

## Fisherfolk's Right to Access Resources

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### Editorial

In the era of globalization, marine and coastal resources are valued factors of production volume boost. The country's national policies that focus on the increasing number of Gross National Product (GNP) and marine export have set Thailand one of leading marine exporters. High technology and newest tools have been brought in by investors and used widely to catch a lot of fish at a time. These damage marine and coastal resources and affect fisherfolk community in every aspects covering mode of production, way of life, culture, stabilities of food and career as well as community status.

The Environmental Report of Thailand in 2006 has shown that more than 80 per cent of corals in the Andaman and more than 50 per cent of corals in Thai Gulf have been

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk : Director of Sustainable Development Foundation. Mrs. Ravadee's outstanding ability and talent is the ability to mobilize the collaborative action among people's organization, NGOs and civil society to work together to protect the community's right in management of natural resources, also to promote the concrete action demonstrate the community in participation , access and manage the natural resources. The concrete result of her effort is the formation of the Federation of Southern Fisher folk, which is the network of small-scale fisher folks in the 13 provinces in the southern Thailand. From knowing Mrs. Ravadee, she has been involved with Environmental Management Bill, the current Fishery Law (being draft) and many others. Lastly, she is the chairperson of the NGO-COD which is a elected position from the over 300 NGOs all over Thailand. The NGO-COD is an umbrella organization of NGO in Thailand

<sup>2</sup> Ms. Kesinee Kwaenjaroen : Kesinee joined SDF in 2001 as an information officer and has been promoted to coordinate a number of projects which requires her to work both in the field and engages in political dialogue. Currently, she has various roles within the organisation and currently responsible in managing a number of environmental projects for Ecosystem-based integrated coastal resources management through multi-stakeholder participation in Southern Thailand, which aims to promote good governance in environmental management and actively involved in policy advocacy projects to promote sustainable natural resource management. She has also has had a direct experience through implementing the following projects namely Joint Management of the Protected Areas, Survey and Information Collection on People's Needs in Addressing Natural Resource and Environmental Problems for Community's Welfare in Thailand, Project for Women's Network Development and Natural Resource and Environment Management in Songkhla Lake Watershed. Given a large responsibility that she is shouldering within an organisation,

<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF): SDF is a registered non-governmental organization under the foundation category. SDF was established in 2000 to promote and expand the idea and approach of sustainable development whereby the local ways of life, indigenous wisdom and natural resource equilibrium become the focal point of development. Its main goal is to bring benefit to the most disadvantaged in the society through strengthening their capacities to improve self-reliance and Thai society as a whole.

destroyed quite severely and have a tendency to decay gradually since the government's tourism policy considered fishing a potential business that can generate a lot of money continuously. The report has pointed that the wetland along the coast of Thailand, covering the area of 20,185 square kilometers, are threatened by development activities such as marine agriculture, tourism and industry development, etc. Meanwhile, fertile mangrove forest of 2.22 million rais scattering along the coast in 1961 was decreased to 1.49 million rais in 2004. With speedy development, abundant mangrove forest has been replaced by land for industrial areas, communities, shrimp farms, and many others.



Come with the development is deterioration. Fisherfolk which is the largest group of people in fishing industry depend on marine and coastal resources in terms of occupation and dwelling. Now, they are facing problems in getting food and earnings since fishing for commerce that uses devastating tools are expanded. Meanwhile, mangrove forest which is nursery area and habitation of marine animals has been invaded and replaced by shrimp and fish farms. It affects ecosystem with pollutions caused by remaining animal food and chemicals. In addition, public sphere has been replaced by hotels and guest houses to serve tourism industry that has been rapidly grown.

It is difficult for fisherfolk families to approach financial supports and opportunities. They are confronting the results of the developments in which they didn't participated or made decisions. On the other hand, they have to bare more burdens caused by rising cost of living covering food and consumer products as well children rising and education. Most of fisherfolk families live in poverty. Their way of life has been changed from being sufficient to being poor. Moreover, some fisherfolk villages had moved out since big development projects sprung up in compliance with flow of investment, industries and free trade, especially in the South and the East of Thailand which are coastal areas. The arrival of developments without good governance has been affecting fisherfolk's way of life, economy, society, and culture and led to instability of lives as well as in put them into difficult situations.

## **Female Local Fishingfolk and Their Problems**

*Nowadays, the fertility and beauty of our beloved sea has changed because of the country's speedy development. Gone is the community's wisdom and women's knowledge in maintaining valuable resources to save them for the next generation. The illusion of economic growth and production has left a heavy burden on women in the community.*

*The more the sea is deteriorated, the harder we earn our living. Women, who have to take care and manage all the expense in the family, have more and more works to do. We are not only a housewife but also a hard-working woman with less time for our family. In some cases, husband has to go to other province to find a job, leaving wife and children at home.*

*When natural resources are valued as money, the fertile sea is raped and beaten, and then sold by those who have access to it with more capital power.*

*Even sadder, they never think of sustainability when using our sea.*

*For us southern fishingfolk women, we live with the sea – it's not only a tourist attraction or a food source. We love the sea as much as our family. We are in the kitchen and know that everything our family eat comes from the sea. It is the place of our lives.*

***Declaration of Southern female Fisherfolk network***<sup>5</sup>

The problems fisherfolk communities encountering have affected “Female” fisherfolk. They can't approach information or participate in development process owing to economic development focusing on the increasing of product volume based on natural resources. This affects stability of coastal communities; lessens social,

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<sup>5</sup> Female Fisherfolk Network is an assembly of female fisherfolk along the coast of Thailand whose lives depend on natural resources. In getting together, they do part-time jobs to earn more incomes as well as join in public and natural recovering activities. The first assembly happened at the conference of the Federation of Southern Fisherfolk held at Weerasatri Anusorn School, Baan Pa Klok, Thalang District, Phuket province from October 8-10, 2008. Female fisherfolk from different villages has exchanged experiences and found that they have same kinds of problems such as decaying resources, rare earnings, increasing pressure and exhaustion, bad health as well as difficulties in raising children. The cooperation between villages may help lessen problems at a level but the assembly of women will generate knowledge exchange, natural resources recovery, and channels to earn incomes. It will link female fisherfolk in different villages together and encourage the cooperation between provinces until they can take care of their communities and their own life.

cultural and knowledge values; puts pressure upon female fisherfolk besides their everyday burdens; as well as hinders them from getting self development opportunities and participating in social activities.

Although Thai society has already reformed the concept of development to promote right, freedom, equality between male and female and participation in public activities, management authorities of marine and coastal resources belong to public sector according to law. Also, although Thailand constitution guaranteed community rights to use, manage, reserve and recover natural resources, they've been mentioned in National Economic and Social Development Plan and Constitution only not coming to practice. The government still has a monopoly on natural resources management.

The deterioration of natural resources and problems fisherfolk facing have led to a conclusion that we have no time to wait for others to fix our problems, instead, we have to fight for our own and communities' rights in order to approach marine and coastal resources as well as make development plans to recover them. Only this would helps return the fertility to natural resources and call off government's monopoly, otherwise, loss and problems will continue.

## Movement of Women Right and Community Right

*“The decline of Songkhla Lake is our problem so it is our duty to recover it instead of waiting for someone’s help. So far, we have learned a lesson that if we don’t take part in the development and make decision by ourselves, the project will bring damages to the lake and affect our life, our family and our community.*

*We can be sure that we have enough food and money and our community is stable and peaceful when we bring back fertility to our lake.”*

***Ms. Supaporn Pannarai***<sup>6</sup>



**Illustration 2:** Ms. Supaporn Pannarai, chairperson of the network of women around Songkhla Lake

Most people in this country have been deprived of the right to approach and manage natural resources owing to the limitation of law and public management system. Therefore fisherfolk communities around Songkhla Lake<sup>7</sup> have called for their right to protect and recover the lake. They got together and established “*Songkhla Lake Fisherfolk Federation*”<sup>8</sup> to solve problems in communities and encourage people to understand and aware of their rights as well as promote the cooperation among people in order to prepare for the coming problems. Most of all, they educate people and get them participated in preserving and recovering the lake.

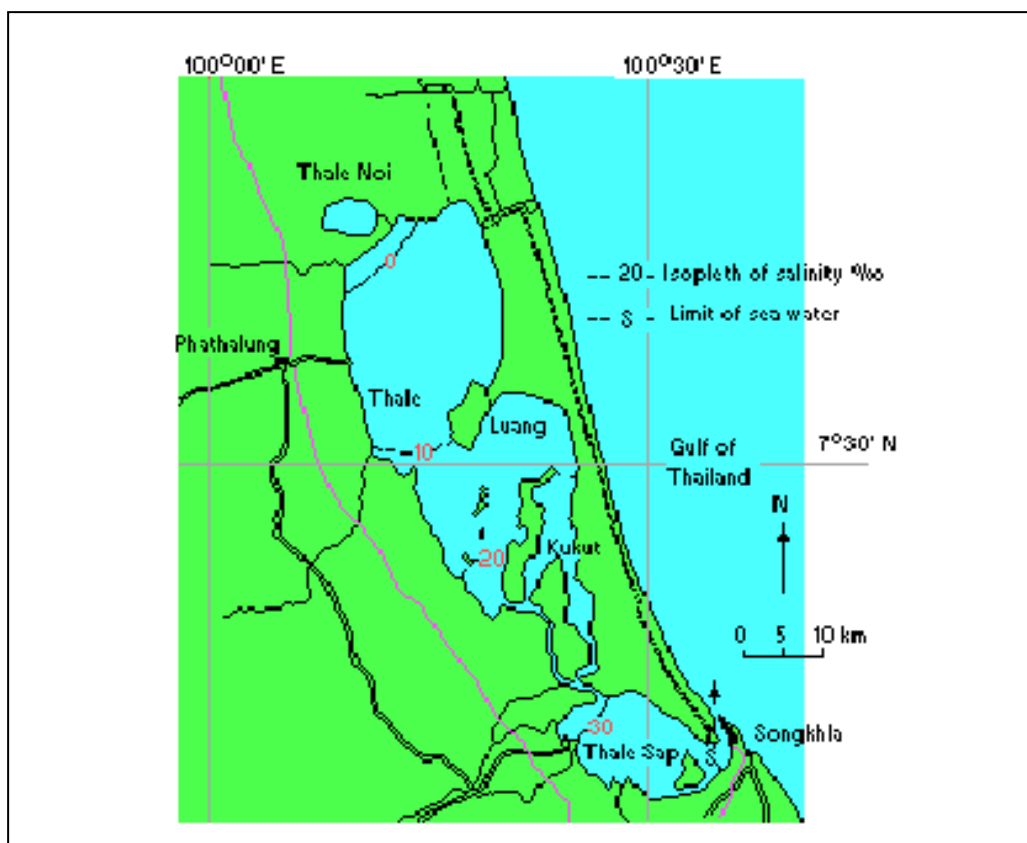
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<sup>6</sup> From the interview of Chairman of Women Network Around Songkhla Lake, October 10, 2008

<sup>7</sup> Songkhla Lake is located in the middle of east coast in the south of Thailand. It has a long history in compliance with nearby communities and cover three provinces: 1) Nakhon Sri Thammarat 2) Pattalung 3) Songkhla. The lake has special characteristic which it combines salt water, brackish water and fresh water together and is one of big lakes in Southeast Asia covering the area of 1,040 square kilometers (about 616,750 rais)

<sup>8</sup> Songkhla Lake Fisherfolk Federation came from the assembly of fisherfolk in five clubs around Songkhla Lake comprises Lower Songkhla Lake Fisherfolk Club, Satingphra District Fisherfolk Club, Pak Payoon District Fisherfolk Club, Khao Chaison – Bangkaew Fisherfolk Club and Raktalay Noi Fisherfolk Club with aims to recover, preserve and protect Songkhla Lake.

Although most members of Songkhla Lake Fisherfolk Federation are men, they are aware that they need cooperation from women either to manage natural and environmental resources. The different views between men and women will support each other and useful to community right movement. Women are urged to participate in research activities, exchange knowledge and work in the Federation.



**Illustration 3:** Physical Characteristics of Songkhla Lake

Source: <http://www.ilec.or.jp/database/asi/img/asi02-01.gif> searched on June 2, 2009

The Federation’s operation is successful as women in many communities have united to establish “*Women’s Network Around Songkhla Lake*”<sup>9</sup> for more solidarity in the movement towards the management of natural resources around the Lake.

Their first movement is the establishment of marine animal nursery area by defining marine flora and fauna zone in the Songkhla Lake with an aim to regain fertility, which will in turn result in sustainable food and income source for the community.

<sup>9</sup> Women’s Network Around Songkhla Lake is another development of women working around Songkhla Lake. In June, 2006, the Network is established to recover, preserve and manage natural resources in Songkhla Lake as well as assure fishingfolk that they have right to approach resources.

This activity encourages cooperation from many parties with local fishingfolk as its main operator. After 15 years of commitment, the Lake has been restored and many government agencies such as the Department of Fisheries, the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources and local administration organizations come to support in terms of equipment and budget, and work together to set local regulations regarding the management of marine flora and fauna conservation. This guarantees the access to resources and the participation of fishingfolk.



**Illustration 4:** Activities of women groups around Songkhla Lake

The above case reflects that moral is the key to successful development. When all parties have set their mutual goals and go for them, it can lead to the ultimate goal in the development of the country.

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