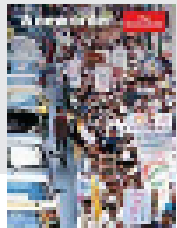


# THAILAND



## *Reform still waiting in the wings*

### **Political structure**

Constitutional monarchy, with the king (Bhumibol Adulyadej) as head of state. Under an interim constitution that came into effect on October 1, 2006, the military council, known as the Council for National Security (CNS), appoints the prime minister, who is then free to form a Council of Ministers (the cabinet). Under the interim constitution, a 250-member National Assembly will act as the national legislature. Assembly members are appointed by the king and are drawn from all regions of the country. The CNS has pledged to hold a general election in October 2007 after a new permanent constitution has been promulgated.

### **Local government system**

Local government in Thailand is organized in six different forms, equally distributed among urban and rural areas. Urban-based forms of local government include:

- ▶ The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), a strong-executive form of local government specific to Bangkok;
- ▶ The Municipality, governing urban centres in the provinces; and
- ▶ The City of Pattaya, a local government form of a city-manager specific to Pattaya.

Rural-based forms of local government include:

- ▶ The Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) constituting local government at the provincial level;
- ▶ The *Tambon* Administrative Organization (TAO) constituting local government at the subdistrict level; and
- ▶ The *Sukhapiban* or Sanitary Committee, a local government in a rural centre, often referred to as a sanitary district.

Each of these forms of local government operates independently of the others. However, all are subject to a considerable degree of control by the central government through the Department of Local Administration, the Ministry of the Interior.

### **Local participation**

Direct participation in local government has been minimal. This may be attributed to two major factors. First, most legislation does not provide for a legal means by which the people may directly participate in the affairs of local government. In situations of conflict between the citizens and the local government, the first often take the issue to the streets in the spirit of petition and protest. The conflict is reported in the media, but a solution is not always found. Such action only initiates a negotiation process. In case of conflicts between the local governments and the central government, there is no legal framework to settle these either. Therefore, all disputes between local governments and central government departments, or among local governments, are resolved at the level of the central government, which usually relies on the judgment of the Department of Local Administration. This is a result of the centralization of governance in the public administration system. Local governments often resort to collective pressure through representation in associations of local governments, for example the Association of Kamnans, or the League of Municipalities.

Under the 1997 Constitution, however, more leeway is provided for people's participation in the affairs of the state. For example, the Constitution provides for a court of governance (Articles 276-280) where conflicts between citizens and the state and their officials are settled. A Parliamentary Ombudsman will be

established to receive complaints and petitions. An independent anti-corruption commission will also be created by Parliament to conduct investigations. These institutions and legal frameworks are believed to provide adequate channels and means for the people to participate in the affairs of the state. It is also believed that the political reform underway will bring about many fundamental changes in the relationship between the state and society.

Second, the general public by and large has little knowledge about local government. This is not surprising. Local govern-

ment is hardly taught in secondary school or in higher levels. Except for those studying political science, most graduates from Thai universities are inadequately informed about the structure and the functioning of the local government. They are aware of the existence of the various forms of local government and of the right to vote in local government elections. Otherwise, little is known about the functioning, the problems and the general affairs of local government. The media coverage generally reports more about politics and the affairs of the central government.

## Coping together in the wake of the tsunami

The tsunami created by an earthquake in the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004 was the worst natural disaster in Thailand's history. The Tsunami affected six provinces along the Andaman Coast of Thailand, leaving more than 8,000 dead, a third of them foreigners. It impacted 418 coastal villages, destroying or badly damaging at least 3,676 houses. Besides causing so much death and destruction, the tsunami tore open and exposed many deep, preexisting problems of poverty, social exclusion, land tenure uncertainty, commercial over-exploitation and government indifference to indigenous groups.

The thing about large-scale calamities like earthquakes, floods and storms is that the institutions, policies and ways of thinking which already exist in most countries are almost never able to cope with them effectively. The scale is just too big, the disaster too sudden, the needs too urgent. Existing systems designed to deal with neatly compartmentalized issues are quickly overwhelmed by the complex needs after a disaster. An organized relief and rehabilitation process cannot be implemented by one group or one agency. What such huge calamities require is for groups in many areas and with many different kinds of expertise to link together in different ways, to pool resources, information and ideas.

This kind of common platform does not exist in most areas, and so when calamities do occur, relief and rehabilitation efforts are often plagued by lack of coordination between groups, competition for funds or recognition, mistrust, terri-

toriality, conflicting agendas and disaster aid philosophies. But when people's groups, NGOs, aid agencies and government departments do link together, through some kind of collaborative mechanism or on a common platform, it can stabilize an otherwise volatile aid situation, and allow the separate efforts of different groups to add up to a more unified, comprehensive and effective aid effort, so nobody misses out. The tsunami has shown that in places where networks and working bonds between groups already existed, or were created and strengthened during the course of the relief process, a more collaborative approach and a culture of working together has helped moderate the effects of the onslaught of aid, so that ultimately, most of the aid resources reached those who really needed it.

The day after the tsunami, CODI<sup>1</sup> organized a meeting with some NGOs, civic groups and community networks in southern Thailand to see how they could work jointly to assist the tsunami victims in the six provinces. They agreed to establish the networks to use every aspect of the relief process to organize and strengthen these damaged communities. The following describes the people-driven relief and rehabilitation process employed at the time.

<sup>1</sup> The *Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI)* is a Thai government agency, an independent public organization, under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, formed in 2000 through the merging of The Urban Community Development Office (UCDO) and The Rural Development Fund.

*Surveying the damage area.* In some places, community networks did the survey. In others, CODI linked up with local NGOs and government agencies to gather information and to begin building a common database on affected communities: their family information, their dead and missing members, the condition of their houses and boats, their employment situation, their lost documents. Within a few days, some preliminary figures had been gathered, and over the past months, this information has continuously been added to and refined.

*Providing relief assistance.* In the form of tents, clothes, medicines, food, water, coffins, and rallying help in the search for the dead.

*Providing relief camp.* The most urgent need was temporary housing to bring back together people scattered by the tsunami, so they could organize themselves, discuss, set priorities and begin developing a collective vision of their future. Camps were soon set up by aid organizations and government departments up and down the Andaman coast. In Phang-Nga, the worst affected province, this network helped set up five camps. The largest and the first to open was the camp at Bang Muang.

*Building temporary housing.* Within a week, the longer-term work of setting up temporary housing in relief camps and

working with people to revive their lives and battered villages had begun.

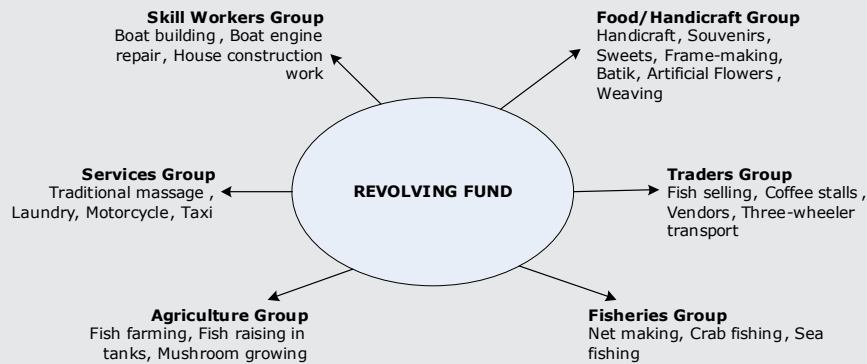
*Setting up the committees.* After setting up the camp, some kind of mechanism to manage it had to be established. Committees were set up to manage cooking, camp hygiene, water supply, medical care, visitors, children's activities, lost people, registration of newcomers and temporary house construction. Camp-wide meetings were held every evening to discuss practical aspects of camp management, to make announcements and to give the committees a chance to report on the day's work. Everyone knew what was happening and all decisions were made in public every evening, with everyone's agreement.

*Promoting income generation activities.* Besides providing emergency relief, setting up income generation activities to help them regain their self-sufficiency became a top priority. A number of government agencies, NGOs and relief organizations helped to set up various kinds of income generation projects in the camp. The camp's community committee decided early on to link all these efforts and organize them under a single revolving livelihood fund, which would support these various occupation groups with loans, financial and accounting assistance, skill training, and market help. Saving groups were also established within all the various occupation groups, as a strategy for getting people back into the mode of managing their finances, as a group.

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*Designing the permanent houses.* CODI mobilized architects, planners, design students, professors and architectural associations from around Thailand to help communities develop plans for rebuilding their houses and settlements. Like all aspects of rehabilitation, a little sensitive intervention made the process of planning and rebuilding houses



Before the needs of the affected communities can be addressed, it is essential that an information gathering process be launched. The affected communities, civic groups and relief agencies should begin gathering information as soon as possible, and update it regularly. Different kinds of information are needed at different

stages of the relief process. At the beginning, rough information about numbers of affected communities, families, boats, deaths and people's immediate needs is required very

quickly to plan for emergency assistance and for temporary accommodation. Then, once people are in the camps, more detailed information about the affected people's families, children, former housing, land tenure status, documents and livelihoods will be required, to plan for the rehabilitation process. If this information gathering can be an active process, which involves the participation of the affected communities themselves, then it also becomes a powerful tool to begin organizing people. The information helps the affected people and support groups to understand the scale of the calamity in concrete ways, both in quality and quantity, and helps them figure out what to do. In these ways, information gathering becomes a tool both to organize people, and to design effective interventions to address people's needs. The more that affected people are involved the better.

and settlements another opportunity to strengthen and rebuild these traumatized communities.

*Building a more secure future.* It also became clear that rehabilitation had to encompass many aspects of people's lives. In villages wiped out by the tsunami, people lost everything: their families, houses, boats, livelihoods, support networks, social system and ways of life. Providing housing wasn't enough. To rebuild lives that were shattered by this crisis called for a more comprehensive rehabilitation program which includes and integrates other crucial aspects of people's survival, such as support for income generation, ecological revitalization, rebuilding of social networks and reviving of traditional cultures destroyed by the tsunami.

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**Lessons learned from implementation**

- 1. Link support groups to create a more unified support and relief operation with a common direction.*  
It is important to link support groups, NGOs, aid agencies, community networks and relief agencies together as soon as possible, so that all these groups can combine their diverse expertise, develop a common objective and work together to conduct a more effective, well-coordinated relief and rehabilitation effort, in which each group does what it does best.

Where the tsunami has scattered people and devastated their dwellings, the village or community they once occupied loses its meaning as an organizational unit. Temporary accommodation (in tents or temporary houses) in camps, as near as possible to the former settlements, is therefore essential to



**Temporary Shelter**

start bringing back together the affected victims. This is the function of temporary housing. Initially, these camps provide traumatized people a safe place to stay, where there is food, medical care, clothes, access to government assistance - and, most importantly - friends to talk to. Once people's immediate needs are met, and they feel more secure in the camps, the temporary housing becomes the place where organizing can begin, little by little. Hence, the revival of these communities can begin already, on a temporary basis, at these camps.

*4. Once they are back together in temporary camps, the affected communities can start a process of interaction and organization in which they work together to set up a system in which they can represent each other, as an organization. The temporary camps can help facilitate this.*

It is important that the affected people can start presenting their needs - *as a group* - as soon as possible. There is a great need for an affected community's own voice to negotiate and propose on what they really need and want in the process of rehabilitation and rebuilding their communities and livelihoods. People have to take control of their lives again, and managing their lives and activities in the camps together is a good place to start. The organization and activities can start right away, and the systems people set up to manage their lives in the temporary camps can later be put to use in the process of planning and reconstructing their permanent

housing. Similarly, other relief activities should also be implemented with a view to building community systems of collective work and collective organization as much as possible.

*5. It is important that people-driven pilot rehabilitation projects be started urgently, to get the ball rolling and to lead the rehabilitation process by demonstrating concrete examples of how reconstruction can work.*

It is very important to show good, concrete examples of how to reconstruct these ravaged

communities through the active involvement of affected communities, with support from local organizations and relevant government agencies, *as soon as possible*. One of the best ways to do this is to undertake pilot community reconstruction projects in which the people and the local authorities work together to develop permanent housing with good collaboration. This is an effective way to lead the rehabilitation process in the right direction to energize all the other communities that are still in the planning process. But the rehabilitation of these pilot communities should involve much more than the physical environment and housing, and should include a more comprehensive or holistic rehabilitation of people's lives, social support structures, livelihood and income sources.

*6. Dealing with post-crisis trauma.* The best therapy is helping affected people to get busy and to focus on their future through activities which have to do with managing their immediate needs and rebuilding their lives.

Large numbers of people experienced serious trauma and shock from the violent and seemingly arbitrary catastrophe of the tsunami. Many have lost family members, witnessed horrific scenes and watched the entire fabric of their lives swept away. Some are unable to cope afterwards. There have been efforts made in different ways to console and to help these people rebuild their spiritual and mental strength, through religious faith or clinical trauma therapy. However,

one of the important ideas that came out of the meeting was that the best way to deal with this trauma is to help people get busy. The best therapy to get people's minds off the tragic events they've witnessed is to find a way for communities to look forward, to focus their energies on the actual situation they are now in, and to get them immediately and actively involved in vital activities such as temporary housing construction, camp management, cooking, getting children to school, surveying, and planning their future lives and communities. There are also many psychological and moral benefits that come from working together as a group. Collective relief activities of all sorts can become a kind of *group therapy*. The horizontal support systems that already exist in these communities have also been badly hit by the crisis, but they too need to be revived. It is clear that if people are left alone and isolated, they feel worse, and these horizontal links – from neighbors and fellow community members – can really help people cope.

*7. It is important to link the affected communities together, to share ideas, learn from each other's experiences, to support each other, to address problems they have in common, and to negotiate collectively with government agencies for what they need.*

As long as they remain in isolation, these poor communities will remain vulnerable to the powerful economic and administrative forces that keep threatening their settlements and livelihoods. Therefore, it is important to create opportunities for communities to link together horizontally, through a variety of common activities and through the process of rehabilitation. Since the rehabilitation process will have to be implemented in all the affected communities simultaneously, there are innumerable opportunities for these communities to make links, share ideas, learn from each others' experience, tackle common issues and work together.

*8. Collaboration with government.* The work that people are doing around issues of their own community revival and reconstruction should not be done in isolation, but every attempt should be made to link this work with what the gov-

ernment is trying to do. It is important to bridge these two streams of post tsunami rehabilitation efforts.

It is very important for affected communities, support organizations and NGOs to keep established links – or to make new links – with the government, to take part in whatever forums or committees the government sets up, and to keep trying to tactfully relate what people are doing on the ground with government policies and plans. Because the tsunami crisis is so big, governments may be unable to deal effectively with the scale of need. And in their efforts to do so, governments may also set policies and launch programs which cannot reach all the affected communities or which conflict with their needs. In this regard, it is up to the people's groups and their supporters to create space for the government to understand what people are doing, and to find proactive ways to link people's initiatives with government processes.

*9. The rehabilitation process should include all the affected people and communities, as much as possible, regardless of their status before the tsunami.*

In many coastal areas affected by the tsunami, efforts are already being made to prevent families or entire communities without formal tenure status from returning to the land they had occupied before the tsunami. In all of the affected countries, these coastlines are dotted with poor fishing communities and indigenous settlements whose land tenure status is unclear. Many of these communities are considered squatters on public land, even though they have occupied their land for decades – or centuries – and there will likely be more and more efforts to deny these people the right to rehabilitation. This is especially a danger given the skyrocketing market values of much of the coastal property they inhabit and political pressure to grab that land being exerted by powerful forces in the tourism and commercial sectors. It is therefore imperative that the rehabilitation process cover *ALL* the affected communities so that the rehabilitation process after the tsunami will be a way to help correct past injustices or administrative inefficiencies and to provide equality and a new legitimacy to everyone. The same considerations should be applied to all minorities and migrant worker groups.



10. *The only way to address the huge scale reconstruction is by tapping the huge scale and active involvement of the affected people themselves, with support from local and civic groups.*

Only if room can be made for people to be key actors in their own rehabilitation process can it be possible to respond to the scale of crisis needs that are clearly too big and too complicated for governments to handle. The tsunami crisis can boost the people's sector as an active development partner. This turned out to be the most effective and efficient way of handling the huge scale of need, by directly tapping the energy of the affected people themselves, and their powerful drive to rebuild their lives. But if the reconstruction assistance has to pass through the government bureaucracy, it tends to get stuck at bottlenecks, and large scale needs cannot be met. There is a need for many new, innovative strategies for how the affected people (who already have the large scale and clear needs to improve their conditions) to be involved in the rehabilitation process, as much as possible. There are many ways to create space for people to be active partners in the process, from surveying, to organizing relief assistance, to managing the camps, to constructing temporary and permanent housing, to setting up of new livelihood opportunities.

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