SDM Project: Supporting and Promoting the Karen Indigenous Socio-ecological Production System in Northern Thailand
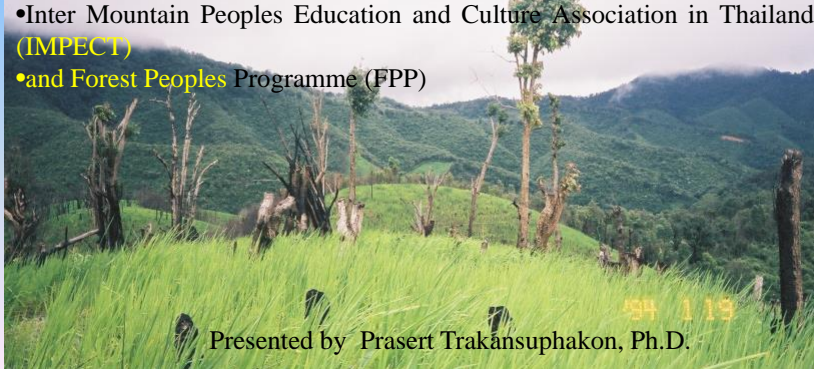(January 2014 - February 2015)

Supported by: Satoyama Development Mechanism
The Institute for Global Environment Strategies (IGES)
Collaboration between:
•Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples (IKAP),
•Karen network For Culture and Environment (KNCE).
•Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture Association in Thailand (IMPECT)
•and Forest Peoples Programme (FPP)

Presented by Prasert Trakansuphakon, Ph.D.

The Wisdom of the Karen in Natural Resource Managemnt (NRM)

Local wisdom (examples):
"Live with the water, care for the river, live with trees, care for the forest"

"One Gibbon dies, seven forests become sorrowful and one horn bill will die, seven Bayan trees become regretful"
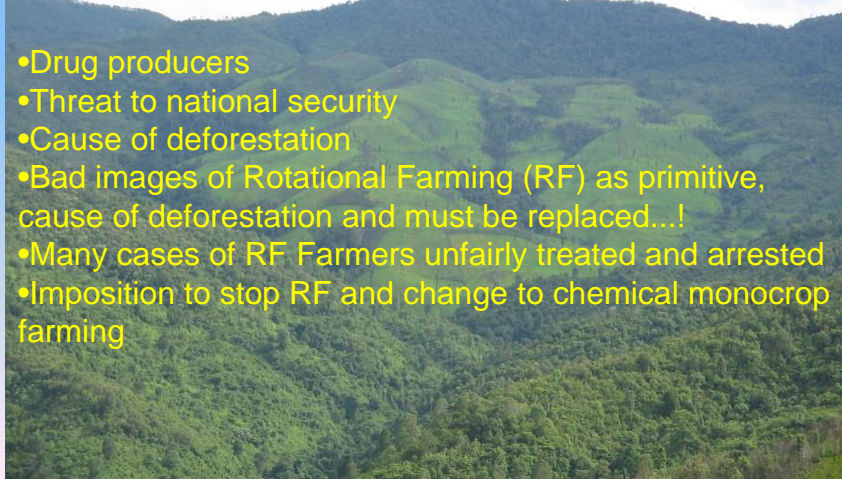
NRM Rituals (examples):

Duf dei pau htoof (Umbilical cord trees & forest)
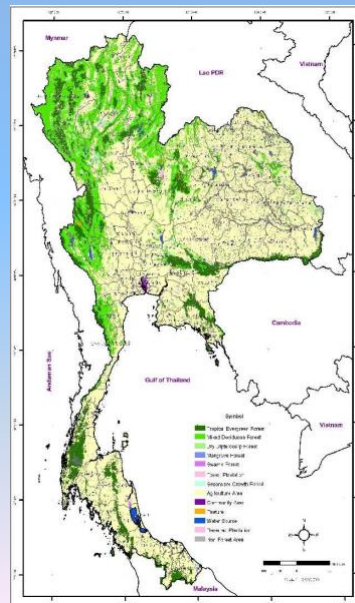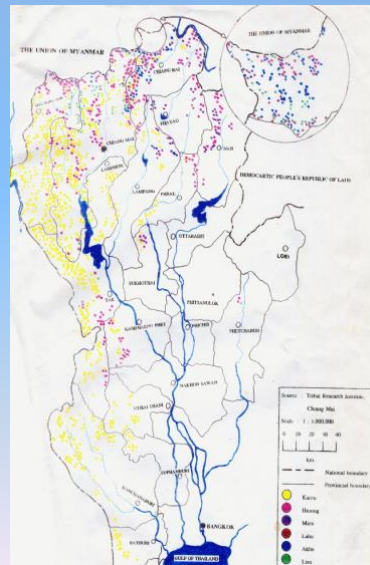Deif hti rai kauj (Forest Offering)

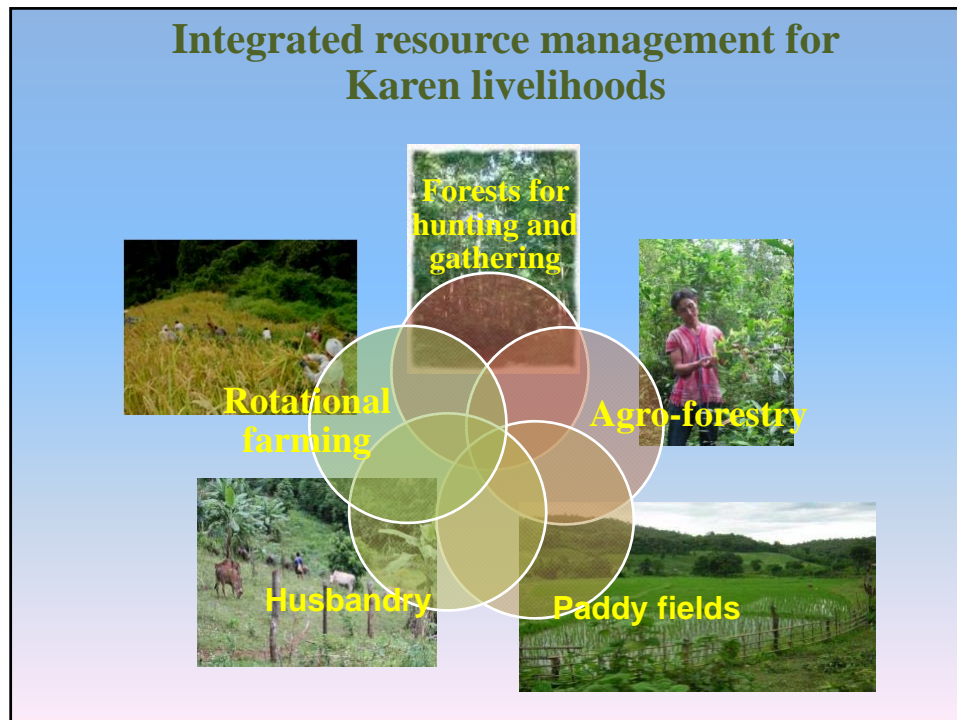2011/09/01 07:32

Threats **to** IPs and SEPLS in Thailand

During the past five decades indigenous peoples in Northern Thailand have been facing negative stereotyping & encroachment on their lands

•Drug producers
•Threat to national security
•Cause of deforestation
•Bad images of Rotational Farming (RF) as primitive, cause of deforestation and must be replaced...!
•Many cases of RF Farmers unfairly treated and arrested
•Imposition to stop RF and change to chemical monocrop farming

Highlanders Settlements and Forested Areas in Thailand

Integrated resource management for Karen livelihoods

Forests for hunting and gathering

Rotational farming

Agro-forestry

Husbandry

Paddy fields

What is Rotational Farming (RF)?

A knowledge-intensive practice that strongly relies on diversity and complementarity of both main and underutilized crops

Sustainable and culturally rich

BUT

misunderstood and criminalized as cause of deforestation and environmental degradation and climate change.

Preparing the firebreak around the field before burning.

"Sowing the mother rice" ritual, carried out by young people before sowing rice in a swidden field.
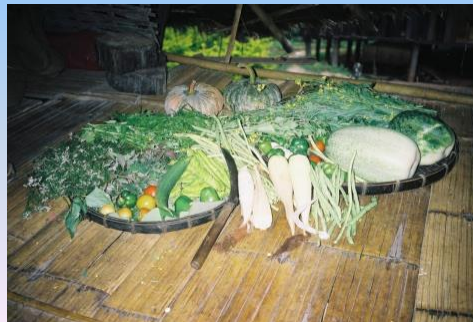
Different kinds of foods are available in the swidden fields in different months.

The *bgau quv* ritual includes an offering to the spirit-owner of the mountains and rivers, an offering to mother rice, an offering to the spirit of fire, and a ritual to remove bad influences from the field.

RF Enhances Biodiversity as a Natural Seed Bank

- Collection of traditional seeds and plant varieties, including spontaneous plants.

- **207 species are found** in the RF fields (Anan et.al, 2004).

- System used for hundreds of years, it is a **Natural Seed Bank**

Biodiversity in Rotational Farming

6

Harvest Season

The harvest is completed by carrying the rice to the barn.

Mae Um Pai Community

Project Goals and Objectives

Goal: Recognize & promote Karen people's livelihood based on culture, traditional & RF practice

Objectives:
• Strengthen POs including men, women and younger generation
• Maintain and revitalise RF & community based NRM
• Protect current RF area from being converted to monocrop farming e.g. corn
• Identify new and complementary sources of environmentally friendly productive activities to supplement incomes and ensure sustainability in the future
• Develop a model for a highland socio-ecological production landscape village for demonstrations & learning on SEPLS

Project and Funding strategy

Project strategy
•Bottom-up identification of community needs (needs assessment, awareness, consciousness, and self-determination)
• Community-based work plan (through participatory mechanism)
• Strengthen people's organizations (leaders, both traditional and official leaders, core leader team with gender balance, community organizations)
• Collaboration between government agencies, NGOs and POs

Funding strategies: from different sources but based on a common plan
• Main contributions come from the community and the Local Administration Office (both fund & in kind contribution)
• Support from IGES/SDM
• Support by the Thai Government through Cabinet Resolution August 3, 2010
• Small funds from other sources

Capacity building (leaders, organizations); Strengthening and revival of traditional occupations (e.g. rotational farming) and farmer-to-farmer seed exchange of indigenous varieties

Leadership training

Networking Meeting

Community Research and Participatory Mapping;
submission of Community Maps and Action Plans to be
approved as part of the TAO (local administration unit)
Development and NRM plan (s)

GIS Mapping Training

Collection and categorizing of indigenous knowledge for inter-generational transmission

Campaigning for the promotion of Mae Um Phai Village/Community to be recognized as a sustainable RF model village → declared a "Special Cultural Zone"

Varieties of RF Products

Publicity Campaign

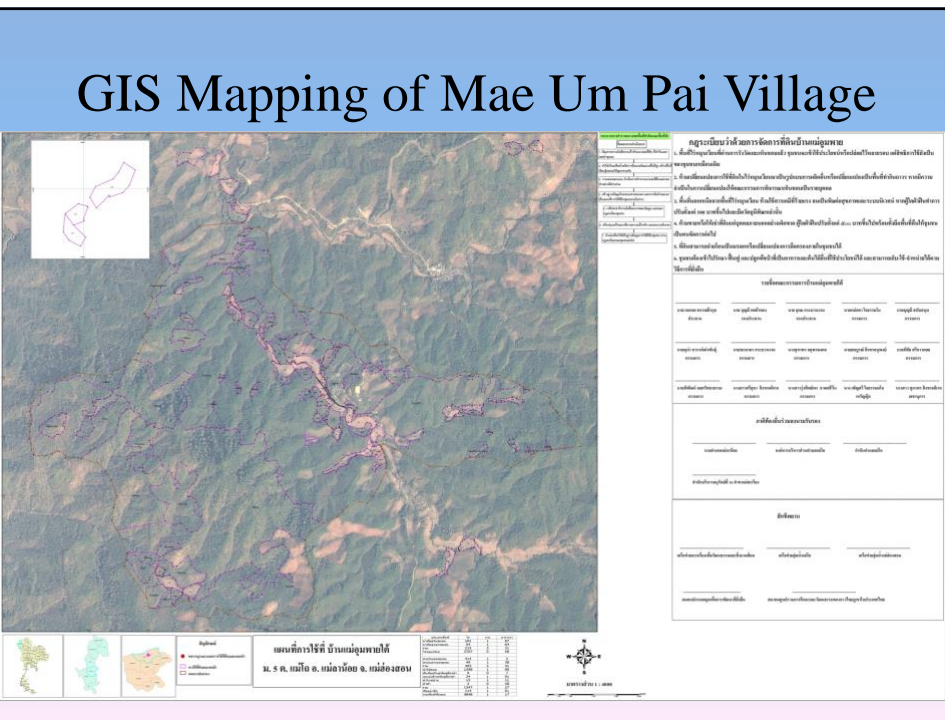# Children's Culture Performance

Opening of Special Cultural Zone

Achievements

- RF farmers are now confident about continuing and revitalising the practice of RF
- RF land use areas demonstrate contribution to sustainable use of biodiversity and protection of cultural landscape
- High potential to be taken into consideration for future recognition of communal land titles
- Complete community-based GIS mapping on RF & NRM are recognized and community plans are now incorporated into Local Government plans.
- Community members as well as outsiders recognise and respect the customary regulations related to RF. & women as knowledge holders on seeds and plants.

GIS Mapping of Mae Um Pai Village

Knowledge generation: ongoing efforts and challenges

- Going deeper into traditional knowledge and the rotational farming system illustrated how sophisticated the system is and how smart the elders were in developing the system.
- Collaboration with different agencies and stakeholders is sometimes difficult and complex, but it pays off in the long term.
- Interplay between modern technology (like mapping) and local knowledge may sometimes be complex, but it is very fruitful and enriching. Multiple evidence (based both on TK and scientific research) can generate more solid and socially accepted and shared knowledge.
- The interplay between productivity of forest and agricultural sites imply a challenge for people as they need to find a balance between having a rich forest for consumption, income and conservation.

Bridging Project Implementation and Knowledge Generation

- The implementation process is a learning experience that should be documented through a participatory approach to generate shared knowledge e.g. knowledge on strengthen POs is a key mechanism of SELPS
- NRM-based IPs/local philosophy should be used as the basis to generate and adapt knowledge on governance and management of ecosystems and SEPLS
- Community GIS mapping can be a very useful tool to generate new knowledge (or new ways to represent knowledge) related to customary land and resource use (including sacred sites)
- The new knowledge generated and the dynamic nature of indigenous knowledge and practice should be adapted to project implementation and needs to be taken into account in the bridging process.
- Multiple types of knowledge need to be used for recovering livelihoods and traditional practices, and to nurture ecosystems.
- Traditional management of NTFP should be used as a mechanism for conservation and income generation, and as a basis for sustainable NRM.

The elders still order us,
The elders still tell us,
Order us to conserve the taro seeds,
Tell us to preserve the yam seeds,
To save at least 30 kinds of seeds,
Even in a famine we will not die.

The words of
Karen's Elders to
their children