

Platform for collaboration

These are policy recommendation for the rehabilitation of small-scale fishing communities along the Andaman coast of southern Thailand after the tsunami

The earthquake that occurred near Sumatra island in Indonesia on 26 December 2004 resulted in tsunami that hit the Andaman coast of southern Thailand. The tsunami greatly devastated the lives, property and infrastructure of coastal communities, along with coastal resources in six provinces, namely, Krabi, Phang Nga, Satun, Phuket, Trang and Ranong.

Among the hardest hit groups are the small-scale fisherfolk who have resided in the coastal areas for many years, and have traditionally sustained their livelihoods through small-scale fishing activities. Based on the information collected on 13 January 2005 by the Fishery Development and Extension Office that functions as a co-ordinating unit for relief initiatives for marine and fishery-related areas, the tsunami resulted in 5,315 large-scale and small-scale fishing vessels being damaged. With regard to the large-scale vessels (more than 10 m in length), Phuket, Ranong, Phang Nga and Krabi have suffered the most among the six provinces. The total number of large-scale vessels damaged is 1,337. Likewise, 3,978 small-scale fishing boats (less than 10 m in length) have also been damaged. The greatest damage to small-scale fishing boats was reported from Krabi, Phang Nga and Trang Provinces.

The extent of destruction of fishing gear has also been phenomenal. To date, 49,548 pieces of fishing gear have been destroyed, along with a large amount of aquaculture equipment (such as floating cages), fish ponds and fish nursery areas. The overall destruction has so far led to a widespread setback of the community's livelihoods across the six provinces.

With regard to loss of life amongst the small-scale fisherfolk, the rapid survey

and most recently updated data from the Coalition Network for Andaman Coastal Community Support reveals that, out of the 418 fishing villages located along the Andaman coast, 186 villages have been affected. Data collected on 15 January 2005 revealed 662 deaths and 1,016 missing persons. (This does not cover Ban Nam Kem, Kao Lak and Phi Phi Island, where search activities are still going on. A preliminary survey reveals that at least 4,900 people have been killed, while 6,000 people remain missing.)

In all, 2,205 houses have been destroyed, along with 2,519 fishing vessels and a large amount of fishing gear like fish cages, crab nets and traps and shrimp nets.

The majority of the population along the Andaman coast are small-scale fisherfolk, mainly Muslims, followed by Buddhists, the Mokens and the *U-rak-ra-woy*. The two last groups are also known as sea gypsies. These fisherfolk are closely linked to the sea through their fishing activities. Some also take up supplementary livelihood activities such as farming.

Severely damaged

Thirty communities were severely damaged by the tsunami. These include Ban Bangben, Ban Ow Koey, Ban Nanok, Ban Talaynok, Ban Tobnua, Ban Pekampuan, in Ranong Province; four communities in Koh Ra Island and Koh Phra Thong Island; and four villages in Kokhao Island, Ban Pak Triam, Ban Nam Khem and two villages at the Pakarang Cape and some communities in Tab Lamu, Pang Nga Province, three Moken and U-rak-ra-woy communities at Rawai, Sapam and Siray in Phuket Province, two U-rak-ra-woy communities in Phi Phi Island, and Ban Sangka-oo and Ban Hualaem in Lanta Island, Krabi Province, Ban Kohmook in Trang Province, Ban

Borjedlook and two other villages in Sarai Island in Satun Province.

After the tsunami, a lot of aid was given to the affected communities, mainly from the government, the private sector and public organizations that came to the affected areas to provide immediate relief and initiate long-term rehabilitation plans. Nonetheless, the aid programmes and a number of policies followed by these different groups lacked a holistic or integrated approach. Each organization executed its own plan, without co-ordinating with other agencies. This resulted in duplication and other problems.

Relief assistance in the temporary camps lacked a clear co-ordinating structure that could allow for appropriate and rapid decisionmaking. Due to the lack of needs assessments, the number of houses built did not match the actual numbers of people who needed housing. Furthermore, the temporary shelters were built without consultation, based on orders from Bangkok, and did not correspond to the actual needs of the victims.

For instance, in Ban Huai Lame Klang, on Lanta Island, where the majority are Muslims, shelters were built on the premises of a Buddhist temple, when the existing school could have been used as a temporary shelter. The Muslim community, therefore, could not live there, which meant that the money and effort were wasted.

Since the assistance was aimed to fulfill immediate needs, many of the initiatives were conducted rapidly, without considering the importance of supporting existing community systems and ensuring community participation, as well as with little consideration for environmental and social aspects. This lack of people-centred and environmental concerns will create additional problems.

Food assistance for the affected people was implemented in a chaotic manner, and the affected people were excluded from sharing management responsibilities. Consequently, there

were problems of unequal distribution of food. Also, food aid often contradicted local cultural norms. Many of the victims were Muslim, so the distribution of non-*halal* tinned food caused unnecessary distress.

The government policy on relocating fishing communities away from the sea has not been well received by the affected fishing communities, as it would require them to completely change their way of life. The fishing communities wish to live near the sea, along the coast or canals, because they need to look after their boats and fishing gear. When ashore, the boats must be within sight of the owners, especially during storms. This requirement is strongly embedded into the traditions of the small-scale fisherfolk.

The loss and damage of fishing gear has rendered the small-scale fisherfolk unemployed. There is thus a need for immediate assistance for repair and replacement of destroyed gear and boats. Nonetheless, government policy on compensation has been restricted by legal and bureaucratic constraints. For instance, those who are entitled to receive compensation must have a registered boat and fishing gear, a permit to fish and a licence issued by the Department of Fisheries, along with seven other official documents. Thus, the compensation process has become a slow and painstaking one.

Additionally, there are legal questions over property rights, especially where claimants live on government-owned land, public land, land that belongs to members of the royal family, private land or land that has unclear title. There are also instances of multiple title deeds, and sea gypsies who do not have Thai citizenship face a special problem. The affected victims who fall under these categories are required to approach a committee for a case-by-case review.

Bureaucratic delays

All these bureaucratic processes further delay relief for the affected communities, and the speed at which they can get back to normalcy and stand on their own feet, rather than depend on donations. Such delays lead to other social problems, such as indebtedness and migration.

Previous initiatives in rehabilitating the environment have been segregated sectorwise, and not viewed from a perspective of natural resource management as a whole.

Past technical studies and research on geology, risk areas and the rehabilitation of coastal resources have not resulted in guidelines that could be used in policy planning for natural resource management. Nor have these studies suggested how to ensure community participation, and integrate the local community's traditional knowledge in formulating policy frameworks and action plans, which would include promoting the use of non-destructive fishing gear and techniques. There is also no clarity yet on the role of community and local organizations in the planning and implementation of such plans.

The tsunami has only worsened the long-term problems faced by the small-scale fisherfolk. Yet, the rehabilitation of community and coastal resources could turn this catastrophe into an opportunity. This should be the time to revive the community in a sustainable way, by squarely facing the problems that each group has. The primary focus should be on participatory consulting to rebuild local social systems and to stress that the people themselves must be the driving force in rehabilitating their community and natural resources, which will differ in

each area. The process requires a great deal of time and effort in formulating detailed action plans. The preliminary approach includes the establishment of the community's central fund to support community initiatives and occupation development, to conduct resources assessment and to implement rehabilitation activities, for instance, the replanting of mangroves, seagrass management, re-installment of artificial coral reefs, and releasing fish species.

To ensure that the community can undertake the above activities, studies and work plans must be sensitive to local ecology, and support the participation of the community and their organizations. The engagement of these groups should take into account both local and scientific knowledge as well as the experience of neighbouring countries that have faced similar problems of natural disasters before. Additionally, capacity building and participatory learning should be supported in order to enhance the community's ability to manage itself.

Support gaps

The government must clearly identify and enforce a variety of actions to support the affected families, all of which must share the same high principles and standards. Additionally, it should clearly explain these measures to the affected groups. There should not be gaps in the support or overlaps, where duplication of effort can

take place. This would reassure the affected groups that they would receive fair treatment from the government's aid programmes.

The government must be responsible for providing food to the victims during the next three to four months. The distribution of food must be systematic, with specific handout times and measures to ensure equal distribution for communities who are fully engaged in rebuilding their homes, or repairing boats and gear.

Assistance must be provided for the repair and/or replacement of boats and fishing gear, apart from immediate compensation. There is also a need for an accurate, periodically updated, database on loss and damage, and relief distribution. Apart from functioning as a monitoring tool, this could serve as a platform of collaboration between the government and the community to collectively identify responses to their problems.

In the matter of housing, the legitimacy of ownership documents must be verified. In cases where the claimants do not have legitimate legal documents to establish ownership of the land, the government should delegate such land to the community, to establish permanent settlements. In cases where the land in question belongs to private owners

(which implies that, technically, before the tsunami, the people living there were squatters or disputed owners), and where the community strongly affirms its wish to remain in the same area to support livelihoods, the government must intervene to resolve the conflict, perhaps by redistributing the land or granting long-term lease. Permanent settlement would not only provide security to the community, but would also give it a sense of ownership and encourage the formulation of long-term development and community management plans. Relocating the coastal communities elsewhere must be avoided. Equally important, the government should take this opportunity to re-assess all land title deeds for coastal areas, as previously the issuance of documents for these areas was not transparent. Many areas of public land were sold to the private sector, despite the fact that the fishing community had been living there for a considerable time. They frequently did not even realize that the land that their ancestors had lived on and passed down through several generations had already become the private property of powerful individuals.

Lack of infrastructure

The lack of basic infrastructure in coastal communities has caused many social problems. Many of the communities are densely populated and often do not have access to electricity or clean drinking water. The government should now take

advantage of the post-tsunami situation to deliver the necessary infrastructure immediately through people's participation. The affected people should also be given a chance to identify their needs and participate in the decision-making process. Many victims do, in fact, have the strength and desire to work together to rebuild what has been lost. The government should provide the financial resources and utilities needed, but the people who are going to live there should control their design and deployment.


There is also a need to organize and support stress-relieving activities and trauma care centres to reassure the victims that they are not alone in their suffering. These activities will improve their mental health and help them start rebuilding their shattered lives.

To support the livelihoods of the fishing community, the government must guarantee prices of seafood for an initial period of three months (January to March). As an incentive to continue fishing, fishing quotas should not be enforced, and fuel should be provided at subsidized rates for fishing vessels. Additionally, the government should discourage the use of destructive fishing gear and techniques, particularly trawl and push nets, and ensure that the Fisheries Act is enforced rigidly.

The government should also consider a permanent mechanism of compensation for fishermen when they are forced to abandon fishing due to natural disasters or uncontrollable causes.

In providing permanent settlements for the community, the government must have an accurate picture of the needs of the community. Through government agencies like the Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs), village heads should be urged to work together with the community to identify settlement areas, and design houses and floor plans in coherence with their own particular traditions and culture.

A single tsunami relief fund should be established, and managed by appointed committees, composed of representative sectors of society, including community

organizations. To ensure that relief measures are implemented in an integrated manner, the government must work with the affected groups to enhance sharing and collective formulation of community-based rehabilitation plans. 

These recommendations have been formulated by the Collaborative Network for the Rehabilitation of Andaman Communities and Natural Resources, and the Coalition Network for Andaman Coastal Community Support (rrafa@loxinfo.co.th), Bangkok, Thailand