

GEF Small Grants Programme Project Site Visit

Country: Thailand
Project No. / Title: THA-SGP-OP4-CORE-07-02/ Sufficient Agriculture for Environment Conservation
Date of Visit: Saturday, June 20, 2009
Location: Wangsaiphon District , Phijit Province
Visitors: 1. Mr. Poonsin Sreesangkom, National Coordinator, GEF SGP
2. Mr. Kanchit Sukjaimitr, NSC member
Project Contact: Ms. Rassami Khanthong, Coordinator, Alternative Agriculture Network , the grantee

1. BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT / PURPOSE OF VISIT

This OP-4 project proposes to contribute to reversing land degradation caused by unsustainable agricultural practices and deforestation in a portion of transboundary watershed area of Nan River Basin, an integrated ecosystems of the South China Sea. Through building capacity and demonstrating environmental approaches to the target population on sustainable water and land use, the project aims to strengthen viable indigenous forest/woodland management systems and use indigenous multiple use tree species to rehabilitate the degraded area. Having been awarded US\$ 31,319.53 from GEF SGP , the project has been in operation just over half-way of its two-year duration, and has already submitted two progress reports. This visit was aimed to witness progress of activities and respective results, and interact with the target population.

2. FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

The project is situated in a location classified as cultivated lowland receiving natural water from mountainous areas in its north and northeast. By-and-large, paddy is the main crop being grown intensively, i.e. seven times within two years. Marginal forests and woodlands compose the remainder areas of the project. One major mono-cultivated species witnessed in the area is eucalyptus. Communities in the four participating villages are a mix of local people who have dwelled in the areas for generations and of other migrated peoples who came from the dryer northeastern region of the country a few decades back.

In order to witness project activities and evaluate the results of appropriate sufficiency agriculture consistent with natural resource conservation, one plot of about one ha belonging to one project member in Baan(village) Dongmornthong was visited. The member had initially been producing ionic plasma to be used in his paddy field and garden, in addition to cow manure. It was confirmed both chemical fertilizer and insecticide at the current visit were no longer in use. The only chemical substance, which was still required, was a solution to suppress the notorious alien species "Cherry snail". Another project activity witnessed was the pilot production of compost in pig stable belonging to one project member. The stable, about 3 by 4 meters and 50 centimeters deep, was cushioned with rice husk and housed 12 young hogs to accelerate fermentation process. After four months, the rice husk was turned into an effective compost, for use in a small plot of paddy and horticulture. So far, the stable had produced about three tons of the compost for later use in agricultural activity.

At Baan Tarkdad, a community approach on land and water use to reverse land degradation was also witnessed. This approach included a mental shift from intensive paddy farming to a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly practice. An example of the progress of this more environmental shift is visible in one project member who turned a portion of his several-ha paddy field into a humid retaining ponds receiving water from modified surrounding water canals. The member has had satisfactory results with the approach, so far.

As to activity on natural resource rehabilitation , a community forest of about three ha in Baan Tarkdaed was visited. The forest was fairly intact with natural vegetation and was being well

overseen by community leaders. During the visit on the plot, there were ongoing “trimming” activities, supported by the government’s Ministry of Labour aiming to urgently relieve victimized rural population. The village committee decided to use this financial support to hire landless community members to work in the area and get familiar with native species in the community forest. However, another nearby plot of community forest was not well managed, due to a change over of local administration. The new Tambol Administrative Organization still needs more time to understand about project approach before making decision to fully participate and support.



Project location is situated in an intensive agricultural land. Land use change was estimated to be 41-60 %. The 2006 flash flood and later yearly smaller deluges caused by upland deforestation would only accelerate land degradation of the area. Natural water flows downwards from forested upland making the location fairly fertile. It constitutes a portion of the country’s region once dubbed “ in the water there is fishes, in the field paddy”.



General composition of project land includes plots of paddy , both of large and small sizes with marginal forests and woodlands which provides a source of cooking fuels. In adjacent districts, underground water is being intensively pumped up for paddy during off season.



In order to demonstrate a wiser use of land and water, the project allocates some land to slow down water, instead of growing more paddy or other quick cash crops. A small pond like this with surrounding canals was said to be of initial success.



Adding up to slowing down natural water, two plots of community forest were put under strict management. There were several kinds of edible species. This plot of forest with about three ha was intended to be used as a learning place . Resources inventory was being conducted. Project leaders decided to use an assistance fund from the government –intended for livelihood and infrastructure–for maintenance of the forest.



An effort to reverse land degradation trend, project members reduced or replace chemical fertilizer by animal manure and ionic plasma (organic solution) in paddy farming. This plot of about one ha was applied with such environmentally-friendly stuff. In spite of initial success and satisfaction, surrounding paddy fields still depending chemical substances remained a complex issue to address.



Another relevant effort involved an effective and simple production of compost. This pigpen of one project member, of about 3 by 4 meters was dug down to 50 cm. deep, laid with rice husk from community rice mill, kept with 12 young hogs, is producing a heap of compost within four months. It was estimated, so far, three tons of compost were produced and applied in cultivated area successfully.