

## **WAP input into Regional Dialogue: *Improving Collaborations for Mangroves Management in Thailand***

Mangroves are one of the most valuable ecosystems, performing a variety of important ecological functions. In Southern Thailand, rural people have relied on mangroves and other wetlands resources for their daily livelihood. Local communities depend on mangroves and wetlands for many things; food, fodder for animals and water. People have managed wetlands and mangroves areas sustainably for generations. However, in the past recent years, there was an increasing demand for shrimp. As such, large areas of wetlands, especially mangrove forests, were converted to agriculture and shrimp farms to make it more economically productive. In addition, some of these wetlands and mangroves are threatened by encroachment and other development activities.

While there is a need to rehabilitate the state of mangroves, more often local authorities and communities split their responsibilities in managing these ecosystems. The Government also faces centralized planning for development and without sense of ownership from the local level, which has led to a reactive approach for mangroves management. At the same time, international organizations also face constraints in working directly with affected communities due to a lack of effective mechanisms to do so.



The Wetlands Alliance Program (WAP) sees these challenges as opportunities to closely work with local governments and the affected local communities as well as with the regional and national government and other international organizations. The Alliance provides a common framework for collaboration with other regional organizations to support working with local partners that would allow them to use their own systems. While most regional organizations operate through national agencies, the work of the Alliance is directly connected to locally identified needs. WAP also focuses on building capacity for local institutions that have mandate to reach out to community and improve their coping mechanisms to changes/vulnerability.

Given the need to improve capacities of local communities for wetlands management, the Wetlands Alliance, through CORIN-Asia, has worked closely with regional institutions such as the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), National Aquaculture Center in Asia (NACA) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) focusing on rehabilitation of mangroves in southern Thailand. Their involvement and facilitation of mangrove rehabilitation projects at the local level enabled Tambon (Sub-district) Administrative Offices

and the provincial government agencies understand local demands and needs which could be elevated into policy agenda at the national and regional levels.

CORIN-Asia's strength in mobilizing multi-stakeholders at the local level complements those of other regional partners and is a good input into the regional dialogue. In the same manner, the collaborative work with other regional partners has enabled CORIN-Asia to further its work in bringing together and facilitate dialogues with various stakeholders from different sectors and levels. This was exemplified through the Mangroves rehabilitation project in collaboration in Southern Thailand with SEI, NACA and IUCN.

By working closely with communities, CORIN-Asia and the Wetlands Alliance have instilled accountability among local people in managing their own resources around the wetland area. This is based on the principle that people, who work, live and have business in the community, have common interests in protecting their shared environment and quality of life. As such, they create a sense of local ownership of issues and solutions, and encourage long-term community support and accountability.

Partners who have developed successful models in wetlands management can share their knowledge with others and find out if their solutions are applicable to other contexts. Through diffusion of innovation, partners can quickly search for and find answers to technical and management problems. Through this method, CORIN-Asia has facilitated learning exchange forum, study tours and site visits as venues for discussion about practical steps necessary in mangrove restoration and coastal resource management. Thus, awareness building activities were seen as necessary steps to increase stakeholder understanding of the functions and values of the wetland and to create interest in its management.

The collaborative efforts of SEI, NACA and IUCN in rehabilitating mangroves in southern Thailand was complemented with the inputs of CORIN-Asia, which resulted to a mechanism of multi-stakeholder approach that was focused on local demands, active local authorities involvement and strong sense of local ownership. The results show that the various user groups, local governments and other partners are continuously involved in formulating and making decisions on conservation and wise use of mangrove forests and wetland areas. In addition, they are committing resources and effort to manage the wetland sustainably because they were involved from the start in the planning, implementing and monitoring stages of resource management.

The success of the process instilled by CORIN-Asia and the Wetlands Alliance reflects local knowledge about how to make use of techniques and tools. It emphasized strong local involvement from the start of the planning, implementing and monitoring stages of resource management. It is expected that through these approaches, other regional partners would see the importance of working directly with local people in wetlands management in Southern Thailand.

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