

# Rural Women's Exchange *Journal*

**From Thailand to Sri Lanka**  
29 October – 4 November 2008



Report by Keawta Tamin and Auaiporn Suthonthanyakorn  
Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF)  
Thailand

Rural and Indigenous Women Task Force  
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

Copyright © 2009 Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

Reproduction of this publication for educational or other non-commercial purposes is authorised and encouraged, provided the source is fully acknowledged.

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)  
Girl Guides Association Compound  
189/3 Changklan Road  
Amphoe Muang  
Chiang Mai 50100  
Thailand

Tel: (66) 53 284527, 284856 Fax: (66) 53 280847  
Email: [apwld@apwld.org](mailto:apwld@apwld.org)  
Websites: [www.apwld.org](http://www.apwld.org) / [www.dontglobalisehunger.net](http://www.dontglobalisehunger.net)

This publication is supported by **Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency**

## Introduction

In line with its objective to support the strengthening of rural and indigenous women's movements and organising in resisting economic policies associated with globalisation, the Rural and Indigenous Women Task Force (RIW TF) had identified the need for an exchange programme among the community partners of the RIW TF members. The primary purpose of the exchange programme was to share information on and skills in the organising, mobilising, and other forms of resistance against the different powers controlling rural and indigenous women's resources their lives.

The objectives of the exchange programme are:

- To contribute to the development of a new generation of young, second-liner grassroots women activists;
- To enrich rural and indigenous women's movements by exchanging various experiences in various contexts;
- To provide an opportunity for sharing information, skills and knowledge on mobilising, organising, networking, and other forms of resistance;
- To contribute in deepening the understanding of feminism and gender equality towards sustainable livelihoods among RIW TF members and their partner communities; and
- To explore and document alternative sustainable livelihoods being practiced by the host communities.

The 2008 exchange activity was held between women engaging in fisheries in Sri Lanka and Thailand. The partners/host organisations involved were members of RIW TF based in the respective countries. Geetha Lakmini from National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO) from Sri Lanka and Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk from Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF) from Thailand led the exchange activity.

The exchange visit from Thailand to Sri Lanka was conducted on 29 October – 4 November 2008.

### **Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), Thailand**

The Sustainable Development Foundation was established in 2000 to support the 'Danish Cooperation for Environment and Development (DANCED) Partnership Programme Towards Sustainable Management of Natural Resources'. The programme focused on the promotion of natural resource management by community organisations. SDF works with independent organisations such as the National Human Right Commission, the National Advisory Council and the Tropical Natural Resource Base Strategies. This is to enhance people's participation in developing policies that are appropriate and benefit the society as a whole. Additionally, the foundation also works with NGOs in various overseas countries, particularly with organisations who work directly and indirectly with natural resources.

For more information and support, please visit  
[http://www.sdfthai.org/web\\_pages\\_index/index.html](http://www.sdfthai.org/web_pages_index/index.html)

## ***Participants***

Mrs. Poonsapya Srichu (PiRom), 47 year-old farmer with two children.  
A community network leader active in environmental management particularly in rehabilitating Songkhla Lake Basin, she also implements other activities, such as buffering aquatic animal conservation zones, managing small water sources in the Songkhla Lake.  
Mrs. Srichu is also involved in organic farming, using alternative energy, and promoting fisheries local market.

Mrs. Pensri Tha-lay-luek (Ja Sri), 35 year-old fisherwoman with two children.  
An active member of a women's group in Koh Muk to conserve natural reserves, she also does the accounting for a savings group.

Miss Kanda Toh-mai, 37 year-old fisherwoman with one daughter.  
A member of the Baan Ya-mee, Koh Yao fisherfolk community, she advocated for the objection of the construction of the marina in Koh Yao-yai.

Mrs. Benjawan Peng-noo (PiJim), Official of the "Rak Talay" Association and Coordinator of the Songkhla Lake women's group network.

Ms. Kaewta Tamin (Nong Tuk), Media and Campaign Officer, Sustainable Development Foundation.

Ms. Auaiporn Suthonthanyakorn (PiPond), Interpreter, Project Coordinator on Women Empowerment, Sustainable Development Foundation.



**Trip Report by** Pi Rom/Ja Dam/Ja Sri  
**Consolidated by** Nong Tuk and Pi Auaiporn

**29 October, 2008**

On the first day of the trip we met at Suvarnabhumi Airport at 11:00 in the morning. There were six of us all together. When we have met and introduced ourselves, we proceeded to the airline check-in counter, filled out the travel documents and exchanged our money. Before we embarked, we discussed our trip to Sri Lanka and went over the trip itinerary. We were all women and we agreed to take care of each other like sisters during our six-day trip together. We agreed to help each other out and not segregate between villagers and officials. We were travelling to Sri Lanka to learn and exchange experiences with our neighbouring country. Pi Rom asked "who is the eldest in the group" and it happened that Pi Rom is the eldest, followed by Pi Auaiporn, Pi Jim, Ja Dam, Ja Sri and Nong Tuk.



This was the first time that Ja Dam and Ja Sri travelled to Bangkok by themselves and to board an international flight. "We are very happy," they said. "When the plane took off we were so excited like we have never been before. We felt calmer after a while." The time in Sri Lanka is one hour and a half behind Thailand time. When we were about to land, we looked down from the airplane and saw many coconut trees, rubber trees and rice fields. It was already

evening when we arrived in Sri Lanka. Two officials came to meet us at the airport and took us to NAFSO's office. On our way there we saw Sri Lankan women dressed very beautifully.

Once we arrived at NAFSO's office we met with Geetha and Herman, NAFSO's coordinators. They are the key persons who made this exchange trip between the fisher women in Thailand and Sri Lanka possible. While we waited, they served us tea and desserts and we introduced ourselves to the NAFSO staff. Geetha explained the itinerary for each day in detail and then took us to our



accommodation, which was on the second floor of the office. We had dinner before we all went to bed to get ready for the next day.

**30 October, 2008**

Today's itinerary began with travelling early in the morning.

Since the time in Sri Lanka is one and a half hour behind Thailand and because of her regular work in cutting rubber, Ja Dam woke up at three in the morning. She carried on a conversation with the others until it was time to leave.

The van came to pick us up at 5:30 in the morning to take us to Pattalam Angamuwa village. We stopped at Geetha's house to pick her up and we had breakfast. On our way to the village we passed a very large swamp, a shrimp farm, and brick-making factories. Sri Lanka has many plant species that are similar to Thailand's, but more abundant. The houses were decorated with beautiful flowers and decorative plants.

Jayawathi, the leader of the women's network who visited Thailand at the Rural Women's Exchange in October was waiting for us on the way to the village. We travelled to the Pattalam Angamuwa village together and arrived there at around 9:30 in the morning.

A crowd of more than 20 people - women, children, infants and men were waiting to greet us. Pattalam Angamuwa is a tank fishing village. The area is around 5,000 hectares located in Anuradhapura district. The villagers also plant agricultural crops. There were a total of 159 families in the village. The village's primary fishing source is the Angamuwa Lake.

In the past, the extensive fishing of the villagers had destroyed the Angamuwa lake. NAFSO then met with the village leaders who understood the problems of the deterioration of natural resources and recognised the need to create awareness among the village members. Discussions were initiated, creating a better understanding among the villagers. This took time and various forms of advocacy until the villagers acknowledged the importance of natural resource conservation. Activities were carried out together with the villagers to rehabilitate the lake and its natural resources. The villagers had agreed on the size of the seine and not to use power-engine boats.



The most crucial stage was during the initial phase when villagers had agreed to stop fishing for six months. During that time they found it very difficult to make a living. Some had to leave the village and work in the city. After six months, the villagers resumed fishing and they felt that they were able to catch more fish, from two kilograms per day to seven

kilograms per day. In addition, outsiders were prohibited from coming in to catch fish in the village. This rule was endorsed at the provincial level.

The women's group in this village was formed last year to initiate other activities such as community savings and income generation activities. Men in the village have been very supportive and pleased to see that women came together and contributed to community affairs. Their involvement lightened up the events. Women have a key role as group members. They manage savings, credit and book keeping within the small group. They have been holding weekly meetings and discussions. Their system is the alternative to the conventional way, without being liaised by middlemen. Many of them have started small income generation activities to support their families.



Most of the women in the village go fishing with the men. They also perform other important duties such as preparing the fishing equipment, cleaning and repairing fishing tools, cooking and doing all the housework. Some women even go fishing alone.

The other strength of this village is that villagers themselves set their own price for the fish they catch. Every time after selling their fish, they donate some money to "central fund" so that more breeds can be bought and released into the tank. A committee was established to oversee the "central funds". All the villagers had agreed that community funds are to be used to help those who have the greatest need.

The village conservation work has been running smoothly since the people have recognised its importance. The villagers have been enthusiastically participating on a regular basis. People in this village are happy to work together. Although they do not have much income, they have plenty of food to eat.

In Angamuwa Village, there was another group of women who also wanted to form a women's group. These women have also been participating in the village's activities and affairs on a regular basis. Forming groups come naturally for women. When there is a problem, women usually come together to find ways to resolve them. They feel that this 'coming together' is very powerful and effective. Hence they wanted to form groups to also conduct other activities similar to the women's group that we met this

morning. The youth has also been participating in village activities, including drugs prevention activities. Capacity building of the youth has been one of the concerns of NAFSO. In this village, youth groups participate in environmental management and preservation and many other social development activities.

Ja Sri exchanged her experience as a member of the women's group in Koh Muk, Thailand since she has been part of the group for more than two years. She shared how she remembered the feeling when the group was initially formed and described her enthusiasm, her hopes and her concerns. Today the women's group in Koh Muk has over 80 members. The group has carried out many activities including savings, natural resources conservation, and setting up a fishing tools shop for the members. Her group is willing to expand and do other supplementary income generating activities in the near future. During the past two years, they have experienced both successes and failures. The group has taken stock of all the lessons learned and tried to improve. "We want our women friends in Sri Lanka to think, make decision and implement your own activities because villagers like us know what is best for ourselves," she said.



We had lunch in this village. The villagers let us eat first and continuously served us more and more food. The house owner and the other villagers would only start to eat once we had finished. This is their custom, they said. Visitors have to be fully fed.

In the afternoon, we went to Angamuwa Lake. We rode in a canoe and hauled in the seine.

We then headed for another village called the Parugasaykamma Village. A women's group whose main activity is baking cashew nuts was waiting for our arrival.

This women's group consisted of 15 members who were mostly elderly. There were five committee members. Women in this group grew cashew nuts themselves and process them. At times they also buy the cashew nuts from other places. Women would spend their spare time after work to shell cashew nuts and put them in the oven. Each month the members would each earn approximately 2,500 Sri Lanka Rupees (Rs.) which is equivalent to 22 US dollars (USD). The women's group here were also thinking about taking on other supplementary income-



generating activities, such as coconut oil and herbs. It was unfortunate that we did not spend as much time with the women's group in this village as we were all tired from travelling and waking up at three in the morning. Some of us were about to fall asleep. Jayawathi, the women's group leader who took us to the village understood how we felt and invited us to sing together before we depart for our rest. We very much hope that we can meet again in the future.

### **Women's group in Palugassegama Village**

Palugassegama women's group was formed by NAFSO's partner organisation, PRAJA SHAKTHI Development organisation, at Puttalam. There are 35 members in the group. Among their major activities are income generation, savings and credit programme, advocacy programme for self empowerment. (NAFSO)

We spent the night in a village. Each house that accommodated us (two persons per house) greeted us very warmly. The owner of the house that Pi Auaiporn and Ja Dam stayed with has knowledge of herbs and how to make herbal drinks. We discussed about plant species and their benefits to human health. The next morning, everybody enjoyed a glass of herbal drink mixed with ginger.



### **31 October, 2008**

We departed at 7.30 in the morning and headed for the Pallivasalpaduwa Village.



We arrived at the Pallivasalpaduwa Village at almost ten in the morning, which was slightly behind our schedule. We met Prinsri, the Chairperson of the Pallivasalpaduwa women's group. She told us that the women were waiting for us since nine in the morning. Just then the villagers were pulling in the seine at the beach and Geetha invited us over to observe the women who were collecting fish on the beach.

Pallivasalpaduwa is a coastal fishing community that uses beach seine to catch fish. They work together as a group of about 35 families. Villagers would usually sell the big fish and divide the money.





Women in this village carry out all fishing-related work except going out to sea with their husbands. While we were walking along the beach observing their fishing techniques, we noticed that the women were helping the men haul in a very large seine. Women stood at the end of the rope and while hauling in the seine, they were also neatly folding it. Once they were done with fishing, the women were responsible for the rest of the duties while the men rested, drank and ate. The women separated the fish according to their species and divided them up equally by eyeballing. After which, they would return home and the large fish would be sold while the smaller ones would be served to their families or processed as salty fish or dried fish.

We all came back to Prinsri's house and sat in a circle in front of her house. The women's group in this village consisted of women of all ages: teenagers, young adults and the elders. We introduced ourselves and exchanged experiences. The women's group in this village was formed since 1998. The first chairperson was in the position for four years before a new committee was elected. The members have since then, agreed to elect a new committee every two years. Most women felt that 'grouping' can really help resolve problems. "We are proud to have a women's group," they said. "We are strong." Group members took turns to chair, lead the group and facilitate exchange knowledge and experiences with others outside the village.

People told us that in the past they were able to catch so many fish that they had to release some of them back into the sea. "Today we cannot catch that many fish," they said. Not only did the population increased, the fishing techniques used is more destructive, for example explosives and large seine. There are also foreign vessels that use modern technologies to catch fish in Sri Lanka. In addition, internal disputes also prevented the people to travel long distances to catch fish. In the past, it was possible to travel up north to look for more fish, but with the rivalry in the country, this is no longer possible.



### Issues related to foreign fishing vessels

The Ministry of Fisheries (MoF) states that the foreign fishing vessels are permitted into Sri Lankan harbours for refilling fuel, ice, food and storing water in the vessels. Our multi-day vessel fish workers know very well that these vessels do not only refill their basic needs, but operate in our free economic zone (FEZ), obtain fish catch, and dump part of their catch in the local market here in Sri Lanka. This was echoed by fishers across all villages in the south and east of Sri Lanka.

The situation is seriously damaging the livelihood of local fisher people, said many fishers in Negombo, Trincomalee and Beruwala (Kalutara district). People were concerned and said that these fishing vessels use high technology devices for catching fish, as well as for storage and exports. The fishers in Devinuwara reported during the consultation that the local fish resources are exploited and local fishers are not able to compete with their available technology for fishing. Women fishers in Hambantota, Balapitiya and Trincomalee stated that these foreign vessels release higher yields of fish into the market as compared to very small catch by the local fisher families, causing a sharp reduction in the fish prices and lower income for our fishers from an already reduced small catch.

*(Toward a People Centred and Sustainable Fisheries Policy: A Citizen's Report, NAFSO 2007)*

### Trends in fishery sectors after the 2004 election in Sri Lanka

- \* Welcome foreign investors on deep sea fishery
  - o 68 new licenses granted in our FEZ
- \* Export oriented fisheries industry
  - o Canned fish - 80% export
  - o Dried fish - for export
- \* Investments on ornamental fishery
  - o Export ornamental fish
- \* Formation of fisheries management councils
  - o Based on district administrative structures

NAFSO did a research study on the changing role of women in deep sea fisheries. The area covered by the study were Munnakkara (Negombo) and Kudawella. The research found both positive and negative changes in several sectors.

The positive changes:

- \* Increased income if we are looking at the comparison between using multi-day boats (boats staying in the ocean for several days or even weeks), FRP boats, motorised traditional crafts and non-motorised traditional *oru* and non-motorised *teppam*.
- \* A welcome increase in women's economic, social and cultural roles in Kudawella and Munnakkara
- \* Increasing trends of women's independence and higher levels of decision making in Kudawella and Munnakkara

The negative changes:

- \* Increased difficulty of handling responsibilities. According to NAFSO's research, most difficult responsibilities and most common problems of women in the fisheries sector are: giving proper education to children; bringing up children; marketing fisheries

products; managing household work; managing social obligations; lack of proper facilities for children's health; etc.

- \* Problems regarding arrests and detentions of fishermen in foreign countries
- \* Problems regarding security, especially when the husband is at sea or in jail, sometimes outsiders would interfere in the women's lives; some boat owners disturb fisher woman's life; and some people do not respect fisher women.

(presented by NAFSO at the Asian regional consultation on women in fishery organised by APWLD, August 12-14, 2004)

People in this village try to help and depend on themselves rather than seek assistance from the government since they've learned that government is not sincere in resolving their problems. They use collective savings scheme to save their money when they cannot catch any fish or during the monsoon season, which generally last about two to three months. Currently the group has a total savings of Rs.800,000 (USD6,967.43), which average to about Rs.15,000 (USD130) per household. The members felt that their savings have been useful in helping their fellow villagers when they are in need.

That evening we joined the sports and recreational activities on the beach and danced joyfully together before we parted to our own accommodations. That night each of us ate late dinner because all the ladies and the housewives in the village were enjoying the recreational activities on the beach until sunset. Normally women do not get to enjoy themselves and participate in recreational activities if they do not have women visitors from other towns. For each house that we spent the night in, we would give the owner a textile bag and jewellery that we brought along with us from Thailand as souvenirs.

### **Women in Fisheries**

The role of women in fisheries has always been undermined. The women fishers across eight districts commented that the present fisheries policy only proposes to 'enhance women's participation in the sector' without providing any clear cut directions of doing so. These women said that women's participation in local, provincial and national fisheries advisory and management bodies is very important. They see this participation as a means of taking into account the interests of women and children in the development, planning and implementation of fisheries related programmes and activities. Fisher women also spoke about provision of basic training, soft loans and other facilities to engage in self empowerment activities. And, they wanted the selection of beneficiaries for such assistance in consultation with the relevant fisher community and its organisations.

*Toward a People Centred and Sustainable Fisheries Policy: A Citizen's Report, NAFSO 2007*



## 1 November, 2008

We woke up to observe the local way of life in the village bright and early in the morning. We talked and observed the way they cooked before we had breakfast and said our goodbyes. Then we continued on our journey to the next village at 9.00 a.m.

We travelled back to Negombo to get to Munnakkaraya and Kadolkale, fishing villages located near the city where large, medium and small fishing boats, including rowing boats were. We were very impressed with the way they greeted us. Children again gave each of us betel-vine leaf as a way to pay respect. We met with Malkanthi, a leader of a women's group. Some women and youth groups work and carry out activities together.

### Chevimutti, Women and Youth Groups, Hadokarae and Munnakkaraya Villages

Hadokarae and Munnakkaraya are both coastal and lake fishing villages. Their main problem is the limited fishing area because they are situated very near the airport. They are prohibited from fishing in the government's area and sometimes, the fish they have caught would be confiscated by the officer. Many times fishing nets that they had dropped would be destroyed, but they could not claim their damages. Most fishermen do not have their own boats and would have to share a boat with others. Some are still using rowing boats, some work on the large boats, but the fish that they catch would usually be down-priced because the large boats that catch more fish would cut down their prices.

Since the villages are located very close to the city, they are limited in space, and yet the village population is increasing. More than 1,000 households live in only eight acres of land. Moreover, while the villagers have been living in these villages for more than 25 years, they do not have land ownership and are very insecure. Comparing



to the other villages that we visited, these two villages have very high costs of living (the other villages have low income and low spending). Some families have to rent houses.

The villagers once requested the government to provide them assistance in the form of loans and revolving funds, particularly during the monsoon when they cannot catch any fish, but this request never materialised. Also, during the beginning of the year when there was a hike in oil prices, the villagers requested the government to help the fisherfolk. The Director General of the Fishery Department had agreed to provide Rs.5,000 (USD43) per month for each family, but the villagers only received Rs.4,500 (USD39).

The women came together and created supplementary income-generating activities for the members, such as selling goods in the village and growing organic vegetables for household consumption. The women also made their own fertiliser and separated wastes for a healthy community. The youth gathered together to plant mangrove forest. They also had activities such as studying English and computer.

We all took turns to tell our stories.

Ja Dam talked about the problems of the government's marina construction project on Koh Yao, how it was to impact the livelihood of the community, and how the community successfully protested against the project.

#### **Government's marina construction project on Koh Yao and people's protest against the project - Thailand**

The project named "Marina" is a mega-project to build a yacht harbour, hotels, and entertainment facilities operated by Naracha Company. The project is located in the area of Yha Mee Village, Koh Yao Yai Sub-District, Koh Yao District, Phang Nga Province. People in Yha Mee and neighboring villages.

Mrs. Kanda Toemai in Yah Mee village said "The Yah Mee villagers do not need development that comes from building the harbour. Our village has enough utilities for living such as electricity and clean water. We also have work."

The Yah Mee village set "the voluntary group for reservation of the marine and coastal resources". The group aimed to (i) stop the Marina Project by demanding cancellation of the company's permit to use the land in the National Reservation park area issued by the authorities; and (ii) protect and reserve the natural resources. Local people preferred to maintain their traditional way of life.

Once the construction begins, the land adjustment will affect mangrove area, seagrass bed area and coastal area. This will cause changes in the food chain, the ecosystem which has been maintained for generations, and endanger food security of the local people.

The only thing the locals can do is to hold hands and help each other by standing up and fighting against the investors. They moved their families away for safety and guarded against trespassers. This is a simple tactic that local people have applied and it has strengthened the ties among the communities.

Local people also expanded their support network with other fishing communities and organisations including the Wild Life and Plant Reservation Association of Thailand, Andaman Project for Participatory Restoration of Natural Resource (ARR) and Federation of Southern Fisherfolks (FFF). Petitions were sent to many local government agencies as well as the Human Rights Committee of Thailand, Department of Special Investigation and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

Finally, the Department of Land Transport at Phang-Nga province cancelled the permission of harbour construction of the Marina on 23 February 2009.

Ja Sri explained the problems that Koh Muk Village had with the Chao-mai National Park and how the villagers cooperated with other nearby villages to protest for their rights and livelihoods, including the Koh Muk women's group forming.

#### **Chao-mai National Park at Koh Muk Village and people's protest against the project - Thailand**

Koh Muk is an island rich in marine and forest resources. It became a part of the conservation area of the Chao Mai National Park in 1982. This led to conflict over the land between the locals and the authorities.

Although it is clear in the documents that management of forest and land is under the national park authority, the villagers claim that the area belongs to them since their ancestors migrated to the island over 100 years ago.

The forest is crucial to the locals. It has been a source of water and food as well as a protection to the surrounding environment for a long time. When an officer of the Forestry Department cut down the forest trees, the local fisherfolk got together and protested by blocking the entrance with their fishing boats. The villagers also carried out a project to protect natural resources as they cooperated with other neighbouring villages.

#### **Alternative problem solving approaches**

Pi Rom talked about various income generation activities in her village such as establishing a saving groups and career development group, developing the local products by adding value, marketing of the local products, etc. Her village has also been organising meetings on community conservation buffer zones. She also shared that the community was able to advocate for the community plans and obtained the government's endorsement by cooperating with local people's groups, government and private sector.

Jim described how the women's group at Songkhla Basin Lake was formed and were able to promote a more active and prominent role of women in community development.

## Women's group at Songkhla Basin Lake – Thailand

The lake is the largest open lake in Thailand (98,680 hectares) with a complex ecosystem of fresh, brackish and salt water. Despite its complex ecosystem, the lake has a very strategic location – it is near the ocean, where labour is cheap. It is also known as the target site for the main southern industries (such as fishery industries, medical industries, rubber plantation industries, etc.). The area consists of 165 villages, with 8,500 households and 85,000 people. One hundred fifty-two of those villages are fisherfolk with the men and women mainly engaged in small-scale fishing.

These conditions of strategic location, large numbers of villages and fisherfolk, had created various inter-connected problems in Songkhla Lake, such as:

- \* Population increase and urban expansion
- \* Problems of agriculture development
- \* Mangrove encroachment for shrimp farming and aquaculture
- \* Degradation and decline of mangrove
- \* Expansion of industries
- \* Problems of shrimp farming/aquaculture
- \* Degradation of spawning and breeding ground
- \* Problems of sewage, industrial and chemical waste
- \* Problems of resource utilisation that sacrifices the well-being of the communities around the lake
- \* Conflict between environment and development

Among those problems faced by fisherfolk in Songkhla Lake, women suffer the most. To explore how the role and livelihood of women in the fishing village have changed through development; and to understand its impacts on women, the NGO initiated a research study with women as a target group for policy advocacy. The areas covered by the study were Ban Khao Mak, Ban Had Kai Tao and Ban Bang Not.

Research methodologies comprised of photo documentation, interviews, data gathering, and group discussions.

The research came out with the following findings on the different impacts of women working in fishery industries:

- Roles of women in fishery have changed: a shift from working at home and at sea to become workers in factories lacking opportunities for self-development.
- Health and mental impact: headaches, body aches, dizziness due to chemical exposure, risks in terms of travelling, etc.
- Social impact: no time to take part in social activities in the community, disruption of family institution (divorce)
- Economic impact: more expenditure (i.e food and babysitter)

(Presented by SDF at the Asian regional consultation on women in fishery organised by APWLD, 12-14 August 2004)

The women's group that was formed to collectively address the problem told us that in the past, the members only worked in the kitchen. Now they know what is going on outside and could foresee the problems. Group forming has been very powerful and very supportive. The group consisted of approximately 1,020 people of which 20 are

men. The group has a total of 65 sub-savings groups that manage their own savings system.

They informed us that people in Sri Lanka eat fish as their primary food. The fishermen have local knowledge in fishing, but they are not being recognised. They are poor and want their children to have other professions.

They were very pleased that we visited them and wanted to see a long-term connection established between Thai-women and Sri Lankan-women to exchange experiences.



Women and children invited us to take a boat ride with them around the community. We saw a very flourishing mangrove forest. The children and youth told us that this was their accomplishment in their project *Youth Forest Growing*. We saw the villagers swinging their fish nets and we asked if we can observe. The fish that they caught are similar but much bigger than we have in Thailand,.

That evening the children performed and danced. They also engaged in recreational activities such as musical chairs before they all went to bed, and we departed for our goodnight's rest.

## **2 November, 2008**

In the morning at around 9.30 we rode a tricycle to the Munnakkaraya Village. It was a Sunday; most villagers were at church. Only a small number of women who were left in the village spoke with us. The others were children and youth. They danced and performed very beautifully for us and gave us each a betel-vine leaf to pay respect similar to most of the villages that we visited.

Munnakkaraya Village is a poor fishing village. There were more than 5,000 congested households. The villages earn an average of about Rs.2,500 (USD22) per month and most people do not have house and land ownership.

The children and youth walked us around the village to observe their way of life. Although they are poor, their houses are very clean and tidy. They told us that poverty have brought them together to try and resolve their problems. Most fishermen do not have their own boats and have to work on large boats for money. More than 35 percent of the men in the village have to travel to work in other countries and send money back home. Fishing does not earn them much and the cost of living is increasing daily, such as tuition fees and oil prices.

Women in this village tried to find supplementary income such as selling goods while the youth gathered together for environmental preservation activities such as planting tree, collecting garbage and taking English classes.

We went back to NAFSO where we spent the night and discussed what we had learned before our meeting with the NAFSO staff the next morning.



### 3 November, 2008



At 8.30 in the morning we had a meeting with Herman, Geetha and the other volunteers at NAFSO. We debriefed and Herman and Geetha described NAFSO's activities. We then discussed about our future collaboration.

In the afternoon we had a chance to visit the city of Kandy. On our way there we saw a very lavish forest and villagers planting tea and trees.



### 4 November, 2008

We departed Colombo for Bangkok via flight UL424 at 2:40 in the afternoon. We arrived at Suvarnabhumi Airport at 8:00 in the evening. We went straight to the Sustainable Development Foundation for the night.

We are very thankful for this learning and exchange opportunity. Everybody we met were very warm and friendly. We will definitely miss each other.

### Evaluation of the exchange visit

**The things that we can take back with us:**

- Strengthen the community leaders and create an opportunity for people to take turns as leaders.
- Encourage women leaders and strengthen the women's groups.
- Take care of our physical and mental health (plant vegetables, herbs, flowers and engage in sports and recreational activities).
- Clean and manage waste.
- Document important events and trip memoirs every time we travel.
- Encourage women and youth to learn and document community local knowledge, its history and folktales.
- Promote and advocate community rules and plans to the government.

**Collaboration between Thailand and Sri Lanka in the future:**

- Exchange information, photos and activities with NAFSO and SDF to maintain the already established networks. There were some technical and language barriers but continuing exchange of information and materials may help lessen these barriers.
- Provision of more similar exchange opportunities, but the time allotted should be longer so as to allow for more technical exchange.
- The opportunity to exchange with neighbouring countries should also be provided to the working staff.

**Impact of armed conflict on small scale fishery in Sri Lanka –**

The government's curtailment of social services has had an impact on women and men in rural areas. NAFSO, Sri Lanka reported that women and men engaging with small-scale fisheries have been experiencing: loss of property and income due to restriction of fishing areas and safety zones, armed groups snatching the catch of fisher women and men, increased number of checkpoints affecting smooth transportation of fish, increasing cost of living such as increase in the prices of oil and food.

The most appropriate time for fishing is at night. But due to the war, people reported that night fishing is totally banned. Fisher people must operate during the time the military forces allow them to do so. Each fisherman must acquire a permit from the military before they can go to sea. People in all the eastern districts relayed that most of the landing sites are situated within the High Security Zones. Due to the loss of those landing sites and anchorage points, small-scale fishers have lost their access to the sea. (*Toward a People Centred and Sustainable Fisheries Policy: A Citizen's Report, NAFSO 2007*)

Migration or seasonal fishery to the north and the eastern part of Sri Lanka is difficult. People have also been experiencing harassments and abuses by the Navy and the other forces.

A woman in Trincomalee is struggling for her life and her three children by herself after losing her husband at sea allegedly killed by the Navy. She sells hoppers and pittu for people's breakfast. The widening of high security zones reaching to the forest near her community does not allow her any more to collect firewood and food items from the forest causing her to lose her livelihood which added to her burden.

A Muslim woman in Ampara has to travel 25km from her home to work as helper of a restaurant after her husband lost his livelihood as a fisherman due to the national security measures set in force in the area which forbid him to go fishing. She has to go through four checkpoints to go to work and come home everyday. As a Muslim woman, she is blamed and

harassed for travelling by herself and engaging in this kind of job. The mosque has also been urging her to stop doing the job. She is depressed but has to keep herself up and sustain her family.

(NAFSO)

### **Impact of Indian Ocean Tsunami on fishing villages in 2004 and reconstruction processes in Sri Lanka**

The Tsunami Reconstruction and Development Strategy prepared by the Ministry of Fisheries states that the government has estimated Rs.18 million (USD156,000) for tsunami reconstruction for the period 2005-2009. However, only Rs.418 million (USD3.6 million), or 2.3 per cent was allocated for the livelihood development of coastal communities, for the entire five-year period. In the name of safety, fishers have been moved away due to imposed coastal buffer zones. Fisher people were given land in remote places away from the coast. It is now more difficult for them to do their daily fishing.

*Toward a People Centred and Sustainable Fisheries Policy: A Citizen's Report,  
NAFSO 2007*