

## **Improved co-management of Beung Kong Long (BKL) Ramsar Site, Nam Mao and Songkram Rivers to benefit local communities and ecosystem connectivity from the headwaters to the Mekong River**

### **Background**

In 2007, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand strengthened local participation in natural resource management. The Constitution specifically guaranteed the right of communities to conserve their traditions and to participate in the management of their natural resources. The constitution also mandated that the State shall promote and encourage communities to participate in the management of natural resources to protect the biological diversity and for the maintenance of the quality of life. This was part of the decentralization of natural resource management from national to community level. Community-based resource management (CBRM) in Thailand has been in existence for about 10-15 years, but not formally recognized until it was included into the Constitution. Government agencies and various NGOs have been facilitating CBRM in Thailand to ensure that the work is carried out in-line with national legislation.

CBRM is quite common now in Thailand. They may be flexible arrangements and not required to register each village carrying out this practice. The head of the sub-district or village headman may organize CBRM, as long as the work is in-line with national policy. Villagers tend to agree to engage in their community fisheries management, as they see the return of the benefits of their actions.

Tai Baan research is a form of participatory resource research involving community-based documentation of the local resources and their importance to village livelihoods. This concept started with forums to help villagers understand the need for baseline data and what the data are used for. Approximately 5 years ago, local Thai NGOs from the northeastern region developed the concept of Tai Baan research. The general set-up is a forum to identify topics for research; responsible parties for data collection; research methodology and materials needed (e.g. questionnaire, equipment, manpower). Then the research plan is developed along with a monitoring plan, a timeline for carrying out the work, and usually quarterly workshops for updating progress. Tai Baan research strengthens the community, allows villagers to understand the status of resources (habitats, protection zones), teaches them how to use resources, increases awareness and knowledge through hands-on activities and attending the local forums. Villages are empowered in devising solutions for themselves. The government often provides support through the provision of technical advisors and tools such as maps, posters, and educational pictures.

### **Overview of Bueng Kong Long, Nam Mao River, and Songkram River**

Bueng Kong Long is an ox-bow situated at the northern end of the Nam Mao River, a tributary of the Songkram River which in turn is one of the Mekong River's main tributaries in Thailand. In 2001, the Bueng Kong Long Non-Hunting Area was designated as Thailand's 2<sup>nd</sup> Ramsar Site. Bueng Kong Long is a narrow, permanent lake (11 km long and 1.5 km at its widest) covering 1,300 ha in Seka District, Bueng Khan Province, 5 km west of the Mekong River. The wetland is important not only for the sustenance that it provides area communities but it is also important for its biodiversity and feeding ground for birds travelling along the East Asian-Australasian flyway. A management plan is in place for wise-use of the site, but doesn't include water management usage.

Fish migrate from the Mekong via the Songkram Rivers and Nam Mao to Bueng Kong Long. The Songkram River, located in northeast Thailand, flows 420 km from the western Phu Pan Mountains in Sakon Nakhon province through Udon Thani Province before reaching the Mekong River, also contains rich biodiversity which includes over 180 species of fish, more than 100 species of birds and

vegetation, countless species of amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates associated with the wetlands and contain habitat for the Globally significant critically endangered fish including the Mekong Giant Catfish. The Lower Songkram Basin is inhabited by over 120,000 local people, the majority of which are dependent on fisheries and other ecosystem services for their livelihoods.

### **Objectives**

1. Improve understanding on monitoring fish catch, biodiversity and migration between BKL, Nam Mao, Songkram and Mekong Rivers.
2. Engage local communities in managing and patrolling fish conservation zones.
3. Develop water use management plan.
4. Raise awareness of stakeholders on development of sustainable hydropower and the importance of ecosystem connectivity.

### **Methodology**

#### **FY13**

1. Carry out research to establish baseline knowledge on fish catch monitoring, fish biodiversity, fish migration from Mekong to Songkram, Nam Mao and BKL Ramsar Site.
2. Carry out socio-economic survey of 26 target villages along Nam Mao and Songkram (includes survey of aquatic resources and non-timber forest products).
3. Initiate establishment stage of RSAT (Identify objectives, stakeholders, data needs)

#### **FY14**

1. Continue RSAT next steps (preparation, assessment, reporting) and promote to relevant stakeholders.
2. Identify and demarcate key habitat areas for fish conservation zones (FCZ) (Nam Mao, Songkram), including feeding and spawning grounds.
3. Establish regulations for FCZ; establish community patrol system (BKL, Nam Mao, Songkram).

#### **FY15**

1. Work with Royal Irrigation Department (RID) and local communities on assessing water storage and water extraction in BKL. Need to know volume, current usage.
2. Establish BKL Ramsar Site water management committee leading in the development of water resource management plan.
3. Update information on fish catch monitoring, biodiversity, migration in BKL.

#### **FY16**

1. Assess fish migration and flow connectivity of 4 irrigation dams for recommending design of future projects to include fish passages.
2. Upscale findings and expand experience on fish migration between other relevant rivers and Mekong within the wider Songkram basin.
3. Develop fish monitoring plan with Department of Fisheries and local communities (BKL to Mekong).

#### **FY17**

1. Implementation of BKL water management plan to complement existing 5yr strategic plan of BKL.
2. Upscale results from first 4 years to implement in other sites on main tributaries.
3. Begin monitoring fish from BKL to Mekong.

Through a participatory mode of implementing the above activities, local communities and stakeholders will elevate their awareness on the importance of fish conservation zones, ecosystem connectivity, and tools for development of sustainable hydropower.

### **Partners**

This project will be implemented with the following partners:

- Department of Fisheries (DOF)
- Royal Irrigation Department (RID)
- Government Provincial DOF and RID
- Government district officials
- Local (provincial) universities
- Sub-district administration organisations
- Local civil society groups
- Local schools
- Village committees
- Local stakeholders including women, fisherfolk, youth groups

### **Expected Outcomes and Outputs**

The major expected outcomes and outputs are as follows:

- Improved understanding of the baseline information on fish migration, biodiversity, catch and socio-economic situation
- Initiation of monitoring system for fish catch
- Establishment of fish conservation zones
- Establishment of water management committee and water management plan
- Pilot project(s) to test upscaling from this project to other areas in the Songkram River Basin
- Reports of the work, community posters and pictures, maps, management plan will be produced.

As mentioned above, the hands-on implementation of activities, particularly the Tai Baan research as well as training workshops will raise capacity and awareness of the villagers and district officials.