



Update 8 from North Andaman Tsunami Relief

30th January 2005

Bodhi's Introduction

When I first arrived in Kuraburi, I guessed that a week of around-the-clock work would enable the project to get established, at which point I probably start to get a decent night's sleep. But with opportunities to help people arising on a daily basis, and an ever-increasing but under-informed cadre of aid groups to be coordinated, it seems that the implementation of the Regular Sleep for Bodhi Project has been delayed for at least another week.

Speaking of fatigue, a growing concern in this area is aid fatigue. Tsunami-affected villagers are being swamped by well-wishers, who appear out of nowhere, give out a few gifts or some money, take extensive notes as to what villagers want, and then disappear again just as quickly, never to return. Surely some of these groups will return with more help, but since there is very little communication with the villagers about plans for aid, the locals have grown increasingly weary of weekend warrior well-wishers. However, the difference in style and substance of tsunami relief efforts among various groups reveals a dichotomy in the motivation to help. In helping someone to have more power over their own life, there are two basic options - use your power and influence to benefit them, or help them to empower themselves. As they say, if you give a man a fish, he can eat for a week, teach him how to fish and he will eat forever.

Do we want tsunami-relief to be just a bandaid, or do we want to take this opportunity to invest in the futures of those that have been affected? Helping the "tsunami relief effort" is actually an abstraction, enabling people to make their own choices in life is the true nature of our work.

Luckily, our friends and loved ones in the communities here make sure that NATR is not at risk of being relegated to this category. Our focus groups, net and livestock replacement projects, and fresh food programs keep us in regular contact with the villagers.

On the subject of empowerment, the database we are designing will not only allow local aid groups to coordinate more effectively by understanding the scope of actions in each village, it will be used as an educational tool to educate and empower locals.

Another major concern are the rumors of a second tsunami that have been a problem in many villages, where unfounded reports often cause the whole community to flee the village for hours at a time. Below you can find more information about our plans to address this issue as soon as possible.

Other interesting happenings this week included an unexpected meeting with the Army Chief of Staff, an opportunity to show the Swiss ambassador around Koh Phratong, and a day spent tracking down semi-wild chickens in villages across Ranong province. If you want my advice, the next time someone tells you that their village needs 'local' chickens, think long and hard before you say yes. Otherwise, you too will have to find, catch, and transport hundreds of rather unhappy fowl on a small long tail boat to a remote village.

Breaking News

Tapa Yoi, one of the villages on Koh Phratong was not affected by the tsunami, but the fear of subsequent natural disasters has brought the entire village onto the mainland, where they are living in a tented camp at the temple. NATR is planning to develop a warning system for the island communities, to monitor earthquake activity and we will be



looking for major funding for this. The Tsunami Information Center (with dedicated links to seismology centers, a call center, and regular radio reports) will help to alleviate the state of continual fear that many villagers are living in.

The villagers of Pak Chok and Koh Ra are just moving into their temporary accommodation, while the new permanent houses at Baan Talae Nok have already been completed.



Our office in Kuraburi has become a hub of activity, with aid agencies, volunteers and private funders visiting for updates, meetings and funding ideas. Bodhi has been involved in many meetings and has become a great information source for people wanting to conduct work on Koh Phratong. We now have our own email: relieffund@inet.co.th and are soon to have our own website to give more images and detail on the relief effort.

Programmes and Projects

This week has seen a great demand for project proposals, which has given us the opportunity to formalise all the work that NATR is handling. There are many aid agencies and government departments still helping to fulfill people's needs, and our role has developed into one of monitoring that the needs are met, and helping to fill those gaps. Our short-term projects are still focusing on food delivery, short-term labour projects, provision of raw materials for handicraft production and livestock replacement. We are now developing longer-term proposals to assist with education and livelihood needs.

Koh Surin: Through our contact with Professor Naramon at Chulalongkorn University, we received a 'wish list' from the Moken (sea gypsy) community on the Surin Islands, and were able to finance this with the help of Island Pools in Phuket. Lucy delivered tools, fresh food and other equipment to the islands where a group of volunteers were also helping to clean up the National Park and some divers were evaluating damage to the coral.



Laem Naew: This village was left in tact by the tsunami, but many of the boats and traps were damaged, which means that villagers cannot fish and therefore access cash for their daily needs. NATR delivered fresh food, chickens and wood to construct chicken coops and to carry out repairs. We also conducted focus group discussions with the villagers to find out their longer-term needs, and met with the school teacher, who currently teaches a class of 28 students comprising 6 different grades. With his input, NATR is developing some educational projects, both for immediate repair of the facilities and longer-term scholarship opportunities for the children. For donors wishing to target children and education, please get in touch with us about this funding opportunity.



Volunteers

The volunteers who arrived this week have been a complete godsend! They plugged in their varied expertise immediately and have already become indispensable! Pa, Bom and Ning, from Mahidol University, have been conducting focus group discussions and finding out new information and needs from villagers. Bonnie and Rachel arrived and upgraded the communications and technology within seconds. Bonnie has been working on a database to record all NATR's activities, which can also be used by aid agencies to avoid duplication of efforts in the different villagers. We are currently looking for funding to expand this project further. Rachel is networking the computer system and will be taking over from me, Lucy, with the communications by email. Nicole also arrived as project coordinator, initially at Kuraburi, and later on Koh Phratong. Paula has gone to Golden Buddha Beach to manage developments there as the resort is rebuilt, and is currently in the company of Emma (a previous Naucrates volunteer), Amanda, and Tanya.