



Update 11 from North Andaman Tsunami Relief (NATR)

22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2005

### Message from Bodhi

Hi everyone,

The world is scientifically and officially turning a little faster these days since the tsunami. Here at NATR it certainly feels like it. As the days turn into months, our little world of tsunami-relief is expanding at what sometimes feels like break neck speed. However, we're now taking a moment to pause and reflect not only on the immediate future, but also gazing at the horizon and considering what that future may hold.

As the villagers begin to move out of crisis mode, NATR is shifting gears along with them. Whilst we continue our appropriate short term programs, we have also begun working with villagers to empower them and support them in making decisions about the next steps in their futures. Villagers are confident that we will be right along with them as they move on with their lives because we have consistently been communicating with them over the last months, and supporting them where needed. This is an important point as other organizations and agencies begin to pull out over the coming months.

To support the long term community growth needed for the future of these Villages, we are in the process of building Community Centers in Bak Jok and Baan Talae Nok, and have created tsunami relief working groups for Koh Phratong, Koh Surin, and Baan Talae Nok.

The politics of tsunami relief work are surprisingly similar to politics the world over, but the particulars of the local pecking order adds a level of complexity that is sometimes very intense. As many of the larger tsunami affected villages such as Khao Lak are overrun with relief groups, numerous groups (including the Ricky Martin Foundation) are beginning to come up the coast to our little Kuraburi area.

While their intentions are certainly good, the results are often far from positive. Pictures are taken, promises are made, and some money is thrown around, but there is little accountability between donor groups and villagers. Often, resources are distributed unfairly, and the inequality adds to the pre-existing tensions within communities. As they say, too many cooks can spoil the broth.

Luckily, NATR's existing relationships, and constant presence in the camps has enabled us to avoid the pitfalls of local politics. In particular, we will continue to serve these communities long after Ricky Martin has packed up and is living *la vida loca* elsewhere. Our feeling for the area has also allowed us to anticipate problems that other groups have not yet recognized. For example, what are the immediate needs of the schools that serve the temporary camps? What is going to happen when villagers move from the temporary shelters into their permanent housing? What about the locals that do not want to go back to fishing as a livelihood? These are the questions our efforts address.

At the time this update goes to press, we are cooperating with many local groups including: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (squid trap replacement in Bak Jok), Thai Research Fund and Wildlife Fund Thailand (boat repair and reforestation in Tung Dap), Koh Samui Rotary (all projects in Tung Dap), Chabad Phuket (fresh food and crab traps in Baan Talae Nok), and TEATA (Thai Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Association) and the German Speaking Protestant Church of Bangkok (boat repair and fishing gear in Laem Naew).

Another news item that may not have made it onto the updates is NATR's official *Leave No Trace* policy. This means that we strive to minimize our negative impact in the communities we serve. No t-shirts with our logo, no big banners advertising our work, and no false promises or unrealistic raising of hopes. The other part of this philosophy involves choosing projects that are culturally appropriate, and are driven by the desires of the villagers, not the tsunami relief groups.

Moving on to less serious matters....a quick word about our communication philosophy here at NATR. We are in the middle of a tiny town in an out of the way place on the distant Western shores of Thailand. We do our best to respond to all emails and calls in a timely manner, but even with our enthusiastic and professional bunch of volunteers this sometimes eludes us. Why? Because our top priority is serving the villages and making sure our projects are done well.



Additional challenges we face are that information changes here much more quickly than can be believed. Minor crises arise on a regular basis, and surprise lurks around every corner. For example two weeks ago a potential tsunami warning caused the island of Koh Phratong to evacuate to the mountain again. And the reported 12<sup>th</sup> March Second Tsunami (a rumor that spread like wildfire) caused several coastal villages to evacuate.

Why, you may ask, have I focused on the less pleasant things in this message? Well, it seems to me that by recognizing existing imperfections, and anticipating future problems, we can make our programs truly responsive to local needs. Otherwise, the program we design this week may be obsolete by the time we begin implementing it next week. The only way to navigate the ever-morphing reality here in Kuraburi is with a light-weight, agile organization that can adapt constantly to the wave of change, and surf the chaos with as much grace as possible. Thanks for being our surfboard!

### **Message from Zander**

As Bodhi suggested, these last few weeks have marked a turning point at NATR. While our immediate needs programs such as food deliveries continue, NATR is beginning to shift its focus to longer term projects.

To facilitate this change in approach, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March we held an all day staff meeting to discuss the direction of NATR. We walked away from the table with a clearer vision of our future, specific goals reflecting this vision, and the actions needed to achieve them.

As an example of our focus on the long term, our squid trap replacement project for the fishermen of Bak Jok is beginning to reap the desired benefits and affected villagers are once more taking to the seas to support themselves.

Another of our long term programs already underway is educational scholarships. Some children have had to discontinue school because their parents could no longer afford to pay the cost of education as a result of the impact of the tsunami on their income. We are working to reduce incidences of this kind by ensuring that all students in the area have needed funds.

The fruition of these programs is paramount to NATR's longer term vision of sustainability and education.

### **Summary of Important Developments**

#### **Website**



Before getting into our project developments, we are thrilled to announce that thanks to the hard work of multiple volunteers in California, photos from the field are now available for viewing! While still in development, we encourage you to visit the website to see our first collection of photos of the people for whom NATR exists.

The photo gallery can be found at: <http://www.northandamantsunamirelief.com/gallery.html>

We have found that here in Thailand (and perhaps in other countries), the photos are not yet available at this address, but can be viewed in the meantime at: <http://northandamantsunamirelief.com/gallery.html>

After visiting the site, please email us your thoughts!

#### **Moken Handicrafts in Bak Jok**

The Moken craftsmen have rapidly improved their skills in the last several weeks and are now producing some of their most elaborate boats to date. We have been working with a special market in Khao Lak that has been created in response to the tsunami. They have agreed to provide a space for our boats as well as the baskets woven by the women when we have an adequate supply to meet the expected demand. When feasible, our goal is to offer these crafts to interested buyers overseas.



#### **Squid Trap Replacement in Bak Jok**

After the initial delivery of squid net materials, 41 fisherman have constructed 25 squid traps each and will soon receive the remaining materials for the next 25. As mentioned in the introduction, the squid traps have already begun to yield dividends with several successful catches being sold at the local market.



## Group Volunteer Projects

Two weeks ago a group of 25 volunteers from California and Nepal spent several days clearing a landslide in Laem Naew, providing art therapy and having many laughs with the children of Bak Jok and Tung Dap, and rebuilding the bridge that connects the two camps in Bak Jok. The landslide was not related to the Tsunami, but was caused by heavy rain from several months earlier. The villagers felt that the landslide could have threatened the school in during the next monsoon season if it had been left unchecked. The bridge at the Bak Jok camp had been erected hastily and, although adequate, was not structurally sound. The volunteers worked with the villagers to strengthen the existing bridge with sturdier materials while also making it safer with the addition of a hand rail.



## Aid Coordination

A meeting was held between the NGO's working in this area with the goal of increasing coordination of aid efforts in order to minimize aid duplication. NATR feels strongly about this issue and is working hard to promote aid coordination in each village. To this end, we, in conjunction with the Ban Talae Nok working group, has begun construction of a community center in Ban Talae Nok.

One of the most crucial elements of sustainable aid is effective coordination of efforts. The villagers of Ban Talae Nok have been overwhelmed by countless organizations making promises to help, without any accountability for these promises. As such, it is crucial to the well-functioning of the community that villagers gain control over the distribution of aid within their community. By organizing villagers into committees, we are helping to put an end to the aid fatigue which is negatively impacting the morale of the people of Ban Talae Nok. This model also ensures that aid will be distributed equitably through the use of a centralized community fund.

The community centre will not only act as a central clearing house for aid, it will also serve as a medium to implement educational programs, environmental education, legal assistance (especially where land ownership is in question), clinical and medical education and assistance, vocational training, and many other community oriented programs that sustain the unique culture and heritage of the local people. The community center will serve as the base for village handicraft programs as well.

## Women's Programs in Ban Talae Nok

In addition to the community center, NATR and the Ban Talae Nok working group are working together to help provide the supplies and markets for goods produced by the women's group in Ban Talae Nok. These include a variety of wonderful Muslim desserts (cookies, pineapple tarts, coconut tarts, cakes and cashew cookies!), and handmade, all-natural, scented soaps.



## Educational Scholarships

Several scholarship projects have been implemented in the past few weeks. In Tung Nam Dam, a village that was brought into the NATR fold in the last two weeks, financial aid was disbursed to each of 26 children to cover the cost of their schooling for the remaining school year, which finishes in March. In order to alleviate any concerns that these children will have free reign over the funds it is a required that a teacher be present in order for the money to be withdrawn. We believe that this caveat will ensure the proper distribution of the scholarship funds.



Last month needed funds were given to two students from Tung Dap who were attending school out of the village. Another disbursement was given this month to these students to cover all educational costs, including travel expenses, as the school is located far from the site of the Tung Dap temporary camp. For those who go to school nearby, we providing needed funds to cover the cost of materials and other related needs. Their needs will be assessed at the end of school year (this month) and we will use this information to inform what aid should be offered for next school year.

## Ongoing Needs Assessment

NATR is implementing a new process for the uniform collection of data from the families in all of the villages we are working. This is especially crucial in developing a picture of student needs. During our assessment we now distribute a form that is designed to collect a variety of pertinent information which we can use to inform our action plan for each community.

Well it's back to work here at NATR, thanks for taking the time to read about the progress you have enabled.