



Three years after the Tsunami: Shelter and livelihood still not secure for local communities

Public Forum “Sustainable Rehabilitation? Experiences and Prospects” marks the close of the Heinrich Boell Foundation’s Tsunami Aid Watch programme

Unresolved conflicts over land, the impact of mega projects planned by the government and competition over resources were highlighted as the main challenges for the Andaman coastal communities three years after the Tsunami. Their experiences, remaining grievances and future challenges for the local communities in the Tsunami affected provinces of Southern Thailand were discussed on Saturday, 26 January 2008, at the Emerald Hotel in Bangkok.

Pakbhum Withanthirawat of the Southern Thai Tsunami aid organization Save Andaman Network and Maitree Jongkraichak of the Community Coordination Center of Bahn Nahm Khem pointed out that only strong, politically aware communities could achieve sustainable results in the rehabilitation process.

Khun Pakbhum stated that the rebuilding of houses does not start with carrying stones but in the process of getting together and debating the needs of the home owner and the way to implement a project with everyone involved. Then, a house-building project becomes a collective activity that can also have healing effects after a disaster. Khun Maitree stressed how important the Bahn Nahm Khem community’s self-empowerment was in starting to coordinate what had begun as a chaotic reconstruction process by too many agencies.

In another example of a “good practices”, Surin Chaiwut and Pisut Bunsit of C² (Computer and Communication Network Co., Ltd.), the former IT department of TAW, presented their development of an E-learning scheme to teach young members of the Southern communities IT skills. In three small computer centers in the Southern communities of Bahn Nahm Khem, Bahn Thabtawan and Muang Kau on Koh Lanta Yai, as well as the Northern village of Nong Jed Nuay in Chiang Mai province, local inhabitants are taught IT-based skills through the freeware program Skype.. After the end of TAW it is planned for these IT trainings to continue.

‘The Andaman Coast is a Golden Opportunity Area’ stated Thanu Nabnien of the Coastal Wetlands Project at the beginning of his presentation in a session on tourism and sustainable community development. This opportunity is all too often hijacked by land developers trying to make a quick buck from public land, sometimes land that had been inhabited by local people for generations. The coastal wetlands are in serious danger when big business and government combine to try and maximize the economic benefit of the Andaman coastal area by developing tourism. Communities need to fight against mega projects like the planned Koh Kho Khao airport directly neighboring Bahn Nahm Khem or the marina seaport on Koh Yao Noi that will destroy the coral reef and hence the fishing grounds of local residents.

Panya Ananthakul from Bahn Nahm Khem highlighted that local administrative bodies often do not represent the interests of local people but join hands with governmental institutions in promoting big business. Thiwawan Chaikao and Romlee

Maeroh of Tsunami Aid Watch supported this critical view towards government policies by shining a light on how government policies could prove more detrimental to Bahn Nahm Khem community's resource base than the Tsunami had been. Especially with the uncontrolled tourism development, the 'assets to capital' policy and the planned privatization of sea banks which were strongly criticized.

The discussion forum on the remaining challenges for the post-Tsunami communities started off with contributions from the following speakers:

- Preda Khongpaen of Chumchon Thai Foundation
- Orawan Hahnthaley, youth group representative from Thabtawan community
- Anusorn Khaewkungwan, head of the Disaster Mitigation Direction Center for the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Ministry of the Interior, Bangkok
- Pakbhum Withanthirawat on behalf of the Sustainable Development Foundation
- Maitree Jongkraichak of the Community Coordination Center Bahn Nahm Khem
- Assoc. Prof. Surichae Wankeuw, head of the Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

The following core challenges were identified through the presentations and the discussion:

- Women's empowerment, especially in decision-making
- Highlighting the issues of the more disadvantaged/vulnerable groups: the elderly and the handicapped, etc.
- Fighting discrimination against the Morgan minority and giving special attention to their needs; as for example solving the problem of timely limitation for the post-Tsunami site of Thungwa village, specially addressed by their community leader in the discussion
- Pushing for a just solution for more than 450 pending land conflict issues; as for example by demanding a government declaration and legal advocacy with Andaman Legal Center
- Challenging the government in regard to planned mega projects
- Pushing the private sector and government to open up a dialogue with the communities concerning tourism development
- Address the destruction of villagers' livelihood through a declaration of national parks/protected areas; brought up as a pressing issue by a representative of Had Chao Mai community in Trang.
- Community-based disaster preparedness
- Supporting migrant workers, mainly from Myanmar/Burma, who all too often completely lost out on aid; and ethnic Thai re-migrants from Myanmar/Burma who lack IDs
- Strengthening the community and NGO networks, in order to gain more bargaining power to contribute to solving the existing problems