

Development in Partnership

The World Bank in Thailand

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T-LAC Helps Protect Rights of Tsunami Victims in Thailand



T-LAC staff members and volunteers giving legal advice to tsunami victims in Phang-Nga

KRABI, September 2007 – What would you do if the worst natural disaster in memory has killed dozens of your relatives, destroyed your house, and ruined your parents' livelihood?

Many people would be crushed. **Laddawan "Fada" Jundang** got right back up and began to look for ways to help people even worse off.

The December 2004 tsunami wrecked havoc on Fada's life, as it did to several thousands of other victims in Thailand. Fada began with the simple act of joining hundreds of volunteers to clear the beach of Phi Phi Island near her now-destroyed house. Then she joined the "Hi Phi Phi!" volunteer group that provided short-term humanitarian relief to the victims and looked after the "tsunami orphans." But when she discovered T-LAC, she spotted a long-term opportunity to make a real difference.

"I'm really happy to be working with T-LAC," Fada said with a smile that brightened a grey monsoon season day.

"There were a lot of unmarried couples with children in tsunami-hit areas. If one of the pair died in the tsunami, the other couldn't become the child's custodian because legally he or she wasn't the child's parent. Many needed help resolving land disputes or simply filing for government restitution."

"I'm happy to help other people. I have been through the same thing they have been through. I know how they feel just looking at their faces."

T-LAC stands for the **Tsunami Rights and Legal Aid Referral Center**, which – you guessed it – works to protect the legal rights of those affected by the tsunami. It is part of the tsunami recovery program, supported by the \$5 million grants from the **Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF)**.

The grants are administered by the World Bank office in Bangkok, which monitors the overall progress of the JSDF program, including how the money is spent. The program on legal services for tsunami survivors receives \$1.82 million in funding from the JSDF grants. It is implemented by **The Asia Foundation** in Thailand, which has begun providing legal support to tsunami-affected individuals since the early stage.

The Asia Foundation uses the JSDF fund to support the operating costs of T-LAC and pay for a wide range of free legal services in four tsunami-affected provinces – Krabi, Phang-Nga, Ranong and Satun. These include workshops and frequent field trips to remote islands and villages to explain basic legal rights to tsunami survivors. T-LAC also pays for everything relating to the cost of legal proceedings, including the lawyer’s fees, the cost of DNA testing, welfare assistance during the trial, case referral, and transportation, among others.

The tsunami and its aftermath has raised a wide range of legal issues, big and small. For example, there were a lot of unmarried couples with children in tsunami-hit areas. If one of the pair died in the tsunami, the other couldn’t become the child’s custodian because legally he or she wasn’t the child’s parent. Many needed help resolving land disputes or simply filing for government restitution.

They can hardly be blamed. Many of the tsunami victims are fisher folk or low-income islanders who had rarely had any contact with government prior to the disaster. Some of them were without birth certificates or marriage registrations, as Ampika has pointed out. Many of the survivors are also children and women, the more vulnerable groups of the population in many societies.



Fada Jundang, a tsunami survivor who now helps other tsunami survivors to protect their rights

To make the survivors aware of their rights as well as the necessary legal process to resolve tsunami issues, T-LAC has organized workshops on introduction to basic legal rights in Krabi, Phang-Nga, Ranong and Satun. It also sent a team of lawyers to provide legal counsel inside the affected communities.

Since March 2006, T-LAC has counseled a total of 5,275 people who have been affected by the tsunami in various ways. It has accepted 1,029 cases covering a wide range of issues for further legal assistance, such as declaring someone dead or missing, appointing the custodian of a child orphaned by the tsunami, prosecuting a child’s rights violator, and claiming ownership of property. T-LAC has helped the victims to receive financial assistance or compensation to which they are entitled, as promised by the Government.

“I’m happy to help other people. I have been through the same thing they have been through. I know how they feel just looking at their faces.”

“Not many tsunami survivors truly understood the whole legal aspect of being a survivor of a natural disaster,” said **Ampika Saibouyai**, a staff member of T-LAC. “A lot of them just thought that you don’t go to court unless you sue someone else or get sued.”

However, providing legal aid to thousands of people has not been easy in the areas where legal experts are scarce, T-LAC has found. To solve this problem, the Center started training volunteers to serve as “paralegals” – the profession’s term for lawyer’s assistants.

During the training, T-LAC staff members introduce the volunteers to the basic law and specific legal rights of the tsunami victims. Volunteers also learn about the legal aid provided by the Center, and data collection as well as interview techniques. After completing the training, they go to the tsunami-affected communities to run the “door-knock” campaign, a door-to-door operation to identify the survivors in need of legal aid.

Many of the volunteers are the tsunami victims themselves, such as Fada, now 27. The tsunami has destroyed her father’s boat and her mother’s food shop, as well as her house near Ao Ton Sai pier on Phi Phi Island. Around 50 of her relatives were killed.

“A lot of my younger cousins have become orphans because of the tsunami,” she said.

With another house in the city to move into, the Jundang family wasn’t as desperate as other victims who had lost everything. Fada herself has been more fortunate than other survivors her age. Her parents were able to afford higher education. When the disaster struck, she has just graduated with a degree in social development from a teacher’s college in Krabi.

“I have studied the basic law before, so I was able to pick up quickly during the T-LAC workshop for tsunami survivors,”

“The essence of this project is helping the people to protect their rights and the rights of their communities...”



Fada during a recent door-knock campaign on Phi Phi Island

she explained. “After the workshop, I decided to join T-LAC as a volunteer paralegal. Having a lot of orphans around me made me want to help other young victims.”

To date, 124 volunteer paralegals have been trained, 25 of whom can now work without supervision of a lawyer. They not only help T-LAC fulfill its mandate, they are able to empower themselves and their communities through their improved knowledge of legal rights.

“The essence of this project is helping the people to protect their rights and the rights of their communities,” said **Ruengrawee Ketphol**, a senior consultant of the Asia Foundation in Bangkok.

“After we have moved out, these people will still be able to continue doing what they have been doing while we are on the ground,” she added. “This project has armed them with the knowledge that they can use to help others in the community. This is an important part of community development.”

For more information on the Tsunami Rights and Legal Aid Referral Center, please visit www.tsunamilegalaid.info

For more information about the World Bank’s tsunami program, please contact our External Affairs Officer, Pichaya Fitts, email: pfitts@worldbank.org, or (02) 686-8300

August Events



Thai Society through Young People's Eyes – An evening with **Dr. Pichet Durongkaveroj**, Executive Director of the Knowledge Network Institute of Thailand, who is also an adviser to the Commission on Higher Education.

During this event, members of the **World Bank Youth Club** exchanged their views on a wide range of issues, including where they thought Thailand would be in 10 years' time, the quality of education in Thailand, changing youth lifestyles, and the impact

technology has had on human interactions.

This informal exchange followed a series of World Bank-sponsored events aimed at encouraging more dialogue between youth and policy-makers.

Roundtable Talk on Carbon Credit – Ever wonder what the Kyoto Protocol is all about? What is “Clean Development Mechanism”? And why several dozen Thai companies are paying a lot of attention now to “Carbon Finance”?

Well, those who joined us at the roundtable talk on Carbon Credit on August 24 will already have the answers to these questions! This event, supported by the World Bank, was organized by the Energy Research Institute (ERI) of Chulalongkorn University. It aimed to improve public understanding of the benefits of Carbon Finance, a mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol designed to reduce emission of greenhouse gas.



World Bank Specialist on Carbon Finance, **Dr. Nat Pinnoi**, joined the panel to discuss the Bank's role in addressing global warming. Other panelists were **Dr. Dawan Wiwattanadate**, Deputy Director, ERI, and **Khun Natee Sithiprasasana**, Deputy CEO of AT Biopower, whose biomass power project has helped the company earn extra income from Carbon Credit.



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