



Update 14

North Andaman Tsunami Relief

21st July 2005

### Opening Thoughts and Monsoon Meditations

The wet season has strange effects here in Kuraburi. Inexplicably, NATR email updates are somehow slowed by the torrential downpours. Hence, we apologize for our delay in reporting on our happenings. Bad excuses aside, the rain is doing us well. It is bringing life back to the coastal forests and mangroves, and coincides with the hope tsunami affected communities are beginning to feel. Many of the villagers now have permanent housing completed or well under construction. Hundreds of work crews up and down the Andaman coast are producing fishing boats in large numbers, and by the next dry season the fleet will be complete.



There are certainly exceptions – the people of Bak Jok will have to wait another 5 months for permanent housing and 16 families in Tung Dap remain unsure of when their homes will be rebuilt. As it stands now, however, all other tsunami displaced families that we work with have been resettled.

The frequency and volume of direct donations has dropped sharply in the last two months. Less and less people are dropping by the tsunami camps with handouts and freebies. In many ways this is good – it is no longer appropriate to engage in direct aid when real development is needed. After all, community initiative is the only way to achieve long term stability. As the donation of goods and money to shelter-dwelling villagers decreases, we have seen an increasing number of people soliciting NATR for individual assistance. When this happens, we ask if the problem at hand is widespread within their community. If so, we work to design a project or notify the appropriate parties. If not, we gently remind the solicitor that NATR focuses on community-wide needs, and that we would be happy to work with them to address these larger problems.

Which brings me to the point of this particular rambling: now is the time for NATR to not only design programs that move beyond crisis response, but assume an accountability to villagers that encompasses both help and the lack thereof. What I mean to say is that NATR now has an important role to play in helping local villagers avoid the pitfalls of welfare psychology. To illustrate, our scholarship program is primarily a way to help the neediest families, but it is also a chance for us to communicate with families that do not qualify for scholarships. In explaining why we did not choose them, we are able to help families understand that tsunami-related assistance is no longer an entitlement, it should be restricted to those that truly need assistance.

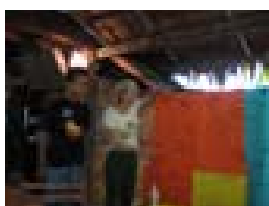
Our email updates focus to a large degree on what we have accomplished. Just as important, though, is what we have not accomplished. There have been many potential projects and funding opportunities that NATR has declined. Without attention to issues, tsunami-relief can do more harm than good. The guidance of our Thai staff and friends has helped us avoid projects that promote aid dependence and unfair distribution. Through painstaking consideration and communication, NATR is supporting projects that help communities back on the path to recovering what was truly lost in the tsunami – not just homes and jobs, but a sense of place and security.

To repeat a phrase that I have been privileged to hear a number of times from the mouths of villagers, chiefs, volunteers, and royalty:

“Thank you, on behalf of the Thai people”

### NATR Staff Retreat

On the weekend of Saturday June 4th, NATR staff went on a retreat to the beautiful Khao Sok National Park. Staff spent the retreat evaluating the implementation and progress of NATR- sponsored projects within the villages, and also assessing NATR’s changing roles with those villages and its long-term goals. The retreat was also a great opportunity for NATR to become an even tighter unit while both relaxing and participating in some great recreational activities including: guitar jams, flood-level river tubing, catch-and-release frog hunting, general shenanigans, and ridiculous amounts of fun.



## Bak Jok Community Centre Opening

We are excited to report that the new Community Centre opened with a bang in Bak Jok. More than one hundred villagers attended the celebration party and were able to view a display of Moken villagers' model boats that had been made by community members. Over 90 Bak Jok adults signed up to become members of the Community Centre, which will give them access to all its benefits, including a computer, reading room, sewing machines, games and English lessons. Community-driven development projects in Bak Jok will now have a home base in the centre, which will serve as a coordination facility among villager-based committees, and a place to implement educational and vocational training programmes.



## Educational Scholarship Programme

NATR has implemented a scholarship program that will assist children in the tsunami-affected villages with financial support until they complete high school. Families have been interviewed to ascertain their needs and this has been a great opportunity for gathering information on the actual help that has been given to villagers to date. It is disturbing how many relief organizations have made promises but then back-tracked, leaving people in limbo. One man that we interviewed had been promised a boat that never materialized, so he resorted to using his savings to buy a small boat to carry on his mud crab trapping work. The only assistance he had received since the tsunami was from the government and NATR. This interview process has been affirming for us by revealing the level of trust villagers have in NATR.



## Eco-Vocational Training (EVT) Project

Due to the impending threats of mass tourism in this area, NATR believes it is critical to develop forms of tourism that are respectful and appropriate for the local communities. Around the world, many areas facing similar threats have used Adventure tourism, Community-based tourism, and Eco-tourism (ACE tourism) to capture the benefits of tourism while avoiding its pitfalls. Therefore, North Andaman Tsunami Relief (NATR) is creating a three-part training program that will incorporate

- English Language for Tourism
- Community Consensus Building and Environmental Empowerment
- Small and Medium Scale ACE Tourism Development



The objectives of this Eco-Vocational Training Program are to preserve and promote the cultural, economic and environmental integrity of communities in the north Andaman region by providing villagers sustainable tourism markets, a sense of ownership and pride in themselves and the environment they live in, and vocational training that will enable the successful adoption of ACE tourism. This is a two to three year project and highlights NATR's transition from immediate relief efforts to longer-term sustainable community development.

Too often, communities are used to serve tourism. Our Eco-Vocational Training project aims to make sure that tourism serves local communities.

## Moken Model Boat Project

The Moken (sea gypsies) have traditionally made models of their boats to sell to tourists as a means of extra income. Tourists have not returned to the islands inhabited by the Moken since the tsunami and thus this source of income has dried up. NATR has stepped in to provide a market for these boats until the tourist industry picks up again. Now the Moken boats are becoming very popular as high quality gifts and we have received two big orders from the USA as well as HRH Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn's purchases for her Phufa shop in Bangkok. If anyone has contacts with craft shops overseas, we would be happy to email our catalogue and can send the boats out by post. We can also accept orders by email, and payment through PayPal.



As NATR's first handicraft project, the artisans of the Moken boat project exemplify the self-sufficiency and determination that inspire us to serve tsunami-affected villages. One of the boats was recently presented to the people of the Haida Nation in Canada to thank them for their tsunami relief contributions.

## Ban Talae Nok Women's Soap Cooperative

The need for additional income in the wake of the tsunami in Ban Talae Nok was recognized by the Thai Ministry of Labour, who took the first steps in implementing the Ban Talae Nok Women's Soap Program by donating initial ingredients and holding training sessions. However, it did not go so far as to provide any long-term support or marketing assistance. NATR stepped in to find a market for the Ban Talae Nok soaps and to help the group develop into a sustainable, independent project.

Creativity and product design is ultimately left up to the women, who excel in this respect. With NATR's help, the Ban Talae Nok soap programme received the wonderful and invaluable endorsement of HRH Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn who has bought and continues to buy soaps for her Phufa shop in Bangkok as well as taking them with her on her trips to America. We are now in the third week of entrepreneurial training so the women are able to manage their own bank accounts, inventory, and the project as a whole.



## Volunteers

It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to Jel, Meth, and Nan, all of whom have been very dedicated and valued members of NATR. Jel has been with NATR for over 5 months, in which time her hard work has benefited local villages in too many ways to describe. Meth joined NATR in March and immediately began focusing on the Ban Talae Nok Women's Soap Programme, where he has been one of the head programme coordinators. Nan, who arrived in Kuraburi in April, was NATR's manager for Tung Dap village development, where her programmes have made great strides and she established a beautiful relationship with the village.



Our new volunteer needs are as follows:

- Marketing expertise – particularly for handicraft products as well as community based natural resource management/eco-tourism. This volunteer could be located either in Thailand, or work from their home country.
- TEFL trained teachers – to develop a curriculum for our education unit which can then be replicated in all the villages.
- Accountant/Bookkeeper – to help keep our books tip top. This volunteer would need to be here for at least 4 months, and would also have ample opportunity to do project work in local villages.
- A website expert (familiar with asp scripting, MS Access database and website design) to help us continuously upgrade and improve the information we are putting online.

## Donation Acknowledgements

We at NATR have done our best to respond to everyone who has given us a donation. If, however, you are aware of anyone who has supported NATR and not received acknowledgement from us, please let us know.

## Email List

If you no longer wish to be on our update list, please let us know and we will remove your email address. If you would like more information on any of our projects, please do not hesitate to ask and we would be happy to oblige, and if there is anyone you know that would like to be put on the update list, please send us their email address and we will happily add them in. You may also look at our website: [www.northandamantsunamirelief.org](http://www.northandamantsunamirelief.org)