



Conclusions - Thailand

Aquaculture and fisheries have been very important drivers of economic development in the coastal areas of Thailand during the last few decades. However, due to a number of unsustainable practices, these developments have not brought continued prosperity and led to severe problems especially, for the local and poor communities, and for the coastal environment. Experiences from the past have provided valuable lessons, which could provide a better basis for future development in Thailand and in other coastal areas in the world.

Lessons from shrimp farming

From the 1990s onwards aquaculture and especially shrimp farming has been booming in South East Asia. Thailand has become one of the major producers. These developments were based on a transition from extensive to highly intensified forms of shrimp production, triggered by high prices and good domestic and export market potential (Japan, USA). Unfortunately, the intensive methods proved to be detrimental to the production systems themselves and their environment and led to several 'boom and bust' cycles. The boom was achieved by rapid exploitation of vast coastal areas, the following bust resulted from degradation of shrimp ponds and the occurrence of diseases. There were also wider effects on the environment such as salinisation of surface water and groundwater, water and soil pollution (from fish food, fertiliser, antibiotics, pesticides and sludge), acidification of soils and destruction of natural vegetation (mangroves) and agricultural lands. As a result, large contaminated and barren coastal areas were abandoned as they could not provide a livelihood for local people. This disrupted local societies and especially affecting the poor. Investors would take short-term profits and move on to the next coastal area. The main conclusion is that the shrimp farming practices in the past have brought wealth to a few rich investors at an extremely high cost to the local community as well as to the national government bearing the rehabilitation. There are a number of lessons.. Firstly, there is an obvious need for sustainable, less intensive aquaculture practices, which can provide a lasting income. This requires investment in spatial planning, improved farm management and environmental protection (including pond refreshment by sea water irrigation and treatment of shrimp pond effluents). Secondly, future aquaculture developments should be under the jurisdiction of local communities, allowing them to protect and exploit their own resources. Because of the harm done in the past, there is a strong requirement to rehabilitate abandoned areas (in Thailand an estimated area of 40,000 ha was abandoned in the Upper Thai Gulf area alone). Rehabilitation is very costly, but necessary to retrieve valuable, indispensable coastal areas. Capacity building is an important element of coastal management. The Training Manual: "Aquaculture experiences in Thailand" is made available, through the CCC website, to promote the application of the Thai lessons in other coastal areas.

Co-management in fisheries

The coastal waters of Thailand (Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea) suffer from severe overfishing. The total annual catch in these waters is estimated to be double the maximum sustainable yield. Community-based management (co-management) is considered a powerful way of improving the situation. Co-management is a dynamic partnership between resource users and the government, leading to a community-based and rights-based system of fisheries. The CHARM project (Coastal Habitats and Resource Management) helped with the development and establishment of a framework, which could serve as a model for replication elsewhere in the country. The project identified a number of major co-management issues and developed a scheme to strengthen and liaise with committed local governments and skilled self-organised communities. CHARM supported over 200 projects involving a variety of community initiatives, innovations and developments creating partnerships between government agencies, local community organisations, local resource users and NGOs.

This resulted amongst other things in an increase of fishery catches in an area where decrease due to overfishing is common. Furthermore the most devastating manner of fishing was abandoned.

Major recommendations include the continued strengthening of community enterprises, the enhancement of community based tourism, the engagement of the private sector and further cooperation and integration of the various parties.