

Women in Southern Thailand Small-scale  
Fishing Villages :  
Amidst Surging Waves

Jawanit Kittitornkool

Support Network for Women in Fisheries Project

(SNWIF)

Thailand



*Workshop on Gender Relations in Fisheries*

*Organized by*

*ICSF - WIF*

*Dakar, Senegal*

*June 10 - 18, 1996*

This overview of the roles of women in southern Thai small-scale fishing villages is a conclusion of the Support Network for Women in Fisheries (SNWIF) project. SNWIF is a tiny non-governmental organization (NGO) with one full-time and one part-time staff member which coordinated with local NGO's in Surat Thani, Trang and some Andaman Coastal provinces during June 1994-November 1995.

This paper presents the primary state of knowledge of the roles of women in southern Thai small-scale fishing villages, an overlooked issue in Thai society. Its ultimate goals are a). to provide basic information to interested people in order to b). promote women's roles in small-scale fishing community organizations and c). promote sustainability of the organizations.

## **Introduction**

All aspects of Thai society changed rapidly during the last three decades since the beginning of the first national plan of social and economic development in 1961. Under the economic growth and export-oriented policy, infrastructural and industrial development projects were substantially accelerated. All social groups including southern small-scale fishing communities were unavoidably affected by such a development mainstream.

Thai fisheries are in crisis due to the near-depletion of fish stocks. Depletion resulted from polluted sewage discharged from rural and urban sectors, depletion of coastal resources and exploitative fishing gears. The small-scale fisherfolks desperately struggle to get by through conserving their facing near-coastal area for their livelihoods (Kaewnoo, 2536 : 2-3).

For about the last five years many small-scale fishing communities in the southern region of Thailand have been organized to solve the problems of coastal resource degradation by setting up various projects, for example seagrass-bed conservation, mangrove conservation, saving groups, petrol cooperatives and etc.. These community organizations learn, with success and failure, to collaborate, to collectively negotiate solutions, and to build up networks for coordination and experience sharing. Since 1994 fishing community organizations in 10 southern

provinces have been organized into the Federation of Southern Small-scale Fisherfolks. It consists of 30 committee members who are representatives and leaders of the provincial-level organizations. The committee has a meeting every three months to discuss affairs and to plan for activities.

The Federation of Southern Small-scale Fisherfolks has gradually developed its work strategies with different degrees of organizational strength in the provincial-level organizations. Since 1996 the Federation has been granted DANCED (Denish governmental agency) financial support of 13 million Baht (about US\$ 520,000) for its two year-and-a-half project activities.

Women are also a crucial part in the effort, even though the roles of women in small-scale fishing community organizations are not yet recognized and accepted.

Women in the southern small-scale fishing villages take care of children, husbands and old people in their families. They are also in charge of cooking, cleaning houses and laundering for their family members. Meanwhile, women go fishing with men or work to earn family incomes. The significant roles of women in the small-scale fishing families as mother, wife, housekeeper, and income earner are not different from their sisters in other communities. At the same time, whenever there are social activities in the villages (religious functions, funerals, wedding ceremonies, mangrove reforestation project, artificial reef production and placement project, and etc.), women are the ones who inform and persuade their family members, relatives and neighbours to participate. They also take an important part in these activities. Particularly, in fishing villages where community organizations have consolidated to solve the problems of coastal resource deterioration, women play a significant role in initiating, mobilizing and implementing a variety of activities as well as men. Yet, such roles are not recognized in Thai society at all.

## **Southern Small-scale Fisheries : Waves of Changes**

The fisheries in the Gulf of Thailand were significantly changed during 1959-1963 due to the import of trawlers from Germany which became rapidly popular in Thailand. The number of trawlers quickly increased. Since 1976 Thai fishing continuously expand by overfishing and by fishing in international and neighbouring waters (Nutalai, P. et al, 1992:100).

According to the Southern Development Centre of the Office of National Economic and Social Development Board, marine fisheries are most important for the southern region due to its total coastal length of 1,670 km. Fishing is a major occupation in all coastal provinces excluding two inland ones: Yala and Pattalung. The number of registered boats in the south accounts for 60 per cent of the country. Most of them are in Nakorn Si Thammarat, Songkhla, Surat Thani and Satun provinces. More than 40 per cent of the catches is used as input for fish meal factories. Other catches are for consumption, for example shrimps, fish, squids, and crabs.

During 1976-1978 the number of the catches increased by 30 per cent each year due to the modernized fishing technology. However, since 1979 the annual increase rate is only 10 per cent. During 1993-1994 the joint fisheries venture with Indonesia increased the catches by 12 per cent per annum (The Southern Development Centre of ONESDB, 1995:40).

The following information indicates the changing trend of southern Thai fisheries that small-scale fisherfolks have to invest more in fishing boats. An increasing number of them turn to aquaculture due to the rapid depletion of the marine resources and the deterioration of coastal resources in the south.

According to the 1990 fisheries census, there were 63,091 fishing households in the southern region which accounted for about 68 per cent of all Thai fishing households. Within 5 years the fishing households increased by 7,335 units which mainly included aquaculturing and fishery laboring households. Southern fisheries tends to shift their direction from natural fishing to aquaculturing for exports.

In 1991 the number of Southern registered fishing boat was 12,154 units which accounted for 54 percent of the national total. The highest numbers of fishing boats



were in Nakorn Si Thammarat (2,543), Songkhla (1,779) and Surat Thani (1,396) respectively (The Southern Development Centre of NESDB, 1995:29).

The analysis results of the 1990 marine fisheries census are as follows:

- The number of more than 60,000 fishing households with 498,929 members accounted for about 1 per cent of the national population. Seventy-three per cent of the fisherfolks were small-scale ones with off-board-engined boats. Eighty-five per cent of them or about 30,000 households of small-scale fisherfolks lived in the south.

- In 1990 the number of fisherfolks without fishing boats decreased 50 per cent from 1985 (from 3,208 cases to be 1,595 ones), while the number of those with off-board-engined boats increased 7 per cent (from 26,891 cases to be 28,814 ones)

- The number of trawlers in the south accounted for 54 per cent of all in Thailand (3,857 vessels), while ones with push nets accounted for 53 per cent (790 vessels) of those in the country (Naweeya, N. , 1993 : 19 - 21).

The decrease of the catches in Thai waters directly affects many thousands of small-scale fisherfolks and their families. The modernized fisheries not only reduce the fish numbers, but also invade into the fishing areas of the small-scale fisherfolks who use simple fishing gears for their subsistence and income earning.

Moreover, the southern small-scale fisherfolks are also affected by the decrease of mangrove forests. The exploitation of mangrove forests for various activities, especially for shrimp farming during the last 10 years, is a major cause of the forest depletion in this region. At present the 1 million rai of the remaining mangrove forest area accounts for about 12 per cent of the southern forest land, but accounts for about 93 per cent of the mangrove forests in Thailand. Most of the southern mangrove forests (91 per cent) is in the western coastal provinces of Pangna, Krabi, and Satun. The other 8 per cent is located in the eastern coastal provinces : Nakorn Si Thammarat, Surat Thani and Pattani.

Within the last 13 years, the mangrove forests were rapidly depleted. Before 1979 the depletion was caused by charcoal concessions, and during 1979-1987 by several development projects including infrastructural construction, aquaculture, expansion of settlements, and mining. But since 1987 the major cause has been shrimp farming which also brings about conflicts in community resource uses, particularly among rice farmers and fisherfolks who originally live in the southern communities.

During 1979-1993 about three hundred thousand rai of mangrove forests were depleted at the rate of 23,000 rai per year. The mangrove forests in Pangna were depleted most at the rate of 6,614 rai per year, compared to those in Satun (3,517 rai per year) and Chumporn (2,608 rai per year) respectively (the Southern Development Centre of ONESDB, 1995:21).

After 1990 the dense areas of shrimp farms in the eastern coast were polluted, particularly in Nakorn Si Thammarat and Surat Thani. Therefore, the shrimp farming businesses have been transferred to the western coast including Kan Tang, Pa Lien, and Yan Takao districts of Trang province; then, Satun, Pangna, Krabi and Phuket respectively (the Southern Development Centre of ONESDB, 1995:50).

The above-mentioned changes in the southern Thailand fisheries are also reflected in the following part of the changing phenomena in some small-scale fishing villages.

### **Southern Small-scale Fishing Communities : Amidst the Waves**

According to some fisherfolks in Surat Thani and Trang provinces, before the last 30 years catches were abundant, but the market was uncertain and prices were low. Therefore, it was not economically rational to invest in modern fishing gears. Within the last twenty years fishery technologies have been rapidly developed in the villages, and the price of fish has also gone up rapidly. Since then, small-scale fisherfolks have conflicts acutely with the trawlers and push nets which illegally invade the 3 km near-shore areas. Since 1972 the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives has proclaimed to prohibit push nets and trawlers fishing within the 3 kilometre near-shore areas because their fishing equipments would destroy seagrass bed and coral reefs which are marine spawning grounds. However, the uncontrollable invasions drastically diminish the catches. Despite the law regulation, the enforcement is still far from reality. Thus, the small-scale fisherfolks livelihoods are severely affected.

Since 1961 Thailand's marine product exports increased constantly. Thailand has become an outstanding marine product exporter ever since. As a result, the fishery

commercialization accelerated investments in modern fishery technologies in all groups of fisherfolks. They competed in capturing more fish for higher incomes. The fisherfolks with least capital had to get loans for investments from village fish brokers so that they could get more catches. Fishing for subsistence was not viable any longer. Their fishing earning had to cover specific expenses, for example loan payment, production costs, and payments for modern household necessities : radio, television, refridgerator, and electric fan (Fishing Community Integrated Development Project , 1993 : 80). In addition, due to the enforcement of the 1970 United Nations Marine Pact, Thailand lost its benefit in international waters which accounted for 300,000 square miles. Thus, some fishing boats had to illegally intrude into the 3 km near-shore areas and detroyed the coastal resources. Moreover, the production costs, particularly petroluem, were much higher since 1983. Therefore, many fisherfolks tried to reduce the costs and make more profits by illegal fishing. These factors substantially deteriorated coastal resources and decreased the catches. In 1980 about 30 per cent of trawlers had to give up fishing due to the failure to cover the costs (Fishing Community Integrated Development Project, 1993: 69 - 71). But for the fisherfolks with least capital, some of them have to migrate to work as labourers. Other could hardly turn to other alternatives, but put more efforts into fishing. Then, they have to financially depend on village fish brokers.

The underprivileged fisherfolks in a number of southern Thai small-scale fishing communities have tried to organize to tackle their own problems with support from local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, the degrees of organizing strength are varied due to different internal factors including the capabilities of leaders and the extent to which the village is exposed to capitalism. Villages with convenient transportation systems, land speculations and shrimp farming business are complicated with internal conflicts and difficult to be organized. Additionally, local NGOs are also a significant factor contributing to community organization's streugth. Although the villagers initiated their own conservation activities due to particular pressures of their livelihoods, the budding community organizations could not gradually grow up unless the local NGOs played an active role in supporting them for a certain period of time. Otherwise, the villager groups would temporarily exist only to tackle urgent problems from time to time. Nevertheless, the significant learning experiences the community

organizations gained from their collective activities would enable them to gradually develop themselves to be people's organizations in the long run.

## **Division of Labour between Women and Men in Fishing Communities**

Fishing activities are categorized into 3 stages as follows : pre-harvesting, harvesting, and post-harvesting. The different participations between women and men in each stage are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Division of Labour between women and men in village fishing activities**

Activity	Twenty years ago		At present		Note
	women	men	womn	men	
<u>Pre-harvesting</u> Buying boat/ boat engine	◐	●	◐	●	
Buying petrol	●	◐	●	◐	Because women spend longer time at home than men.
Buying nets	●	●	●	◐	Because women spend longer time at home than men.
Cooking food	●	◐	●	◐	Sometimes men cook in the boat.
Binding nets	●	●	●	●	Not very different.
Mending nets	●	●	●	●	Not very different.
Worshipping boat spirits	◐	●	◐	●	Women prepare food, fragrant powder, 3 kinds of fragrant flowers, while men go to invite male neighbours and spiritual intermediaries.
<u>Harvesting</u> Going fishing	●	●	◐	●	Depending on types of fishing gears and family conditions
Netting	●	●	◐	●	
steering		●	◐	●	Boat engine is quite heavy for woman.
<u>Post-harvesting</u> Taking catches out of the nets	●	●	●	●	- If fishing boat returns to shore after fishing, women and men have to work together as fast as possible to go fishing again.

Activity	Twenty years ago		At present		Note
	women	men	womn	men	
Catch processing	●		●		
Selling catches	●	◐	●	◐	- Men go to sell catches in the district before boating back home - Women sell catches to villiage fish brokers.
Money Managing	●	◐	●	◐	women and men tend to share decision making in big expenses.

Note The size of dark circle represents the degree of the activity.

According to the above-mentioned table, the roles of women in village fishing activities could be discussed as follows:

1. Pre-harvesting The roles of women in twenty years ago and at present are not obviously different. Mothers or grown-up daughters cook food for family members, buy petrol for going fishing in the next day, and bind nets (by combining nets, strings and metal together to be a complete fishing gear). These activities either reduce expenses or earn extra income. Women also mend used nets and prepare supplies for worshipping boat spirits. Nevertheless, women bind and mend nets less than before. It may be because fisherfolks tend to use more ready-made fishing nets and because some kinds of nets - including crab gill nets - cannot be mended after they are torn.

2. Harvesting : Women go fishing more than before. The fisherfolks have to compete in extracting the depleting marine resources to earn most incomes and cover the higher costs. Meanwhile, household labour is also decreasing because younger people move out to seek for other jobs. In this respect, the roles of women are determined by various factors including types of fishing gears (Table 2), the number of household labour and the household economic condition.



**Table 2 Types of fishing gears and users**

The fishing gears which are widely used among the Southern small-scale fisherfolks both in the Andaman Coastal and the Gulf of Thailand areas are as follows:

Fish gears	Female users	Male users	Note
- Crab gill net	✓	✓	- Most popular, men steering women netting
- Shrimp trammel net	✓	✓	
- Bream long line	✓	✓	
- Bream gill net	✓	✓	
- Squid trap	-	✓	
- Squid cast net	✓	✓	
- Shrimp push net	✓	✓	- Men steering
- Mackerel gill net	✓	✓	
- Stow net	-	✓	
- Seabass encircling net	-	✓	

Note: The couple tend to go fishing together to reduce fishing wages, or sometimes because of lack of male labour in the family. A mother may go fishing with her son. For couples with young children, their neighbours or parents would help take care of the children.

3. Post-harvesting : The present roles of women are not different from the ones in the past, particularly in managing the earnings from the catches. Women are in charge of saving and taking care of expenses. However, we should not conclude that women are more influential than men in making decisions on household expenses. Although women tend to decide what to buy for household consumptions and for children, and women keep the money, the decisions on a large amount of expenses are primarily and mutually made by both women and men.

Moreover, the livelihoods of the small-scale fisherfolks mainly rely upon the natural environment. The decision making and the division of labour between women

and men in fishing activities are closely related to environmental factors. Thus, the study of power in decision making between women and men should focus on household phenomena caused by external situations affecting the prevalent life styles.

In addition, the data confirm the existing perception in Thai society that women are the ones who manage household expenses. Therefore, the crucial issue in promoting women's roles in the long run is how to alert them to the dangers of the mainstream consumerist ideology which subtly degrades environments at all levels. Once alerted, women as the regulators of household consumption could play a significant role in all aspects of environmental conservation.

Moreover, according to an academic who has been actively involved in community-based project activities to prevent and solve drug addiction problems in the southern small-scale fishing villages, drug addiction is a serious problem threatening almost all fishing villages. At least ten to a hundred of young male teenagers and men in each fishing village are addicted to different kinds of drug ranging from marijuana to heroin. A solution is possible only when their mothers and families accept the problem and cooperate in tackling it. The important issue is how to promote women's roles as mothers and sisters together with men to solve this problem in the communities.

In summary, women in southern small-scale fishing villages have been actively playing many roles for a long time. When they are young, the girls help their mothers do household chores and look after the younger brothers and sisters. As single women, they help take care of household livelihoods and share their mothers' burdens. Women also help bind and mend nets, and go fishing with men. Then, when married, they have to add the burdens of being wives and mothers on their shoulders. Within the acute situations of marine and coastal resource deteriorations, and competition for the limited resources among small-scale fisherfolks themselves and among the small-scale and medium-scale fisherfolks, the poor small-scale fisherfolks with debts and simple fishing gears are pushed into a corner. As such, women in these deprived families have to take part in solving these problems shoulder to shoulder with men.

Women work very hard in the dry season, particularly when crabs are abundant. Some days they have to work from morning to midnight. In the monsoon season, even though they cannot go fishing, women still work as hard in their households as in the dry season.

However, it is necessary to quantify working hours and financial contributions of women and men in fishing families with different kinds of fishing gears over a long period of time to gain a systematic understanding of the sexual division of labour between women and men.

The Andaman coast has more mangrove forests and more islands with variegated resources than the western coast. This difference allows fisherfolks to use more kinds of fishing gears than those in the Gulf of Thailand in both the dry and the monsoon seasons. Both men and women could earn their living or reduce their expenses by using simple fishing gears in mangrove forests or canals. Meanwhile, the fisherfolks in the Gulf of Thailand areas are severely constrained by geographical limitations and degradation of coastal resources. A large number of them have to move out to seek for jobs in the monsoon season and to work as wage labourers in shrimp farms. That is why the level of debts of the fisherfolks in the Gulf of Thailand areas is higher than the one of those in the Andaman coastal areas.

In addition, young women in some fishing villages work as wage earners in canneries or cold storage factories due to the regular incomes. Moreover, they could hardly financially rely on fishing any longer. There are certain aspects of social changes in fishing communities affected by daily waging life styles which necessitate further studies.

There is only one research studying about Moslem women in Pattani province who work in factories. It found that the small-scale fisheries households suffer economic problems due to the drastic fishing decrease in the Pattani Bay caused by trawlers. Therefore, the women have to commute to work in the urban factories. They also adopt urban culture into their daily activities which bring about some changes in life styles. Yet, the changes have not seriously affected the social norms of the Moslem village (Lerdrit, 1991: 103).

## **The Role of Women in Conserving Coastal Resources in Southern Small-Scale Fishing Villages**

Southern small-scale fishing villages have been seriously affected by mainstream development. The deterioration of coastal resources include mangrove forests, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and marine organisms. The deterioration is caused by exploitative fishing gears and uncontrollable expansions of shrimp farms. All the kinds of catches are transferred from village fish brokers to the town brokers. Then, they are sent to both urban consumers and processing factories to be finally exported. Like the catches entangled in the nets, the fisherfolks are endlessly trapped in a spiral of debts with the village fish broker. Meanwhile, women themselves have to shoulder three types of burdens : In production work, they work hard along with men in all steps of fisheries activities. Women are also in charge of reproduction work by taking care of children and the old in their families, laundering, cleaning houses, and cooking like women in almost all societies. Moreover, they have been involved in the process of community organizing to tackle the problems of livelihoods for their families and communities.

Three women's group meetings were held. Women agreed that the families and the community could get by using only the fertility of coastal resources because the more catches they could get, the more earnings they could gain for their families. The women were concerned with the problems of coastal resource deteriorations which directly affected their families' livelihoods. Therefore, they concluded that men and women in all families had to be organized to solve these problems. People either had to take action themselves, such as placing artificial reefs in the sea, or they had to request that government agencies solve the problems such as by submitting an official appeal to the chief of district to direct the police to arrest the illegally encroaching trawlers and push nets.

Nevertheless, the women regard the duty of taking care of the family members daily lives as their primary responsibility to be fulfilled before participating in community activities. They also relate this significant role to the sustainability of the

community. However, when crisis call for prompt actions, they would temporarily leave their families behind to take part in the community activities. Additionally, the women regard working shoulder to shoulder with men in the family as pleasure and pride.

From the SNWIF project experiences in coordinating local NGOs, we could see that the southern small-scale fishing community organizations have implemented a variety of projects to tackle the problems of coastal resource deterioration. The projects are as follows :

1. The protection of rights in using coastal resources

There are different cases in this respect : The Chao Mai villagers protested against the national park land designation over their preoccupied land in 1994, The Tha Chana fisherfolks were organized to submit an official appeal to the high-ranking officers to prohibit illegal trawling and push nets within 3 km offshore in 1994. The fisherfolks also produced and placed artificial reefs to protect the encroachment of trawlers and push nets.

2. The rehabilitation and conservation of degraded coastal resources

The examples of this category are as follows: The Chao Mai villagers implemented the seagrass bed and dugong conservation project in 1992-1995. The artificial reef project of Tha Chana fisherfolks was to both protect their rights in coastal resource using and to rehabilitate the resources at the same time. The mangrove reforestation project of Ban Pra Muang and Ban Mod Tanoy villagers in 1993 and the one in Ban Klong Rang in 1994 are also the cases.

3. The development of quality of life

Saving groups, petrol cooperatives, income generating groups and religious group for community voluntary development are included in this category due to their aims of developing the villagers quality of life for self reliance and solidarity. There are such projects in almost all villages but with different degrees of strength and achievement.

In fact, these three categories of projects are interrelated in a process of community organizing to strengthen itself in the long run. The community organizations have gradually grown up due to their learning experiences and the support

of local NGOs. They are connected into networks of small-scale fishing organizations at district and provincial levels, then set up into the Federation of Southern Small-scale Fisherfolks in 1994. The executive committee of the Federation comprises 30 members who are representatives from fisheries community organizations in 10 provinces. During these two years the Federation has been developing its work strategies by coordinating with different organizations in government and private sectors. Since 1996 the Federation has been granted 13 million Baht by DANCED (the Danish government agency) for developing and strengthening the southern small-scale fisherfolk organizations for two years and a half.

Throughout the consolidating process of the community organizations, women have been playing several roles as follows:

1. Leader

Only one woman leader is evident in the community organization of Ban Chao Mai in Kan Tang district, Trang province. She played a crucial role in initiating and implementing conservation and development projects in the village. She was the only woman who was involved in all steps of the village protest when the government attempted to designate the villagers' occupied land to be national park land in 1993.

However, despite her outstanding potential and comprehensive understanding of conservation issues, the development of the community organization and her role are limited due to the village conflicts of interests caused by business investments from outsiders.

2. Core group

Women are essential components in the core group of community organization in almost all villages. They actively take part in planning, preparing and implementing any activity of the community organization. Women of some villages in Tha Chana district were so upset with the difficulties caused by illegal encroachment of trawlers and push nets that they led the villagers to make a request to the government officers. In addition, some core group members, men and women alike, agreed that having women to negotiate with the counterparts could decrease the degrees of violence and confrontation.

3. Participant



There were as many women as men who helped mix cement and sand together for producing artificial reefs and dumping them into the sea. Women also worked side by side with men in the mangrove reforestation projects for community forests. Additionally, those who prepared food and served water were always women. In this respect, women energetically played different roles both in front of and behind the scenes.

#### 4. Supporter

Although women are sometimes too obliged by their daily household chores to participate in the community activities, they are influential in persuading (or forcing) men to take part in the projects. Apart from this, women also provide support in cash or kind. In some families, men were quite indifferent to the projects. But they could not resist women's influence so that they had to participate in the activities.

Women play a crucial role in community conservation projects because they are concerned with the hardship their families and communities have to experience due to pressures and conflicts in natural resource uses and deterioration of coastal resources. The women are also worried about their children's future and want to conserve community resources for the next generations. This kind of caring motivates Thai women in several underprivileged social groups to become the forefront of the current Thai environmental movement (Atiphodi, k., 1995: 198).

However, within Thai social constraints of sexual inequities, the above-mentioned outstanding women's roles in fisheries communities are certainly attributed to specific factors to be identified.

### **Factors Contributive to Women's Prominent Roles in Small-scale Fishing Communities**

According to the interviews of leading women in community organizations, the factors that contribute to women's prominent roles in the small-scale fishing communities are as follows:

1. The accumulation of participating experiences in social activities.

The leading women in the fisheries community organizations have experiences in participating in community organizations initiated by governmental agencies i.e. housewives' group organized by the Department of Agricultural Extension in 1987, voluntary women's group for rural development organized by the Department of Community Development in 1991, and voluntary group for village public health organized by the Ministry of Public Health in 1977.

Some villagers complain that these women's groups are mandatorily set up without taking village needs and conditions into account. The women members are always ordered to serve the officers in governmental functions. However these activities provide chances for women to leave their limited household areas to broaden their horizons, to learn about group expressions, and to expose to various information; which are significant in developing their self-confidence and expressive capabilities.

In addition, these leading women also gain experiences from other social activities i.e. selling, managing family's small business, and etc.. Their skills and personalities developed from interactions with society outside the household are somehow related to their outstanding roles in community organizations. In particular, the woman leader in Ban Chao Mai spent almost two years working with an academic as a research assistant in her village before she became an outstanding leader.

## 2. The support of men in the family

These leading women are all supported by their husbands or fathers, who are also involved in community activities, to play an active role in the community organizations. Some women have their husbands to help them doing household chores or taking care of children while they are away for community activities. Other couples with grown-up children accompany each other for public participations. Such support renders women self-confident to work for public betterment without fear of being unaccepted by family and community.

# **Women's Constraints in Playing an Active Role in Fishing Communities**

However, despite their strong intention to contribute to community betterment, a great number of women could not actively participate in the community organizations due to the following constraints:

1. Women's overburdening

As mentioned before, women are always in charge of household chores and earn money for their families, so that they are overwhelmed with different kinds of work all day, especially in the dry season. Therefore, they could hardly play an active role in the community organizations.

The critical question is how to manage conservation projects without adding more burdens to the women's overloaded shoulders. In other words, how could men help share women's household loads so that both men and women could equally and cooperatively participate in conservation activities?

2. Women's lack of self-confidence

In general, women are less confident in public expression than men due to their specific socialization. Most rural women never speak in public get-togethers. Even when they strongly want to express their ideas or to ask questions, they could hardly do so.

Nevertheless, once women begin to learn from introducing themselves in a meeting, then they gradually practice expressing ideas about their project and other issues. By this way, they come to gain self-confidence through the process. Some women eventually develop into articulate speakers.

Self development for women best begins with small-group activities with appropriate styles before the women are exposed to other larger-scale meetings. The role models of woman leaders at different levels of forums are also very significant in this process. It is concluded from the SNWIF project experiences and those of other NGOs that group process is an important condition for women's self development.

3. Women's lack of power

A great number of women have to comply with their husbands' decision in spite of their own wills. Some women in the small-scale fisheries villages were originally active to initiate or participate in community projects. But when their

husbands disagreed, they had to give up the ideas and limit themselves merely to household work as before.

The issue is how to educate men to understand and accept that women also have an equal chance to participate in community activities. In this respect, men in NGOs and community organizations have to include gender issues into their project activities.

## **Policy Implications**

The above-mentioned issues lead to specific suggestions :

### 1. Women's learning opportunities

It is necessary that women be organized into groups concentrating on particular issues to develop team working and leading skills. Moser, c. (1993) suggested that grassroots women need a space of their own. "...This space, both physical and conceptual, is the prerequisite for identifying needs and then mobilising to meet them. Women's groups offer a legitimate forum beyond the private, domestic world ; membership of an organization offers an initial substitute for lack of bureaucratic know-how, and inexperience with public discourse..." (Moser, C., 1993:183).

Nevertheless, it is crucial that this group organizing not repeat the same mistakes of the ones organized by the governmental agencies.

Moreover, the group organizing should not be limited to women only because community betterment will be achieved by collaborations of both men and women.

### 2. To promote men's understanding and acceptance of women's roles.

It is important that men share women's burdens and support women to play an active role in the community organizations. In addition, men in the community organizations should keep their family members, especially their wives, informed of their project activities as well as to encourage women's participation.

### 3. To strengthen community organizations and encourage women's participation in all steps.

Men and women need to learn to develop the community organizations together throughout its prolonged process. On the other hand, the strength of community organization is mutually interrelated to the one of women's group.

According to the SNWIF project experience, we find potential women's groups in the communities only where the community organizations are relatively strong.

4. To formulate a long-term policy and plans in promoting women's roles.

It is necessary that the networks of small-scale fisheries community organizations and the Federation of Southern Small-scale Fisherfolks formulate long-term policy and plans to systematically promote women's roles in community organizations. It is hoped that a larger number of women will actively participate in the small-scale fisheries organizations and the networks in the future.

5. To begin women development projects in local NGOs

According to the final project meeting with the few NGO staff members who had a long-standing coordination with the project, it is necessary that local NGOs assign specific female staff to work specifically in promoting women's roles in fishing communities and developing the existing networks of women's groups. The female staff have to closely collaborate with their colleagues who are already too overburdened with many project activities to implement the women development policy originally stated in their plan.

However, provided that it is not yet likely for NGOs to employ particular staff for women development project for the time being, they should begin with identifying potential staff to play an active role in this area of work. Then, the staff should have a chance to develop their skills and gender perspectives for future activities when chances rise. In addition, the local NGOs should closely coordinate with women development NGOs in Bangkok to initiate some activities for women's groups and women's group networks.

Indeed, the process of strengthening community organizations and women's groups, and of building up their networks consumes great time and effort for all concerned parties. Yet, amidst the surging waves over the southern small-scale fisheries villages, women and men of the communities have already collaboratively steered their boat towards their destinations, regardless of the distance and obstacles.

## Reference

1. Atiphoti, K. and Phuang-sum-li, A. (eds.) 1995. Thai Environment : Thai Women's Visions. in *Thai Environment, Thai Future : Collection of Contemporary Views*. Bangkok : Networks of environmental Organizations'95. (in Thai)
2. Fishing Community Integrated Development Project, 1993. *Thailand : Thai Fisheries - A Descriptive Study*. in Dias, C. and Joseph, C. (ed). *The Fisherfolk of Asia : Justice Denied*. Bangkok : Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD).
3. Naweeya, N. *The Image of Thai Fisherfolks by the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Centruy : Analysis of Thai Fisheries from Marine Fisheries Census 1990*. Lae Tai (Nov.-Dec. 1993). (in Thai)
4. Nutalai, P. et al., 1992. Document for "Thailand's the 3rd seminar on the Conservation of Natural Resources and Environment. (31 October-1 November 1992). Bangkok : Organizing Committee. (in Thai)
5. The Southern Development Centre (The Office of National Economic and Social Development Board), 1995. *The overview of the southern Region 1995*. Songkhla: ONESDB. (in Thai)
6. Lerdrit, S., 1992. *Thai Moslem Women and Industrial Factories in Pattani : The Study of Impacts on Life styles*. Pattani : Institute of Arts and Culture, Prince of Songkla University. (in Thai)
7. Kaewnoo, A. *Crisis in Thai Fisheries and Three Development Streams*. Lae Tai. (Nov.-Dec. 1994).
8. Moss, J., 1993. *Half the World, Halt A Chance*. UK, : Oxfam