNDP project, the people began exploring collective strategies for solving the whole island's land problems, in one fell swoop. They began by surveying the whole community and the problems everyone sustained as a result of the waves. They found that of the island's 400 households, 248 have land problems.

Through a series of community meetings and planning sessions, with cooperation from the local authority and special high-level Tsunami Land Tenure Committee, the people gradually developed a comprehensive plan for providing secure land and housing for all these 248 families with land problems. What they finally came up with was a very delicate plan which sorted the problems and the solutions into three parts :

248 Families with tenure problems :

- 100 families are living on National Park land
- 24 families are living on Port Authority land
- 9 families are living on Coastal Zone land
- 70 families are squatting on private land
- 45 families are living on family members' land

- 54 households which own other land on the island will move there and build new houses.
- 100 households squatting on national park land will rebuild their houses on the same land, with long-term communal user rights.
- 94 households will relocate to a 3-hectare piece of national forest land offered by government and build a new community and houses there.

Once the proposed plan was finalized, it was officially submitted to the Tsunami Tenure Committee, which then worked with the various land-owning agencies and departments concerned with land problems, to OK the plan. Eventually, the whole plan was approved. On March 7, 2006, a gala ceremony was held to erect the first columns in all 248 houses being built around the island, with General Surin, the very supportive chairman of Tsunami Land Tenure Committee presiding.

MANGROVES, DUGONGS and CORAL :

Koh Mook residents find that making a softer ecological footprint on their island's fragile ecosystem makes good sense for people - and beasts!



There is a wondrous sea creature that lives in the shallow waters off Koh Mook. The dugong (called *Plaa Payoon* in Thai) is a huge sea mammal whose haunting song is said to so closely resemble that of a woman's that sailors have mistaken them for mermaids. These gentle, vegetarian 400-kilo, 5-meter-long mammals, though considered a national treasure in Thailand, look very little like mermaids! Herds of dugong feast on the lush sea-grass meadows that grow in the clear shallow seas that lie beyond coastal mangrove forests, which are habitats for all kinds of shellfish and sea life. Long ago, the waters around Koh Mook were

full of frolicking dugong, but their sea-grass feeding grounds have gradually been destroyed by the big fishing trawlers, whose nets rake up the floor of the sea and frequently cause dugong (who must come up for air every few minutes) to drown. When mangroves are cut down, this also causes the sea-grass beds to deteriorate, which in turn causes the coral reefs beyond the sea-grass beds to break down, which in turn means all kinds of sea life begins to disappear – and no more dugongs.

The whole thing is a lesson in the fragility and minute interdependence of all ecosystems, and it is a lesson villagers in Koh Mook have been re-learning in their earnest project to bring their island – and the seas which surround it – back to an earlier state of life and health after the tsunami.

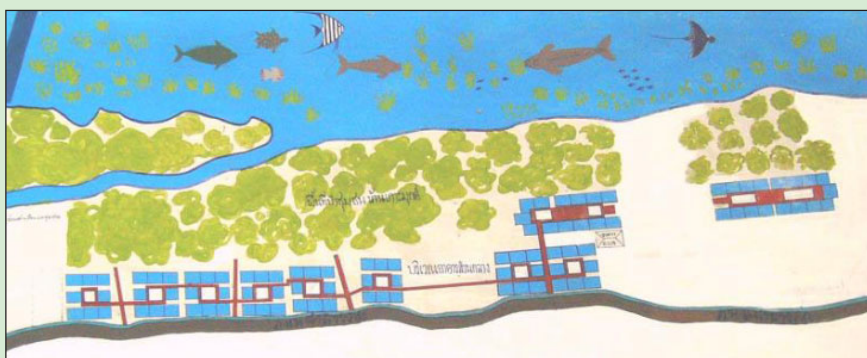
A FIRST IN THAILAND :

New “floating community” in Koh Mook is built on stilts and leaves undisturbed the changing tides and rich mangrove eco-systems down underneath ...

For Koh Mook's 94 landless families who were granted alternatives land by the Tsunami Land Committee, their new home is a 3-hectare piece of Forest Department land, located right in the middle of a coastal mangrove forest (*Paa Chailane* in Thai). On this unusual site, the people are now building a similarly unusual and ecologically-light-footed settlement of stilt houses, with a central “floating walkway” which links all the houses together and provides a public space for all kinds of community activities. The single story houses will be very simply built of wood, and range in size from 24 to 34 square meters. The whole development is built up on top of slender concrete columns, to minimize the impact on this fragile mangrove environment, and to allow the tides to come and go down below. For these families, most of whom are fishermen, the site provides easy access to the sea, but is also very well protected from storms and high seas by the mangroves.

If you've never been in a mangrove forest, you've really missing something. The shade in there can be quite deep, so deep that even in the middle of the day, they can be quite dark and eerily quiet. When the tide is in, it's like being in a flooded forest, and you can tootle around amongst the thick foliage in a small rowboat. When the tide is out, a thick confusion of gnarled gray roots lie exposed, along with the rank, brackish mud these trees especially love. As silent and lonely as they may seem, the mangroves are actually teeming with animal, fish, bird and plant life.

This new site for the 94 landless families is technically public land, under the Forest Department's protected coastal mangrove category. The people will obtain collective user rights to the land, which they will not be able to sell or develop for any purpose other than for their housing and fishing purposes. Construction of the walkways has already begun, with the entire island's population chipping in with labor. The houses cost about US\$ 1,800, which comes from donations. The services and infrastructure will be subsidized by CODI's Baan Mankong Upgrading program.



All with a little help from a team of sensitive, low-profile community architects ...

The housing project in Koh Mook makes a good example of how young architects can bring a lot more to a project than simply helping translate villagers' ideas into solid drawings and plans. The floating community in Koh Mook was designed by the community people through a series of workshops organized by *Community Architects for Shelter and Environment (CASE)*, an association of professional designers who have been working with poor communities on their housing initiatives for many years. For architects used to squeezing as much as possible into extremely crowded, un-beautiful urban sites, this breezy and environmentally challenging site on Koh Mook opened up all sorts of possibilities for both designers and people taking part in the design process.

In these ways, architects and planners can play an extremely important role in promoting new and imaginative physical manifestations of change, in which sensitive planning, affordability, community involvement and practicality can be introduced in such a way as to solve not only the community's serious needs, but also produce a better local environment.

For more information about the work of CODI, the Thai Community Foundation and other networks and NGOs involved in Thailand's tsunami reconstruction, contact ACHR or CODI :

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ACEH, INDONESIA

A celebration of people-driven reconstruction, one year after the waves hit :

On the first-year anniversary of the tsunami, governments in Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India all organized high-profile commemorations to honor the hundreds of thousands who died in the waves. TV viewers worldwide watched moving footage of doves being released, dignitaries giving speeches, candle-light vigils and interviews with survivors on BBC and CNN. Much less publicized, but as important, were some one-year-after events organized by some of the tsunami's most vulnerable survivors, living in coastal fishing communities in Thailand and Indonesia. These people's tsunami commemorations gave large numbers of traumatized communities a chance to collectively reflect on their losses, but at the same time to consider all the work they'd done rebuilding their lives and settlements over the past year. One such event was the one-year-tsunami people's dialogue in Banda Aceh in early January 2006, hosted by Udeep Beusaree ("Live together" in Acehese), a network of 25 tsunami-affected coastal villages which have been rebuilding their villages, with support from the national Uplink network.

A big group of tsunami survivors from India, Thailand and Sri Lanka, as well as some earthquake survivors from Pakistan and India got a chance to compare notes on all the big issues of rehabilitation - land tenure, housing, livelihood revival and dealing with misguided government regulations - with the Acehese and Uplink groups from other parts of Indonesia.

The centerpiece of the dialogue was the enormous, people-planned and people-built rebuilding program that is going on in the 25-villages - a program which involves the construction of a staggering 3,500 earthquake-resistant houses (2,751 already finished), full roads and infrastructural facilities and an extensive "eco-development" program to restore mangroves and create layers of built and planted safety barriers between the sea and the villages.

Udeep Beusaree Network of 25 villages rebuilds : Welcome to one of the busiest parts of Banda Aceh . . .

By January 2006, it was shocking for many visitors to see how little the situation had changed as they went bumping out into the vast, treeless wastes of ruins and brackish water where two-thirds of the city of Banda Aceh once stood. The big chunks of rubble had been cleared away and the monsoon rains had sweetened the air and brought back the greenery of swamp grasses and the sound of crickets, but there was very little rebuilding of houses or roads. Elsewhere in the province, 70,000 people (30% of Aceh's tsunami survivors) still languished in tents and barracks. The government's "transitional shelter" reconstruction program had not even begun yet - forget about permanent housing! For those lucky enough to get housing being built by aid agencies, there was no choice, no involvement.

Things changed dramatically when you reached the 8-kilometer stretch of coastline where the 25 villages in the Udeep Beusaree Network are located, and where the transformation from silent ruin to cheerful and chaotic rebuilding was sudden and dramatic! Suddenly, the shiny galvanized tin roofs of hundreds of new houses appeared out of the gloom, and stretched along the horizon to where Aceh's cinnamon and coffee-growing hills meet its narrow coastal plain. Everywhere, there were crews of people laying bricks, hammering up roof frames, sawing timber joists, pouring concrete, bending iron reinforcing bars - or just hanging out in their dozens at the little make-shift coffee houses that have continued to multiply across the ruined city. Some villagers had already planted orchards (star fruit, coconut, oranges and mangosteen), and in places where the salt water had somehow drained away, there were even some patches of iridescent green rice paddies. The roads along the villages were still bumpy, but they'd been lined with colorful banners and kerosene torches to light the visitors way home at night, in lieu of electricity.

These are the villages that just 12 months earlier had been totally leveled by the tsunami. Between half and three-quarters of their populations had been swept away, along with their houses, boats, cars, toys, books, televisions and furniture - *everything*. But these are also the villages which had defied the government's original decree forbidding rebuilding within 2 kilometers of the sea, who marched out of the relief camps and back to their land, where they began energetically rebuilding their ruined houses and villages. The project to rebuild these villages makes a very potent demonstration of how much faster, cheaper, more appropriate and more comprehensive post-disaster rehabilitation can be when the survivors themselves - as a large collective group - are in charge, and are supported to do what they need.



During the 3-day dialogue, more than 150 participants were feasted on spicy Acehese delicacies, driven around town in pedicabs by the local *becak* drivers group and accommodated by villagers whose new houses are finished. Besides being an inexpensive way of accommodating a large number of participants, these home stays allowed tsunami-hit people from other parts of Asia to experience first hand this exciting phase of reconstruction in Aceh. The warmth of the welcome, the quiet, the star-filled skies at night, and the pride with which these battered villagers could at last properly host guests, after a year of unspeakable hardships, smoothed over any discomforts in the slightly primitive conditions.

Bringing back the spirit with activities :

One of the main goals behind this huge reconstruction process has been to rebuild trust and a spirit of collective action in these battered communities, to show other disaster-hit communities and the government that with a little support, even the most traumatized people can get to work right away building a better life for themselves. Especially in Aceh, where years of civil strife have left hope and social cohesion in these villages badly torn and in need of mending, even before the waves hit. Virtually every activity in the rehabilitation process has been consciously organized and designed to build this collective, self-help spirit: from surveying, to mapping, constructing temporary houses, drafting village plans, designing and building permanent houses, starting livelihood projects, revitalizing agriculture, pre-

paring eco-village plans, etc. Uplink tried from the very start to help bring these villagers together into a network, so that the survivors didn't feel that they were by themselves, but had brothers and sisters in other villages, other tsunami-affected cities and countries. When people mourn together, cook together, plan together, build together and create a new future for themselves together, that is real rehabilitation in the fullest sense. Mind you, the picture hasn't all been rosy: there have been plenty of conflicts, differences of opinion, and clashes with aid groups aggressively pushing their various agendas in these villages. But the network mechanism - and the innumerable meetings and overlapping activities it promotes - allow plenty of opportunities to turn these disagreements into learning for everyone.

Building 3,500 earthquake-proof houses : 2,751 houses completed or under way, 749 houses to go. All will be finished by the end of July 2006 . . .

About 300,000 houses in Aceh were destroyed by the tsunami, or by the earthquake which preceded it. The project to build 3,500 houses and full infrastructure in the 25 villages in the Udeep Beusaree Network may resolve only 1% of this staggering need, but it still represents an enormous undertaking for the villagers, and for their technical supporters in the Uplink network. The project follows a holistic approach to village rebuilding, in which the planning and reconstruction process is being used as a means to revive the environment, economy, culture and spirit of mutual assistance in these 25 destroyed fishing villages. By June 2005, a swift and intense process of village planning had more-less been completed, which covered the design of public spaces, waste management, composting, drainage, water and sanitation, dikes, electricity, alternative energy sources, tree planting, eco-village planning and house design. By July, construction was in full steam. The modest houses, which all had to be built within the budget ceiling of US\$4,200, are all designed to be enlarged incrementally, as people's needs expand or their means allow them to do so.

1 Houses for G.A.M. rebels brought into housing projects :

In addition to the 3,000 houses being built for surviving families in the 25 villages, the networks also decided to build another 500 houses to provide homes for returning members of the Free Aceh Movement, the rebels who are now coming down from the jungles and returning to their villages and ordinary life, after the signing of the peace agreement in Helsinki.

2 Dealing with the complicated issues of land consolidation :

In some of the villages in the network, the sea has eaten away a lot of the village land that was closer to the sea. Several villages want to relocate themselves a little further inland, for safety sake. In such villages, they are planning a process of "land consolidation" in which property rights are rearranged in order to allow the layout and location of the village to be adjusted. This is a complex process because virtually all the land is privately owned.

3 60% of the reconstruction budget should stay in the village :

The project has set a target that 60% of the funds for reconstructing houses and infrastructure should stay in the village, so the rebuilding process boosts the village economies. This means hiring local suppliers, local masons, local laborers and supervisors as much as possible (though many such skilled workers died). If they can't be found, then they try to find them in other network villages nearby. To buy less bricks from outside suppliers, the network set up several soil-cement block-making yards, using a technology borrowed from friends in Gujarat. These yards are now producing most of the high-quality building blocks used in the new houses, and are providing employment to dozens of villagers in the process.

4 The one no-compromise requirement is seismic safety :

People can make whatever design changes they like to the basic house models being built in the project. But the one non-negotiable rule in the project is that all the houses must be built to be safe, following the principals of special reinforcement for earthquake resistance, with four ring beams (at foundation, sill, lintel and roof levels), reinforcing at corners, double-thick brick walls, etc. No human being can build a house to withstand a tsunami, but they can definitely build a house which will not fall on anybody and kill them in an earthquake.



The architects have dubbed these stilt houses, which draw on design wisdom from traditional Acehnese houses, "Classical", where the more modern houses on ground level are "Jazz."

CLASSICAL or JAZZ : Traditional Acehnese stilt houses make a comeback - with modifications - in Banda Aceh

The communities worked with young architects on Uplink's technical team to design several basic house models which people could choose from: some on-the-ground models and some houses designed up on concrete columns, all buildable within the budget of US\$4,200. At first people preferred the ground-floor houses, which were considered more "modern", but the stilt houses have since been winning many converts, especially in villages closest to the sea. There never used to be any floods here, but after the tsunami, the landscape has changed dramatically, coastal land has dropped by two meters and people are now worried about water. The stilt houses are built with all the seismic-resistant features of the ground-level houses, but the design allows the main living area upstairs to be built lightly of wood, on top of a stout concrete base of slab and pillars, through which the water can flow without affecting the house above. The stilt houses offers the additional advantage of extra space: the ground-floor houses have only 39 square meters of living space, the stilt house offers 36 square meters down and another 36 sm above, almost doubling the useable space and allowing for much bigger kitchens.

ACEH, INDONESIA

PEOPLE'S LAND SURVEYS :

The struggle to get the government to recognize people's information about their own villages

Almost all families in the 25 villages owned their land before the tsunami, but the land records and district land record offices were all destroyed in the waves, leaving no official record of who owns what land in the area. To complicate things further, the tsunami wiped out all the landmarks which used to identify plot boundaries, and many families were completely wiped out, leaving nobody to claim their land.

Very early on, before the permanent housing construction began, the network decided to work with Uplink to undertake a complete survey of the ruined villages, which included a participatory land mapping and full enumeration of surviving families. After this information was gathered, a set of more technical digital land survey maps were prepared by the Uplink technical team, supervised by villagers.

When the survey maps for all 25 villages were completed, after months and months of painstaking work, the network submitted the whole set to the government, which promptly announced they would now repeat the same thing themselves! They said that the surveyors have to be government surveyors! It was only after an intense round of negotiation and relentless advocacy work that they were finally able to convince the government to accept the people's land survey and land tenure lists as official land records. The Land Survey Department is now re-registering all the villagers' land and issuing legal land ownership certificates, all according to the land survey which people did themselves. The land issue is still not fully resolved, but lots of problems which might have emerged around land have been avoided, as a result of this open, community mapping and surveying process.

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Please come to my home
and spend the night,
if you'd like to.
I'm sorry, you won't sleep
on a mattress.
Even the walls of my home
were torn down some days ago.
I can only promise that tonight,
there will be millions of stars
giving us company.

(A poem composed by a network member and printed on one of the Udeep Beusaree Network calanders for sale at the one-year tsunami anniversary event)

Rehabilitation is not just rebuilding houses but rebuilding the local village economies also . . .

As the new permanent housing nears completion, the Udeep Beusaree network's project to bring their lives and village back to life is gradually making room for economic activities and to expand plans to bring back more earning opportunities into the villages.

In the first year, the construction process itself has generated a great deal of economic life in the villages. As Kiran Vaghela, a civil engineer from India who has been assisting the network puts it, "Livelihood is going to continue to be a major issue in these villages for quite some time. The construction budget is very big, if you multiply 41 million Rupiah (the per-house budget) by the number of houses in one village, then by all 25 villages in the network, *it is a massive figure!* So the question is how can the maximum amount of this money go right back into the local village, and not all fly away in the pockets of outside materials suppliers and contractors? The reconstruction process can also be a big opportunity to rebuild the shattered economy and generate new jobs, skills, entrepreneurship. If we plan the construction in that fashion, once it's finished, by then the village economies have also gotten a boost and are back in business. The soil-cement block-making yards, the carpentry workshops and steel bar-bending workshops have all been started with that idea in mind."

But besides construction, the project has also set up village-based economic revolving loan funds to help village members start small businesses and handicraft making units. At the one-year celebration, a special exhibition was set up to display and sell some village-made handicrafts in weaving, embroidery, quilting and painting. A pedicab group has also been set up, in which 70 *becak* drivers from the villages have been given loans to buy their own pedicabs. They repay the loan in installments into a special fund which they can use collectively for other economic activities, for welfare, for their family emergencies, etc.

As part of the network's eco-village planning, the buffer layers of plantation which are being introduced between the sea and the villages, and behind the villages before the hills will also be developed as "productive agricultural assets" where many things will be planted which also generate income: chilies, vegetables, fruit trees, coconut trees, fishponds, etc. So in this way, the environmental planning can have a very good effect on people's economic future as well.



A plug for people centered rehabilitation from the government's chief rehabilitation agency :

During the last of the 4-day event's dialogues, the group was joined by the Deputy Director of the national government's *Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency for Aceh-Niwas (BRR)*, who came for a discussion on the theme of community-driven reconstruction. At the end of the meeting, to triumphant cheers, he announced his agency's full support for the Udeep Beusaree Network's work, and for the principles of people-centered, people-driven tsunami reconstruction in other parts of Aceh, with the Udeep Beusaree Network's reconstruction as a model for other areas.

INDIA

NGO Coordinating Centre at Nagapattinam : Some notes on the under-appreciated art of directing traffic after a major disaster . . .

In theory, every time the world deals with a major disaster, the skills for handling disasters in general should get sharper, more efficient, more effective, right? In practice, the same mistakes get made over and over again, until those mistakes become almost a system. The story of the NGO Coordination Center in Nagapattinam is an example of how that cycle can be broken, so that mistakes made in one disaster need not be made in the next, and lessons can be passed on. As such the story of what happened in Nagapattinam is more about all the things that DIDN'T happen but might have: things like clumsy, overlapping and un-coordinated rehabilitation programs which might have left many needs unmet, huge delays, huge gaps, corruption, discrimination and repetition.

The role of coordinating relief operations in a major catastrophe is a difficult one, but a humble one. These are not the people who get all the glory or the recognition, and they may find it very tough getting funding to support their work, which doesn't directly deliver any countable things like bags of rice, tents, typhoid injections, toilets or temporary housing units. Even so, coordination can be one of the most crucial and diplomatically tricky roles to play, to ensure everyone who needs help gets it.

The Bhuj-based NGO Abhiyan had worked out an elaborate system for doing just this kind of coordination in Kutch after a major earthquake in 2001, involving hundreds of NGOs and government agencies seeking to help hundreds of devastated villages. When the tsunami struck, they rushed down to India's southernmost state of Tamil Nadu and helped groups there set up a similar coordinating system in Nagapattinam District, India's worst-hit area, where 5,000 people were killed and hundreds of villages badly destroyed.

The NGO Coordination Center (NCC) was run by two local NGOs - SIFFS (South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies) and SNEHA. The team from Abhiyan provided a firm back-up team to help steer the process. The story is not easy to commit to a small space, but here are a few notes drawn from the first-yearly report of the NCC, to give an idea how it worked.

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Don't let anyone tell you the big international aid agencies have a monopoly on disaster expertise :

Abhiyan's approach to disaster management and people-driven rehabilitation was home-sown in the particularly harsh soil of western Gujarat, but some of its key aspects have transplanted very well in the salty coastal sands of Tamil Nadu, as well as in the tsunami-ravaged wastes of Aceh.

Nagapattinam NGO Coordinating Center :

Working to enable a more coordinated interaction between district and state governments, NGOs and affected people.

In the early stages of relief work in Tamil Nadu, Abhiyan's assistance was mostly associated with relief and rehabilitation activities being planned and implemented through the *NGO Coordination Center (NCC)* in Nagapattinam. The idea of the NCC was to establish a regular and transparent interaction between the district and state government agencies and NGOs and to ensure that the needs of the affected communities were properly represented and effectively addressed.

Nagapattinam, the district worst affected by the tsunami, attracted the greatest attention from both the government and civil society. But in the first days, a lack of coordination between local NGOs and the district administration in immediate relief operations and damage assessment was causing duplication in some areas and gaps in others. It was also difficult to get accurate information on the real situation in the affected areas, in order to carry out *need-based* action. The district administration responded to the situation by establishing a working relationship with the NGOs. This led to the establishment of the NCC on January 1, 2005, with SIFFS (South Indian Federation of Fishermen's Societies, a local NGO) mandated to run it. SNEHA (another local NGO working with fishing communities), with its strong grassroots base in the district, joined SIFFS to put the center on a strong footing. Here are some of the NCC's achievements in the first few months :

- **Registered 400 NGOs working in the district** during the relief phase, and created a database for public access.
- **Set up a system of volunteers to cover most of the affected villages** who would establish a 2-way system of information flow, to and from the villages, on their relief needs.
- **Coordinated with the government relief system** to ensure that relief materials reached relief camps and affected villages, based on needs reported by village volunteers. Helped the government manage the flow of relief materials and install computerized inventory systems.
- **Coordinated with NGOs and donors to organize the supply of relief materials** for needs not met by the government depots. Highlighted uneven distribution of relief to vulnerable and marginalized communities, based on verification by the village volunteers.
- **Placed over 200 youth volunteers** in various organizations during the relief phase.
- **Conducted meetings to create a sense of common purpose amongst the NGOs.** Provided information to all NGOs on a number of aspects and contributed to an enhanced understanding of the local context. Worked out a consensus between NGOs on where each would work for interim shelter, to avoid unnecessary overlap.
- **Enabled the formation of sector groups** relating to shelter, livelihoods, counseling, health and sanitation, children, etc, which flagged the critical issues and undertook collective responsibility to try and address these issues on the ground.
- **Set up a separate grievance redressal desk for legal aid** to families of missing persons, and worked with the district to set up a "single window" system to handle this speedily.

"External aid always brings with it the danger of weakening in people the spirit of self-reliance, especially after a major disaster. Abhiyan is committed to leveraging available resources to catalyze a reconstruction development process which further strengthens the innate force of the community, so that its members emerge from a disaster stronger and richer in experience of cooperation."

SRI LANKA

Government inaction and a slide back into war take their toll on the country's tsunami rehabilitation work :

Sadly, the tsunami has been replaced as the main story in Sri Lanka by the country's return to war. In the Tamil majority areas along the country's northern and eastern coasts, where some of the most devastating effects of the tsunami were felt, hundreds of people have been killed, shops have been burned, and suicide bombs have exploded in recent months. Spasms of violence and destruction punctuate daily life in these areas, which are sliding back into the full-scale conflict which lasted for two decades and claimed 65,000 Sri Lankan lives. Neither side is adhering to the peace agreement signed last February and negotiations have broken down.

In the mean time, huge amounts of aid money for tsunami reconstruction are lying unused in government coffers, while tens of thousands of people continue to languish in tents and temporary housing around the country, most of them reluctant to defy government prohibitions and move back to their coastal land, unlike their counterparts in Indonesia and Thailand. Despite this extremely difficult situation, the two large women's federations are carrying on with their energetic and large-scale tsunami rehabilitation work around the country.

A brief update on the progress of ACHR's new joint fund for tsunami revival ...

The special tsunami rehabilitation fund which was set up a few months after the waves hit, is continuing to provide small grants and loans to NGOs, people's federations and community groups to support a variety of innovative and people-driven projects in wave-hit areas involving income-generation, house and toilet construction, land purchase, learning exchange, information dissemination, boat-building, community organizing, network building and savings group formation.

The idea of the fund was to create space for different groups and development actors who had never worked together before to link with each other, to forge new relationships of mutual assistance and to begin building a common understanding about how to promote a tsunami rehabilitation process in Sri Lanka in which the affected communities are at the core.

The fund, which is being jointly managed by a committee of community leaders and professionals, has so far supported projects affecting some 13,000 people in several parts of the country, as proposed by Women's Bank, the NGOs Sevanatha and Help-O, and some fishermen's cooperatives and local authorities in the Eastern Provinces.

(for more on this fund, please contact ACHR)

WOMEN'S BANK : Credit to help people rebuild their lives remains this network's first disaster rehabilitation tool

Women's Bank (WB), a national network of women's grassroots savings groups, has been undergoing a huge expansion of its women-run savings and credit groups in tsunami-hit areas over the past 18 months. WB is now operating in nine tsunami-hit districts, mostly along Sri Lanka's southern and eastern coasts. In these districts, Women's Bank has expanded already-established savings groups and started new ones, to provide a people-controlled mechanism for extending badly-needed credit to tsunami survivors, for all their immediate needs. To enable people to qualify for loans from WB's national funds (and from the ACHR joint tsunami fund), the rules for membership, loan-taking and repayment have all been relaxed and loan request procedures accelerated, while teams of experienced women savings group leaders have been moving all over the country to assist these new groups in managing their loans and repayments.

The main focus of this rapid expansion of lending in tsunami-hit areas has been to help people start earning again. But in addition to loans for income generating activities, WB is also giving loans to purchase alternative land, construct new houses or repair damaged ones, dig wells, lay water pipes, build toilets, pay school fees, cover health costs and repay high-interest informal debts. Many of these new areas are fishing villages, so loans are also being extended to buy, build or repair boats, and to purchase fishing equipment. Here is a brief update on WB's tsunami lending, as compiled by Sevanatha in May 2006, with some comments from some new borrowers.



1 960 self employment loans

"Our family had a small tourist handicraft shop that employed five people. It was completely destroyed by the tsunami. We wanted to start the business again, but had no money. Fortunately, the Women's Bank came to our village and helped us to join their savings and credit scheme. I have since got a Rs. 75,000 loan to reestablish our family business. I've started rebuilding my damaged house also. Eventually, I hope to rent out the upper floor of the house for a little extra money." (Ms. W.M. Sunitha, Unawatuna)



2 245 house rebuilding loans

"Both of us have received loans of one hundred thousand Rupees for purchasing two new plots of land where we will build new houses, after our old ones near the sea were destroyed by the tsunami. A foreign donor has promised to help us build new houses on this land. We have already begun making small repayments on the land loan to Women's Bank from our earnings." (Ms. Renuka Damayanthi and Mr. G.P. Ramani of Unawatuna)



3 75 fishing equipment loans

"I have applied for a loan to help me purchase a new boat and to help me set up a small tropical fish farm. I have already received a 50,000 Rupee loan from Women's Bank for fish farming. Apart from the financial support, I am very much delighted to mention that the women savings group system, which is new to us here in Wasana Village, has provided a unique opportunity for us to meet each other regularly and to share our grievances after this tragedy." (Ms. P.H.K. Malani, Wasana Group, Unawatuna)



4 458 loans for other purposes

"My truck was badly damaged by the tsunami. Without it, my small transport business was closed and I could not support my family. The Women's Bank helped me to repair the truck, through a loan of 60,000 Rupees. I am confident that I can pay back the loan through my earnings from the truck." (Ms. Palika Alagiyawanna, Nilmini Savings Group, Unawatuna)

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City-wide community upgrading in Moratuwa :

The latest on WDBF's project to transform tsunami reconstruction into a city-wide land and housing movement . . .

The Women's Development Bank Federation (WDBF), Sri Lanka's other national network of women's savings and credit groups, has continued to expand its work helping tsunami-ravaged communities rebuild their lives and settlements, through direct, people-to-people assistance with post-disaster social surveying, community mapping, temporary and permanent house construction, livelihood revival and land tenure negotiations. A focus of WDBF's work continues to be the southern city of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka's third largest city and one of the most severely battered by the tsunami. In Moratuwa, six slums along the city's coastline were almost completely obliterated by the waves, leaving hundreds dead and 3,000 families scattered in relief camps, without homes, belongings, boats or jobs – and most without any land ownership papers.

Over the past year, WDBF has spearheaded an unusual rehabilitation process in Moratuwa, which began with these most vulnerable coastal settlements, but has expanded into a process of surveying and mapping the whole city's poor communities – both tsunami affected and otherwise. In taking this more comprehensive, city-wide approach to Moratuwa's land and housing problems, the federation has used the tsunami crisis as a catalyst to open up the larger issues of land security and housing in the city. In the process, they have won the support of the city's Mayor and Municipal Council, with whom the federation is now working in close partnership.

With assistance from the Indian alliance of the National Slum Dwellers Federation, SPARC and Mahila Milan, and from Slum Dwellers International, WDBF is now exploring the possibility of creating a city-wide development fund for Moratuwa, which will provide resources for house building, infrastructure upgrading, community toilet construction and income-generation, in both tsunami-hit communities and other informal settlements around the city, in partnership with the Municipality, which will assist with permissions and land. As the security situation in Sri Lanka deteriorates, progress has been difficult. All the same, there have been several concrete achievements in Moratuwa :

- **50 temporary timber houses have been constructed** for families in the coastal slum of Jayagathpura who lost their houses in the tsunami, on municipal land that was provided by the Municipality within the former settlement.
- **10 permanent brick and concrete houses have been built** in Jayagathpura, to launch the in-situ redevelopment of that community.
- **A community center has been established** to provide an important point of congregation and sharing which belongs to the city's poor community people.



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Landless renters in Galle :

Housing relocation project provides land and houses for some of the tsunami's most vulnerable survivors



The NGO Help-O continues to support a variety of tsunami rehabilitation initiatives in the badly-hit historic city of Galle, in southern Sri Lanka. Since the waves hit, Help-O, which formerly focused its work on environmental issues, has helped set up 380 savings and credit groups (with 4,000 new members) in tsunami-battered fishing communities, established three community-based information centers in affected communities, helped families rebuild damaged houses and constructed badly-needed community toilets in settlements where survivors are camping out and have begun to rebuild, but have access to no sanitation facilities, since the infrastructure was swept away along with the houses.

In the past year, Help-O has also been helping organize a housing project for a group of 28 poor tenant families who had been living in coastal communities before the tsunami, and who were not on any government beneficiary lists. After identifying a 1-hectare piece of affordable land in Katugoda, the community applied to the ACHR joint tsunami fund for a land purchase loan.

Help-O is now assisting the people there to construct new houses, which are being built with donor funds and are scheduled to be completed in October 2006. Six of these houses are semi-detached units, while the rest are detached. Once the houses are finished, the work of developing the site will begin, including the construction of roads and retaining walls, developing a water supply system, laying a waste water disposal system and planting trees.

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What comes next?



A few of the things that **people-centered** tsunami rehabilitation has gotten started :

1 Community based disaster relief encores in Indonesia

When the earthquake hit Yogyakarta in East Java in May 2006, killing thousands and leaving half a million people homeless, the Uplink network was there within hours mobilizing and bringing in emergency relief supplies and setting up emergency centers. A week later, they were helping organize village teams for *Gogur Gunung*, a local term for team work, to begin cleaning up the rubble from their ruined houses in several communities, instead of waiting around for slow-moving government assistance. This is a first step in what looks to become a repeat of the experience in the Udeep Beusaree Network.

2 And community based disaster relief encores in Thailand too

- **When the floods hit southern Thailand in December 25, 2005**, the southern community networks and community planning network assisted the relief operations and helped communities use the rehabilitation process to deal with deeper land issues.
- **When the floods hit Chiang Mai in August 2005**, and the big concrete dams burst, Thailand's natural resources community networks and rural networks came to help the hundreds of flooded villages to rebuild, but also organized a special process to reintroduce indigenous ways of dealing with water and flooding, such as traditional wooden and bamboo "fai" dams, where the big concrete dams had breached, causing the floods.
- **When the big floods hit Uttaradit and Phrae in May 2006**, killing hundreds and flooding 1,000 villages and causing mud-slides, the Ministry called in CODI to organize a bottom-up, tsunami-style, community-based clean-up and house-rebuilding campaign in 700 villages, in which special rehabilitation funds were set up immediately in each village, which the people manage collectively to support the house-building, farm revitalizing and clearing work, and to draft village rehabilitation plans to use as blueprints for the various government agencies to support.

3 A national land tenure mvement takes off after the tsunami

First the communities and the national subcommittee on land showed that it was possible to resolve some very serious and very old land conflicts in tsunami-hit areas of Thailand, allowing over 1,000 poor households to begin rebuilding their lives with secure tenure. This created a new confidence that serious land tenure problems were solvable after all. Now, in 207 districts around Thailand, an extraordinary process is under way in which landless people and people with land problems are coming together to survey their various land situations, identify all the unused land in their districts (under private or government ownership) develop district-wide plans to match all the landless households with open land, to begin negotiating with. This process is stirring up communities to actively look into the land issue, and all this comes from the impact of the tsunami.

4 An indigenous culture movement is also taking off

The kind of cultural revival that is blossoming under the formal tsunami-rehabilitation projects in Thailand's Koh Lanta and Koh Mook is now spreading out into a movement, throughout all six of the tsunami-hit provinces, in dozens of villages - and beyond that! In a world where real culture is fast being replaced by the fake global version of culture, this kind of revival of cultural practices that go back very far and down very deep in these coastal fishing communities is something extremely important, especially for the poor, for whom a common culture is something lively and empowering - and it doesn't cost anything at all.

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