Ramsar visit to Thailand, November-December 2003

19 December 2003

Thailand

Implementation of Ramsar Convention in Thailand

DANIDA wetland project delivers success

Guangchun Lei, Ramsar Senior Advisor for Asia

Thailand has made enormous progress since its accession to the Ramsar Convention in 1998. It has designated ten Ramsar sites, its National Wetlands Committee and National Wetlands Policy are now in place, and a comprehensive wetlands inventory had been completed. Currently, a 2001-2006 project entitled "Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Thailand" is under implementation, funded by DANIDA (the Danish Agency for Development Assistance).

Invited by the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, I participated in Thailand's National Workshop on the Ramsar Convention and visited their DANIDA wetland project sites (Nong Bong Kai Non-Hunting Area, in the far north bordering Laos and Burma, and Krabi Estury in the south) between 26 November and 5 December 2003.

The National Ramsar Workshop was a big event in Thailand. More than 200 participants from government officials of ministerial and provincial levels, academic professionals, NGO representatives, Ramsar Site representatives, and all four of the Ramsar Convention's International Organization Partners took part.

The workshop was opened by a special speech on "Thailand and the Ramsar Convention" by the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Mr. Chatree Chuayprasit, the chairman of the Ramsar project Steering Committee. Then followed my keynote speech, a comprehensive presentation of the Ramsar Convention, its history, evolution from waterbird conservation to wetlands wise use in general, the three pillars of the
Following that, there were presentations from Wetlands International, IUCN, WWF and BirdLife International reflecting upon their activities in Thailand. WI reported on its CEPA programme with Thai partners; IUCN reported on its Mekong river GEF project, especially the pilot project in one of the tributaries of the Mekong river in Thailand; WWF reported on its preliminary work on policy and legal frameworks, exploring the Ramsar Convention legal framework for developing countries, and described its ecotourism pilot project; BirdLife International reported on its recent work on the threatened bird species in Asia.

The workshop provided a good opportunity to explain what the Ramsar Convention is, as well as how wetlands work for the country and local communities, in front of different stakeholders of wetlands in Thailand.

Krabi Estuary

The Krabi Estuary Ramsar Site includes the Krabi Estuary itself, the tidal flats and the whole of Krabi town, a famous tourist city in southern Thailand. The development of the city, as well as of the local communities, depends heavily upon the wetland ecosystem, and thus it is sensible to include the whole town, as well as more than 40 communities, within the Ramsar Site boundary. It is also because of this feature that the pilot project aims to initiate a process of participatory planning for the Ramsar site.
The pilot project has been successful in getting the top government officials on board, and my meeting with the vice-governor and the mayor turned out to be a very pleasant and fruitful conversation. Both are fully aware of the importance of the wetlands to their economic development, and they are also concerned the sustainability of the project.

As we met with local people in Krabi, the first question they asked me was: "What does being a Ramsar Site mean to us?"

Representatives of local communities asked what being listed as a Ramsar Site means to them, and after my explanations, they told me some exciting stories of their resource use.

With just a change in their fishing behavior, their use of local resources returned to its sustainable track. The local people told me that they used to harvest snails by net, which captured all size and ages of the snails, and as a result the yield of snails declined dramatically. Once they recognized the extent to which their way of harvesting was cutting their income, they discussed among all fishermen and reached an agreement to ban such harvesting methods. Now they dive into the sea grassland to collect only the mature snails, and with this improvement, the snail harvest has grown steadily over the past years.

Nong Bong Kai Non-Hunting Area

Chiang Sean Lake, Nong Bong Kai Non-hunting Area Ramsar Site (434 ha), borders with Laos and Burma and has been famous as the "Golden Triangle". Water quantity and quality are critical to the functions of the ecosystem, as well to the welfare of both the communities downstream (fishery, drinking water, irrigation, etc.) and the communities around the lake (fishing, drinking water, and tourism). Therefore the focus of the pilot project is on land use to ensure the health, quantity and quality of the water that flows into the Chiang Sean Lake.
Chiang Saen Lake

Comprehensive participatory stakeholder analysis laid a solid basis for the project team to form various user groups. These groups are working effectively to discuss the rules and responsibilities to the environment of the lake, which looks exciting and very likely sustainable over the long term.

Organic fertilizers are doubling the yield and income of local farmers, and all of the farmers I met are happy with that result after having applied the organic fertilizers to their crops, their fish-ponds, and their live stocks. By applying the organic fertilizers (produced by the farmers themselves, with technical support and partial financial support of the project), the soil structure improved, the production increased (by 40-70%), and more importantly, their products are getting better prices and gaining market favor abroad. This exciting message is now spreading to the surrounding villages, and more and more farmers are expected to apply organic farming.

Mr. Yanyong Sricharoen, an excellent social economist, is the coordinator of the pilot project at Chiang Saen Lake.

The wetland complex to the south of the Ramsar Site is a wonderful and dynamic ecosystem consisting of swamps, lakes, and floodplains and has been annually flooded by the Mekong River in the wet season. These wetlands are important habitat for migratory birds and fishes, and might very well benefit from being integrated as part of the
existing Ramsar Site.

Nong Luang Lake, the major water body in the wetlands complex.

Source URL: https://www.ramsar.org/news/ramsar-visit-to-thailand-november-december-2003#comment-0