

# Filling The Gap Between Theory and Practice

**While Thailand has been proactive in implementing the SSF Guidelines, much work is required to join social development with sustainable fisheries**

In 2015 all UN member states, including Thailand, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that include: Ending poverty, improving healthcare and education, tackling climate change, reducing inequality, and stimulating economic growth. Thailand has committed to achieving these goals by 'leaving no-one behind', thus laying the groundwork to achieve social and economic equality and acting as an impetus to transition from an 'upper-middle income' country to 'high income' country, as outlined in Thailand's 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037).

SDG 14 is titled 'life below water'. It calls for the sustainable use and conservation of oceans, sea and marine resources, including small-scale fisheries. It acknowledges the critical importance of marine resources to poverty, employment, nutrition and food security, among other things. That said, years of over-exploitation has caused unprecedented damage. Though a natural check like the COVID-19 pandemic has relieved the pressure, this goal acknowledges more needs to be done.

Thailand is a Southeast Asian nation with a tropical climate and an abundance of diverse water resources. This makes Thailand one of the world's major exporters of shrimps, fish and fish products, generating roughly 20 percent of the total food product export. Moreover, an abundance of small-scale fisheries provide for local consumers.

Recent growth in the fisheries sector has brought about severe challenges, like the degradation of marine fishery resources and ecosystems because of overfishing. The importance of SDG 14 to Thailand is obvious, as is the necessity of clear regulation and intervention. Thailand has adopted a number of international and national policies, including the FAO's Voluntary

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Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). These focus on strengthening the capacity and resilience of small-scale fishing communities, including access to resources and markets.

Research seeks to review legislation informing social development in Thailand, as also to ascertain how social development can help aid the conservation and sustainable use of marine, coastal, freshwater and brackish water diversity. While the study examines issues of poverty, inequality, employment, decent work, social inclusion, occupational health and safety, education, livelihoods, sanitation, water, clean energy, climate change, domestic violence and the family institution, this article highlights

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Village health volunteers trying to reduce mosquito menace in a fishing village in Thailand. There has been an effort to specify social inclusion in policy statements, but in reality, there are still vast gaps that make this discussion purely theoretical

the key findings. Conclusions were drawn through document reviews and analysis, focus groups and national workshops.

#### **What the research found**

In 2019, the government's policy statement was ratified and features twelve major policies and twelve urgent policies that help the country meet the SDG goals. Importance is placed on social inclusion, community empowerment and developing public health and social security systems that cover suitable education, healthcare

and employment. Since ratification, progress has been made in the realms of social security and social development.

The findings suggest that the poverty rate has decreased from 9.85 per cent in 2018 to 6.24 per cent in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruptions to economic growth, employment and poverty reduction. That said, further gains have been made with the development of the 'health security for all' programme that provides all citizens, including artisanal fishers, access to medical care. In addition, progress has been

made in terms of access to education (all children are guaranteed access until at least grade nine), public supply of utilities and sanitation.

Some progress is obvious. But more needs to be done to put theory into practice. Artisanal small-scale fishers, ethnic fishers and women fishworkers have historically been left out of national fisheries policies and decision-making processes. This has largely been attributed to gaps in government data sets, for example, on women's roles in the artisanal fisheries value chain. This shows that even though there has been an effort to specify social inclusion in policy statements, but in reality, there are still vast gaps that make this discussion purely theoretical. The consequences of this exclusion have led to a lack of knowledge and opportunity, especially with reference to the development of capacity building policy.

Further, the drive to achieve the targets outlined in the SDGs has led to the growth of development gaps and overlapping priorities. The government has indeed been promoting investment for economic growth based on marine and coastal resources (as outlined in the major policy five), such as the construction of sea ports, industrial estates and the tourism service industry, this growth concurrently removes access to the resources fishers rely on for a living, depriving them of their livelihoods. Further issues of access have arisen due to the promotion of aquaculture and mariculture as an enterprising opportunity.

The research that informs this article concludes that Thailand has comprehensive measures in place to achieve the goals set out in the SDGs, but in practice they lack coherent transition from theory to action.

### Research recommendations

Considering the broader social and economic development, the following suggestions will enhance the position of small-scale fishers, both men and women:

- Developing a database system covering the whole population, ensuring it is updated and maintained regularly. It will provide

an informed baseline for future policy and intervention.

- A review of the concept of development based on the principles of shared national benefits and balanced conservation and rehabilitation practices.
- Development of an area-based approach to management of fisheries and natural resources.
- Prioritisation of good governance within resource management.

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- Reevaluation of the policies on fisheries and natural resources and environmental management. They currently lack linkages to social development policies and implementation.

Adoption of these recommendations will lead to the development of policy which truly leaves nobody behind. 📌

### For more

#### Sustainable Development Foundation

<http://sdfthai.org/>

#### Marine Fisheries Management Plan of Thailand: A National Policy for Marine Fisheries Management

<https://fisheries-refugia.org/regional-inception-workshop/inception-presentation/21-21-fr-inception-workshop-marine-fisheries-management-plan-thailand/file>

#### The Right Form of Rights

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#### Guardians of the Sea

[https://www.icsf.net/images/yemaya/pdf/english/issue\\_34/1649\\_art01.pdf](https://www.icsf.net/images/yemaya/pdf/english/issue_34/1649_art01.pdf)