

# **Daughters of Development: Women and Thailand's Changing Environment**

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Although Thai women have no significant participation in the conception and implementation of ill-fitting development policies, they are nonetheless suspected of destroying Thailand's forests, poisoning its air and water and, in general, facilitating ecological degradation. Already powerless in a patriarchal society, women are expected to be knowledgeable of the most "environment-friendly" waste management techniques in the performance of domestic roles. While there have been notable instances where Thai women successfully prevented government programs from inflicting further damage to their lives and the environment, they continue to be the recipient of misplaced blame.

Research literature by Thai academics on women's issues especially those on the relationship between women and environment, has been limited in scope. Kanjana Kaewthep's study<sup>1</sup> presented at the Political Economy Forum in 1992 was an initial attempt to draw attention to a lack of serious research. Her study focused on the relationship between women's roles and the environment as they are affected by economic development. Kaewthep called for a process of problem solving directed by a "women-centered" approach.<sup>2</sup> However, actualizing such an approach requires society to undergo a change in the balance of power between women and men. There is a need to question the "ways of framing" (the use of particular models, theories, approaches and discourses) of women's experiences, needs and contributions that tend to marginalize them and thereby maintain the status quo of gender roles and the attendant imbalance of power. In a society governed by patriarchal relations, it is generally a group of men from a particular ethnic, economic, religious and/or political segment of society whose collective and personal experiences, influences and interests hold the balance of power.

In 1994 the National Commission on Women's Affairs (NCWA) of the Office of the Prime Minister presented documentation on women and the environment. These were written by Nittaya Mahapol, a specialist in environmental hygiene, and Tanya Sanitwong Na Ayudhaya, a university

lecturer. Nittaya's paper focused on public health issues related to pollution, e.g. water, air, sound, garbage, food additives, and toxic and hazardous waste, and on the role of women in addressing this issue. In order to find solutions to environmental problems associated with pollution, she suggested that women set up a community organization whose goal would be to investigate areas of environmental pollution and degradation in their community. Moreover, according to the Code of National Environmental Promotion and Conservation, as declared in 1992, "such organizations should obtain technical, managerial and financial support from the government."<sup>3</sup> Tanya, on the other hand, viewed the relation between women and the environment at the macro level. She argued that "the development model the government has been implementing requires the ultimate utilization of resources, often without any understanding of the relationship between the ecological system and the interdependence of humans and nature. The results have been the sudden shortage of natural resources and dramatic changes in the ecological system."<sup>4</sup>

However, even when approaching environmental issues from a different perspective, Tanya's solution is no different from Nittaya's. She also places the burden of responsibility on women. Women, therefore, must know everything from purchasing appropriate commodity goods to adjusting routine behavior (e.g. stop using foam container, turn off the shower while applying soap, etc.) to preserve the environment.

Similar prescriptions designating a disproportionate share of responsibility on women also appeared in several national literature and documents on women and environment. For instance, the summary of the Women's Long-Term Policy and Master Plan<sup>5</sup> indicated that:

- 1) Women have not adequately realized the importance of their duties and influences on family members and community in terms of environmental conservation.
- 2) Women have not obtained proper knowledge and understanding regarding the workplace environment, the chemicals and toxins they use at home or at work and their effects on health.<sup>6</sup>

The prescriptive language used here implicitly places blame for our environmental problems on women. Prescriptions evolve out of specific

ways of framing issues. Women are implicitly blamed for the continuing environmental degradation: they lack the necessary knowledge and technical understanding of chemical usage and they lack the insight to recognize that their role is to affect social change through their individual actions at the family and community levels. But such a framing is ideologically narrow and distorting because it tends not only to adhere to a liberal “rational” model that individualizes actions and responsibility (away from collective action and responsibility), but it also does two other things: it keeps women at the margins of critical social production by suppressing their critical insights, experiences, concerns and needs while it places the burden of blame and responsibility (without the powers for and access to decision-making) on women, thereby deferring criticism, blame and responsibility from the true progenitors of environmental degradation.

This is why Nittaya’s and Tanya’s papers tend to uncritically support such framing and so their papers lacked substantial socio-political, economic and gender analysis, which would have critically explained the relations of power that continue to marginalize women in terms of their use of environmental resources, while allowing a minority of men to maintain control over resource exploitation which consequently result in environmental degradation. Their work also failed to explain how this set-up of power relations control the formal discourses on resource exploitation and environmental degradation in an effort to misplace blame.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that these national documents did not include the story of Sa-ing, a woman in her early forties who was instrumental in the conservation of the Dong Mae Ped forest in Roi-Et Province. There is also Miya Hawa, a woman with five children, whose pioneering work on the conservation of sea-grass was instrumental in restoring the population of the *dugon*, a rare fish, and the fertility of the shoreline near her village. In general, issues related to women and the environment, especially those that have great relevance to the majority of women, i.e., poor women, have not been properly addressed in national fora and academic discussions.

In a statement prepared by the Thai Grassroots Women Group for the 4th World’s Conference on Women in Beijing, the group insisted that “the government must issue a bill that recognizes the community people’s right to manage their own natural resources and environment.”<sup>7</sup> The

statement demands not only “the right of each to earn his or her own living” but also access to means on how to do so. With this, the plight of millions of women whose role is to make decisions regarding day to day survival is hoped to be given greater prominence.

The remainder of this article attempts to explain the relationship between women and the environment at the macro level where there is a need to question the social patterns that have saddled women not only with housework but also with the responsibility of protecting the environment in the context of everyday efforts for personal, family and community survival.

### **The Thai Environment**

In mid summer, during April, children like me are happy because that is the time when the Yom River, with clear water, is a beautiful place and becomes our amusement park. The river’s area is full of stories.

On the other side of the river there are giant thorny plants and the krite trees, soft and fine sand, crabs, fish and shrimps. If we are hungry, we split up to find firewood, catch crabs, fish, or shrimps. We do not have to buy canned food. We have delicious and fresh food to eat everyday. Besides crabs, fish and shrimps, we can find krite mushrooms growing around the krite trees. Sometimes, when we cannot find mushrooms we pick up vegetables such as morning glory, melothria heterophyllia (pac tamlueng) and many more that are growing along the river.

After swimming in the river, we go for a walk in the forest where we study with our friends. It is our school. We pick up fruits in the forest to eat. We also try to learn new names of fruits. There is much food for us in the forest. Throughout the other seasons, we can usually find something to eat. Besides fruits, there are also bamboo shoots and various kinds of vegetables that we can eat e.g. spinach, meliantha sauvis (pak wan) and bale leaf (bai matoom), etc. There are different kinds of mushrooms.

Our study tour is endless. It continues everyday and is like the stream in the big forest. If only it is not destroyed by the dams and the capitalists.

Others accuse the villagers of cutting the trees, destroying the forest and lavishly using the forest wood. I want to ask them why they think this way. I want to tell them that the villagers cut the trees in order to build houses for their families. They do not sell these trees for profit. Tell me, how can this be understood as lavish? The villagers, unlike others, do not have such powers and connections that they can move timber through the police checkpoints. Do you really think the villagers are able to do this?

Studying at school is very different from studying by ourselves, where we have opportunity to learn with freedom of body and thought. At all times, children need freedom and they need justice. We want everyone to play fair and give freedom to children, to the forest, wild animals and trees.

This essay was written by Appika Sa-eaeb Kong, a young girl from Prae province. She did not realize how unique her essay was, as it was both a record of the diverse heritage of resources along the Yom River, and a historical diary on the beauty and simplicity of a forest economy which will no longer exist as these villages and the last golden teak forest of the country will be soon under the Kang Suah Ten Dam.

Where will Appika be tomorrow? Go south to sell her body in Had Yai or end up in Bangkok and live her life like “Suk Kanha who lost everything to the Rasri Salai Dam?”<sup>8</sup> The other choice is moving up north to Lumpoon province to die in an industrial estate like the 14 bodies “reported dead with AIDS, not with illness caused by work.”<sup>9</sup>

If Appika is lucky enough to survive the industrial workplace toxins and her fortune allows her to become a mother of a girl, her daughter will grow up surrounded by the fumes of factory chimneys instead of the breeze of the Yom River, which Appika had once enjoyed.

Nevertheless, Appika is luckier than Pongthom in having been raised by the Yom River. Pongthom, at the age of one year and one month, learned to do without the milk of his mother, Pui, who is serving a jail sentence.<sup>10</sup> Pui, whose husband is both an alcoholic and neurotic, is mother to Pongthom and his three siblings. She and her neighbors were accused of trespassing on public land in Sri Sakate province where they had lived for more than 20 years. Shortly after her arrest, the Ministry of

Agriculture and Cooperatives gave 10 families rights to occupy the already deteriorating forest in Phuket Province. These families also happen to be millionaires. The Minister insisted that “they are qualified.”<sup>11</sup>

These were actual stories involving Thai women and their environment that took place sometime in November 1994. On November 28-29, 1994, the First Thai Grassroots Women Forum was organized in preparation for the 1995 NGO Forum and the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing. It was a historical moment. Over 300 women from all over (industrial estate, island, seashore, slum, paddy-rice field, forest, etc.) came together to discuss issues that were relevant to them. The stories depict an intensifying conflict between those who have lived on the land and depended on it for generations and those who wish to acquire it for additional profit.

Each environmental issue may differ in detail, but on closer examination, each is a symptom of an illness. This illness is the government development policy which promotes among others the construction of dams, the use of eucalyptus trees for commercial benefit, and the promotion of industry and export. So far the development policy remains unresponsive to local needs while giving emphasis on energy intensive and capital intensive megaprojects whose benefits are felt not by the community. Meanwhile, the costs of environmental degradation, community disintegration and loss of sustainable livelihood are disproportionately felt by the local villagers.

### **Developmental Approaches: The Sources of Environmental Problems**

The term “development” was introduced in Thailand over 40 years ago during the term of Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat. In other countries, the approaches to attaining development were implemented after World War II.

Guided by the principles of developmentalism based on varying principles of poverty, these development guidelines were geared toward acquiring “western” industrialization that would create jobs, goods, and services that will help a country “grow” its way out of poverty. As noted by Rostow’s economic growth model:

It is possible to identify all societies, in their economic dimensions, as lying within one of five categories: the traditional society, the pre-conditions for take-off, take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption.<sup>12</sup>

Using western countries as the universal standard, Rostow's model suggested that these countries had moved through four previous economic stages before becoming "developed." Other countries remained at the "underdeveloped stage." To become "developed," the underdeveloped countries must catch up with the western countries by attaining a stage of high mass consumption. This is more commonly known as the "catching up theory."

In his book *Understanding Postwar Reformism in Thailand*, Chairat Charoensin-o-lam argued that there are two factors that could explain the success of a number of developmentalist ideologies, including Rostow's, in gaining influence over the leaders of many Third World countries since the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> The first factor is the measurable successes of putting these various ideologies in practice elsewhere, such as the "overnight" success in the economic recovery of Japan after having been thrown into economic ruin by the end of World War II; the successful economic reconstruction of Europe under the Marshall Plan; and the rise of the Soviet Union from a pre-war agriculturally backward country to a post-war industrial world power. The second is the financial mechanisms supporting the development practices, i.e., major financial contributions by the U.S. government and its affiliated international development agencies such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) of the World Bank, seemed to guarantee some measure of success (access to capital that was needed to make the changes was implicitly guaranteed).

In the early 1960s, an ideology of "developmentalism" was put into practice with the export of a strategy of accumulation called Import-Substitution Industrialization (ISI) to the Third World. The ideology provides that "the developing countries can 'catch up' with the developed nations by simply imitating the latter's style of development, i.e., through industrialization."<sup>14</sup> Technically, the reason why these countries should start with this step is because they have not yet reached the conditions necessary for industrialization, e.g., a high level of technological knowledge, management skills and intensive capital. Therefore, "it would be better

for these countries to start with light manufacturing industries geared toward the stable 'home' market by producing substitutes for the imported consumer goods."<sup>15</sup>

However, after almost a decade of implementing this strategy, it was found that the weakness of ISI was not only due to the limitations of the home market in the poor countries but also the difficulties in repaying capital, loans, and purchasing high-technology machinery from rich countries. Therefore, the time was right for the implementation of a "more appropriate" development theory, that is, to move from the inward-looking industries such as ISI to an outward-looking policy of competing in the world market of Export-Oriented Industrialization (EOI).<sup>16</sup>

In Southeast Asia, this new strategy has been actively adopted. The Asian Development Bank stated in one of its reports that the focus on "the exploitation of natural and human resources must be intensified" and "instead of orienting their industrial pattern toward their limited domestic markets, the Southeast Asian countries should orient it toward the export market and should also try to take advantage of their abundant endowment of natural resources...In order to succeed in the export of labor-intensive manufacturers, wage cost must be kept low...Potentially, the most important factor to be taken into account in the new strategy of industrialization is the Green Revolution itself."<sup>17</sup>

Since then, and as a result of following this course of action, the Southeast Asian countries' economies have been highly tied to the system of global accumulation of capital, which has not only intensified the degree of external exploitation, but also strengthened the dominance of the center at the expense of the periphery. As defined by Ichiyo:

For the export-oriented industrialization, on the one hand, internalizes imperialism in the heart of the host country's economy, and on the other hand, links it with (the) global system of production and marketing dominated by the gigantic multinational corporations...The export-oriented industrialization never meant 'Industrialization of Asia through export promotion' but meant operations reflecting the decision of multinational capital to begin its own 'competitive' business in Asia.<sup>18</sup>



For Thailand, the adoption of industrialization through the support of World Bank began in 1959. That year, the World Bank Survey Mission Group came to Thailand and published its report entitled *A Public Development Program For Thailand*. Commenting on the report, Charoensin-o-larn said that it “was not only a critique of Thailand’s previous performance in political economic development but also a blueprint for Thailand’s postwar development practices”.<sup>19</sup>

Three years later, the First National Economic and Social Development Plan was adopted and implemented by the Thanarat government. From 1962 to 1996, Thailand adopted seven national master plans, each with a different focus based on criticisms of past plans. Nonetheless, all the master plans adopted the standard rhetoric of arguing for low labor wages and irrational utilization of resources.

### **The Developmental Approaches from Feminist Perspective**

In one of her articles, Maria Mies, a feminist scholar, stated that the consumption pattern of the Northern countries is the root cause of poverty and environmental degradation in the South. She used per capita energy consumption rates as example to argue that:

If we keep in mind that the six percent of the world’s population who live in the United States annually use up 30 percent of the fossil energy produced, then it should be clear, that the rest of the world’s population, of which about 75-80 percent live in the poor countries of the South, cannot consume as much energy per person...the people living in the rich industrialized countries — United States, Europe and Japan — who make up only one quarter of the world’s population, consume three quarters of the world’s energy production.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Rostow’s theory of economic growth is not feasible because underdeveloped countries at the bottom rung of the ladder cannot catch up with the developed countries. This is because the consumptive habits of the North threaten the future availability of current energy resources.

What is more, both the developed and underdeveloped countries are also going through the process of polarization where others are “climbing up” to “develop” at one pole, at the expense of the other pole, which is getting underdeveloped evenmore. She explains:

Two hundred years ago, the western world was only five times as rich as the poor countries of today. In 1960 this relationship was already 20:1, and in 1983 it was 46:1...It would take about 500 years till the poor countries would have reached the standard of living prevailing in the rich countries of the North. And this would only be possible if these rich countries would not continue with their further growth of goods and services.<sup>22</sup>

Another thing that needs to be taken into consideration is that Rostow's growth model assumes that the world must have an unlimited supply of resources. Therefore, the advanced stage or "catch-up" phase can never be attained by the countries of the south as the world's resources are not only unevenly distributed, but also limited. What is more, Mies stated that "wealth in the rich countries grows even faster and within a limited world. This means it grows at the expense of others, which I continue to call colonies: nature, women, the so-called Third World."<sup>23</sup>

The colonies of the south help supply and maintain the high living standard in the rich Northern countries not only with natural resources but also cheap labor. As Mies pointed out, "... if all labor, incorporated in the commodities sold in the rich countries was paid at the rates of a skilled (male) worker of Germany then most of these commodities would be so expensive that only a small minority could buy them."<sup>24</sup>

Increasing surplus from the colonies, which is then accumulated in the North is reflected in the changes in an individual's consumption pattern and lifestyle in these rich country. Mies used Germany, her home country, as an example to illustrate this phenomenon:

In West Germany, ...the consumption [rate] of private households has shown a continuous growth in the last decade. Between 1950 and 1980 private consumption grew five-fold. This continuous growth was accompanied by changes in the consumption patterns. Whereas around 1950, almost half of the expenses were spent on food, this proportion was only 23 percent in 1987. A much greater amount of the income of private households could now be spent on leisure time activities and luxury items.<sup>25</sup>

The growth model has brought to the North not only an accumulation of "wealth" but also increased "waste" in both the domestic and public

spheres which have directly affected the global environmental system through ozone layer depletion, increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide (the green-house effect), and the pollution of the earth's water, soil and air with both organic and toxic wastes. (As Mies has already noted, 80 percent of the carbon dioxide produced is due to the waste resulting from energy consumption by only one fourth of the world's population).

The increasing quantity of garbage from households is another indicator of changes in consumption behavior in Germany. Within a ten year period (1971-1982) household waste had increased from 300 to 775 kgs. per person per year <sup>26</sup> (an average of two kgs per day). This means a household with four family members will produce on average 3,000 kgs of garbage per year. Thus, at this rate, a town of 300,000 people will produce at least 232,500,000 kgs of garbage per year. Adding the tremendous amount of industrial waste, the Northern countries are in crisis regarding finding enough dumpsites within the country. This situation results in the poorer countries facing double exploitation. That is, not only are their human and natural resources exploited, but their countries also become dumpsites for toxic and hazardous waste from the North.

According to a Greenpeace document, Canada is accused as one of the "sinister seven" countries, exporting over 162,000 tons of hazardous waste, under the pretext of "recycling" to eight Southeast Asian countries.<sup>27</sup> A Canadian weekly newspaper further reported, "from January to October 1993, Canada exported 483,679 kgs of ash containing lead to Taiwan, and the U.S. exported 378,553 kgs of ash containing zinc to India and other countries..."<sup>28</sup> Thus, if one would try to generate the living standard and consumption pattern of the rich countries to all the people living in the world, Mies sarcastically remarked "one would need two more planets...one planet to get the necessary raw materials and the other planet to dump our waste."<sup>29</sup> Mies concluded:

"Catching up development" is not possible for the poor countries and that a conception like sustainable development for all is not compatible with a growth-oriented industrial world market system. This system is simply not sustainable. And it is not generalizable...the continuation of the industrial growth model will not only lead to further ecological destruction but also lead to more inequality and more poverty. And this will affect as is well known, women and children first.<sup>30</sup>

The “discourse on development” of the First World boasts that it can eradicate suffering and bring about wealth to the Third World. Actually, it is an effort to establish neo-colonial relations, that is, a marketplace utilizes raw materials and cheap labor from the South, for the purpose of maintaining the wealth of the First World. For Vandana Shiva, an Indian physicist and ecologist, it is the “development” that causes the problems, not “poverty.” It is development whereby one group of people exploits the resources used by others who really need them. The locals have managed these natural resources for many generations not only because their lives depend on it but also out of respect for the land which has given them life. Although in the language of development, they are regarded as “nobodies” who merely get in the way. As Shiva pointed out:

What is currently called development is essentially maldevelopment based on the introduction or accentuation of the domination of man over nature and women...Nature and women are turned into passive objects, to be used and exploited for the uncontrollable desires of alienated man. From being the creators and sustainers of life, nature and women are reduced to being ‘resources’ in the fragmented, anti-life model of maldevelopment.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of Thailand the situation is hardly different from other countries in the Third World. It cannot be denied that development under its many different labels, e.g. export-oriented industrialization, monoculture agribusiness etc., has been the primary contributor to ecological dysfunction and environmental degradation. Sanitsuda Ekachal suggested that the situation in the northeast of Thailand was such an example:

A contributing factor to erratic and fewer rainfalls has been the clearing of the tropical forest over the past two or three decades to grow cash crops such as maize, tobacco and tapioca which is mainly sold to the animal feed markets of the European community. The loss of the forest has also caused soil erosion, lowering the quality and the fertility of the land further still.<sup>32</sup>

The ecological crisis has affected women most by marginalizing them even further, placing them in an increasingly desperate position. As Shiva argued:

When commodity production as the prime economic activity is introduced as development it destroys the potential of nature and women to produce life and, goods and services for basic needs. More commodities and more cash means less life in nature (through ecological destruction) and society (through denial of basic needs). Women are devalued firstly because their work cooperates with nature's processes, and secondly, because work which satisfies needs and ensures sustenance is devalued in general...It is no accident that the modern, efficient and productive technologies created within the context of growth in market economic terms are associated with heavy costs borne largely by women.<sup>33</sup>

The First World type of development detrimentally affects every aspect of Thai women's lives. In the northeastern region, the environmental degradation which is both the direct and indirect consequence of development, drives more women in the region to leave their hometown than it does to women in other regions. In her study, Pasuk Phongpaichit found that while on the average "only 44.4% of the city's women (over the age of 11) participated in the labor force, the rate of participation by migrant women from the north was 54.5%, and among migrant women from the northeast it had soared up to 80.8%."<sup>34</sup> These figures correspond to the research findings of the Gender and Development Research Institute (1991), indicating that the Thai female labor force in the agricultural sector has significantly decreased from 87.6% to 57.5% over the last two decades (1970-88). In addition, from 1985-88, female laborers migrating to the urban areas outnumbered migrating male laborers by a total of two million. Most of them belong to the 15-24 age group and were serving as primary labor force in the textile, garment, shoe, food processing, electronic equipment and tourism industries. The rest earned very low wages in the informal sector doing domestic work and street vending among others. Later, it would be no surprise to learn that many end up in prostitution in order to earn more wages.

While male theorists from the rich northern countries would boast that development approach is "neutral" in terms of race, class and gender, feminists from the poorer countries present strong evidence to the contrary. They pointed out that development does not only cause ecological instability in the Third World but also intensifies women's subjugation. They argue that the core of the development approach is "the latest and the most brutal expression of patriarchal ideology."<sup>35</sup>

Although this ideology has only recently appeared in its current form as an economic development model at the end of World War II, its seeds are deeply rooted in the scientific and industrial revolution of the 15th century, as pointed out by Shiva:

Scientific revolution in Europe transformed nature from 'terra mater' into a machine and a source of raw material...Industrialism created a limitless appetite for resource exploitation, and modern science made it ethical and possible to attack and rape Mother Earth. The new relationship of man's domination and mastery over nature was thus also associated with new patterns of domination and mastery over women. Since then women have been excluded from participating as partners in both science and development.<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, Shiva argued that a strong relationship exists between ecological deterioration and the deprivation of women's status, the high price being paid for mainstream development activities. This development process destroys the self-reliance production of a community and turns natural resources into commodities.

## Conclusion

Olarn forecasted that the Thai economy would grow by 8.7% in 1995. He indicated that the world economy is beginning to recover. Thai exports continue to grow and increasing production capability will generate more capital and income for the provinces. Inflation will only be 4.9%."<sup>37</sup>

By the year 2000, it would have cost Thailand at least \$20 billion or 500,000 million baht for environmental restructuring. At present there are three main environmental problems, i.e. the accumulation of waste, air pollution, and polluted water. However the World Bank indicated that it is difficult to obtain such large amounts of money. This means the environment in Asia will continue being destroyed.<sup>38</sup>

Since 1959, the World Bank supported by the U.S. government, has played an important role in pushing for the design and implementation of the Economic and Social Development Plans in Thailand. The plans have caused massive changes in the economic structure, i.e., from agriculture to heavy industrialization. The change was seen as a promising means to eradicate poverty and bring wealth back to society. According

to a report of the Thailand Development Research Institute, 36 years have passed and Thailand finds itself instead with large-scale environmental degradation that is estimated to cost at least half a billion baht to remedy and is currently ranked 6th from the bottom in terms of the income gap between the rich and poor.<sup>39</sup>

The country's participation in developing its industrial base as directed by the World Bank failed to eradicate the hardships of the people. Except for a small group that benefited from the projects of development, the majority bears what Shalardchai Ramitanondh called "priceless loss."

The ground's surface is washed away. The sea is degraded so drastically that there are hardly any living things left. Air is polluted. Lives are shorter. Is this a cost or a profit or nothing at all since it does not have an economic measure?<sup>40</sup>

Ironically, the country's leaders help maintain the colonial status of the country. For example, in 1994, then Prime Minister Chuan Leakpal answered the questions regarding income distribution as follows:

The only way of doing this is by reducing the agricultural work force from 60% to 5.6% while the remaining workforce would be placed in the industrial sector. Only that agriculture which is needed during times of crisis will be maintained and with government subsidy, as they do in Japan. Moreover, the generation of jobs in the industrial sector must be spread out more to the provinces in order to attract more farmers' children to join that sector.<sup>41</sup>

While the ruling class of the country goes along the wrong track, grassroots women — those who are directly affected by the government's mainstream development — are protesting the government's development plan. They have paid a high price for development with the loss of their forests and the disappearance or contamination of water to mention a few. Thinking that they will ultimately suffer the consequences of environmental degradation, a number of women became actively involved in environmental issues. For instance, Sompong and Charoen who were once a fisherfolk and housewife, respectively, protested the construction of the Pak Moon dam. Another female activist Sa-ing of Dong Mae Ped, negotiated a land rights settlement on behalf of the villagers and lobbied

government authorities to promote the need for the restoration and conservation of the water source of Dong Mae Ped forest.

When grassroots women from various areas, groups and organizations got together for the first time at a national forum to prepare for the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing on November 1994, they came out with their consensus about the environment. They developed a motto for the conference — “Government is Prohibited from Developing Autonomously.” This was later elaborated into two action points which was sent as proposal to the government and to the 4th World Conference on Women:

1. Government must cancel development plans that negatively affect the natural resources and environment. Government must change the direction of development to self-sustainable development with recognition of the local knowledge.
2. Government must approve the code for the right of the community to manage natural resources and the environment.

While there remains a wide gap between the rich and the poor in the world economy, there is a wider gap between studies on women and environment and the contemporary situation of globalization in spite of the correlation between women's poverty and environmental degradation. Women are burdened with both the necessity to do housework and to act as frontrunners in the fight for the right to manage the community resources in order to maintain the stability of environment and nature which is necessary for everyday survival. It is repeatedly said that during times of crisis, the future of our lives and the environment are in the hands of women. This remark has not lost its truth up to present. ❀



## Endnotes

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