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# Learning from Tragedy

*Working together to build safer, more resilient communities*

## Post-Tsunami Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods Project

*Theme Paper*



In response to this unfortunate approach to disaster management, the Post-Tsunami Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods Program has encouraged the promotion of a regional exchange of best practices in hazard preparedness and building community resilience amongst tsunami affected countries. The aim is to open a dialogue between tsunami affected countries so as to share what's been learned in the aftermath of this tragedy. In an atmosphere of regional sharing and openness communities can learn from each other and turn this tragedy into impetus to “build back better” and create communities that are better prepared for the next hazard event.

The December 2004 tsunami was the largest natural tragedy to strike the human race in modern times. It reminded the world of the awesome force of nature and humanity's fragility and vulnerability. It also illustrated how unprepared the world was to deal with a disaster of this magnitude. While the outpouring of generosity from all over the world was unprecedented, it has become clear that preparing for disaster is far more effective than responding to them.





*“Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it”*

**George Santayana**

## The Study Tour Exchange Program (STEP)

One of the focus elements of the Post-Tsunami Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods Program is promotion of the regional exchange of lessons learned and best practices among tsunami affected countries. Consistent with that mandate the Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods Program initiated the Study Tour Exchange Program (STEP) in December 2006.

The purpose of STEP was to seek out effective post-tsunami practices that had the potential to be transferred between countries. The first step in STEP was the performance of reconnaissance trips to India, Indonesia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Thailand with the goal of identifying effective projects and practices in these countries. The team was also attempting to ascertain gaps and

weaknesses in one country that could be addressed by the ‘good’ practices of other countries. Finally, the reconnaissance team sought out appropriate participants that not only had the on-the ground experience to implement new programs but also the societal influence within their communities to reach out and spread these practices.

The Program supported the sharing of effective practices by bringing participants to visit these successful community resilience building efforts and techniques throughout the region.

Finally, the USAID funded Post-tsunami Sustainable Livelihoods Project has provided selected participants from India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia (Banda Aceh) with small grants to assist them in replicating and promoting these practices back in their own communities.



## Study Tour Topics :

● ***Linking Effective Microfinance practices with Microenterprise support.*** In Banda Aceh and the Maldives, microfinance programs and cooperatives were not as successful as hoped. Payback rates were low, defaults were high and therefore the institutions and communities could not grow because of the restricted cash flow. STEP brought practitioners and leaders in microfinance from Indonesia and Maldives to visit successful microfinance institutions in Nakhon Sri Thammarat and at the Post-tsunami Sustainable Livelihoods Project site in Ranong, Thailand. Participants learned that simple to use transparent accounting systems coupled with trusted leadership and a strong sense of community were key elements absent in their current efforts.



*Locally produced soap*





● ***Horticulture and Efficient Post-Harvest Techniques.***

It was observed by the STEP reconnaissance team that Thailand was recognized throughout the region as the leader in horticulture techniques for fruits and vegetables. Additionally, Thailand was adept at post-harvest techniques and processes that increased utilization and decreased waste of valuable food products. Participants from India and Sri Lanka were invited to visit Thailand's Horticulture Research Institute and the Department of Agriculture where they were exposed to a variety of growing

and post-harvest processing techniques. Additionally, the study tour included field visits to a variety of farms and plantations in the tsunami affected areas in Southern Thailand where participants had the opportunity to see first hand and talk with farmers about such issues as

hydroponics, intercropping of rice with fruit trees, integration of chicken and fish farming, and the benefits and risks of using marsh land for cultivation.



*Effective Post-Harvest packaging*



● **Seaweed culture.** Fish farmers from Banda Aceh were exposed for the first time to community based farming of seaweed (sp. *Gracilaria* and *Spinosum*) on the island of Bali, Indonesia. They had the opportunity to speak directly with the seaweed farming community to learn the economics and techniques associated with seaweed farming. Participants became familiar with the unique coastal environment necessary to successfully raise seaweed for profit. The farmers were subsequently provided small grants to assist them to begin growing seaweed as an alternative income option to help the community diversify away from their over reliance on fish and shrimp culture.



● **Integrated seaweed and grouper culture.** Fish and shrimp farmers from Thailand, Banda Aceh and The Maldives visited the Gondol Research Institute for Mariculture in Bali where they were introduced to the practice of using seaweed culture within fish ponds so as to improve water quality and minimize disease for a variety of farmed species. In addition to lectures and demonstrations on the science of the practice, participants were also afforded the opportunity to visit a number of “backyard” operations in the area that were using practical techniques for the purpose of income generation.





● **Full cycle hatchery operation methods for grouper culture.** One of the major objectives of the Marine Research Center (MRC) of the Maldives is to promote and support local aquaculture so as to lessen fishing pressure on existing resources and provide a supplementary livelihood that would help to diversify local island economies away from their overdependence on fishing. In pursuit of this aim the MRC has been endeavoring to produce reef fish fingerlings for local grow-out fish farmers. Unfortunately, their efforts were unsuccessful due to an extremely high mortality rate in the early stages of larval development. The participants also visited a number of local “backyard hatcheries” where survival rates of high value reef fish such as grouper are much higher. The MRC staff returned home with an extensive list of relatively simple and inexpensive methods proven to improve survival rates that they wish to apply to their facility.



# USAID's Post-Tsunami Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods Program

## Overview of Project

When the tsunami of December 2004 struck Thailand's Andaman coast it carried away not only the lives of over 5000 people but it also washed away the livelihoods for tens of thousands left behind. The disaster devastated the local economy by destroying fishing boats, engines and gear. The huge wave also took in its wake, homes, public buildings, and coastal infrastructure, including roads and bridges. The tsunami had its greatest impacts on rural coastal communities, many of which were already poor and economically vulnerable with limited livelihood options. Recovery is especially difficult in these poor communities because many of those that survived lost the capacity to practice their livelihoods.

The USAID Regional Development Mission/Asia responded with the Post-Tsunami Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods (SCL) demonstration project that helps coastal communities of Southern Thailand rehabilitate livelihoods, become more resilient to future natural disasters, and adopt livelihood practices that use natural resources more sustainably. Instead of just building back the way it was, this project strives to build it back better.

The project has a 30 month time horizon, with an end date of September 30, 2007. It is implemented in a partnership with the Coastal Resources Center of the University of Rhode Island, the Asia Institute for Technology (AIT), University of Hawaii, Coca-Cola Thailand, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, and other local partners.

It is a model project, meaning that knowledge and lessons learned from what is developed and put in practice can be used in other at-risk coastal communities in Thailand or other countries in the Asia region.

Five tsunami-affected villages in Ranong Province were selected for the demonstration initiative. Located within Laem Son National Park, these villages have a population of 5,000 and are dependent on fishing and agriculture for their livelihoods. The relatively small, compact area makes it suitable for modeling an integrated approach to coastal disaster rehabilitation.

The SCL project seeks to build coastal community resilience with a focus on rebuilding the economic basis of livelihoods rather than on physical reconstruction, and on giving coastal people the skills and resources for self-recovery. Key elements of resilience include building livelihood opportunities that do not degrade the natural environment, protecting ecosystems, reducing vulnerability to natural hazards, and strengthening local governance. Project interventions combine ICM and hazard management frameworks.

# USAID Post-Tsunami Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods Project

## Theme Papers

This paper is one of a series of elemental theme papers from USAID's (SCL) Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods Project. USAID SCL Theme Papers are intended to provide an overview of our experiences, lessons learned and approach to rebuilding and rehabilitating communities in a post-disaster context. Each paper will address an issue that has been undertaken in the course of our efforts to assist in the rehabilitation process and the building of Coastal Community Resilience.

The papers will be based loosely upon the five main elements of the SCL Project:

**1. Build a common vision for action.**

The project works closely with local government authorities and community leaders to build local ownership and establish a common vision for rehabilitation. The project's activities are accomplished by community efforts and collaboration.

**2. Reestablish and diversify environmentally sustainable livelihoods.**

Microfinance, livelihood training, demonstration of new livelihood practices, small grants, and cash-for-work are strategies to reestablish and diversify livelihoods.

**3. Natural Resources Management and Environmental Stewardship**

Trainings and extension activities are focused on enhancing the capacity of local communities to better manage their ecological environment. Specific activities include training modules on solid waste management, monitoring and rehabilitation of coastal habitats such as coral reefs, beaches, mangroves and sea grass beds, and the development of marine park co-management plans.

**4. Enhance community readiness and resilience to hazards.(CBDM)**

The project builds readiness and resilience to natural hazards in communities through mapping of areas at risk to inundation, delineation of evacuation routes, training, village disaster management planning, evacuation drills, and First Aid training.

**5. Share experience and best practices.**

Regional learning workshops and study tours are convened to share lessons learned with others in tsunami rehabilitation, disaster preparedness and issues associated with community resilience.

Each paper provides a summary description of the Project's approach to particular issues or the above referenced cross cutting elements. The description represents a summary of the lessons learned by the Project and illustrates the approaches utilized to overcome specific obstacles encountered throughout the maturation cycle of the program.

While providing a useful overview of Project activities to our regional partner institutions, SCL theme papers are primarily intended for our Global partners in development, disaster preparedness and community resilience. The Papers aim to raise awareness of the Project's activities, accomplishments and lessons learned and to pique the interest of individuals and organizations to seek more information so as to contribute towards the ongoing discussion about strategic direction in disaster preparedness and community resilience.



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