HUMANITY AND NATURE

Traditional, Cultural, & Alternative Perspectives

FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH

THE SOMBATH INITIATIVE

In cooperation with

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
SOUTHEAST ASIA

Humanity and Nature
Traditional, Cultural, & Alternative Perspectives

by

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Focus on the Global South (Focus) is a non-governmental organization with offices in Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, and India. Focus combines policy research, advocacy, activism and grassroots capacity building in order to generate critical analysis and debates among social movements, civil society organizations, elected officials, government functionaries, and the general public on national and international policies related to corporate-led globalization, neo-liberalism, and militarization.

The Sombath Initiative (SI) was established after the disappearance of Sombath Somphone in Laos in 2012. The SI aims to increase awareness about the human rights and development contexts in Laos, maintain pressure to address these issues, including the case of Sombath's disappearance, and to build networks of solidarity to further this work. The SI is currently a project of Focus, embedded in Focus' Power and Democracy program.

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Contents

Introduction

An economy is often defined as "the wealth and resources of a country or region." Few would contest that the greatest wealth and most fundamental resource for humanity is the earth in which we live; yet most do not see our environment as an economy in itself.

Conversely, nearly all contemporary economic and development models see the natural economy as resource to be exploited (or at best managed) to serve the needs of the monetized economy.

While this perspective is certainly predominant, it is neither intrinsic nor universal. It is also increasingly proving to be unsustainable.

Sombath Somphone, a senior member of Lao civil society, spoke about the limits of the current model of development and growth. He advocated for less greed and materialism, and more respect for nature, indigenous knowledge, and traditional practices. In Laos, Sombath pioneered the Rice Integrated Farming Systems that sought to preserve and invigorate traditional agricultural knowledge and agro-biodiversity.

In 1996, Sombath founded the Participatory Development Training Centre (PADETC), an indigenous, all-Lao organization committed to making a unique and distinctive contribution to holistic development in Laos. Many of the practical approaches and methods Sombath pioneered have influenced the direction of other sustainable development programs in Laos.

On the evening of 15 December 2012, he was abducted at a police traffic post in Vientiane, Lao PDR and his whereabouts have since remained unknown.

The Sombath Symposium, held February 15-17, 2016, is part of the collaborative action of the Sombath Initiative and Focus on the Global South, with support from Heinrich Boll Stiftung, to carry forward Sombath's ideas and ideals. It became a venue for presenting knowledge and practices drawn from different cultures and traditions that can serve as alternative foundation to the predominant growth-driven development model.

This publication compiles essays discussing these perspectives and syntheses of the different parts of the symposium. The Sombath Initiative and Focus on the Global South hope that this publication will serve as resource material as well as guide document for the ongoing and future work on alternative perspectives on humanity's relationship with nature.

SOMBATH SOMPHONE:

His Philosophy and Ideas on Sustainable Development

By Ng Shui Meng

Even as Sombath's wife who had known and lived with Sombath for more than 30 years, it is not so easy to summarize Sombath Somphone's philosophy and ideas. This is because, as with most people, his ideas have been developed through a long evolutionary process of learning, reflection, and practice. They evolved based on his life-long journey of concrete experience working in the context of Laos, among Lao people in the communities.

Sombath's ideas and philosophy have also been largely shaped by his childhood, his family background, and his culture. And like most people with vision, Sombath had a great capacity to learn: he was curious about everything, very observant, and had a great ability to ask questions and listen as well to the people around him. He also had no fear of failure or of being laughed at by others—he just loved to try out new ideas, and if they didn't work, to try new ones.

True Son of the Soil Growing Up in the Midst of Civil Conflict

To understand what shaped Sombath to become who he is, we have to start with his childhood and his family background. Sombath is a true son of the soil whose childhood and teenage years were largely spent in poverty and in the midst of civil conflict in Laos in the 1960s and early '70s. Sombath was the firstborn son in a poor peasant family. Sombath's life as a farm boy was not easy. As the eldest in the family, he had to take on many responsibilities from a very early age—helping out with all the domestic and

farm chores. He also had to help his grandfather and father catch fish and hunt for small animals in the forest and fields to feed the family.

Living so close to nature and so dependent on nature helped Sombath learn very early that their lives depended a lot on the natural environment, which provided them much of their food and daily necessities. His childhood experience taught him to respect and work with rather than against nature. This understanding of the value of the natural environment would later shape much of his ideas on the need to promote sustainable development and environmental protection, especially for the many rural communities in Laos that continued to rely so much on the natural environment for their food security, and material well-being. *This I believe is one major idea that stuck with him through his life, that the environment—its waters, forests, and fields are the source of the people's livelihoods. Destruction of nature without full consideration of its impact on the rural people's lives can lead to undermining of their livelihoods and security.*

Sombath also grew up at the time when Laos was in the midst of a civil war, a war between the American-allied government forces and the pro-Vietnam communist-revolutionary forces. For many of the poor rural Lao, like Sombath's parents with little understanding of politics, they were just caught in the middle. They sided with neither of the political forces, but just went on with their lives working the land, and hoped that the fighting would not affect their communities. Sombath recalled how soldiers from the two warring factions rampaged repeatedly the village, destroying the fields, killing the farm animals, and seizing their rice. When Sombath was nine years old, his mother packed up a few belongings and took her young children across the Mekong River to Thailand to live with her relatives who had settled there.

Sombath's father was the only one who remained in the village to guard whatever was left of their home and farm, but it would be left to the frail nine-year old Sombath to peddle a small boat once every two weeks across the Mekong to get rice from his father and take it back to the family living with their relatives. Sombath did that for a year before his father decided to move his family back to the Lao side of the Mekong. This experience of insecurity and the impact of war on the lives of ordinary and powerless people would also teach Sombath in his adult life to abhor conflict and always to pursue peaceful means to resolve differences. He always said, wars have no winners, only losers!

That is another major influence that shaped Sombath's philosophy and approach to work later in life. He always tried to reach out and engage different groups to sit and listen to all sides. He always said people have different perspectives, and whether we agree with them or not, it is always good to listen to them and understand their perspectives. We don't need to always push our perspectives on others—we can find ways to come to terms with differences.

Love for Education

Another major influence that shaped Sombath's life was his love of learning, something that his father had instilled in him when he was very young. Sombath's father did not have a chance to go to school because Sombath's grandfather did not believe that going to school was necessary to be a good farmer. He did not want his son to spend time in school while he could use the time to work in the field and raise animals. Sombath's father regretted his lack of opportunity to go to school and considered that his lack of education was a major stumbling block towards a better life. He was determined

that his son would not suffer the same fate. So he put Sombath in a temple school when he was just a little older than four and made him get up very early to study by the light of the kitchen fire.

His father would continue to push the boy to study even if this meant that he had to borrow money to put Sombath through school, and having Sombath walk long distances through the forest to go to another school after he finished the first two grades in the temple school. His father's insistence on getting Sombath educated no matter how difficult it was, would influence Sombath for the rest of his life. Sombath too realized that education was one way for the rural poor to improve their lives. Sombath studied hard and always retained a curiosity to learn and to question.

Education in the USA Opened Sombath's Vision to New Ways of Thinking

Another important factor that shaped Sombath's life was that he was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to study abroad. In 1969, at the age of 16, Sombath gained a scholarship to go on an exchange program to study for one year in the United States. Sombath was sent to a small town in Wisconsin to live with an American family and study in an American high school. It was Sombath's first encounter with a new culture and first exposure to a different lifestyle. For the first time, he experienced the ease of life without the need for daily struggle to find food for the table. He could also focus on his studies without having to do a multitude of chores and work the fields. His year living with an American family made him learn to appreciate the value of economic and financial security enjoyed by many American families, but at the same time, he also gained much more appreciation for the simplicity of the village life in Laos, where people were more caring and sharing, and had a greater sense of family and community solidarity. This was an insight that would stay with him for the rest of his life. He used to say, "even though materially we were poor, somehow the level of our contentment and happiness was very high. Our social security was the family. You cannot put a cash value on this."

In 1970/71 he returned to Laos, and one year later in 1972, he got another scholarship to go to the University of Hawaii to study Education. This was not his preferred field of study, as Sombath had always wanted to study agriculture so that he could have the knowledge and skills to help improve the lives of poor farmers like his parents. But he had to accept the condition of his scholarship. As it turned out this background in Education would later help to understand the importance of education as the basis of transformation of the younger generation of Lao people.

After he completed his degree, Sombath enrolled again to study for a Master's Degree in Agronomy. He was happy that at last he would be studying something he thought would give him knowledge and experience to better contribute to the development of Laos where more than 80 percent of the population were farmers. His study of Agronomy enabled Sombath to learn new scientific knowledge and techniques of modern farming that can boost farm production. However, his exposure to modern agriculture also made him realize that many of these new techniques were not very appropriate for farmers in Laos. Sombath knew that the majority of farmers were too poor and their farms too small to adopt modern farming systems which were heavily dependent on expensive machinery, high investment in improved seeds, and heavy use of chemicals and pesticides. He

knew instinctively that he must find low-cost and appropriate technologies more suited to the farming in Laos.

Sombath's love for education and his experience living and studying in the United States also forged these major lessons in life and helped shape his approach and work:

1. Education is important in helping build human capital and transforming society.
2. Education is good and necessary, but do not copy or learn only from western technology—use the knowledge and information from new technologies and reflect their appropriateness in one's own cultural, economic, and social context.
3. There is a lot of local knowledge and indigenous wisdom that should also be taught in schools.

Early Development Efforts: Improving Food Security through Low-cost Farming Approaches

In 1975, the war in Laos finally came to an end, with the declaration of the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) on December 2,1975. Sombath returned to Laos for good in 1982.

After his return, Sombath's initial development efforts were mostly focused on working to improve agriculture production of rural farmers. He knew that the farmers needed to increase rice production to enhance their food security. His work with rural communities indeed confirmed his concerns that high-tech farming was not appropriate for Laos. Lao farmers were too poor to invest in expensive farm machinery or chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Together with the farmers he tested inexpensive ways to improve rice yields, such as raising fish in the rice fields. He also pioneered integrated farming technologies in both lowland and upland areas, which integrated the planting of several types of crops together—beans, squash, herbs, tomatoes, cucumbers together with rice. Sombath knew that rice was the mainstay of the Lao people's diet, but they also needed other types of food to improve their nutrition. Moreover, Sombath believed that integrating other crops with rice would reduce the risk of crop failure, because if one type of crop failed, they still had other types. This was later known as the RIFS technology (Rice-based integrated farming system). The RIFS technology proved to be very successful and improved food security of many farming communities. It also depended very little on external inputs and is self-sustaining and environmentally appropriate.

Such experience working with farming communities explained why he would always caution against blindly following external models of farming, and by extension, also foreign development models and concepts without understanding their appropriateness within the Lao context.

From Agricultural Improvement to Integrated Community Development

Sombath's aspiration to return to his homeland and build a better life for ordinary Lao people started from the simple goal of increased food security and improved material well-being for the rural poor. These were the common people, like his parents and relatives and friends he grew up with. But soon he also saw the limitations of working only in the agriculture sector. Working closely with the community made him realize that there were many other pressing community issues apart from food security, such as water

and sanitation, education, health, employment, gender issues, etc. These issues also must be addressed simultaneously in order to improve the lives of the people in the community. He began to think about ways to tackle issues of community development in a more holistic way.

He experimented with small-scale community development activities that the community people identified as priority through a simple participatory planning process. It could be digging wells, repairing schools, or building toilets, or setting up a small rice mill to reduce women's labor. Through this experience—always starting with involvement of the people themselves, he was able to show that people were able and willing to take ownership of these community activities, and were willing to be accountable for their success or failure. It also demonstrated that community development driven from the inside was more sustainable than those driven by outside forces.

Through learning from the community and engaging them to resolve their priority needs, Sombath also came to realize that for sustained change, he needed to address and engage the young people more by empowering them as the change agents within their families and communities.

Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC), Incubator for Change

In 1995, many people who recognized Sombath's leadership in grassroot community development, encouraged Sombath to start his own organization. Unfortunately, in Laos, there was no government policy that allowed the establishment of Lao NGOs. The Lao Government only permitted International Development Agencies (UN Agencies and International Non-Government Agencies) to be established.

An opportunity came when the Lao Ministry of Education permitted the establishment of private schools to ease the demand for education services. Sombath seized this opportunity and requested to set up a private not-for-profit training institution, called the Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC). Through a great deal of persistence, persuasion, and strategic alliance building, the Ministry of Education approved the establishment of PADETC, officially establishing it in 1996, with Sombath as its Director.

Once officially established as a private not-for-profit training center, PADETC was able to legitimately pioneer many different kinds of training-cum-demonstration, development activities. PADETC became the only defacto all-Lao non-governmental development organization, without it being called an NGO.

Promoting Sustainable Community and Small-scale Enterprise Development

Through PADETC, Sombath continued to expand the scope of training and development activities. PADETC's programs and projects were multi-faceted and geographically determined by the people's own capacity, resources, and interests. Between 1996 and 2010, PADETC initiated many community-focused projects and small-scale business start-ups using mainly eco-friendly technologies.

These projects included:

- support to production and application of organic fertilizers in agriculture

- setting up of garbage recycling centers in schools and in communities
- making and marketing of fuel-efficient stoves and low-cost water-filters to promote small rural enterprises.
- Establishing village handcraft production run mostly by women;
- Regeneration of forests in degraded or bomb-devastated areas

PADETC's role was mainly to provide technical support and small start-up funds to establish working models. Once established, the initiatives and businesses would be taken to scale by the village or community groups.

Education and Youth Empowerment—Sowing the Seeds for Changing the Next Generation

By the late 1990s, increasingly, PADETC's training/development activities shifted to education and youth leadership empowerment. As more than half of Laos' population was under 20, Sombath realized that education and empowerment of the young people was crucial to social change in Laos. He looked at education and youth empowerment as "sowing the seeds of long-term change" for Lao's society and economy.

Sombath was aware that education through formal schooling system was too traditional, rigid, outmoded, and did not promote analytical and creative thinking. The school curriculum was too content-based, too compartmentalized, and did not educate students in a holistic way. It lacked lifeskills training, did not offer children the opportunity to explore different areas of knowledge, or develop their multiple intelligences. He knew he could not make much headway to promote change in the formal school system. But he could use the hours provided within the school curriculum for "non-formal extra-curricular activities" as an entry point to reach the students of different age groups and provide them with more practical and experiential learning opportunities.

PADETC started a youth development program which children and youth from different age groups could join PADETC's youth volunteer program led by PADETC's staff on weekends and during school holidays. The training program emphasized the "3 H Approach," or education of the Head, the Hands, and the Heart. Education of the Head referred to learning knowledge and skills; education of the Hands referred to learning by practice and experience; and education of the Heart referred to learning the Buddhist values of empathy, kindness, appreciation, respect for life and nature. Hence PADETC's youth empowerment program taught the young leadership, teamwork, simple activity planning, and management skills, as well as a diverse range of life-based, locally-ground knowledge, such as environmental awareness, good farming practices, entrepreneurship, and urgent social issues like drug abuse prevention, HIV-AIDS awareness, and reproductive health.

The youth volunteers were also provided opportunities to go on "community immersion" or "community service" trips during school holidays, where they had to do their own planning and organizing. They had to learn from and engage with other people, young and old, outside their own communities. Such peer-to-peer education allowed the young to bridge the social and urban-rural divide and taught them to appreciate cultural and environmental diversity and richness within their own country.

It also helped develop in the young a sense of social justice and personal responsibility, characteristics needed to become future leaders.

The Youth Development and Empowerment Program became one of PADETC's most successful flagship programs which earned it much praise and recognition among the international development community as well as among parents, teachers, and some government officials. Over a period of more than 10 years, PADETC's program reached and trained thousands of young people, and many of them have now become young parents, who will hopefully carry such skills into their adult life. For Sombath, the seeds of change were planted.

Advocating Balanced Development Vision Based on Buddhist Values

After 2005, Sombath started to reflect more deeply on charting a development vision more suited for Laos. He spent a lot of time reading and studying different development models and learned from experiences of successful alternative development paths that put people at the center of development. He also dug deep into his own culture and spiritual roots, and thought hard about a development model which would be more appropriate for his own society.

He believed that Laos did not need to fall into development traps experienced by some other countries in the region, whereby the poor and marginalized groups have to bear the most negative consequences of periodic economic crisis, market down-turns, and social turmoil. Sombath firmly believed that given Laos' small population and rich natural resources, it could spearhead a development model that was ecologically sound, environmentally sustainable and would put people's social wellbeing at the center of development.

He also seriously studied Buddhist writings of renowned Buddhist scholars like the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Thai Buddhist scholar, Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, and incorporated many of their teachings of "Engaged Buddhism" in his development work. He came to the conclusion that western development models that stress individualism, competition and constant pursuit of material success made people self-centered and selfish, whereas the Buddhist values of respect of all living things (human, animal, and nature), compassion, loving kindness, and peace make people more caring and generous, and more aware that human beings are part of nature—not above nature. He believed that such values should guide our lives and be the basis for educating our young. He summarized this as "Education of the Heart should be the Heart of Education."

Based on his reflections and drawing from years of development practice and directly working with people in communities across the country, Sombath proposed a development model whose base is grounded on good governance and education, and shored up by these four pillars: (1) economy; (2) culture; (3) spiritual values; and (4) environment. He likened this Lao development model to a well-balanced, strong, and stable house ensuring well-being and happiness of its citizens. He also stressed that the pillars needed to be developed simultaneously and in a balanced manner.

Sombath's development vision resonated with many people in the development community, in and outside Laos. In many communities and schools, his development philosophy and ideas

have been put into practice and have shown to be very successful.

Below are a few examples of how his ideas and thoughts have influenced development activities in many communities in Laos:

1. Use of appropriate and low-cost technologies in agriculture—in many communities his ideas, especially reliance on use of biofertilizers like bio-extract, composting, and vermin culture have continued. An increasing number of vegetable growers around the main urban centers has turned to organic farming because of the higher price organic vegetables can now command in the market.
2. Promotion of village enterprises, in addition to farming, to provide employment to rural families, especially women.
3. Promotion of experiential learning, especially getting children to learn outside the classroom is now part of Laos' education reform program.
4. Application of local indigenous knowledge in education, something that Sombath also pioneered is also being continued, especially by NGOs working with minority communities.
5. Teaching of Buddhist ethics and values in school by monks—this program called Dhamma Sanchorn (or moving Dhamma) is conducted in many schools. Parents and teachers now want to have this program in their schools and communities.
6. The most successful part of Sombath's vision and work has been his youth development program. Through the work of PADETC, he had trained and mentored many thousands of young people who have gone on to learn and work in different communities. Many of the young people he had trained have today become adults and some have either established their own small development organizations or are working with international NGOs and applying Sombath's vision and ideas in their work.

Sombath's Enforced Disappearance, Its Impact on His Philosophy and Development Vision

Unfortunately, Sombath's work was suddenly cut short by his enforced disappearance on 15 December 2012. Sombath's enforced disappearance is of course a personal tragedy for me and his family. However, when talking to various local development groups, especially those headed by some of the young people he had trained, I understand that many of Sombath's development ideas have continued to guide their work. I personally believe that many of Sombath's practical ideas and thinking will continue to be relevant because they have been tested and proven useful.

An Eco-Farm Initiated by Sombath

By Somchit Phankham

Panyanivej farm was founded by PADETC in 2008 under the guidance of Sombath. Through the farm, PADETC aims to promote and showcase organic farming using appropriate technologies. In 2014, Panyanivej farm became an independent social enterprise promoting food safety and sustainable agriculture among farmers, students, tourists, and the general public.

"Panyanivej" is from the two Lao words "panya" (wisdom) and "nivej" (ecology). The farm was named as such to reflect the organization's aspiration to exercise wisdom—in nurturing a healthy ecology in which human and nature co-exist harmoniously. Our agriculture principle is based on an integrated farming system that promotes interdependence among plant and animal life in a balanced ecosystem.

This is our core value, our message to society but we also want to be self sustaining financially. We want to show this through our practice of daily activities, such as through our management system which includes regular meetings and planning to follow up on and evaluate our work. Our staff consists of those who have an agriculture background, and family roots in the rural area. Our farm serves as a place for practicing and improving staff's agriculture skills. It is also a second home to them where they can live the way they used to back in their hometown. When people come to the farm, they would get to see and experience Lao culture through the staff.

To maintain our sustainability, we generate income through our daily activities such as selling organic produce and providing services. We produce vegetables and rice to supply to local school canteens and Vientiane weekly. Our vegetables are grown seasonally with great care. We practice crop rotation, and grow different crops in the same beds. We also rely on organic fertilizers and pesticides that are not harmful to humans. We produce three types of rice: brown, white, and sticky rice–a local staple. We carefully select our rice seeds and grow one cycle of rice per year without any harmful chemical substances. When the rice is ready for harvest, we gather, dry, thresh, and mill it.

Another way to generate income for our farm is through providing services. There are three types of services we provide: facilitation and training, farm visits for tourists, and an outdoor classroom for students and children. For facilitation and training, we offer hands-on training and workshops on integrated farming techniques for farmers, the general public, and students. When students visit the farm, we facilitate reflection and discussion on sustainability and local knowledge. Moreover, we offer a space and plan challenging activities for team-building workshops. As for farm visits for tourists, we provide a hands-on experience which includes organic vegetable farming, and rice farming techniques for tourists. For the outdoor classroom for students and children, we teach students how to plant padi or to harvest rice, how to grow and harvest vegetables, and how to prepare a meal together, as well as how to make arts and crafts using materials sourced from the farm, and at the end of the visit students will get to reflect on their experience and to discuss sustainability.

SYNTHESIS OF SESSION 1:

Perspectives on the Work of Sombath Somphone

Sombath's philosophy, ideas, and initiatives were shaped by his childhood experiences and derived from the community and culture he was embedded in. He grew up as a farm boy in a small community whose well-being was very dependent on its natural environment. He lived very close to nature and his upbringing in rural Laos instilled in him the deep interrelationship between humans and nature. He knew that for him and most of the Lao people, their life depended on the rivers, the forests, and the fields; that they should respect the natural, social, and cultural environment. This understanding of the value of nature would later shape much of his ideas on sustainable development and environmental protection.

Sombath, a true son of the soil, also grew up in the turbulent time of the Laotian Civil War. He used to say, "We do not know who is fighting and why they are fighting; all we know is we are the ones suffering." His experiences growing up during the war solidified his belief in a peaceful, non-confrontational approach with nature and people and also fueled his love for education.

Sombath's community had few schools. Parents generally did not value education because they needed their children to help out in the farm. Despite growing up in a poor family, Sombath received an education that opened up his worldview and changed the way he viewed life. His stints of studies in the United States gave him an appreciation of the simplicity of village life and community solidarity in Laos. Sombath studied education and agriculture, which he thought would be useful when he returned to Laos. He realized modern agriculture was not suitable in Laos because it was too dependent on high investments in technology and machinery that were meant more for commercial agriculture rather than family farmlands.

Sombath believed in practical, self-reliant, and sustainable ways of solving problems at the local level with the use of appropriate technologies. He initiated two ideas: 1) a rice-based integrated system and 2) improving food security through low-cost farming. Sombath's approach towards reviving and building local knowledge and natural resource governance was further highlighted when he pioneered the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal in Laos and established the Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC) and the Panyanivej Organic Farm.

Sombath's ability to build partnerships was one of his guiding principles in the way he worked. His way was always to reach out, even to people he did not like or groups he did not agree with. He was respected by civil society and even government groups in Laos because

he was able to put aside his own ideas, thinking only to reach out and find a common ground with the people.

Sombath later on started to explore the spiritual aspect of development. Raised as a Buddhist, he believed that the basic values of compassion, love, kindness, and respect of nature should form the basis of society. He consolidated all of his thinking and perspectives into a Model of Balanced Development and a Happy Livable Laos, which is composed of the four pillars—economy, culture, spirituality, and environment—and with quality education and good governance as the foundations. He argued that development is not only about economic growth but ultimately involves ecological, holistic, and spiritual well-being. For him, society should be comprised of people who can engage in sustainable livelihoods, internalize spiritual values, and do no harm to other people and the environment.

ETHNIC PERSPECTIVES

Human Behavior Towards Nature and the Thai Ethnic Philosophy

By Duong Hoang Cong

Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups (53 are minorities, one is the majority) among its 90 million population. The country's land area is 33 million hectares, and of these close to 14 million hectares are forests. The 53 ethnic groups have customs, habits, traditional knowledge on use of the forest and water resources. In the second half of the 20th century, when Vietnam's economy became more developed, population density increased in delta regions and also in the remote mountainous regions. Forest areas are shrinking, and where they shrink, the water resources dry up, and the experiences in management, exploitation, and use of forests and water resources are also limited and have changed.

According to the 2009 census, there are 1,500,423 Thai people living in Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Son La, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, and Nghe An.

Thai people practice rice cultivation using appropriate irrigation systems, which are locally called *Muong-Phai-Lai-Lin* (consisting of ditch, damming, water over obstacles, trough) and found in valley fields. They used to plant sticky rice crops, now they have moved on to two ordinary rice crops. They also do shifting cultivation to plant rice, corn, cotton, dyes, mulberry, and textile fabric. Most households have livestock, poultry, and engage too in knitting. The famous product of Thai people is brocade, durable woven fabric with clear lines and patterns. With them, sticky rice is traditional food. *Com Lam* is distinctive character of Thai people. Other special food are dried and grilled.

Thai people live in villages and each village has from a few dozen to more than 100 households adjacent to each other, often settled near water sources. Their houses have stilts, with the roof round and bowl-like the turtle shells, with both sides of the roof having the symbol called *Khau Cut*. The stilts are long and high.

About Their Costume. Thai girls' traditional attire is a close-fitting blouse and long black skirt. They also wear a special brocade for a head scarf called "Khăn piêu." From childhood, girls are taught how to fasten "Xài yêu," a belt made of cloth, so as to have an S body shape. Traditionally, a black Thai wear a black blouse with a high collar, while a white Thai wear white blouse with heart-shaped collar. A blouse has two rows of silver buttons on the front: one row has female butterfly-shaped buttons and the other, male butterfly-shaped buttons. A single girl wears blouse with an even number of buttons, while married women have an odd number of buttons on their blouse.

Thai men do not require flashy and sophisticated style clothes. They only wear belted short pants and shirt with open collar and two pockets on either side. The popular color for male clothes is black, pale red, or white, and have stripes for design.

Thai people really like to sing and dance. They have a traditional dance, using fan and bamboo, which is unique to their culture.

They worship their ancestors, heaven and earth, and their *Muong* (community). Their agricultural production is tied to rituals or prayers for a good season. They start a new year with a ceremony to welcome the God of Thunder.

They have sacred forests where the public worships. This area measuring about under one hectare to a few hectares, in which ancient trees are protected and preserved voluntarily because people live in the sacredness of the forest.

Thai People's Wisdom

1. With forest

Thai people's tradition to protect the forest originates from their ancient teachings: "The trees have fur (ancient trees) as the elderly have beard. If the forest is immensely green, it is a watershed, and if the forest have endless water, the forest is sacred and is ground for rituals and abstinence."

In their village, they have what they call the forest spirits called *Cua Xen*, while the entrance to the village has village forest spirits called *Cua Pong*, which means the soul of community holds the village.

Thai people never destroy the forest; they know that the forest has higher humidity, provides them enough water for daily living and for the plants. The forest is a source of wood for building houses, home to enough animals, provide bamboo shoots and vegetables for food. Thai people only use dead branches of trees for cooking and heating. When Thai people die, their loved ones also need the firewoods to burn but these firewood have been earned and stored, no tree is burned alive. The dead people's ashes are buried in the soil in the forest, and so the forest resource is very close and the living have a harmonious relationship with it. Forests feed people when they are alive, so when people die, forests are fed by becoming burial place called **Tai đin phăng, Nhắng pá liệng**.

Thai communities also classify the forests. There's the sacred forest place called *Dong Xen*, measuring around two hectares and is for worshiping. In this place no one is allowed to cut down a tree, and there are also no shifting cultivation activities. The old forests, where there are water sources or streams, are also restricted and protected. In some communities, they have a Cemetery Forest (ghost forest), such as in Son La and Lai Chau provinces. The last kind of forest is where they can harvest products such as timber, wood, bamboo, medicinal plants.

There's a saying among the Thai people that "No land is not a forest," which means forest resources are endless. There are areas devoted shifting cultivation (people plant corn and rice) near the forest, but it is just only a corner in the forest, and the people never cut down the trees to grow corn, rice, or cassava.

Other beliefs about the forest:

- Only use the dead branches of a tree as firewood
- When people get something from forest, people heve to talk first with the village leader
- When people get bamboo shoot from forest, only choose where follow the sundown
- Never harvest all the bamboo shoots, only get a third.

The anxiety of the current generation for future generations if forest resources are excessively abused also guides the Thais. "Forest fires make the children cry." This statement again confirms that forest resources are extremely important to the Thai people. Forest fires also imply that if previous generation's exploitation and use of forest resources lead to exhaustion, the damage created will have to be borne by the future generation. If the forest is lost, it means they lose water, food and also land in which to bury when Thai people die.

2. Wood to build house

When Thai people need to cut the tree or bamboo, they always cut the tree in the center, because the old trees are there, while young trees are at the outer parts, and have to be protected. Over time these young trees become old trees and again comprised the inner parts of the forest, the old place will become space for the next generation of young trees that will grow.

Pẳmạyẳm táng cuông óck nọ

- Only cut down the old trees
- Who is the first person can tick to the tree, it means that tree has owner, and others are not alowed to cut the tree.
- Of course have to ask and get permission of village leader

3. Harvesting the medicinal herb

The medicinal herbs are of different variety, and healers which plants are medicinal. They have to

ensure to let the trees develop again after using them for medicinal purposes.

When they cut the medicine tree, they never cut all the roots.

Khút da nhá khút mết cốc
Lốc un nhá lốc mết hạ

- Never use the spade to dig the root of medicine tree
- Only get herb medicine in the morning or afternoon, never at noon or nighttime
- Only get the tops and stems, never get the root
- Before taking herb medicine, hold a ceremony and ask permission from God

4. Water resource

Each village has one bathing area for men and one for women; the one for women is on higher ground because it is believed that women are the mother of water. But the area for washing is a the lowest level to ensure that the water source is not polluted. Water for rituals, such as in *Com Lam* or funeral is taken from the watershed before sunrise when the water is cooler. To conserve water, the Thai people always remind each other to protect the watershed: "If someone plants vegetables in the watershed, everyone goes to lift together, if someone plants the Taro at the water circuit, everyone goes to pluck together." In their mind, the vegetable that grows near the watershed is planted by a ghost or bad person. If they want to have enough water, they have to protect the watershed together by maintaining the area surrounding the watershed clean.

Người với sông suối
Where have water, there is village
Where have trench, there have rice
Enough water, enough land
Where dry field, there is not village
one rice by natural water equal 10 rices by artificial water.
10 waters at the bottom is not enough like 1 on the top.

With Thai people, water is very important; they need water as fish need water.

"Forever as fish living under the water, as field need water" is their belief.

Lớng lớng sướng nặm pờng pa, sướng ná pờng nặm

Protecting the watershed is very important so that the Thai people abstain from washing there and from using the area for grazing. They mark the zone by a traditional symbol called *Ta Leo*, where hang Ta Leo, which means to prohibit doing bad things with the watershed. For them, watershed is of mother earth, mother water, mother forest, soul of village. Keeping the forest resource is ensuring water enough for everyday, ensuring survival of humans.

Everyone in the community shares the water resource through the trench system. Each household controls the water level to be fed into the field and to be used by the households.

Each village has two bathing beaches (one for men, another for women); the bathing beach for women is higher than the bathing beach for men, because women is mother of water. The washing beach is the lowest level to ensure the water will not be polluted.

The water for ritual, e.g. for the *Com La* or funeral should be retrieved from the watershed before sunrise (with them water will be cool before the Sun see it.

To conserve the water, Thai people always remind each other this:

"If someone plant the vegetable in the watershed, everyone goes to lift together, if someone plants

the Taro on the water circuit, everyone goes to pluck together."

In their minds, vegetable growing near the watershed is planted by a ghost or bad person. If they want to have enough water, they have to protect the watershed together.

5. The interaction: human - field - human

Their other beliefs:

Chính nà thiệt hẳn thảu
Chính nảu thiệt hẳn tai

"Chính nà thiệt hẳn thảu" – meaning each household's field is inviolable, or the hatred will be continuous from this generation to the next.

"Chính nảu thiệt hẳn tai" – meaning the field is same as a wife (as most loved ones). So the Thai people always remind each other to avoid taboos and behave well in the community by working hard in the field so that there is rice to eat and if there is water flowing into the field, there will be fish.

The field under the village is the best, but the village under a swidden is beautiful. When field bunds are broken while catching fish, rice will be lost because the water will flow out, and this will also result in flooding. So as not to deal with floods, villagers should never build a house in the middle of a field.

The Thai people deal with flood
- Never build house on the island
- If astray, don't be sleep near the ravine

Tẳng hươn nhá tăng đon cang
Non táng nhá nón liệp huổi

But the Thai recognize that nature is not always in state of harmony, as there are places with ravines, and rivers can flood anytime.

6. Land resources

Thai people have a way of dividing lands. They believe that forests and lands are part of the commons, and their ownership and management depend on who can delineate them. The Thai people have customary laws that guide the community on how to divide and manage the lands.

The owner of a piece of land is the one who reclaimed, or who range markers to use first.

Every member of the community follows these principles
- good people can use the field near the village
- generous people can use the field at the first of trench

Cốn Chau đi chẳng kin ná liệp bản
Cốn chau quảng chẳng kin ná pá mương

This sentence means: in key position where effect to the water for village, if someone owner, that person have to be a good person (good family), because the place where they owner is near the watershed to ensure water enough for hold village.

7. Traditional education

The Thai children are taught folk songs by adults, and these songs are very simple, soft, melodic, and easy to recite. They tell of how to behave in the family, and with siblings and neighbors.

There are also songs that teach children love for nature such as **Inh lả ơi, xao noọng ời,** which goes like this:

Everywhere in the mountain and forest is brightly, when spring comes, a thousand flower are smiling

So, when human began to realize, they are tough to understand the natural as a friend.

Higaonon Perspective

By Nena Undag-Lumandong

Indigenous women take care of Mother Nature because this is where we live together with our elders and ancestors. We treat nature as our market because this is where we get different kinds of delicious foods and wild fruits. We treat nature as our pharmacy because this is where we get medicines for our health. We treat nature as our park because this is where we breathe cool and fresh air and find beautiful flowers. We treat nature as our zoo because this is where we find different animal species and appreciate beautiful sceneries in the environment where we live. We are very happy every time we hear the sound of the river flowing. This is why we consider ourselves nature lovers.

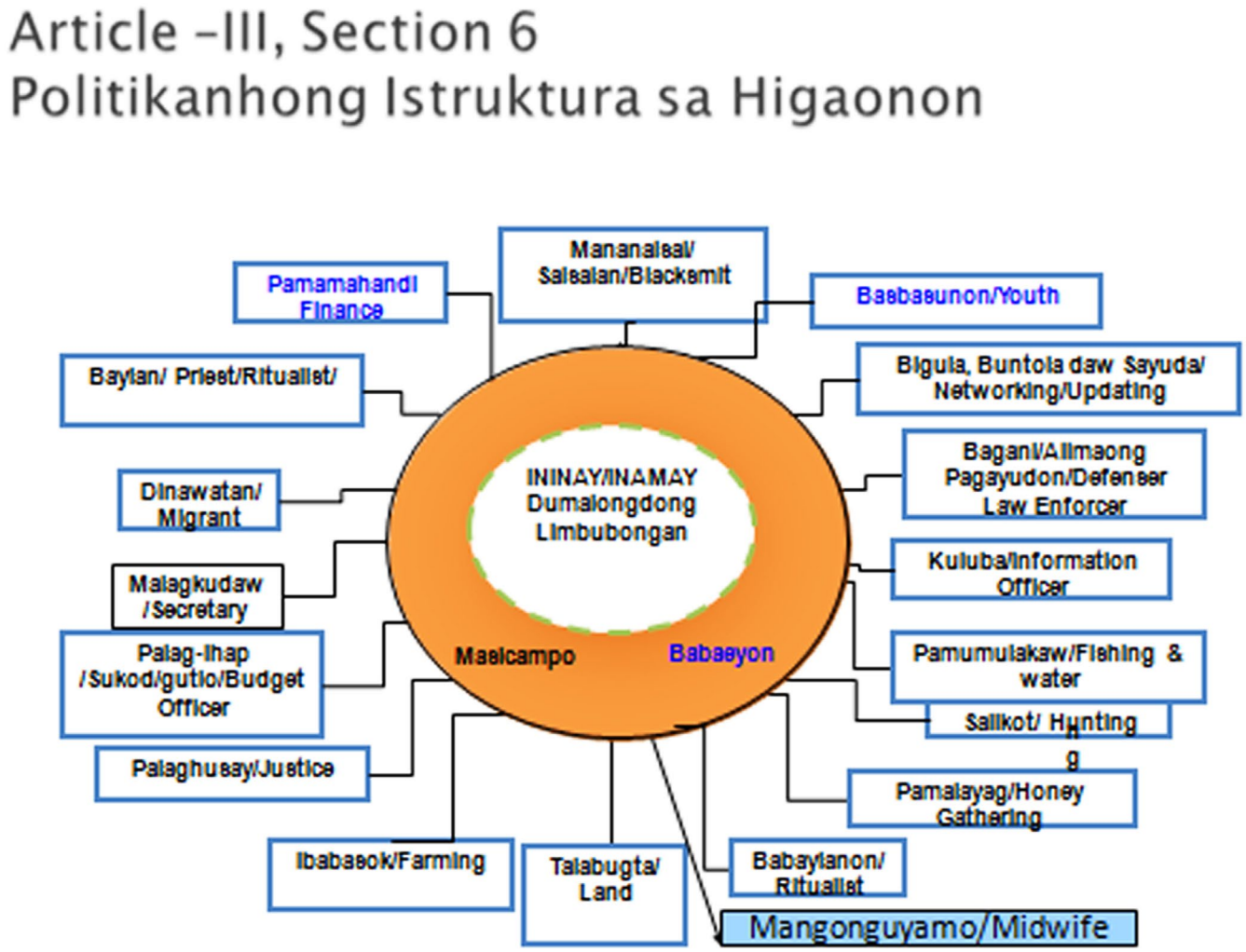
When nature is destroyed, it is like the people living with nature are being killed. Nature for us is life. Nature is very important for us indigenous peoples because when it is destroyed, the spirits of the tree, the stones, the air, the earth, the water, the honey, the wild pigs, the birds, and other species or living beings found in our nature will exact revenge on us even if we are not the ones who destroyed them.

Fusto Orasan aka Datu Sandignan of Higaonons in southern Philippines

This view is not only applicable for a select few; this is based on and deeply rooted in our culture and traditions expressed in our Customary Laws. All these came from *Bungkatol Ha Bulawan Daw Nangka Tasa Ha Lana* or the Sacred Golden Rule of the Higaonon. This law has its own structure so that governance will function effectively through our Indigenous Political Structure and serve as a guide to the implementation of the Right to Self Determination (RSD) of the *Higaonon* tribe. This structure consists of different committees (see figure below).

Indigenous Political Structure

The use of our Indigenous Political Structure is important to serve as a guide in improving our lives. It is clearly stated here that each and every one of us has a responsibility to become a true leader. But we also see the limitation in terms of indigenous women's participation. There were only three committees with women. In spite of these challenges in indigenous women participation, we continue to strive to include women in all of the committees. and we started



this practice in *KAGDUMA* where the Chairperson is a woman. Oftentimes, the leadership position is only limited to men, however, indigenous women play an important role in facilitating the functioning of their communities.

Threats to Our Nature and Ancestral Domain

On November 16, 2011, Cagayan de Oro and Iligan City in MIndanao, southern Philippines, were devastated by Typhoon Sendong. Thousands of people died because of heavy flooding, which was caused by large-scale mining operations in the hinterland of Cagayan de Oro, which is part of our ancestral domain. Logging and mining operations caused landslides in our mountains. The establishment of mining companies like CEKAS Development Corporation, EVERGROW, G-39, MINERGY, NORMICA, and many others had caused the widespread destruction of our nature and turned the Iponan River brown. A few of our indigenous brothers and sisters did away with farming and became mining laborers.

Fausto Orasan, also known as Datu Sandigan, was killed in September 16, 2011 near the boundary of Barangay Taglimao and Tuburan. He was a recognized Higaonon leader in Cagayan de Oro City. He selflessly offered his life for our struggle in defending our nature and ancestral domain.

Higaonon IP Women

The indigenous women of Higaonon bravely resisted the entry of various destructive development projects in our ancestral domain, especially the operations of large-scale mining companies. We lobbied with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources—Mines and Geosciences Bureau and narrated to them the connivance of their own employees with the mining companies in destroying our ancestral domain resulting to the loss of our source of livelihood. These companies entered our ancestral domain with no Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and ignored the provisions of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA).

In conclusion,

1. We, the indigenous women from the Philippines, oppose any forms of "development" projects that destroy our nature.
2. Indigenous people and women's rights should be respected.
3. Laws and processes protecting indigenous peoples rights such as IPRA and FPIC should be followed, especially when a "development" project is involved.
4. We consider nature and our ancestral domain as life itself; thus it should not be destroyed but instead used sustainably for the development of indigenous peoples.

Bunong and Nature

By Yun Lorang

Indigenous people in Cambodia live in remote areas and highlands of the country, especially in the Northeast, which includes Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, Kratie, and Preh Vihear, and in the southwest in Cardamom Mountains, Kampong Som, Koh Kong, Posat, Bat Dom Bang, Siem Reap, Audomean Chey, Banteay Mean Chey, and Kompong Cham provinces. These provinces are located far from Phnom Penh, the capital. The infrastructure in these locations is very poor, but these areas are rich in natural resources. They live in 15 of 24 provinces of Cambodia, 36 districts, 131 communes, 504 communities, comprising about 45,000 households or 200,000 people from 24 indigenous people groups namely, Phnong (Bunong), Kouy (Kui), Tumpuon (Tampuen), Charay (Jarai), Kroeung, Prov, Kavet, Stieng, Kraol, Mil, Kachak, Por, Khaonh, Chorng, Suoy, Thmaun, Lun, Saauch, Roder, Khe, Raang, Spung, Laeun, and Samre.

The Bunong people live in more than 50 communes in four provinces; 21 of these communes are in Busra, Srae Ampum, Monourom, Bu Chri, Chong Phlah, Memang, Srae Chuk, Srae Khtum, Srae Preah, Nang Khi Loek, Ou Buon Leu, Royo, Sokh Sant, Srae

Huy, Srae Sangkom, Krong The, Monorom, Dak Dam, Rom Manea, Sokodom, Spean Mean Chey. In Mondulkiri province, there are 91 villages. Most of the indigenous people communities in Mondulkiri province depend mainly on land, including forests, where they practice their customary agricultural system, *Chamka* (shifting cultivation), in rice fields. For daily livelihood, they also rely on non-timber products.

In general terms, the highlanders can be distinguished from their lowland neighbors not only by the former having lived in the upland areas most of their lives, but also because of their particular religion binding them to their surrounding environment and their use of semi-settled swidden agriculture techniques.

According to the local belief system, the entire natural environment—the sky, the earth, the forest along with water sources, hills, stones, and rice fields—is populated by spiritual forces. The indigenous people's religious beliefs influence their health and wellbeing, as well as their prosperity. For example, the primary forest areas surrounding the villages are believed to be inhabited by forest spirits (one Brou elder has described it as "these trees that were born in the time of the gods," thus people are forbidden to cut them. To do so would arouse the anger of the spirits, resulting in the sickness or even the death of the individuals responsible (as is described in local Languages, they would "do us"). In addition to these spirits from the natural world, spirits of the ancestors are also believed to have the power to protect, or conversely (if agreed or not propitiated effectively), to wreak havoc on human world. At crucial stages of the agricultural cycle, in case of illnesses where supernatural interference is believed to be the cause, in times of severe misfortune, or at other opportune times of the year, such as animal sacrifices and offering of rice wine as part of organized communal ritual. The members of each village are bound together not only through kinship ties but also in a religious sense, as every village has its own tutelary protective spirits which must be regularly propitiated with a sacrificial offering and feast. Many villages are named after forest sites and streams close to their base, as well as after the ancient elders who were the first inhabitants of the settlement. There is also a wealth of local mythology concerning distinctive areas surrounding the village.

The Bunong, for instance, have strong links with the mountains surrounding their villages. Some communities make annual offerings to the spirits there. These practices are related to their belief that people originally inhabited these mountains and that their ancestors are still there. The Bunong spend much of their time in or around the forest environment, whether working in the fields, watching livestock, gathering firewood, hunting, fishing or seeking fruit and leaves as foods and medicine. They are renowned for their knowledge of forest terrain, and according to history for centuries they have been sought out by lowlanders hoping to exchange goods for the rare and lucrative produce from the forest. The Bunong are known to have a unique detailed definition, categorization, and knowledge of the trees, plants, and other elements of their environment. They have words for all these trees, plants, and other species that do not exist in any language other than their own.

Traditional Authority

The Bunong abide by the traditional rule of a group of elders in the village, referred to as *Purahn*, which in the Phnong language refers

to respected elders, or *Purahn Ban*, who play a key role in governing the community, such as in settling issues, organizing spirit sacrifices, and maintaining peace and happiness within the community. In addition, a village elder or middle-aged person capable in negotiations is appointed as village spokesperson; this person is called the *Antreahn.* Today there are over ten purahn, two Purahn Ban, and three or four Antreahn who work together in the village.

Purahn Ban

A Purahn Ban's key role and duties include the following:

- Organizing of sacrifice ceremonies in the village to request the spirits for peace, happiness, and forgiveness
- Organizing of village ceremonies, such as weddings
- Mediation of village disputes
- Organizing of meetings among village elders to resolve problems within the village
- Educating village children in accordance to traditional culture and practice.
- Advising villagers on land matters, including preserving forest for non-timber products or selecting suitable land for cultivation. Villagers believe that such persons are knowledgeable on the subject of sacred forests.
- Representing villagers in negotiation and dispute resolution with neighboring villages.
- Maintaining solidarity within the village.

A Purahn Ban is not selected based on any particular criteria. A person becomes a Purahn Ban if he is considered to be in good standing within the community and are knowledgeable in traditional beliefs and capable of solving conflicts. The majority of Purahn Ban inherited their title; however, inheritance is not the main criterion for selecting a Purahn Ban.

Antreahn

An Antreahn's principal roles are the following:

- They serve as village spokesperson responsible for facilitating conflict-resolution, especially in cases of divorce.
- Organizer of village festivities including conciliation ceremonies with chicken and wine.
- Matchmaker in any village engagement and wedding process. Often, a Purahn Ban is asked to become an Antreahn.

Dispute Resolution Procedure

For many generations, like in other indigenous communities in Cambodia, villagers have solved conflicts using negotiation, mediation, and arbitration. The traditional and typical way of settling disputes is through mediation by the Antreahn and the Purahn Ban. In general, the conflict resolution procedure is as follows:

Resolving Conflicts among Parties

In cases where a dispute is not serious, the aggrieved party may meet with the opposing party to discuss the dispute. In such cases, the party who accepts fault for the dispute will meet with the other party and ask for forgiveness. Often, a small amount of compensation is offered to ensure the conflict does not escalate. In solving the conflict by themselves, the parties involved avoid having to pay conduct *Kaos,* a ceremony involving the use of wine and chicken to symbolize reconciliation. The Bunong categorize forests into sacred forest, burial forest, community forest (for collection of non-timber forest product), watershed forest (old forest). These are all protected forests, part of their life and thus must be cared for by themselves, even without government support.

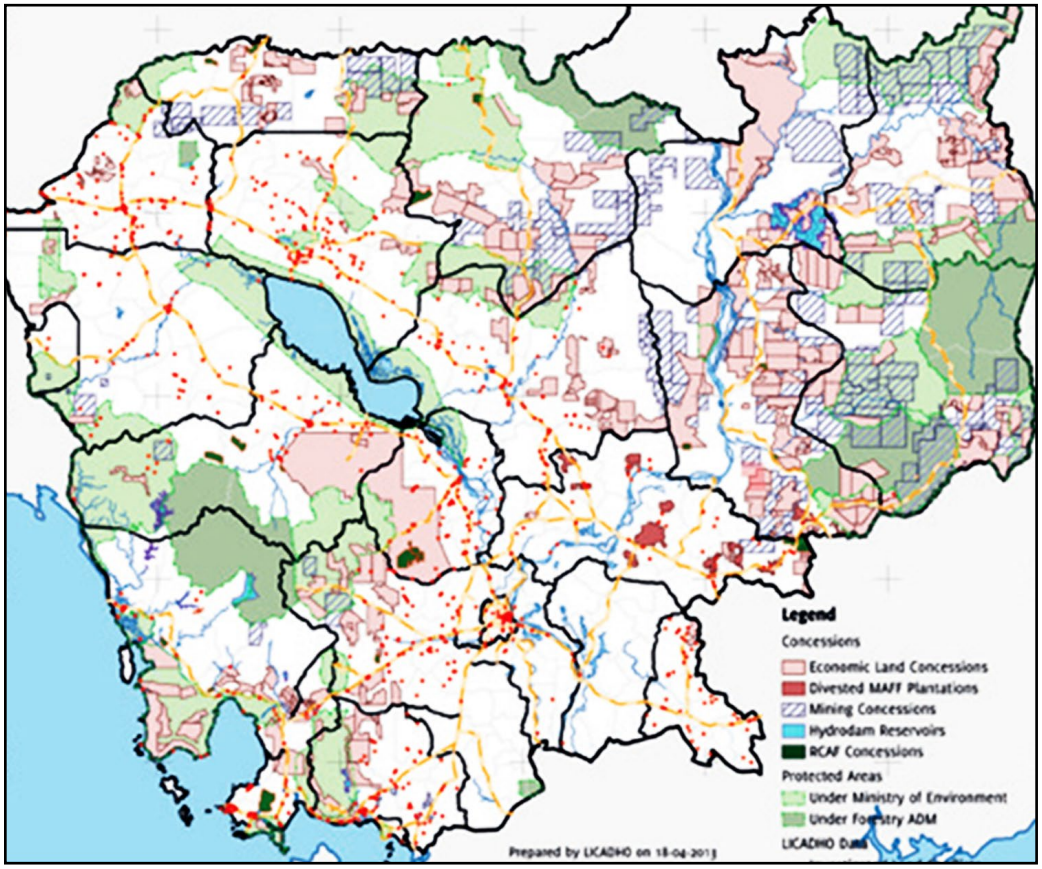
The forest also offers many herbal and medicinal plants and firewood for the living and the dead (funeral rituals). If there is a violation, people who depend on it will take action against these people. The violators will be punished by the communities through customary rules.

Kaos & Mpes

- *Kaos* means holding the perpetrator responsible through compensation, reparation, and offering of property for the praise of the spirits and for ridding the village of bad luck.
- *Mpes* is a ceremony for praying to the spirits to ask for forgiveness for any wrong doing and for ridding the village of bad fortune and danger. The ceremony consists of sacrificing chickens, dogs, pigs, buffalo, and wine depending on the gravity of the wrongdoing. Pig or chicken blood is used to paint the opening of the wine jar and the forehead of the victim. Village elders perform the ritual while whispering apologetic words and asking that the village be rid of all bad fortune. They use coconuts or sticks to stir the wine while the apologies are made. For minor accidents such as dogbites, the Mpes is performed simply using a small amount of rice and tree leaves.

Challenges the Bunong Face

The systematic violation of the individual and collective rights of IPs, including not following the compensation system and procedures, has affected their economic, social, and cultural rights.



Did you know 80% of land concessions in Cambodia are for rubber?

But in most cases, IPs don't understand their rights and are defenseless against external pressures on their communities. The government makes decisions on resource allocation in an ad-hoc and centralized basis. Government laws and policies have resulted in the privatization and commodification of land and land-based production. They have also mining and agricultural industries through economic land concessions granted by the Cambodian Government to private companies, without proper Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Thus, indigenous communities face land tenure insecurity, weakened traditional common-property rights, and increasing land conflicts. IPs' traditional sustainable resources-use patterns are being replaced by unsustainable and environmentally damaging practices.

Indigenous peoples are worried about these changes taking place in their domain at an unprecedented scale and pace. Intensive forms of agricultural technology are replacing IPs' traditional farm practices, while there has also been rapid shift from common-property to private land ownership, usually catalyzed by private companies and influential personalities, as well as by globalized development and rapid modernization.

The non-recognition of the collective land rights of IPs has led to widespread land grabbing and forced displacement associated with plantations, large-scale mining, dams, and infrastructure implemented by private companies without proper social and environmental impact assessment. Weak governance, poor observance of laws, and poor enforcement of policy have left forestland and the land tilled by indigenous communities at the disposal of powerful and well-connected individuals. The current trend in migration brings additional pressures to IPs since migrants are now competing with them in the use and allocation of natural resources. In the process, traditional land and forest claims are not fully respected, leading to more land and forest disputes.

SYNTHESIS OF SESSION 2:

Ethnic Perspectives

There are different ethnic perspectives, traditional wisdoms, and indigenous visions around the world on how to live in harmony with nature. These also include the indigenous peoples' (IP) identity and how they link and relate with non-IP local communities. Valuable information and knowledge on how these communities approach and relate with nature may be obtained by learning about the languages used in different cultures and communities, as new scientific knowledge supports the advance value of IP and local knowledge among communities.

The Thai classify their communities into categories. There are sacred forest places for worship called Dong Xen, where no one is allowed to either cut down any trees or cultivate the land. The old forests, where streams and sources of water are found, are called Mother Water. In some communities, they also have Cemetery or Ghost Forest. Thais believe that the forests feed the people while they live and the forest is their burial place when they die. They also have a category for the harvesting of forest products such as timber, bamboo, and medicinal plants.

People learn to protect their forests from ancient teachings. Customary law, on the other hand, allows communities to make decisions about land use management. Their ecological relation is coded into community practice. For instance, agricultural practices involve generations of knowledge about regenerating land, forests, and water. Such practices also show respect for 'forces larger than humans' such as land, rice, mountains, and rivers. They keep these traditional methods and transfer them to the next generations.

The Higaonons of the Philippines take care of Mother Earth because they believe this is where they live together with their elders and ancestors. They see land as a special gift from Magbabaya or their God the Creator. They treat nature as their local market, pharmacy, park, zoo, and are very happy every time they hear the sound of river flowing. They consider themselves nature lovers.

The Teduray-Lambangians, also from Mindanao, consider nature as the extension of life and body; thus, they strive to safeguard their closeness to nature. They practice collective leadership and group consultation that determines by consensus what the whole community desires. They believe in an equal status in the society and the communal ownership of the land, hunting and fishing grounds, and worship places, and reject development that values one human being over another. For the Teduray-Lambangians, development should ensure that the good fedew remains the basis of justice, peace, and development. Good fedew is the presence of a good feeling, peace of mind, and the physical well-being of every individual member of the community. For them, this is the strongest foundation of peace, justice, and development in a tribal society.

The Bunong of Cambodia depend mainly on land and forest, practicing their customary Chamka or shifting cultivation, tilling of rice fields, and collecting non-timber forest products for their daily livelihood. According to the local belief system, the entire natural environment is populated by a vast array of spiritual forces. These religious beliefs have the power to influence the health, well-being, and prosperity of villagers. Many villages are named after the forest sites and streams close to their base, aside from the ancient elders who were the first inhabitants of the settlement. There is a wealth of local mythology concerning distinctive areas surrounding a village. Like other indigenous minorities, villagers in Cambodia have solved conflicts using negotiation, mediation and arbitration throughout many generations.

While there are differences among these ethnic perspectives, there are also many similarities. They all equate nature with life. They view nature as the source of life as it sustains life today and ensures life for future generations. They believe that if nature is destroyed, it is similar to people being killed, and thus seek to live harmoniously with it. They believe in non-commodification, non-ownership, collectivity, and communal decision making and governance.

All these ethnic values, perspectives, and alternatives are not only taught by elders or indigenous leaders but also transmitted through creative means like parables, stories, and music.

SPIRITUAL & CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Ecological Ethos and Indigenous Traditions

By Debal Deb

Based on past experiences of resource crunch, all traditional indigenous huntergatherer-cultivator societies learned to erect cultural institutions to protect their resource base and ensure long-term sustenance of the prey base. Thus, most of hunter-gatherer societies observed tacit rules of restraint so as to not over-harvest resources. Traditional hunters and artisanal fishers observed closed seasons, which coincided with the breeding periods of the prey animals. Women in indigenous societies were also aware of similar restraints while harvesting wild mushrooms and tubers in the forest.

Inchoate understanding of the value of biodiversity and the need to protect the resource base for posterity is reflected in various forms of cultural and social behavior. In most indigenous cultures, norms against callous or cruel conduct toward animals and excessive and gratuitous exploitation of plant resources are often motivated by "sentiments of affinity," and are often "unrelated to a calculated empiricism" (Kellert 1996, p. 151).

Sacred Species and Habitats

All hunter-gatherer-shifting cultivator societies have mythologies and folklore that recognize several species as "sacred." These sacred species may be totems (linked to myths of origin of respective clans of a tribe), or sanctified, with reference to certain deities. Many such sacred species (e.g. *Cocos nuciferaa, Aegle marmelos, Ocimum sanctum*) have important uses as food or medicine, and their "sacred" status serves to protect the resource base from gratuitous destruction. However, there are some keystone species with no direct economic use value (such as *Adina cordifolia, Ficuls benghalensis*), and yet are considered "sacred" in indigenous traditions.

Not only species but also habitats are considered sacred in settled indigenous societies in all the continents. In South Asia, thousands of forest patches, ponds, and lakes are still held sacred. Sacred groves (SGs) are distinct patches of vegetation (ranging in size from a small cluster of a few trees to a large forest stand spanning several hundred acres), which are consecrated to local deities or ancestral spirits. Removal of any living things from the SG is a taboo, although dead logs and leaves are sometimes removed from some SGs. As a consequence of prolonged social protection, remnants of SGs are today the last bastions of several rare and endemic flora and fauna (Spadoni and Deb 2005; Deb 2007). The institution of sacred groves and ponds is perhaps the best example of indigenous traditional resource use practices promoting conservation of biodiversity.

The assignment of religious value to a species or an ecosystem, regardless of its consumptive end-uses, seems to be a symbolic recognition by local cultures of its "existence value", and a moral attitude towards nature in general (Deb 2014). This attitude is what Fromm (1973) calls *biophilia*–an innate love and respect for life and creatures.

Existence Value and Ritual Use Value

The existence value of an element of biodiversity, which otherwise does not have any consumptive use value, may get translated into a ritual use value. Different species are considered essential in performing certain religious rites. Thus, Santal, Munda, Bhumij, and Kora people must eat pieces of the tuber *Dioscoria pentaphylla* on the *Dak Sankranti* (the last day of Ashadha month of Indian calendar) as a ritual necessity. Flowers and leaves of different plants that have no consumptive uses are often associated with different rites of passage in tribal and Hindu cultures. *Saraca indica* twigs are a necessary item in Kora obituary rituals, and *Jatropha gossypi* ia flowers are essential in Bhumij wedding ceremony (Deb and Malhotra 1997), although these species are neither considered sacred nor used for any other purposes in these cultures.

Domestication and Amplification of Genetic Diversity

Indigenous people identified ancestral species of animals and plants, from which they derived all the domesticated animals and crop plants that we know today.

Beginning with the dog *(Canis familiaris)*, created in the process of domestication of the Eurasian wolf some 17000 years ago, early humans had domesticated over 40 vertebrates and about 300 crop plants (Caras 1996; Diamond 2002). Moreover, indigenous societies fabulously amplified the genetic diversity of these domesticated species through selection, to suit their specific needs (Shi and Lai 2015). Thus, hundreds of dog breeds were created to assist shepherds, hunters, and farmers; thousands of ricelands were created to grow in diverse local edapho-climatic conditions, as well as gustatory preferences (Deb 2005; Huang et al. 2012).

The novel crop varieties and breeds of domesticated animals spread across continents by an expanding network of exchange among ancient indigenous societies. In this exchange network of what Eisenstein (2011) calls sacred economics, seeds are considered to be a common pool resource and a gift item, open to all members of the community. Community seed banks are an example of the communitarian heritage of the institution of continual use and maintenance of crop genetic diversity.

Conservation Ethos in Contemporary Indigenous Societies

Three salient patterns of the cultural practices relating to nature emerge from our study of traditional indigenous mode of resource use. First, the cultures of primitive technology that were empirically predicated experiences of resource crunch are likely to forbid the resource use modes that are known to have had adverse consequences in the past. Profligate use of other resources, especially the ones that had not affected resource availability in the past, would tend to remain unrectified. The "neutral" practices with no conservation consequences may appear under changed circumstances to be profligate, and vice versa.

Second, some of the current practices that signify "profligate" use of resources may have evolved in response to certain external influences on the local culture and economy. The erosion of traditional social organization, loss of community control over natural resources, and inclusion of the resource items into market economy inevitably disrupted the cultural restraints on overexploitation of resources (Oström 2009; Deb 2009).

Third, all the cultural practices with any conservation implications, incidental or otherwise, seem to depict a reverential attitude toward nature, an attitude that is likely to prevent exhaustive extraction and use of vital resources. Thus, the assigning of "sacred" status to a multitude of plants and animals, and the design of the Lodha and Munda bird traps to prevent injury to the captured animal seem to reveal the respect for nature inherent in these cultures.

Obviously, certain practices regarding natural objects may not have any conservation consequences, yet may serve to reveal the *Weltanschauung* of the culture. Indigenous cultural tradition provides the semiotic plane on which the basic reverential attitude toward nature are reflected, and reinforced, by various cultural institutions and belief systems.

Some of these practices may have conservation consequences to varying extents, while others may have no significant impact on the resource base. Sacred groves and seasonal restrictions of harvest are examples of the former; the omens depicted above, and the myths and beliefs about various plants and animals (Shepard 1993; Nelson 1993) are examples of the latter, which express the biophilia of the society along the metaphorical corridor. Omens, auguries, and related myths may thus be described as a "syntactical" extension of the biophilous "semantic" structure, and serve to endorse biophilia in traditional cultural mores (Deb and Malhotra 2001; Deb 2009).

Continuing traditional norms of resource use indicate that indigenous societies retain an inchoate perception of the value of biodiversity—a value that transcends the instrumental value of natural resources (Deb 2014). Instances of restraints on profligate resource use, and the sanctification of selected components of the living world reflect the indigenous pre-industrial *Weltanschauung* which is facing the threat of disappearance with the advent of capitalization and commodification of nature. It is not too late to reorient national land use policies and state management systems to ensure security to all co-passengers of Spaceship Earth.

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More Than Rice: From Rice Bank to People's Movement Network

By Father Niphot Thienvihan

Establishment of the Rice Merit Network

Rice merit network is a movement formed by a confederation of rice merit groups in 383 villages in Chiangmai and Maehongsorn Provinces. They are located in nine areas divided according to the establishment by Catholic communities. They formally organized as community organizations in 2002 using the name "Khrua Khai Gong Boon Khao" (Rice Merit Network). The network has a committee

with members representing villages. This committee is in charge of policy development and planning. It also has an executive committee represented by members from each field area and responsible for management work. They are supported by Catholic organizations, such as the Diocesan Social Action Centre of the Diocese of Chiangmai. The Rice Merit Network evolved as follows.

Evolution of the Rice Merit Network

Pre-Missionary Period

Mutual aid is practiced among the villagers during times of shortage. In the past, villagers were engaged primarily in subsistence production where reciprocal labor was necessary. The community was small with close relationship among members, and traditional leaders played a significant role. Normally, village leaders called "He Kho" would give advice on mutual aid. They would, in consultation with village elders, attend to living conditions of villagers.

Mutual aid within the community was done by those who had more in life to help those who lacked and were helpless. They gave what they had in kind, such as rice, taro, yam, clothes, kitchen utensils, and so on, and in labor, such as husking, carrying water, house building, rice field clearing, and cultivation. In the old days, they shared meat they had hunted for food. In addition, there was also mutual aid in times of crisis or important life events, such as sickness, death, house fires, weddings, and so on. The concept of giving assistance to the needy (especially rice) is explained through myths, stories, legends, and songs as an act of merit making, and it is the task of community members to help one another.

Formation Period

- **Missionary Age (1964-1977)**

Forty years ago, most remote villages did not have enough rice to eat. Missionary priests who came to promote Christianity in villages helped solve the problem of rice shortages by setting up rice groups in different villages. They gave money to catechists or Christian leaders to buy rice and set up a community rice fund from which community members could borrow in times of rice shortage. The villagers paid low interest according to their capacity. The formation of rice groups or rice funds by missionaries, apart from helping relieve starvation, also helped lessen the problem of drug addiction (opium) among villagers, because one of the conditions was that drug addicts did not have a right to borrow from this rice fund.

As a result, drug addicts tried to stop using drugs so that their family members would have the right to borrow rice. Hence, the problem of drug addiction was lessened and disappeared at present.

- **The Age of the Rice Bank (1978-1988)**

The Diocesan Social Action Centre (DISAC) of Chiangmai started to work with highland and lowland people on community development. The main activities during the initial period was to raise awareness of grassroots leaders and provide support to economic projects, especially towards the formation of a rice bank in various villages, which was a continuation of the rice groups introduced by missionaries and later developed as rice banks. This helped the renewal of the value of mutual aid and solve exploitation by traders and middlemen from the outside. It worked with community leaders

to analyse their situation and impacts on their communities in the future. They planned to address different community problems. For example, in the analysis the leaders saw that they did not have enough rice because they had small plots of land for cultivation. Therefore, they collectively cleared new rice fields. They also addressed the problem of shortages of water for domestic consumption by initiating a mountain tap water system in different villages. They requested funds for farm implements from DISAC. They initiated various animal-raising projects, such as cows, buffalo, pigs, and so on. Leaders organized villagers in each community and extended the rice bank service to various villages in Chiangmai and Maehongsorn. There were about 30 leaders who took part in this first discussion. These leaders are still leaders in different communities at present and are also leaders of the rice merit network.

The establishment of the rice bank helped the villagers so that they didn't have to rely on opium cultivation, and thus also contriubted to solving the problem of drug addiction. They had time to clear farmlands to prepare terrace cultivation, which was more productive and developed permanent farmlands. They also organized irrigation systems and grew vegetables. Simultaneously, they attended trainings and other learning processes DISAC organized to get updates on changes in society and trends in the development of community livelihoods. At the same time, there were trainings of community leaders in various villages to extend the concept of mutual aid, starting from rice to buffalo bank, cow bank, and other economic projects, such as pig raising, chicken raising, land projects, and so on. These activities aimed to prevent villagers from being exploited by traders and middlemen who provided loans and bought rice when it was still green, charging high interest rates.

Rice Merit Group-Network Age (1989-Present)

After operating the rice bank for a decade (1978-1988) simultaneously with an ongoing process of education and training, and leaders meeting, DISAC now tried to raise their awareness about extending help to other people. During this time, there was study on community cultures. Therefore, there was a mutual search among grassroots leaders to identify values in community religions and cultures, such as the value of sharing, mutual aid, simplicity, contentment, which which were the principles in rice and merit making of the Karen people.

The organization of village groups through rice merit making activity expanded to cover more areas as well as some villages in Chiangrai and Lampoon.

They officially set up a network of rice merit in March 2002, consolidating rice merit groups in 383 villages. This network was grassroots based and whose goal was to build mutual aid relationships within and among communities. The network has extended its activities to mobilisation to address present problems at community level, such as land, environment, non-chemical farming, drugs, youth, revival and transmission of local cultures and wisdom. They also continue to foster collaboration among communities, leading to the establishment of networks attending to specific issues, such as a network on conservation of natural resources and environment, a network on river basins, a network of women, a network of youth, etc. Activities the networks implement are training and education, such as meetings and seminars of network and regional committees, training of new leaders and organization of rice merit activities to support revolving rice fund in communities, scholarships for poor

children, women's savings groups, and funds for assistance to orphans, widows, handicapped, and old people in communities.

Differences between Rice Banks and Rice Merit Group

We could sum up the outputs of both types of development projects by assessing the opinions of villagers. (See below)

Results of Activities of the Rice Merit Network

Implementation of rice merit activities in Karen communities in Chiangmai and Maehongsorn was quite successful in both quantity and quality. Quantitatively, more activities took place in the community. Qualitatively, there is a process of conceptual development of grassroots leaders and villagers which is conducive to the promotion of community organizations in the future. This document will describe processes of development of activities and strengthening and empowerment of communities.

a) Process One – Development Activity Initiative Process

The Rice Merit Network has been established for 17 years (1989) in the context of Karen ethnic groups in Chiangmai and Maehongsorn who had small farmlands (on hill slopes), which resulted in inadequate rice for a whole year of domestic consumption. They only had enough rice to eat for 6-8 months per year.

DISAC Chiangmai has employed a development paradigm that did not only provide "materials" for Karen villagers, but also introduced "concepts", especially on development based on religio-cultural values of community.

The scope of the work of DISAC covered 383 villages in 2 provinces, i.e. Chiangmai and

Rice Bank	Rice Merit Group
Rice bank activity is purely based on "economic" reasons.	Rice merit activity is based on belief and culture of the community.
Motivation of organisation of people to implement a rice bank is based on "problems".	Villagers got organised to implement rice merit activity based on the "virtue" of mutual aid.
Resources to set up a rice bank are mobilised from outside (foreign donor agencies).	Resources to support rice merit activity are mobilised from within the community according to their willingness and capacity with some contribution from outside.
Rice bank provides loans with a low interest rate with regulations determined by outsiders.	Rice merit has three types: • Grant or relief • Set up different revolving funds for community • Set up operation fund for networks at two levels, namely regional and network

Maehongsorn. DISAC has divided these villages into 9 parochial areas. The first activities were establishments of rice banks, buffalo banks and cow banks, in which DISAC provided funds and supported the villagers to formulate regulations on management by themselves. Interest gained from these activities was kept in the groups. These activities were supported to address the problem of high interest on rice loans sought from traders from outside. It was not long before Karen community members had enough rice to eat, and were liberated from the bond of traders from outside their communities.

The religio-cultural notion of development concept is based on the value that "human persons are fulfilled when they are both "recipients and givers". When villagers were running short of rice, DISAC came in to give assistance. Therefore, when the communities have enough rice to eat, they should also share their surplus to help others. This is the origin of a new tradition of activities, namely the rice merit fund (mobilised from 383 communities. It is both "development work" and "merit making" deeply integrated systematically. The fund is revolved to villages where there is not enough rice. Then, the proceeds in rice and cash mobilised from this rice merit making campaign are used to set up a new community rice fund.

Since Karen people professed diverse religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism and ancestral beliefs, this rice merit making tradition united and involved people of all faiths in the same activity with rice as the common concern and awareness of ethnic identity.

Other activities were extended from this rice merit fund to address different problems of the communities, such as a revolving rice fund in the local community, a community welfare fund (in time of sickness, death, fire, flood, and so on), funds for assistance to widows, orphans, elderly people, the handicapped, scholarships for poor children, women's savings groups, a natural resource conservation fund, and non-chemical farming, etc.

b) Process Two – Discourse Development Process

The initiation of a new pattern of development activities is a process of developing a discourse from various perspectives in parallel with the rice merit network, which can be classified into three steps of discourse production, distribution and consumption.

1. Discourse Production

1.1 Raw materials for discourse production are original social capital existing in Karen or other ethnic cultures, such as stories, legends, tales, and so on, integrated with new external capital, such as the concept of networks and creation of symbols, such as logo of the network, and so on.

1.2 Strategy for production of a new concept and definition of development in the rice merit network is a hybridisation of existing and new properties. For example, the rice merit network has created new symbols by rediscovering concepts or teachings from traditional cultures, such as concepts from stories, legends and poems, etc., to design a new logo of the network. This new logo comprises a candle and bee wax (representing religious teachings and goodness).

Rice Stalk – a symbol representing a living based on the principle of sufficiency economy, an economy based on morality or moral economy.

Human Icon – is a symbol that is human centred in terms of equal and fair distribution of resources, without holding money as the

primary and human person as secondary as it is today.

Therefore, the villagers have created their logo from these 3 symbols, i.e. rice stalk and human icons with a motto "tasty rice, good and virtuous people".

2. **Distribution** means distribution of the definition of rice merit fund by reviving community philosophy, perception and belief through various symbols in the forms of logo and flag of the network, and production implements. These symbols will be displayed on different occasions or areas, such as at activities implemented by the rice merit network. This helped the participants to see this strange logo and ask its meaning that is full of concepts and ideology on mutual aid among community members.
3. **Consumption of the definition:** In knowing and understanding the definition of each symbol, organic intellectuals would explain the meaning to their partners to foster common understanding. A handbook has been prepared, which gradually developed as a curriculum for children and youth to learn in different schools in local communities.

c) Strategy on discursive struggle

A significant method of struggle against the mainstream development discourse, especially an ideological struggle, is the so-called "binary opposition" strategy. The discursive struggle of the rice merit network employs the strategy of "the good and the bad". In other word, they institute "rice" as the symbol of the good giving life to community, foster mutual aid, sacrifice and hospitality, etc. While "money" constitutes the bad coming from outside and represents selfishness, competition, rivalry, greed, etc. This does not mean that the villagers refuse money, because they are forced to have more and live with money. In this situation, the villagers have to criticise money as the symbol of capitalism. This is the discourse developed by the villagers against the mainstream development discourse.

The Discursive Struggle is at Two Levels in the Rice Merit Network

1. Struggle against the definition of the mainstream development discourse from outside

There are two sets of discourse manifesting in activities of the rice merit network.

1.1 The discourse on "What is Development": Words, phrases and messages constantly flowing in activities of rice merit network are always re-stated. The mainstream development discourse from outside explains the definition of development as "individualism, consumerism and materialist happiness". On the contrary, the development discourse of the rice merit network is defined as organisation for mutual aid and unity. For example, one of its poems says "one grain of paddy cannot make rice wine, one single bamboo cannot make a raft". This implies that fraternity, morality and self-sufficiency are the core principle for the harmonious and sustainable existence of community.

1.2 "Who Are Highland People"

We normally hear the mainstream development discourse that "highland people are responsible for deforestation, slash-and-burn cultivation, intensive use of farm chemicals and drug trafficking". On the contrary, the rice merit network extends its activities and forms different networks, such as the network on conservation of natural resources and the environment, the network on non-chemical farming, the network on campaign against drugs, and so on. These attempts mean to prove themselves and tell outsiders that the highland people are not like what the mainstream discourse propagates.

2. *Struggle against definition of discourse within the network itself*

Definition of discourse in the rice merit network is different depending on economic and social conditions, and leaders, committee, and ordinary members who have a different understanding. It also depends on messages each one has received. However, this different understanding of the discursive definition is not the factor creating division or weakening the rice merit network at all, on the contrary it supports villagers in different conditions and status so that they can get involved and learn how to live together amidst diversity of opinions, beliefs and ideologies, and be able to manage conflict. In this context, the role of discursive struggle is significant and unending in itself, because what the development direction to strengthen the community would be, would depend on how and to what direction the groups holding different sets of discourse would empower themselves to institute their discursive definition, through their methods of management, initiation of activities, and equal and fair sharing of benefits, and so on.

How Activities of the Rice Merit Network Empower Community Organizations

The economic, social and political changes in Thailand moved the state towards changing its "development" direction towards having greater participation of local people. This new direction enables the state to intervene and dictate life of the villagers in all aspects to a greater extent. However, instead of being totally dominated or of struggling against this domination through various means, the villagers also use "discourse" as the means to struggle against the mainstream development discourse. The villagers have learned to develop counter discourse against the mainstream discourse, directly and covertly to neutralise legitimacy of the mainstream discourse or to build up their negotiation power against the mainstream development discourse and marketing system (Suppachai, 2001).

The study found that the struggle for the definition of development by the villagers through the rice merit network is in fact the struggle against concepts in capitalism, which are the mainstream concept the villagers are facing in their daily life. For example, they use rice instead of money, unity instead of selfishness, and so on.

This rice merit network is a successful case of project operation with people's participation based on community culture that could be used in development, and emphasizing the empowerment of community.

The rice merit network has opened a channel for community participation in debating and defining development, which has diverse meanings and varies depending on groups of people and their different interests. The rice merit network has been trying to stand firm on its goal and in its struggle to take the lead in giving definition. For example, it struggled to define development that emphasizes traditional ideology of the community, and to control and manage the rice merit fund, among others. These struggles for definition of development have led to implementation of different activities to address problems of the communities, such as the rice fund, community welfare fund (in case of sickness, death, fire, etc.), funds for assisting orphans, elderly people, and the handicapped, scholarships for poor children, women's savings group, conservation of the environment, and non-chemical farming. The most important

struggle is for expression of identity of ethnic or tribal groups, which exhibit capacity to dictate their own destiny or the strength of community. This identity empowers them to negotiate for acceptance especially from outside. Although this opposition or struggle for definition sometimes might not lead to the right to definition or clearly reflect victory or loss, but it could safely be said that it is the origin of "new shoots" of various disadvantaged groups in empowering themselves.

Development of the rice merit network clearly indicates strength of the communities. They have the capacity to manage their own life through social capital existing in their communities, such as the role of communication in transmitting a community value system and extending social networks, or empowering local communities in the struggle against systems from outside that penetrate to weaken the communities, such as the capitalist system and modern values, etc. Regarding transmission of a value system, the rice merit network has struggled to give definition that is profoundly linked with values existing in traditional cultures of local communities in the context of present society based on materialism and which gives priority to money and individualistic relationships.

As for extension of social networks, the rice merit network has developed new partners at the community level. This has fostered participation of all groups in the community who have different status, ethnic origins and beliefs. It is a development which has empowered community organizations, such as in conservation of natural resources and the environment, non-chemical farming, and extend the network to women, youth groups, and the environment. It has also tried to develop partnerships with outside organizations to promote understanding and acceptance of, and support to, people's organizations by local concerned state agencies, local politicians, and Catholic educational institutions, etc. This partnership has created new social capital enriching the base of the network existing in the communities, such as kinship, which is a social capital in community. Extension of social networks is the foundation of social capital for the benefit of individuals, community, and society as a whole. This social capital or resources emerging from the process of social interaction, which can be conducive to interdependence and reflects social capital that is the dimension of values, power ideology and social relationship for dynamic mutual living. This social capital can be rebuilt in the attempt to build common space.

The rice merit network has also fostered concrete activities using mutual aid, which is conducive to empowerment of communities. For example, the network led to establishment of community welfare fund for emergency cases, such as sickness, death, fire, and so on. There are also scholarships for poor children, community rice funds for those who do not have enough rice, etc. These activities will reinforce the community to become stronger, since they are funds initiated by and are mobilized from villagers themselves. They have committees elected by the villagers to make management decisions and to plan activities. They have formulated regulations and criteria to enable all members to equally benefit from development based on the principle of justice. The criteria they adopted is that the top priority is given to the most needy. The strength of the community is reflected in the management of conflicts. The villagers have adopted the tool of compromise in communication to avoid further rift and damage the group or network. The example of this is the case of flexibility in repayment that a rice bank extended to those who did not have rice or cash so that they can repay using other materials.

Accomplishments of the Rice Merit Network leading to Strength of Community

1. The network now has capacity in management to dictate their own lives and destiny through social capitals existing in the community, such as the transmission of a community value system, extension of social networks for empowerment of local communities to struggle against systems from outside that weaken local communities, such as the capitalist system, modern values, etc.
2. Extension of social networks in the rice merit network has helped develop more partners in social networks at community level, conducive to participation of all community groups, which is also a means to empower communities.
3. The rice merit fund has led to the initiation of concrete activities for mutual aid in an attempt to strengthen local communities, such as establishment of community funds, fund to help the poor (widows, orphans, elderly people), provision of community welfare in an emergency, such as sickness, etc.
4. The rice merit network is a grassroots organization with an attempt to struggle against the dominant development discourse based on capitalism and consumerism in which ethnic people have to live in a situation where competition for resources, soil, water, and forests is heightened amidst accusations that they are the cause of environmental destruction.
5. The rice merit network was successful in promoting people's participation based on community cultures, which could be applied in development work that gives emphasis on empowerment of local communities since there is forum for participation at all levels, including public and private sectors as well as village communities.
6. The rice merit network can apply concepts embedded in folklore to create a logo of the rice merit fund, which aims to raise awareness of mutual aid based on belief and sharing.
7. After formally setting up the rice merit network, implementation of the rice merit fund became an expression of identity and power towards outsiders and has to coordinate and interact with public sector and various agencies to extend the concept further.

The research has come up with recommendations for building networks or motivating group formations in other areas of operation to empower the community and give priority to perception of or a definition of development based on community perspectives. This community strength will lead to struggle on values expressed in daily living, such as common good/personal interest, mutual aid/individualism, etc., so that it would lead to change in daily life and in the present society.

Culture and Tradition of Sustainable Tree Ordination

By Phra Sankom Thanapanyo and Phra Win Siriwatthano

More than six decades of development and modernization (which emphasized material progress) have contributed to numerous crises: the weakening of grassroots communities, environmental degradation, spiritual and cultural decline, among others. Market values have displaced ethics and spirituality in society. These crises are getting increasingly complex, violent, and difficult to mitigate or tackle.

At the same time, the Sangha is dominated by the State, capitalism, and consumerism. It lacks transparency and accountability. In general, the bond between lay and ordained communities is also rapidly weakening. The Sangha is in decline, and there is no sign that it will be able to halt this downward momentum. It can be said that the Sangha no longer serves as a major source of wisdom and spiritual guidance in society.

Amid this crisis, there are a number of monks and nuns who steadfastly uphold the Dhamma. They offer guidance in terms of wisdom and spirituality to society at large. Most of them reside in the rural areas, in areas far from 'modernity.' They cooperate with local villagers in empowering grassroots communities, attempting to make them more self-sufficient, for instance. In addition, many of them are engaged in 'academic' work, offering knowledge, guidance, and solutions to present crises based on the teachings of the Buddha.

In 1990 the Thai-Inter-religious Commission for Development (TICD), an organization under the umbrella of the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, invited several monks mentioned above to a meeting to share views and experiences on social work. The meeting also provided a forum to meditate together and to provide moral support for each other's work. Many at the meeting agreed that monks and nuns who were working in the field of development should create a network that would provide support and coordination as well as facilitate the adaptation of Buddhist teachings to contemporary life and society based on sufficiency and sustainability. As such the "Sekhiyadhamma Group" was created. Its primary objective was to increase the relevancy of Buddhism, to make it socially engaged and capable of coping with the crises in contemporary society.

Aside from upholding the Dhammavinaya, the Sekhiyadhamma Group also came up with common observances: avoiding a way of life

that supports capitalism and consumerism; abstaining from all forms of intoxicants (e.g., cigarettes, betel nuts, soft drinks, energy drinks, etc.); and minimizing/discontinuing the use of plastic and Styrofoam products as well as luxury goods that impede the cultivation of contentment and the proper behavior for the ordained.

Along with seven other socially-oriented Buddhist activities. Another main activity focuses on the environmental conservation sphere. We have activities linking together many interested parties (ordained as well as lay) to heighten social awareness of and interest in ongoing environmental crises. We organize workshops, forest walks, and excursion trips. Our primary engine in conservationism is the Dhammayatra. We have the Dhammayatras for Songkhla Lake, for the Lum Patao River (Chaiyaphum province), and for the Mekong River.

The 'Tree Ordination' tradition is not only about Thai forest being cut down at one of the fastest rates in Asia, according to professor Susan Darlington at Hampshire College. The statistics though are staggering: in 1938, forest cover was 72 percent of the country's land area, and by 1985 forest cover was a mere 29 percent. Over the last few decades, both forest monks and many lay people have attempted to address this problem. These monks are: Phra Kru Kasemdhamrungsri (Luang Por Dum), Luanphor Khamkien Suwanno, Phra Pongsak Tejadhammo, Phra Kru Pitaknuntakhun, Phra Prajak Kuttajitto, Phra Paisal Visalo, Phra Somboon Sumongklo, and Phra Sankom Thanapanyo.

Why are monks involved in forest conservation?

The Phra or so-called 'Venerable" are fellows of Lord Buddha. Before the great awakening he was Prince Siddhartha. His life as a prince was

overwhelmed by wealth and assets, but he chose to leave all things behind to search the Truth. After Enlightenment, most of Buddha's life was spent in the forest. Actually His life from Birth, Enlightenment, Great Sermon, and Prinibbana was under the tree. All important and significant Buddha teachings are in the forest; thus the First Buddhist University. One of the Vinaya or principles of monk life is to not allow cutting of trees because this is like killing an animal.

Our simple formula is "EARTH":

E – Environment
A – Animals
R – Rivers
T – Trees
H – Human Beings

Our belief is that the:

Forest is the world's 'best dam'.

Forest provides clothing, food, shelter, and medicine.

Forest is the Supreme University of Human beings to end global suffering. Thus, we have the School of Buddha and Arahants.

The secrets in Tree Ordination are:

To stop forest fires, one must stop fire in the mind first.

Second, the myth of reforestation is not only about the tree, but the "EARTH". There's local traditional wisdom that says "Feed the soil and let the soil feed the plants."Not only the tree but most of Buddha's life was ground in the earth from Birth to Awakening, and to Nibbana.

And third, read the first again.

Plants, Animals, Salt, and Spirits: How People Live With and Talk About the Environment[1]

By Bampen Chaiyarak and Toshiyuki Doi

One Environment, Different Views

A crowd of people went into a room to see an elephant. They had never seen an elephant before. It was completely dark in the room. So each of them felt the animal with the palm of their hand. One touched the elephant's ear and said, "It's like a fan." Another touched its leg and said, "It's like a pillar." Yet another touched its back and said, "It's like a throne."[2]

Mekong region's environment these days is like an elephant in a dark room. No one can understand its complex entirety. And yet, governments and corporates view it as a source of profit. Engineers view it as a testing ground for hydropower technologies. Hard scientists believe they know it through figures and charts. Moreover, these 'authorities' often dismiss views of local communities who have lived with Mekong's environment day-to-day across a number of generations.

The People's Story Project

But what exactly are local communities' views of Mekong's environment? Last year, we joined a team of researchers to collect legends, folktales, and life histories in rural Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand with the hope that these "people's stories" would help us understand how local people in Mekong region view the environment. Most of the 102 stories our team recorded were narrated in indigenous or minority languages. They covered a wide range of topics, including the community's history, customs and beliefs, and knowledge of native plants. Fifteen

representative stories have been put together in an English language booklet with pictures and illustrations drawn by local artists.[3]

Mekong's Environment Encoded in People's Stories

We would like to present two stories to discuss local people's views of Mekong's environment. Both stories are related to traditional small-scale salt production in northeast Thailand or better known as Isan. The following are summaries of the stories.

Phadaeng and Nang Ai[4]

Nang Ai was the daughter of Khita Nakhon's king. Nang Ai's beauty was well known in many places. Phadaeng travelled to Khita Nakhon, sneaked into Nang Ai's room and had a relationship with her. Phangkhi, son of King Naga who ruled the underground kingdom, also learned of Nang Ai's beauty. He had to meet her because they had been married in their previous life. Phangkhi changed himself into a white squirrel and came up to the terrace of Nang Ai's room. Nang Ai became curious and asked a hunter to catch the squirrel. The hunter chased the animal, but it escaped into a suan mon or mulberry garden. It is in the present-day Suan Mon Village. The squirrel passed a forest to get to a "jan" tree on Um Jan Hill. This is in the present-day Um Jan Village. The hunter tried to shoot the squirrel with a bow but the string or "sai" broke. He found a new one and carried it to Khon Sai Village or Carry String Village. The hunter finally shot the squirrel to death. When he sliced its meat, the meat multiplied and filled up one thousand carts. Everyone in Khita Nakhon, including Nang Ai, ate the squirrel meat. King Naga came to know that his son had been killed and eaten. He became very angry, sent his army and destroyed Khita Nakhon. Phadaeng tried to save Nang Ai. But she sank with Khita Nakhon. Only a lake full of water has remained. This is how Nong Han Lake was created.

White elephant path[5]

Phya Thaen, who had created the earth, made the first humans from his scurf. They were Grandpa Sang Ka Sa and Grandma Sang Ka Si. When the two came down to the earth, they were blown apart by a strong wind and separated on both sides of a big river. They built a bridge across the river with gourd vines and finally met each other. Sang Ka Sa asked Sang Ka Si to marry him. However, Sang Ka Si said, "Only if you answer my riddle." The riddle was "What is dark and light in this world?" Sang Ka Sa could not answer the riddle and had to travel to find the right answer. After ten thousand years, he found the answer with Phya Thaen's help. The answer was "It is the human mind.

When it is dark, the world will not proceed. When it is light, the world will prosper". Sang Ka Sa went back and married Sang Ka Si. They lived together and had many children. The two also worked on a farm and had rice, fish, and gourds to eat. However, they were not tasty and nutritious. So the children were very thin, weak, and not smart. Phya Thaen was worried and changed himself into a white elephant. The white elephant urinated over Sang Ka Sa and Sang Ka Si's land. The white elephant's urine became salt. Sang Ka Sa and Sang Ka Si made use of the salt to make "pla daek" or fermented fish. Pla daek made food tasty, and Sang Ka Sa and Sang Ka Si's children became stronger and healthier.

In the *Phadaeng and Nang Ai* story, the origin of local names, such as Suan Mon, Um Jan, and Khon Sai Villages, is explained. The story also explains how Nong Han Lake was created. These "origin episodes" are often found in the people's stories. We would like to argue that origin episodes can connect the local community with the surrounding landscape. They play a role in forming the members' identity with the community. The place names can activate personal as well as collective feelings of attachment with the immediate locality. Origin episodes in people's stories position the local community within the environment in inextricable ways. Such ties can then enable the community to steward Mekong's valuable natural resources such as water and land, and pass them on to future generations.

In the *White elephant* path story, Phya Thaen's scurf became the first human couple. Phya Thaen transformed himself into a white elephant. The elephant's urine became salt. In the Phadaeng and Nang Ai story, Phangkhi transformed himself into a white squirrel. The stories we recorded contained many similar "transformation episodes". In these stories, plants, animals, humans, minerals and spirits interchanged with each other. We would like to argue that transformation episodes indicate local community members' recognition of the ubiquitous life in Mekong's environment. Such a view of the environment is quite different from the one in which humans were created to rule and control the rest of the world, including fish, birds, animals, plants, and minerals. Transformation episodes can offer an alternative view in which the environment may be structured more horizontally, and life can traverse across different forms without placing one over the other.[6]

People's Views in Operation

People's views of Mekong's environment are found not just in traditional stories. We would like to present three cases to show that they are also active in more contemporary incidents.

As the first case, in late 1990s to early 2000s, the Thai government was funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to build a huge facility which would manage industrial wastewater in a

local community called Klong Dan in the central province of Samut Prakarn. The government and ADB called the project "Samut Prakarn Wastewater Management Project" after the name of the province. The facility was to remove heavy metals and discharge treated wastewater into Thailand's coastal area. The project proponents claimed that the discharge would not damage the environment. They even said the local environment had already been deteriorated and that the project would actually help improve it. The Klong Dan community staged a strong protest against the project, which was eventually cancelled. During the campaign, the Klong Dan villagers had to counter the project proponents' claim by showing how rich the local mangrove was and how productive the local mussel-shell and shrimp farming was. The Klong Dan community consistently called the project "Klong Dan Wastewater Management Plant" and not by the externally-imposed "Samut Prakarn Wastewater Management Project".

Of course, this made sense especially to the local community because the facility was located in Klong Dan. However, in the people's story perspective, Klong Dan also came to mean more than just a physical location to the local community. It probably represented the entire local environment, livelihoods and history, which the proponents refused to care about. It was a fight over what Klong Dan signifies and represents. The community thus could not accept any other name than Klong Dan.

The second case is also from Thailand. In the early 1990s, Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) was funded by the World Bank to build a hydroelectric dam along Isan's Mun River, one of the major tributaries of the Mekong. The dam was intended to block fish migration. The local community whose livelihood heavily relied on the environment opposed the project.

Very unfortunately, the dam was built. Rapids along Mun River, which had been important feeding and spawning grounds for migratory fish, were dynamited to make way for the Pak Mun dam. Some villagers later testified that they had heard the rapids cry. This could have been metaphor for the blasting sound. However, in the people's story interpretation, the local community might have actually heard the rapids cry. Or maybe, the rapids did cry.

The third case had to do with Ai Sombath's work. In his last public address before he was abducted in December 2012, Sombath reported the following:[7]

…To foster solidarity against poverty and for sustainable development in Laos, and also as part of the preparation for AEPF9, CSOs in Laos teamed up with government and mass organizations (MO) to conduct consultations in all provinces…Together, they learned that poverty was a complex issue, and that sustainable development was quite a difficult concept for ordinary Lao to understand… the facilitating team also learned that terms like poverty and sustainable development need to be presented in a language culturally relevant and easily understood…Lao people understand poverty in a more holistic way—poverty can be physical, social, and emotional. In Lao language there is one word that sums it up very well. It is called "Khuam Tuk" which means all forms of suffering. Its opposite is called "Khuam Suk" which means happiness or contentment. The Lao often equate happiness or contentment with sustainable development or sustainable livelihoods…

In his thinking, Ai Sombath was trying to interpret "poverty" and "sustainable development" from the perspective of ordinary Lao people, which are well situated in Mekong's environment. His approach is similar to ours. Sombath realized that poverty was a holistic concept and that the "khuam tuk"-"khuam suk" contrast in Lao language mirrored the poverty-sustainability dichotomy. While fitting poverty and sustainability into the local Lao context, Sombath also succeeded in enriching the two concepts. Poverty and sustainable development have physical, social, and emotional dimensions.

Conclusion

It is important to understand and articulate the complex nature of Mekong's environment in the view of local communities who live within and with it every day for years. People's views on the local environment in Mekong region are not given due recognition and respect, especially in the development sector. We would like to propose that people's stories, including legends, folk tales, and life histories, can be a window through which to understand and appreciate local communities' views of the environment. We would also like to stress that people's stories can connect local community members among themselves and with the local landscape. They form part of the community identity and define their obligations to the surrounding environment. As such, people's stories play an important role in the community's efforts to manage and utilize Mekong's commons such as water, fisheries, forests, minerals and lands in non-destructive, recoverable, and sustainable ways.

1 We would like to thank Mr. Randall Arnst for his very useful comments on an earlier version of this paper. The Nippon Foundation's API Program and the Japan Fund for Global Environment of the Environmental Restoration and Conservation Agency financially supported the fieldwork and publication of the booklet (Doi 2015a). We would like to express our gratitude to them. The content and claims in this paper are ours and have no connection with the others.

2 Jalal al-Din Rumi. 2004. "The elephant in the dark: On the reconciliation of contrarieties". In A.J. Arberry, tr. Tales from Masnavi. http://www.khamush.com/tales_from_masnavi.htm#The%20Elephant. The illustration is from Printers' Ink 1919. Vol. CVIII 13, p. 107. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4b/Blind_men_and_elephant5.jpg

3 Doi, Toshiyuki, ed. 2015a. Plants, animals, salt and spirits: How people live with and talk about the environment in rural Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. Tokyo: Mekong Watch. http://www.mekongwatch.org/PDF/Booklet_PeopleStory.pdf

4 The story was told by Mr. Thawon Manosin at Huay Sam Phad Sub-district, Prajak Silapakhom District in Udonthani Province on 9 November 2014. See Doi (2015a), pp. 100-107. The illustration is by Amarit Muadthong.

5 The story was told by Mr. Thongsin Thonkannya in Tha Yiam Village, Wang Luang Sub-district, Selaphum District in Roiet Province on 25 October 2014. See Doi (2015a), pp. 91-99. The illustration is by Worajak Maneewong.

6 See more analysis in Doi, Toshiyuki. 2015b. "From stories to policies: Reflections on API collaborative grant research". The Asian Public Intellectuals Newsletter 29, pp. 16-17., and Doi, Toshiyuki. 2015c. "Commons are telling: People's folktales and legends on their environment". Mekong Commons. http://www.mekongcommons.org/commons-are-telling-peoples-folktales-and-legends-on-their-environment/

7 Sombath Somphone. 2012. Challenges for poverty reduction and sustainable development: A view from Laos. Opening speech given at the 9th Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF9). 16-19 October 2012, Vientiane, Laos.

SYNTHESIS OF SESSION 3:

Spiritual and Cultural Perspectives

Spirituality is deeply connected with how people relate with nature. People see the transformation of animals, humans, and plants as part of shaping the spiritual and cultural process. While different groups express spirituality in different forms—the Karen for instance profess diverse religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and ancestral beliefs—they are still united by their traditional practices. The Karen are united by their rice merit-making tradition that involves people of all faiths in the same activity and with rice as the common concern, reaffirming ethnic identity. This is also true in the Mekong and across the region, where the environment is encoded in people's stories, where people's livelihood are deeply rooted in the natural world of rivers and forests, and where many legends, tales, and narratives that revolve around nature have been created and handed down from generation to generation.

These narratives have played an important role in protecting nature, forming part of community identity and defining their obligations and responsibilities to the surrounding environment. For many, sacredness is crucial in protecting and regenerating nature—local and indigenous peoples designate places, animals, and plants as sacred for strengthening cultures. As such, people's stories play an important role in the community's efforts to manage and utilize Mekong's commons such as water, fisheries, forests, minerals and land in non-destructive, non-irrecoverable, and sustainable ways. They also serve as an avenue for environmental protection.

While both spirituality and sacredness promote a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, it is observed in recent years that humans have the capacity and proclivity to destroy nature too. Decades of development and modernization, which emphasized material progress, have contributed to numerous crises: the continuing rise in global temperature, the weakening of grassroots communities, environmental degradation, spiritual and cultural decline, and so on. Profit-focused economic development has increased across countries, leading to the rapid deterioration of the environment. At the same time, traditional knowledge of natural resource use as conveyed by people's tales is being lost. The destruction of nature by humans driven by materialistic lifestyle and mainstream education has led the people away from nature and sacredness. This runs counter to indigenous visions and alternatives, which are characterized by organization for mutual aid, harmony, and unity.

Strategies that are peaceful, non-destructive, and non-confrontational are being developed to bring back harmonious relationships between humans and their environment. These include

promoting sufficiency economy, appropriate technologies, traditional knowledge, and knowledge-wisdom, those that value, document, and share peoples' wisdom through stories, books, songs, and other creative means. There is now a growing call to bring sacredness back to life and bring the philosophy of ecological harmony and equilibrium into practice.

Alongside this transformation, a different type of education, one that is critical of the mainstream Westernized teaching is being explored and gaining adherents. The youth learn traditional practices from the elders. Different aspects of indigenous cultures—dances, songs, and texts—are taught across age groups. Indigenous peoples are able to practice and use their own language. Efforts to restore traditions of protecting environment, ancestral living, traditions, and cultures are ramped up across communities and across regions.

LIVELIHOOD PERSPECTIVES

Agroecology

By Rustam Effendi

The word 'agroecology' may be new to some, but it has long been practiced by Asian farmers. Even before the advent of the green revolution in the agricultural world from western nations which wanted to market their technology after World War 2, agroecology is already part of Asian peasant culture and peasant families' daily activity. But the increasingly rampant damaging of land and seeds since the 1980s has made it more urgent to find an alternative agricultural system.

As the agricultural market is currently dominated by transnational corporations with various products invading developing countries, the people have become mere consumers who often know not about the process involved in agricultural production peasants and the harmful additives used in crops or livestock.

In 1996, agroecology started as alternative practice in agriculture especially in the face of world food crisis, then in Surin, in 2012, agroecology become an international movement.

Agroecology has since become part of the social movement aiming for food sovereignty and to enable farmers to break free from their dependence on various agricultural inputs. Agroecology also aims to repair environmental damage caused by the dominant agricultural system.

Here are some things that are important to know about agroecology:

I. Definition of Agroecology

Agroecology or sustainable farming system is a method of farming that integrates comprehensively the socio-economic environment with agricultural communities. This means that:

1. It is part of a sustainable environmental conservation movement;
2. It is advantageous to the health and social care of family farms;
3. It has economic benefits.

II. Principles of Agroecology

1. Recycle micro-organisms as nutrients to optimize and balance the flow of nutrients;
2. Ensure healthy soil conditions by increasing soil biotic activity, particularly when dealing with natural problems;
3. Minimize losses due to solar radiation in air and water by managing soil cover;
4. Diversify species and genetic agro-ecosystem;
5. Increase the beneficial biological interactions and synergy between the components of biodiversity, which can create ecologically-related services.

III. Methods of Development

The methods developed are the result of the direct interaction among peasants and of their in-depth knowledge of their environment and things that affect lands and plants, and the harvesting process.

Agroecology is both technology and culture that saves peasant families and the environment, and is necessary for achieving food sovereignty.

Agroecology movement is a movement that starts from the countryside always moving from one village to another. It is a rural movement which is a necessity to peasant families and consumers in their effort to rescue organic farming.

Traditional Knowledge of Fisherfolk in Indonesia

By Niko Amrullah

For the people of Indonesia, the sea is a living space. Social institutions in the communities have local knowledge for managing marine resources in a fair and sustainable way.

Fisheries management models in the world have shown a pattern of exploitation, which has resulted in a global food security problem. The FAO 2008 report showed that total world fishery production increased rapidly from 100 million tonnes at the end of the decade of the 1980s, to 140 million tonnes end of 2008.

As is the case of Indonesia, based on data from its Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (2014), marine fish production increased from 4.8 million tonnes in 2009 to 5.8 million tons in 2014, recording an average rise of 3.75 percent

annually. Furthermore, fish consumption levels increased from 29.08 kg/cap/year in 2009 to 37.89 kg/ cap/year in 2014. This situation requires policy makers to boost fishery production. If they do not promote sustainable ocean governance, the over-exploitation is a threat to marine resources. Therefore, local knowledge becomes an instrument of control in marine and fisheries resources.

Local Governance

Exploitation lies in fishing industry's being capital-oriented, which influences production and sustainability. Government therefore should strengthen traditional knowledge and develop the co-management model, a partnership between government and society.

Indonesia is a country with archipelagic waters measuring 6.32 million km2 (76.79 percent water) and a land area of 1.91 million km2 (23.21 percent land); its coastline stretches 99.093 kms, considered as the second longest coastline in the world after Canada (202,080 kms). It has 17,504 islands spread in 27 provinces. Indonesia has various cultures, including local knowledge of traditional fisherfolk.

From Aceh we can see Hukum Adat Laot, Mane'e in North Sulawesi, Lamafa in East Nusa Tenggara, Sasi in Maluku, Labuhan Kraton in Yogyakarta, Petik Laut in Banten, Erau in East Kalimantan, and much more in each region. All of them have the same goal, that is to manage and take advantage of the ocean in a sustainable and fair manner.

Panglima Laot is an institution managing authority of Hukum Adat Laot in Aceh. Hukum Adat Laot or customary rules are preserved and maintained by the fishing communities to manage fishing and fishing community life in the coastal areas. Jurisdiction of the commander of the ocean include: *Bineh Pasie* (Zone of waterfront), *Leun Pukat* (Zone of to pull the trawl), *Kuala and Teupien* (Zone of landing for the boat, and *Laot Luah* (Zone of high seas).

Interestingly, there are areas called *uteun pasie* (coastal forest), or designated forest areas because of the canopy trees growing on the beach. They comprise a protected green belt area, *bineh pasie* (waterfront). Still, human activities have damaged the mangrove areas in Aceh. Because of depleted mangrove areas, Aceh was greatly devastated by the tsunami a few years ago. This experience now provides a lesson that traditional knowledge of fisherfolk is a noble heritage that should be preserved and strengthened.

Talaud Island in North Sulawesi practices this local knowledge, known as Mane'e. This culture became a tourist attraction that appeals to foreign tourists. Mane'e is a unique fishing tradition carried out by indigenous elders on the beach using spells, palm leaf, and root wood to ensure good catch. This ritual is for inviting thousands of fish, but the fishers must catch only with bare hands. Before the ritual is held, six months prior, the local community and those from the outside are forbidden to catch fish and other marine resources in the Mane'e area.

Sasi in Maluku Province is a traditional institution which has agreements and sanctions for violators.

The agreement consists of: (1) No fishing of eels in the river (2) Prohibiting use of toxic/explosives to catch shrimp and fish (3) Prohibiting the cutting of mangroves (4) Prohibiting taking live corals from the sea (5) Prohibiting fishing with a mesh that is too small, and (6) Prohibiting capture

of fish from the boat when fish are entering the lagoon area.

The other conservation models from local communities are in Lamalera, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Their model for protection of whales involves restricting the type and size of whale that fishers are allowed to catch, use of traditional fishing gear, how may catcher boats are allowed, the time of arrest, and where to fish. The community of Lamalera only capture the Lodan whales (sperm whale), and not the blue whale (baleen whale). They implement size restriction, by prohibiting the catching of small whales, mature male, and pregnant female whales. The boat used is built according to traditional knowledge and communally owned. Time of fishing begins in the period May-October and July-October, and the designated fishing ground should not be farther than three nautical miles from shore.

Finally, the management of fisheries, especially in Indonesia, should be through an adaptive process, participatory, and based on the social capital of each stakeholder. Therefore, the strengthening of local institutions is not only for the benefit of fisheries resources and society, but is also mandated by the Indonesian Fisheries Law No. 31 of 2014.

A Commons Perspective on Human-Nature Relations: Analysis, Visions, and Strategies for Alternative Futures

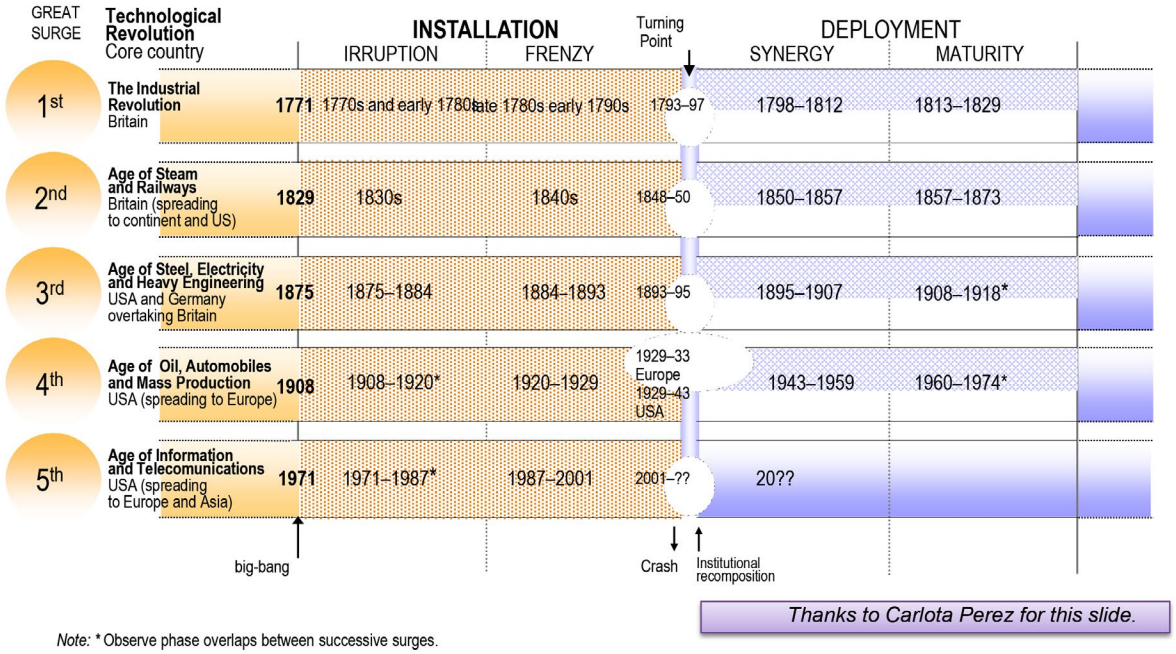
By Bonn Juego

I offer here some reflections on the commons. In particular, I reflect upon the question "How does the commons, as an alternative perspective, see the relationship between humans and nature?"

This question is actually central to my current vocation as an academic, someone who works in the university, and particularly to my subject called "political economy." In essence, political

Technological Revolutions, or "Techno-economic Paradigms"

Approximate dates of the installation and deployment periods of the great surges of development -- 1771 to the present



Thanks to Carlota Perez for this slide.

Note: * Observe phase overlaps between successive surges.

economy is the study of the struggle for power and resources in which we seek to investigate: "Who gets what power and resources, where, when, how, why, and for whom?"

Capitalism and the Conflictual Relationship Between Humans and Nature

The major development problems of the world today are well known: (1) poverty and inequality, (2) resource wars and conflicts, (3) climate change and ecological degradation, (4) recurrent economic crises, and (5) social injustices. Each of these problems is rooted in the conflictual relationship of humans with nature—and within it, the antagonistic relationship between humans—that have been structured by the prevailing capitalist system.

Despite capitalism's series of economic crises, and the socio-political challenges that confront its legitimacy, we are still at this point in history of the "universalization" of the capitalist system—from the global institutions to states to local communities. Today's global problems are not only the manifest "contradictions" of the current stage of the capitalist system, nor a "mismanagement" of the capitalist mode of production, but it is "capitalism" itself—the very logic that values: (a) markets over societies; (b) profits over peoples; (c) production for profits and not for needs; (d) privatizing public assets, while socializing risks and costs; and (e) the commodification of nature and human life.

Capitalism survives and reproduces itself in, and through, the market by pursuing these logics of profit-maximization, competition, privatization, and commodification. This dependence of capitalism on the market for the system's survival and reproduction has taken the ideological form and concrete set of socio-economic policies since the 1980s that are now regarded as "neoliberalism." The central strategy by which neoliberal capitalism creates wealth and value is through the contradictory process of "accumulation by dispossession" that can be observed in countless practices that are becoming the norm in the ways business and state governance are conducted today such as privatization, land-grabbing, land conversion, and the extractive industries. Privatization, or the transfer of a government property to a private sector, entails the deprivation of citizens' public assets that they originally owned as a collective. The corporate practices of land-grabbing, land conversion, and the extractive industries to generate more money and material wealth, while exploiting the environment, are usually done with the aid of the coercive apparatuses of governments—the police, military, and the judicial courts—to effect the displacements of local communities and indigenous peoples through the use of force, harassment, violence, or legalese techniques.

Since the 1980s, neoliberal capitalist policies, which have framed production systems for the export market and the strategy of creating demands for goods, have also given tremendous powers to corporations to produce goods way beyond the real wages and consuming capacity of workers. Neoliberalism has further accelerated the Earth system's transition into what scientists call the "Anthropocene," a new geological epoch in humans-nature relationship which seems to have become more noticeable since the mid-20th century marked by the pervasiveness of human activities that interferes, competes, or conflicts with the Earth's natural processes. Neoliberalism's growth obsession combined with, firstly, the cumulative maturity of capitalism's techno-economic paradigms between the 1800s and the 1960s (i.e., from

the industrial revolution to the full development of steam, railways, steel, electricity, heavy engineering, oil, automobiles, and mass production); and secondly, the installation phase of the current information and communications technology period since the early 1970s. Neoliberal capitalism during this Anthropocene geological period now appears to be leading us to unprecedented ecological and planetary crises characterized by deforestation, lesser biodiversity, warmer temperatures, higher sea levels, and extreme weather conditions.

The concept of "natural resource governance" is one of the modern buzzwords in development studies and practice. In the context of neoliberal capitalism, we are thus urged to critically ask a fundamental question about this concept: "Who governs, and governance for whom?" First, at the global scale, patterns and relations of colonialism persist between industrialized countries specializing in high-tech production and rich consumption, and peripheral countries specializing in poor economic activities supplying raw materials. The European Commission, for instance, continues to strategically use its foreign and aid policy to secure access to Africa's rare minerals and raw materials to sustain Europe's high-tech industries and satisfy consumer demands. Second, in multilateral institutions, corporate polluters themselves have captured the institutional mechanisms and policy negotiations on addressing climate change. An essentially neoliberal climate policy is being forged and formulated where production systems remain to be market-oriented, oil-based, and fossil fuel-dependent. Third, at local or national level, we see political-business alliances versus society's communities where corporations ally with governments in the process of accumulation by dispossession. Governance is done and regulations are enforced for markets rather than the common weal.

With the way capitalism is progressing through the maintenance of relations of inequality between peoples and through the abuse of the natural environment, it is commonsensical that the capitalist system itself cannot also be sustained in the foreseeable future. But, time and again, we must accept the fact that capitalism cannot collapse on its own.

A Commons Project as an Alternative

Day by day, we are confronted with morally intolerable realities in the world. From time to time, we hear and read of alternative ideas to prevailing elitist political-economic structures and consumerist lifestyles. Indeed, our moral sentiments and ideological reasons are more than compelling to critique the dominance of capitalist values on peoples' lives and to seek out alternative futures. What is most urgently needed at this historical moment is to build on our "analyses and critiques" of current realities by coming up with collective "visions" of alternative futures, and importantly think through practicable "strategies" to realize these visions.

One of the most promising and viable alternatives to neoliberal capitalist development that are now happening across continents in many different local communities and organizations in the world—from the cyberspace to South and North Americas, to Asia, Africa, and Europe—is the project of "the commons" which, among other things, envisions and strategizes a harmonious (rather than conflictive or abusive) relationship of humanity with nature. The precondition for such harmonious relationship between humans and nature is a harmonious relationship between human beings on how to live well and lead a good life individually and together in a shared environment.

While the project of the commons is in the process of becoming a true alternative which needs to be mapped out by various collectives from the international level to states to workplaces to communities in order to re-shape and re-define humanity's relationship with nature, I wish to offer some key propositions and guiding principles for the present and future of the commons project. I sketch out a commons project for the time being—i.e., commons as an analysis, a vision, and a strategy.

Analysis of the Commons

The commons perspective is an alternative analysis to the dominant discourse of "The Tragedy of the Commons," which is simply a fable that has been influential in shaping peoples' worldviews and in making socioeconomic policies since the mid-1960s. The Tragedy of the Commons thesis is based on the assumption that all humans are rational and as such motivated by selfish interests; thus shared resources inevitably result in abuse and destruction. This therefore justifies private ownership which is assumed to be better at the maintenance and management of the productive use of common resources. But isn't it capitalistic behaviour of private individuals and corporations, further encouraged by neoliberal policies for limitless capital accumulation and privatized growth, that have, on record, destroyed common resources and ruined ecosystems?

The commons perspective is a critique of The Tragedy of the Commons thesis of mutually indifferent, self-interested individuals. It believes in the will and capacity of human beings, individually and collectively, to share with, and care for, one other in the ethos of community solidarity. It appreciates the capability of communities to set up systems and processes of self- regulation and self-governance with the view to the virtues of responsibility, equality, and sustainability.

Visions of the Commons

The commons envisions an alternative production system to the prevailing capitalist mode of production. A focus on production is a first-order agenda for the redistributive goals of the commons project. An alternative production system to produce wealth to satisfy people's needs and create value for equitable social redistribution can be "green"—i.e., technologically feasible, economically sufficient, socially acceptable, politically doable, and ecologically sustainable. While it encourages the development of sustainable communities, it likewise understands the necessity of an ecological synergy between rural and urban activities; and between the sectors of manufacturing, agriculture, services, and micro-small-medium enterprises.

The commons project also envisions an alternative system of exchange. It regards the market, which is the space for the exchange of goods and labour value, not as a goal per se; but as a tool for socio-economic and ecological well-being, and for living well and the good life.

An extremely important goal of the commons is the democratization of natural resources. Democracy means "people power" at all levels, from the state to workplaces to communities to households. Political and economic democracy has, at the minimum, the objectives of social justice, civil freedoms, equality, and equitable distribution of wealth. In essence, democracy shall be the driving mechanism of the governance of—and relations within—the polity, economy, society, and shared natural resources.

At the levels of both states and inter-national relations, the commons is a way of human living-together in a shared space and time based on the values of political democracy, economic self-sufficiency, cultural diversity, ecological sustainability, and human solidarity. In smaller scales, the commons observes the spirit of democratic, self-governing communities with local systems of governance in making collective binding decisions on the conduct of people-to-people relationships and the management of the natural environment.

The commons vision is neither heaven nor nirvana where every living and non-living things are at peace and in harmony at all times. Conflicts exist in human relations and social life, and there will be conflicts even within a functioning social commons. But institutions and mechanisms will be in place, anchored to collectively agreed upon system of principles, in which conflicts are duly resolved always in favour of the common good, or the well-being of humans and nature.

Strategies for the Commons

At present, what can and should be done towards attaining an ecological production systems is an economic policy shift from the focus on "growth" (i.e., by ever increasing investments to generate higher and higher GDP or gross domestic product) to the goals and strategies of "full employment" (i.e., ensuring people's decent productive work in manufacturing, agriculture, and service sectors, as well as creative work in the arts, and livelihood through enterprises) and "basic income" (i.e., the provision of needs-based unconditional incomes to households and individuals to allow them lead a life of dignity). Local and global economies cannot anymore continue to grow, let alone be sustained, by ceaseless exploitation of climate and the environment. The economic policy goals and strategies of full employment and basic incomes do not only lead to what progressive economists call "de-growth" or "zero growth" in the economy, but they can also create conditions for ecological production systems and green economic activities.

A key strategy of the commons project is to attempt to reorient, if not reclaim, the state for the telos of the good life. As a political philosopher once put it, "A state comes into existence for the purpose of ensuring life, and it continues to exist for the purpose of the good life."

The commons project must also engage in the strategy of changing people's mentalities through education for a variety of reasons. One purpose is to understand the realities of "political economy" to contribute to the process of awakening the consciousness of peoples and communities regarding the realpolitik of vested interests in politics, the economy, and the management of natural resources. That the struggle for power and resources in the spaces we share is real, serious, and everywhere. That we are all part and involved in this struggle.

The other critical purpose of education is for people to rediscover "science," or to at least to learn to combine faith with science, especially in appreciating natural processes of the Earth and in comprehending "man-made" disasters and sufferings that result from natural calamities like earthquakes, floods, tsunami, and volcanic eruptions. It has been observed that many influential religious groups and individuals are quick to pronounce that natural disasters and their unpleasant and deadly aftermath are "acts of god," or that these are signs of "god's wrath" on the people who died and the families and friends who suffer from these tragedies. Their

beliefs often point to supernatural curse, hastily making judgements that those who have been "punished" to death, misery, trauma, or loss are the "sinful" and "wicked" ones.

Historically, however, an appreciation of science could contribute to the learning of many peoples that many of these sufferings are man-made, or inflicted by humanity, which can be prevented and avoided. In other words, many of the miseries in the world have been caused not by "god" but by men. Tragedies from natural disasters are becoming tragic manifestations of the worsening disrespectful, hostile, and alienated relationship of human beings with nature. Humanity's caring and loving sense of nature and the environment has long been missing. Humanity has a high degree of free will in relating with nature. Thus, humanity should and can be reconciled with nature—personally, ideologically, technologically, and policy-wise.

Education is a cornerstone of sustainability by imparting knowledge and nurturing wisdom for present and future generations. Science and technology know-how can complement a local culture's rich tacit knowledge and technical innovations in the collective management and improvement of shared natural resources.

Moreover, the commons project is engaged in the creation of a culture, or a counter-culture. It believes in the cultural capacities of peoples and communities for learning and cognitive development, including the responsible ways of managing natural resources. It understands culture not only as a way of life of a particular community to be observed and respected, but also as an arena of struggle and opposing tendencies. Apparently, there have been cultural practices, traditions, and belief systems causing harm, damage, or danger to human life, to human relationships, and the ecosystem that need to be re-examined, if not stopped altogether.

Finally, the commons is a "counter-movement" of organized socio-political groups. As "a learning movement," the commons is idealistic yet pragmatic who are mindful of the importance of specific context or particular local conditions in decision-making, and who could draw lessons from history as well as the good and best practices of ecologically sustainable solutions and communities existing elsewhere. These progressive socio-political movements will carry out the strategies to create the necessary global and social conditions to make possible the realization of the visions of the commons for: 1) alternative systems of production and exchange; 2) the democratization of the use and management of social-economic wealth and natural resources; and 3) the reconciliation of humanity with nature.

For now, the most urgent task of the commons movement is to not only talk about the need for alternative futures; but to make these sustainable communities and alternative ways of living-together tangible, visible, and really existing in every space possible and imaginable.

SYNTHESIS OF SESSION 4:

Livelihood Perspectives

Many communities around the world are dependent on nature to provide for their most basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and livelihood. For the Bunong of Cambodia, they consider food as part of their identity as indigenous people. Across regions, we see different alternative paradigms actualized by farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, and other small-scale food producers through their own means. However, these are being threatened by mainstream education and dominant models of development that run counter to the peoples' alternative worldview of a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature, one that provides for the needs of the people but also respects Mother Earth.

For many generations now, the concept of food sovereignty has been practiced through various socio-cultures and ways of production and distribution of seeds, food and agriculture. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations, needs and livelihoods of those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies. It develops a model of small-scale sustainable production benefiting communities and their environment. Food sovereignty always respects Mother Earth and the people's common and upholds shared values.

These perspectives are not limited to agriculture. For many fisherfolk communities, the sea is a living space. Many people, especially those living in archipelagic Southeast Asia and the coastal areas are dependent on the sea to provide for their livelihood. These communities and their social institutions have the local knowledge for the management of marine resources in a fair and sustainable manner. Local fisherfolk communities argue that traditional knowledge in the co-management model that is a partnership between government and society should be strengthened and that the management of fisheries should be through an adaptive process, participatory, and based on the social capital of each stakeholder.

The issue of the struggle for power and resources comes into play, in which the critical question is asked: "Who gets what power and resources, where, when, how, why, and for whom?" The issue of sovereignty is tackled in the face of the prevailing capitalist system, a system of privatization, land-grabbing, land conversion, and extractive industries that displace local communities and indigenous peoples through the use of force, harassment, and violence.

An alternative for the democratization of natural resources is presented—"the commons"—which, among other things, envisions and strategizes a harmonious rather than conflictive or abusive relationship of humanity with nature. It believes in the will and capacity of human

beings, individually and collectively, to share with, and care for, one another, in the ethos of community solidarity. It appreciates the capability of communities to set up systems and processes of self-regulation and self-governance that gives primacy to the virtues of responsibility, equality, and sustainability. Education is the cornerstone of these virtues by imparting knowledge and nurturing wisdom for present and future generations. Science and technology know-how can complement a local culture's rich tacit knowledge and technical innovations in the collective management and improvement of shared natural resources.

The Sombath Symposium was held on 15-17 February 2016 at the Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand The Speakers in the Symposium were:

	Name of Speaker*	Topic of Presentation	Organization	Country
1.	Ng Shuimeng	Sombath's Philosophy and Ideas	Spouse of Sombath Somphone	Singapore/ Lao PDR
2.	Premrudee Daorouang	Sombath's Approach Towards Reviving and Building Local Knowledge and Natural Resource Governance	Project Sevana	Thailand
3.	Somchit Phankham	Panyanivet	Panyanivet, the niece of Sombath Somphone	Lao PDR
4.	Duong Hoang Cong	Traditional Wisdom of the Tai People and their Visions and Perspective on How to Live in Harmony with Nature	Center for Sustainable Development in Mountainous Area	Vietnam
5.	Nena Undag-Lumandong (Bae Rose)	Higaonon Perspective on Nature	Kagduma Hu Mga Higaonon Inc (Kagduma)	The Philippines
6.	Yun Lorang	Bunong Perspectives on Nature	Indigenous Peoples Communities' Alliances	Cambodia
7.	Father Niphot Thienvihan	Rice Rituals and Building Community	Center for Interreligious and Cultural Affairs	Thailand
8.	Phra Sankom Thanapanyo	Culture and Tradition of Sustainable Tree Ordination	Wat Phraborom-Thad Doi Phasom	Thailand
9.	Bampen Chaiyarat	Plants, Animals, Salt, and Spirits: How People Live and Talk About Environment in Rural Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand	Ecology and Culture Study Group	Thailand
10.	Toshiyuki Doi	Plants, Animals, Salt, and Spirits: How People Live and Talk About Environment In Rural Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand	Mekong Watch	Thailand

11.	Dr. Debal Deb	Center for Interdisciplinary Studies	The Indigenous Cultures of Resource Use, with Special Reference to 'Sacred Habitats' in Asia	India
12.	Rustam Effendi	Agroecology	Indonesian Peasant Union	Indonesia
13.	Niko Amrullah	Traditional Knowledge of Fisherfolk in Indonesia	Traditional Fisherfolk Union of Indonesia	Indonesia
14.	Bonn Juego	A Commons Perspective on Human-Nature Relations: Analysis, Vision and Strategy for an Alternative Future	Development and International Cooperation, University of Jyvaskyla, Finland	Finland

**The speakers in the symposium wrote their presentations as essays, which now form the content of this publication.*