



20 YEARS AFTER THE 2004 TSUNAMI:

THAI RED CROSS SOCIETY'S
LESSONS LEARNED FOR PREPAREDNESS



Preface

20 years ago in 2004, Thailand experienced an unprecedented disaster caused by a huge tsunami. Amidst the destruction that was left behind by the tsunami, we also witnessed the outpouring of generosity from people, both domestic and international, who provided tremendous assistance to those affected by this disaster. Thai Red Cross Society was one organization that provided assistance and rehabilitation to the affected community from the very early days of the disaster right up until 2015.

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the 2004 Tsunami, it is an opportunity for Thai Red Cross Society to extract lessons learned from the disaster relief operation in order to prepare for future disasters that are becoming more frequent and severe, and they will remind all of us of the urgent need to care for, preserve and mitigate climate change impacts.

On this occasion, I would like to thank the production team and people giving support and assistance to complete the “20 Years after the 2004 Tsunami - Thai Red Cross Society’s Lessons Learned for Preparedness” as listed below:

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Preamble

During my 20 years as Assistant Secretary General for External Relations and Council Member of Thai Red Cross Society, I worked with Thai Red Cross staff on humanitarian assistance projects in many crises. However, the 2004 tsunami was an unprecedented disaster. There was collaboration from various sectors that had never happened before. It is a memory I will never forget.

I was reminded of this event again from the remarks of Prof. Emeritus Dr. Khunying Suchada Kiranandana, Chairman of the Human Resources Committee of Thai Red Cross Society, regarding the review of relief work for the victims; and I consider that there has not been a comprehensive record or a thorough assessment of tsunami preparedness measures. For these reasons, “20 Years after the 2004 Tsunami – Thai Red Cross Society’s Lessons Learned for Preparedness” was published to not let this tragedy fade away from Thai people’s memories with time.

I sincerely hope that this article will be useful to all those interested in disasters and to assist in preparing for tsunamis that may happen again in the future.

Mr. Sawanit Kongsiri
Council Member
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Preamble

The 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami was one of the most devastating disasters of our time. It prompted an unprecedented outpouring of generosity from the public, enabling the IFRC to mobilize international assistance from around the world to the Thai Red Cross Society (TRCS) to respond to critical needs in the community. To date, it is still the IFRC's largest-ever emergency response and recovery operation since World War II.

Two decades on, the frequency, severity and complexity of natural disasters continue to rise due to factors such as climate change and rapid urbanization, bringing unprecedented losses, new and emerging risks as well as changing needs and vulnerabilities. To ensure the preservation of life and alleviation of suffering in our changing context, disaster preparedness is key for reducing the impacts of disasters on local communities and preventing hazards from turning into catastrophic events.

This article represents the strong aspiration and commitment of TRCS towards enhancing the relevance of their disaster relief services, to respond to the challenges. Based on past interventions in Thailand, the article examines some of the key successes and challenges to gather valuable insights and identify lessons to guide the improvement process.

The key learnings from this article demonstrate, once again, that meaningful engagement with local communities is paramount for effective

assistance. Whether to promote community ownership or to provide contextually appropriate assistance, recognizing and valuing the community as equal partners contributes to building acceptance and trust, and long-term sustainability of assistance.

Additionally, local actors also emerge as a critical component in driving efficient and timely assistance. With extensive reach and presence within communities before, during and after crises, local actors, such as Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, are best placed to provide immediate response and ensure its linkage with longer term resilience building, preparedness and recovery. This highlights a need for greater investment in strengthening local capacities as well as the relevant structures and mechanisms to enable local actors to deliver life-saving services.

From the reflection, it also becomes clear that technology and innovation are essential elements to enhance our ability to address the complexity of current crises and emergencies. Digital transformation helps to ensure the right tools and systems are in place to improve the relevance, speed, quality, accessibility and resilience of humanitarian services to people in need, including facilitating early warning for all, accurate forecasting as well as widespread awareness on disaster risk management. This emphasizes a need to effectively harness the power of innovation to bolster our existing ways of working.

Lastly, I extend my appreciation to TRCS, for the exemplary spirit of humanity they showed in responding to this disaster 20 years ago, as well as to their staff and volunteers who continue to demonstrate this spirit of humanity every day. May the collective wisdom and key recommendations

proposed in this article guide preparedness for more effective response and recovery. Despite our changing context, we must make the necessary changes to continue to save lives.

Kathryn Clarkson
Head of Delegation and Representative to
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20 Years after the 2004 Tsunami: Thai Red Cross Society's Lessons Learned for Preparedness

In the morning of December 26, 2004, just one day after Christmas celebrations, a huge volume of water from the Andaman Sea coast swept into six provinces: Ranong, Phang Nga, Krabi, Trang, Phuket and Satun. Very few people knew what this mass of water was. An earthquake measuring 9 on the Richter scale, with an epicenter approximately 240 kilometers west of the island of Sumatra, triggered a tsunami that within less than 2 hours had affected the coastlines in countries located on the Indian Ocean, including Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives and Somalia.



Damages from the tsunami disasters

The incident resulted in severe damage to houses and buildings; and more than 10,000 people injured and dead, both Thai and internationals. Thailand had never previously experienced such a devastating disaster. Although, Thai Red Cross Society has a long history of providing assistance to people affected by disasters, this was the first such operation in response to a tsunami event, which has led to significant learning for the Thai Red Cross Society and changes to how they provide humanitarian assistance.

The 20th anniversary of the 2004 Tsunami is therefore an appropriate opportunity to extract lessons learned on providing assistance, rehabilitation and recovery support for more than 10 years (2005-2015) to people affected by the tsunami. The lessons were based on documentation and interviews with those who worked at that time as well as those who were involved in order to benefit Thai Red Cross Society and future generations, who should be aware of the importance of preparedness and effective response development, if such a large-scale disaster occurs again.



Thai Red Cross staff working in areas affected by Tsunami

Immediate aftermath of the Tsunami to recovery



Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn met volunteers and Thai Red Cross staff who were packing supplies to help the victims

Just one day after the disaster, on December 27, 2004, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn visited Thai Red Cross Society to check the proper operation and offer encouragement to the medical teams from King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital and the Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University, who travelled to support the work of the hospitals in the disaster affected area. In addition, primary relief units were established by the Relief and Community Health Bureau and Provincial Red Cross Chapters for the affected people, and the National Blood Centre also urgently mobilized blood donors and delivered blood to the injured. This was a major initiative in the history of the Thai Red Cross Society to integrate four main bureaus under one operation: medical and health services, disaster relief, blood services, and health promotion.



Many people volunteered to pack heart-to-heart relief bags and did various volunteer works at Thai Red Cross Society

Although the staff of the Thai Red Cross Society had accumulated knowledge, expertise and long experience, the tsunami operation was the first time that the Thai Red Cross Society had accepted international humanitarian assistance from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and other national societies. At that time, Mr. Sawanit Kongsiri, Assistant Secretary General for External Relations, saw that Thai Red Cross Society had minimal coordination with international organizations and had no experience in dealing with such a large-scale disaster affecting a large number of both Thai and international people. Therefore, he was open to receiving humanitarian support from international agencies for the Thai Red Cross operation.

For this reason, the Assistant Secretary General for External Relations, including the International Relations Department under the Administration Bureau, were primarily responsible for coordinating international assistance, repatriating the victims, tracking down missing persons, confirming identities of the dead to their relatives, as well as implementing the Tsunami Recovery Programme, and the IFRC Tsunami Residual Fund in collaboration with other departments within Thai Red Cross Society and the Partner National Societies until the end of this project in 2015.



Kuwait Red Crescent Society delivered humanitarian assistance to support the work of Thai Red Cross Society. Mr. Phan Wannamethee, former Secretary General of Thai Red Cross Society (center), Mr. Sawanit Kongsiri, former Assistant Secretary General for External Relations (far right), and Lt. Gen. Amnat Barlee, M.D., Director of the Relief and Community Health Bureau (second from left), were the representatives to receive the donation.

Tsunami Recovery Programme

After the initial phase of assistance, Thai Red Cross Society proceeded to develop their Tsunami Recovery Programme, which began in 2005 and was completed in 2010. The project received budget support of CHF 68.7 million from the IFRC, as well as personnel support and project funding from American Red Cross, Finnish Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross and French Red Cross. This project aimed to build resilience in disaster affected communities and strengthen long-term disaster preparedness. It included a number of sub-projects as follows:

1. Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR), a sub-project that aimed to mitigate disaster risk, prepare for disasters, and enhance disaster management capacity in 55 communities at risk in Ranong, Phang Nga,



Villagers and community leaders in Phang Nga Province participated in the training program on Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR)

Trang and Satun provinces, such as establishing a disaster response working group, setting up a disaster warning system, conducting evacuation drills, and mobilizing community volunteers. It was carried out by the Relief and Community Health Bureau with 36 million Baht fund donation from the IFRC and American Red Cross.

From an interview with a former CBDRR project coordinator who was responsible for tsunami relief operations from the beginning to the end of the tsunami-related projects in 2015, she recounted her first field visit experience that the situation was chaotic and confusing, and the assistance of various agencies was not well coordinated. Until the Tsunami Recovery Programme began, a volunteer system for the CBDRR project was adopted to provide the support. She also suggested that there should be a far more concrete needs assessment than what occurred, to design assistance to meet the needs of the people affected as much as possible. For example, in some areas, halal food assistance was required, or when a project was handed over to the community, the project plan should be formulated at both the provincial and local levels, and disaster preparedness should be continuously monitored and evaluated to support community work in the long term.

2. Rescue and Emergency Response Programme (SE/ER), a former officer responsible for this project informed that, based on the problem of lack of life-saving skills in emergency situations, the First Aid and Health Care Training Center of the Thai Red Cross Society, launched the Sea Rescue and Emergency Response Programme, with cooperation from internal departments of Thai Red Cross Society, 5 Thai government agencies: Naval Special Warfare Command, Royal Thai Fleet, Thai Marine Police Division, Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Bureau of Water Transport and Maritime Promotion Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant

Conservation, and 3 national societies: Finnish Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross and Swedish Red Cross. This programme can be divided into 2 sub-projects as follows:

Sea Search and Rescue Project (SSAR), it was operated in collaboration with 5 Thai agencies, Norwegian Red Cross and Finnish Red Cross for training local people to be sea rescue volunteers. The First Aid and Health Care Training Center was responsible for managing the training by inviting personnel from the Naval Special Warfare Command, Royal Thai Fleet as lecturers and establishing 3 community-based sea rescue units in Krabi, Phang Nga and Trang provinces to be volunteer operation centers for providing marine assistance and rescue at sea in a timely manner.



Sea Search and Rescue Project

The First Aid Training Project (FA), starting with the First Aid and Health Care Training Center, the first aid training course was developed in collaboration with the Swedish Red Cross to achieve an internationally compatible course. Then, they ran the course with a training of trainers model (ToT) in the way that emergency room nurses and community nurses in the area were selected to attend the training course of the first aid



First Aid Training Project

instructor. After finishing the Training of Trainers program, those nurses trained and shared knowledge to people in their communities. Throughout the project, the lecturers from the First Aid and Health Care Training Center provided advice, supervision and monitoring to ensure that the trainings met the required standards.

The operation of both sub-projects was based on the idea that if a tsunami or other disaster occurs, local people will be able to help themselves; they will have sea rescue skills and knowledge of first aid on land before sending victims to hospital in order to reduce the severity of injuries and increase the chance of survival for victims. As a result of the implementation of the project, a total of 13,199 people completed the training.

A former SE/ER project officer said that a major limitation of the project implementation was finding suitable trainees for the course, especially the training course of sea rescue volunteers because the volunteers must rescue people at sea and the trainees are at risk during training and field operations. Therefore, it is very important to select the right trainees. Before the training, several tests must be conducted, such as physical fitness testing, swimming and diving testing. In addition, the trainees must devote all their time to the training throughout the course, etc. Another important challenge was to hand over the project to the community for further implementation. She suggested that there should be integrated and collaborative measures for working across departments within Thai Red Cross Society and coordination with local government agencies, at both district and provincial levels to ensure continuity throughout the project. Upon the handover date, all sectors will clearly understand their roles in working together to maximize benefits and sustainability of the communities. After completing the project, Thai Red Cross Society handed over the community-based sea rescue units in 3 provinces to the Kura Subdistrict Administration Organization in Phang Nga Province, the Nong Talay Subdistrict Administration Organization in Krabi Province and the Thai Marine Police Division in Trang Province.

Another important suggestion is that operations of Thai Red Cross Society require the power of volunteers. The creation of volunteers with volunteer spirit starts with Thai Red Cross Society staff who must have volunteer spirit and be proud of being a part of working for the Movement, and be ready to make these feelings accessible and understandable to the volunteers. Whatever disaster occurs, everyone will have the volunteer spirit to work together. In addition, it is essential to recognize the importance of retaining volunteers to work for the Movement in the long term.



*The National Blood Service Building, Phuket Province,
with the support of Finnish Red Cross*

3. Blood Service Project, it included the establishment of blood service centers in 6 Andaman coastal provinces and the construction of a Regional Blood Centre in Phuket Province in 2008-2010. It was a collaborative project between the National Blood Centre, Thai Red Cross Society and Finnish Red Cross. The project was initiated from the problem of a shortage of blood service coordinators for the Provincial Red Cross Chapters and several hospitals in the 6 tsunami-affected provinces that lacked an adequate blood supply to meet their healthcare needs, as well as a shortage of blood donors.

The National Blood Centre had hired blood service coordinators for the 6 southern provinces affected by the tsunami and had collaborated with Finnish Red Cross to build a Regional Blood Centre in Phuket Province. It has a comprehensive management system comparable to the National Blood Centre in Bangkok. A total of 93 million Baht was budgeted; Finnish Red Cross supported the construction budget and deployed personnel from Finland to help train the staff. In addition, there

was coordination with the Provincial Red Cross Chapters to launch a campaign targeting blood donors and to conduct off-site blood donation. Finnish Red Cross supported the project until December 2010, after that the Phuket Regional Blood Centre took over the project and has been providing services to the public until now.

4. Community health project in 6 southern provinces affected by the tsunami, it was a project to develop and drive people and migrant workers in 6 provinces by Thai Red Cross Society Nursing College or the current Srisavarindhira Thai Red Cross Institute of Nursing, in collaboration with the IFRC, to provide both physical and mental health services, and to build a network to train holistic health service instructors and volunteers in 135 communities affected by the tsunami. The IFRC had supported the project until December 2007, and then American Red Cross had continued this work from 2008 to 2010.

As for the projects in the Tsunami Recovery Programme in 6 Andaman coastal provinces, Thai Red Cross Society, the IFRC and the Partner National Societies had planned to hand over the projects to local authorities. The projects were handed over to the relevant authorities, and the Provincial Red Cross Chapters monitored the implementation of the project. Thai Red Cross Society withdrew from the projects in December 2010.

IFRC Tsunami Residual Fund

IFRC's Tsunami Residual Fund was created after the end of the Tsunami Recovery Programme in 2010. Subsequently, various departments of Thai Red Cross Society had proposed project plans that expanded from the existing projects or extended the existing projects to disaster risk areas by

using the remaining budget from the IFRC that had supporting in the Tsunami Recovery Programme. There were 21 projects, such as Increased efficiency on blood group screening of Phuket Regional Blood Center, Follow up on the communities implemented project by Srisavarindhira Thai Red Cross Institute of Nursing, a project to develop a communication system of the Phuket Province Red Cross Chapter for earthquake and tsunami warning in Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi by Thai Red Cross Chapters and Administration Office, the project for refresher on disaster preparedness for communities in of Ranong, Phang Nga, Trang and Satun by the Relief and Community Health Bureau, etc.

The projects funded by the IFRC Tsunami Residual Fund ended in June 2015, and the support for tsunami-related missions by Thai Red Cross Society and the Partner National Societies was concluded.

Recommendations for disaster preparedness

Throughout the 10 years of Thai Red Cross Society's mission to help tsunami affected people and build resilience in communities affected by disasters, there have been many successful projects that have achieved the set objectives. However, when looking back, we can see that there are some parts of our work that should be reviewed for further learning and development and then be applied to help disaster operations in the future.

1. Disaster preparedness and management. The former CBDRR project coordinator said that preparedness was very important because it could help reduce the loss of life and property. It could effectively be a guideline for disaster management in the relief phase (during a disaster) and the recovery and development phase (after a disaster) at a lower cost. She also proposed

that there should be a concrete Damage and Needs Assessment (DANA) in order to be able to respond to disasters comprehensively and meet the real needs of the victims. Each community, area, or disaster has differences to consider.. For example, the preparation of tsunami evacuation zone, in mountainous area, temporary shelter may be sufficient for sanctuary, but at areas near the sea, it is better to provide a safe zone than the temporary shelter. As for relief items, in addition to the need for the four basic necessities, there may be a need for a missing people service to connect families and proactive mental health services to alleviate a variety of psychological conditions people face in the early stages following a disaster. From her past experience, she saw the developments in the response to the 2011 flood disaster. On that occasion, psychiatrists went to the area to provide psychological counseling to those affected which was a good practice.

In addition to the preparedness by assessing damage and needs, disaster response plans should be included in the national agendas and plans and shared with the regional and local action plans to reduce gaps in budget and manpower. For example, earthquake and tsunami drills in Thailand might be scheduled every 2-3 years to stimulate and cultivate people's survival skills. In Thailand, there is currently no regular national evacuation drills. The former CBDRR project coordinator added that Thailand may not need as many national evacuation drills as Japan, which is frequently hit by earthquakes and tsunamis. Moreover, these evacuation drills can be specially applied to other disasters in many areas of Thailand to mitigate damage, such as earthquake evacuation drills in the northern and western regions, etc.

From the author's perspective, the disaster preparedness in Thailand and stakeholders should make active use of social media technology to alert

people about various emergency situations such that they can initially plan for dealing with numerous incidents. For example, widely shared clips of the earthquake on January 1, 2024; a Japanese woman who was live streaming on social media, received an earthquake alert via SMS; then she quickly sought shelter before a strong earthquake happened within minutes.

In terms of disaster management, the former CBDRR project coordinator noticed a few days after the incident that it was very difficult to assist the people because communication was cut off and public utilities were damaged. Many organizations, both public and private, as well as individuals, had come to provide overwhelming assistance to the victims. However, at the same time, there was no preparation for response to the situation and there was a lack of good management and clear division of duties among the personnel involved, or those who did not have enough capacity took on the duties, which resulted in duplication of work and inability to provide thorough assistance. Many times, the provision of assistance had become a problem for officials and villagers in facilitating the provision of accommodation, food, and coordination support to the volunteers. Therefore, there should be a main agency or focal point for delegating work and allocating duties among those involved to reduce such problems.

2. Humanitarian relief items and logistics. The former CBDRR project coordinator commented that the delivery of relief items was effective in the initial phase of relief operation. However, in order to deliver the relief items, a system must be established based on a needs assessment in order to truly meet the needs of affected people. From the experience at that time, Thai Red Cross Society received a large number of in-kind donations, but some of the donations were out-of date and unusable, and it was time consuming to clean and sort the donated items, a lot of which became waste and an additional burden on the staff to dispose of them. Other factors should also

be considered, such as in the event that the disaster area is so damaged that it is impossible for people to live a normal life. Therefore, it is appropriate to provide assistance with relief items; but the restriction of access to the area due to damaged roads should be taken into account. If the affected areas are not severely damaged and the community market system can function normally, cash assistance should be provided to strengthen the community and stimulate the community economy rather than providing relief items. Cash assistance also helps control the increase in goods prices in the disaster area because it reduces the dependence on external transportation.

However, in the recovery phase, financial support may be an appropriate and beneficial method for communities because the communities can allocate the budget received to best meet their needs. Nevertheless, all the donations and financial management must be perfectly transparent and comply with international standards.

3. Culture and context of the area. A crucial consideration when going to affected areas to assist disaster victims is to study and understand the context of the situation and culture of each area to be visited in order to build and maintain relationships with local people, so that we can work in the area smoothly and safely.

The former CBDRR project coordinators shared their experiences of visiting disaster areas in 6 southern provinces during the rehabilitation project that the communities were diverse in terms of race, religion, beliefs, etc., which were different from other regions in Thailand. The villagers respect religious leaders as caretakers of the community. Sometimes, the project operator must first contact religious or community leaders for permission in order to be accepted by the villagers in that area. The CBDRR projects in collaboration with the partner national societies had encountered problems in visiting operation areas because people in some areas had a negative

attitude towards foreigners, or some areas are located on islands far from the mainland or in conflict areas in the South. The safety of the staff is the first priority.

Thai Red Cross Society plays a role in supporting the government's humanitarian work; it is not the first agency to enter a risk area for providing assistance to people. Therefore, the safety of the staff and volunteers, who will access the area to perform their duties, is important. Furthermore, all staff members should have common safety measures, such as setting entry and exit times for the accommodation area and disaster area, specifying safe areas and risk areas, etc.

The former SE/ER project officer shared her experience in first aid training among Muslims in disaster areas that training activities must not conflict with religious principles, such as preparing halal food for the trainees, taking a break for them to pray at certain times of day; particularly during the training, female instructors must not stand near the heads of male trainees, when they were in the lying-down position, etc. Both parties should learn to be flexible, adjust to each other, and accept and respect each other; these will help us get the job done!

4. Making use of today's social media. Over the past 20 years, communication technology development can be used to effectively respond to disasters. The former CBDRR project coordinator sees advantages of social media because it can quickly disseminate information to the public. However, there should be an agency responsible for supervising the announcement of disaster information so that all media accurately present the same information. This will help prevent confusion among the public from fake news that may create misunderstandings and cause damage.

Information dissemination must cover the period before, during and after a disaster, and reach all groups of people. The use of analog media

such as radio, television and newspapers is still important for the elderly or people who do not have smartphones. Everyone in the community must be able to access information to cope with disasters as quickly as possible.

5. Do what we are good at. The former CBDRR project coordinator said that in the urgent need to help people in disaster areas and return systems to normal state, we should do what we are good at or have expertise in. Thai Red Cross Society had experience in doing things that we are not good at. We ran a livelihood programs for people in disaster-stricken areas to do farming, grow vegetables, and do traditional fishing activity, however, they did not belong to Thai Red Cross Society's capacity compared to medical or health work. Consequently, we encountered many obstacles during the operation and the results of the project were not as successful as they should have been. The crops did have a good yield but lack of market for selling products. Therefore, it was not possible to generate steady income for local villagers.

In addition, the work of Thai Red Cross Society volunteers and staff from other agencies should be integrated by assigning tasks that match each person's knowledge and abilities. The volunteers also should be categorized according to their skills and abilities; these will make disaster operations run smoother and more efficiently.

6. Sustainability aspects. The former CBDRR project coordinator and the former SE/ER project officer agreed that what will sustainably prevent and cope with tsunamis is to have a substantial continuity of work with clear evaluation and monitoring, by integrating disaster preparedness plans into the management plans of central and local agencies, because it will save time and budget when the project is restarted. In this regard, the former SE/ER project officer added that in order to run the work in the long term, it is necessary to reach as many people as possible and positively involve the community from the beginning to the end of the project. Or if you want to

show the benefits of what you have done and it can be applied in practice, you can use storytelling methods conducted by experienced people or local people who have participated in the project. In addition, Thai Red Cross Society staff should maintain a good image (Employee Branding) and understand the essence of voluntary service work in all situations. Moreover, Thai Red Cross Society should cooperate with the Ministry of Interior, which has various departments that alleviate suffering and promote well-being for people in communities, and it will help support each other's work very well.

A former Movement Cooperation Officer of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Bangkok Office commented that the government sector and Thai Red Cross Society should play an important role in regularly raising awareness among the community and should not let the memories and knowledge accumulated in the past fade over time. In addition, the current living conditions and limitations of people in the community should also be taken into account, because the way of life of the current generation may be different from that of the people in 20 years ago, such as a change in occupation, the economy recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, the global warming, and the environmental change impacts. In implementing various projects, these limitations should be considered, especially the factor that requires the participation of people in a community; they must be able to balance their time, and the participation should not interfere their work or lifestyle.

7. Human resource development. Based on his experience in coordination between Thai Red Cross Society and the ICRC, the former Movement Cooperation Officer suggested that Thai Red Cross Society should regularly develop its capacity and train its staff in order to drive the organization to become self-reliant and should not wait for help or rely on international support, because currently many countries around the world are facing

problems of disasters and conflicts, and also disasters are occurring more frequently and with greater severity. As a result, the financial resources of governments and humanitarian organizations may not be enough to respond to humanitarian crises in the future. Therefore, Thai Red Cross Society, including all Thai people, should pay attention to self-reliance and reduce the burden on the environment and climate. Importantly, Thai Red Cross Society staff should strengthen English communication skills to a high level because it helps increase access and understanding of international experiential learning. When it is necessary to coordinate work with international agencies, they will be able to work more efficiently. In addition, the staff should be trained on critical thinking, global awareness, and task prioritization.

A staff from Relief and Community Health Bureau added comments on the work of Thai Red Cross Society that when a disaster occurs, there should be internal coordination among various departments with different roles and functions, and disaster relief response plan should be jointly rehearsed at our organization as well as at external organizations, so that each department personnel will systematically understand their roles and functions, and develop their abilities to be ready for their work and gain confidence when actually performing their duties.

Epilogue

After 20 years, the 2004 Tsunami may fade from the memory of many people, or it is just one page of history for future generations. The former CBDRR project coordinator believes that Thailand is still at risk of another tsunami, but that history will not repeat itself and cause as much damage as in 2004 because people and humanitarian relief personnel have more knowledge and experience from the previous disaster, and many communities in risk areas have been relocated to safer areas. Moreover, Thai Red Cross Society has been continuously monitoring disasters, data analysis technology has developed to help manage disasters more effectively, such as disaster relief applications that can help assess situations, and disaster preparedness and the provision of assistance to disaster affected people are much better than they were in the past.

However, essential lessons from the tsunami response can still be learnt by Thai Red Cross Society and relevant agencies when carrying out future humanitarian work including: increasing community disaster preparedness, providing appropriate assistance according to the needs of people by taking into account their situation, culture, and context, consistent communication that reaches all groups of people, focusing on activities where there is existing strength and expertise, clear monitoring and evaluation processes, involvement of key relevant parties from the beginning, and finally taking into account limitations, including to human resources.

While no one can predict when the next disaster will occur, lessons learned alone may not be enough. Therefore, it is important to learn lessons and put them into practice in order to reduce losses as much as possible.

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