



HIN LAD NAI, CHIANG RAI THAILAND



Center of Excellence



Hin Lad Nai is a small village situated in the valley of Khun Jae National Park Mountainous forests, a basin part of the upper Mae Lao River system. This village is located in Ban Pong Sub district, Wiang Pa Pao District, Chiang Rai Province. There are 20 households with 35 families. The total population of the community is 107 people with 5 clans (2019 stats). Hin Lad Nai is part of the Huay Hin Lad Thai local administrative system (“Moo”) together with two other villages called Pha Yaung and Hin Lad Nok. Their ancestors moved in the early 1990s from the Mae Chang Kao watershed to Huay Hid Lad watershed and subsequently formed the Huay Hin Lad community. Sai Kao – fourth village; Lahu village (the other 3 are Karen).

In 1986 the Thai government allowed the Chiang Rai Tham Mai logging company to operate in the Khun Jae area, which included the Huay Hin Lad community. Sacred forests such as Deh Paw and the community’s cemetery were destroyed in the span of a few years. The villagers tried to restore their forest by formulating community rules and regulations for forest management and by constructing fire break lines.

In 1992, the area was declared Khun Jae National Park and the villagers were ordered to leave their community. The villagers then joined forces with other ethnic groups who face similar problems and formed the Northern Farmers’ Network (NFN) to fight for their rights to retain their lands. As part of the national-level Assembly of the Poor, they conducted a series of protest actions until they were allowed to stay in their own villages. Since 1993, the Huay Hin Lad community has maintained rules and regulations to manage their natural resources. They have a community-forest committee, community map and have carried out various activities on natural resource management, such as constructing fire break lines, for maintaining sustainable livelihoods.

LOCATION



The Huay Hin Lad Nai village area and its vicinity are part of a high mountain system where 14 creeks originate and flow to form Huay Hin Lad Nai River. Water from the stream flows into Mae Chang Kao river, which is a branch of the Lao river. For centuries, the Mae Chang Kao watershed was known as the old land of Pgakenyaw. The residential area of Hin Lad Nai covers about 14.08 rai. The weather is cool all year long as it is surrounded by wild forest and is close to the creeks. In the south of the village, there are mountainous areas called by the villagers “Hsgo soo co” or “Black Pine Mountain” (mountain of *pinus merkusii coniferae*). The area to the west of the village is called “Mav hkif moov co” (nose-run drying palm). In the east, there is an area called Doi Mon Liam which extends from the south. Part of the area is reserved for farming.

COMMUNITY & LIVELIHOOD



All of the villagers of Ban Hin Lad Nai belong to the Pgakenyaw tribe of the Karen group. Their ancestors came into the area from Mae Chaem, a district of Chiang Mai province, and settled down more than 100 years ago. The villagers of Ban Hin Lad Nai believe in both animism and Buddhism.

Upland rice farming is the substantial activity of the Huay Hin Lad Nai community. Growing rice, tea and some commercial crops and gathering forest products are their major economic activities. Community forest covers 19,498 rai³ (3119.68 hectares), while agricultural land is approximately 3,547 rai (567.52 hectares; 2008 stats). The community's livelihoods depend largely on natural resources; therefore, they have high respect for nature, which is the key to their peaceful living as well as sustainable livelihoods. Practices in sustainable natural resource utilisation are based on valuable experiences and local wisdom of their ancestors as well as the awareness of the community members and organisation that fully participate in the management.

GOVERNANCE & DECISION-MAKING

Hin Lad Nai maintains two co-existing leadership structures in order to manage its internal and external affairs. The “formal” leadership body (represented by the village Head who is selected by the community) liaises with the government and external actors, and the “traditional” body, called “Hee Kho”, deals with internal affairs of the community, including spiritual matters. These are two separate systems within the community however they work together in decision-making.

The village Head reports to the district every month. Every five years the government reviews the performance of the Head. If they perform well, the community will continue to support them. The Head can continue in the role until they are 60 years old. The community comes together on the 10th of every month to make decisions and consider orders or information from the district. Every household sends a representative to attend to the meeting, consistent with the principle that no one person can make a decision for the whole community. While household representatives can be male or female, in practice, most of the representatives are men. The village Head chairs the meeting and decisions are documented in a book.

Many of Hin Lad Nai’s laws and protocols are documented, including their belief system, way of life and livelihoods (for instance, rotational farming) which the community relies on. This documentation is updated regularly as circumstances, opportunities and challenges change. For instance, in the past, a community regulation disallowed the use of electric saws. This regulation was amended to allow their use, however only for specific purposes (for example, not for tree clearing).

Amendments are made through discussion.

In the case of conflict between members in the community, the first step is to bring the conflicting parties together to discuss and see if they can settle the dispute. If this is not possible, they approach the village Head or an elder to mediate. Conflict resolution in the community is guided by the principle of the concern for the common good – that one must think about what is in the best interest of the whole community. This is a shared value even in conflict, which can, if managed correctly, be part of making the community stronger.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOVERNMENT

In the early 2000s, aggressive state policies and measures related to climate change mitigation and adaptation were being enforced by Thai authorities, increasingly impacting local production and community-forest management. These measures put the community at risk of losing their land and preventing them from continuing their sustainable livelihood activities.

In a 3 August 2010 cabinet decision on a policy approach for the cultural revitalisation of Karen peoples, the government identified Hin Lad Nai as one of five Karen villages for cultural revitalisation (2019 states). In 2013, Mr. Preecha Siri, community leader and Northern Farmer Network (NFN) Advisor received an international recognition of Forest Hero Award from the United Nations Forum on Forest (UNFF). This was the result of AIPP team's effort on documentation and nomination of Mr. Siri for the revitalisation of Karen traditional beliefs, culture, knowledge and sustainable forest management systems. Besides international recognition, Hin Lad Nai village has received number of provincial and national awards for their sustainable resource management system.

The village being situated inside a national park brought about uncertainty as it meant they could be relocated at any time and deprived of their rights granted by the Constitution if they did not reduce their rotational farming areas and the cycles of cultivation. The community tried to negotiate with the government to be able to practice their own natural resource management in the area. In a progressive and continuous manner, the villagers developed alternative agricultural production incorporating other crops such as tea and bamboo forest to their farming system. These alternative approaches were eventually accepted by the government as a community model in which people and forest could coexist. These active operations reduced the pressure from the side of the government forestry policy and strengthened the community to maintain their rights and power to manage the forest by themselves and continue their practice on rotational farming.

The Hin Lad Nai community recognises the need to live alongside government law over their territory. Previously their relationship with government was not good due to the government's lack of understanding about the community's way of life.

Misunderstanding characterised interactions and there were many confrontations. Today the relationship is much improved as the government has come to recognise how Hin Lad Nai is effectively managing the land and natural resources. Some NGOs have also supported the community in this work.

RELATIONSHIP/S WITH OTHER INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Hin Lad Nai has good relationships with neighbouring communities, and regularly cooperates with others on natural resource management, in particular, fire management. There is a clear division of responsibility between the communities, however, they still come together regularly to talk about shared issues and strengthen their cooperation.

Hin Lad Nai is quite open, accepting visitors regularly. The community manages its lands according to its rules and regulations, which other villages respect. For instance, while other communities have taken up monocropping, Hin Lad Nai has not. In instances where outsiders come to extract or use resources within Hin Lad Nai's territory, the community will first talk with them to see if they can resolve the issue directly. For instance, they often discuss the impacts of chemical use in agriculture, referencing climate change, sustainability and how such activities effect the land and waterways. Where the issue cannot be resolved, they will appeal to state law.

Such pressures on their lands are an ongoing challenge for Hin Lad Nai. Many people are coming to introduce rubber plantations, which the community does not deem sustainable. Resisting such projects and interventions is consistent with the community's principle that prevention is better than needing to find a cure.



KNOWLEDGE MAINTENANCE AND SHARING

Knowledge-sharing in the community is a comprehensive, life-long intergenerational exchange that begins at birth, however there is no formalised system. Children and young people accompany the adults as they go about their work and routines. Through this process, children learn by observing and participating in the activities and practices that sustain and nourish the community. Most of the children also attend formal state education during the week, which means much of the traditional knowledge transmission occurs during on the weekends or outside of class time. In Hin Lad Nai, young people are playing a critical role in maintaining and evolving traditional practices. They organise themselves according to their interests and are connecting online to other communities and markets. Many are choosing to forgo formal state education in order to remain closely connected to their community and invest in strengthening traditional practices and developing traditional products like tea and honey. Young people are not discouraged from attending formal education. Rather, they are encouraged to be guided by what makes them happy. The community accredits this strength to the high value it places on passing on knowledge to the next generation.

Many people come to the village with different proposals for working with Hin Lad Nai or in their territory. The community's approach is to listen and consider what is of benefit for their community. They do not take everything on, but rather consider each proposal carefully and make a decision together. Hin Lad Nai elders often act as a channel of communication between outsiders, particularly academics, and the forest. Elders understand that knowledge is not fixed in a room – it lives in the forest, on the land, in the water, and is acquired through time.



KEY CHALLENGES

A key challenge for the community is the state education system. In school, the children are encouraged to speak Thai rather than their mother tongue and the lessons do not take “whole person” into consideration. Hin Lad Nai community has asked the teachers to be more flexible with respect to culture and curriculum to no avail.

Broadly, the community is witnessing a language loss among Karen peoples and a related threat to the continuation of Karen culture.

The meaning and practice of self-determination Hin Lad Nai recognises its resilience as its key strength. Community members have not forgotten or abandoned customary practices and yet, they are responding to new opportunities, challenges and issues as they come along. The community is holding on to their traditional way of life, yet being resilience and adjusting to new realities.



SELF DETERMINATION

Self-determination is: “you breathe from your own nose and you stand on your own legs”. Self-determination enables resilience – “if you rely on others, you are weak”.

For example, in the past the district authority told Hin Lad Nai to stop rotational farming and to take up ecotourism. However, tourism is dependent on outsiders. During Covid, for instance, outsiders did not come and those communities reliant on them suffered. In this way, if you leave your traditional way of life and take on other things, you become reliant. A community that stands on its own legs and is self-reliant is resilient – this is self-determination. Hin Lad Nai is practicing this by holding on to their traditional way of life while also being open to the new world. So long as the community continues to be happy, they will keep this approach.



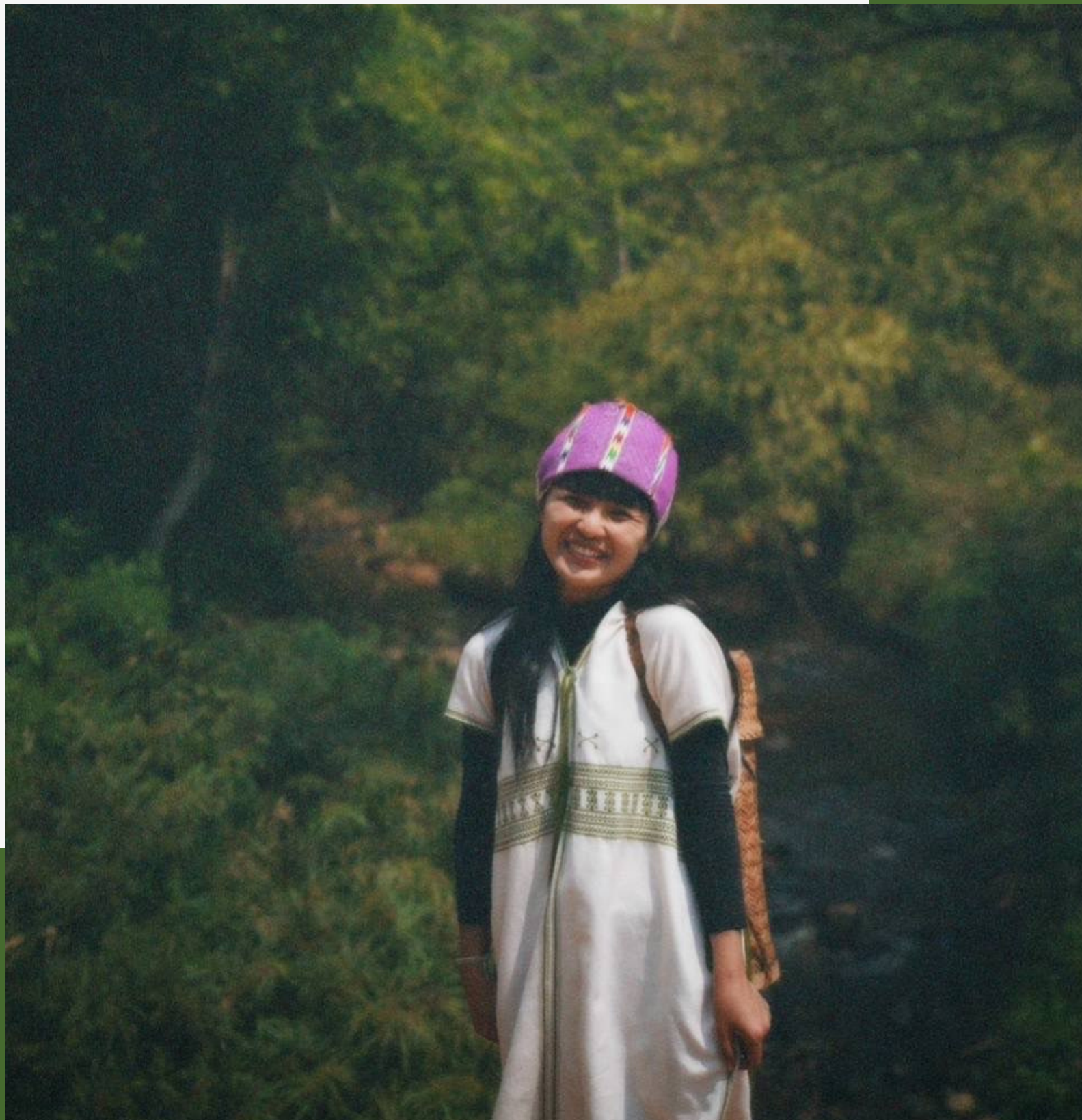
Prasit

Siri



"Drink from water resources you must preserve the water resources. Depending on the forest you must take care of the forest. Abundant natural resources, abundant life."

Sirinthip Sirichariya



"Elephants have strength in their trunks. Horses have strength in their hooves. Karen's strength lies in their children."

Duangdee

Siri



"Bringing the bonds of brotherhood together as one, to bind the pillars of life so that they stand firmly."