

Abstract

The objective of " Dynamics of biodiversity management in local communities of northern Thailand " is the first step in the an initiative to study the relationship between local community and biodiversity resources in the North of Thailand in Nan province. This study is to understand how communities use and manage biodiversity resources, the learning process and evolving of community adaptive systems through the use and development of local wisdom, value systems, belief systems, the process of managing resources and community organization.

As mainstream industrial development sweeps into village communities from outside the; local biodiversity resources are being seriously depleted which is threatening the ecological survival of local communities. It is necessary to understand how communities evolve a process of dealing with as well as adapting to these social and economic changes. This process serves to conserve, recover and develop biological diversity in order to ensure security in terms of village livelihood as well as natural ecosystems.

Like most communities, Nam Cham community owes its development to an abundant biodiversity resources base under the various conditions of self-reliance, common property rights, limited population, value and belief system, local wisdom, community organization and strong social institution. These reasons have supported the Nam Cham village capacity to conserve and manage biodiversity through sustainable production systems, seed selection, seed exchange and distribution, and local medicine.

The entry of main stream development into Nam Cham community resulted in enormous changes in conditions that lead to the loss of previous community cohesiveness in managing biological diversity leading to the rapid degradation of biodiversity.

As outside pressures to use village biological resources increases, the new value systems that comes with mainstream development replaced the old such as increased trade and currency system to replace agricultural production for the market instead of self-sufficiency, industrial agriculture replaced traditional crop varieties, the state forest policy minimized the rights of the community to manage natural resources, modern medicine competed with the role of the village healers. These changes also eroded the effectiveness of traditional village institutions for local knowledge such as the role of monks in temples and village elders to be replaced by the modern school and educational system. The impacts on the community from these rapid changes were increased resource conflicts between different users as villagers began using natural resources for self-sufficiency and began producing for the outside market. The poorer villages resulted to shot-term economic gains for instance through cutting trees for sale, leading to conflict with other village resource users such as farmers and orchard owners wanting to conserve forests as watershed for streams and water supply.

The outside technology and knowledge that lead to new forms of production could not provide for the recovery of ecosystems or maintain traditional knowledge systems. Among the various problems that emerged were increased debts, migration of

villagers from the village to work as wage laborers, changes in village professions, and increased consumerism.

Faced with this crisis, some Nam Cham villagers who had not fully been integrated into the market economy began to raise questions and looked for alternative to conservation and the recovery of natural ecosystems through various frameworks. Such as the initiation of the integrated farming group, committee to conserve community forests, local youth group for local medicine viewing that communities can survive as long as they can ensure the security of biological resources.

These new strategies of the village group did not refuse development and pine for old-value systems of natural resource management since the new village conditions were different. On the other hand, the above community process was an attempt to adapt traditional knowledge and the management of biological resources that existed previously through mixing with new systems of production, knowledge and ecological management.

The concept of environment mixed with the traditional value systems, and adapting ceremonies such as ordaining trees emerged in order to produce an ideology of nature conservation in a new framework. The concept of production for self-sufficiency were mixed with the concepts of trade.

New methods were adopted such as mixed cropping, and the development of management such as the establishing of new types of local organization.

The creative power of some of the Nam Cham community even though still face various problems and limitations. However, when taken as a whole, the new directions mentioned have been recognized and expanding rapidly both at the local level between neighboring villages as well as outside in terms of community development groups, academics, officials who have been supporting the process of village efforts at ecological recovery.

Thus this creative power has waved strong cooperation among different parties as an important feature in supporting villagers to have strong potential in the increased managing biological diversity to achieve the objectives of sustainable use and abundant biological diversity.

Local communities base their quality of life on traditional knowledge and biological diversity, and have the ability to learn how to effectively manage biological resources and confident in adapting themselves in the face of changes from outside.