

Pgaz K' Nyau (Karen) Traditional and Innovation Wisdom and Practice for Sustainable Development Goals

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With a population of around 1 million indigenous people in Thailand, the Karen are half of the whole population and the largest indigenous community of Thailand. They are found mainly in the northern and western region of Thailand where they have settled for more than three to four centuries. Their homeland is the headwater of several major rivers emerging out of the hills and mountains which dot the landscape. Their world view, culture, language and livelihood are so closely linked with their land, territories, flora and fauna and the overall environment. This is part of their traditional symbiotic relationship with nature. Thus, for the Karen people, the forest around the fields and villages are managed by a set of customs, prohibitions and rituals and includes sacred forests and traditional burial grounds.

The community Hin Lad Nai is located in a biodiversity-rich hilly forest ecosystem in Northern Thailand. Between the 1970s and 1980s, the Thai government awarded mass logging concessions in the surrounding forests, which led to devastating deforestation and caused the rivers to stagnate. After the deforestation concession was terminated in 1989, the community began to restore its ecosystem and has restored 80% of the deforested area to date. The villagers began to create fire barriers or channels as there was a lot of dry material in their forests, such as leaves, branches and trunks, which were left behind after logging. The villagers of Hin Lad Nai carefully control the wild fire during the summertime, as it would destroy their forest, their wildlife, and their fallow rotation field. All of these are their food sources and part of their lives. The villagers work together to create various plantations along the rivers, agroforestry such as different types of bamboo, rattan, local tea and diverse native trees. They classify different types of forests based on their traditional knowledge, customary law and practice. Thus, a wildlife conservation area was created, which is located 1 km² around the village. After a few years, the wildlife ecosystem returned, and even some endangered wild animals returned, such as the silver pheasant.

By rebuilding its ecosystem, the municipality of Hin Lad Nai has effectively contributed to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 15, or more precisely, to Sub-goal 15.2. which aims to promote the sustainable management of all forest species, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and afforestation and reforestation.

Tea grows wild, but is cared for and pruned to get the best leaves. Bamboo shoots are harvested and honey is collected in the forest from carefully placed beehives. These are the main sources of income for the community. The rotational farming system contains an exceptionally rich biodiversity of edible varieties and semi-domesticated plants, which along with the products on the rice fields of the community provide food security. This environmentally well adapted economic system of the Karen people contributes to the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biological diversity, as well as their capacity to provide essential benefits for sustainable development, as required in sub-target 15.4.

As part of their rotational farming practice, the fallow fields not only increase their food crops and wild species, but also beekeeping is practiced, promoting the process of pollination of the plants on the fallow land and nearby woodland, and thus the sustainable development of the ecosystem and humans living in it. The ecosystem will increase in biodiversity, in terms of quantity and quality of the ecosystem.

In the community of Hin Lad Nai, by adding value to the various products such as honey, tea, bamboo shoots, etc. this also motivates young people to return to their community. They then play an important role in product innovation, thereby also creating new sources of income. Part of the proceeds from the sale of products are given to the collective community fund. This collective fund is intended for all

urgent and joint activities, in particular for the care and preservation of their environment. The young generation of Hin Lad Nai is thus developing their own solutions with traditional local products in a new approach for innovation and a dynamic process for economic self-sufficiency and a self-determined life. In this way, they finally contribute to the achievement of Sub-goal 15.9 and incorporate the values of ecosystem and biodiversity into local poverty reduction and development strategies.