
Climate, human rights and forests in Thailand

In Thailand, indigenous communities have been and continue to be threatened to be expelled from their traditional territories as a result of the implementation of the country's REDD+ policy. This human rights violation is due to the fact that communities have been accused of contributing to the climate crisis because they would deforest, they would destroy natural resources and they would cause forest fires, all activities that result in carbon emissions. At the same time, they use not to be consulted when this type of analysis and, based on this, policies are being formulated.

To challenge this vision and policy, a study has been carried out with the indigenous Karen community of HuayHin Lad in Wieng Pa Pao district in the Chiang Rai province, a community threatened itself to be expelled because of being located in a national park. Their traditional ways of using and relating with the forest was studied, including the potential and capacity of community forests to absorb greenhouse gases, in comparison to the emissions of greenhouse gases by the community's activities.

The conclusion of this study was that the way of life and doing agriculture of highland peoples in Thailand not only does not contribute adversely to climate change, but "the traditional livelihood practices of these peoples are helping to balance the ecological system, effectively mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change and maintain a sustainable food security".

It showed that the shifting agriculture practice of the community causes few carbon emissions, because it is a self-sufficient system, it does not use any chemical input so it has minimal expenses, and it is able to guarantee food security of the community throughout the year because of different harvesting periods. The community prefers the locally produced food instead of buying industrially processed food. This all contributes to a very low ecological footprint and the result that annual carbon emissions in the community are only 0.08% of the carbon stored in the community area.

Another important factor that influences the way the community deals with their forest is the fact that the utilization of the natural resources and food consumption of the community are all guided by their traditional ways of dealing with their environment, based on beliefs, wisdom and regulations collectively established. For example, cutting a tree is a collectively decided process, guided by several rules.

The findings of the study reinforce the need to respect the rights of highlands peoples to sustainable natural resource management, in accordance with the Thai constitution. And also, the study shows how necessary it is that indigenous peoples are consulted and can fully participate in the formulation of policies relating to climate change.

This interesting study also shows how much people, including governments, can learn from this and other communities in tropical forest areas worldwide about the responsible use of natural resources, about how to live well and in harmony with these resources without causing negative impacts for the climate and environment in general. The results of this case study are also a clear message to policy makers in Thailand and in many tropical forest countries not to take people out of the forests because

they are not responsible for forest destruction. On the contrary, they are key actors in the struggle for forest conservation.

Based on: `Climate Change, Trees and Livelihood: A case study on the carbon footprint of a Karen Community in Northern Thailand,´ written by Northern Development Foundation and the HuayHin Lad community. (http://ccmin.aippnet.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=350&Itemid=159)