



**Recovering from the Tsunami:
Taking stock of
promising communal development**

Three accounts from Thailand

by Phakpoom Withantrawat,
Maitree Jongkraichak and
Somsak Surlyamonthon

Tsunami Aid Watch is a programme of the Southeast Asia Regional Office of Heinrich Boell Foundation, in co-operation with Southeast Asia Consult and Resource Co., Ltd.

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Keeping the Affected Communities at the Heart of the Rehabilitation Effort: a lesson learnt from the Andaman Tsunami hitting Thailand

by Phakpoom Withantirawat

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Three Years of Tsunami Rehabilitation in Bahn Nahm Khem: Opportunity in crisis

by Somsak Suriyamonthon

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Recovering from the Tsunami: Taking stock of promising communal development.

Edited by Tsunami Aid Watch, a programme of Heinrich Boell Foundation, Southeast Asia Regional Office

First Edition, Chiang Mai 2008

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Printing: Suthep Printing, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

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Krabi Declaration on Sustainable Post-Tsunami Rehabilitation

The participants of the forum would like to extend their gratitude and heartfelt thanks to all individuals, communities, national and international groups, parties and organizations for the help and aid they have provided for the individuals and communities affected by the tsunami of December 26th 2004. We hope that they will continue to give us unwavering support during the remaining task of long-term rehabilitation. The tsunami has left Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, the Maldives and other countries with devastated coasts, shattered communities, economies and hundreds of thousands of people in need of support. This destruction was, however, only the initial direct impact of the tsunami disaster. The ensuing aid efforts were part of just the first phase of tsunami rehabilitation.

Nine months have now passed since the tsunami and in most affected areas treatment has been delivered to the wounded and basic shelter is available for the surviving victims; in many cases the boats and fishing gear needed for livelihood restoration of the fisher folk have been provided; the remaining tasks are ready to be overseen by restored community structures and local administrations. The situation can, thus, in most instances be described as approaching stability. However, it is a far cry from being normal.

The tsunami recovery now enters a second phase of transformation that is the recovery from a disaster into a more permanent and functioning economic and social set-up, i.e. the mitigation of the secondary tsunami impact. While the aid to rehabilitate from the initial direct impact of the tsunami was characterized by speed and efficiency, the recovery support effort needed for the indirect impact recovery must strive for long-term effectiveness and sustainability. Taking into account livelihood, economic recovery, disaster management, issues of land and housing for the displaced, the landless, women, children, gender issues as well as migrant labor problems. In order to achieve this, a number of measures are urgently needed. Based on past aid delivery experience we therefore ask the international community and supporting NGO's and GO's to mobilize all available resources to:

- Ensure that the long-term rehabilitation of the tsunami affected area is based on definitions of fairness, justice, sustainability and stability as perceived and defined by the tsunami affected communities and individuals;
- Develop the secondary tsunami recovery support into an opportunity to address and solve pre-tsunami problems that have been worsened and/or exposed by the disaster;
- Deliver assistance and support in an accountable and transparent form that ensures participation of those affected in planning, implementation and execution of long-term rehabilitation programs;
- Establish – a vitally important point - a proper, honest and forward-looking information system and data-base on the tsunami disaster for the use and to the benefit of its affected individuals and communities, independent of nationality, race or religion;
- Initiate an aid-tracking system / mechanism to avoid the misuse of aid-resources or its appropriation for something other than aid purposes;
- Ensure that the remaining rehabilitation becomes a stepping stone for further development of the affected areas leading to better conditions than before the tsunami disaster.

If the international community, governments and civil societies help to continue with the tsunami recovery support based on the conditions given above, the tsunami disaster itself can be turned into an opportunity for development that is in line with sustainability needs and economic progress of all mankind. We believe in the strength of cooperation, coordination, openness and solidarity in times of need.

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Preface

This final volume of the Tsunami Aid Watch series is published on the cusp of the fourth anniversary of the Tsunami wave of December 26th, 2004. It follows in a similar vein to the publication by Karl Segschneider and Lars Krause “Bridging the Expectation Gap” in taking an overall view of the following years of recovery in the communities along the Thai Andaman coast.

A prominent place is given to the so called ‘Tsunami village’ of Bahn Nahm Khem in Phang Nga province. However, it is not just one text, but comprises of the contributions by three authors and looks at the post-Tsunami years from different angles.

The first resulted from an interesting experiment. The idea arose during a meeting between Maitree Jongkraichak from Bahn Nahm Khem and TAW staff in the local Community Coordination Center: to compile a book that would gather stories and information about the recovery years in Bahn Nahm Khem. In due process, a writer from a Karen village in Chiang Mai province in the North of Thailand, Somsak Suryamonthon, traveled to the South and now provides us with an account of what he concludes of the Bahn Nahm Khem story, after conducting interviews with leaders as well as ordinary members of the community. The result is an extraordinarily insightful story.

The two other texts were written by two of Tsunami Aid Watch’s closest partners over the past couple of years: Phakpoom Withanthirawat of Save Andaman Network (SAN) and Maitree Jongkraichak, a leader in Bahn Nahm Khem’s Community Coordination Center. Both had also been invited by the Heinrich Böll Foundation’s head office as distinguished speakers to a workshop on post-disaster rehabilitation that took place in Berlin. Inspired by their talks and discussions there, Phakpoom shares some reflections of the Tsunami rehabilitation process and SAN’s role in it, arriving at a clearer picture of conditions necessary for success in achieving sustainability and fairness in recovery and rehabilitation. Maitree gives a very personal account of how he experienced the Tsunami disaster and its aftermath.

We hope that you will enjoy reading the authors’ reflections and find plenty of inspiring thoughts.

With the completion of this series, the Tsunami Aid Watch program of the Heinrich Böll Foundation’s Southeast Asia Regional Office has completed the

task of extensive documentation of the post disaster recovery and rehabilitation process of an entire region affected by a calamitous disaster. It covers the many challenges and problems on the way to more sustainable and fairer results, mostly from the perspectives of local communities and NGOs. It provides a lot of helpful background information to understand the particular local context; and, of course, it also communicates the success stories and valuable reflections that could be used for the achievement of better rehabilitation results in other post-disaster situations. We hope that the TAW series can stimulate discussion of fundamental principles and problems faced in development cooperation more generally.

Last but not least, the Heinrich Böll Foundation wishes to thank Somsak Suriyamonthon for taking up the challenge, as a Northerner, of entering into a dialogue with the southern community of Bahn Nahm Khem to provide us with a valuable account from his particular perspective; and not least the other two authors, Phakpoom Withanthirawat and Maitree Jongkraichak for their efforts in documenting their painful reflections; and again for all their help given to the Tsunami Aid Watch program.

Chiang Mai, November 2008

Dr. Heike Löschmann

Director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Southeast Asia Regional Office

Keeping the Affected Communities at the Heart of the Rehabilitation Effort: a lesson learnt from the Andaman Tsunami hitting Thailand

by Phakpoom Withantirawat, Save Andaman Network

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“Gigantic was the Tsunami and the coastal communal life was swept away.”²

26th December 2004

7.59 am

On the morning of the 26th of December 2004, there was a seaquake under the bed of the Indian Ocean, 330 km to the west of the Sumatran island of Indonesia and 580 km away from the Thai Andaman coast. The quake initially measured 8.9 on the Richter scale, but was later revised above 9 to become one of the five strongest earthquakes ever to have been recorded. For the rest of the day, from 8.21 am to 6.03 pm, another 113 quakes ranging from 5.0 to 6.9 on the Richter scale continued to rock the ocean bed.

9.20 am

The Thai Andaman coast experienced the strange phenomenon of the sea level suddenly receding from the shoreline for hundreds of meters. Local people and tourists staying nearby were fascinated by it. Many started to explore the suddenly dry and exposed seabed, while some groups of former sea nomads, such as the Morglan and Uraklawoi, ran to higher ground.

9.30 am

A huge wave with a height of around ten meters crashed onto the Andaman shore that lines Phuket, Phang Nga, Ranong, Krabi, Trang, and Satun provinces. The southern part of Phuket Island was reported to be the first area badly hit by the wave, followed by the northern area and Phang Nga province, respectively. From the epicenter of the quake under the ocean floor, the wave spent 112 minutes traveling to Phuket, gradually sweeping north to devastate all beach areas in the six provinces mentioned above. Satun was the last to be affected, taking the Tsunami 266 minutes to arrive.

The great losses the wave caused

The death toll rose to reach 5,395 in Thailand alone. Among the bodies identified, there were 1,925 Thais and 1,953 foreigners, while another 1,517 remained anonymous. The number of people missing reached 3,071, 2,029

² Taken from the book “Khau Khon Andaman Khau Khon Raksathalae (People of Andaman , Ones Who Love the Sea)”, Save Andaman Network, July 2005

Thais and 917 foreigners. 8,457 people were injured, 6,065 of those were Thais and 2,392 foreigners. The Ministry of Interior collected information and reported its conclusion about the consequences of the wave. According to this information, six provinces with 24 districts (Amphoe), 78 sub-districts (Tambon) and 292 villages were affected by the Tsunami. Phang Nga was the hardest hit province. 54,632 people (12,068 households) were impacted with damage to varying degrees afflicted on 6,799 buildings, 2,389 agricultural areas and 1,224 fish and prawn farms. 1,222 large fishing boats and 3,426 small boats were wrecked while the large and small boats used in the tourist industry were also listed as damaged property.

Help from people in the South and other regions was witnessed during the initial aid period. People along the Andaman coast, both Thais and foreigners, had limited knowledge of tsunamis before the disaster, so no one anticipated it. Hence, there were no preparations for a tsunami. Lacking not only knowledge but also preparedness caused a tremendous loss of life. At present, even though we have experienced the Tsunami, Thailand is still not well enough prepared for a possible tsunami wave in the future.

In 2004, because of the lack of knowledge and experience, NGOs and civil societies were caught off guard and did not know where to start helping. During the two days following the Tsunami, NGOs and civil society organizations mobilized their people to help reduce the devastating impacts of the wave. They did what they could and began establishing temporary shelters.

On the 28th of December 2004, at the office of the Federation of Local Fishing Groups of Southern Thailand, groups of NGOs and civil society held a coordinating meeting to discuss how to improve the situation. Everyone in the meeting agreed that the problems were too enormous to be managed by any single organization. As a result, Save Andaman Network (SAN) was founded. The network is now regarded as one of the most effective NGOs rebuilding the affected communities. SAN, in cooperation with its affiliated organizations, proceeded to fulfill its duty immediately from the day it was founded. SAN set its concepts, rehabilitation procedures and achievement objectives as follows:

Concepts

All rehabilitation concepts should be based on the ideas, plans and development requirements of the affected communities. This will empower these communities in light of self-management of their own futures.

SAN's rehabilitation procedures

The focus of development procedures is on the participation of the affected communities. The establishment of communal organizations is encouraged and self-developmental potential is utilized to empower the communities. This is at the heart of SAN's working procedures. All components will serve as cornerstones for local development in order to solve the problems in the communities systematically. Religious and traditional principles are never overlooked but regarded as important aspects in achieving the set goals.

The objectives

Sustainability is at heart of the process. In other words, communities should become more stable and stronger with regard to democratic principles and good governance. Communal business groups should be created and run by the communities to solve economic problems. People should use money wisely and strategically. The principle of sustainable rehabilitation for marine and coastal resources should be maintained and encouraged.

However, to SAN and its allies, this kind of large scale rehabilitation for the affected communities was a new challenge. Only the Four Regions Slum Network had had some experience of large scale community rehabilitation, such as rebuilding communities in towns.

Being as small as it was, SAN immediately faced budget and personnel constraints. However, thanks to its strong and willing workforce and the knowledge provided by them and the communities they worked with, they were effective with their projects. Gradually, more and more people joined in and a larger budget became available. Other organizations also contributed and groups with the relevant expertise became involved. Some aid organizations that provided money to the affected communities strongly suggested their aid should help certain target groups in a sustainable manner and wished the recipients to participate in the rehabilitation process as much as possible. Thus, the rehabilitation process had to be implemented in line with the perspectives of the affected communities. Hence, SAN needed to send its staff to learn about the requirements and needs of the target communities. The experiences gained from this fieldwork consisted

mainly of newly learned lessons, in other words, knowledge from shared experiences.

Dilemmas and chaos after the disaster

One month after the wave there were still a number of new seaquakes reported. On land, people who had lost their relatives continued to search for their beloved. Some were still scared of a new wave and remained on high grounds for days. Many activities went on, bodies were found and had to be identified, the injured needed help, and so on. Aid provisions in many forms flowed into the devastated areas. Some people just came to see what was going on in the area, which often caused traffic congestion. Government officers came to observe and assess the extent of the damage. Robberies happened here and there throughout the affected areas.

An elder from Koh Muk said: “We were helping each other and sticking together for some time after the wave. But when the aid provisions arrived, problems began to emerge as quarrels erupted among us. Some people said that there was no fair procedure in place for allocating the delivered aid. The aid distribution process lacked a just and fair system. While some received some aid, others said they did not. The aid organizations did not seem to have enough experience to deal with the affected communities.”

Maitree Jongkraichak from Bahn Nahm Khem reflected: “The failures of a number of communal development activities in the past and the varying degrees of honesty in people caused a lot of distrust.”

In Satun, local fishery groups who lived in the villages along the Andaman coast were severely affected by the wave. They already had experience in accomplishing communal activities such as setting up fishery savings groups. The local fishery groups had their own budget set aside as initial aid provision for their members in case of an emergency situation. A central committee was responsible for the systematic coordination of aid delivered by the government and public sources. They also surveyed the level of damage inflicted in order to establish a short term communal development plan.

Know the target group before trying to help them

The main objective of providing aid is the recovery of the normal life-styles of the affected people, so first of all, we need to understand the target groups

and communities. Providing material aid is also important but secondary to this first priority.

In a crisis situation, there are always leaders emerging from each group. They volunteer their time and energy to help their communities. Some are officers of local governments while others are just next door neighbors or unofficial community leaders. In the rehabilitation process, we had to find these kind of people, invite them to join in and get their opinions to create a just and fair rehabilitation system. Generally, after agreeing in principle, communities will select a committee that will assess and manage the aid allocation process, especially material donations. A fair aid system based on a clear plan helps reduce conflicts and problems caused by incompetent aid allocation. The aid will then be delivered according to the assessed needs of the target group. It is important to change the perception of aid receivers as victims. They have to be encouraged to become independent from external help as quickly as possible. Communal work and talking to friends and neighbors will also help to reduce the despair and mental stress caused by their losses.

Quickly comes the next dawn of life

For the Tsunami survivors, the problem that needed to be dealt with immediately was the despair and mental depression caused by the loss of one's loved ones, property and possessions collected over many years, even generations. The longer they have to wait for help in such hopeless circumstances, the worse their situation will be. We need to realize that the affected people used to independently support themselves and their families with dignity. After the wave, they were reduced to standing in line waiting for aid delivered by others. This not only wore down their dignity but also their energy to start a new life. Often, this worsens the situation.

In order to help the affected people to recover their normal lives quickly, the spiritual dimension needs to be taken into account. This is a really important aspect. The activities we witnessed during the Tsunami rehabilitation were helping to recover or rebuild boats and houses and to provide advice to the survivors. But what are the optimal answers to the needs of the affected people? The ones who know best are the survivors themselves. We needed to collect and assess the needs they had and list their names along with their individual material requirements for new boats or houses according to their actual situation. All this should happen with as much participation from the affected people as possible and by utilizing their own abilities. Participatory

brainstorming, planning and implementation processes are needed in order to increase their will to live and create new lives for themselves.

Sadly, the Tsunami in Thailand was also an opportunity for the government and some private companies to take advantage of the affected people. They pushed them off their lands pretending to be concerned about their safety or claimed their lands saying it belonged to the government. The private sector just claimed the rights to the land.

This opportunity was seized by some profiteers and made the lives of the survivors even worse. It was a violation of human rights. The land rights issue did not make the rehabilitation process any easier, but could not be solved right away. The priority has been to help the survivors to start over with their lives. Only after the immediate crisis is overcome, we could pay attention to the complex issue of the land conflicts, which will take a long time to solve. Faulty laws and corruption are the source of unjust land right documents. So, would we be able to leave land problem behind and help the people to overcome the crisis? This could be a spring board for long-term sustainable development in the future.

Disaster aid centers located in and owned by the affected communities

After a disaster occurs, disaster aid centers need to be established throughout the affected areas and continuously managed by the same people. This helps improve the smooth flow and pace of the work. In the case of the Tsunami, the first year was so chaotic that recovery plans needed to be changed or adjusted repeatedly to accommodate ever-changing circumstances.

SAN supported the affected communities to establish communal rehabilitation committees that were able to take charge of all administrative tasks. This could for example relate to setting up communal shipyards or repairing houses. In some communities, most boats were destroyed and they needed more boat repairing workshops than others who had been less affected. There were three boat repair workshops at Koh Muk and two at Bahn Nahm Khem and the available tools and equipment were sufficient. This way, building and repairing boats in different communities was possible at the same time. After the affected communities had their own boat repairing workshops, the donors could make direct contact with them. There were numerous people helping the communities in this way. During the time the boats were repaired, they donated wood, tools and even food.

Rebuilding houses was another part of the rehabilitation process facilitated and owned by many affected communities through the election of community recovery committees. The communities designed their own houses according to the size of the available land, the number of families and the type of livelihood they pursued. The activities of outside volunteers varied, they helped building houses and distributing food, material and money. The amount of the money donated was displayed on the community boards and thus made transparent.

In the first six months after the Tsunami, about 1,000 boats had been repaired by SAN's and its communities' projects. By early 2007, the number rose to 1,585 and by mid-year, another 156 boats had been fixed. The money spent for these repairs including boat engines, fishing equipment and occupational funds, added up to 150 million baht. This amount is relatively small considering the dimension and seriousness of the situation. The affected communities had to spend only some of their own funds on this, thanks to the numerous donations.

Go further than ever

While the urgent problems needed immediate or temporary solutions with outside help, other problems like physical damage could be solved through working together in the affected communities. Communities had the opportunity to learn how to manage and administer budgets. They already had long practiced skills in building boats and houses. Because they worked together in groups, they acquired group working skills as well. All acquired skills were developed further in the process to find sustainable solutions for various problems, such as solving debt problems because of lacking revolving funds or establishing permanent boat repair shipyards. The boat workshops would also provide new jobs for people in each community.

In Satun province, affected communities developed their own communal fish markets in order to increase their income from selling the fish they caught. The fish markets also supplied fishing equipment at a lower price than the conventional markets. Many communities in Trang province got together in groups to initiate activities to protect the marine and coastal resources. The same happened in other communities in Krabi, Phang Nga, Phuket and Ranong. Many communities have continually been involved in such activities since then. Once communities recovered from the Tsunami, they had become so strong that they could run their own fish markets and sell fishing equipment to their members at affordable prices. They were also

able to provide savings groups structures. These groups were run in the same fashion as the Bahn Nahm Khem Communal Bank. So the faster communities recover, the further they can go in their efforts.

Preparedness for disaster

The effort to move affected communities off their land after a disaster is usually justified with safety motives. The Thai government has repeatedly done so since the landslide in Nakorn Sri Thammarath in 1989. After the Tsunami, the government did this again in the landslide disaster in Northern Thailand in 2006. If this is the only response after large disasters, then all affected communities will need to move around from place to place every time a natural disaster takes place. Several areas are always at risk. In fact, if we had a system protecting us from possible natural disasters, we could adjust and prepare ourselves. What we actually and urgently need are practical systems for disaster preparedness, monitoring and rehabilitation. The Tsunami showed that we need proper natural management on buffer areas close to the sea. Mangrove forests should be preserved, planted or rehabilitated to reduce the effects of such waves. Houses in these areas need to be built on higher and stronger posts to allow the sea water to flow underneath easily.

In Bahn Nahm Khem in Phang Nga province we observed the multiple failures of the disaster drill using the Tsunami Early Warning System set up by the government. Among those were rumors spread among the local population and misinformation by the government. The different levels of awareness and knowledge about disasters and the lack of a reliable early warning system caused uncertainty. The affected communities doubted the system would really work in case of an emergency.

The people at Bahn Nahm Khem then initiated their own disaster warning system, which was reliable enough to sustain their normal lives. The system would allow people in a widespread area to know of impending disaster and to escape in time. The volunteers at Bahn Nahm Khem in cooperation with the Disaster Prevention Department coordinated the relevant parties to develop plans to prepare for disasters. The plans teach the communities to make population registration lists and to determine the target groups of special assistance, like elderly, children, women and handicapped. They further identify safe places and escape routes, come up with traffic control plans and positions from which to observe the sea, stipulate regular disaster drills (at least twice a year) and integrate individual plans made by temples,

schools and communities. Communal funds for first aid to be used before outside help would arrive were also on the agenda.

Community Based Disaster Risk Management as the only solution

Bahn Nahm Khem's project to understand and apply the lessons learnt to survive earthquakes and tsunamis was titled: 'When we gather to help recover Thailand...from disaster to disaster preparedness in the future'. Concepts by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center and Ottawa University in Canada (See Annex 1 for more details) were taken as points of departure in order to apply them to Thai society. Their principles are recommended as working concepts to implement any disaster management. However, in reality, lessons learnt from Bahn Nahm Khem showed us that the strength of communities should be developed as a first priority. The Community Based Disaster Risk Management plans cannot work if community cooperation is not been in place. (See Annex 2 for Bahn Nahm Khem's list of conditions to be met for CBDRM to succeed.)

The system requires the correct numbers of management staff and volunteers according to the conditions in the communities, especially where local administrations have to follow government regulations. The main problem is that most of the local administrations are not ready to follow. The affected communities then have to manage the disaster management plans on their own. The plans need to include every single person in the communities, without exception, as participation is most important for the success of the Community Based Disaster Risk Management plans.

Building and developing voluntary networks into systems that work as alliances linking to the higher administrative levels

The principles of civil disaster prevention produced by the Thai government in 2005 and underlying master plans of disaster prevention 2007 are defined as follows: the integrated participation of every party involved, developing human resources, building voluntary systems and the identification of cooperation networks. However, government administrations tend to operate in a top-to-bottom manner when dealing with the relevant organizations and their staff. That makes the coordination with volunteer networks and organizations more difficult.

So, besides the duty of the local administrations to support victims of disasters, the role support organizations play in the coordination of aid provisions is an important mechanism for the affected communities as they

fill the gaps left by the government. Voluntary systems and support organizations hardly find space in the official system dealing with disaster relief and risk management. Unlike private and governmental bodies such as provincial and district organizations, community organizations and their support groups are barely visible as important players.

In order to strengthen the existing network for disaster prevention, more volunteer groups should be established in the communities to work on technical support and training in relevant issues, such as rescue, IT database management, group development, (re)building community strength, nursery and other occupational training. In addition, the volunteer networks need to improve their coordination with the district and provincial administrative levels, so a strong disaster risk management mechanism will be in place.

Annex 1: Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM)

7 Steps of the Community Based Disaster Risk Management-CBDRM

Adapted from Asian Disaster Preparedness Center-ADPC

1. Select the communities
2. Support Building an Understanding in the Community
3. Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment-PDRA
4. Participatory DRM Planning
5. Building and Training a CDRM Organization-CDRMO
6. Community-Managed Implementation
7. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Community Based Disaster Risk Management-CBDRM

Based on the concepts of the syllabus from Ottawa University, Canada

1. Understanding Basic Concepts of Disaster and Disaster Risk Management
2. Community Risk Assessment, Hazard Vulnerability Capacity Assessment & Perception of Risk
3. Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation, Public Awareness and Early Warning, Evacuation and Evacuation Center Management, Structural Mitigation, Strengthening Livelihood, Community Health & Local DM System/Organization
4. Emergency Response, Emergency Operations Center, Damage Needs Capacity, Assessment/Disaster Info System, Relief Delivery Operation, Psychosocial Intervention
5. Coordination, Networking, Resource Mobilization
6. Disaster Risk Management Plan & Action Planning

Annex 2: 10 Conditions to develop CBDRM in Bahn Nahm Khem

1. The commitment of the people (especially group leaders);
2. The continuity of support and advice from alliances;
3. Continued expansion of groups in size and numbers;
4. Being open to life long learning;
5. Immediate implementation of all involved issues;
6. Managing funds, financial aspects, saving to establish community banks or central communal welfare;
7. Pro-active coordination with every party without hesitation or exception;
8. Looking for sustainable community development plans for the future;
9. Real and practical disaster preparedness plans and disaster evacuation drills;
10. Being open to wider society of victims of various types of disasters not only for a specific group.

Remembering Life after the Tsunami: Rising from disaster to go further than before

by Mr. Maitree Jongkraichak, a Tsunami survivor in Phang Nga³

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³ Mr. Maitree Chongkraichak is a member of the Tambon Administration Organization of Bang Muang. After 3 months in office, the Tsunami hit Bahn Nahm Khem. Mr. Maitree has been involved in all subsequent proceedings, from the day the Tsunami occurred through communal rehabilitation phases to the stage of disaster preparedness. He is one of many at Bahn Nahm Khem who have been committed to the Tsunami rehabilitation process applying the concept of sustainable development. Mr. Maitree wrote down his recollections to inform the public about these events from the perspective of a Tsunami survivor (June 2008).

A moment in time: the disastrous day of the Tsunami in the Andaman Sea

Bahn Nahm Khem, Tambon Bang Muang, Amphoe Takua Pa, Phang Nga province, was devastated by the Tsunami. 661 people died while another 765 went missing. 165 children became orphans. Of 1,566 houses, 1,270 were totally destroyed and 76 had to be repaired.

Around 10 am on the morning of the 26th of December, 2004, a few of my friends and I sat in front of Mr. Amnuay's house. One of my sisters talked about fish farming and attending a funeral in Phatalung province. My wife was

preparing trays for fish not far away from the sea. Suddenly she came up to us and asked me to take a look at something strange happening in the sea. She said the sea level had lowered. Everybody present heard the conversation between my wife and me, and followed us to the sea. I just said she was exaggerating but asked her to bring a camera.

At the beach, Pi Pui was washing his boat. Normally, the sea level where he swam with his boat was up to an adult's waist level. But now the water had suddenly receded so much that we could see the seabed for about 100 meters from the shore. Then we saw the wave appear in the distance and it was approaching us fast. On a concrete road running parallel to the sea, there were about 100 people standing and watching the sea, including some members of my family.

When my wife arrived with the camera, I had no chance to take any photos anymore. My family was there, too, including my mother and father. My mother was 75 years old and a bit overweight, so she was unable to run quickly. My brother and I helped her to get away. I shouted to everyone running in front of us to go to the second floor of Pi Amnuay's house. Located about 150 meters away from the high water mark, the house was never expected to be reached by any sea waves. But this wave did.

When we were inside, I tried to shut the door of the first floor. I locked it and ran upstairs. The door did not withstand the pressure for long and was quickly broken by the great power of the wave, making a loud noise. On the second floor, I found all of my family except my father, who was not there. We were frantically looking for him and started to panic when we were suddenly surrounded by water. The whole house started filling with sea water.

The only thing we could do was to check who was there and who was not. There were 38 people in the house but my father was not among them. My brother started crying, making all of us very miserable. Besides my father, my 13 year-old nephew Jay was also missing. While we watched the wave retreating back to the sea, I thought all the people in Bahn Nahm Khem might die. The reason I felt like that was because I saw all the empty space after the wave disappeared. People, houses and cars that used to be there had all been washed into the sea. I wondered how I could go on from there. It had been just three months since my election as a member of the Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO). Now all people who had elected me had died.

After the water had drained from the flooded area, we began to search for our father. We found his body lying face down on the ground, in his hand was his golden necklace. At least we were fortunate enough that his body was not taken out to sea as many other things that were washed away by the wave. One thing I suddenly thought about was the merit my father had been making throughout his life. He had been a member of the Bahn Nahm Khem temple committee and part of the group of people that initiated the temple's rehabilitation. The temple's crematory, dharma halls and public rest houses were restored as a result of this group's efforts. Many communal activities had been initiated by my father, who had also donated some of his private land to the temple.

When we found his body, I tried to restore his breathing and did everything else I could think of to bring him back. But it was too late, there was nothing we could do. My brother Choke could not control himself, he took the body on his shoulders and walked up to our house, swearing all the way. My second brother, Nuay, asked him to stop but could only calm him down for a while. Then he headed to the beach to search for his son but could not find him. We left the body of our beloved father at the house and went out to look for other friends and family members.

We then met the assistant officer of Bang Muang TAO who was walking towards us with a woman. When they staggered closer, I noticed that the woman had nothing to cover the lower part of her body, so I gave her something to cover herself up. Then I told them to stay in the house with the others who were already there, by now about 40 people.

Soon after, I met one of my friends, Sak, who had sustained an injury to his groin. He had been cut by a piece of corrugated roofing and the wound was black but small, so he could still walk as though nothing had happen to him. I asked him to sit down and went to find medicine and water for him. Later on, he went to the hospital to have his wound cleaned. He was admitted and stayed hospitalized for some time because the wound became infected. Consequently, his leg had to be amputated and during a second operation on the injury he died. I was really sorry to hear the news about his death.

After I had helped my friend Sak I went to get some drinking water from the nearby grocery shop with a few young people staying in the house. We took everything edible we could find with us, such as milk, water, instant noodles and soft drinks. The water was poured into a big jar on the second floor. By now there were many people the house, some of whom we knew and some we didn't. The water in the jar did not last long and soon ran out. I had not expected that and realized we needed to share more carefully with each other. I tried to control the situation and made my point by holding an axe and telling them that I would force some of them to leave if necessary. I told everyone to stay in their place because it could become even more crowded than this. A man I didn't know climbed into the house and asked for permission to stay with us, then a second load of water arrived. My brother who had been looking for his son also arrived. Outside we saw two old women on the beach trying to crawl on their stomachs. They were relatives of one of my neighbors, so we went to help them and brought them to the house.

Then, the second wave arrived. By now there were about a hundred people in the house, some were very scared and climbed onto the roof. Some ran away to three-storied house nearby but were warned by a number of people that the house was unstable and would not withstand another huge wave because it was very old. The second wave came but fortunately for us, it didn't reach us. But we did not know anymore if we were safe or not. Everyone in the house felt restless and the telephone was out of service. We could only think about how to escape from this area, so we made a raft out of floating material usually used for fish farms. We carried my father's body, some elderly and the children to the raft and moved everybody from the house to an old mining area.

Everything going on around us could only be described as complete chaos. Everyone wanted to leave the area. Some went to the TAO office, others

moved to the Sok Hill 50 km away, and the rest sought shelter at the school. Even though some people still hoped to find their relatives, they had no idea how to go about it because of all the devastation and destruction.

Gathering the Tsunami survivors in temporary shelters

On the 28th of December 2004, two days after the Tsunami, some changes took place. In the morning I went to the Bang Muang TAO in order to receive some aid donations. I had a talk with the chairman to find the best solution. But he could not figure out how to proceed because of his budget problems. I could only help my people by delivering what had been donated. From a truck, we distributed the donations to the victims. In my work group, a man called Ton worked so hard that he was soaking wet from his sweat. I said to him: "Just do it without hoping that people will thank you, but at least I know how serious you are." Ton wiped the sweat away, smiled and went on working. Although there was a huge pile of donations, very few people helped out that day.

Around 2.30 pm, two men and two women approached me. One man wore sun glasses and was dressed in the local manner while the other was sporting a better style. They came to me and asked if I was a member of the Bang Muang TAO. After I confirmed, they asked me if they could have a conversation with me and other TAO members. We sat down to talk and they introduced themselves. I found out that the first man was called Nong (Anong Chitnirat) and came from the Four Region Slum Network. One of the women was Dong (Preeda Kongpan) from the Chumchon Thai Foundation. The other man, Tuay (Amporn Kaewnu), was from the Community Organization Development Institute, a public organization. The second woman was Noi (Anong's wife) from the National Housing Authority. Later, more people joined in but I can not recall who they were.

Anong, whom I call Pi Nong, asked me about our work and any plans we had. I explained that we had just tried to adjust to what had happened, but now we needed to gather as many people as possible. People who understood the situation quite well and were capable of assisting in this special task of rehabilitating the community. Dong asked what we needed to do next. I went on to explain that first we needed shelters that could support at least 2,000 people. Toilets were also important. This facility should be located near a government agency. Pi Nong asked me if I could gather a sufficient number of workers to accomplish this task and I answered confidently that I was sure I could.

After our discussion we divided up the tasks ahead and proceeded accordingly to our assignment. I went to the District Office, where a lot of Tsunami survivors had gathered, and tried to work out how many wanted to stay in the area to be rebuilt. Many of them confirmed that they really would like to stay. I then went into the office to meet the sheriff and ask for permission to use government land belonging to the Ministry of Agriculture. After he gave me green light, I returned to Bang Muang. Piles of material to be used for building shelters were everywhere. That made me very happy because it meant one hurdle less to reach our goal. The next challenge was to deal with tents and toilets. We continued planning how to proceed until late at night.

On the 29th of December 2004, I went to Bang Muang again. I saw that they had started building toilets and many tents were set up. The supporting systems were all set up to prevent potential problems with waste water and hygienic issues. I then led the people who had been staying around this area to the front of the District Administration Office to live here. The first group to move in were the people of Soi Tok Pu. Parn was their leader and responsible for arranging the tents, etc. The next group to follow was the Morglans and then another band who were led by a man named Prathan. The next time I went there to talk and check the situation for myself I was able to confirm that there were enough tents for everyone and all facilities were adequate. I then rented six trucks to pick up the rest of the people who were going to live at the temporary shelter.

Gathering people to stay in the center was not easy as it sounded because some felt uncertain about the help they would get. Parn, Prathan and I, however, succeeded in persuading them all to live there while help was provided by the District Administration.

The first group of people needed 50 tents but the tents we had were not enough, though. More tents were needed to support almost 3,500 people. As more people arrived, we organized the shelter by dividing the area into 10 zones of 10 tents each and assigned 60 people to be in charge as zone leaders. There were a number of departments carrying out different tasks such as taking care of incoming aid and donations, distributing food, ensuring everybody's safety and managing housing and the temporary shelters.

There were a lot of people coming to donate money at first. This was great but caused another problem. Because a lot of aid and money arrived every day, there was a meeting on the night of the 31st of December which I didn't attend because of my father's funeral. I came back again on the 4th of January 2005 and we held another meeting. Around 7 pm, the meeting started and was attended by a lot of people. Many problems could be solved in meetings like this. We held an open session and there was this man, I have him in my mind's eye even now, questioning the prohibition of alcohol we had established in the center. He asked how it was possible to sleep without drinking alcohol for people like him who had lost all of their family. He was the only one surviving out of nine. The meeting fell silent for a while to consider this problem.

On the 14th of January 2005, we considered the issue that the money donated by individuals was not a permanent source of help, so we decided to establish a central fund to be used as a circular fund. The first group to come up with their own plans was called the 'coffee house forum'. The members of the group would pay in 100 baht each. That way 3,200 baht were collected from 32 people. Since this group was part of the wider forum where people came to talk and drink coffee in the morning, we called it the 'friendly forum coffee house'. After this group was set up, we thought about other kinds of groups that would be able to support themselves and avoid waiting for help from outside.

The first livelihood collective to be formed was a fish farming business. The 21 members of this group agreed to using collective savings. Their agreements and rules were drafted and submitted to the Community Organization Development Institute and the first budget request was granted. All members agreed that they would do fish farming and pay back 50% of the money borrowed from the central fund of Bahn Nahm Khem. Afterwards, more groups were established using the central funds of the temporary shelter.

The collective called Hua Thing Boat was made up of a group of people who had lost their boats but needed them to sustain their livelihoods. They did not just want to receive help from outside, so they got together to build their own boats with their own hands. As soon as they had earned enough money with their new boats, they would return the loans to the fund.

Finally, the hope of returning these people back to the sea to fish was to be fulfilled after I discussed the idea with Pi Chamnong, Pi Nok (Phakphum Withantirawat) and Dr. Bancha (Dr. Bancha Phongphanit) from Save Andaman Network (SAN). The three of them were consultants for this project. When we got together the fishermen who wanted to join the boat project, we communicated the idea to our benefactors, such as Siam Cement Group, Toyota Motor Thailand Co. Ltd, Japanese Volunteer Group and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. After the donors agreed in principle and approved the projects, they provided budgets for building boats through SAN. This enabled a two-way learning process that allowed the communal ship building school to cooperate with of a number of organizations. 50 boats were built without any money being provided by outside donors. Since then, more livelihood groups have been established, and each group makes use of the circular fund principle.

Livelihood groups and circular funds

Why did we come up with these ideas to manage the problems caused by the Tsunami? There is a simple to answer this question. I kept seeing donors coming in to give money or other aid to the affected people, usually ranging from 500 to 1,000 baht. They always gave money based on what they saw or what they felt like. Some victims pretended their situation to be worse than it actually was to evoke more pity and get as much money as possible. The donated money would normally not last long and provided no long term solution. So we came up with the idea to do something to utilize this money in order to help people in the long run. Communal funds turned out to be the most suitable answer. Negotiations with donors were held to inform them that the local people needed circular funds to invest the donated money. The investment of would be in the form of livelihood funds. Some organizations agreed to this idea while others felt uncertain about how it would work and were worried about letting the victims manage the funds themselves. Some individuals still randomly gave money to people but were troubled when some villagers pointed out there was a bias in giving money to only some groups. Some of the donors were so upset by this that they actually broke down into tears.

A lesson that cost us 1,400,000 baht

Mistakes were made constantly by the committee that managed the communal funds. One expensive lesson the committee learned took place when they received one million baht. After a meeting on the use of this donation, the Tsunami survivors wanted the money allotted to them directly

in cash. The committee had to accept the proposal and allotted the money accordingly. The person who distributed the money was the head of the Tambon Bang Muang. This caused frustration in the committee as they felt their hard work was not rewarded when another person could show off their achievement. Each household was to receive 900 baht but the event took a bad turn when some households did not receive any money. They complained about the mistake, and in the end it was fortunate for the committee that they were not to blame.

After that we decided to develop a better donation support system. We came up with the idea that the affected people should form groups and submit their own projects. Before lending money to them, it was required that they establish a savings fund for the group from their own money. The project proposals were sent to the coordination center where the committee would consider them and approve sound projects. The committee would later submit the detailed project to the donors. This ensured the money would be used only in line with the agreed objectives. Once people understood the principles of this system, they gathered and initiated their own livelihood groups. In the end, 20 livelihood groups were established.

On the 4th of April 2005, as the calendar marked 100 days since the Tsunami, we officially opened the Bahn Nahm Khem Communal Bank at the temporary shelter. The bank was to be the financial management center for proper financing methods and mobilize the savings of each livelihood group. The funds collected and managed this way had a much greater potential than just letting each group or individual spend money without a clear goal.

From the coffee house forum to the Communal Bank

After the Tsunami, there were only 210 houses left. About 600 people were officially claimed lost but in fact it was more than 1,000 people. Because this official number was based on a census stating 4,724 registered people but another 1,500 people had never been registered in any census.

Bahn Nahm Khem consisted of several communities living in an area covering Lamson, Lampom, Phonoi, Natalad, Saithong, Tharuajang, Ongkarn, Soi Go-Pad and Suphan. After being struck by the wave, the people of these communities stayed in separate sites, namely Bang Muang TAO (300 households), Bahn Phaen Phung Pha at Bang Muang (80 households), Nahm Khem health station (50 households), Bahn Nahm Khem

school (100 households), Bahn Phaen Phung Pha at Bahn Nahm Khem (120 households) and Phru Teaw (185 households). Later, more houses (matchbox style houses) would be built on the flat land in many affected areas after the ruins had been cleared away.

At the Tsunami Aid Center at Bang Muang TAO, there were many organizations and individuals participating in the rehabilitation process. Among them were the Southern Communal Development Institute, Four Region Slum Network and Housing Foundation who helped the committee to support the people in any way necessary. The committee was a team elected from a larger group of Tsunami survivors. It was registered on the 1st of January 2005. Almost all members of the committee were people from Bahn Nahm Khem.

The people of Bahn Nahm Khem consisted of various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. Thais and Burmese made up the majorities in this area. The Thais originated from many regions in Thailand, such as Phatalung, Trang, Prajuab Kirikhan, Phetburi, Saphan Buri, Chonburi, Chumpae, Khon Kaen, Buri Ram, Roi-ed, Phayao and Chiang Mai, to name a few. These people had moved to the area during the mining era and when the mining industry died, most of them changed their way of life to become fishermen. The fishing industry expanded into other areas, such as fish farming, restaurants and entertainment facilities. A huge number of people worked in this sector. In the past, no other activity or livelihood group had ever been as successful in trying to set up collectives, such as a drinking water business, village fund groups, or petrol share groups.

The coordination of the Tsunami aid was very difficult. We tried to organize meetings to provide procedural forums for the people in Bahn Nahm Khem. The thousands of people in Bahn Nahm Khem had their own requirements under normal circumstances, so things grew much more complicated in an extreme situation like the one after the Tsunami. People tried to get whatever they could and were shouting, quarreling and fighting over the provided aid. We had to stand up it, no matter what. Again and again, for months, we held meetings in order to empower the people until they could find ways to help themselves.

I, as a member of the Bang Muang TAO, now found myself in a role that I could not leave any more. I partly saw myself as a victim, as one who lost a father to the wave, but I also had other roles as the chairman of the

Communal Coordination Center and the manager of the Bahn Nahm Khem Communal Bank.

We established the coffee house forum group as the meeting place for our community. Now we have many more groups, such as a fish farming team, a weaving group, a batik cloth circle and the Mad-Uan (fishing net) team. People enjoy talking and sharing their problems and solutions with each other when they meet. The livelihood groups also raise incomes for their members. Bang Muang has become the center for the 22 livelihood groups. The center has just received a desktop computer from Krung Thai Bank. The amount of savings collected from every group now exceeds one million baht, and we are going to build our new work base at Soi Chiang Mai. It will be a shipyard and multi-purpose center initiated by Siam Cement Co. Ltd. and Toyota Motors Thailand Co. Ltd. We are quite satisfied that today 50% of the community's boats belong to our groups. In the past this would not have been possible.

Working with the people in Bahn Nahm Khem in this chaotic situation has not been easy. Not only the affected people faced problems but also the organizations and their staff working in the area. The committee and other related departments had to be available at all times. Meetings were held every night. Groups mushroomed together with their funds. Funding was supported by several organizations and foundations, such as Duang Pra Theep Foundation, Sikka Asia Foundation, World Vision Foundation, Sahathai Foundation, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Mother and Children Health, Christian groups, NGO Development Institute, Four Region Slum Network, Housing Development Foundation and Communal Life Plan Network.

The following opinions and suggestions regarding the activities in Bahn Nahm Khem were given by our consultants.

Jamnong Jitnirat, consultant of the committee and independent developer: "Since the mining era, decades before the Tsunami, Bahn Nahm Khem had not accomplished much in doing any development activity together. All development processes failed to meet the expected goals. But now the situation is completely different as people at the individual level participate in all aspects of communal development activities. They have no particular plan but help the community in any way they can. Some may develop into a prospective project later on. They have their own systems as opposed to the

government agencies who work without clear directions or plans. Here in Bahn Nahm Khem, people have adjusted themselves to the ideas that many parties developed for them.”

Phakphum Witthantirawat: “The support given to the people in Bahn Nahm Khem is meant to encourage them to participate in the rehabilitation process. They need to do everything from their own point of view. Only the activities supported by SAN are different as cost nearly 10 million baht. However, any activity or project proposed by the people here that is clear, reasonable and based on participation and sustainability, we are willing to support.”

Buncha Phongphanit, chairman of SAN: “I think the important Communal Bank should be the center for people. This means it’s not only a place to deposit money but also a place for people to gather and develop their own funds. Bahn Nahm Khem ought to be a case study for other communities.”

Fish farming groups

The incredible loss resulting from the Tsunami depressed people. Around them, nothing was left but despair. The Bahn Nahm Khem they knew was gone and they saw no future. Not only were their houses and fishing equipment destroyed, but even more tragic, many people’s lives were lost, all of whom had been beloved relatives and friends.

On the 20th of January 2005, officers from the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI) came into the area and met with people who used to fish farm to talk about a recovery project for fish farms. When CODI proposed a budget, the fish farming team was initiated. But it was not as easy as it sounds as there were a lot of problems developing it. The fish farm project was like a tree promising its fruit in the future, but in this case it should take at least eight months. Initially, some people were still afraid that another tsunami would strike and all their efforts would be in vain because everything would be lost again. We encouraged these people by telling them that doing something is better than doing nothing and at least it would give them something to do. That turned out to be true because after starting their new work, everyone felt better and their stress decreased significantly.

Two standard shipyards: Bang Muang and Soi Chiang Mai

Before the Tsunami, 420 fishing boats had belonged to the people in Bahn Nahm Khem. About 300 boats were completely lost while another 50 were

destroyed beyond repair. All legally registered boats were compensated for by the government at 60,000 baht each. Owners of unregistered boats had to appeal for compensation, which was only 40,000 baht. This was not enough to build a typical boat as used widely by fishermen. A regular boat consists of 25 keels, and boats of this size cost 150,000 baht to build.

The rest of money needed to build new boats might come from the donors but the problem was that the donors did not know how much was needed and whom to give the money to. This could provoke conflicts among the people. So how can we prevent that? This was the question that the communal leaders and people in Bahn Nahm Khem kept asking themselves and consulting each other over in the coffee house forum. Help offers specifically for boat rebuilding kept coming in various forms, such as a repairing service by foreigners at the local ports. Some small boats were built by the World Vision Foundation. Some benefactors donated ready-built boats while others promised boats without setting a delivery date.

“We were really appreciative about the boats donated but we could not use them for fishing. Some people here just sold them because they could not survive on boats that looked like that.” Another villager told me: “I never had a boat and had no hope of ever owning one, but some donors wanted me to receive a boat they brought, so I just took it because I could not refuse.”

The new shipyard in Bahn Nahm Khem was started at the temporary shelter around Bang Muang TAO. The shipyard was a huge undertaking at the community center and the first shipyard built at the temporary shelter. In early March 2005, with the cooperation and financial support of SAN, The communities built it based on the concept of communal participation, which made working much easier. The first goal was to build boats according to the available labor in the shipyard, which was about 50 workers.

The labor and craftsmanship these people provided were the strength of Bahn Nahm Khem. The shipyard here was expected to be a one-stop service shipyard. There would be a repair workshop, boat platform building houses, a marine engine repair shop, a fish net winch construction and even window and door frame making facilities. SAN provided full support for these activities along with contributions from many other parties (the Siam Cement Group Co. Ltd., Toyota Motor Thailand Co. Ltd., Norwegian Embassy, Japanese Volunteer (JVC), Stock Market Association and Thailand

Capital Business Council). The mobilized capital in June 2005 was over 20 million baht.

“How did things progress so fast?” asked Mr. Chalaluk Boon-nak, a consultant from Siam Cement Group Co., Ltd., on the 1st of July 2005 when he inspected the work in Bahn Nahm Khem. He saw people busying themselves with a number of communal development activities at the shipyard in Soi Chiang Mai. Even though the shipyard had only just opened in mid-May, about a month later, there were already plenty of activities going on and the space was crowded with all the people working here together.

Soi Tok Pu: What kinds of houses are safe and adequate for the owners?

Parn, a villager from Bahn Nahm Khem, complained: “It sounded too complicated to build new houses for us. At first, they said we could not build houses without land rights. Sometimes we were told that the areas we wanted to build our houses in were not safe because they were too close to the sea. Then we would have to have our houses located too far away from the sea. Different authorities kept telling us different things, for example that we would only get 30,000 baht instead of 100,000 if we wanted to build the houses by ourselves. When they had finished building the houses according to their plans, they all looked strange, like a match box or a bird cage. They were too narrow to live in. The wood used was low in quality and swelled out and deformed when wet. Another example were houses built by the private sector. The floors of these were made of gypsum, which is not strong enough. A foreigner once broke the floor with just his weight and fell through it to the ground floor and was injured. These houses were also built too close to each other. This made a workable escape plan in case of emergencies even less possible. The signs in front of the houses displayed the names of the donors, which made us feel the houses were theirs, not ours.”

Some of the people who lost their houses in Bahn Nahm Khem were not willing to accept new houses built by donors or the government as these not considered suitable for living. “How can a big family live in a house sized 4x4 or 6x6 meters consisting of one small room and a toilet? They never consulted us before building.”

“My house in Soi Tok Pu is the elevated one. At first we lived there and could catch crabs easily because the house was located near the sea. Some

authorities told us to move to a new house. At first, we were very afraid that it would be useless for us but we were lucky that the architects from Khon Kaen University asked us what we really wanted. We then got a house that met all of our requirements. Another problem was the lack of money. However, SAN allotted a budget to build our houses according to our needs as a pilot community," Parn or Panya Anantakul said.

"I like the houses that were built according to our requirements. When the land in the Soi was up for sale, I hurried to deposit some money in order to establish the Coordination Center there." Pi Rut or Wirut Nonthong, chairman of fishing group, mentioned.

"Some people could not get houses even though they had a land rights document. The army did not offer a service to build their houses. In fact, the land owners just did not ask for the rights because they did not want to have such a house. I then contacted SAN for help. Mr. Phuak, another poor neighbor who once had his own boat, is now blind and we helped him to build his house, which turned out quite beautiful and adequate," Aunt Wee from the middle fishing group added.

All the quotations above are part of the house building experience. Sometimes, the new houses met the requirements of the owners. Such houses were built around the Lampom community, where people got together and collected money until they could build dozens of houses. These houses are big enough and quite nice to live in. The areas where such houses can be seen now are Nok Na, Had Sai Dam Nok, Bang Klay Nok, Pak Triam, Thung Wa, Thabtawan and Nai Rai.

The homeless people

Sakda Phanrangsri is an officer in the Coordination Center. He has no house to live in. In the past, he had rented a house in Bahn Nahm Khem. After the Tsunami, he tried to get help from the government but was refused because there was no policy for people who had just rented houses.

We tried to gather the people who had only rented houses. From the registration, we got a list of 180 people in need of help. We collected some of their money for savings and gave them the chance to propose ideas how to solve their problem. Two months later, about 100 people left because they received another kind of help from the government. The help was in form of permanent housing outside of Bahn Nahm Khem. 1000 houses were offered

but the people living there must pay an annual land rent and a monthly house rent.

A reason why people left the housing group was uncertainty. A person of the housing group told me that he was very uncertain if he would ever get a house because he had been waiting for his chance for months. Thus, the members of this group gradually decreased because they felt unsure if they would get any houses at all.

Old Kom was also a member of the housing group. He voiced his fears about not getting a new house as he had already waited quite a long time by then. I asked him how old he was and he replied he was 55. He had lived in a rented house for 30 years and could not wait for a new house any more. I just told him that the time he had been waiting was so short compared to the time he had spent living in the rented houses in the past. So he surely could wait a little bit longer. He nearly broke into tears after considering what I had said.

Then we received information from Pi Chamnong that we would get land to build houses for the homeless people at one million per rai. The land had been located by the committee members who were responsible for finding land..The committee of the housing group went to inspect it and during negotiations managed to reduce the price to 900,000 baht per rai. All members were satisfied with this price and the land. We had loans from the Danish development agency Danida to build houses and additional loans from CODI. The new house owners had to repay installments to the group and the Institute.

CODI provided a budget for the infrastructure and Danida helped us purchase the land. All processes were coordinated by the Chumchon Thai Foundation. There were 50 members left in the group by the time everything fell into place. The first group had achieved its goal, so a second group was formed. As usually, we gathered the people from all around and they built their houses in the same fashion as the first group did, by helping each other.

The housing problem after the Tsunami was very difficult to solve because a huge amount of money was required to buy land and build houses. Both the first and second group registered together as a co-operative under the name of 'Bahn Nahm Khem Phattana (development) Co-operative Ltd.' All

members adhered to the rule that all members would help each other to build houses and pay monthly installments for their land. The objective was to have adequate houses to live in and to develop strong communities in which everyone continues to help each other just as they did when they built the houses

Palm was an officer from the Community Organization Development Institute arriving from Paktriam and stationed at Bang Muang. She is a hard working woman and very good at managing documents, preparing her work as well as giving good advice. She has stayed with us so long that we feel like she is an old acquaintance. Sometimes we did not have to say anything at all as she had already prepared everything in advance. She is still there and will be for a long time, for sure.

From the rehabilitation in Bahn Nahm Khem to the network of the Tsunami survivors

On the 26th of January 2005, a meeting took place to exchange experiences of the previous few months. We recognized that in some areas there were still problems and no support, for example in Bahn Nai Rai, located about 5 km away from the highway. There, a number of people still lacked supplies to meet their basic needs, such as mats, mosquito nets, powdered milk for babies and rice. In the meeting, we tried to reach a consensus among the 18 participating communities. We put together 18 proposals to submit to the government and also agreed that all communities should provide any surplus aid to those in need of the basics. This would also be a signal for the network that members cared for and helped each other.

After the first meeting, held under the auspices of SAN, we had monthly meetings and more people joined every time. Each meeting produced new proposals to the government in the hope they would use them to solve the roots of our problems as we saw them. Even though the government accepted every proposal, we did not know to what extent they understood our problems and how much support they would give us.

Gen Chaowalit Yongjaiyut, the deputy prime minister, visited and accepted the proposals submitted by the people of the Bang Muang district. The villagers were very excited about the opportunity to talk to him. He was kind and confirmed that he would look into all problems caused by the Tsunami, including the land conflicts. Later, he returned to Lampom and accepted the villagers' proposal in the name of SAN to the government. This

was regarded as the first step forward made by the 1,500 Tsunami survivors and witnessed by many government agencies.

Summary

I consider the successes achieved by the villagers of Bahn Nahm Khem as the result of the close attention paid by everyone to the consultations among the teams that worked together. That encouraged people to think about sustainable development, ownership and participation. Their commitment to work came from their hearts and they owned and participated in every phase of the problem solving process.

Of the lessons we have learned, some have cost the blood and tears of the people in our communities. We hope something like this will never happen again, to anyone in this world. The communities have had enough of the competition over benefits. The healing process in the community under such circumstances is much more difficult than in a normal situation. Thus, we would like to share our experiences and hope this will be beneficial to other communities as solutions to similar problems.

I would like to thank all consultants who devoted their valuable time, energy and financial support to us. Everything that was given to us did not arrive by chance but through the genuinely good intentions of all the facilitators involved. The results of their work will be part of our long-term achievement in the future. The most important question we need to consider is how we can continue the successful work and maintain our achievements to develop our communities to the best of our ability. May I show my respect to all of those in the Bahn Nahm Khem development team.

Three years of Tsunami rehabilitation in Bahn Nahm Khem. Opportunity in crisis

by Somsak Suriyamonthon

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Bahn Nahm Khem, Tambon Bang Muang, Amphoe Takua Pa, Phang Nga province, has become very well-known since the 2004 Tsunami hit the community. Bahn Nahm Khem was left badly damaged, having suffered many lost villagers. It was one of the most severely affected of the Andaman communities.

Before the Tsunami

Bahn Nahm Khem began as an anchorage for local fisherman. However things changed when a mining company, which had obtained the concession to start up mining in Takua Pa district, found tin in the Bahn Nahm Khem area and extended the mining operations into the sea. The mine operated for more than ten years using dredges and high technology mining equipment, which degraded the environment and became the source of many disagreements between the villagers and the foreign owned mining company. By 1975 the tin ore ran out and the mining company was not able to continue commercial operations. Subsequently the mine was shut down.

When in the following year Dr. Thawat Makarapol was governor of Phang Nga province, he gave permission for individual miners to continue digging for tin in the former concession area. After the announcement of the new mining policy a big change took place at Bahn Nahm Khem as people from all over Thailand flooded in to take advantage of the new economic opportunity to mine tin. Consequently, the population increased and Bahn Nahm Khem grew into quite a large community.

This time however, high technology mining equipment was not used. To begin with, the miners used more simple methods by making bamboo rafts and diving into the sea to retrieve the tin ore. Later on, this developed by using fishing boats with suction tubes attached. However, they still needed to dive into the deep sea in order to position the front end of the suction pipe.

Although these methods of mining were difficult, they failed to discourage people from trying their luck; the miners were patient and tough. Later on, mining dredges were developed which required more investment, about ten million baht. Reshaping the local mining methods changed the activities into small scale mining businesses.

From the outset, the discovery of tin along with the accompanying investment into the area transformed Bahn Nahm Khem, particularly the old districts of Chao Nam and Lam Pom, from local fishing into mining

communities. Most villagers were now working in the mining industry. For that reason some made bamboo and metal rafts, whilst others invested money in modifying their fishing boats with pumps and suction tubes.

People from other provinces and towns displayed their origins through the street names erected along the main road of Nahm Khem community; Soi Chumpae, Chiang Mai, Ayuttaya, Ta Tao, Suphan, Sena, Kophat, Taksin, Reufah, Ongkarn, Bahn Pan, Tok Pu, Sai Thong, Nakornsri and so on.

Whilst the mining was in full swing, the local economy flourished and Bahn Nahm Khem was open to everyone, including the unsavory. So it became chaotic with crimes occurring everyday.

Stories often heard at that time usually followed the theme of cheating others, so that one individual could keep all the tin. A boat owner who had modified his fishing boat with suction tubes went to work obtaining tin ore at sea. In the team, there were a number of people with various duties. One group had to dive into the water to operate the equipment to get the tin; whilst another had to retrieve the tin from the first group. Those who dived into the sea used a plastic tubing to breathe. Yet, if the boat crew who were waiting on deck wanted to keep all the tin they had collected, they would cut the plastic pipe and let the water in, so the diver or divers would drown. Sometimes, there were rock falls while they were working in the mines on land and people died. Other crimes involved robbing the mined tin resulting in the formation of a mafia in the location (Rabob Nakleng). Some criminals, men like Sua Noi and Sua Kin, are still remembered today.

When the ore was depleted and not financially worth the effort to collect it any more, mining became sluggish. Some of those who had moved from other provinces had become rich from the tin but others were bankrupt. Occasionally individuals were known to have committed suicide over their bad luck at Bahn Nahm Khem.

Once the tin mining ended, many people who had moved into the area left and some of them went back to where they had come from. However, others stayed but they changed their occupation from mining to fishing. There was new business investment and the economy of Bahn Nahm Khem prospered again.

An increased number of newcomers arrived to live and work in Bahn Nahm Khem until it became a crowded community of local people and those who had come from other provinces living together. Fishing returned to the community as the major occupation.

There were various economic groups of people living at Bahn Nahm Khem, ranging from fishing boat laborers to fish market owners and rich investors. Other people worked in fish farms, tourist resorts, restaurants and grocery shops. Hired laborers also came from neighboring countries. Bahn Nahm Khem had become a seaside town which later on many people referred to as 'Texas' or 'Nahm Khem City'.

Since Bahn Nahm Khem was located in an area near tourist destinations like Khao Lak and Phuket, fishing exports to these places provided the town with a good source of income. Some people who were living there began to work in different locations. Villagers at Bahn Nahm Khem now lived together without anyone bothering to know about each other's personal lives. Bahn Nahm Khem was no longer a small community where everyone knew each other intimately, it had become urbanized.

This can be seen from a conversation with Khun Pratan, a local leader who became the president of the community bank of Bahn Nahm Khem after the Tsunami, who shared with us some details relating to Khun Maitree Jongkrajak, who later became one of the key individuals in Bahn Nahm Khem's recovery:

"Before the Tsunami, I wasn't close to Khun Maitree but I used to talk to his father and sister a little bit. However, after we went through the Tsunami together, he and I became good friends."

The terrible situation imposed on residents by the Tsunami's waves meant that everything familiar they had been used to day by day vanished. It changed their ways of thought, livelihoods and the relationships among them. The resultant circumstances of the Tsunami created a new reality; everything would begin from zero again. They used to live separate lives, but since they had been through the catastrophe together, it created a link between them and they started to care much more about each other's problems.

Group setup after the Tsunami

Following the Tsunami, residents at Bahn Nahm Khem had to move away from their town to stay at temporary shelters located in front of Takua Pa district office. This office did not only provide assistance for the occupants of Bahn Nahm Khem, but also for other affected villages such as Bang Nieng, Bang Sak and Kuek Kak for instance.

Still, there were some people who could not move anywhere because they were still looking for their family members who had died or were missing. One person from Bahn Nahm Khem told us:

“At that time, we had lost everything, we only had ourselves and we were really searching not only for the missing but also for new hope. To have hope, we needed help and material donations. Luckily for us, people in Takua Pa and nearby areas were kindly volunteering their time to cook for us.”

Three or four days after the Tsunami, Mr. Maitree Jongkrajak, a TAO (Tambon Administrative Organization) member, said to Khun Prathan, an occupant of Bahn Nahm Khem:

“We have to leave the district office area and find a new place to stay.” The reason was that people from Bahn Nahm Khem were dispersed around the area or staying in other villages which made it difficult to manage their assistance. To simplify their task and take the aid management into their own hands Mr. Maitree consulted with Khun Prathan about gathering Bahn Nahm Khem’s residents into one area and both of them agreed to this.

They connected up with local government agencies to find a location for a temporary shelter. They got a piece of land which belonged to the Department of Mineral Resources near the TAO office at Bang Muang, which was not far from Bahn Nahm Khem. After they had got the land for the shelter, the two leaders asked the residents to move there. But not many of them came because they were unsure whether they would be able to stay there. When the two leaders had explained the situation, some residents began moving in, yet they still had some accommodation problems because there were not enough tents. Mr. Maitree as the TAO representative coordinated with the aid agencies.

By that time, officers from the Chumchon Thai Foundation and the Community Development Institute (CODI) had provided advice in organizing the group. They also set up some 50 tents for the villagers on the first night. Although a number of residents moved into the temporary shelter at the Department of Natural Resources area, most of them remained at the district office first.

Khun Prathan told us, that at the beginning of their stay there, they tried to find volunteers to distribute the responsibilities for cooking food, so the affected residents could help each other. On January 4th, 2005, the temporary shelter at the district office had to be closed and residents moved in groups to the temporary shelter at the Department of Natural Resources.

The more people moved there, the more problems evolved because each person held different opinions. That caused arguments, especially in the distribution of aid, since no officially responsible group had yet been established. Eventually, they held a meeting to solve the situation of the then homeless residents.

To manage such a large group of people like this was difficult because residents had never experienced a situation like this before, exacerbated by the fact that they had been living side by side rather than together, unlike villages that were based on family relationships.

When the disaster occurred and people were forced to live together, they had to set up volunteer systems and a committee to manage the situation. Also, they had to allocate responsibilities to separate groups who would deal with donations, act as security guards, take care of toilets, water management and cooking. They organized their work systematically and had follow-up meetings where every group had to take part.

Finally, they agreed to build temporary houses with the common agreement that the first set had to be provided for the old, new-born infants, poor and the disadvantaged.

Meanwhile, aid flooded into the area.

“At that time, there were people coming from all over the country and different organizations to help in building temporary shelters. A lot of people came here”, Khun Prathan said.

After the system set up by the residents had begun to work properly, collaboration by the Chumchon Thai Foundation, Community Development Institute and the community leaders took little time to finish the first set of temporary houses.

Even though the temporary shelters were established, there were many groups in Bahn Nahm Khem and too many donations coming into the village which caused problems. The committee had to cope with many issues related to donation money because some donors gave directly to some villagers and not to others, causing conflicts between those who did not get any money and those who did.

The committee tried to solve the problem by setting up a central donation desk with the condition for donors that they should add their donations to a donation fund. However, there were some donors who did not trust the committee and continued to give money to villagers by themselves. Some donors received complaints directly from the villagers because of the erratic way money was given out.

At that time, besides the continued existence of the temporary shelter at the Department of Natural Resources, some residents moved back into their houses. Three donation boxes were set up inside the town which funded that particular group. Management at the temporary shelter was different from other areas because they were guided by the Chumchon Thai Foundation with the Community Development Institute organizing the donation management. Every evening, representatives from each group and the committee held a meeting about their plans for the next day. They divided into sections with each section comprised of about 30 tents with one group leader. The system seemed to go very well, but there was a major problem with the donation money as its amount was already crossing the one million baht threshold. A number of villagers wanted to have the money distributed and finally, with the figure standing at one million four hundred thousand baht, it was agreed to distribute the money among the residents.

The donation money was shared amongst residents in Bahn Nahm Khem, including both those who stayed at the Department of Natural Resource temporary shelter and those who had already moved back to Bahn Nahm Khem.

“Each of us only got 900 baht. On top of that, some of us have not even received the full amount”, one leading member of the community said with resignation about the reality of where everyone was trying to grab a share of the donation money which should have been used for the community as a whole instead.

Once the more than one million baht was divided up into such small sums for each person, the usefulness of the money was reduced. So the committee at the temporary shelter had a meeting in order to try to find a solution to this issue. The solution they came up with was to gather those residents who would be willing to contribute their shares to a joint fund. They would be registered and their share of the donation money would be kept as a single sum to be used to fund a useful project for the whole community.

After every resident who had stayed at the temporary shelter had received their temporary houses, the committee made up of the leaders of each section considered their future. Residents at Bahn Nahm Khem had a habit of coffee drinking, and especially in the mornings, men liked to drink coffee and have discussions. So one of them had an idea:

“Since we are drinking coffee every morning, we should open up a coffee house and collect money for the equipment, coffee and glasses. Each of us can contribute 100 baht, so after we get up we can have a chat and drink coffee together.”

“We used the lid of a coffin to make our coffee house forum sign, and opened our coffee house under this tree”, Mr. Sakda Phannarangsri pointed out to us the former location of the coffee house on the day the author visited the temporary shelter.

With the opening of the coffee house forum, residents started to discuss their futures and issues over their occupations more often. A growing solidarity developed in the temporary shelter whilst the group management by the committee became more systematic. Residents gained a better understanding of each other’s situation and needs.

With the facility of the coffee house forum they were able to begin setting up more groups to find solutions for the residents’ future. They talked about the previous jobs of each person which led them to another problem: Some residents who used to work in fishing did not have enough money to buy

new fishing boats and if they wanted to continue working in their previous occupation, each new boat would cost about a hundred thousand baht.

“Following the Tsunami disaster we no longer had access to loan credits. No one would let us buy anything by installments,” Khun Pratan said commenting on the credit viability of the residents during the post-Tsunami period.

After they had shared their views in the coffee house some people suggested the residents should set up occupation groups. They started each group by identifying members by their previous occupations and what kind of occupation they would like to do now. Then each member had to pay into the group’s fund and a savings club was created. Following the starting of a savings club, there was more money available. The leader of each occupational group would deposit their money at the bank. Conflicts still occurred, perhaps because of inexperience in financial management.

Fortunately for everyone, there was one volunteer at the temporary shelter who was working in a bank at the executive level. He held a meeting with them and suggested they should set up their own community bank, which sounded unbelievable at first. After he provided some background information, an officer from a foundation in the network of non-government organizations brought the villagers to visit a community bank which was operating in another village. After they saw it, the residents set up their own community bank under the management system of the committee. Mr. Maitree worked as the executive and coordinator with aid organizations.

A hundred days after the Tsunami, April 4th, 2005 was marked by the opening of Bahn Nahm Khem’s community bank.

The early warning system

Every time there is a natural disaster, government agencies manage to come up with unfamiliar methods to protect people from a recurrence of the same situation. Often it would be a project that required a large budget to implement with high technology, whilst the locals who had difficulty understanding the system would not rely on them.

“The technologies used in the early warning system are unreliable.” Mr. Suriya Sinprasert, a villager from Hua Pon, Amphoe Jom Thong, Chiang Mai province, told us while we were talking about an early warning system in his village which did not work properly.

Mr. Suriya's house is located near the foot of Inthanon Mountain where there was a big flood in 2005. A number of areas on the mountain had already been surveyed and identified as being at risk of flash floods and landslides; therefore, the government set up a rain water measuring meter and an early-warning system in the villages at risk.

According to a survey done in 2005, when Chiang Mai had a serious flood crisis, too much rain would cause flash floods and landslides anywhere on the mountainside down to the foot hills. Therefore rain level measuring instruments and a warning system were installed for his village.

According to Suriya, "the villagers, who normally communicate by word of mouth, do not fully understand the warning system and they don't really know how it works. The villagers here are only able to speak Thai on a basic level, therefore it is not surprising, if some of them, especially the elderly, have misunderstandings after listening to the explanations of others, who also do not fully understand the system either. The situation in the village remains the same today."

"The warning system should help us by sounding an alarm if there is any onset of heavy rain, which could cause floods or landslides in the area. The system should warn us in advance. After hearing the warning signals we have to hurry to the refuge places...". This is an example of an explanation a young man gave to a group of elderly. In a demonstration, the warning signal was sounded so everyone could hear what it sounds like.

Suriya continued in an ironic tone that, "after the rainy season ended, everyone forgot about the warning system, how it works and what it was there for. Nothing happened after the installation until one night when there was a heavy rain storm. Suddenly the alarm sounded in the middle of the night. Some of those hearing it ran in panic to escape from their houses to find safe places; a number received injuries and bruises during the escape. They ran out of their houses but they did not know where to go. They just wanted to be somewhere they thought was safe enough, but found themselves surrounded by a dark night in heavy rain. Luckily, there was no one seriously injured that night and best of all, there was no landslide or flash flood. But because the sound of the rain was very loud, some people still slept on, not realizing what was going on. If everyone had heard the alarm, the situation might have been even more chaotic."

In the district of Pai, Mae Hong Son province, in 2005 there were flash floods and landslides causing a large loss of life and property. There is now a radar-based disaster warning system installed there. Like the residents of Chiang Mai province, people living in Pai district have little accurate knowledge about the warning systems theoretically in place.

Khun Phongphiphat Mee-benjamart, a member of the Nature Investigation Network Committee, Mae Hong Son province, reveals that he also feels unsure whether the systems installed in the area will really help.

“It is difficult to anticipate how much we would lose in lives and property each time a disaster occurs. We will only know after it happens. So it’s worth considering when the government uses only new technology for the warning system but excludes local wisdom whether it’s a good choice or not. Natural disaster warning signs are all around us. Local wisdom tells us that there will always be something unusual happening by looking at animal activity or ant migration, for instance, which can inform us about coming rains....”

Khun Phongphiphat continued about the radar-based disaster warning systems installed in the heart of Pai district:

“I cannot tell how chaotic it would be if the alarm was sounded by mistake at midday when there would be a lot of people, both tourists and locals, hearing the sound. That could result in real disorder ...”

It looks like in this regard there are similarities between the disaster warning systems in the North and South of Thailand. In late 2004, the Tsunami destroyed coastal communities along the Thai Andaman coast; it caused an immense amount of loss of lives and property. Not only have there been physical effects on those communities but psychological ones as well, even until today. Bahn Nahm Khem is the one of the communities that was most impacted by the waves.

After the disaster the government came up with a warning system which they installed. However, the affected communities were not impressed by the effectiveness of the system and, according to Khun Sakda Phunranksri, “we cannot rely on such systems. They are not one hundred percent reliable. Erected in the open without care, sun and rain can gradually deteriorate the system, ruining it or at least leaving it in bad condition. Sometimes we think,

even the sound of heavy rain might be able to mask the warning sound reaching some areas.”

Once disasters occur, no matter where they are, in the North or the South, the first reaction at the administration level is always to believe that technology is the answer in creating warning systems. Again and again, people have little or no opportunity of involvement in the decision-making process. This kind of negative thinking causes Thai people to wonder if they are being cheated by a hidden agenda. They question the way and the amount of money being spent on such projects. Besides, the administrations always overlook the body of local wisdom regarding natural disaster warning signs. Even though it is clear that local people’s knowledge of natural disasters and warnings surely exists in both southern and northern regions, the knowledge has never been accessed to be incorporated in the disaster warning systems.

All this knowledge, in the long run, could be built on or developed by government agencies as curriculums to be used in schools. Firstly, it could be used for passing on knowledge and secondly, preparing ourselves for natural disasters. It would be better if the knowledge was included along with any new technology which, it has to be remembered, is also new to the affected communities.

Volunteers of Tsunami aid provision

It was not the first time that I had visited Bahn Nahm Khem. My plan was to meet Khun Maitree, then a leader at Bahn Nahm Khem Communal Coordination Centre. He had not changed since our first meeting. The day we met again he was still occupied with work in his small room, working behind his monitor; he always had a telephone and a walkie-talkie with him. Nevertheless, he was willing to offer me some help after we had a chat, so I told him I wanted a boat to take me on a trip.

“I could contact some of my friends to check if there are some boats,” he said. I thought that would be better than searching for one myself, so I accepted without hesitation. We made a plan on how and where we would meet and finally agreed the trip would start at 2 pm in the afternoon because of the general timetable for boat owners regarding tides.

After departing the center to do personal business somewhere else, I was there again at 1 pm. By chance, I met the crew of a television program who

came to interview some residents and Khun Maitree. I had to wait for a while before he had time to talk with me and speak to a boat owner through his walkie talkie. Shortly afterwards a man arrived and he offered to drive me to Lamson beach where we might find a boat. I introduced myself first and he told me his nickname was Samae. From then on I referred to him as Pi Samae.

A few minutes later I found myself on the back of his motor bike, he said we had to check the weather conditions before it was possible to go on the trip.

“Strong winds could block us from leaving,” he said. “Last night, because of strong winds, I could only go on one journey to place fish traps in the sea and had to return back to shore quickly,” he added.

At the beach of Bahn Lamson, nearly 30 boats were floating along offshore. The wind was strong like he had said. Colorful cloth tied on the poles of those boats blew horizontally, whipping up and down by the force of the wind. Pi Samae had a talk with some boat owners with southern accents. I caught very few things they discussed. Pi Samae told me all of the captains did not want to set sail now because of the wind.

So we went to another port that used to function as moorage for mining barges in the past and Pi Samae told me:

“Last night I saw there were people making camp around here. They had a great time enjoying themselves cooking on those old barges” I looked at the old craft floating at anchor and imagined how romantic it would be to sleep on them.

We had been leaning into the wind looking at everything and nothing for a while before going to the Tsunami memorial site of Bahn Nahm Khem. The Kromaluang Chumphorn monument is a place well known to Thais, nearby is the Khun Thalay spirit house. From there we could clearly see some large ships starting out to sea. Two of them were electric generator ships. Following them were seine net fishing boats known locally as Mae ships. The Mae ships are large boats with many masts. They also have large superstructures with a number of decks on top. Around 40 or 50 crew or workers, depending on the size of the boat, can live and work on board. I noticed that they carried a lot of bamboo. Pi Samae explained:

“They will lower the bamboo into the sea so that sea weed will grow on them. Sea weed is a good source of food for fish. Around those bamboo poles electric generators will shine lights on the surface of the sea to lure fish and the crew will then catch them using seine nets to trap them.”

Among the ships we saw another one caught my interest. This was of the type locally called Loi (floating) ships. On this kind of vessel there are winches to help drag the seine nets on board. We saw the boats departing until they all disappeared beyond the horizon. Then Pi Samae started talking about his experience of unusual winds:

“I have noticed a strange phenomenon like this wind and thought perhaps it was something caused by changes in the atmosphere through global warming. It is an unusual wind.” He continued on by saying that the sea and weather changed all the time now, sometimes strong winds arrived without warning. Strong winds and bad weather were real problems for local fishermen when they were working at placing and collecting fish traps.

“How far do boats normally go out to sea? Do you know?” I asked. “About ten nautical miles, where the sea depth is about 40 meters.” He explained to me that one nautical mile was equal to 1,600 meters. After that we talked about his personal background. He told me that he was born in Trang in 1976 and then moved to Bahn Nahm Khem as a child, studying at the local school.

“At that time Bahn Nahm Khem’s school roof was covered with nipa palm leaves and only had two teachers. My father worked at the mining sites when the areas around Bahn Nahm Khem were all involved in the tin mining business,” he said. “Around 1976, after the end of mining concession of Tamko Co., Ltd, the governor of Phuket province granted permission to people to collect tin ore in Bahn Nahm Khem.”

He pointed to a restaurant located on one side of the shore and said: “The area around there used to be called Bang Lud, but now it has been changed to Lam Pom. It also used to be a mine.” He stopped and swept his eyes over the area along the shore. “In recent years, there have been a lot of restaurants or food stalls with big umbrellas opening up along this shore,” Pi Samae said sharing his knowledge about the past of Bahn Nahm Khem.

“The Tsunami swept away everything on the beach,” Pi Samae said with a tone reflecting the tragedy. “I still remember the day when the Tsunami happened. I was not at my home. I just made a call to chat with one of my friends, when he told me about the situation at Bahn Nahm Khem. Everything along the shore had been completely swept away by the wave. I first thought that it was a joke, it was unbelievable.

My friend replied saying, “a huge wave came on a day with a clear blue sky!” Then the line suddenly went dead. After making a second call I heard him crying and telling me that there was only my sister left alive at my house. I rushed back to Bahn Nahm Khem but the police blocked everyone from going into the affected area. However, I drove through the barrier but I could not go any further because of the big piles of wreckage, consisting of ruined boats and houses stopping me before I was able to reach my house.”

“Everyone tried to find their relatives. The dead had been scattered throughout the area. When anyone found a body that was not one of their relatives, they made a sign to indicate the place where it lay. So there were lots of sticks with plastic bottles on top enabling people to check. Some even had to use water to wash the muddy faces of the dead they found to see whether they were their relatives or not. It’s scary to see things like that. Some bodies were stripped of clothes by the force of the wave and everything available was used to cover them.”

Luckily, Pi Samae met his father after a long search; he had been stranded in the sea for seven hours before people found him at Bang Muang temple. He became paralyzed after the rescue but some said he was just sick from despair and it was not really a physical symptom. Pi Samae never found his mother...

“I prayed to god to help me find my mother like I met my dad. I spent days looking for her but there was not a sign of her anywhere... ” His voice faded and became emotional. This was one of those bitter memories of someone who experienced the Tsunami, it is impossible for them to forget. No one wanted to face it or accept that it was real. Pi Samae in fact did not want to escape from talking about it, saying that the Tsunami experience for him was something unavoidable because it would be in their memories forever.

We kept silent for some time. Only the sound of the sea could be heard.

“Maitree helped our community a lot after the Tsunami”, Pi Samae stated, suddenly changing the topic and starting to talk about Khun Maitree, one of Bahn Nahm Khem’s leaders. “It’s hard to imagine what it would have been like if he had not been here to help.” He said with sincere and heartfelt appreciation for the efforts that Khun Maitree had made on behalf of Bahn Nahm Khem.

A diver at Bahn Nahm Khem and his sickness after the Tsunami

It has been three years at Bahn Nahm Khem since the Tsunami. Before it, old Luarn was an active old man of nearly 70 years of age. Some said he did not like sitting still and not working. Even though he was nearly 70 he was still healthy and never had a serious illness. He was one of those who were swept out to sea the day the Tsunami came and it took hours before he was rescued. Old Luarn was in fact Pi Samae’s father. Pi Samae told me about his father’s ordeal after the wave swept everything, including the old man, out to sea. With his last breath his father had continued swimming and was finally able to grasp a sofa he saw floating with him and rest on it for hours until he was found and rescued. Pi Samae was very happy and also hoped to find his mother alive but she was never seen again.

When his father had still been in a good health, he always went fishing with him. He was really good at diving without a snorkel. Sometimes his father dove for so long that he began to worry, but every time he would emerge in good shape.

However, the Tsunami brought an illness to old Luarn. Three months after he had been rescued, an illness befell him, he was so sick that he had to go to hospital.

“Some said he suffered from despair,” Pi Samae added, “but I don’t think his illness is only from despair, my father is not weak like that.” He continued by saying he believed the Tsunami brought strange things with it and this illness was perhaps part of it. There was a strange grass, for example, that started growing throughout Bahn Nahm Khem after the Tsunami. This grass had not existed here before; he was so sure that it came with the Tsunami.

He told me that following the disaster there were some people at Bahn Nahm Khem who were injured. They suffered from wounds accompanied by chronic pain and the wounds have never healed. In some cases they

became worse and worse. There was the case of a family that had experienced this kind of mysterious illness. The husband had to have an operation to cut his leg off but that did not help. He later died of infection. Even now the widow still suffers from infected wounds.

Another case involved an old man who was the same age as Pi Samae's father. He was also hit by the wave and cast adrift in the sea; he later developed the same illness. He also became kind of paralyzed but fortunately not in such a serious condition as old Luarn. He now has to use a stick to aid his walking.

As for old Luarn, he could not look after himself, unable to do anything, even bathing or eating. The children took care of him all the time. The illnesses that came after the disaster not only affected old Luarn, but also showed up in other people, making it something directly attributable to the Tsunami. The families of those patients were burdened by the duty of looking after their relatives. The needs of the relatives were very difficult to manage for them, and the case of old Luarn, for example, should be diligently investigated by the physicians.

If it is possible, these patients caught up by the Tsunami should be given free treatment. People here are very upset as the illnesses have really aggravated their overall situation.

"Our family has had to pay 800 baht each time we go to hospital for medicine," Pi Samae explained. "The medicine we get is only enough for one month." It would be better if the hospital would assign doctors to provide routine visits to the patients in their homes, at least once every two or three months. The appeal from the members of patients' families reflected an unattended need. Outsiders might believe the rehabilitation process at Bahn Nahm Khem has recovered all the damage already, but this is far from the truth. They overlook the deeper and more complex side effects, especially the emotional and psychological problems. The community at Bahn Nahm Khem still needs more help to recover.

Krasue boats

At the time of writing, it has been three years since the day of the Tsunami and for most people everything about it seems to fade away with each passing day. To outside appearances, those at Bahn Nahm Khem, especially the fishermen, also try to live their lives as if it were the day before the

destructive waves. However, they are still recovering from the destruction that also totally destroyed their fishing equipment.

At the port of Lamson community, in the afternoon under the hot sun, with a constant gentle breeze coming on shore, local fishing boats are dropping anchor and their crews are unloading fishing equipment such as fishing baskets, seine nets and traps etc. The fish and shrimps that are still in the traps and nets are going to be removed elsewhere on the beach.

When the catch is prepared, fish retailers usually come along and buy it. The retailers, who are part of the same communities as the fishermen, conduct negotiations on the beach to buy their catch. If the retailers do not arrive, fishermen will deliver the fish to the fish market where they will receive a wholesale price. Fishermen at Bahn Nahm Khem have a long relationship with a number of fish market owners and they tend to deal with the same ones they have known for a long time. According to Pi Samae, at Bahn Lamson, Pi Yhawweep and Pi Prayoon are two of the fish market owners the fishermen can rely on.

“If fishermen catch a hundred kilos of fish or more each time they go out to the sea, it is fine. They can make enough money to feed their families out of that,” Pi Samae said.

A hundred kilos of fish would be divided among the three fishermen who are normally in the same group. With 10,000 baht to be divided among the three it is quite good money. Around 2 pm in the afternoon the fishermen leave on their daily fishing trips. Ten nautical miles out and at a depth of around 40 meters is their destination. They will drift on the sea overnight and come back to shore by the next midday.

I had a chance to join in with the activities of the fishermen and experience the way in which they lived their lives. That day, I helped them remove fish and crab from the seine nets and it gave me a good chance to talk and laugh in a relaxed way with them. Boats were continually traveling back and forth on the sea; they all knew each other so well that they could recognize each boat at a distance. After having completed the removal of fish from the nets, they were shared out. Normally, they would take just enough for consumption for their families and the rest would be sold.

There were even some children helping on the boats, but their reward for this work was different. They were provided with instant noodles and when

shrimps were added the aroma made me feel hungry. I asked the fishermen about their experiences on the boats around the coastal areas and if they were satisfied with their lives. They replied that it was ok but they were worried about the future of the local fishery.

The day I spent with Pi Samae at the port, he told me that fishermen had begun to arrive off Bahn Nahm Khem's waters using larger boats and tighter mesh's in their nets. The villagers call them Krasue (the name of a female ghost accompanied by dazzling lights). They were highly destructive because of the nets they used. They also had searchlights to lure fish and could catch them in both shallow and deep water.

"As we have seen, there are six or seven Krasue boats coming to fish around Bahn Nahm Khem, most of them are from Lang Suan, Ranong province." Krasue boats cause local fishermen to worry about the future of their fishery because of the way they catch fish, using nets with a smaller mesh catches even juvenile fish. So everything would be caught no matter whether the fish were mature or not.

"The seine nets they use certainly affect the environment and our local way of life. Such tactics are totally destructive. They are from other areas and do not recognize the affects on our community and they don't care if they denude our area of the sea, leaving it completely empty, they just keep on taking fish from everywhere. This is different from what we have been doing here at Bahn Nahm Khem. The sea is important to us as a source of food and income. If we used destructive methods like them, the fish stock would be reduced and we would not know where to go if our sea was empty of fish," said a villager. The villagers have appealed to the local fishery office but no action has been taken to solve this problem. "Even though the authorities have come to see the situation for themselves, it's still the same. Nothing has happened."

The troubling case of the Krasue boats coming to Bahn Nahm Khem became heated when local fishermen and the Krasue boats owners began to quarrel. Boat owners challenged the fishermen declaring that they were not afraid of anyone around.

Local fishermen's leaders felt very concerned about this situation because in the past when their communities had similar problems, violence was the result and these leaders did not want their community to become embroiled

in the same sort of conflicts again. They attempted to coordinate with the provincial fishery office but they were not willing to become involved.

Pi Parn was one of the community leaders of Soi Tok Pu. He earned his living trapping squid and we talked about the consequences resulting from the arrival of the Krasue boats.

“We came to the conclusion that if we did nothing and left the boats alone to continue to fish, very soon the sea in this area would be empty. Many of the community leaders at Bahn Nahm Khem thought the best way out would be to get help from supporting agencies to immediately come and solve this problem. The fishermen by themselves could do very little and they were doing what they could by discussing the best course of action.”

Pi Sakda another local leader said, “such problems need resolutions at the policy level, we (local people) could not easily ask them (the Krasue boat owners) to make a compromise. They think they have the right to go fishing anywhere they want. If villagers and boats owners met to try and make a compromise, there would only be an argument. It’s not worth it. There should have been measures in place to limit the operational area for these Krasue boats. We as a community should be entitled to protect our sea in the same way that people in Northern Thailand who live in forests are able to protect their communal forest.” Pi Sakda concluded his comments by saying that sooner or later this issue of communal sea management will become part of the public agenda.

He also added that if the boats persisted in fishing in shallow water, all the natural resources, fish, seashells and crabs would soon be gone. That meant people here would have problems with having to go farther afield to find new sources of food or income in other areas. The problem of Krasue boats cannot be managed by the community itself. This is a good example of how difficult it is for a community in Thailand to resolve problems by themselves without any help from the government.

Preparations for the arrival of tourism at Bahn Nahm Khem

I had just arrived from the Tsunami memorial site of Bahn Nahm Khem and was continuing on to Khao Lak. At Khao Lak, there are a lot of small bars that have opened up along the beach and at any time the police could come and pull them down.

“They do not have enough money to pay for better locations to open bars or shops like these. There is no other option, they do not have any jobs. It does not matter if the police come and ask them to leave. They have nothing to lose,” Pi Sakda explained to me. It reminded me of what I had heard from people at Bahn Tok Pu a couple of days before, “tourism is only beneficial to developers not to communities...”

After the Tsunami, many organizations mobilized material and other forms of assistance to help the affected communities which included both short and long-term aid. As time passed by, most people in the impacted communities started to forget the nightmare. The long-term aid had been systematically organized with a huge amount of money. The parties in charge of the task worked at the national administrative level.

Four years ago, the district of Takua Pa, Tambon Khao Lak, enjoyed a high income derived from tourism. However, the Tsunami destroyed everything in its path and in the years following a huge budget was mobilized for rehabilitation. Khao Lak has been recovered to almost the pre-Tsunami condition. There are a lot of tourists and most traces of the disaster have gone. Today it is ready to welcome tourists again.

Bahn Nahm Khem was another community hit especially hard by the Tsunami. Hence, it was amongst the first of the target communities which needed to be recovered. Tourism projects have been established in the area and the history and origins of Bahn Nahm Khem have been considered for use as an additional tourist attraction. This could be linked to other tourism projects to be implemented in the area. I heard from Pi Parn that special tourism areas are being developed in Koh Khor Khao. Bahn Nahm Khem is located in the vicinity of these projects.

There is a correlation between the information Pi Parn gave me, and the information I already knew: the issue that Koh Kor Khao has some features and facilities that could attract tourists to visit the place. To begin with, there is an old airport built during World War II. It is expected to be rehabilitated and used again as a link to Phuket airport. A canal which is connected to Takua Pa district, once used as the main method of commuting, would be used again for tourist cruises.

The effort to connect Koh Khor Khao to Bahn Nahm Khem might be of benefit to Bahn Nahm Khem because there will be a lot of tourists visiting

the community to enjoy a number of activities. Even with the kind of activities like taking photographs of boats and land in the community damaged by the Tsunami, visiting the community as an 'open air museum', residents could gain a benefit by, for example selling souvenirs. Tourists would come from two directions, from Koh Khor Khao and Phuket.

The tourism plan needs time for gradual implementation. There have already been three consecutive governments involved in the plan. The traditional way of life of fisher folk here also needs to be considered as well as the fishing activities being mainly for daily consumption in households. Sometimes fishing communities like Bahn Nahm Khem have been disrupted by the issue of whether it is necessary to spend a lot of money on such projects.

Khun Maitree in his role as leader of Bahn Nahm Khem mentioned that the tourism project had been initiated after the Tsunami without any information being given to the villagers. Therefore, they could not participate. Under Khun Maitree's leadership they got together as a communal group to form the Bahn Nahm Khem communal bank, and successively to develop a tourism project on their own. It is called 'Phiphitaphan Mee Cheewit' (the Living Museum). They want to show that they can run a project of this kind themselves.

"In the front of every house, there will be a map of Bahn Nahm Khem to show tourists where the sites of interest in Bahn Nahm Khem are. People here could answer questions or guide the tourists to where they want to go." "The living museum' is a project that Khun Maitree is proud to present, and to demonstrate how they will use their own natural resources to rehabilitate their community after the Tsunami. From informal conversations with the residents, I have found that they do not want their community to be just another place for tourists to come and leave. They want to develop it to showcase their history for everyone to study. Khun Maitree explained to me about the natural sites that could be linked to their way of life and to ecotourism, such as the mangrove forest for example. Villagers are also involved with ongoing efforts of planting mangrove trees to preserve the forest.

The message I gleaned from the villagers at Soi Tok Pu is that they think that Bahn Nahm Khem can never separate itself from the mangrove forest because of the very close relationship the community has with the forest.

Since the Tsunami the forest has been regenerated by a communal effort to protect it. Already before the Tsunami, mangrove forest concessions had destroyed the mangroves over a large area. A group of small fishing boat owners talked with the government to recommend that they stop allowing forest concessions. Their negotiations worked out quite well because the concessions have since reduced and in some areas even stopped. Since then the forest has recovered to a good condition again.

The forest proved itself invaluable to the community and it has been recognized as worth preserving when it saved a lot of people from the Tsunami. As a natural barrier it reduces the effects of a tsunami. Some say, the community might have lost many more people if the forest had not been there. The mangrove forest around Bang Pu canal and Koh Lan are at present used for fishing. They are also expected to be included in the areas for tourism to show everyday life in Bahn Nahm Khem.

From Nakorn Sri Thammarath to Bahn Nahm Khem

Some of you might be familiar with the saying "Circumstance makes heroes". When the Tsunami struck the communities along the Andaman Coast, Khun Maitree Jongkraichak's role as a leader of Bahn Nahm Khem began.

Looking back on his life long before circumstances forced him to take up his role as a community leader: He was born in Amphoe Chien Yai, Nakorn Sri Thammarath province. Along with his parents he later moved to Bahn Nahm Khem because of a political issue that affected his family. In those days there were two political beliefs in conflict, communism and capitalism as promoted by the Thai government. This was to become a turning point for his family because his father got caught up in this struggle, even though he was neither a politician, nor communist nor a leader in any way.

Being in contact with and knowing many people, his father still could not avoid being trapped in this situation, especially as lives had been lost during fighting between the groups. The way of life and traditions of communities all over Thailand had been affected and his father was just another one of those who had to move out of Nakorn Sri Thammarath for his safety.

"My father had no permanent work at that time but he got involved with trying to solve problems in the community such as cattle rustling. He would

find out where they were taken to and even steal them back from the rustler." Such people involved in cattle rustling were called "nakleng" (men with a violent nature, a kind of local mafiosi). Naklengs were regarded as being another aspect of the local way of life in the south of Thailand. They had to be willing to assist the community generally and with such help they would be respected. People understood that they had the power to make others afraid of them.

With the escalation of the conflict of ideas even in the local sphere, nakleng methods did not provide a way out. People more and more distrusted each other. They also got suspicious on which side Maitree's father stood in the conflict. That's why he had to leave.

He and his family moved to Bahn Nahm Khem. With them moved Maitree, the ninth child in the family which was very poor at the time. In the beginning, Maitree had to walk to Bahn Nahm Khem school in his bare feet. As a nakleng his father did not care much about his family. Maitree was the youngest child, and the first and only one to get more than only primary school education. His father's nakleng involvement only started to get less when Maitree attended secondary school and his father started to plant rubber trees. After graduation from high school in Takua Pa district, Maitree furthered his education to get a vocational certificate as an electric technician in Phuket province.

Supported by his mother, he moved on to continue his studies in Bangkok. He attended evening classes and worked during the day time, especially after the initial financial support of his mother, based on a loan she had taken for him from a loan shark, had run out. His work was highly appreciated in the garage and all the factories where he would successively work. It was a tough time for him, until he finally received the High Vocational Certificate.

Maitree ordained as a monk in Nakorn for some time, before he returned to Bangkok to look for a job. He was not successful, so that he finally followed the advice of his then girl-friend to rent a shop and sell Southern food. This business developed successfully, even though Maitree felt a bit ashamed not to be able to use his formal education. Still, they were to accumulate enough savings that he felt so confident as to get married. With these savings, they went into a new business, selling clothes. This went rather well for some time - until the Asian Crisis of 1997 came. With the rent

being continuously high, sales slowly went down, particularly after the Thai Government had accepted a loan from the International Monetary Fund. Despite all struggling, Maitree and his wife ended up with a failed business and 400,000 Baht in debt.

As a result, they had to move to Maitree's mother-in-law's house in Surat Thani. Bad times followed with low income from a factory job plus what they could gain from feeding some pigs; but that was just enough to pay back the monthly rates to come up for the debts. For their survival they depended on his mother-in-law. Luckily, Maitree did not resort to alcohol at the time, he just started to smoke heavily. Their life at the time had almost collapsed.

"One day I said to myself that I cannot put up with this situation any more. It's an embarrassment letting my mother in law look after us." He decided to go back to Bahn Nahm Khem. His wife did not agree with him in first place, so he returned to Bahn Nahm Khem alone and started work as an employee in a fish market owned by his sister.

For example, I worked as a driver for my sister when fish were delivered late at night; I sometimes had to work until 2 or 3 am in the morning. Separating fish according to size was also my task and I never refused any work. I received no salary from her. I just was given money if we were lucky enough to get a lot of fish, then I used to have five or six thousand baht. I never asked for money if my sister didn't give me any and in the instances we were well off, she gave it to me twice a month."

As time passed by, his decision to come back to Bahn Nahm Khem proved to be the right one. With the help of his sister and his enthusiastic attitude to work helped improve things and he began to save the money he received from his sister. It was enough to pay off his debt to the clothes shop. Then he went to see his wife and children and had them move to Bahn Nahm Khem, keeping his promise.

Back in the days when he was troubled all his problems seemed endless and he could only speak with despair to his wife about how bad he felt. He did not even have one penny in his pocket and television was the only entertainment he could afford. He gained a lot of knowledge from the numerous programs he saw and there was especially one program called

‘Sam Nauk Rak Bahn Kerd’ (the gratefulness we owe to our hometown) that influenced him.

“One day after I saw the program, I felt that I had to do something to show gratitude to my hometown. I had knowledge and the question was how could I use this knowledge to help improve my village?”

That was the first time his intention to help his community was triggered. He wanted to see his hometown shown on television in the same way as other villages in the north or northeastern provinces were. He also hoped people in Bahn Nahm Khem would join in doing communal activities together such as the Loi Krathong festival instead of just engaging in them by themselves.

He proposed his idea to organize a communal festival to some communal leaders but they were rejected as being unrealistic. They said a festival like Loi Krathong needed a lot of money and many people to hold. Bahn Nahm Khem could not manage to do that by itself. When his ideas were rejected he was upset and this became a real challenge for him. He resolved that if he someday was in a position in the communal administration, he would do something useful for the community, especially like the idea of organizing the Loi Krathong festival. When it came to the TAO election season, he put himself forward by applying to be a TAO member. He was then successfully elected to the position he wanted.

Three months after he was elected, he organized a Loi Krathong festival. There were some groups of people gossiping behind his back that he was only trying to promote himself, while others still praised him. This was the first project where only a few people joined in to help. However, it turned out very well and he and his colleagues ended up sending a letter of thanks to all the companies and individuals that provided money and helped organize the festival.

After the event ended, the management staff including himself received praise from many groups. They regarded the way they had managed the money to hold the celebration as clear and upfront. This signaled a new dimension to local administration and was actually Khun Maitree’s dream inspired by the above mentioned T.V. program. It was a good start. He began to dream of the time when Bahn Nahm Khem would be featured on television. There was around 10,000 baht left over and was deposited in the

village cooperative. The money would be kept for the purpose of starting another communal project.

The new management group collected more members and started to consider other issues that occurred again and again, like the problem of the local fishery. Boats were very important necessities for fishing. The safety of fishermen drifting at sea relied mainly on their boats. The loss of those boats was like losing their most valuable possession. Khun Maitree was always aware of this issue. Even though he was not one of those who were directly involved with going to sea and using the boats for fishing, he worked with local people and knew their problems. Above all, the people he knew were all from his neighborhood since he was a child. Each boat lost or damaged cost a lot of money, sometimes up to 100,000 baht. The fishermen then needed to obtain a loan to get a new boat as soon as possible.

So he came up with the idea to set up a communal boat group. This group would help its members in saving money for the time that any fisherman lost his boat. In this case the member could borrow money directly from the fund. This would help them save money avoiding the necessity of paying high interests to loan sharks.

However, before the fund was finally established, the terrible nightmare of the Andaman Tsunami occurred!

“On the day of the Tsunami, my wife and I were in front of our house when my wife noticed a large crest of a wave coming. She excitedly asked me to look. I told her off for exaggerating and just said to her to have our camera ready to take a photo. Partly, the sea water retreated and left a dry beach. We just did not have a chance to take a photo. When the wave came near, we ran, escaping just in time.....” Khun Maitree shared with me his horrible experience of the tragedy.

The situation after the wave arrived was very chaotic. The areas near the shore of Bahn Nahm Khem were swept away. “I thought there would be nothing left of Bahn Nahm Khem any more. How could we continue to live our lives with the community destroyed like that?” The scene he saw was indescribable because of the overwhelming shock: people swallowed by the sea, the ruined houses and bodies of the dead everywhere. Even today, all these images are still in his memory, never fading.

The Tsunami is regarded as a turning point in his life. As a member of the local government, Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO), he acted according to what he believed was needed for his beloved town. Deep inside, he wanted to do something to heal his community. Now he started to show his real leadership. Khun Maitree met a lot of people who came to help in the area. Many of those groups not only came to give material help but also to develop the community in some way. The aid given had been managed systematically as the goals had been set in advance and the gathering of affected people soon developed into a network of Tsunami victims.

There were many strangers from a lot of NGOs and they proved themselves to be professionals in disaster aid. They had had a lot of experience in disaster aid, some for more than 30 years. However, their goals needed to be adjusted because the situation after the Tsunami was different from the disasters occurring in the past, as every disaster is a new one and has its own characteristics. There were vast areas and a lot of people affected by the one called Tsunami. Its consequences were something huge and formless.

Houses for the homeless

Bahn Nahm Khem consisted of people with various backgrounds and origins. Some were originally local. By law people have to take part in the national census after living in an area for a time. Some moved in and rented houses there, whilst their names were still registered in other provinces or areas. However, many of them stayed in Bahn Nahm Khem for a long time. The rest was a group of people who were not Thais. Thus, the Bahn Nahm Khem people could all be divided into subgroups such as “the locals”, “the displaced Thais” (Thai Plad Thin) and foreign workers from neighboring countries, mostly Myanmar/Burma.

All those people in Bahn Nahm Khem, no matter who they were, suddenly became victims of the Tsunami. Afterwards, the level of aid they obtained varied. A large group of people concentrated at the temporary shelter at the Department of Mineral Resources office. They got together in hope of solving their problems in different ways. They arranged to have the communal bank of Bahn Nahm Khem as the main focus of Tsunami aid. There were a lot of professions there such as fish farmers, local boat owners and fishermen.

The Bahn Mankhong project (Secure Home Project) was one developed under a larger programme to solve the housing problem. There were too many hurdles to overcome when getting involved with government agencies to solve this problem because the help was limited to those individuals who owned land. At present in Bahn Nahm Khem a lot of signs recalling the names of the aid donors can be seen everywhere. For those local people who were displaced and did not possess their own plot of land, the government built shelters on state land (such as the ITV houses built in the area of Bahn Bang Muang located far away from Bahn Nahm Khem and Bahn Pru Teaw) but the victims of the Tsunami could not really own these houses.

Most of the people who did not receive help from the government were coming from other areas outside of Bahn Nahm Khem and had rented houses in the community. In reality they had been living in Bahn Nahm Khem for decades but they were still not classed as local people according to the law. After the Tsunami this was the group of people which later on gathered and stayed at the temporary sheltering center around the savings cooperative.

The communal bank of Bahn Nahm Khem was founded with the help provided from aid organizations, foundations and international governments. Its conception was based on the rehabilitation project originally owned by the residents. The management bodies for the houses of displaced people had initiated the Secure Home Project 1 with more than 50 resident members. Land was bought to build houses for each household within the membership after which the members had to pay back in monthly installments to the housing fund.

The Community Organization Development Institute was another body that played a key role in supporting the Secure Home Project. The institute provided support for building roads, an electricity grid and a water supply system.

As for the money to build the houses, all the budgets were in the form of funds provided through the management of Bahn Nahm Khem's communal bank. The money given to establish the fund was donated by various organizations and the Chumchon Thai foundation. The foundation also acted as facilitator for the project.

The Secure Home Project actually sprung from the response of those people who were neglected by the government, as this group was not included in the list of victims according to the guidelines set by the government. The leader of the group had begun taking action when they were in the temporary shelter center. They had a single-minded attitude towards their circumstances and this helped the group achieve their ends.

The determination of the members of this group usually grew out of the meetings with the leaders and the intention to own new houses. The needs of each member had to be taken into account and they had to develop a good understanding of how they could participate in the project. The members needed to be selected based on the qualifications outlined; the savings group was established to support the group's financial status through the communal bank. The bank had an important role in helping the villagers down to the smallest detail because most of them were impoverished.

A leader from the group communicated that after the Tsunami this group of people could not take out loans from anywhere because they had no credit. An employee from Krung Thai bank suggested that the communal bank was a good way to go in solving the problem. And the communal bank really worked out. When the group had to set up the conditions proposed by the supporting organizations, the first step in building the houses for its members started with buying land.

The project 1 had learned somewhat through trial and error, even though all its members had participated and the process had been identified carefully, the participation of the members needed to be developed and guided at the beginning. In particular, many problems had to be addressed during the building of the houses.

The problems that were encountered during project 1 were used as a lessons learnt in project 2. In project 2, there were 56 members. It followed the general pattern of the first project and only the details were adjusted. For example, the houses built would not be allotted to its members until all of them had been built.

For this reason, it was found that all the houses were built to the same standard. There were no biases in building the houses such as those which happened in the 1st project because the members had no idea whose house

they were constructing. A homeless person Sakda Phanrangsri, who was the chairman of the Secure House Project 1, said that

“We have made new history in Bahn Nahm Khem for our children. We’ll tell them that people of this generation built Bahn Nahm Khem from its ruins. Even though we were poor, we have a story to be proud of in our community.”

Not only Sakda, but all those individuals participating in the rehabilitation of the ruined Bahn Nahm Khem could feel proud of themselves. Today they have taken one more step forward from what they used to imagine was their reality. They got a chance to communicate their problems on TV and the community was not only strong but also more secure.

Recollections of the author

This has been the first time I have traveled to the far South on a plane; it took just a few hours. All around I found myself surrounded by sea water, it is totally different from the North where we are embraced by mountain ranges.

The Tsunami was beyond the imagination of the highland people. Now, on television, they could see what it was like. My traveling to the South this time was involved in bringing the wave into the light by collecting data about how communities helped themselves after the Tsunami.

I understood that residents in communities in every part of Thailand have their own problems. Now in the South, people here were faced by the particularly devastating problems caused by nature. Bahn Nahm Khem was my target area from which I would go and collect data about the situation three years after the Tsunami.

The first day I was there, despite the passing of three years, I still saw traces of the destruction that the Tsunami wrought everywhere. Many aspects of the disaster have faded away from the memory of the people here while others still linger. The orange ship also known as the devil or Sri Samut ship rests on land around Soi Tok Pu. This ship brought home to the locals the realization of what the Tsunami really was.

The devil ship’s name was coined by the way it hurtled into the community on the wave, crashed into buildings and killed many people in its path.

Another ship was painted blue and also had its story. The blue one was named the angel ship or Krissana Sakorn. The story went that the blue ship saved two people without causing any serious damage.

The answers I needed to find for the questions I had, could be obtained from the lessons learnt by the residents after the Tsunami. At first I thought the resolutions here were the same as in other areas facing normal problems. I had many experiences with a number of communities previously. In reality, Bahn Nahm Khem was very different in light of its mixture of people and cultures. I felt this was a worthwhile experience and collecting data in Bahn Nahm Khem made me feel happy.

I was used to seeing groups of people participating in forming communal groups. However, my experience in forming communal groups was disappointing as most of the projects failed, this was different from what I saw in Bahn Nahm Khem. There were differences displaying communal strength generated by a strong collective value. All these qualities were formed through a hard-working process and dedication in the leadership of each group.

I realized an outstanding characteristic of the group in Bahn Nahm Khem when comparing them to the groups I was used to dealing with in the north of Thailand. The groups here followed their leaders. At the same time, the leaders were serious and decisive. In my opinion, the traits of leadership shown in Bahn Nahm Khem came from the local values and personal characteristics.

The communal groups were developed to be the strong communal organizations having the same goal. Based on the common sense of the community, villagers worked with their true inspiration without anyone to tell them otherwise. The clear procedures in the projects in Bahn Nahm Khem could be seen as the team worked with clear-cut responsibilities of each individual.

One thing that could be seen all the time in the groups, was the dedication of their leaders. They worked really hard for the communities. When I was in Bahn Nahm Khem, I talked a lot with Khun Maitree. He was an important leader there. He said that what makes us feel the value of ourselves was when we help others who lack opportunities. He started thinking like this after the Tsunami happened. He was immersed in the real life event of

seeing the last moments of life of people swept away by the wave. We will not be able to take anything with us when we die.

The Tsunami created a new dimension in which to see life. Khun Maitree with his colleagues worked as a team. After Bahn Nahm Khem recovered to some extent, he had even more duties to do. Besides Bahn Nahm Khem, he had to get involved with development duties in other areas, too. That is because the Tsunami not only affected Bahn Nahm Khem.

Khun Maitree worked as a coordinator in the gathering of the Tsunami Victims Network along the Andaman coast, a network which helped to solve problems after the Tsunami.

At the same time, his dream to develop his community had to go on, such as developing the quality of life for people there. Bahn Nahm Khem's Communal Coordination Center provided a lot of help as the primary coordinating body with support by the communal bank. Today through many of the projects affiliated to the center, the community of Bahn Nahm Khem has recovered a great deal from the Tsunami. The first phase, where it had to depend on help from the Department of Mineral Resources has long passed. It is more than three years now, after the end of the mid-term Tsunami rehabilitation, and occupational groups such as fish farmers, inshore fishermen and other self-employed professions have been conducting their livelihoods. The overall picture of Bahn Nahm Khem in many aspects has improved. Still, there are some problems remaining, serious ones too. Land conflicts and illnesses (both physical and mental) brought on by the Tsunami are waiting for proper solutions. The problems left must not be allowed to only become personal matters, so that the suffering of these individuals would have to be solved on their own.

Resolving problems after the Tsunami for long term rehabilitation was not quite enough for the affected people. Another difficulty for them arose when they were told that there would be a development project, declaring special areas in the South. Phang Nga, Krabi and Phuket would be further developed to become international tourism centers.

The decision made by the government of the day caused a lot of worries for the local people. It sounded like Bahn Nahm Khem was being prepared for an influx of tourism. Many projects would begin there, such as building a large bridge to link Koh Khor Nork to Bahn Nahm Khem and so on.

Previously, the community understood their own ability to engage as a tourist destination but only to the extent based on their realistic potential. I talked with Khun Maitree about this and I knew that he had an idea of how to develop Bahn Nahm Khem as an area for tourism. It is suitable for small-scale eco-tourism but not anything large-scale such as in the government's potential plans. This idea was based on the existing resources that Bahn Nahm Khem had. There were unspoiled mangrove forests here for example and a local museum was another thing he wanted to make the most of. The museum would bring about better conditions for people after the Tsunami. The museum is now at the secure home project 2. It is aimed at the tourists and run by the community.

The Tsunami had happened more than three years previously. Many of the affected communities have become more stable with the new developments, especially in the case of Bahn Nahm Khem. The admirable principle lying behind such developments was the participation from the affected communities in solving their problems by themselves.

Without people like Khun Maitree, Sakda, Parn, Prathan, Prayoon, Aou and many others related to the rehabilitation, Bahn Nahm Khem would have had real difficulty to make the community as strong it is now. The real heroes were individual local people who dedicated all their energies to the work. Including the people who were involved in the individual development organizations. No matter how much they offered, everything they provided contributed good merit to Bahn Nahm Khem, as they participated in some aspect of providing the affected people a new home – a new home for the homeless.

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Programme period: November 2005 – January 2008.