

## Asia/ Malaysia

### Learning from each other

*Fishworkers from Penang Inshore Fishermen Welfare Association (PIFWA), Malaysia learned a lot from a recent workshop organized in the Trang province of Thailand*

**By P Balan, Adviser to PIFWA**

Members of Penang Inshore Fishermen Welfare Association (PIFWA), Malaysia, have just come back from a workshop *In the Hands of the Fishers* organized by Yadfong Association in Trang, Thailand with the support of Mangrove Action Project (MAP). The workshop was held from 6 to 9 November 2000 with the participation of fishworkers from Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. Six fishworkers from PIFWA attended the workshop.

The workshop objectives were:

- to allow fisherfolk from the region to share ideas and experiences about efforts to stop destructive fishing methods that threaten the livelihood of in-shore fishing communities;
- to share experience in the form of case studies of co-management or community- based coastal resources management;
- to present ideas for alternative sustainable livelihoods that could be adapted by groups or individuals to suit the needs of a fishing community;
- to form a network amongst groups in the region to exchange knowledge, skills and support for sustainable management of coastal resources.

Clearly, where women's involvement is concerned, we have learned a lot from the workshop. For example, during our field visit to the villages of Ban Laem Makham and Ban Toh Ban, we were shown how women's groups have been empowered through the setting up of handicraft centers for generating extra income. The income from the handicraft center enables women to earn a living from a renewable resource, within the fishing village thus keeping the social fabric of the family and society intact.

We were also informed of the many uses of the *nipah* palm, a plant found in abundance even in our own area, Penang. The *nipah* palm is a wetland plant that can be harvested for its leaves, bark and roots.

We foresee a possibility of using the *nipah* palm as a way to help improve the living standard of the women of fishing communities in Penang and we are currently active in pursuing this matter.

The exposure we received from the successful organization of women of fishing communities in Trang, Thailand has motivated us to implement a similar programme here in Penang. We will keep you informed of our latest activities.

For the World Fisheries Day, we organized a mangrove replanting activity in Sungai Chenaam, Seberang Perai Selatan and Penang. Part of the mangrove has already been cleared to make way for shrimp farming by agencies of the State and the private sector. Since healthy mangroves are crucial to a healthy stock of marine resources, and, therefore, to the livelihood of fishworkers, the replanting activity was well-received and supported not only by the men but also the women of the fishing village.

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