

Gender and Knowledge Dynamics of Inland Fishery in the Mun Basin



Miss Wannapa Wongpinij
Mekong Studies Program
Faculty of Liberal Arts
Ubon Ratchathani University

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kanokwan Manorom
Faculty of Liberal Arts
Ubon Ratchathani University



Abstract



This research aims to study the dynamics of women and men's knowledge of folk fishery from the past and present, to predict the future of fishery trends, and to study the different conditions of the creation, the dynamic, the transmission and the utilization of women and men's local fishery knowledge. The results show that the past local fishery knowledge is based on the reliance of nature. Men and women possessed a different body of knowledge because they fished in different fishing venues, mainly shallow places and river banks and use different gears. However, when the construction of Rasi Salai dam was completed in 1993, the Mun River has turned into the reservoir and it has flooded a large area. The fishermen have had to adapt ways to use their fishing gears, but women could not use their knowledge to catch fish in shallow river banks as in the past. Nowadays, men and women have learned and cooperated to fish in deeper reservoirs and men have transmitted knowledge to women because they catch fish together. Even though women have the equal opportunities to access the new body of knowledge related to fishery as men and are able to develop their economic role to get more income from fishing, it is unavoidable for them to work harder than men. In the future, the local body of knowledge concerning fisheries will not disappear, but it will be reproduced mutually with other types of knowledge including scientific knowledge.

Research Method

This research uses a qualitative research method including a literature review, participation observation and in-depth interviews with the fishermen. (17 men and 18 women). This research also uses a community history timeline, a life history timeline, and gender resource mapping.

Results



Fishing Gear And Dynamic of Local Knowledge

Before Rasi Salai dam construction, In 1957-1972 the fishing gear was made from natural materials. The gill net was made from Kenaf (**Mong Pan**). In 1972-1993, the fish trade in the market system caused people to use the fishing gear made from nylon (**Mong En**) which helped fishermen catch a larger amount of fish. After the dam construction, (1993-2007) the changing of the ecosystem brought conflict among the fishermen and forced them to use larger fishing gear namely "square dip net" (**Pae Sadung**). Nevertheless, only wealthy fishermen can afford it but the poorer ones cannot. In 2007-2019, fishermen have acquired the knowledge from fishermen in the Southern part of Thailand to use the new fishing gear called "multi gill net" (**Mong Zing**) which allows them to catch small, medium and big fish on small, medium and big at the same time.

Gender and Local Fishery Knowledge

Before the Rasi Salai Dam construction, men and women fished in different fishing locations and utilized different fishing gear because men had the ability to catch fish in deeper rivers and women caught fish in the more shallow river banks. There is an Isan proverb saying "Men catch fish but women catch small shellfish." Therefore, men and women possessed a different body of knowledge regarding fisheries. After the Rasi Salai Dam construction, the situation has transformed the gender-related knowledge. With the enclosure of nature, it forces men and women to fish together in the Mun River. Men transferred their knowledge to women to help them catch fish but the knowledge was only circulated within their families and kinships such as the passing of knowledge from husband to wife or father to son. However, we did not find the transfer of fishery knowledge from parents to their daughters.

Discussion

Rasi Salai Dam has affected fishermen's livelihood. The number of fish species has decreased. Local fishery knowledge is not in accordance with the new ecosystem. It becomes subjugated under scientific knowledge. However, fishermen have learned to acquire fishing skills from other fellow fishermen in other areas and integrate them with their existing local knowledge. Fishermen also have gained scientific knowledge about fish farming cage system, fish conservation, and fish breeding.

In 1993-1997, the construction of Rasi Salai Dam and the economic crisis forced both men and women to migrate to work in the city. In 2012, villagers decided to return to their hometown. Women had difficulties to find a job in their communities. Some women decided to be fisherwomen even though they lacked the fishing knowledge. This adaptation has brought new opportunities for women to access men's fishing knowledge. Women have worked harder as mothers, fisherwomen, fish traders, and cooks. The fisherwomen said that fishing in the Mun River is more satisfying than working in Bangkok. For them, fishing can create an income and can allow them to spend more time with their families and negotiate with men.



Acknowledgement

This study was sponsored by the Tracking Change Local and Traditional Knowledge in Watershed Governance and Thailand Research Fund (TRF).