



PROFILE

Taking the lead—Ramida Sarasit

Following the tsunami, a fisherwoman becomes a community leader actively involved in rehabilitation and restoration activities

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Ramida Sarasit, 48, is the president of the Southern Women Fisheries Association and Secretary for the alternative livelihood group of Libong Island, the largest island in Thailand's Trang province. With its picturesque red-brown beaches and ubiquitous rubber trees, Libong Island is home to a small Muslim fishing community whose mainstay besides fishing is rubber farming. The island once had healthy mangroves along its coast but due to human activity, the mangroves that once served as natural barriers to large waves and intense winds are today in a depleted state. The impact of mangrove loss

was felt mostly acutely in 2004 when the island was ravaged by the Indian Ocean tsunami which killed many and destroyed vast amounts of property.

Born and raised in Libong Island, Ramida, like many other women of the island, was once a fisherwoman. Her talent for leadership however manifested itself in the aftermath of the tsunami, when the devastated community faced the difficult task of rebuilding itself.

Ramida's involvement in rehabilitation and restoration activities engaged her in a process of community involvement that has grown only stronger with time.

Ramida is deeply committed to increasing the participation of women in the community life of Libong Island. Over the years, the Southern Women Fisheries Association as well as the other women's groups she is associated with have been involved in various community works such as building check dams, mangrove rehabilitation, the pursuit of alternative livelihood and agro-forestry. Ramida's priority is to facilitate the formation of a forum for women-in-fisheries communities that will, she hopes, encourage their greater participation in the fisheries, take up the issue of food security and work towards the wellbeing of community members.

However, according to Ramida, the greatest problem that the women face is the lack of access to public policy making. The government has failed to involve the people in marine and coastal resources management, which is marked by the absence of women from coastal communities at the local planning level, a disregard for their knowledge and skills as well as a rejection of their rights over natural resources.

Clearly, a hard battle lies ahead for Ramida and the women of Libong Island. **M**