

# PHUKET'S NEW COMMUNITY NETWORK :

Using the tsunami as an opportunity to broaden the rehabilitation activities and bring **ALL** of Phuket's poor, indigenous and vulnerable communities into a collective process of learning, sharing and finding lasting solutions to the problems they have in common . .

■ **TOURISM Vs. TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES :** Phuket Province (which is a large island) is one of Thailand's hottest tourism and business growth areas. 4.8 million tourists visit Phuket every year! For affluent sun-seekers, the place is a paradise, but for the island's poor and indigenous communities, all this money and development have put their communities, their culture and their survival at risk.

■ **CONCEPT OF LAND TITLE IS VERY NEW :** Khun Nong, the village Chief at Phuket's Tai Mai Community, tells how when his great grandmother settled here at the beginning of the 20th century, this was virgin land, with huge trees covering the area with a canopy of green, full of birds and blue-eyed lizards. Back then, there was no concept of land title or land ownership papers. People just built their huts, planted their gardens and coconut trees and started fishing – after that, everyone in the village considered it "their land". Nobody challenged this tenure system until two decades ago, when the tourism brought

■ **THE TSUNAMI EXPOSED ALL THESE OLD PROBLEMS :** The tsunami just brought these accumulating problems out and made them worse. The serious land and housing problems these communities face began long before the tsunami. Many of these communities have occupied their land for a long time – some longer than a century – but the tsunami gave unscrupulous businessmen and public agencies an new opportunity to try to push them out and grab their land for development. Two years after the tsunami, Phuket is booming again, and the renewed tourism and real-estate development has brought back the threat of eviction for many of these poor and traditional communities around the island.

■ **PROUD OF THEIR CULTURE AND HISTORY :** The people who live in these communities are very proud of their culture and heritage as indigenous Andaman coastal fishermen (including Indigenous sea gypsy, Muslim and Buddhist communities, with all their rituals and fishing practices and food and their own languages). In this hot tourist place, that heritage is in great danger of being erased. They don't want to lose this heritage, want to pass it on to their children.

■ **TSUNAMI DAMAGE LIGHTER IN PHUKET :** Tsunami damage here was much lighter than in other coastal areas farther north. Only three communities in Phuket were severely affected by the tsunami. A few others lost boats and fishing equipment, but were not otherwise to much affected.



## 20 COMMUNITIES :

A new platform for looking at island-wide problems and sharing island-wide strategies for solving them . . .

After the tsunami, Phuket's vulnerable communities used the momentum from the relief and rehabilitation process to form a network of affected communities, and then quickly expanded that network to include all the vulnerable communities in the province – not just those affected by the tsunami. Now, all these Phuket communities are part of an active community network. All these communities share similar problems and are now beginning to fight together as a united force to solve them. The communities and their network are also collaborating with their local provincial and sub-district authorities and with NGOs (especially Chumchon Thai Foundation) to find solutions to these serious land and housing problems. The Phuket Network is just one of many community networks in Thailand, and they have been able to draw on the wealth of networking processes elsewhere as they developed their local activities :

- **SURVEYING AND MAPPING :** All the communities have carried out social surveys, mapped their settlements and examined their land tenure status. This is the first step in getting villagers to think collectively about problems they face and the things they want to improve.
- **SAVING :** All these 20 communities now have savings groups and manage their own revolving loan funds, which they borrow from for livelihood, emergencies and housing.
- **PLANNING COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS :** With help from young architects from CODI and Chumchon Thai Foundation, most communities are developing plans for improving their houses and settlements, either in the same place or on land nearby.
- **EXCHANGES AND JOINT ACTIVITIES :** meetings and seminars. Phuket is a small island, and all these communities visit each other frequently, and meet often to compare notes, learn from and support each other and share breakthroughs.
- **NEGOTIATING :** Negotiating with their local authorities and developing collaborative projects between communities and their sub-district and provincial authorities, mostly with land and housing projects.



## Tackling province-wide land and housing problems :



Phuket makes a very good case of how a major disaster can create opportunities to organize and network all the island's poor and vulnerable communities, and to tackle the deeper issue of secure land tenure by connecting tsunami rehabilitation with the next stage of development of the whole island's poor communities.

- So far, out of the **20 communities** in the network, three communities have resolved their land problems but another **12 communities** in Phuket facing serious land conflicts.
- Many of these communities occupy land under the control of the Department of Forests or National Parks. Other communities are embroiled in court cases launched by powerful business interests who claim to own their land.
- Another **6 communities** are in the process of planning and implementing community upgrading projects, with support from CODI's Baan Mankong Program - including 5 tsunami-affected settlements and one settlement that was not affected by the tsunami.



# HIN LOOK DIO :

One of the poorest of the sea gypsy communities affected by the tsunami turns an eviction crisis into an opportunity to solve underlying land and housing problems once and for all . . .



**HIN LOOK DIO** (which means "one rock" in the Thai) is a very old, very poor Moken ("sea gypsy") fishing community of 54 households (192 people), built among the mangrove forests along the northeastern edge of Phuket island.

The people here mostly came from farther up the Andaman coast, in Phangnga Province, but migrated here from farther up the Andaman coast about 100 years ago - first a few families, and then later more joined them.

## ■ ALL FISHERMEN :

Most of the people living in Hin Look Dio are fishermen, who practice their traditional subsistence fishing as they have always done, from the beautiful wooden "long-tail" boats which they moor in the mangrove backwaters just below the community.



■ **TSUNAMI DAMAGE :** The tsunami didn't cause any deaths here, but a lot of the village got flooded and many of the people's very lightly-built bamboo and thatch houses were destroyed. They also lost a lot of their boats, nets and fishing equipment.

■ **EVICTED FROM THEIR TRADITIONAL LAND :** Before the tsunami, the villagers occupied a small piece of land where they had lived for over 100 years (5-6 generations). But after the tsunami, the community faced a greater crisis when a rich businessman, whom none of the people knew, showed up claiming to be the legal owner of a large portion of their land. 34 of the village's 54 households found themselves being evicted from land they had always considered their own, but had no title deeds for. The remaining 20 families who had no conflict stayed put.



## ■ RELOCATION TO NEARBY LAND :

These 34 families packed up their meager belongings and moved to a strip of low-lying public forest land nearby, classified as "degraded coastal mangrove forests." Eventually, with support from the Phuket Community Network and the National Tsunami Land Conflict Committee, they were able to negotiate with the local sub-district authority to get permission to build temporary houses on this land.

■ **MAKING A NEW COMMUNITY :** These 34 families have now obtained long-term collective land-use rights for this land and are in the process of planning the development of their new community, with support from the Phuket Community Network, the Chumchon Thai Foundation, CODI's Baan Mankong Community Upgrading Program, and with good cooperation from the sub-district and provincial authorities.



## HIN LOOK DIO VILLAGE :

a rare chance to see Moken sea gypsy life at its most simple and most pure . . .



Palm, who is a young member of CODI's tsunami support staff, describes Hin Look Dio as the most traditional of all the Moken villages hit by the tsunami. Here you won't find much sign of the tourism or commercialization that have transformed other sea gypsy communities along the Andaman coast. In fact you won't find much evidence of the modern world at all: the people still live as simply as the Moken must have lived hundreds of years ago, very close to the rhythms of the sea.

The villagers still live in the lightest of bamboo, wood and thatch shelters, which they build themselves on stilts, from materials they gather nearby, and which are empty but for a few cooking utensils and changes of clothing. Most are subsistence fishermen, who sell only the surplus of their catch after feeding their families.

But what they lack in material possessions, they make up for in a very long and very rich sea gypsy heritage, with their ballads, their drums, their rituals, their mythology, their gods and their stories.



## "But these ARE our permanent houses!"

During a recent visit by team of tsunami survivors from Aceh, Yuri, a young architect from Indonesia, whose been working in Aceh since the tsunami asked, "When will you start building your permanent houses?" When the people answered, "These are our permanent houses!" all Yuri could say was "Amazing!"





# BUILDING A SECURE, ENVIRONMENTALLY LIGHT-FOOTED NEW COMMUNITY AT HIN LOOK DIO :

Now that they have obtained tenure rights to their coastal mangrove land, the villagers at Hin Look Dio are now busy designing their new community and housing, with help from CODI's **Baan Mankong** Community Upgrading Program . . .

■ **SURVEYED THE COMMUNITY :** Work started with a survey, which the people conducted themselves, with help from the Phuket Community Network and volunteers from the Chumchon Thai Foundation. Besides collecting information about each family, they studied the village's problems that needed fixing, and the village's good points which need strengthening.

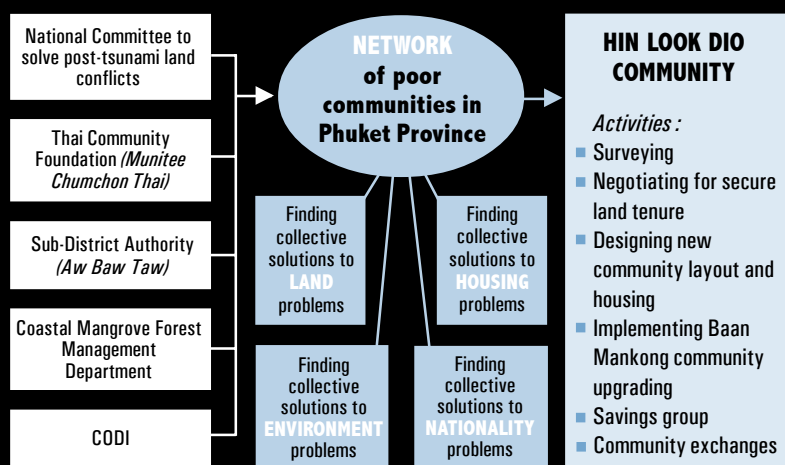
■ **GATHERED DOCUMENTS AND LAND HISTORY :** After the survey, they began gathering documents which prove their long occupation of this land, and with help from the network, they obtained satellite maps showing the village's existence.

■ **STARTED SAVING FOR HOUSING :** All the families in the project are now members of the community savings group, in which members save a minimum of 100 Baht per month, towards their housing. Community members can also take small loans from the collective savings for their small vending businesses and cottage production projects. All these savings activities are also preparation for collectively managing their community upgrading budgets.

■ **ORGANIZED THE COMMUNITY :** To manage this flurry of new activities in the village, the people have set up a community management system, with help from the other communities in the Phuket Community Network and 6-Province Tsunami Network. Five committees have been set up to manage activities involving the environment, housing technical issues, youth groups, cultural revival and savings and credit. With seven people on each committee, nearly half the village's population is now active in steering the community's revival!

■ **SET UP OCCUPATION GROUPS :** To beef up their incomes, the community has set up occupation groups, making fishing nets, fish-trap baskets and miniature wooden boats to sell to tourists.

## ■ SOLVING THE LAND AND HOUSING PROBLEMS :



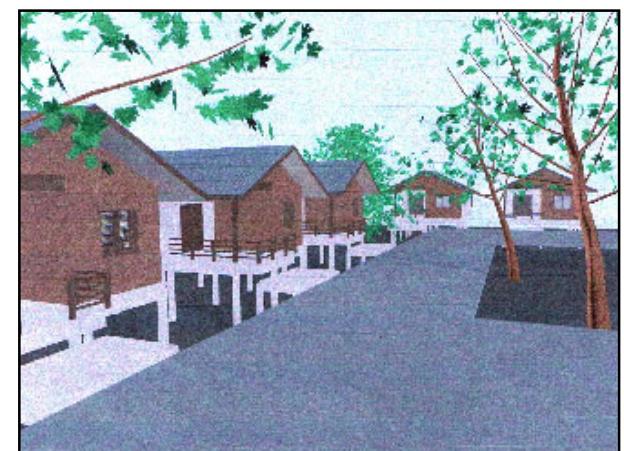
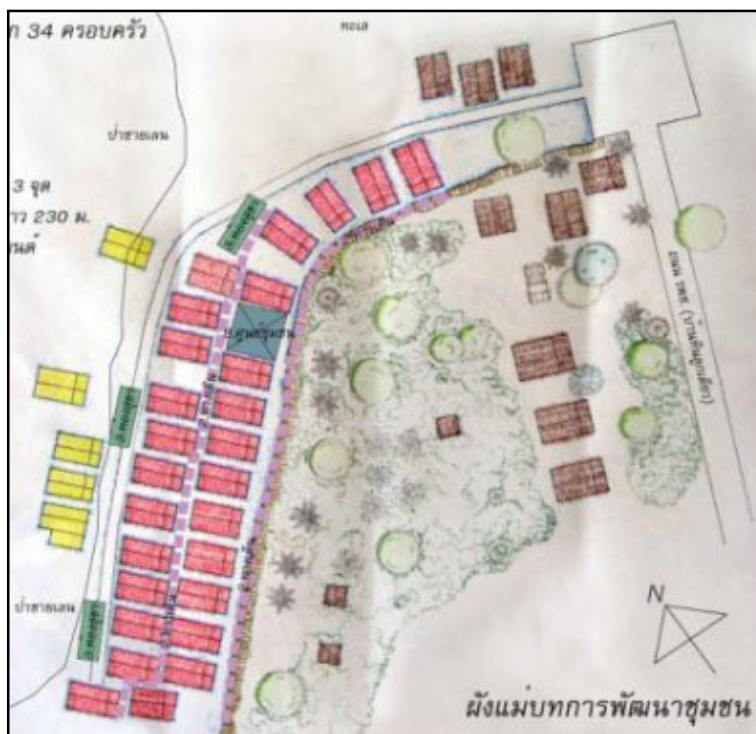
## UPGRADING PLANS :

The community at Hin Look Dio has now completed their plans for developing infrastructure and new housing on the 0.56-Hectare new land :

■ Demolishing old structures and filling the new land :	Baht 87,750	(\$2,372)
■ Constructing an elevated walkway (2m x 230 meters) :	Baht 300,600	(\$8,124)
■ Constructing 12 community toilets (in 3 blocks, 4 seats each) :	Baht 436,170	(\$11,788)
■ Individual household kitchen waste-water treatment systems :	Baht 324,000	(\$8,757)
■ Installing a piped water supply system (2" x 230 meters) :	Baht 30,455	(\$823)
■ Planting trees :	Baht 20,400	(\$551)
■ Constructing a community center :	Baht 151,100	(\$4,084)

### TOTAL BUDGET :

Baht 1,350,475 (US\$ 36,500)



**NEW HOUSES :** As part of the Baan Mankong Upgrading Program, several community members will take loans from CODI to rebuild their houses. Those who cannot afford loans will rebuild their simple bamboo and timber houses and upgrade them later. Through a series of design workshops, the people have designed a house model which retains all the elements of their traditional sea gypsy houses, but uses slightly stronger, more permanent materials that will require less expense in long-term maintenance. The breezy, wooden houses are built up on stilts to accommodate seasonal flooding and to minimize the environmental impact in this fragile mangrove eco-system.



# HURRICANE KATRINA meets ASIAN TSUNAMI

The question is whether poor American folks from flooded neighborhoods, polluted towns and locked public housing projects in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast have anything to share with even poorer fisher folk from tsunami-hit villages in Thailand and Indonesia?

In March, 2006, we got an e-mail from Brad Paul at the **National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (NPACH)**, asking for some information about the Asian tsunami, and especially about how communities had been struggling to go back to their ruined villages and rebuild, despite efforts to dispossess them of their land. Brad had been working with community groups and support organizations in New Orleans after the city was devastated and emptied out by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. In the following months, a lively discussion and exchange of news ensued, and a series of exchange visits were organized, as a joint venture of NPACH, the New York-based **National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI)** and **ACHR**.

## 1 June 2006 - ACHR makes first visit to New Orleans :

During a packed two days, Brad and Sharda Sekaran, from NESRI, showed us around the city and introduced us to several of the communities affected by Hurricane Katrina and their supporters who were working in various ways to reclaim their neighborhoods and city, ten months after the storm.



## 2 September 2006 - First New Orleans group visits Asia :

On the first trip, a group of four people from inner-city communities and public housing projects hit by the Hurricane Katrina visited tsunami community rehabilitation projects that were being planned and managed and implemented by the survivors themselves, in southern Thailand and Aceh, Indonesia.



## 3 October 2006 - Second New Orleans group visits Asia :

This time, a much larger group of 10 community leaders and support professionals from Katrina-affected communities came to Thailand to exchange notes with tsunami survivors, and to attend a regional seminar on people-driven disaster recovery. After the seminar and visits, the group went on to more recently earthquake-hit areas around Yogyakarta, in Indonesia.



## In a Bangkok slum

**Sangwan** (*Community leader at Bonkai Community*): It is important to identify where people are and create activities which link people and pull them back together, wherever they are - maybe even in other cities, if they are still there - so they can share opinions, start their planning, support each other.

**Pam** (*from New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward*): That's the most difficult part, because our government isn't allowing neighborhood associations like mine to access this information. We don't know where everyone is. It's like a secret!

**Sangwan**: In this kind of situation, the government never helps. It's the same everywhere, not just in your country! We have to do it ourselves!

**Endesha** (*from New Orleans' St. Bernard Public Housing Project*): We're trying to do that, but we're not as good as you all are. But we're trying to learn. People in the USA have forgotten how to fight, even the poor.

**Sangwan**: You have to think small-to-big. Start with what you can do now, and build on that. After the first small project becomes visible, and once community leaders are linked through forums and meetings and visits, everyone will begin to know about the good projects happening here and there, and draw strength from them, copy them. Then the movement gathers force.

**Endesha**: Before this trip, the four of us didn't work together - we didn't even know each other. This trip helped link us together across the city.

**Sangwan**: It's the same as here in Bangkok. We have 1,000 slum communities in this city. Before, we never knew each other, never met or talked. We just bothered about our own lives and dealt with evictions alone. Then we surveyed all these communities ourselves, and we came to know the problems and issues that we have in common. After that, people with similar problems began linking together into community networks to tackle these problems and find solutions together. If we stay separate, we have no strength. These problems are too big for one community to change alone.

“ In America, we all rely on the government. We've lost our sense of self-determination. And we're lazy! Not like you all here! In New Orleans, we're waiting around on the government to do things for us, but here you all are doing by yourselves. When we go back, your model is our new goal. ”



“ See? We don't need Brad Pitt to tell us how to design a house! ”



“ I live in a historical neighborhood [Holy Cross, in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans] You know what I wish is that you guys can show us and help us, so that we can take the information from here and use it in the United States. Because you guys are strong, and we're feeding off of that, every single day. ”

# 4 TSUNAMI in THAILAND