

# **Transformation of Gender Roles and Sustainable Development**

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper is an attempt to examine gender and sustainable development within the system of natural resource management in a Karen community as a whole, with special emphasis on the role of gender in resource management. This paper will also look at how the women adjust themselves in terms of sustainable natural resource management amidst current mainstream development aiming at modernization and economic growth, and state policies of natural resource management relating to the globalization system.

During the past forty years, so called “growth-oriented development” has caused many adverse effects for people and the environment. Natural resources, such as soil, water, forest, and biodiversity, are decreasing (Mccaskill, 1997). Under “the auspice of development”, the Thai state and other organizations, have influenced and impacted on various aspects of the ways of life, land use patterns and economic structure as well as the way of thinking at a community level. Moreover, government officials assume that humans and forest can not coexist. They think that communities located in the protected forest areas should be relocated (Chupinit, 1971, Somnuk, 1996, in Prasert, 1997).

In response to environmental degradation, the Thai government has initiated a forest conservation policy with natural conservation projects. Under these policies of project human beings and natural resources are separated and dichotomized (Miles and Shiva; 1993). Consequently, their patterns of land use and resource management have drastically changed (Suppachai, 1998). In short, modernization affects communities at all levels and yields serious impacts on the way of life of different classes, gender, race, and ethnicity in these highland communities.

Communities that once lived peacefully are being exploited to sustain consumerist capitalism with full support from the state. Under the state and market mechanism, local people lose their potential access to natural resources and are thus marginalized. Among the Karen, natural resource management has a direct relationship with women, as women have an intimate knowledge of soil types, seeds, edible and medicinal plants. Women are the caretakers of bio-diversity. They play a key role in production especially in her family farm, as well as managing the household economy (Kanjana, 1978; Waralak, 1997; Yos, 1998). Thus the integrated production system introduced to the highland communities has been less sustainable because their production is dependent on seeds from the outside, and lacks gender perspective for understanding natural resource management. This is true because mono-cultural production has to depend on means of production from outside. In this method of farming, men play the major role in production (Agarwal, 1992).

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

This study, Transformation of Gender Roles and Sustainable Development is an examination of changes of the roles of women and men and the subsequent adjustment in natural resource management. The main concept used in this study is "Gender role", especially the gender power relationship, which has undergone various changes and adaptations in each era. The changing relationship relates to and impacts on families and communities. Moreover, gender role correlates with the power relations of production, beliefs system, and the domestic and public spheres. When the production and belief systems as well as domestic and public spheres have changed, the gender role also changes accordingly.

Furthermore, this paper focuses on the local rights and knowledge of a community in a close relationship with the environment. It also studies the adjustment of the community in natural resource management that separates relationship between human being and the environment on the change of mode of production that totally depends on external means and market. It studies the impact of state policies on natural resources management which lead to a loss of biodiversity and resources. The study examines the increasing internal differentiation resulting from the penetration of market mechanisms, and also how an increasing differentiation among social classes, has an effect on gender roles and the transformation of gender relations. The study also shows how women adjust themselves for sustainable natural resource management at the household and community level.

The conceptual framework will integrate a complex structure of the relationship which include functional relations of physical resources, structural relationships between various social groups in local communities, and processual relationships within subsistence and commercial systems. Moreover, the structural relationships is quite essential in understanding the management of new technology that can leads to the most four important goals of resource management:, i.e., social equality, resource stability, and sustainability and gender equality. (Kanok and Anan, 1993).

## **3. The Characteristic of the Village Studied.**

Ban Dok Dang is a Karen community in the Hod district, of Chiang Mai Province. It was established 64 years ago. There are 75 households in this village. At the beginning, Ban Dok Dang was rich in natural resources; soil, water, forest, and different living organisms. When the population grew, the need for resources also grew. In addition, neighboring villages felled trees and cleared forest for opium and cash crop cultivation, which required large tracts of land. This land clearing caused drought.

There was a project to build a road into this village to transport cash crops to market, and there were policies on farmland control, suppression of opium cultivation, declaration of conserved forest and watershed area to prevent the loss of the remaining resources. These policies seriously affected Ban Dok Dang. Its mode of production based on local wisdom harmoniously and reciprocally relating to the environment has undergone changes. Villagers, both men and women have turned to

cash cropping, such as the production of cabbage, tomato, chillies, and cucumber. This farming system has to rely on capital, technologies, and the market.

As a result, villagers are indebted and have to seek non-farming employment to earn additional income. The younger generation has to move to live in urban areas. At the same time, the villagers have set up a rice bank, women's group, consumer co-operative shop and an association for the conservation of the environment. There is how the villagers adjusted themselves to cope with such a situation.

#### **4. History of Production and Resource Management**

In order to gain a better understanding of the impact of the transformation of gender roles on the resource management of Ban Dok Dang area, some historical background to the present situation is provided. It can be divided into three periods, as follows :

**4.1 Period of Subsistence Production (1936-1974).** The agricultural production of the villagers is self-reliant and for subsistence. They forage for forest products and hunt wild animals for consumption as well. Furthermore, some of the Karen men go out to work as laborers in logging companies all over upper Northern Thailand. Their way of living is related to nature and “the Absolute” or “Guardian Spirits” which is expressed through rituals in the production and passage of life. Furthermore, the “Hif Hkof” is not only a conductor in the rituals but also a governor of villagers and resources for consumption as well.

Their system of resource management is based on their beliefs and experiences accumulated as “local knowledge or wisdom”, manifesting as practical regulations for utilizing and balancing nature, as well as respecting “the guardian spirits” who reside on the watershed. But later, the Thai state increasingly starts to control resources, especially the forest, so that Karen resource management is changed according to the centralized law and policy. The state not only declares centralized and restricted forest Acts, but also sends governmental officials to control the forest, as well as encourages the highlanders to grow cash crops using modern technology.

**4.2 Period of Transition to Commercialization (1975-1992).** The policy of state control over resources in this area started with 2 projects; a soil road construction project and pine plantation project. And later, because the state would like to solve opium growing, deforestation, and swidden cultivation problems, the state encourages highlanders to grow cash crops and practice permanent cultivation.

It was inevitable that the villagers would start growing cash crops, because of the state policy of land control as well as population pressure. Anyway, their commercial agricultural production depends on means of production from outside. Later, most of the cash croppers became in debt to the Chinese traders of Mae Tho village. At the same time, their health and the environment became contaminated from the use of chemical fertilizer and insecticide.

**4.3 Period of Commercial and Local Reaction against Forest Encroachment of Thai State (1993- Present).** In this period, the villagers as well as the environment

were exploited intensively. And the cash crop production depends on outside factors and market mechanism absolutely. However, the villagers who can grow cash crops are the villagers who have a large amount of cattle and cultivation fields: upland and terraced fields. Consequently, the cash crop production causes class differentiation in the community according to the amount of cultivation field, income, and debt. Four sub-classes of the Karen; are created, rich, middle, poor, and landless households. Anyway, they are all poor, but the way of manipulation is different among them.

At the same time, the villagers had to confront the state land controlling policy. The state intended to declare “Mae Tho National Park” over this area and a neighboring area in 2002. Infection to this policy, as well as former forest management policies of the state, the villagers were forced to establish the “Environment and Nature Conservationist-Village Group” to revise their own knowledge and wisdom and express their ideal of “real conservationists” to the public.

## **5. Resource Management in Local Control Dimension.**

The Karen practiced rotational rice cultivation by selecting a field that had lain fallow for 6-10 years. The pattern of the Karen agricultural production in upland field is the so-called “short cultivation and long fallow”. It means that the Karen use a swidden area for dry rice cultivation for one year only. In 6-10 years, they return to the original plot again. However, terraced wet rice fields has also been an important cultivation practice area for this community. But there is no clear oral historical evidence to say when land was first cleared for wet rice farming.

In the local control of resource management, the “Hif Hkof” (village spiritual head man) has the authority to allocate land communally held to individual households for cultivation on the usufruct basis. However, terraced wet rice fields as well as orchards, gardens, and household compounds are considered to be privately owned, because they are used continuously by certain households and can be inherited and sold. The Karen also recognize rights of encumbrance which give an individual a claim to another land because of the person’s relationship with the landowners. This rights is inherent mainly within the family or close kinship. Non-kin households can also ask for temporary use rights which depends solely on the generosity of the rights-holder. (Anan, 2000)

The traditionally villagers manage resources according to the relationship between human being and nature (Charean,1997; Yos, 1999). The Karen classifies ‘forest-land’ into types and uses several categories for the classification. Village or House Construction Area is mostly situated at the foot of a hill. And there is usually a small stream flowing near the village. This area is not allowed to be bought or sold. When the village moves into and out of the village, the “Hif Hkof” will allocate an area for the “new comer” according to the tradition. They have to “consult” the “Guardian spirits” before the allocation.

Ritually utilized Forest Area surrounds the house construction area. When a baby is born the Karen will take the placenta, which is put into a bamboo tube, to tie onto a tree in this forest. And the tree can not be cut forever according to their tradition. Moreover, the villagers go to pick up forest product in this area such as

wood-fuel, vegetables, and wood for house construction.

The village Burial Area is close to the ritually utilized forest area. The Karen believe that the souls of their ancestors always remain in the burial forest. If the souls or the area is disturbed such as by felling trees or cultivation or hunting there, the disobeyed will get sick with various kinds of illnesses or may meet natural disasters.

The cultivation Area can be divided into 3 types: swidden, terraced field, and garden. The Karen uses usufruct rights for swidden, and private rights for terraced field and garden. But the villagers can forage for natural product in the terraced field and gardens. The prohibited Forest Area is a watershed or “head of water” area. The Karen believe that the guardian spirits reside in this area. The villagers will not cut trees or cultivate or hunt there (Prasert, 1997).

Before cultivation, the “Hif Hhof” will perform the “Nif Sau Hkof”, or New Year ceremony, usually in February. The purpose of this ceremony is to request the blessing of the guardian spirits of the land, forest, mountain, and other auspicious beings to protect cultivated crop as well as their living. Another part of this ceremony is that it is an opportunity for the villagers to discuss where and how the crop will be cultivated as well as how to exchange labor. After this ceremony is performed, the “Hif Hkof” will be the first person who cultivates the crop, and then the villagers follow.

When selecting a new swidden plot Karen will make a sign or cut some trees to show the others that this area is occupied already. Moreover, the Karen believe that they have permission to cultivate the land only for one year. The “Hif Hkof” will contact “Te k’ ca Kau k’ ca” to ask for the permission for members of the village. The occupying family will do some traditional activities or rituals for using the occupied land separately. The roles of “Hif Hkof” and the elder group are village land selection, acceptance of the new comers, and conflict resolution in the village as well. There are 2 ways to become members of the village: birth and marriage. Village membership is not only having a right to use resources, but also having a duty for resource management, such as making forest fire breaks and exchanging labor.

Wild vegetables and herbs are foraged from forest surrounding their community. And they also can forage a crab, fish, shellfish, and other aquatic animals in small streams near their community. Moreover, the Karen believe that they should not use or cut some kind of plants. If someone disobeys the regulations, they will be punished by “spirit”. They do not buy and sell this kind of food, but exchange or distribute according to the Karen proverb: When we eat, we eat together. And when we starve, we starve together. Nowadays, the Karen of this village still practice according to this proverb, especially for the poor such as widows and orphans.

In hunting, the Karen hunter is allowed to kill only one bear, one gaur, or one rhinoceros within one year. And there are a number of animals, which can not be hunted such as gibbons, giant hornbills, vultures, woodpeckers, minivets, crows, owls, hawks, swallows, and pythons. The Karen relate these animals to folk tales and emphasize that if someone kills these kinds of animal, they will get bad luck or sickness or scarcity of production. Furthermore, there are regulations for foraging for forest products

## **6. The Centralization of State Control over Resources.**

The Thai state began to control forest resources, especially in the North, by declaring the Forest Act of 1897 after the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) has been established for 1 year. The substance of the Act is to force all logging concessionaires to make a contract with RFD directly. On the other hand, the declaration of the Act not only seized concession power for “the Lanna Royal Family”, but also to start the period of centralization of resource management by the Thai state.

Later, the Thai state declared the Forest Act of 1941 to control the forest. This made the villagers of highland communities become “the intruders” although they had cultivated in the forest for generations. Only terraced fields were accepted and Thai state guarantee according to Land Code Act 1954, and have to be appealed to related government agency for use. But most of the Karen do not go to appeal because they do not understand law system of the Thai state.

In 1956, the Ministry of Interior declared that the state would not allow anybody to utilize forest areas because they are state property. Later, the Thai state declared the Reserved Forest Act 1964. This declaration caused the alienation of highland community because they could not control resource management, especially the forest, anymore. Only the Thai state had power on resource management all over the country.

At the same time, the Thai state collected local maintenance tax operated by the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior. This caused confusion among the villagers. The villagers thought that the Thai state accepted their rights on the land because they paid local maintenance tax. Some housewife and villagers thought that this receipt had a value and shown the right to their land. Later, this document was nullified.

In 1961, the Registration Section of Hod District went to survey citizen registration at Ban Dok Dang and appointed an official village-headman. Furthermore, the Registration Section united 5 small villages; Ban Dok Dang, Ban Om-long Nai, Ban Om-long Klang, Ban Mai, and Ban Mae Tho Noi, into one official or administrative village. Hpa Tij Koa Kae, the socio-religious leader, or Hif Hkof, was appointed to be the first official village-headman and fulfilled, acted in this job for 25 years.

Being the official village-headman of the “Hif Hkof” increased the power and duty of the “Hif Hkof”. Anyway, this is a strategy that the traditional leader can control resource management of the community in the new context by holding a concurrent post. Nowadays, The “Hif Hkof” and the official village-headmen are not the same person. Therefore, the “Hif Hkof” has less power over resource management, especially the disputes over land rights, because the official village-headman and forestry government official hold the power according to Thai law instead.

In the village, the exchange or the contribution of labor depends on the type of

work. For example, the women play a major role, in almost every step of the swidden farming rotation. At the same time, the men help in terms of a heavy work, such as swidden cutting, seed dibbling, fencing, etc. The women are recognized as the owners of the rotational swidden fields. Normally men play the major role in the irrigated rice field.

Currently, the role of men in subsistence production has decreased and shifted into the commercial cash crop production system. At the same time, some women, after they have completed their major work, intend to work as wage laborers both in the community and in the city to help the men make additional income for the family.

The rich families have less of a subsistence production system and are more involved in market production. At the same time, the restriction policy of the government strongly implements and reinforces the conservation of the forest. The remainder of the subsistence production in rotational swidden farming is the main responsibility of women. The participation of men is based on physical ability. Actually, in former times, there was no division of labor between women and men.

Because of the state policy on forest preservation, the villagers of Ban Dok Dang have had to decrease the period of rotational shifting, or upland cultivation, from 6-11 years to 1-3 years. Furthermore, they are presently decreasing their rice cultivation area but increasing their cash cropping area in upland fields.

In upland rice production, both men and women work together in every step of the production according to gender physical and types of work. In periods of subsistence production, men and women share access and control over resources equally. Furthermore, they consult each other before making a decision about their resources.

Traditionally, in upland cultivation, the men take responsibility for hard labor such as finding the field, cutting big trees, drying cut-trees, clearing the burned field, growing rice, harvesting, and carrying the rice to the granary. The women help as supplementary labor, and take responsibility for time consuming and elaborate work such as weeding, foraging for food in the field, and seeding.

The women spend more time than the men in upland cultivation because it is their duty to be responsible for domestic food consumption. Therefore, they have to take care of upland cultivation in a good manner for their family consumption. There is a saying that the upland cultivation belongs to women and the irrigate rice cultivation belongs to men (Karen idiom heard during field research, 2001).

When the villagers from the rich and middle class households enter commercial production, especially cash cropping, the women take main roles in every step of the upland rice production while the men help to work only occasionally on hard jobs. This is because the men spend most of their time on cash cropping that is grown year round. Men do not help women as they did in the past. This is different from the poor and land-less households, in which men and women still work together in both upland fields and cash cropping.

## **7. Gender Roles and Resource Management at Household Level**

Resource management at the household level in Ban Dok Dang is not merely related to production patterns of each category of households for their survival. Community members of Ban Dok Dang also practice a pattern of common property management. This is related to the use in production and sustainable conservation of resources for the community at present and in the future. In addition, natural resource management of Ban Dok Dang Community is also an expression of ideology and belief in nature and the “Absolute” that supports everyone in the community.

Resource management at the household level in rich and middle-class households have greater access and control over their resources, because of their original assets of inherited resources, as earlier mentioned, such as rice field, upland farm and cash crop plots. These households reduce the size of upland farm to expand cash crop production.

In addition, the rich can act as agents for moneylenders and villagers. At the same time, these rich households also borrow from moneylenders and BAAC to buy inputs to improve their livelihood. Furthermore, their farmland is near water resources and their soil is more fertile, which is good for cultivation. Therefore, these households are the one engaged in intensive commercial cropping. Although it needs high investment, risks disease and pests, and unstable price as fixed by middlemen and outside the market, they continue to be engaged in intensive cash crop production.

Concerning gender roles in the rich and middle-class households, in the past women and men used to help one another in their work or would do the work for others. At present, domestic work is solely the task of women. Women will also take part in cash crop production, which increases their burden and workload. At the same time, women have less free time after their work on highland farming and rice cultivation. Therefore, food production activities, such as seed collecting from farmlands, and domestic work, such as spinning and weaving, will decrease or disappear. The most serious effect is that women are losing their rights of access and control of natural resources which is the source of their life and their family. In addition, the men have access and control over the resources in the domestic sphere at the household level because they now exercise power in making decision on financial matters. The more they are involved in commercial agriculture, the less women have status as decision makers. Therefore in the richer households women’s role has become inferior to the men’s. They also work harder than men.

In contrast, the poor and land-less households continue to lead their life in a traditional way, such as practicing upland rice cultivation. However, access and control over resources is limited because they do not have access to the means of production for commercial cropping. What they can do is to earn wages in this production system. However, apart from being the households which are able to maintain the way of life that depends on nature, they also help to maintain the balance of nature. Whereas the rich and middle class households are active in inducing a transformation in resource management.

The poor and land-less households continue to do farming on uplands growing rice and varieties of vegetable for domestic consumption without depending on outside factors. However, the state policy to declare the area of Mae Tho National

Park over their farmland is another factor that pushes the poor and land-less households to seek alternatives by earning wages or sending their children into outside labour market in order to survive.

Households of all socio-economic statuses, as discussed, are dependent on natural resources, especially soil, water and forests. This is evident in their close relationship to and the balance between nature and human beings. This relationship has been disturbed by external factors, namely cash crop cultivation, resulting in several adverse effects on community members. The community is trying to adapt and maintain its identity and potential to manage natural resources at a household level amidst these current conditions.

### **7.1 Gender Roles and Resource Management in Community Level**

Resource management at the community level is based on the relationship of human beings with nature and the belief in the “Absolute” dwelling in nature. It is this value that gives life to human beings and nature. Both women and men in the community have indigenous knowledge about resource management, which is closely related to the life cycle of human beings from womb to tomb. It is related to nature, land, water, forest and bio-diversity, based on a management system with an ultimate goal of conserving and managing natural resources. This knowledge has been practiced from the past until present. Although this knowledge is decreasing, the villagers still practice it for expressing their beliefs and the conservation and management of natural resources. This is a dynamic practice because there is modification of tactics to respond to the current social context through their local knowledge.

Natural resource management is traditionally expressed in rituals to pay respect to the “Absolute” dwelling in nature and human beings, such as the ritual of *Nif sau hko* at New Year and a ritual offered to the spirit of the irrigation canal. It is an affirmation of the value of nature to human beings who have to foster good and reciprocal relationships, leading to forms for discussion and sharing of ideas on resource management. In the ritual, the males from rich and middle class families are the leader while females from all types of households arrange the food for offering. The Buddhist and Christian women of both rich and poor households have become attendees while the men play a major role in the ritual. At the same time, the new beliefs are also strengthening women ability to understand the social situation and organize a women’s movement in the community to foster their capacity in the present day.

In new models of natural resource management, the villagers have integrated traditional beliefs of the community into the new pattern of resource management. An example of this is the mountain tap water project and rice donation merit fund. These activities, including the conservation and management of natural resources, are a reaction of the villagers’ resistance to the state encroachment over the resource policy which prohibits the people to cultivate their own land. The villagers have set up a social movement in the community in collaboration with various groups and organisations to maintain its existence in the present day society. This newly initiated organization is established by the modern-educated with support from outside agencies such as Chiang Mai Diocesan Social Action Center (DISAC-CM).

At present, the women are more involved in these organizations and some of the women have become leaders of these organizations. They have the dimension of values inherited from the past, which give new meaning and practice in the present age. At the same time, they have drawn lessons from resource management and development in the past. This had helped the villagers to be responsible for their own community and pushed them to set up a village committee comprising village representatives of both women and men from rich, middle class and poor households in developing their village in a holistic manner. In the end, this will strengthen their community and maintain balance with nature.

### **7.3 The Changing of Gender Roles**

Nowadays, the Karen gender role in resource management is changing rapidly and distinctively. There are 3 main factors that cause the transformation of the Karen gender roles in resource management at Ban Dok Dang.

*First*, the changing mode of production, from subsistence to commercial production cause class and gender differentiation in Ban Dok Dang. The result is that men in the rich and middle class can access and control the production process and natural resource management both in household and community level. In the past, men and women from every class worked together in upland fields. Now women are spending more time and work in every step of the production process, while men are involved only in hard work and land selection of upland cultivation.

Although the men from rich and middle class households are intensively involved in cash cropping, women work both in upland, terraced fields and also help men in cash cropping. The access and control over the means of production, especially money and finance decision making, which used to be in the hands of women, now belongs to men.

Even though the women in every category do not take a main role in commercial crop production, they have established the “Saving Group” and the “Cooperative store” for helping each other in the economic dimension. In other words, because of the “saving group” and the “cooperative store” they are supported and able to survive in the changing economic system, both at the household and community level.

*Second*, religious conversion causes the changing of gender roles. In the traditional belief system, the Karen, both men and women, are participants in rituals. In the new religions of Buddhism and Christianity, they become attendants of the rituals. This changing of belief and practice has impacted the “*Hif hko*”, because commercial production not only emphasizes money and market, but also does not value the relationship between human beings and nature. So the role of the “*Hif hko*” in practicing the rituals has decreased. The “*Hif hko*” has to practice the ritual in a hurry. At the same time, women who used to play an important role in traditional beliefs have become attendees in the new beliefs, which are male oriented, while men take a major role as a representative of “the Absolute”.

The women who converted to “the new belief” do not ignore traditional practice. They still play their role such as arranging things for offering in the rituals

and participating in the rituals. The new beliefs give the women a chance to have more education so that they can analyze and understand social situations which cause their serious problems regarding their rights of access and control over their resources. At the same time, the women have more opportunity to leave their village which also puts them in a disadvantageous position. They are taken out of the local context thus there is no longer any continuity in terms of mother- daughter relationship, thus no continuity of local knowledge transition. Furthermore, the decreasing access of upland cultivation also adds disadvantages to women.

At the same time, the villagers are continuing to practice traditional rituals by reconstructing the new pattern of resource management from the traditional, which emphasizes the relationship between human being-nature and absolute beings; such as the mountain-water supply ritual and the Kong Bun Kao (Rice Donation Merit). These activities are participated in equally by both women and men from each socio-economic category household taking part in different roles.

*Third*, Thai State policy, especially land control, impacts on Karen gender roles. Thai state policies are mostly written according to the main stream development concepts, for instance, separating human beings and forest, prohibiting rotational shifting cultivation, and declaring more and more forest conservation. It has affected the women's role, especially the women from the poor and land-less households who practiced the rotational shifting cultivation. From these policies, the Karen women created a new strategy by grouping women for women activities, by bargaining with forestry officials, and by participating with men to fight for their rights in community natural resource management. The Karen women dare to protect their rights and land. They attended the meeting with the Karen men in bargaining with forestry officials for the right to manage resources based on their local knowledge. Furthermore, they asked for participatory resource management for keeping their identity and the survival of the community.

The following are cases of gender roles and resource management at Ban Dok Dang in strengthening their rights and knowledge to sustain the balance of nature in the community.

### **Case 1. Gender Roles in Communal Activity**

In 1995, the housewives of Ban Dok Dang, from 55 households, cooperated to establish the "housewife group" comprised of rich, middle class and poor households and supported by DISAC-CM. The DISAC-CM encourage them to make supplementary income for the family, and educate them about the wider society and raise the awareness of woman's role in family and community.

The first activity of "Housewife group" a Saving Group for use in emergency. The activity emphasizes "helping the distressed and relieving the suffering" because they need cash for investment in commercial crop production. They use this money as a "revolving fund" for use in emergency, educational fee for the children, cash crop investment, and former debt payment. The housewife is very proud of this activity because they were able to pay money back to the DISAC-CM and it is very clear that "the female saving group" benefits the villager both at a household and community level

After this, the housewives of Ban Dok Dang established a cooperative store and sell products at a fair and just price for responding to the needs of the villagers. At the beginning of the establishment, they cooperated as a whole village. Later, they divided into 2 groups according to the female saving group.

In the traditional rituals, the women's role in the community is hidden. But in modern organization, the women's role has its own space such as the women saving group and the cooperative store. These two spaces are not only for saving money, selling goods, and meeting among the members, but also for discussing about how to make a living, especially upland cultivation. Presently, the women are increasingly becoming leaders in the public sphere to protect their rights over cultivation land.

### **Case 2. Gender Roles in Community Resource Management**

Nowadays, the natural resource management of Ban Dok Dang has changed both in pattern and gender role perspectives. In the modern pattern of resource management, they establishes written regulations, and structured the organization so that the village committee has only 1% women. This is different from the past, when women worked with men, side by side, to preserve nature.

This activity is influenced from the outside, both by GOs and NGOs. The villagers established the "The environmental and natural conservationist-villager group" organized as a modern organization: consisting of a committee, written regulations, activities, and so on. The establishment is to show the public that the Karen are environmental by nature.

### **Case 3. The Women's Strategy in Bargaining with Forestry Officials**

The national park officials first come to visit the village in 1999. At that time, the head of the national park official held a meeting to explain the national park policy. Both men and women attended the meeting and asked to cancel the "Mae Tho" national park declaration because it is a resource they depend on to make a living. Furthermore, the village has lived in the same place for generations and has used the forest conservatively.

The state answered their request by declaring "Mae Tho" a national park in 2002. The villagers are very worried about this declaration, especially how they can make a living in such a situation. The villagers think that their life will be worse off. Because some of them have experienced running away from forestry officials while cutting trees on upland fields, and some have presented a petition about cultivation land to national park officials, and waited for the result. However, the villagers are ready to appeal or to find out a way to maintain their rights. The women also discuss this issue both formally and informally.

The women view that upland cultivation may damage nature, but at the same time, the villagers preserve nature. Their rotational shifting cultivation does not harm nature. Moreover, the villagers know that if the forest is damaged, it will impact their

life which is dependent on nature. Therefore, because of their belief and need for survival, the villagers have consciousness and awareness in their role and duty to protect the forest, at least for themselves.

The housewife group prepared food for forestry officials who visited their community for the meeting. This is one strategy used by the Karen women for bargaining with forestry officials. They used their own space to appeal for their fundamental rights in making a living by cooking upland rice for the officials. When the officials had finished their meal and went out to talk and thank the villagers for the meal. One of the housewives from the middle class asked the head of the National Park “Is our rice delicious?” The answer was “Yes, it’s very delicious”. Then, the housewife said, “The rice you eat is upland rice. Nowadays, our land is limited. If our rice is delicious, please allow us to practice upland cultivation for our family. This is the only land that we inherited from our ancestors”. The head of the National Park replied that “No, because it is state policy to not allow anybody to practice any cultivation in the national park area. The state has made a restricted area.”

The women said “Even if we refer to our ancestors that stayed here for generations, as well as talk about population pressure at the present time, to ask for our right to stay here, the RFD officials do not listen to us. The state still limits our cultivation land.” Both men and women ask themselves who will have control over the forest once it is declared as a national park. They also wonder if this is a common problem affecting the whole of Thailand.

This phenomenon shows the women’s role in the political sphere by bargaining with forestry officials for their rights of cultivation land. When there is permission, the villagers grow rice in the remaining area and meet the shortage of rice. Therefore, they go out to work as a wage laborer to earn cash for buying food and rice. The villagers question what is the standard of development, which emphasizes the resources of the wealthy, not human resources, and those who have a shortage of rice.

Later, on April 8, 2001, the national park officials had made an appointment with the villagers to explain the national park declaration. The officials informed them when they surveyed the forest by helicopter, they saw a large amount of burned area for upland cultivation. Therefore, the officials think that the villagers do not respect forest law and regulation, and destroy the forest. The officials view that upland cultivation causes enormous deforestation.

Furthermore, the forestry officials informed them that when they surveyed the forest area by foot, they met the villagers cutting trees for upland cultivation. Therefore, they seized agricultural instruments such as swords, axes, and spades, and asked who the practitioner of this field was. The villagers, 8 females and 2 males, accepted that they were the practitioners, and asked for the rights to cultivate in this area.

During the meeting, the officials explained that “the national park officials who come to visit the village are going to help the villagers demarcate the cultivation and forest area. This demarcation benefits the villagers. And in the future, the villagers can get land title. Because there is no clear demarcation, that the state does

not give land title to the villagers yet. Therefore, we have to survey the area clearly. Anyway, the state will definitely declare 'Mae Tho National Park' by the year 2002. Presently, we are in the stage of surveying and preparing the decree."

In the meeting about natural resource management the officials explained that: "The villager has traditional regulations for natural resource management. But the RFD has The Act that gives authority to the RFD to manage the forest area. The declaration of the national park, to conserve our forest forever. And this forest area can also be operated as a tourism area, and it can make income from entrance fee for the state. And this income will be the state budget for protecting the forest. Furthermore, the villagers can get incomes from tourism too by selling some forest products or handicrafts. It is a supplementary income for the villager."

The villagers, who attended the meeting, were interested in the declaration of the national park over their community area. Both men and women intensively inquired with the officials. The villagers asked the officials for the right to stay and make a living in the forest as well as to preserve the forest by local knowledge. And the villagers had already established the "Assembly of Wild Life and Forest Conservation" to deal with this activity.

The villagers informed the officials that they had established a village committee to take responsibility for forest conservation. And they cooperated with the state growing trees in the forest as well as protecting from forest fires and practicing according to the law. Therefore, they asked for the rights of natural resource management as they did in the past. But the officials refused and referred to Thai law and state policy on natural resource management that the villager has to accept.

From the meeting, it can be viewed that the standpoint of the national park officials about natural resource management is based on the assumption that natural resource is valued material that can be exchanged, bought and sold. The way to keep the forest fertility is that human beings have to move out of the forest. This idea is opposite to the villagers' idea. The villager view natural resources as not only valued material, but also the source of the villager life. It has spiritual value and is related to the way of life of the villager. The villagers have made a sustained living by utilizing nature in a sustainable way until the present.

Therefore, the concept of natural resource management to the villager, comes from the basic needs of the villager that focuses on human being not only depending on, but also preserving natural resources. The discourse against the main concept of the state resource management not only disregards natural resource management as a whole, but also ignores traditional gender perspectives. Because in the past, the Karen resource management was related to gender roles that was the main factor supporting the survival of human being and nature. It differs from the present where natural resources are exploited and eventually damaged.

Furthermore, the discussion and bargaining of the Karen women in the meeting was interesting because the Karen traditionally let men contact outsiders while women avoided this matter. In this meeting, the Karen women dared to discuss with the officials. This shows that the Karen women had to enter the outside-community-public sphere because the survival of their families and the community

was under threat. They had to fight side by side with men for the right to their land.

## **8. Major Findings of the Study**

Based on the results and experiences of this study, there are four major findings.

**8.1** Presently, the resource management under Thai state policy on restricted forest areas, causes the villagers to lose their local knowledge and local control over natural resources. The villagers have to change from traditional practices to modern law and regulation. The villagers are excluded from cultivating land in upland fields, because of the state demarcation for conservation areas. It causes a serious effect to the villagers, especially the poor and land-less households who lost the power to access and control natural resources. The lose of their local knowledge in utilizing and keeping the balance of natural resources is related to the production in the up land field which is the only source of their survival.

At the same time, the state policy in controlling natural resources caused a change in gender role of resource management. Women, who practice rotational shifting cultivation, preserve nature and bio-diversity with local knowledge. The women play a main role in every step of the upland fields cultivation for their consumption. When the state announced the conservation area in the upland areas which is the cultivation area. Villagers, especially women, lost their power to access and control resources.

The women are responsible for upland fields which have a limited area and they also risk confronting state officers. Some of the villagers are going out to work as wage laborers after cultivation, while the men mainly concentrate on the commercial production and don't have time to cultivate in the upland fields as in the past.

**8.2** The cash crop production which is promoted by both capitalist and the state causes class differentiation amongst the villagers of Ban Dok Dang, because some of them have more access and control over their resources than the others, especially with terraced and upland fields that have irrigation water. They have capital to invest in cash cropping such as cattle and elephant. The rich and middle class household are therefore growing cash crops.

The rich and middle class villagers of Ban Dok Dang, mostly grow cash crops using their resources intensively. This trend leads to unsustainable development. The rich and middle-class households have access to the means of production, they have to use a large amount of money for production. Some of them use their own capital but some of them lend from the Chinese traders but they all have to confront price fluctuation. Finally, they are all in debt. Consequently, some of them go to work as wage laborers, both inside and outside the community. The poor and land-less households not only cultivate traditionally, but they also go to work as wage laborers after the rice cultivation, as the middle-class households do. This means that in the changing context, the villager is forced to go to the city and works as a wage laborer more and more.

**8.3** The promotion of cash crop production, and the new technology, causes gender differentiation, because this type of production is appropriated to men. The

men can access and control the resources in the domestic sphere at the household level by exercising power in making decisions on financial matters. In the past women and men would consult each other for making a decision on agriculture production and women would take care of the money. Presently, men play the main role in every step of cash crop cultivation (especially selling and financing management) in keeping and allocating money for the family consumption and debt. Women have less of a role in resource management because they are only involved in a few steps and know very little about family finance and receive only a small amount of the money after paying the debt.

Many of the families who entered commercial production are of the younger generation. The old generation are familiar with subsistence production and they don't like to be involved in cash crop production, while the young people are trying to practice cash crop production as an alternative way to cope with the present situation and to increase their family income. Some of the rich and the middle class households have young men engaged and responsible for household financing and make the decisions in production at the household level. The more Karen men are involved in commercial production, the less the Karen women have a role in decision making and financial matters. The women's status thus becomes inferior to the men's.

#### **8.4 The adjustment of the villagers of Ban Dok Dang toward resource management.**

There are several forms of resource management of Ban Dok Dang, both at the household and community level. Some are expressed in the form of belief, traditional practice, or ritual. The villagers organized in a modern form namely the "*Nature and Environment Conservationist-village Group*", to express their identity as "real environmentalists". Both women and men work together in this group. The villagers negotiate with the state forest officers to campaign for their rights over natural resource management. They focus on human being as a center, that can co-exist with nature and relate to nature and spirit. This is the discourse against the main concept of the state policy of resource management. Therefore, in Ban Dok Dang the villagers are adapting resource management between the traditional and modern mechanisms.

From empirical data and information, this phenomenon can be described as that the villager identifies the relationship into two modes of production: one is the traditional relationship and the other is the capitalist relationship. The traditional relationship is used for subsistence production, the capitalism relationship is used for cash crop production. This means that there are 2 modes of production system in the community. Most of the villagers of Ban Dok Dang have entered both cash crop production and also cultivate a local species for consumption in the upland fields and in the terraced fields. There are 2 systems of production for their survival under the changing socio-cultural context. The Karen use the exchange of labor for subsistent production and use wage labor for cash crop production. Moreover, while they have to decrease their rice cultivation area, they also have to increase the cash crop production area in the upland fields. Some are trying to find out sustainable ways by practicing agro-forestry, integrated farming and practicing traditional beliefs which emphasizes the relationship of the people, nature and spirit in their production. Every village has its own development the villagers are adjusting to the existing mode of production for the survival of their family and community.

The relationship among the villagers has not changed much, because the villagers have respectful belief in the absolute beings' which dwell in nature, and human beings. By helping each other through labor exchange, land distribution and

contribution to the poor people and the ritual attendant. The kinship system as well as traditional practices, are still practiced in Ban Dok Dang. They also share a spiritual cosmos with their relatives.

## **9. Theoretical Discussions of the Findings**

**9.1** In Thailand, the growth-oriented development or modernization has been the main stream concept, or theory of development for a century. However, the concept has been questioned by non-government organizations and some donor agencies since the 1970s because such development makes only the minority urban center benefit while the rural majority are still left in poverty. After the economic crash bankruptcy in 1997, the best way of development was seriously questioned in Thailand.

There are three major concepts or theories of development against growth oriented development. These concepts pay too much attention to only a certain aspect of social life at the expense of others. While, the Buddhist approach tends to focus on the individual level in contrast to the collective level as the community approach does, the community rights approach focuses on usufructs right of natural resource management.

However, the villager does not receive or accept all of the development concepts absolutely. In other word, the main stream development concept does not dominate the local concept. Villagers have selected a development concept through their awareness of which concept is most appropriate to their local concept. This has become the so called “articulated concept” emphasizing local control over natural resources. The local control is related to power relationship which are against the state power control over the resources. In the case of Ban Dok Dang, villagers bargained with the forestry office to protect their rights of local control over natural resource to utilize and conserve in a sustainable way. At the same time, they organized a village committee, comprised of both female and male representatives from each household social-economic category to take part in the committee in managing the Dok Dang village as a whole. This is a specific adjustment to cope with the changing context for the survival of the family and community.

**9.2** The use of feminist theory as like all western concepts in developing countries especially Thailand, is problematic. A conceptual framework should be applied and rethought; for instance, domestic and public spheres should be not applied inflexibly. It can be use for analyzing concepts; such as the separated spheres of men and women in western countries. There is an increasing complexity and adaptability between domestic and public spheres. In the Karen society, the two spheres overlap the roles which men and women play in the community. But it is useful to use domestic and public spheres for analyzing the changing of gender roles in the two spheres in the changing context. For instance the Karen women of Ban Dok Dang, can not be viewed as confined in the domestic sphere, because the woman’s role is not limited only to the domestic sphere. This is related to the study of Viseth(2000) on the role of women in the north of Thailand, which found that the marriage system of northern people provided an opportunity for women to perform their role in the public sphere. This means that on the occasion of marriage, both men and women are allowed to perform their role in the public sphere ( namely the communal sphere), because in reality the

women do not perform their roles only in the domestic sphere. The women are also involved in cash crop production and involved in women's activities such as the women's saving group and the cooperative store which has benefited their family and community. And presently the women of Ban Dok Dang take part side by side with men in bargaining for local rights over natural resources and become members of village committees in managing the resources and village as a whole.

Moreover, the gender difference, for instance gender roles in domestic and public spheres, does not always mean "inferior" or "inequity". The equity does not mean to decrease the difference. It rather means the acceptance of the difference of both men and women. Furthermore, the view of the Karen women of the studied area is different from the academic's view. They accept the difference of gender roles, but do not think about who works harder or is subordinate or dominate to whom. They rather think that the difference is for supporting each other. This is to emphasize that because of the different experience of the poor Karen women they do not think like the academic or urban middle class women.

Both men and women are side by side, in operating the natural conservation projects, such as forest fire control and forest firebreak making. Moreover, together they established the village committee to take responsibility for sustainable resource management.

## **CONCLUSION**

*The resource management at Ban Dok Dang is based on their belief and experiences accumulated as "local knowledge or wisdom" relating to practical regulations for utilizing and balancing nature, as well as respecting "the guardian spirits" who reside in the watershed. Both Karen men and women have equal roles in resource management. While the women concentrate on upland cultivation, the men concentrate on constructing terraced fields.*

*The resource management at Ban Dok Dang has changed according to the state policy that declares centralized and restricted forest acts, and also sends government officials to control the forest. The policy of the state control over resources in this area started from 2 projects: the soil road construction project and pine plantation project to solve opium growing, deforestation, and swidden cultivation problems. The state promoted and encouraged the highlanders to grow cash crops with modern technology and to practice permanent cultivation.*

*Once the restriction policy of the state on natural conservation was implemented, the declaration of the national park has put strong pressure on the villagers to cease their rotation swidden cultivation system. As a result the villagers are in a disadvantaged position, therefore some of them have become involved in commercial production systems. The commercial production, or cash crop production, absolutely depends on outside factors, for instance the means of production, loans and market system. The villagers who can grow cash crops are those who have a large number of cattle and cultivation fields, both upland and terraced fields. Consequently, the cash crop production causes class differentiation in the community according to the amount of cultivation field, income, and debt.*

The villagers at Ban Dok Dang, have a local reaction against forest encroachment by the government. The state intends to declare Mae Tho National Park over this and neighboring areas. Because of this policy, as well as the former forest management policy, the villagers were forced to establish the “Environment and Nature Conservation Group” to revise their own knowledge and wisdom and express their ideal of “environmentalism” to the public. At the same time, the villagers adapted and articulated the concept and the project of development in responding to the needs of the community.

The gender roles in resource management amidst the current of mainstream development aiming at modernization or economic growth, and state policies on modern pattern of natural resource management relating to the globalization system. It challenged even though the women do not have a main role in cash cropping and a decreasing role in natural resource management, the women adjust themselves and try to find ways out of their struggle. They have organized the woman’s group and established a women’s saving group and cooperative store for helping each other in the financial dimension. Moreover, the women have started to go out with men to struggle for their rights on land in out-side-community public sphere and have joined village committee members to foster sustainable natural resources.

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