

BASELINE INVESTIGATION AND PROMOTION OF SELF-ORGANIZING NETWORKS IN TWO SOUTHERN AREAS OF THAILAND

Sanchai Tandavanitj, CHARM Project, Department of Fisheries, s.tandavanitj@charm-th.com
Yves Henoque, CHARM Project, Department of Fisheries, yves.henoque@ifremer.fr

ABSTRACT

The CHARM Project is a 5-years project (2002-2007) of the Royal Thai Government supported by the European Union. Its focus on developing coastal habitats and resources co-management processes is based on the assumption that the most important aspect of inefficient use of coastal resources lies at the institutional level. Among the different types of governance, self-organizing networks is believed to be of particular relevance when sharing a common pool of resources. It involves the transformation of a system of local government into a system of local governance, including complex sets of organizations drawn from the public and private sector. Beyond the so-called community-based management approach, the project seeks to establish dialogue and communication throughout the governing process, primarily through the development of self-organizing networks between organizations and communities within the Southern Thailand project areas of Phang Nga Bay and Ban Don Bay. After a preliminary appraisal and site selection, a template for a techno-socio-economic baseline applied to the different sites has been developed. In spite of important differences in environmental, socio-economic and cultural values context, it is believed that such a baseline will pave the way for developing a common language and future mutually developed agreements between producers, suppliers, and local authorities in each region.

Keywords: self-organizing, Thailand, network

INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, fisheries and tourism have significantly contributed to the rapid economic growth that took place in Thailand during the 1980s and early 1990s but are now facing structural challenges. Looking beyond official statistics, Thailand is in reality becoming a net importer of fishery products notwithstanding the high productivity of her tropical coastal ecosystems. The national harvest is mostly composed of trash-fish for fish meal, reducing the role of coastal commercial fisheries to the rank of basic supplier of the animal feed industry while the bulk of the food fish for export or internal consumption is harvested by the distant waters fleets operating everywhere from Asia to Africa.

The small-scale fishermen, accounting for roughly 89% of the total employment in the sector but only for 5-6% of the total national catches, have been bypassed by external commercial investment in fisheries and shrimp culture, and are engulfed in a downward spiral of poverty and debt in a context of habitats degradation and resources decline.

The marine tourism industry is plagued by a short-term attitude favouring promotion over planning and by a strong environmental impact, while the combined pressure of the major groups and of the local small/medium operators is increasingly targeting the extensive areas of National Marine Parks for expansion and encroachment. The industry profits on the scenic beauty and health of coastal marine ecosystems but do not invest for their conservation and management, quickly eroding the base of its business.

Unrestricted access to habitats and resources, frequent evasion of regulatory supervision and enforcement, and an extensive but non-integrated legislative framework have hampered effective management. Social conflicts over resource use have intensified, and Thailand's coastal resources are over- or ill-exploited

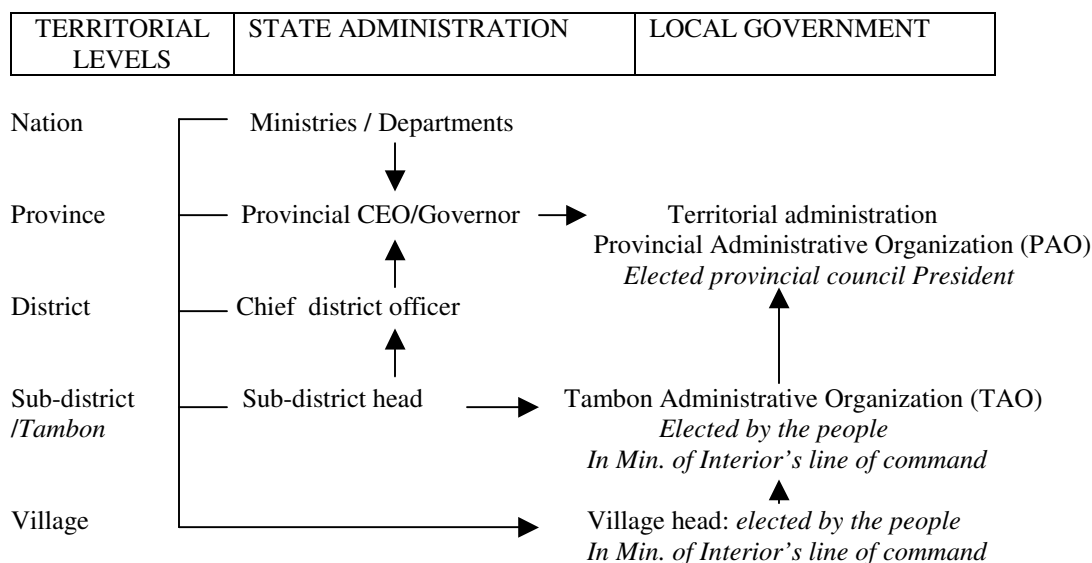
with coastal habitats being rapidly degraded. Urgent action is needed to support and encourage environmentally sustainable coastal resource use and habitat conservation.

CHARM, CRAFTING CO-MANAGEMENT

Mission

The main mission of the CHARM project, a 5-years project (2002-2007) of the Royal Thai Government supported by the European Union, is to introduce to Thailand the practice of coastal resource co-management as a promising alternative to the traditional top-down management that has incurred widespread deterioration of resources and serious users’ conflicts. The introduction of this new concept comes amidst the major political changes that have followed the 1997 Constitution and Public Administrative Decentralization Act. The 9th National Economic and Social Development Plan has followed closely its previous plan in putting the people at the center of development. The newly evolved provincial governor CEO and the ongoing strengthening of local administrative institutions, notably Tambon Administrative Offices (TAOs) have brought many new institutional players into the coastal resource management (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Territory-based administrative structure in Thailand



Co-management is understood as a two-track approach that adopts a strategy of formulating actions simultaneously at the community and national scales. This strategy typically begins a national coastal management initiative with demonstration projects at selected sites that define and analyse the issues that must be addressed and formulate new approaches to resolving them at small scale. The assumption is that success will be replicated and eventually produce a coherent and effective coastal co-management plan and decision-making procedures that encompasses the nation as a whole.

Activities

The activities in the two Project areas, Phang Nga Bay on the Andaman Sea and Ban Don Bay on the Gulf of Thailand, focus on co-management of the following three areas:

- specialized coastal ecosystems/habitats such as mangroves swamps, coral reefs, etc.;
- shoreline areas with existing or potential aquaculture development; and
- areas affected by misuse/overexploitation both at the macro and micro level.

The project is phased in a start-up phase for data-collection and strategy identification, an implementation phase to establish the co-management concept, institutional support and capacity building, as well as a consolidation phase that, in facts, starts from the beginning of the project till the end of the latter.

From the operational point of view, the project has five basic components:

1. Coordination within Government through improving policy and legal framework
2. Cooperation between resource users through establishing a participatory management framework
3. Enhancing human capacity
4. Improving information and communication
5. Project management and monitoring & evaluation

Operational approach

Five key attributes, to be kept in good balance, should characterize the work of the CHARM project:

- Participation;
- Partnerships;
- Integrated approaches and methods;
- Learning and adaptation;
- Building capacity.

Participation –International experience demonstrates that projects are sustained only where there are constituencies that are active advocates for improved resources management. The CHARM project seeks to carefully design mechanisms to assure that participants at national, provincial and local levels participate in each phase of the co-management process. Under the Provincial and Tambon Administration, village committees should become focal points for conflict mediation and implementation of “pragmatic co-management activities” that test new approaches to habitat and resource management at a pilot scale.

Partnerships - Forging mutually beneficial partnerships among institutions, communities, NGOs, and with donors is a central feature of CHARM activities at every level. The Financing Agreement that governs the relationship between the Royal Thai Government and the European Commission is designed as a partnership with National and European co-directors with comparable responsibilities and authority. At the ministerial level, the Project Steering Committee is a partnership among the Departments and professional organisations with major roles in coastal management. The departmental coordinators group should develop in a partnership designed to improve the effectiveness of departmental actions at national, provincial and local levels. The Project Management Unit (PMU) and the Field Management Offices (FMO) with concerned government agencies, are developing partnerships for community consultation, promotion of alternative livelihoods, and operation of community revolving funds. The PMU/FMOs are working in partnership with NGOs where they are already working.

Integrated approaches and methods – The integration in coastal management is what makes the difference from traditional sectoral projects that address only fragments of the whole picture. The integration requires multidimensional:

- integration of science with policies, with a strong emphasis on the social and political process and the belief that research and technical tools (permits, zoning, impact assessment, etc.) are of little value if

the institutional and societal context in which they are introduced is not yet capable of making the changes in values and behaviour that such tools require;

- integration between bottom-up and top-down approaches to resource management;
- integration between large- and small-scale management, and between short- and long-term time scales;
- integration among sectors and disciplines, expressed through the multi-agency project steering committee and the inter-department focal points group, and through the participation of the academic and research institutions.

Learning and adaptation – Feedback should be central to the implementation of the CHARM project activities. Techniques and mechanisms have to be developed to encourage the open exchange of ideas and experience and foster learning both internally, among the CHARM project staff, and externally, with stakeholders and with the public at large.

Building capacity – The project works at building a core group of professionals that can sustain a coherent co-management process into the future. This concerns individuals with adequate training and experience within government at national, provincial and local level, universities, NGOs and communities in the different sites. The ‘learning-by-doing’ approach will be bolstered by formal training along with exchange visits within the country and to other countries.

PRACTICES AT THE FIELD SITES

Demonstration projects: concentrating on village-level activities

The CHARM project strategy in the field is to develop early actions (second year) in selected sites designed to lead to quick and tangible results while supporting a longer-term planning process through local government support, funding and continuing advice from outside institutions. Early actions give substance to one or several demonstration projects by site or village.

Demonstration projects are mainly intended (i) to contribute to the building of the community structure needed to help implement their own policies and actions in the framework of the Provincial and TAO strategies, and (ii) to test the local conditions for action plan implementation.

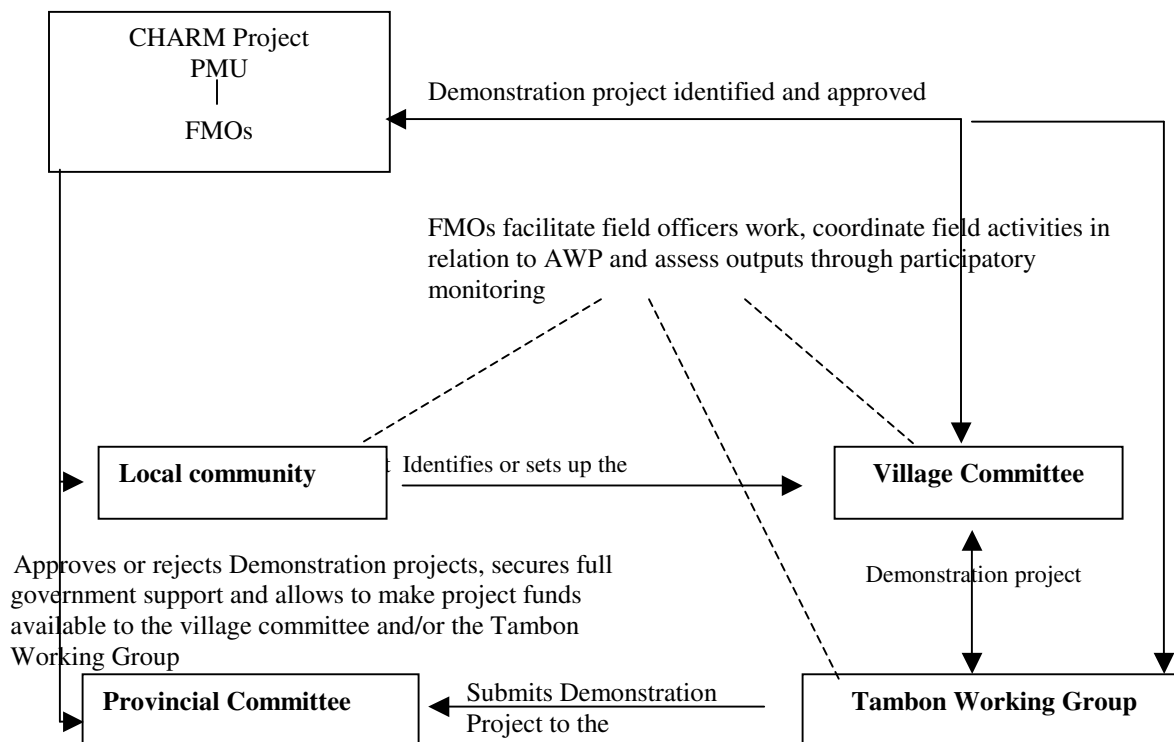
The two pilot areas have about 320 villages distributed in 99 sub-districts (Tambon). The selection criteria and process have been worked out during a preliminary appraisal, which lead to the first selection of 27 villages distributed in 16 Tambon. So far, 18 demonstration projects have been developed, 12 are ongoing while a number of submitted projects are under scrutiny.

Figure 2 illustrates the project strategy in regard to the different institutional structures. Three governance levels are targeted through the village committee, the Tambon Working Group and the provincial Coastal Resources Management Committee.

The demonstration projects are currently mainly focussing on the village level. A proposal has been developed to address in parallel and on different sites, a number of TAO and negotiate with them short-term plans aiming at developing with the villages coastal habitats and resources co-management initiatives. Using these two entries, the project tries to apply its two-track planning strategy, from the village to the TAO and from the TAO to the village.

At the provincial level, on CHARM Executing Authority's request (Department of Fisheries), Coastal Resources Management Provincial Committees have been set up by CEO Governors in each project areas province, i.e. Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Trang, and Surat Thani. While these committees were initiated in the name of the CHARM project, the aim is to strengthen them in order to progressively incorporate their activities within the Provincial Administration Organisation, including their involvement into the CHARM activities planning and follow-up.

Figure 2: Decision making process for demonstration projects identification, planning, implementation and monitoring.



Community perspectives of quality of life and coastal resources management issues

The participatory process is an essential element of any co-management effort. It is initiated with a baseline assessment work in a sampling of the selected sites (Pollnac and Crawford, 2000).

With respect to understanding community perspectives of quality of life and coastal resources management issues, the goal of the baseline assessment of the CHARM project is stated as follows:

- To provide information of use for analyzing impacts of project interventions; and
- To provide information essential to the identification of problems and the proper formulation of intervention strategies.

The approach involved a combination of standard survey techniques designed to capture qualitative data on perspectives of changes in quality of life, and participatory action research techniques which provide opportunities for community participants to examine and document attitudes and experiences of issues relating to coastal habitat and resources management affecting quality of life in the past, present and future.

In each site, an initial scoping was undertaken to identify obvious geographical and social boundaries and to identify areas where different individuals and groups in the local community came together as a natural part of their daily activities. The presence of these locations was identified as a potentially important element of social capital. These locations also provided a good central locale in which to base focus group discussions. In some instances, an initial visit to an area allowed for brief discussions with people in the area and appointments were made to visit for more discussions later on during the site visit.

Common features in different contexts

Out of 19 villages distributed in 6 Tambon and 5 provinces, although representing very different geographical and socio-economic contexts, a number of common features have been identified as follows:

Basic Infrastructure and Services

Main issues are (i) Freshwater supply and quality, (ii) Transportation (Roads/Sea/Canals) contributing to marginalizing communities and constraining their access to education, (iii) Health services in some villages.

Participation in development decisions

Main issues are (i) Access to decision-making forums (in Islamic villages, women and non Islamic groups), and (ii) Access to information. Generally speaking potential for improvement is good.

Social support and networks

Strengths are (i) Proximity to neighbours, (ii) Proximity to kinship groups, and (iii) Capacity to form organised groups except in some villages.

The major weakness resides in limited solidarity between individuals and groups.

Health issues

Main health issues are (i) Generalization of diabetes and high blood pressure, (i) Good relationship with Health Services, and (iii) Low awareness of health promotion.

Education issues

The main constraint resides in the ability to finance education (related to transport cost) while non-traditional and traditional livelihoods (generations) are conflicting.

Livelihood / Economic aspects

- Most of the villages contribute to labour in town or factories;
- Transport cost seriously affect incomes;
- Almost all natural resources are highly exploited;
- General depletion of natural resources;
- Growing impact of private investors on land use;
- Shifting of shrimp farming activity from villagers to outside investors.

To face this situation, there is a growing interest in tourism and new forms of aquaculture (soft-shell crab, shellfish) but villagers keep cautious as regards fish aquaculture (feed cost) since their financial capacity

is very limited. There is therefore a strong demand to be trained in tourism business, cooperative and financial management, as well as marketing aspects of aquaculture.

Social issues and problems

Although there is relatively high unemployment or under employment, security is not perceived as a problem (very little crime in general) and the impact of the government anti-drug policy/campaign is considered to be positive.

Relationship with other communities /individuals in the area

Considered as generally good, although there is a lack of organization structuring among individuals and groups sharing common interests.

NEXT STEPS

Some of the above-common features between villages will be soon converted into indicators that should help in following-up and comparing progress between sites.

More generally speaking and following a first feedback seminar organized in Surat Thani Province during June 25-26, 2004 (CHARM-TEI, 2004), Coastal Resources Management (CRM) is understood as heading towards “the abundance of the natural resources and the improved quality of life of the local communities” with the following identified strategies:

- Prevent the destruction and the rehabilitation of the ecosystem;
- Promote the eco-tourism;
- Promote the activities of the housewives’ groups and community enterprises;
- Promote local cultures and traditions;
- Use appropriate fishing gears;
- Prevent and solve the pollutants discharge into the seashore;
- Apply a good administration and management system for land use zoning, land demarcation, determination of community rules and regulations and law enforcement;
- Enhance knowledge through the development of coastal ecosystem learning centers;
- Support the administrative activities like setting up fishing funds, saving groups, etc.

These strategies involve many activities that should be simultaneously developed in respect of one specific issue common to a number of sites limited first to a limited area, e.g. a small bay or an estuary area.

Since it had been proven to be an effective CRM approach in the Philippines and Indonesia (Balgos et al., 2001), Community-Based Marine Sanctuaries (CB-MSs) will be assessed as a possible common specific issue in the case of Thailand. CB-MSs can be defined as co-management regimes between local government and the community where they are established by formal TAO ordinance, developed with widespread support and participation of the communities and local government, and are part of a larger village CRM plan.

Establishing viable livelihood projects should be developed alongside the sanctuary. Eco-tourism can be a good alternative livelihood project as well as promoting conservation, because tourism often depends upon the environment to attract visitors.

CONCLUSION

The CHARM project geographical scope is rather extended. Its implementation takes place in a number of sites scattered in two specific areas, Phang Nga bay and Ban Don bay. In such a large areas, the CHARM project is not acting alone and in the name of co-management, seeks to coordinate its activities with a number of other on-going site-based projects within the same area or in contiguous ones.

It is thus necessary to develop with concerned communities, a strategy that will link their activities in a “learning portfolio” about the conditions under which a co-management approach to habitats and coastal resources is most effective. A learning portfolio’s net impact should become far greater than the sum of its parts.

To that purpose, the CHARM project will test the CB-MS model already developed in the Philippines and Indonesia taking into consideration the following factors of success: a relatively small population size, a perceived crisis in terms of reduced fish populations, the presence of successful alternative-income projects, a relatively high level of community participation in decision-making, continuing advice from the support organizations, inputs from the local government or TAO.

REFERENCES

- Balgos Miriam, Bayer Tom G., Crawford Brian, Pagdilao Cesario R., Tulungen Johnnes, White Alan T., 2001, Proceedings: Philippines-Indonesia Workshop on Community-Based Marine Sanctuaries, *CRC Coastal Management Report #2234*, 106 pp.
- CHARM-TEI, 2004, Feasibility study on collaborative learning through inter-site monitoring, *Final Report*, 36 pp.
- Pollnac Richard B., and B.R. Crawford, 2000, Assessing behavioral aspects of coastal resource use, *Proyek Pesisir Publications Special Report. CRC Coastal Management Report #2226*, 139 pp.