

**Story of the older women present in the
village meeting – Ms Pruen Saenrak and
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Wang Sila is a village located on the banks of the Ing River in Chiang Rai province, not far from a main road. It is on slightly higher ground than many surrounding villages. Most of the inhabitants belong to families who moved here from the drier north-east of Thailand, for what they saw as the areas abundant natural resources. Since settling here, they have relied on farming, fishing and trading activities for their livelihoods. A meeting was held in the village hall, where large maps of the village and diagrams of its disaster planning are now displayed. Joining the meeting were the village head; two older women members of the community, and a group of three young people who had undertaken a village mapping project as part of the climate resilience project

Wang Sila village, the village chief said, was founded in the Buddhist year 2500, or 1957. The story goes that a general travelling through noticed that the land in the area was fertile, well-watered and with abundant river fish, and so he encouraged people to move here from Isaan, the drier and less fertile plateau of Thailand's north-east. Most families now in Wang Sila originate from there. There hasn't been much out-migration from the village so far, everyone in the meeting agreed, though a few families have moved to other provinces, and some young people have gone to work in Korea. After giving his short introduction, the village head left the floor to the two older women present to give the detail of the village's situation, and how they had experienced floods and organised response, engaging with MFU.

Ms Pruen Saenrak said she arrived here as a baby, when her parents moved from Nakhon Ratchasima (N.E. Thailand). She makes a living by raising fish and also silkworms – the original training and materials for the silkworm business were provided by the Royal Sericulture Centre, whose staff visited the village and trained several people. In the rainy season, she collects mushrooms in the forest. Ms Somboon Palada, the second of the two senior women present, had also taken up silkworm raising, she said, and later showed us the worms and cocoons in the shelter under her house.

Effects of climate change in the village were clear, Mrs Pruen Saenrak said. There is now far more extreme heat and cold, compared to the past. Crops ceased to grow because of the heat and sometimes have also been destroyed by flood. She said the floods that came last year and in years previously were the first she'd experienced in her lifetime here.

"Last year's was the worst of all. Hundreds of hectares of paddy were completely flooded," she said, noting that there is now clearly a pattern of increasing cycles of drought and flood.

Wang Sila village was not as badly affected last year as several other villages in the area, she said, as it is on slightly higher ground – not so many houses were flooded, though agricultural land was badly affected.

She said that after the floods had receded, she and others received seeds to grow vegetables, and also seed rice. This had helped to bridge the gap until their regular sources of income were restored. The vegetable seed distribution from the SCR project was definitely the most useful help they received, she said. She and others planted the seed, and harvested vegetables in the rainy season. They mainly used manure for fertiliser, so there were no significant cash costs in cultivation. They used the vegetables for household consumption but also sold a lot for cash – there is a local market every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday down on the main road that passes near the village, and so customers come both from within the village, and from other communities around.

Ms Somboon Palada, who'd also benefited from receiving vegetable seeds, chimed in to say that the income from selling vegetables hadn't been enough to completely replace income lost due to flood damage, but it did provide her and others with enough to bridge the gap until their regular sources of income were working again. The vegetables were also an important source of nutrition. She hadn't continued growing vegetables herself after that first harvest, but said that several families had, as an extra income source. Whether or not people did this depended on how much land they had available.

Talking about warning for last year's flood, Ms Pruan Saenrak said that when the rains were getting very heavy, a warning came from the village head, and so preparations began. She was emphatic that the warning had not come from government, and the village head himself said that the information came through the smartphone app in which surrounding communities engaged and shared word about rainfall, river rises etc. The app had in fact been developed originally by the Thai government's Office of National Water Resources but had only come into active use in Wang Sila and neighbouring communities after MFU's intervention, which actively engaged them to show how the app was directly relevant, and how they could make it a tool to give them more knowledge and control over their vulnerability to floods and other weather events.

When we asked Ms Pruan Saenrak and Ms Somboon Palada if they felt that women's voice was properly listened to and respected in planning and preparedness and response for the community, they said women's role has not been so much in planning.

"We looked after provision of food, and helped to bring elderly people and People with Disability to safety," they said.

However, it was noticeable throughout the discussion in the group that the village head left it to the two older women present to speak about the whole village situation, the climatic conditions, and full details of the processes for flood preparedness and response. He did not at any point interrupt or contradict their version of events or analysis of the village's situation. This seemed to indicate that women had actually been far more active and instrumental through all stages than they directly articulated.



Ms Somboon Palada