

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The tsunami that struck Thailand on 26 December 2004 was the greatest natural disaster in the country's history. It left in its wake unprecedented damage and destruction. A year after the tsunami, this report looks at the impact of the disaster, Thailand's response, and the role of international partners in relief and recovery efforts.

## Impact

The tsunami affected six provinces along the Andaman Coast of Thailand, leaving more than 8,000 dead, a third of them foreigners. It impacted 407 villages, and completely destroyed 47, including well-known tourist destinations. Vulnerable fishing communities, ethnic groups, migrant workers and workers in the tourism industry bore the brunt of the disaster; communities were destroyed and livelihoods lost. Children suffered the loss of parents or guardians, and survivors were left to cope with the psychological trauma of the disaster. The impact on the environment included damage to coral reefs and marine and coastal habitats. The intrusion of sea water affected water quality and agricultural land. The total financial impact of the tsunami is estimated at more than USD 2 billion. This makes Thailand the second most affected country in financial terms. It is estimated that the tsunami reduced overall GDP growth by 0.4 %. The sectors most affected were tourism, fisheries and agriculture.

## Thailand's Response

It is widely acknowledged that the Royal Thai Government (RTG) led an effective emergency response to the disaster including a massive forensic operation to identify the bodies of thousands of foreign visitors and Thai citizens. The basic humanitarian needs of the affected communities were addressed within days. One of the striking features of the relief operations was the contribution of the Thai public, the Thai private sector and local NGOs. The RTG put in place special assistance programmes and compensation schemes for the victims through eight national Sub-Committees, which had provided assistance to 285,000 people by November, 2005.

The longer-term recovery of the affected communities and the local economy are now the focus of the national response. The RTG, with support from NGOs and the private sector, is assisting in the recovery of livelihoods in the fisheries, tourism, business and agricultural sectors. The RTG has put in place social protection measures for children, especially orphans, and is providing psychosocial support for survivors of the disaster. The RTG, in association with national and international technical institutions and NGOs, is working to restore the environmental damage caused by the tsunami. This includes legislation to protect and rehabilitate natural resources in the affected region. The RTG has focused considerable attention and resources on the establishment of an early warning system and putting in place a national disaster preparedness plan.

Relief and recovery operations on this unprecedented scale have called for strong and effective coordination mechanisms. The RTG, led by the Prime Minister, has been at the helm of the relief and recovery operations, coordinating the national and international effort. NGO networking and coordination has been an important feature of Thailand's response to the disaster.

As of November 2005, the RTG has provided upwards of USD 1 billion in direct and indirect assistance to 442,460 affected people. This has been strongly reinforced by the contribution of the Thai private sector and NGOs, which can hardly be overstated.

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## The Contribution of International Partners

Given its capacity, resources and institutions, Thailand did not appeal for international financial assistance but welcomed technical support from international partners, including know-how, equipment, and direct support to the affected communities.

Financial and in-kind contributions also came from foundations, the private sector and individuals from around the world, in support of Thailand's response to the tsunami. The United Nations Country Team, bilateral agencies, and international NGOs contributed more structured technical support, with allocations of USD 69 million for the immediate and longer-term recovery effort.

## Challenges

One year after the tsunami, as Thailand moves forward to ensure sustainable recovery for the communities and areas affected by the disaster, it is faced with a number of challenges. These include the need to solve land disputes, address the housing situation, the livelihood recovery of poor and vulnerable communities, rights of migrant workers, the rights of children and long-term social protection, improved local governance and community participation, environmental rehabilitation, and community-based disaster preparedness.

It is important that Thailand adequately addresses these challenges in the rebuilding effort, and as former United States President, Bill Clinton, the Special Envoy of the UN for tsunami relief has insisted, ensures that the rebuilding abide by the principle of "build back better."