



Message from Bodhi

As the days turn in to weeks, and the gulf of time that separates us from the tsunami continues to grow, things seem to be getting back to normal. It is easy to get used to the tent camps and hastily built temporary housing, the ever-present officials and dignitaries parading around the devastated villages (posing for a quick photo with the most distraught looking local they can find), the ridiculous oversupply of donated clothes and plastic water bottles. After a few days, all of this seems to just be just about average. But if you scratch the surface, you can see the anguish and uncertainty that fills the days of those who survived the tsunami. You can see that the dignity of these people is being threatened by an onslaught of well meaning but misdirected aid. You can see that there are basics, like fruit, vegetables, and meat that people cannot afford. You can see that there are stories to be told and tears to be cried. A friend of mine in Hat Praphat calmly described how her 2 year-old child was torn from her arms by the torrent, never to be seen again. In the end, it will be a community of caring friends and concerned neighbors that will heal these wounds, not the international or governmental aid efforts. So, to me, the most important question is how to enable the re-forging of community, how to make sure that people feel good about where they live and what they do.

From this perspective, there is still much work to be done, and because of our connections and friendships in these communities, we have been able to make a difference – particularly with the short-term labor and fresh food delivery programs. As I was helping the villagers of Had Sai Kaew to remove a long-tail boat from the mangroves, their laughter and teamwork was something I had not experienced since before the tsunami. We are also able to respond quickly to particular needs in various villages, such as the water shortage in Tung Dap, or the food crisis in the remote Moken village beyond the Surins.



Below is a more detailed update of what we are doing, and below that are two relevant articles from Bangkok newspapers. I hope that you can also take a moment to feel good about being involved in the tsunami relief effort, the people here often express their gratitude that people half way around the world have made an effort on their behalf.

Progress Report

Today, Sunday, marks four weeks since the tsunami ravaged the North Andaman islands and coastline. So much has been accomplished in that time, through efforts of government, aid organisations and the communities themselves, but it will still be a long time before people's lives return to any level of normality. The villagers from Bak Jok are still in a tented camp at the Kuraburi school; the community of Tung Dap has just moved into their temporary housing built by the Thai army, but are now without a clean supply of water; and the people of Baan Talae Nok are watching their new permanent houses being constructed.

NATR continues to play an active role in providing for the needs as yet unmet by other agencies. The short term labour project for Hat Praphat and Had Sai Kaew has been particularly successful. We had anticipated the involvement of twenty villagers, forty showed up the first day, and by the third day of the project, sixty people had come to work! They have been pulling their boats out of the mangroves in the channel between the villages and clearing up debris. For a few hours each day, the community is able to focus on the present and shape their future, rather than sinking under the enormity of what they have lost.



The handicrafts project also started this week, with the purchase and delivery of pandanus leaves for weaving. Dye is soon to arrive from Bangkok so that the women can begin to make baskets and mats again, for sale. Next week, we will also deliver pandanus to the Moken (sea gypsy) community on the Surin Islands. This community has achieved a degree of fame within Thailand as their oral tradition includes an understanding of tsunamis (from a previous occurrence in 1907) and they were able to save all but one of the village members as well as a number of tourists. They have built 56 houses in 10 days and have started fishing again. NATR sent over mosquito nets with a group who had come to Kuraburi for a new boat and has also requested



their help in delivering food and clothing to other sea gypsy communities in the region that are not receiving aid due to inefficiencies.

In order to assess the effectiveness of NATR's projects, we have been running on-going evaluations. Instrumental in this has been Duk, a resident of Bak Jok (one of the worst affected villages) and a past employee of Golden Buddha Beach. He has been interviewing village members to find out their views on current projects, and assessing whether we can assist with their unmet needs. NATR would like to thank him for volunteering his time so selflessly and the great contribution he has made to the success of the projects.

This Update is being compiled from NATR's new office in Kuraburi. It is located next to the internet café and has already become a hub of activity. Paula has arrived to focus on ecotourism, and in the next few days, we are expecting a group of eight more volunteers to join us as project coordinators, clerical staff and for some serious manual labour! These include Rachel, Bonnie, Emma, Amanda and Nicole. Our call for Thai translators and focus group facilitators has been answered and we look forward to welcoming Pa and Bom to the office tomorrow.

We have now finalised the NATR Operational Plan (including budget), Village Assessment Report and more detailed Project outlines. As an interested donor, if you would like to be sent any of these, please contact us at lhtravel@inet.co.th

Currently, we are looking for a donor to fund a large supply of equipment to the sea gypsy village on the Surin Islands. If you know anyone who would be interested in supporting this project area, kindly get in touch!

Lucy