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Press Release

Database System and Indigenous Peoples in Thailand in the 4.0 Era

Development agencies and community leaders have been in need of a robust database system with comprehensive information to tackle issues and problems and improve the quality of life of indigenous peoples in Thailand. To meet this need, the project “Development of community knowledge-based database system (CKBDS) for empowering the most marginalized and vulnerable indigenous groups (MMVIC) in Thailand” was piloted among 10 vulnerable ethnic groups in Thailand. The project is supported by the European Union (EU) and the International Workgroup for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA).

One of the major challenges that various development agencies have been facing while promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples in Thailand is the lack of sufficient and authentic information. In addition, accessing relevant information from the concerned government agencies is also a major challenge for the indigenous peoples in Thailand. This has resulted in deprivation of basic services from the state as well as lack of evidence-based advocacy for their rights.

Further, incorrect information on indigenous peoples in Thailand have caused misunderstanding and stereotyping (such as negative connotation or terms used to refer to certain indigenous groups), which affect their life negatively. The prevalence of incorrect information have also resulted in developing policies and programmes, for indigenous peoples, that are irrelevant for them and do not reflect the real need of the indigenous peoples.

“We don’t like outside people calling us Sakai, savage people or Ngaw. We would rather want them to call us Mani as Mani means human being”

Poi Srisaithong, a Mani leader

Lack of information makes it difficult to deal with or make the wider public know about the crucial issues affecting the indigenous peoples in Thailand, such as relocation of indigenous peoples out of forest areas (e.g. the Mlabri case) and limited access to traditional livelihoods practices in protected areas (e.g. Chao ley case).





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In the context of the above, Indigenous Peoples Foundation for Education and Environment (IPF), Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples Foundation (IKAP) and their partners initiated the project for empowering MMVIC in Thailand. The project focuses on community-based organizations (CBOs) and their networks in the target areas. Another focus is on capacity building to effectively use community knowledge portal for participating in sub-regional and national level indigenous movement, including policy dialogue on governance and accountability processes at different levels. The target communities in the pilot areas include: Mlabri, Kaw (Umpi), Bisu, Chong, Yatkru, Taisaek, Moka, Moka, Ulak-rawoy and Mani.

"The rights of indigenous peoples rank highly among the priorities of the EU's action to advance democracy and human rights. The EU gives the importance to further enhancing opportunities for dialogue and consultation with indigenous peoples. We will continue to stand by indigenous peoples in combatting discrimination and inequality."

H.E. Pirkka Tapiola, EU Ambassador to Thailand

This project commenced in January 2016 and will be completed by the end of 2018. Some of the main activities comprise micro level documentation, capacity building, advocacy and development of online and offline database. This database is already in use for resolving problems, particularly for the Mani Indigenous groups. Their genealogy or kinship system, taken from the database, has been used for their application of Thai citizenship. Over the course of two years, more than 80 percent of the Mani people have received Thai citizenship.

'After documenting kinship system of Mani, this information was used as an important evidence to apply for Thai citizenship for the Mani people. The document was easy for the officers to understand and thus speed up the granting process. This has enabled the Mani people to have access to their basic rights.'

Chaiyut Boonnuy, a volunteer for documenting information on Mani

In addition, data collection process have also revived and strengthened relationship among MMVIC. For example, due to this project, the Tai-saek community in Nakornphanom province and Sakonnakorn province got opportunities to meet and interact with each other after a long time.





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'We now have more and new friends. We sometimes have to help them in harvesting rice during data documentation. We also have opportunities to meet our relatives in different communities whom we haven't met for a long time. This has helped to strengthen our relationship and expand our Tai-saek network'

Chuang Konkan, a volunteer for documenting information on Tai-saek

The database system can be replicated and used by the Council of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand or other organizations for data collection of other indigenous groups in Thailand. Further, it can also be used for evidence-based policy advocacy and for linking their issues with other indigenous peoples' issues at the regional and global level.

Much of the expected outcomes of the project has been achieved and they contribute to this year's main theme of Thailand's Indigenous Peoples' Day, which reads "Indigenous Peoples ways in the 4.0 era: towards a just and sustainable society".

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