

**Ms Mei Padtaisong and Ms Kimleang
Thepsombat Pa Kha village**



Pa Kha village is located in Kun Tan district of Chiang Rai province. It is close to the Ing River, and is quite low-lying, with the village centre, including village hall, health station, temple and rice bank barn being located on slightly higher ground. It currently comprises 126 households, with a total population of 571. Of these, there are 139 elderly people, and 38 People with Disability – two of these are bed-bound. Irrigated rice and corn are the main crops, and livestock raising for market is also important. Fish catch from the Ing River has also been a major source of livelihood

Ms Mei Padtaisong who has lived in Pa Kha for 60 years, and Ms Kimleang Thepsombat, aged 55 both joined the meeting called by the village head, and were keen to talk about their background in Pa Kha and their experience of climate resilience activities, preparation for the flood which hit in 2024, and their part in the response.

Ms Mei Padtaisong says she farms rice, and has 20 rai (3.2ha) of irrigated rice land. Sometimes she leases it out to other farmers. She also had mango trees, but they all died as a result of the 2024 floods.

Ms Kimleang Thepsombat says that because she is relatively young, she can't remember a long time back. She did hear stories from her parents. What she does know is that the rainy season is no longer predictable. It starts later; rainfall is random, and it also gets hotter in the hot season, she said. The degree of cold the community has been experiencing is also unusual.

Talking about women's role in preparation for and response to last year's floods, both said women are the food providers.

"We go to cook and distribute food in the flood response."

Ms Mei Padtaisong went on to say that she is the head of the women's association in the village, so she could better coordinate with outside agencies that came to assess and help. She said she plays the role of mediator, liaises with the village head, and with outside organisations – including MFU, and different government bodies, and then passes on relevant information to the community. She explained that during the flood period, she was the one responsible for overseeing the delivery of supplies to the village.

Both Ms Mei and Ms Kimleang were emphatic that it's not possible to prevent floods. But if the village head receives advance warning, they said, as had happened last year, it can really mitigate the level of damage, particularly through receiving information by the app; having the PA system to quickly inform the community, and also having a plan in place where everyone knows their role, and where the necessary resources are.

As for the future,

"We can only prepare ourselves mentally, and recognise the possibility that we might lose substantially," was their shared assessment.

Ms Kimleang spoke about fish farming as one possible area for diversification and said that this could help safeguard livelihoods against drought in particular. Local government has been promoting this, she said.

MFU has also been introducing a new type of fish-raising activity. Rather than farming tilapia, which are an introduced species that require special feeding and other inputs, they have worked with researchers in Ubon Ratchathani province (NE Thailand) which have identified suitable species of fish native to the Mekong River system, which require much lower inputs, and less risk of disease.

Ms Kimleang said she is considering giving this another try. (MFU have replaced fish stocks from those people in the village who lost theirs during the flood). Growing wet rice will still be her main livelihood activity. Fish, she said, are high risk,

“If you know that floods are likely, it is not good to do, as the ponds will be flooded and the fish swim away.”

Mentioning the evacuation and care of People with Disability in the floods, Ms Mei Padtaisong said that one person has paralysis, so requiring a high level of help to be evacuated. They had a special vehicle for this.

The issue in evacuating both people and livestock were that the tractors they used had to make a lot of trips, and so used a lot of fuel. The cost of this wasn't covered by government compensation, she noted, and so they relied on donations from MFU.

After the floods, the village had a visit from the Governor of Chiang Rai province, and the village arranged the reception for him to take place at the Som Saing wetland, to highlight its importance to their livelihoods and their community identity.

Around 15 of the village people who'd first joined the public meeting accompanied us to the Som Saing wetland, nearly dry at the moment, with an elevated walkway allowing visitors to walk between the large trees that are adapted to the alternate conditions of submergence and drying. According to Thai Buddhist tradition, a large number of the long-established trees had been 'ordained', with lengths of monk's robe fabric fastened around the trunk. This indicates their sacred status to the local community and ecosystem. Several of the community had independently mentioned the wetland and its importance to their livelihoods in their conversations with us. This forms part of their chosen fisheries conservation zone; motivation for this has increased after the planning discussions with the SCR project staff, and the experience of vulnerability shown by the flood. The wetland was previously proposed as a Ramsar site, but the community had then been reluctant to pursue its registration, as they realised how many complicated bureaucratic procedures they would need to follow. With support from MFU, they are considering re-starting the process.