

Welfare and rehabilitation services for disaster victims
by
Ministry of Social Development and Human Security

Since 1942, the Department of Public Welfare, the Ministry of Interior had provided welfare and rehabilitation services for disaster victims who are in need of immediate assistance. The Department had maintained cooperation and coordination with all concerned agencies to ensure that prompt and appropriate services reach all victims in time to meet their needs and to help them resume their normal life.

Assistance and rehabilitation services provided include victims of the following disaster:

1. Natural disaster e.g. fire, flood, storm, drought, cold weather and lack of clean water for household consumption etc.
2. Man-made disaster e.g. terrorism, activities of external forces, political conflicts, technology-related hazards, and others etc.
3. Thai people facing difficulties and in need of help either within or outside the country.

There were five regional disaster relief centers as follows:

1. The Central Disaster Relief Centre which is located in Bangkok and responsible for disaster relief in 26 provinces in the central region;
2. The North-eastern Disaster Relief Center which is located in Khon Khaen Province and responsible for disaster relief in 19 provinces in the north-eastern region;
3. The Northern Disaster Relief Centre which is located in Phitsanulok Province and responsible for disaster relief in 17 provinces in the northern region;
4. The Southern Disaster Relief Centre which is located in Songkhla Province and responsible for disaster relief in 8 provinces in the southern region
5. The Upper Southern Disaster Relief Centre which is located in Surat Thani Province and responsible for disaster relief in 6 provinces in the upper southern region.

Each regional centre facilitates and supports the provincial authority in providing assistance for disaster victims. Each centre could give support to the provincial authority with regard to vehicles, expendable and non-expendable as well as other equipment.

The process of relief operations was as follows:

1. Preparation

The Department shall formulate of a Disaster Prevention Plan and an Inter-agency Cooperation Plan and map up the areas which are highly prone to disasters. It shall then cooperate with provincial authorities, government and non-government agencies in preparation for manpower, vehicles, supplies and equipment for immediate action. In addition, the Department shall also conduct training courses for disaster relief volunteers who work in support of the Department's disaster relief programme.

2. Emergency response

When a province is struck by a disaster, the provincial public welfare office and the district or local public welfare office in the vicinity shall dispatch their officials to the disaster-affected areas. The officials shall report the damage to their supervisors while providing immediate assistance to disaster victims. According to the government financial regulations, for each disaster, a provincial public welfare office is entitled to making an immediate emergency fund available up to 3,000,000 baht for relief operation.

3. Follow-up

The Department shall send a team of social workers to visit disaster victims after initial assistance is provided. Further assistance shall be provided if those victims still need e.g. referral services to residential homes, vocational training centers or send them home.

After public sector reform took place in 2002, the main roles and responsibilities of providing assistance to disaster victims have been transferred to be the authority of the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation which is a newly established agency under the Ministry of Interior. As for the Department of Public Welfare, the roles and responsibilities have also been improved. The Department has been restructured and become "The Department of Social Development and Welfare" under a new ministry – Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. It still maintains services with regard to rehabilitation of disaster victims and persons affected by a disaster who are among its target groups comprising children and youth, women, older persons, the destitute, persons with disabilities, the hilltribes who are ethnic minorities, members of self-help land settlements, HIV/AIDS infected and affected persons, persons facing social problems, low-income families and victims of human trafficking.

The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security by the Department of Social Development and Welfare has implemented activities/ services for disaster victims as follows:

1. Reimburse the cash advance that the provincial authority has paid to provide assistance for disaster victims;
2. Dispatch a team of officials from the Department's headquarter at central level to reinforce the work of disaster relief staff in each province where a disaster occurs;
3. Dispatch mobile disaster relief units to support the provincial authority in relief operation;
4. Cooperate with concerned government agencies in providing assistance for distressed people either within the country or abroad and facilitating their return to Thailand;
5. Cooperate with non-government agencies in providing effective services to cover all disaster victims.

Proper assistance has been provided to disaster victims according to their needs to ease their immediate problems, but not to compensate of any damage caused by the disaster. The assistance provided is as follows:

1. Cash assistance: The Department has allocated budget to assist disaster victims, for example, funding support for cremation ceremony, medical expenses, occupational fund and education fund etc.

2. In-kind assistance: The Department has provided consumer goods, kitchen utensils, equipment for income-generating activities, necessary items for disaster victims' families including materials for disaster victims to rebuild or repair their houses, accommodation for monks and novices, barns, crops storehouses, sheds and so on.

3. Services provided are as follows:

- Food
- Temporary shelters, kitchens, bathrooms and toilets.
- Electricity, water and drinking water.
- Arrangements for disaster victims to make a living in self-help land settlements.
- Return of disaster victims to their domiciles or referral services to hospital and other institutions as deemed appropriate for each case.
- Counseling services, home visit and follow-up.

In 2004, after the tsunami disaster struck the 6 southern provinces of Thailand, the MSDHS has provided welfare assistance and rehabilitation services for disaster victims as follows:

1. Assistance in time of crisis and easing of immediate problems;
2. Rehabilitation services to secure employment and income opportunities through the provision of short vocational training courses, promotion of occupational group formation and funding support for income-generating activities;
3. Welfare assistance and rehabilitation services for orphans and children affected by the tsunami disaster;
4. Maintaining of coordination to provide permanent accommodation for families of disaster victims.

Moreover, in January 2005, the ministry sent the team (the Director General of Office of Women Affairs and Family Development (OWFAD), senior officers together with their colleagues) to visit to those who have been affected by Tsunami in the 6 southern provinces and assess the damage as well as collect the information concerning the urgent basic needs for their recovery and reconstruction. In according to this, the OWFAD held the seminar consisting of multi-target groups; those affected, leaders from local and central government, NGOs and those in private/business sector (such as Regional Saving Bank, Lions Club 310 D Thailand, etc.). The objectives were to identify victims' situation after the disaster, reflect their needs (short term and long term) for support, and possibility of available aids to be done by various sectors (the representatives of which participated in the seminar) to alleviate their miserable status.

OWFAD's activities after the seminar had been undertaken as follows:-

- Allocation of budget to local organizations, focusing female groups' activities such as vocational training and local productivity in the 6 provinces;
- Support establishment of 36 Family Development Centres in local communities and the activities from the other 41 existing centers in the 6 provinces. Estimated financial support was 16,300,000 baht;

- Collect related information from concerned GOs, NGOs and private/business sectors;
- Organize a follow-up meeting among multi-sectors: relieved groups, local leaders, supportive groups network and OWFAD to discuss the outcome of relief/assistance, constrains and recommendations raised by stakeholders.
