

## New Orleans visits Asian Tsunami Areas – September 9-17, 2006

- In Thailand September 9 - 13
- In Aceh, September 13 – 16

These are Tom's rough notes on the Thai part of the trip

### Who was on the team in Thailand?

1. **Ms. Pam Dashiell** (Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, New Orleans)
2. **Ms. Viola Washington** (Welfare Rights Organization in Gentilly Neighborhood, New Orleans)
3. **Mr. Endesha Juakali** (Community leader, "Survivors Village" at the St. Bernard Public Housing Project, New Orleans)
4. **Father Hongdung Van Lukenguyen (Father Luke)** (Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church, New Orleans East)
5. **Mr. Palm** : Is an enthusiastic young community organizer, who comes from a fishing village in southern Thailand along the Andaman Sea. Since the tsunami, Palm has been working with CODI to support the tsunami-hit communities in six southern provinces. As he keeps proudly telling us, "*I am a chau-baan!*" [*chau-baan*" being the Thai word for villager, or community member, as distinct from a educated professional, social worker, government staff person or NGO worker. The distinction between *chau-baan* and these others in Thailand is usually quite clear.]
6. **Ms. Pikun** : Is a sociologist, development researcher and translator from Phuket, in southern Thailand. Since the tsunami, she has been closely involved in the relief, rehabilitation and support work, as a volunteer, consultant and close friend of the networks of tsunami-hit communities and support organizations working in the six tsunami-hit provinces. She has come along as Thai translator with big groups of tsunami survivors to several of the regional tsunami forums ACHR has organized in Phuket, Aceh and Sri Lanka.
7. **Mr. Peter Swan** : Peter comes from Australia, but has been working in Asia for years, mostly in high-level UN jobs. But Peter has also made a number of video films over the years on issues of urban poverty – including several on community-to-community exchanges and tsunami dialogues he made for ACHR as a volunteer.
8. **Ms. Marasee** : Marasee comes from Thailand, is Peter's wife, and helped out with translation and arrangement-making on this trip.
9. **Ms. Uan (Walaiporn Tantikanangkul)** : Is an old Thai friend of Maurice's, with whom he worked in the Thai refugee camps in Thailand in the 1970s and 1980s. Uan now lives in London, where she teaches at university and translates professionally.
10. **Mr. Maurice Leonhardt** has been ACHR's program coordinator for the past 15 years.
11. **Mr. Thomas Kerr** has been working as ACHR's English language publications coordinator for the past nine years.

### Contact details for New Orleans Team :

- Viola Washington : [vwre@bellsouth.net](mailto:vwre@bellsouth.net)
- Father Luke : [thanhb4@yahoo.com](mailto:thanhb4@yahoo.com)
- Pam Dashiell : [orleans2007@yahoo.com](mailto:orleans2007@yahoo.com)
- Endesha Juakali : [ejkssno@yahoo.com](mailto:ejkssno@yahoo.com)



## Visit Itinerary in Thailand and Aceh :

**Saturday September 9 : Arrive Bangkok. Sleep in Park Hotel, Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok**

### **Sunday September 10 :**

**07:30** – Team leaves hotel. Have breakfast, be ready and checked out in the lobby **by 8:00 sharp!**  
**08:00 – 10:00** – Visit the Bonkai Slum Community upgrading project, supported by CODI, in Bangkok  
**11:10 – 12:30** : Flight to Phuket

- Visit **Taa Chatchai** village – a fishing village which used to occupy extremely valuable beachfront property owned by the government, and was evicted after the tsunami. They negotiated for resettlement and free housing project on government land nearby, on long-term community lease.

### **Leave Phuket to Phang Nga Province (worst hit area)**

- Visit **Baan Nairai Village** (old fishing village involved in land-ownership dispute with a powerful business man. The case is not yet resolved, but the people have built their new houses)
- Stay over night at TONY LODGE in Kao Lak area, Phang Nga Province.

### **Monday September 11 :**

- Visit **Tung Wah village** (indigenous "Sea Gypsy" village, totally destroyed by tsunami, which the Provincial government tried to evict after the tsunami, but they negotiated to rebuild their village on part of the old land, in a "land sharing" agreement. Also big revival of pride in Sea Gypsy culture after the tsunami)
- Visit **Tap Tawan village** : Another traditional fishing village that is involved in a land-ownership dispute with a powerful capitalist.
- Visit **New Housing for landless renters** who were tsunami survivors in **Baan Nam Khem** (this is the seaside fishing town that was the worst-hit place in Thailand) – the first site is now under construction and almost finished – Danish Prince donated land.
- Visit and discussion with the **Ban Nam Khem Community Bank**, at the Community Bank Office, with the leader, Mr. Maitree.
- Look around Ban Nam Khem town, visit the government's seaside Tsunami Memorial.
- Stay over night at Takua Paa Town, in Phang Nga Province.

### **Tuesday September 12 :**

- Visit **Pak Triem Village** (a seaside Muslim fishing village in the north of Phang Nga Province, which was completely destroyed by the tsunami. The land they used to occupy on a small island was swept away and is now underwater. So these people found a small piece of land on the mainland, nearby, in a mangrove forest, to purchase collectively and resettle on their own. Built their own beautiful wooden stilt houses.
- **Boat trip through the mangrove forests near Pak Triem**, and lunch at the fish breeding place.
- Back to Phuket and stay over night in Phuket.

### **Wednesday September 13 :**

**07:00** Leave hotel for Phuket Airport

**10:00** Fly Phuket to Jakarta (via Kuala Lumpur) on Malaysian Airlines Flight MH785 – MH723

**17:30** Arrive in Jakarta

- Stay over night in Jakarta – UPC/Uplink friends will pick up from airport

### **Thursday September 14 :**

**early morning:** fly to Banda Aceh (via Medan)

### **Friday – Saturday, September 15 - 16 :**

Visit communities in the Udeep Beusaree Network in Aceh. Evening Sept. 16, fly back to Jakarta.

**Sunday September 17 :** Fly Jakarta to Bangkok, and connect to flight back to USA.

Endesha (at the hotel the first night) :

**"I don't know who invented air conditioning, but them's some *bad boys!*"**



**Surprises :** Endesha was in the army, and afterwards went to law school at Tulane, practiced as a criminal defense lawyer for 10 years before getting fed up and becoming an activist. Grew up partly in rural Mississippi, and partly in the St. Bernard Public Housing project, which he says used to be like a village, until crack cocaine began destroying the community in the 1980s.

**St. Bernard Update :** There are 1,500 units at St. Bernard. Before the storm, only 800 were actually occupied, though. Why? Because the government had been following a policy of gradually closing up the project, and when people moved out, they were locking

up these units and not allowing anyone to move in. The plan was eventually to tear the whole project down and rebuild it as a "mixed income" development the way they did at St. Thomas.

- Endesha says that when he was a boy, living here, nobody sat inside watching TV, they all sat outside in the evening and interacted. Now people live isolated, in their "little boxes" and hardly have any reason to talk to each other.
- St. Bernard is all black – no white families lived in the project.
- **The Lafite (?) and Iberville Public Housing projects** did have some white families living in them, mostly elderly poor white folks who had stayed there a long time.
- **The Iberville Public Housing Project is the city's oldest public housing**, and it's very near the French Quarter. This project is also locked up, and nobody is being allowed to move back in, even though it wasn't flooded at all!
- **The Desire and Florida (?) Public housing projects** have already been torn down and redeveloped as "mixed income" housing.
- After the St. Thomas Public Housing Project was demolished and redeveloped, some of the residents there were sent to St. Bernard to live. There were turf wars then between groups of young people from the different projects. Endesha worked hard to try to keep the peace!



## 1. Visit to Bonkai Slum Redevelopment Project in Bangkok

### BACKGROUND on the Bonkai project :

Bonkai is a 26-year old squatter community of 566 households, living in extremely crowded conditions in the Klong Toey area of central Bangkok, on land belonging to the Crown Property Bureau (CPB). The slum is surrounded by several multi-story public housing developments built by the National Housing Authority in the 1970s and 80s to provide single-room, subsidized rental housing to many of the people who were evicted from slums in the area years ago. In December 2001, a fire destroyed 200 houses in one area of the settlement, and the community used the crisis to negotiate a more secure future for themselves. After forming a cooperative, they entered into lengthy negotiations with CPB and eventually got a 30-year (renewable) lease on the land.

*Thailand's first "Community Lease"* : In the past, most state agencies lease land to poor families individually, which makes it easy for communities to be manipulated by outside interests. Bonkai is the first case of a land lease contract being made to a community cooperative, on a nominal rent of 150 Baht per month per household, paid by the community cooperative in one big monthly payment. Collective land tenure arrangements can be a powerful tool for bringing community members together and one of the best safeguards against speculation and gentrification in inner-city communities like Bonkai.

The community's complete reconstruction has been planned in three phases, which allow the new housing to be built without anyone ever having to leave the site. In the first phase, 72 houses are being built to accommodate the worst-affected fire victims, who lived in tents between the rows of new houses during construction. 288 units will be built in the 2nd phase; 42 in the third.

*"Expandable" row houses* : In order to squeeze so many families into such small land, the community worked with young architects to draft an extremely efficient layout plan with narrow lanes and compact 3-story row-houses built on tiny plots of only 24 square meters. To keep the new houses as cheap as possible, they designed an extra-tall upper floor with a half-loft, which can later be made into a full third floor. These fully-finished houses cost 200,000 Baht. The community opted to use a contractor to build the first phase houses, but to reduce house costs, the second and third phase houses will be built by community members themselves.



We walk through the old, densely-crowded part of the slum and into the area where the first phase of the rebuilding has been completed. We are welcomed by the Bonkai community people as well as community leaders from several community upgrading projects around the city, who have come to meet our friends from New Orleans.

Somsook Boonyabancha, the director of CODI (*Community Organizations Development Institute*, which is providing housing loans, infrastructure subsidies and technical support to the upgrading process at Bonkai, through the *Baan Mankong City-wide Upgrading Program*) is also there to welcome the New Orleans group, all of which she had met last June, when she visited New Orleans. About fifty of

us sit in a big circle out in the narrow lane in between the new two-and-a-half story townhouses, which the people here have built themselves.

### **History of the Bonkai Community's Redevelopment :**

Mr. Sangwan the tough community leader of Bonkai, tells the story of Bonkai's 32-year-long struggle to secure their land and get decent housing and basic services here. He tells how 32 years ago, this was just vacant land, not far from the Port. Nobody knew who owned it, so people began building small shacks and staying here, without any running water, electricity, drains or sewers. Gradually the settlement grew into a large slum of about 600 families, occupying about 2.5 hectares of land. There have been several attempts to evict the people over the years, as the area developed. It was only when a big fire destroyed a large portion of the community that the people started really organizing themselves, launched savings groups, and began negotiating with the Crown Property Bureau to regularize their land tenure here.



**"We started from scratch"** Sangwan tells how first the community managed to get electricity, then they started a community savings scheme. Later, they formed a cooperative, and as a cooperative finally managed to persuade the Crown Property Bureau to regularize their land tenure under a long-term-collective land lease (15 years). Next, they got loans and started building new houses, with proper infrastructure.

**Bonkai is the first case in Thailand where a poor community cooperative was able to negotiate a community land-lease contract**, where the land is not leased to individuals (as is the common practice with land leases on government land), but to the community cooperative. Since Bonkai pioneered this new collective tenure strategy, as a means of preventing gentrifying and holding communities together, the cooperative land tenure movement has really taken off in many Thai cities, where hundreds of communities have now been able to buy or lease their land as cooperatives, with support from CODI's Baan Mankong Upgrading program.

**Endesha : What happens when the lease expires in 15 years?**



**Sangwan : You have to go beyond houses. You have to keep people awake, have to have social systems and activities in the community which keep people together – things like daily community savings and credit, community welfare, etc.** Sangwan shows the locked steel box they use to collect people's welfare donations (usually 10 Baht per day), with different compartments for different zones in the settlement. They open the box at the end of the month and count the money, with everyone watching, so it's all clear to everyone. In these ways, the cooperative acts as a bank and a welfare support system for the community members. (*Endesha puts in some money to the box, and then Pam, Viola and Father Luke follow suit!*)

**Sangwan : How are you going to fight in New Orleans?**

**Endesha :** We are the ones who came back to our empty neighborhoods, we are the vanguard. [Endesha goes on to explain about the closure of public housing projects in New Orleans after the storm. Says these housing projects occupy valuable land and the government has been wanting to get this land back for years, to develop it – the only problem is there are people living on it! Now that the storm has cleared the people out, they've got their wish. He says there are now 100 people living in the "Survivors Village" outside the fenced-off St. Bernard Housing project. They were planning to go back in on July 4th (American Independence Day) But they decided 100 people wasn't enough yet to storm the fences and reoccupy the project with sufficient strength. So they're waiting and planning and gathering their forces and supporters until they're strong enough, and then even if the government doesn't allow them to do so, they will go in and knock down the fences, go in and squat in their former apartments.]

**Sangwan : Have you made a survey in New Orleans yet?** Endesha explains that the problem is that everyone is still scattered around the country, where they were sent as hurricane refugees after the storm. There are 150,000 people just in Houston, which is 600 miles away! Pam explains that lots of people came back to New Orleans on buses for the one-year anniversary of the storm. They all want to return, but they have no place to stay – their houses are ruined and can't be lived in yet – and they have no support systems in the city yet. So they had to go back to the other cities, where they get room and food support from the government, for another six months or so.

**Sangwan :** It is important to identify where people are, and create activities which pull people back together in the city. Use TV, newspaper, websites, whatever.

**Endesha :** If they do come back to the city, they lose



their hand-outs from the government. But the hand-outs are only given for 18 months anyway, so in another six months or so, they won't have the handouts any more. When that's over, they'll all come home and fight!

**Question :** Are you afraid of more storms coming? Pam says *Yes, I'm scared! The levees which protect the city have been repaired, but they're now no stronger than they were before the storm, which is not strong enough!*

**Endesha :** *A hurricane is an act of God we can't control. It's the evil of men that we have to worry about!*

**Sangwan :** It's important to link people together wherever they are – maybe even in other cities, if they are still there. Important that people are linked and able to share opinions, start their planning, support each other.

**Pam :** That's the most difficult part, because the government is not releasing information about where all these New Orleans people are. We don't know where everyone is. The government isn't allowing neighborhood associations like mine to access this information. *It's like a secret!*

**Endesha :** We're trying to do that, but we're not as good as you all are. But we're trying to learn.

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

**"The golden moment" :**

Paa Chan speaks. She is the outspoken community leader from Klong Lumnoon (another very strong squatter settlement in suburban Bangkok that redeveloped itself and negotiated secure land tenure, after a long and nasty eviction struggle)

*"When people come back, that is your golden moment! That's your opportunity. That's the time to make a survey in the area by people – not by the government! That's the time to get people's minds together and going in the same direction."*

**Endesha :** Even if they're poor, people in the USA have forgotten how to fight.

**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 the community leaders are linked through lots and lots of 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. It's important to pull together and work together. If we stay separate, we have no strength. These problems are too big for one community to



change alone.

**Viola** : Father Luke's Vietnamese community was like an island – it was very well organized, but we didn't know about what they were doing, we weren't linked with them at all. Now we can share ideas and learn from their experience.

**Sangwan** : Right now in Thailand we have a very good government policy which supports informal communities like ours to upgrade their housing and living conditions and land tenure, through CODI's *Baan Mankong* Program. ***But this policy is not permanent! Government policies keep changing. You can't trust that the government will support you now or forever.*** We know this, and so we are using this good opportunity to link communities all over the country together into a national federation of urban poor communities. In Bangkok, we are bringing 10 people from each slum. Never mind if this new federation is strong or not – the main thing is that all these people in all these vulnerable communities are linked together, to have a strong voice in their negotiations with whatever government comes along in the future. As policies come and go, communities have to provide the continuity and the strength, to push for what they need, through linking together.



**Pam** : We are also starting to organize a coalition of neighborhood groups in New Orleans.

**Viola** : And organizations of poor women also.

**Endesha** : Before the storm, I was a lawyer. Now I'm a full time gangster.

**Luke** : Me, I'm still a priest. We go to city meetings with the members of our parish, and our youth groups help clean up after the storm. We say, "Play, pray and work."

*(After saying goodbye to the folks at Bonkai, we race across Bangkok in the van to catch our flight to*

*Phuket. On the way, there is a more detailed discussion amongst the NOLA group about how to get this information about where people are.)*

### Discussion with Viola on the plane :

Viola helped start a **Welfare Rights Organization** in the Gentilly neighborhood where she lives - a non-profit, community based organization which helps welfare recipients (especially women) who get treated very badly by the welfare system to deal with problems getting the support they need. They started work in 1980, and are now formally registered as a non-profit, and so can apply for funding support and pay themselves salaries. First they tried to understand the policies within the welfare system that created these problems.

**Welfare reform in the USA** : Viola explains the various stages of "welfare reform" that have been imposed by subsequent administrations in the USA, all with the goal of reducing the welfare state, and all reflecting the increasing American move away from the notion that it the government has some responsibility to guarantee some minimum living standard to society's poor, marginalized and disadvantaged. *(These are Tom's notes on this – I'm not sure how much I got right...)*

- **Reagan** : During the Reagan administration, a big chunk of the funds that had been given directly to individual welfare recipients was decentralized and given in bulk grants to the states, to use for "the poor." In the notoriously corrupt state of Louisiana, this money just disappeared, while the number of poor people (particularly poor black families) who could access welfare entitlements declined sharply.
- **Clinton** : The Clinton administration took the process much further, offering state incentives to get people off welfare within a certain period of time, by imposing time limits on benefits and supposedly providing education and training and social support to help people get jobs – help them to be more "self determining". But in Louisiana, nothing much materialized of the education or training, and mothers wishing to go back to college couldn't even get help paying for the hugely expensive day-care they needed to attend university. The time limits on benefits (7 years?) were imposed, however.

- **Bush** : Then, the most recent welfare "reform" idea came out of the Bush administration – to give the benefits as a one-time bulk subsidy to needy families, who are then "free" to invest this little capital, as if they were all little stock brokers, and not families in a perpetual crisis of poverty. So far, this reform is still an idea, has been a hugely unpopular idea and has not been passed into law. Now in Louisiana, there is a 5-year lifetime limit on receiving welfare benefits, with a limit of 2 years at a stretch. As welfare payments have declined, desperate families have been forced to sell their food stamps to pay their utilities, and then go to food banks for something to eat.

### For those who thought the informal sector in USA was dead :

*Viola tells about some of the informal businesses which thrive in New Orleans poorer neighborhoods, offering goods and services that are affordable, while they build neighborhood relations and extremely local economic prosperity. Though none of these businesses are registered or licensed, the police never hassle them, and Viola says they are just one way these poorer neighborhoods in the city support each other and find affordable alternatives to the things they need, within their own neighborhoods.*

- **"Suppers"** - All across Gentilly, and other New Orleans neighborhoods, there are families which make a bit of money cooking full home-cooked meals for people who don't have time or space to cook. No license or business registration! These meals can be delivered to people's houses, eaten in the cook's kitchen, or delivered to people to eat at work on their lunch hours. The meals generally cost about \$6.00 a plate (10 years ago, the rate was \$2 a plate!), and include fried fish (on Fridays, in heavily Catholic New Orleans) or chicken (on other days), green salad, potato or macaroni salad and dessert. They're especially popular on Fridays and Saturdays. They say, "Oh did you hear, Viola's got a supper" – which means Viola has started preparing suppers for sale. News of a good cook spreads fast among friends circles and workplace circles. Some even put up signs on telephone poles, advertising their "supper" and giving the phone number to call in orders. Most people order their suppers in advance, but some also take "walk-ins." If they take away their supper or have it delivered, they are packed in Styrofoam boxes, complete with napkins and plastic cutlery. Some of these informal businesses are modest, preparing only a dozen suppers, but some become quite large, with the whole extended family chipping in to the shopping, preparing, cooking and delivering of suppers. Viola says the key to a successful "supper" is delivering on time – especially if your customers are working in factories or offices, and have their lunch hour at a certain time. Can't be late. And it can be a very lucrative business for a good "supper" – a popular "supper" can make \$500 - \$2,000 in one weekend!
- **Card games after** : At some eat-in suppers, a card game is organized after the meal, as an added business attraction, with a minimum stake of \$10 to play. The family which runs the supper gets a cut of this. The card games they play have an equally southern flavor: *pitty-pat* and *tonk*!
- **"Boxes"** - There is also a larger version of "suppers" in New Orleans, in which families prepare big full, home-cooked meals for bigger groups, to order, with a whole roast chicken, a full cake, etc. etc. for a big group or a party – with the size of the box depending on the order. At church socials, auctioning off "boxes" prepared by known good cooks is a popular fund-raising technique.
- **"Sweet shops"** are informal shops run out of the front of people's houses in neighborhoods like Gentilly, selling candy, potato chips, snacks, cokes, etc. There are special wholesale stores which cater specially to supplying these "sweet shops", which can make a family \$100 a day and up, especially if there are lots of school kids in the area.
- **Barber shops and hair salons on porches** : It costs \$13 for a hair-cut in a proper barber shop in New Orleans, but in an unlicensed front-porch barber shop in the neighborhoods, it costs only \$10. There are also home-based salons for women – especially places to get your hair braided into the elaborate rows of tiny braids that are the rage among African American women. In a proper beauty parlor, it can cost between \$200 and \$350 to have these tiny braids done (depending on the number and fineness – it takes hours!), but on a front porch, it costs only \$50 - \$75.
- **Ironing clothes** :
- **Home Baby-sitting** : According to Louisiana law, you can run a day-care in your own house for up to six children without a license. It's illegal if you have more than six kids. It costs \$65 a week to leave your kid while you're at work (\$260 a month), which is the amount the state welfare will pay, as an alternative to the big, less human, less neighborly day-care center businesses.



### **Viola gives an update on the situation in her Gentilly neighborhood :**

- Only 10% of the people in the neighborhood have come back.
- Lots of warehouses in the area are for sale – one idea is to use these to set up temporary housing for people to stay, who want to come back, but whose houses are not yet repaired.
- Land-grabbing by outsiders already starting – people buying up very cheaply houses from families too poor or too discouraged to return.
- Rental rates going up dramatically: before Katrina, a 2-bedroom house in Gentilly would rent for about \$500 a month. Now the same house goes for \$1,400 a month.
- There is no rent control in New Orleans.
- Getting a FEMA trailer to stay in while you repair your house is VERY difficult, lots of paper work and bureaucracy. So much difficulty that huge numbers of these trailers are standing in parking lots, unused! Then, if you are actually able to get the trailer, then the next difficulty is getting the electricity to power it – another huge bureaucracy, which FEMA and the City have not managed to make easy.
- Viola returned to Gentilly six months after the hurricane. Her homeowners insurance paid for the roof repairs, while her flood insurance paid for the water damage in the lower part of the house. Even with most of the work being done by her own extended family network (most of whom live in nearby cities, and were not hit by the storm), it still cost about \$100,000 to completely repair her house and make it livable again.
- People were getting ripped off all over the place by all the fly-by-night contractors taking jobs to gut and repair storm-damaged houses, many using low-paid Hispanic workers from Mexico! High prices and shoddy work.
- Many people were forced to use these cheating contractors, rather than do the work themselves, because the city and insurance companies required that you use licensed plumbers, electricians etc. to get a building permit! The city has every single house on the digital map in the computer, so it's difficult to take matters into your own hand, without having a "STOP WORK" order pasted up on the house. All very heavily regulated and controlled. Still lots of corruption.
- In some areas of the city, they are also requiring that people raise the level of their houses by 5 feet, to be above flood level. This is not always possible, of course, when houses are too big or are built on grade on concrete slab floors. And even when it is possible to jack up the house and put it on higher blocks, it's VERY expensive. This is one way the city is using impossible regulations to ensure that people don't come back!
- In many of the city's poor neighborhoods, these houses were the only real assets people had to pass on to their children. Those with no money and no insurance to repair the houses face the prospect of losing them – and in the end they will also be homeless.

## Visit to Taa Chatchai Village, in Phuket Province:

### BACKGROUND on the project here : Relocation to nearby government land, with long-term individual leases

Baan Taa Chatchai is an old community of fishermen, vendors and laborers which occupied a strip of Treasury Department-owned land along the northernmost tip of Phuket Island. The tsunami destroyed 46 houses and all their fishing boats, but nobody was killed. At first, the people worked with two young architects to draft plans for redeveloping their houses in the same place and used these plans to negotiate for a long-term collective land lease.

But the Treasury Department, which had been trying to relocate them for years, to make a public park, would not allow these 46 families to rebuild. Eventually, the people agreed to shift to a relocation site the government had prepared some years earlier about 500 meters away, and are now collectively constructing their own tightly-designed "twin houses" on the 50-square meter resettlement plots.

They lost their beach-front location, but the trade-off was long-term secure land tenure and free houses of their own design, on fully-serviced plots in the same area. Of the remaining families whose houses were further back and were not destroyed in the tsunami, some have land title deeds and some have gotten permission to stay. The Deputy Prime Minister inaugurated the project on January 20, 2005, and by May, the houses were nearly finished.

### Tenure terms at Taa Chatchai :

- **Number of families** : 20 (out of the total 57 families in the old community)
- **Tenure terms BEFORE** : Long term occupancy (without any legal title deeds or lease) on beach-front public land under Treasury Department ownership.
- **Tenure terms AFTER** : 3-year renewable land leases to individual families on Treasury Department relocation site at nominal rent of 300 Baht (US\$7) per year.
- **Houses** : The 4 x 9 meter twin houses (on 50- square meter plots) have been designed and built collectively by the community.
- **House cost** : 150,000 Baht (\$3,750), with materials paid for by donations and community labor subsidized by the district.



## Visit to Baan Nairai village, in Phang Nga Province:

### BACKGROUND on the project at Ban Nairai :

This Muslim fishing village in southern Phangnga is in a coastal area of tourist resorts and deep pits left over from the tin-mining days, when all this public land was concessioned out to mining companies. The land was originally settled by mining laborers, but their grandchildren now work as fishermen or boat-hands. The tsunami destroyed most of the community, but when the people came back, a rich factory owner appeared with a deed claiming to have bought 120 hectares of the villagers' land - almost the entire village – at auction 40 years ago! He got the police to try to stop people rebuilding and has since filed a court case against the villagers.

Inspired by "invasions" in other tsunami-hit villages, a group of 20 families decided to "negotiate with their hands" by quickly reoccupying a small portion of their old land and starting to rebuild. Their 3.2 hectare site used to belong to five families, but to accommodate others without land, they divided this into 20 small plots and began building modest wooden houses, with design support from architecture students. The community's plans also include a children's center, open-air salas, tree planting and a lake-front park, all described in a beautiful scale model built by architecture students from Maha Salakam University.

Baan Nairai's struggle against eviction has been supported by the 4-Regions Slum Network, volunteers and community people from other parts of the country, who have come to help build. The community is now preparing documents to submit their case to the national land tenure committee for help. So far, land records, old aerial photos and the community's research have called into question the legality of 18 of this so-called land-owner's 23 title deeds.

### Tenure terms at Baan Nairai :

- **Number of families** : 20 (out of the total 180 families in the old community)
- **Tenure terms BEFORE** : Ban Nairai is a patchwork of uncertain tenure and unclear land status. Some have title deeds or tenure documents, most don't.
- **Tenure terms AFTER** : If the community can establish their right to stay on this public land, they are planning to apply for a communal long-term land lease, as a group.
- **Houses** : The simple, inexpensive timber and bamboo-panel house model (on stilts) which the people developed with the architecture students costs about 100,000 Baht (\$2,500). The people build the houses collectively, with only a few hired carpenters to help, using private donations.

- This is another coastal fishing village that was almost completely wiped out by the tsunami – only a single house in the whole village remained standing after the waves as tall as a coconut tree hit. Only one life was lost here, though. Some believe this is because of the mangrove forests and dunes which provided a barrier to the waves.
- **We talk to a guy named Sahat**, one of the community leaders here. (*Viola remarks that he must be of African descent, because his skin, darkened by his days fishing out at sea, is much darker than hers!*) We sit in the open-sided community school, which was rebuilt by the Princess Sirintorn.
- **100 families (24 families?) in this village are still embroiled with a serious land conflict** with a big Pineapple Factory owner, who claims to own the land the people have been living on for many generations. The land conflict had begun even before the tsunami. The court case is still going on.
- On December 29, just 3 days after the tsunami, the business guy tried to measure the land.
- Later, the National Land Department (which is notorious for facilitating these illegal seizures of public land by private business interests) sent a letter to the villagers calling them "invaders" of this land, and telling them they have to leave. People responded with letters of their own, assuring the Land Department their grandfathers and great grandfathers had lived in this public land – how could it have been sold to this private businessmen?



- **A breakthrough?** The latest news is that the government has announced that within three months, it will recognize the community's rights to occupy the land. What the details of this "recognition" are is not yet clear, and the people are not relaxing yet.



- **What the people here want is a long-term collective lease contract to the land** – a single paper which includes the rights to the big pond (formerly a tin-mining pit) which they use for fish farming.
- **Oyster leases** : Pam says that in Louisiana, they have something like this, where people lease area under water for fishing, and they call them "oyster leases".
- Before the tsunami, only six families stayed in this portion of the village, where the new bamboo and timber houses have been built. But after the waves, relatives and neighbors who had no place to live joined and now it is 24 families on this land.
- After the tsunami, aid organizations, like Rotary International, gave houses and support only to those with land title.
- **Boat building workshop** : The Save the Andaman Network (SAN) helped people even if they had no land, according to people's needs. SAN helped bring in a master boat builder and helped set up a boat-building workshop in the village to replace lost boats and help the fishermen start earning again. First people had to form groups to prioritize who would get the boats first, and set up a revolving fund to pay for the new boats, with SAN providing some seed capital to the fund. Fishermen have to repay part of the boat costs (not all) when they start fishing again, but the repayment goes into the village's revolving fund to support other village-driven income generation projects, not back to SAN. After surveying the need for replacement boats, the people in Ban Nairai first requested 19 boats. After setting their criteria and screening the applicants for new boats, the number was reduced to 13 boats, which they have now built.
- **Sufficiency fishing here** : Most fishermen here fish in a small way – for their own family's food, and a little extra to sell at market, just to survive. Sahat says that the seas around here are quite rich in fish, what with all the mangroves. But there is always the struggle against the big commercial fishing trawlers, who are supposed to fish no closer than 3 kms from the shore. But they cheat and come very close to the shore, and their big nets clean out everything in the sea, wiping out the stocks and hatcheries, and destroy the delicate sea-grass breeding grounds in shallow seas, leaving the sea barren. Now it is the rainy season, and most fishermen do not go out into the sea during this season – but they do a little shoreline fishing, collect shellfish and catch things along the sea edge.
- SAN Network also supports village involved in land conflicts.
- We talk to a woman named Naa, who makes about 200 Baht a day with her fish farming set up, which is out in the pond that is part of Ban Nairai

### Visit to Tung Wah Village, Phang Nga Province :

#### BACKGROUND on the project at BAN TUNG WAH :

Ban Tung Wah is a village of indigenous *Moken* sea gypsies in Kao Lak, a badly-hit area of Phangnga. The village is on public land, but its proximity to the coastal highway and a big tourist hub made it prime real-estate. All 70 houses in the village were swept away by the tsunami and 42 people were killed. A few weeks later, Tung Wah survivors staying at the nearby Kuk Khak relief camp were shocked to find a big sign-board on their old land announcing the construction of a German-financed public hospital. A few phone calls to the German Embassy in Bangkok revealed the project was bogus and the sign board was a crude attempt to seize the land. Though they had no title deeds, these fisher folk had lived there for generations and considered the land their own. They were certainly not interested in the government resettlement sites being offered.

So without waiting for anyone's permission, they gathered themselves together and marched right back home, where they encircled their wrecked village with rope, in a symbolic gesture to mark their land ownership. With the entire community camping out there, it became difficult for the authorities to chase them away, especially given the intense media attention being focused on tsunami rehabilitation and the plight of such poor Andaman fishing communities. With help from a few architects and the

Community Planning Network, the people immediately set to work, designing a wooden house model, securing donor funds and starting to build permanent houses. Within days, Ban Tung Wah had become a lightning rod for the land rights struggles of many similar villages, and visitors started flowing in.

The district officials and the provincial governor, meanwhile, continued intimidating the villagers and eventually the land tenure committee got involved. It was the land committee which first suggested a land-sharing option for Tung Wah, in which the people would keep part of the land for redeveloping their settlement, and give part to the province, supposedly for "public use". At first, the people were indignant at the idea of giving up a single bit of their ancestral land. But they came around when faced with the prospect of years lost in legal battles and the possibility that the courts might eventually rule against them, leaving them homeless. So the negotiations about how to divide the land began.

- **The land sharing deal :** The original village occupied 4.16 hectares of land. Initially, the provincial governor wanted at least half this land, but after some tough haggling and many tense meetings, it was agreed that the villagers would keep 2.56 hectares and give 1.6 hectares to the province. As part of the agreement, the villagers can now regularize their tenure status under a communal land-lease, given by the province for three years, initially, as a first step towards permanent tenure.
- **Project inauguration :** On February 27th 2005, the people invited the Deputy Prime Minister to inaugurate their first ten permanent houses. He spent over an hour in Ban Tung Wah, talking with the people, listening to their stories and climbing up to see how cool the new houses were inside. It was a friendly, human occasion, but also an important acknowledgement, from the highest level of government, that what these people were doing was right. Hundreds of fisher folk from other communities had also come to join the celebration and to see for themselves what was possible.
- **The impact of the case at Ban Tung Wah :** Once the land-sharing agreement had been made, the villagers at Tung Wah were able to get back to the reconstruction of their houses and community in earnest. Almost all the houses are finished now and many have gone back to sea to fish. The impact of this case, and of what these determined people are building into their community, is much stronger and more valuable than all the months and years they might have spent haggling with the land authorities about who really has the right to this land. Once the people went ahead, many other communities started coming to see what they were doing and to learn from their example. In this way, Tung Wah has become an important model for how to resolve land-conflict cases. Now, officials from the sub-district come to Ban Tung Wah to learn about "people-managed tsunami rehabilitation" while researchers and university students turn up there by the bus-full to study "indigenous people's wisdom."



This is a very old Moken fishing village that was totally destroyed by the tsunami. After tsunami, there was a land conflict with the District, which finally agreed to the community's land-sharing proposal, in which the villagers gave part of the land to the District, and kept the rest for their housing, for which they made a beautiful rebuilding plan, with a community center, a Moken cultural museum, a market, playground, school and lovely wooden stilt houses.

- The So-Sa Foundation and UNDP provided funds for the houses, which people designed and built themselves, in the style of the traditional Moken house – of wood and raised on stilts

- CODI provided infrastructure through Baan Mankong (check this?) and UNDP provided drainage.
- Moken Cultural Center and Museum : We visit when a local artist is working on big paintings made of coffee, which show some of the Moken traditions, including ancestor worship and worship of the sea. They believe that when they die, they go live on an island. They are planning a big event for the opening of this center in two months – all the Moken community groups from all along the Andaman sea will come, have a big celebration of Moken pride and unity.



- Catfish raising in small tanks around the houses – first tiny babies in one "nursery" tank, and then larger fish in a bigger tank.



We sit under one of the houses and talk with **Mr. Chane and Mr. Hong**, two of the 15 community leaders here. First the NOLA team explain how Katrina worked, broke the levees, how the city of New Orleans is "like a bowl" with its sides broken, so water comes inside. Explains how they are trying to keep the poor from coming back.

- **Hong**: Why?
- **Endesha** : They want the land, and they feel the city would be better if it was richer and more white.
- **Viola** : explains how they used sections and zip-codes to allow or not allow people back. The zip-codes which covered mostly-black areas of the city were not allowed to come back until very late.

- **Hong** : Black and white people both died in the storm?
- **Viola** : It was mostly black people who died. Because the levees which protected the mostly white areas were stronger, higher, better built, better maintained, while the levees protecting mostly black neighborhoods were in bad condition, built with shabby workmanship and unimproved. The government let people stay in these neighborhoods – or at least they did nothing to help those without cars or immobile to evacuate – so the floods came in and killed them.
- **Endesha** : explains about the evacuation, and how people had to go hundreds of miles away. Explains that the floods in New Orleans were not like the tsunami. Here, the water came with great force and then receded right away. In New Orleans, the water came and stayed for two weeks – in some areas for six weeks. First Katrina, then Wilma, then Rita – three storms in a row, all bringing lot of rain and water.
- **Hong** : Did they rescue white people first and black people later? What will happen the next time there is a hurricane?
- **Endesha** : Hurricanes come every year – it's part of the common weather pattern there - but not all of them hit New Orleans. And big ones like this come only once every 30 or 40 years. Besides, New Orleans didn't get much problem from the hurricane itself, but from the flooding that happened after the levees broke. In Biloxi, a town in Mississippi 100 miles away, houses got blown away by the storm itself!
- **Pam** : In the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, where I live, only parts are on higher ground. Very few people have come back, and no electricity and water in most parts still. Everyone was evacuated to places very far away, scattered and hard to contact.
- **Father Luke** : In our area, 70% of the people have come back, but there are still no schools or hospitals running. We were the first to come back.
- **Hong** : It was the same here! The government decided where the relief camps would be set up.
- **Viola** : In the process of loading people onto buses and planes to evacuate, families were broken up, children were separated from their parents. They did not identify people before loading them on buses, no record or ID, as is typical in refugee situations. Now many still missing.
- **Hong** : The Thais are much better! *(he whispers very softly when he says this, out of politeness, not wishing to offend our American guests!)*



**Endesha : 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.**

- **Hong** : Similar! We stayed in the temporary camp for three weeks, waiting for help. Then we decided to come back to our land. 42 people died here, but only 12 bodies were recovered and for the rest, we were not able to perform any ceremonies or burial. People here can all swim very well, but they died from swallowing mud or from being killed by the force of debris that came with the waves.
- **Pam** : How did you design these houses?

**Hong** : *There were many problems!* Everyone had different ideas about how the houses should be, and nobody agreed. Lots of fights. So we set up different groups and let each group design their own house model. With help from the young architects, models of each group's design were built, so we could look at all of them. Finally, we decided on the model that everyone liked the best: the traditional wooden house on stilts. Before the tsunami, our houses were similar in design, but made of bamboo and thatch. Now we have a chance to use better materials, using strong wood and roof tiles.



- **Endesha** : See. We don't need Brad Pitt to tell us how to design a house!
- **Pam** : How did you resolve the fights about the house design?
- **Hong** : First we were fighting. Then outsiders came and CODI and the Community Planning Network came to support us. They gave us ideas about how to organize ourselves. But still the fights continued. Finally, the way that allowed us to resolve these differences was to let all the ideas be built in small models, and then let people vote on their favorite house model.
- **Pam** : Did all the people here know how to build these houses?
- **Hong** : Yes! We look and learn by doing ourselves. It is not so difficult.

## Visit to Tap Tawan Village, Phang Nga Province :

### BACKGROUND on the project at BAN TAP TAWAN :

Tap Tawan is a small Sea Gypsy fishing village in Phang Nga's Takua Paa District. All 47 houses were swept away by the tsunami, but most of the coconut trees planted by earlier generations survived. Tap Tawan was the first village in Thailand to use the strategy of "invading" their own land, to defy claims of ownership by a rich landlord, who appeared right after the tsunami with spurious title deeds. They were also the first to start building permanent houses on their land, without asking for anyone's permission, which ended up strengthening their claim to that land. The beautiful timber and bamboo stilt houses they have built, using private donor funds and help from volunteer architects, stand as a defiant statement of possession. Their case is now one of several being forwarded for help to the national tsunami land tenure committee.

This is another Moken village that was almost totally destroyed by the tsunami. They are also involved in a land conflict, which is not yet resolved.

- **Very active Youth Group here :** We order blended fruit drinks from the drinks shop that has been set up by the community's youth group – a beautiful bamboo and wooden building with a thatched roof, set in a garden full of flowers and little thatched gazebos for sitting in the shade. Besides the restaurant, the youth group also runs a community radio station, and organizes a batik-making project for income generation. This youth group was established only after the tsunami. They also have a summer camp for kids out of school, and organize workshops to promote awareness and protection of their fragile coastal eco-system and their unique indigenous *Moken* culture. Once a week, most of the youth group members go over to nearby Kao Lak to get free English lessons from a foreign volunteer. One of the girls in the youth group was invited to go to Sweden!



- **The Four Regions Slum Network** (which worked especially to support tsunami communities without secure land) helped set up this youth group here and in other tsunami-hit villages. They also helped to set up elderly folks groups, housewives groups, income generation groups, boat-building groups, etc. All with the idea of creating new activities and new linkages within and between communities to strengthen them. All these groups work closely together, and all will continue once the tsunami rehabilitation is complete.



- **Community center :** We go and sit in the big community center structure which was donated by some organization – a kind of vaulted structure with a roof of translucent sheets.
- **We talk with a tiny woman named Laap,** who is one of the strong community leaders here (she

went to Sri Lanka for ACHR's regional tsunami dialogue there). She was working on a nearby construction site when the tsunami came. Her boss called everyone to look when the water on the beach receded dramatically by almost a kilometer in less than a minute. They all started to run inland. 20 people in Tap Tawan died. Laap says the waves were like a big cobra.

- **Coming back to their land :** The survivors went to stay in one of the relief camps set up nearby, but returned to their land after just a month. The land issue was their main focus, and realized they could not protect their rights to the land if they stayed in





the camp. Had to reoccupy their land and defend it through occupation. Some groups offered free houses at relocation sites, but the people here were clear that they could not live anywhere else. This village has been here for 200 years, their ancestors are buried here, and their ties to this land are very strong.

- **Land conflict :** As in so many of the other post-tsunami land conflict cases, here in Tap Tawan, a rich capitalist showed up only after the tsunami, claiming that he was the owner of this land, and waving title deeds to the land. But as Laap says, according by Thai law, if people live on a piece of land for ten years without anyone else making any claim to that land, they are legally entitled to that land. Out of a total 47 families in the village, 36 families are involved in the court case about the land conflict. *Why only 36 families involved in the court case?* After the tsunami, the company lawyers sent registered letters to all the community members asking them to sign a form saying "I accept that I am an illegal invader of this private land." This is a common trick used in cases like this, where most villagers are illiterate, and will sign as the delivery boy asks them to, but don't know what they signed. Even the professional NGO woman who runs the village's day-care center got a letter, and she doesn't even live here! The other 11 families had someone literate there, who could read the letter and warn their family not to sign.
- **In these ways, the tsunami proved to be a very good opportunity for land grabbing by unscrupulous developers and gangster politicians, all with the collusion of government and land department officials.**
- **The coconut tree system of proving occupation :** Here, they could prove their long occupation of this land by showing the coconut trees they had planted around their houses (the rings on the coconut tree show how many years the tree has been alive). This smarmy capitalist said, *no, my own staff planted those coconut trees.* But the people argued, *if you plant coconut trees in an orchard for profit, you plant them all in neat rows, not scattered here and there, around existing houses like this!*



- **Pam : What jobs to people have here?** How soon could they go back to work? **Laap answers :** Within three or four months, our fishermen could go back to sea. Even though they had lost their boats and didn't have any new ones yet, they could catch fish without any boat! We know how to get fish! So-Sa Foundation supported us to set up our own boat building workshop here, with a master boat builder from Phuket.
- **New community layout :** After the tsunami, they kept the same land boundaries, but made a new layout for their village, since everything had been destroyed. The layout and house design process was assisted in several

community workshops by young volunteer architects.

- **Trusting outsiders who come to help?** Viola asks whether the people here trust all these outsiders who come offering different kinds of help? Laap answers that at the beginning, they were all very scared, very paranoid and suspicious of everyone who came, especially because of the aggressive land-grabbing problem. But now the community is more strong, and they know what they want to do, so they can easily handle and welcome groups with good intentions, without being pushed around by them. Also, she says that the new Youth Group here is increasingly acting as a bridge between the community and the government.
- **Tap Tawan is part of the Phang Nga Province's Moken (Sea gypsy) community network.** There are 15 Moken villages in Phang Nga Province. Now this network is doing a fresh survey of all the households in these villages, and organize regular forums and exchange visits.



## Visit to Ban Nam Khem's new housing project for landless renters (Part 1 of two projects)

### BACKGROUND on the RENTERS HOUSING at BAN NAM KHEM :

What about renters and landless tsunami victims? This special land and housing project allows 105 poor, landless tsunami-hit households to escape the cycle of exploitative rents with a place of their own. Ban Nam Khem, the worst-hit settlement of Thailand's worst-hit province, is a maze of unclear and overlapping tenure claims and dicey land status, with disputes and court cases abounding. There is one group of survivors, though, who had no claim to anything, since they'd been living in cheap rental rooms when the waves hit. Among the village's poorest residents, they lost loved-ones, jobs and possessions like everyone else, but because they did not qualify for the government's housing compensation or relocation schemes, and are not part of any village reconstruction projects, there was no place for them. They had been organized into a group, though, and had begun to discuss possibilities.

In April, 2005, families in this situation got an unexpected boost when a US\$300,000 donation from Denmark's Crown Prince was used to set up a special fund to assist Ban Nam Khem's poorest survivors. With support from CODI and NGOs, 105 renter families staying in the Bang Muang relief camp organized themselves and began discussing what to do. After forming a cooperative and identifying two plots of land just a half-kilometer down the road from Ban Nam Khem, the group bought the land and worked with architects to design houses and community layouts.

50 houses on the first site are now nearly finished, and work on the remaining 56 houses on the second site is about to begin. The new community used the Danish fund to pay for the houses and subsidize their community labor, and took out a CODI loan for the land, which was purchased collectively, through their new cooperative. The roads, drains and basic services in the two settlements are being developed by the people, using the Baan Mankong Program's US\$625-per-family infrastructure subsidy.

All these activities have been deliberately organized to get people to work together, plan together, build together - and forge ties where there had been none before.



**Palm :** In this project, the government, the support NGOs and the poor landless tsunami victims who had been renting rooms or squatting in shacks in Ban Nam Khem village, all got together to form a solution. The people searched for and bought this land collectively, to make a new community for themselves.

**Lots of young American and European volunteers helping out here,** being delivered to the site in bright yellow trucks (this project is assigned 20 volunteers every day) from the Phang Nga Volunteer center, all of them looking more than a little bit wilted to be working so hard in this kind of heat, with no shade in site.

Some connected with this and other tsunami rebuilding

projects through the website [tsunamivolunteers.net](http://tsunamivolunteers.net) and some just happened by on their holidays and decided to help out for a few weeks. Seems to me an awful hard way to get a sun-tan! The system is that each village involved in rebuilding has to make a request to the Volunteer center, and must let the volunteers know what they can and can't do, cultural rules, work out a weekly program and work targets with the volunteers, etc. Prajak tells us it is important that the volunteers do not get involved in the internal community issues or in issues of building standards, which all have to be set and controlled by the villagers themselves, not by the foreign volunteers. So far, no problems with this. VERY organized volunteer system here!

*We sit on the front porch of the gaudy, just-finished house belonging to Mr. Prajak, a self-employed tailor, who is a leader here in the community. Prajak tells the story of this project :*



- **At first all these people didn't know each other** – they all lived in scattered rental rooms around the town of Ban Nam Khem before the tsunami, most working as vendors, boatmen, hotel staff or laborers in the construction and fisheries sector. After the tsunami, in the Bang Muang Relief camp nearby, they met each other and started to survey themselves about who has problems of land and housing. Very quickly, they organized a group around the problem of people with no land or houses.
- **Prajak says that at first, they didn't have any expectation that anybody would help them**, since most of the tsunami housing being offered by the government or aid organizations was only for those with clear land title, who owned their lost houses. They knew they would have to rely on themselves, and on their new group's togetherness to find some kind of solution to their housing problems.
- **So with support from CODI and the Thai Community Foundation, they began by starting a savings group.** Their idea was to save their money together and one day to buy land for housing. Later, after a visit by the Danish Crown Prince Frederick to the Bang Muang Relief camp, the Danish government offered to donate some money for the rebuilding of Ban Nam Khem. Mr. Amporn from CODI (who was at that time in charge of coordinating CODI's tsunami work in the six provinces) advised this new group to prepare a proposal to submit to the Danish Embassy to get funding to support their new housing.
- **First survey : 180 landless families affected by the tsunami in Ban Nam Khem village.** All joined the new savings group. But later on, some of these people withdrew – some got donated houses elsewhere and changed their mind, didn't believe this project would ever come about. So the number in the saving group dwindled to only 60 households.
- **Then these 60 families set to work:** they found a piece of land nearby to buy, prepared a housing layout plan and house model design and were successful in getting the funding from the Danish Embassy and began the project, many of the other doubters came back, wanting to rejoin the group. So the first 60 families fit into the first piece of land, and the other 50 late-returners would be accommodated in the second phase, on a second piece of nearby land.
- **Communal ownership of the new land :** The group finally decided to use the free money from the Danish government to build their houses (\$5,000 per household), and after forming a cooperative, took a collective loan from CODI to buy the land, repayable in 15 years. After the CODI land loan is paid off in 15 years, the cooperative will then decide what to do: to continue with the cooperative land ownership, or to allot individual titles to the families in the project. It's up to the people.
- **Pam asks what about the kids, will they inherit the houses? And what about buying and selling of the houses, when people have to move away?** Prajak explains that each family owns its own house, and they can decide who to give it to when they die. But if people want to sell their houses, they cannot sell to outsiders by themselves, but must sell it back to the cooperative, which can then sell it to a new family. The cooperative has set a rule that the priority in these cases will be to selling to poor or landless families.
- **Viola asks whether people are building their own houses?** Yes, most people are doing most of the labor themselves, with several teams of skilled masons and plumbers hired by the cooperative also working alongside the families. There are also teams of foreign volunteers helping out. From the Danish Government's grant, each family gets a budget of exactly 200,000 Baht (US\$ 5,000) for building their house. So it depends on each family how much they want to spend on labor. If they do the work themselves and save on labor, they can build a bigger house or have money left over for furniture and fittings.
- **Viola asks whether people here know the folks at Tap Tawan village?** Prajak says yes! We know each other's work very well and visit each other's projects all the time – we have worked together from the very beginning, within the Phang Nga Network of Tsunami affected communities. We have our own network within Phang Nga Province, and we are also part of the larger 6-province network of tsunami-affected communities. This linking is very strong now.
- **Not just "my village" but other big issues :** These community networks also create linkages between communities having the same kind of problems, so they can compare notes, support each other and negotiate as a large, powerful block. And all this networking is a potent way of shaking people out of the "my community" insular thinking, and opens up even these very sleepy, traditional fishing villages to understanding the larger issues about housing and land and access to resources. Now none of these communities are only on the receiving end of assistance, but are going out and helping others all the time.



- **A furniture builder named Sakdaa speaks :** After the waves came, he found himself dazed and naked, except for a torn, sodden pair of underpants, with terrible bruises all over his body. After helping set up the Bang Muang Relief camp, and assisting in the first survey of tsunami-affected people, Sakdaa says he vowed to only work for others from now on. Sakdaa is a member of this new renters community. Not just working for money, but for my community. He says it doesn't matter whether I'm richer or poorer now – the point is *I'm happier!*
- **Viola asks whether there will be space in the new community for a day-care center?** Prajak says yes, we have left space in the plan for a nursery school, a play-ground and tree planting. Now we are now planning for waste-water treatment, recycling center and drainage lines and road paving, but we all want to finish our houses first. Prajak explains that they want to look at all these environmental issues in a more holistic way, including using organic fertilizer, raising environmentally sound products, household organic vegetable gardens, fish ponds, etc. To make a future for our children that is healthy for them, and healthy for this coastal environment. The funds to support these infrastructure developments will come as a grant from CODI's Baan Mankong Upgrading program.
- **They are also beginning to plan some income generation projects to boost people's incomes, using products and materials that are all from around here** – like fish, plants, coconuts, wood, shells, etc. Prajak says that the focus of their planning is not only to increase our incomes, but to decrease our expenses, become more self-reliant! *This is how they get more free!*
- **Pam notices a distinct "urban vibe" in this community,** as different from some of the fishing villages we've already visited. The kids' clothes and hair-styles.

### Meeting at the Ban Nam Khem Village Bank



Next we all drive into Ban Nam Khem, the small fishing town that was Thailand's most badly-hit area. About 1,500 people died in the tsunami here in this village alone. We stop at the office of the new *Village Bank* in Ban Nam Khem, which is 100% managed and run by some of the poorest tsunami victims. A group of community leaders from the two landless renters housing projects join the meeting, which is led by Mr. Maitree, the community leader in Ban Nam Khem.

First the New Orleans group members introduce themselves and make brief presentations of their situation and work in New Orleans :

- **Father Luke :** Tells about the flooding at his Mary Queen of Vietnam neighborhood in New Orleans east, shows slides of the situation during and after the floods (900 slides! Not possible to show all of them!). Tells briefly about the process of using the church as the center to organize the community's move back to their neighborhood and rebuilding.
- **Pam :** Tells about the Lower Ninth Ward, where she lives, which is the city's worst affected area, experiencing the "tsunami" from the broken levee, plus some of the deepest flooding. Tells about "shot-gun" houses – a design that came to New Orleans from Africa, via Haiti. Shows slides of the gatherings and demos to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the storm.
- **Viola :** shows some photos of the one-year anniversary of Katrina and tells a little about her work trying to get people back in the Gentilly neighborhood.

**Endesha :** Endesha explains more generally about why New Orleans flooded :

- **The city is built like a bowl in the crescent of the Mississippi River,** with Lake Ponchartrain at the back. So there is water on all sides. The levees are a system of walls and earth-banks built around the city to keep all this water out, but they haven't been properly maintained or upgraded in recent decades. The city weathered the hurricane without many serious problems, but later on, the levees broke, and let all the water in, the city was flooded.
- So as Endesha sees it, **the government flooded New Orleans, not the storm!**
- **It costs a lot of money to leave the city. The poor in New Orleans couldn't afford to leave** – they had no transport, no cars, nobody to help them, no place to go. So the poor stayed when the warning from the Mayor came to evacuate. The government offered them no help. For example, a very low-income person in New Orleans may spend about \$600 a month for their housing, utility and food bills. But the cost of evacuating to another city (including transport, food, hotel bills, etc.) would

cost at least \$600, just for a few days! So they can't afford to go, and many poor people had to make the choice to trust their luck and stay home.

- **120,000 people in New Orleans don't have any cars.** And there was no government transport provided to help people leave. Nobody helped those who couldn't drive out themselves. And many had to stay and look after elderly or unwell relatives. Quickly ran out of food and water when the floods hit, many died in their houses.

**Maitree asks about the differences between black and white in America ["khon dam" and "khon kao" in Thai – black people and white people].** Endesha gives a brief, simple run-down on the race situation in New Orleans, and in the larger American culture:

- **Endesha :** Black and white people are separate in USA – always separate. Explains about the deep race divisions in American society. Whites are the bosses, and blacks are the laborers. A minority of blacks do become professionals and bosses, but the majority don't, cant.
- **Endesha explains that before the storm, New Orleans was 70% black. Today, the city is 80% white!**

**Maitree asks about the rehabilitation process in New Orleans :**

**Endesha explains that he lives in a large public housing project,** and that after the storm, he and his neighbors were locked out of the project, and not allowed back in, even though the damage from the floods was not too bad. Why? Because the land that public housing is built on is so valuable. Even before the storm, they were starting to empty out the project, not allowing new families to move in when there was a vacant apartment. The entire project has 1,500 apartments (1, 2 and 3-bedroom family-size apartments), but before the storm, only 800 of them were occupied, the rest kept locked.

**Pam :** All levels of government were "not minding the store": Since the storm, the policies are not responding to the needs of people affected by the storm. So people are beginning to take power into their own hands – just beginning. Neighborhood associations and individuals are retaking control of their rehabilitation because the government – all levels of government! – were not minding the store.

**Somchai asks :** Did the government in USA help the affected people to link together?



**Endesha :** The government helps people to stay away and stay separate - not come back! That's the form government assistance takes in New Orleans!

**Maitree explains a little about Ban Nam Khem and the rehabilitation work going on there :**

- **The population of Ban Nam Khem was about 6,000 people before the tsunami.** After the catastrophe, people were scattered here and there.
- **They decided that the first and most important thing was to get people back together,** and used the Bang Muang Relief Camp (which was the largest tsunami relief camp, and the only one to be totally managed by the tsunami survivors who lived there) as the staging ground for this bringing people back and organizing.
- **Explains how they organized the tsunami survivors in the camp** in groups of ten families and zones, each with a group leader. Nightly camp-wide meetings to give news, organize work, report on donations, discuss problems and begin organizing.
- **People managed all aspects of this relief camp themselves** – outside assistance groups were all welcome, but they weren't controlling the camp.
- **When donations at the camp exceeded need,** there were committees to arrange to send the excess food, money, supplies and etc. to other areas still in need.
- **Later, the focus of the work moved to helping those whom the official assistance wasn't reaching** – particularly those without any legal land title or houses – and helping these affected people form **networks of support.**
- **Used the strategy of moving back and reoccupying the village land as soon as possible,** even if all the houses were destroyed and people had to live in tents. Then immediately began rebuilding

permanent houses. In some cases where there were extremely aggressive capitalists trying to grab the land, people rebuilt their houses in a single night! This "people's counter-strategy" was a powerful response to all the land-grabbling attempts going on. Then, people negotiate for their land rights from a position of BEING IN OCCUPATION!

- **Lots and lots of activities right away, so all these survivors didn't have time to brood on their losses :** Here in Ban Nam Khem, they started building temporary housing, started savings group and income generation projects, set up the community bank, got a community radio station running, surveyed all the households about their land status and housing problems, and began organizing the landless renters.

**Maitree : All these activities began right away! And all these activities were ways of getting people to work together, to get people out of the "victim mode" and into the "active and in charge mode", to begin their long-term rehabilitation right away – no need to wait for anybody's permission, or to wait for the government to provide direction or resources!**



- **Government housing assistance for people in Ban Nam Khem who did have land title and houses before being wiped out by the tsunami :** The government gave people two choices – house model A and B. People did not have the option of getting building materials and rebuilding themselves – had to take the contractor-built, government-designed house, or nothing at all. These houses now dot the town. These tiny contractor-built houses were EXTREMELY unpopular among the people here. For the same amount it cost to build these awful little concrete boxes (\$3,000), 23 families in the village said no to the government offer and built much better quality and much bigger 2-bedroom houses for the same price!
- **Starting the "Community Bank" -** some donors came in to the Bang Muang Relief camp, and wanted to hand out \$20 in aid directly to all 3,000 affected families – very small money. They all felt that it was worthless to just divide up this money like this – it would just disappear and not make much difference, except for a day or two. So the camp organizers collectively decided to instead use this money to set up a revolving loan fund – initially with a capital of about \$35,000. Later, the capital was increased by CODI and by other donations. Now the fund has grown to \$175,000! A very attractive source for donor money! So the money gets used again and again to help people get back on their feet financially, with all kinds of income generation projects. So this is how the savings groups began forming, to set up a system for managing the loans from this fund. Once open, the Ban Nam Khem Community Bank began making bulk loans to livelihood groups (not to individuals) building boats, starting vending businesses, making handicrafts, starting laundry or hair salon businesses, etc. Just recently, the Community Bank decided to start giving loans directly to individual members, not only to these occupation groups.
- **Community bank started with 180 members, now up to over 1,100 members, now after 1.5 years.** The initial success opened up the bank to many new members – all members have to be part of a community saving group.
- **Next step: starting community-managed welfare program :** Now, Community Bank members also get some welfare support in cases of sickness or to help pay for funeral expenses if someone in a member's family dies. The welfare program pays 100 Baht for a single hospital visit (although in Thailand the government hospitals cost only 30 Baht per visit!), so the payment is like an incentive to join the Community Bank.
- **Now all the tsunami communities are linking with other community networks around Thailand** to try to get the government policy to change, so the network is powerful enough to talk to the government and make recommendations about what is good for people and what isn't.

**One-Year anniversary of the Tsunami : Two celebrations – the government's and the people's :** Maitree tells how the government organized a very big, high-profile event on the one-year anniversary of the tsunami. All clearly oriented towards the tourist sector and convincing people to come back to Thailand. Event was by-invitation-only, and all the ministers, the Prime Minister and visiting ambassadors and families of tourists who were killed - mostly white-skinned! Even the Miss Universe

contestants were invited to attend! Maitree was invited to attend this big event, but decided not to go. *Why should I have to be invited to the commemoration of my own tragedy? I disagree with the idea of inviting affected people as guests! Who does this event belong to, the government or the people who suffered in the tsunami?*

- **Alternative People's One Year Anniversary Event :** So we decided to organize our own ceremony! We organized our event three days before the big government's event, so there would be no conflict or overlap. *This was not a protest against the government!* 5,000 people came to Ban Nam Khem, and our event was a celebration of people's own capacity to rebuild their lives and strengthen their rights to be here. To save face, a lot of government officials came to attend our celebration, including the Minister of Environment, who was very worried we'd organize a big anti-government protest! As part of the event, we discussed all the post-tsunami problems people have faced, and presented a list of ten recommendations to the government, including issues of sea gypsies, wetlands protection, etc. The Minister accepted our recommendations publicly – no clear changes in policy, but at least he came and listened.

**Endesha : It was the same in New Orleans.** The focus of all the publicity has been on the French Quarter, and showing everybody that *"New Orleans is back"*, so all the tourists will come right back and bring in their money! Never mind that most of the city is still abandoned and looks like a battle-field in Iraq, a year after the storm.

**Maitree : This is the advantage of being a big network :** For some medium-sized problems, we can get some positive response from the officials, and can make our voice heard in the government. This is not possible if villages struggle alone. The networks strengthen people's voice, they provide a platform for people to help each other, etc.

- **The tsunami land conflict cases make a good example of the power of networks.** Very soon, all these land conflict cases were gathered together into a network of communities struggling with land conflicts, and they all negotiated as a group, and they helped each other to build houses, helped each other to seize back their land, provided moral support, exchanged information. Nobody got isolated, nobody struggled alone.
- **Big networks can also make these issues like land rights public** – in many of the land conflict cases, large numbers of people from other communities came to support those villages that decided to "re-invade" their own land, in the face of threats by powerful land-grabbers. This way, there were too many people on the land! The police could not arrest everyone! The press was there, nobody could stop them coming back! a

**Viola : How can you trust these outsiders who come to help?** Maitree : We are now confident in our own strength, and in our own plans for redeveloping our lives and villages. We aren't afraid of whoever comes to help.

**Pam : Are people who take loans from the Community Bank paying them back?** Maitree: so far, **we have 95% pay back on time! Only 5% make payments late, and NO DEFAULTS!**

**Maitree : Housing loans and Income Generation loans are separate :** The Community Bank makes loans only for income generation purposes. Housing loans or grants for infrastructure and environmental improvement come from CODI – that 's separate!

**Maitree : Now the community bank is promoting self sufficiency in Ban Nam Khem :** trying to give an incentive to people to plant their own vegetable gardens, develop fish breeding tanks for their own family consumption, etc. The Community Bank will give a subsidy of 3 Baht per plant to get people to start growing their own fruits and vegetables.



**Food stalls outside the Community Bank Office :**

The Community Bank has set up a long line of small bamboo food stalls on both sides of the road outside the Community Bank Office. People who are members of the community bank can rent these stalls for 15 Baht (30 cents) a day, to sell fruit, handicrafts, grilled fish, papaya salad, snacks, etc. These have become very popular pit-stops for construction and fishing workers nearby.

## Visit to the Pak Triem Village, in northern Phang Nga Province :

### BACKGROUND on the project at BAN PAK TRIEM :

The small fishing village of Ban Pak Triem used to be on a tiny island just off the coast of northern Phangnga, near the town of Kholaburi. The tsunami tore so violently through the island that it was divided into two parts, and the villagers' land is now mostly under water. Although they lost all their houses, boats and belongings in the tsunami, only one villager was killed.

As soon as they had gathered in a relief camp on the mainland, the people decided to begin searching for land they could buy as a group to resettle on. They managed to find a small 3 rai (0.48 hectare) piece of land bordering the seaside mangrove forests, only a 10-minute boat ride from the old island, and collectively purchased the "user rights" to this public land for \$5,250 (\$175 per family), using a special no-interest loan from CODI. After dividing the land into two rows of 50-square meter plots, with a community center and children's play area off to the side, they began building their beautiful wooden houses on raised pillars.

People in Pak Triem are happy to tell how before the tsunami, families took care of themselves, but now they do everything as a group. Everyone still eats together in the communal kitchen and takes turns cooking. Only when all the houses are completely finished will families start cooking their own meals.

### Tenure terms at Baan Pak Triem :

- **Number of families** : 33
- **Tenure terms BEFORE** : Long term occupancy (without any legal title or lease) on public land.
- **Tenure terms AFTER** : Villagers will have permanent "user rights" to this public land, under a communal land title, which will be issued by the Land Department after surveying and checking the new land.
- **Houses** : The people's basic 70-square meter 2-story timber stilt house model is adjusted by each family. All are being built collectively.
- **House cost** : The community received a donated subsidy of \$3,500 per family, of which they spend \$2,000 on the house and use the rest for basic needs or land payments.

*When we arrive, we all sit down in the cool, open-air community center, where a lot of women are sitting working on braiding the fringe of the beautiful tie-and-dye cotton sarongs they make, to sell to tourists. This is a community enterprise which all the village women participate in. Many have small children and infants with them, who play or sleep on their mother's laps. Many of the women wear veils over their hair. There is a little shyness, and when the men come to talk to us, the women stay on their side of the room, and don't share in the discussion much. Pikun explains that this is the Muslim culture in southern Thailand – where the men do the fishing and hard physical work, and the women take the fish from the boat when they come home, cook and sell the fish. But she also tells us that in this culture, the women control the money in the family! Sometimes women collect shellfish and do shore-fishing, but most of the fishing is left to the men. Usually fishermen work in pairs – it takes two people to throw and gather back in the big nets they cast from the wooden long-tail boats.*



### **Two of the community leaders (Sompop and Tawan) tell us about the Pak Triem story :**

This Muslim fishing community which for the past 100 years had occupied a strip of remote land on a small island, with the sea on one side and the mangrove backwaters on the other. Technically, this was all government land. When the tsunami came, it tore right through the village, destroying all the houses and leaving most of the settlement under water. So their land was gone!

- **First they all fled down one of the canals through the mangrove forest by boat, to a nearby mosque on the main land**, where they stayed for ten days.

Then moved to another place, where they camped out for 20 days. While they were in this second encampment, they began organizing themselves into teams: temporary housing team, food preparation team, health-care team, etc. Their big question was where to live, now that their land was gone?



- **Began immediately looking for alternative land.** With some donations, they managed to quickly find and buy a small piece of land of only 3 rai (4,800 square meters) to buy for \$5,250, in a nearby mangrove forest. Within a month of the tsunami, they were living on this new land, which was total jungle, and had to be cleared with machetes! Hard work, which these tough people did all themselves. Meanwhile, they were all living in tents on the land, and eating in the collective kitchen they had set up.
- **Our guide Palm, who works with CODI,** was living with and supporting these people almost from the beginning, so he's like one of the family here. When he introduces Tuwan (who looks like a Bob Marley clone), he jokes that *even though this guy Tuan hasn't bathed or washed his clothes in a week and smells terrible, I'm going to sit next to him, because we're like brothers!*
- **This is a very tightly-knit little community,** in which everyone is somehow related to each other.
- **23 houses in this new land.** They designed and built the beautiful stilt-houses all themselves, with some help organizing the design process from CODI's young architects. Sompop tells us that the men do all the heavy construction work, and the women cook (!).
- **Later, they collectively bought another small piece of land** across the road, for their community center and school.
- **Pam asks whether they could just occupy more land, since it seems to be raw mangrove forest on all sides?** Sompop explains that this land is protected Mangrove forest land, and the community has no right to it. They are all fishermen here, and they know the value of protecting this mangrove, which is the breeding ground for fish, and part of the ecosystem.
- **Endesha says that's why New Orleans has been so vulnerable to storms and floods :** because long ago, the city was surrounded by wetland and swamps, which absorbed the water from storms and floods, so the land where the city is now would stay dry. But as these wetlands have been filled and developed, there's no place for the water to go, and the city is more vulnerable.
- **Question about the house designs:** They had a series of workshops in the new community to design their new houses within a very limited budget of donor money. With help from some young volunteer architects, they came up with six house models, and then voted on which one people liked best. Then everyone built more-less the same house, with variations on how the front porch works. Their goal for the house was to make it as simple as possible, using natural materials, and up on stilts, with room below for toilets, storage and hammocks.
- **Community decision : Nobody would move from the tents into the new houses until all the houses are finished!** Houses built in groups of five, with each group responsible for finishing those five houses – so even the construction process was collective!



- **It took a total of only 3 months to build all the houses.** Concrete roads and drains built afterwards, with subsidy from CODI's Baan Mankong Upgrading Program. So within a period of only 5 months, this intrepid community had found and bought alternative land, planned their new settlement, built their new houses and start their lives again, after the tragedy! *(We all marvel at how fast they did this, but Tawan and Sompop complain that it took so long! But they do add that if people wait for the government to give them new houses, they will have to wait for at least a year, and then look at the awful houses the government will give you to live in – all wrong for your life as fisher folk!)*
- **New Land is cooperatively owned.** The community formed a cooperative, and the cooperative is the legal owner of the land, not individual families.
- **Endesha comments that it cost \$50,000 (2 million Baht!) to repair his own house after Katrina.** The shocked residents of Ban Pak Triem suggest he sell off his property over there and come live here! *Sompop : "Better to have a simple life, you'll be happier here!"*

**Endesha : 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!**

- **Sompop** : We always thought that everybody in the USA is rich, like in the movies. What about the people in USA who are poorer than you? Can they do like we did, and rebuild their own communities, in a simple way, with very little money?
- **Endesha** : No, it's not possible. All land is already owned by individual families. Besides, it would be too expensive, you have to follow all the rules and regulations about building, etc.
- **Pam asks about how people here cope with stress and sorrow about loss, when so many relatives and loved-ones died in the tsunami?** (we learn that only two people died here – both infants – everyone else learns to swim from birth) Sompop says that in the early stages, they had community meetings every night, as a forum for people to express their concerns. These meetings were open to all issues, and they allowed everyone to help each other to find solutions to all the problems that came up.
- **Lots of activities, keeping busy is also a very practical form of therapy for traumatized people** : Sompop also explains that from the beginning, people were too busy managing all the activities of their own relief and rehabilitation and land searching to sit around. This keeping busy was a good way to heal wounds. *No time to think too much!*



**Need for networks to counter bad government ideas** : Palm talks about how the Thai Government also tried to use the tsunami as an excuse to establish a new "Tourist Zone" in many of these affected Andaman provinces, and then use this tourist zone policy as an excuse to evict people from their traditional fishing villages. But the networks all said a strong, unified, loud NO to this. This is the importance of networking – if people or individual communities are alone, they have no power at all, and are at the mercy of whatever stupid government policy comes floating down from Bangkok. To be more powerful and have more clout in their negotiations about these kinds of big, structural issues, they need networks among their own communities, and they also need networks with support NGOs and academics and rights groups and outsiders.



- **Endesha** : He's right. That's our weakness in New Orleans. Because we all own property, my rights and your rights have no connection, we're all separated by our assets. We are learning from you here, though, the idea that all of us together are strong.
- **Discussion about how to build these networks where none existed before?** What are the practical steps to do this? Support from NGO partners to organize lots of forums and exchange visits, community-managed surveys, etc.
- **Viola** : The things we have in common are more than the things that keep us apart.
- **Pam** : Maybe the problem is that in New

Orleans, we haven't got an effective approach to community.

- **Sompop** : **Don't be mistaken! It was not all easy with us either! Many people withdrew along the way. We used to have over 50 households in our old community. Many left, or took offers of free donor-given houses.** Some just decided to give up their lives as fishermen. Now we only have 23 families, after all this struggle! The key point is to show that it is possible, even if you begin with a smaller group. Once people see that it's possible, they will have faith and join back in. It's always like this. You have to start small.



**Boat ride and lunch in the mangroves :** After the discussions and a walk through the new Pak Triem Community, we take a ride in one of the beautiful wooden "long-tail" boats through the mangrove backwaters around Pak Triem, to a big fish-breeding set-up out in the mangroves. Here we get off and have a lunch of fried fish, steamed soft-shell crab and sautéed vegetables and rice in a little bamboo floating hut. It is one of the village's ideas to promote this kind of thing as an "eco tourism" draw for tourists. So our group is one of the first to enjoy this spectacular adventure. On the way back to the village, we go by the area where the old village was, which is now just a thin strip of sand, with a couple of giant old trees that survived the waves.

- **Endesha :** This is exactly like the bayou in Mississippi and Louisiana.
- **Endesha on gumbo and jambalaya :** In New Orleans, even pig's feet we can make it taste so good! This is a legacy of slavery. Even our diet is a remnant of the culture of slavery, when the master would take the best parts of the butchered animal, and throw the leftover inedible bits to his slaves – the joints, the knuckles, the gristle, the bones, etc. What's called *soul food* is more less whatever the white man threw away. We mixed it all up, made it taste good and called it *Gumbo* or *Jambalaya*. These are all recipes that come from Africa. They are communal recipes, where everyone would go out onto the savanna and forage, come back with what they could find, throw it in the same pot and make a stew out of it – a communal meal.
- **Endesha :** Don't worry about the small stuff. After you've been through life and death, it's all small stuff. I never worry.

