

Stakeholder Agency in the Governance of Resilience Building in Thailand's Tourism-Dependent Coastal Communities

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In order to address the priorities of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 many countries in the Indian Ocean Region have undertaken wide-ranging institutional and policy changes to strengthen disaster risk reduction (DRR) and to develop national early warning systems to tsunamis and other coastal hazards. It is frequently expected that government and community-based initiatives can build resilience to increasing climate-induced and other environmental and man-made risks if they create co-benefits with other priorities, such as natural resource management and livelihoods improvement. However, the lessons from several decades of coastal disasters provide ample evidence that resilience building measures during recovery, disaster preparedness, and early warning, rarely addresses the underlying causes of vulnerability and trajectories of social inequality in disaster prone societies.

The 2004 tsunami, one of the most destructive tsunamis in recorded history, hit 11 countries in the Indian Ocean and killed more than 270,000 people. Thailand's burgeoning tourism industry was severely affected; the tsunami caused extensive damage to the southern provinces of



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Ranong, Phang Nga, Phuket, Krabi, Trang and Saturn along the Andaman Coast. The tsunami prompted swift action from the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and local industry groups and generated a massive multi-scaled and multi-institutional response from national governments, tourism industry bodies, non-government organisations (NGOs), and individuals.

The authors have been involved in monitoring the progress made over the last five years as the immediate relief transformed into longer term recovery and DRR measures. The evidence in this paper derives from extensive field work in Krabi, Khao Lak, Phi Phi Don, and Patong Beach during 2007-2008, and secondary data from literature reviews. The analysis employs a theoretical framework which conceptualises vulnerability as place-specific, highly scaled, dynamic and differential, whereby a population's characteristics, the multiple stressors it is susceptible to, and its capacity to respond and adapt continuously change over space and time. This highlights the centrality of the political economy of resource access and distribution and the contested actions and outcomes which link human agency and structures of power.

We contend that the most prominent source of resilience of affected coastal communities has been innovative modes of stakeholder agency throughout the public, private and civil society sectors. This includes the interaction between strong family and organisational networks, loyal tourism clientele, community leaders and tourism representative bodies, and resourceful and adaptive entrepreneurs. Despite the considerable progress made since the 2004 tsunami in institutionalising formal governance structures in the public sector, internationally as well as nationally in Thailand, such forms of collective action have largely remained informal in nature. We argue that the main reasons for the inability to address underlying vulnerabilities in Thailand's coastal communities are a lack of legitimacy of informal governance mechanisms and low cohesion between public, private, and civil society sectors.