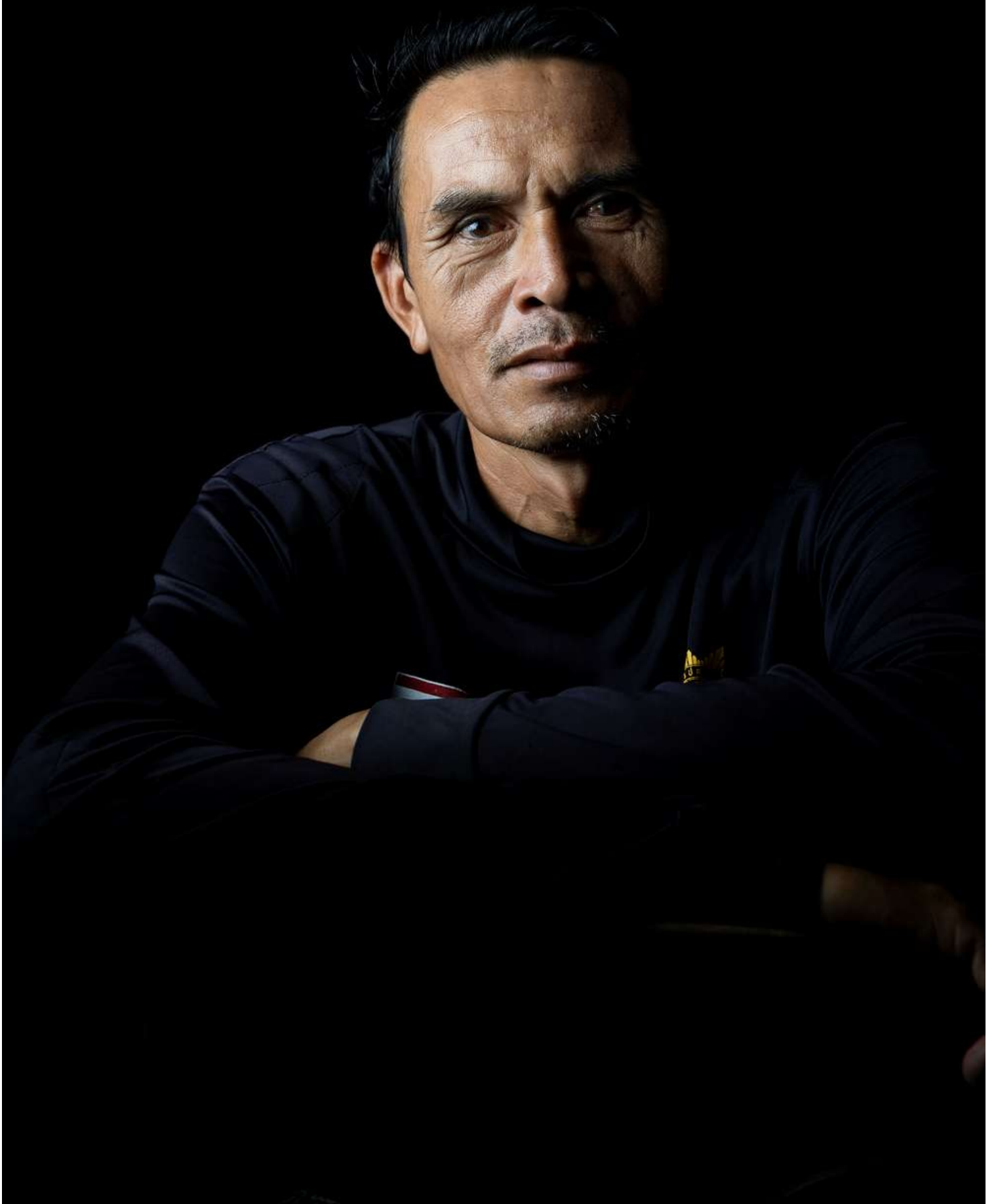


Mr Nikorn Saenruk, Village Head



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 area's 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.

Mr Nikorn Saenruk, Village Head

Mr Nikorn has been in the role of village head of Wang Sila for two years now. There is a good awareness among the community, he said, of the need for preparedness and adaptation. He echoed the information given by the two older women, Ms Pruan and Ms Somboon, who spoke first, about the changes in climate experienced in Wang Sila in recent years, and particularly the increased threats to livelihoods.

"Floods could destroy the whole rice crop and even stocks of seed rice, and pigs and chickens," he said.

Mr Nikorn described the training session on disaster preparedness delivered by MFU. At that point, he said, he and the community already knew that the Ing river was likely to flood, and that drought was also increasingly likely. However, last year's flood happened very soon afterwards, so there had been no chance to put everything into action, and the community had to focus instead on immediate response.

In the floods last year, the smartphone application (flood early warning) helped, he said. This had been developed previously by the government's Office of National Water Resources but had not been used by the Wang Sila community and adjacent villages. Training by MFU students and researchers showed him and others in Wang Sila how to use it in ways that were directly relevant to them. They created a map for the community, which showed how to locate People with Disability, sick and frail people, to make proper evacuation plans for them, and to identify a gathering place that was out of reach of flood waters.

Mr Nikorn said Wang Sila village was the centre for external donations coming in to help people affected by the floods. He pointed out that, as this village is on slightly higher ground, they suffered less inundation than other villages in the area and were able to help neighbouring villages which were worse affected - by sending boats to help with evacuation of people and goods. Overall, the response was good, but the community still lacks awareness of some key issues, he felt.

"Events that would have been once in a hundred years now happen every five to ten," and the community is coming to realisation of the impact of this. Mr Nikorn thinks that next time a flood strikes, they will be better prepared, and particularly because all the communities in the area are now familiar with the FEWS phone app. This is effective for warnings about rising levels in the Ing River, coming from upstream communities, but not so much for local flash floods, he pointed out, as these come mainly from deforested hills nearby.

"Deforestation and its consequences have definitely become a more serious issue in the last few years," he said.

The village did establish its own fisheries conservation zone (FCZ), well before the inception of the project. It is a stretch of river 500m long, and adjacent to the village pagoda. The close presence of the monks is one factor which ensures that the rules the community set up for the FCZ are respected. Community members said that the FCZ does work well to protect fish breeding, but fish catch has been affected by the run-off from chemical fertilisers and pesticides, which has increased in recent years.

“We can still catch plenty of the larger types of fish, but several smaller kinds have now disappeared,” Mr Nikorn said.

He took us to see two households near the river which have been active in fish preservation and processing. One older man proudly told us that he had paid his son’s way through university education through selling *pla som*, fish preserved through fermentation, packaged with his own label. His son is now a doctor in a major hospital in Chiang Mai. In another nearby household Ms Somboon Palada proudly showed the silkworm larvae she was raising as part of the initiative introduced by the Royal Thai Sericulture Centre, alongside fish processing work. People’s focus in this area of the village was clearly on strengthening alternative livelihood strategies that could withstand and compensate the effects of increasing drought and flood.