



Livelihoods and Dwelling Security: The Challenges of Indigenous Karen People

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Abstract

The Indigenous Karen people living in the Kaeng Krachan National Park (KKNP) in Western Thailand were evicted from their traditional village home by armed Thai forces to an allocated area. These operations have led to the enormous change in the traditional way of life. They cannot fully continue with their traditional ways of life. The misunderstanding of the livelihood system of the Karen is the critical problems. This paper aims to examine the challenges of indigenous Banggloy Karen people under regulation of the national park. This study is framed within a phenomenological perspective and draws on specific empirical experience by employing participant observation, interview and focus group. Empirical evidence shows that one of the main obstacles facing the Karen are the political issues that impact on the traditional way of life. The critical problem is the struggle to maintain their way of life in the current settlements; for example, the policies to reclaim the forest and relocate people are also a problem for those inhabiting the forest, who might be evicted. Law and regulation are the obstructions of traditional practice. Land allocation is also a part of the policy that reduces the shifting cultivation. Thus, the state should provide clear guidance within a human right framework and ecological approach and respect for the traditional knowledge and rights of indigenous communities including sustainable livelihoods.

Keywords: Indigenous Karen, Dwelling Security, Conflict, Development, Banggloy, Ethnographic Method

Introduction: Understanding the Indigenous Karen People

The Evacuation Policy

The operation to relocate the Karen ethnic minority group in 2011 by force from the Kaeng Krachan National Park was a huge issue that led to the death of 16 officials and one photographer, while the Karen were widely labelled as a delinquent group. The last operation took place in June 2011. During the operation, almost 100 houses were burnt down, and rice granaries were destroyed by military and national park officials. These traditional areas are where the Karen have lived for hundreds of years. The military and park officials destroyed Karen properties and burned houses and granaries, as well as accusing and arresting the Karen as intruders and for illegal deforestation along the sensitive Thai–Myanmar border. These operations have contributed to the Karen people losing their homes and lacking the farmland to sustain a safe and stable life. They were evicted to an allocated piece of land called “Banggloy Village” within the national park, further from the border. However, currently the solutions for the evicted Karen community are unclear; they still live with not enough land for farming and poor living conditions.

The Problems of Indigenous People in Thailand

Indigenous World 2005 reported that it was estimated around 16 percent of the population in Thailand live in reserved areas or conservation forests, of which most of them are indigenous people who experience restrictions on their cultivation and dwelling rights (Erni & Stidsen, 2005). Many indigenous groups are among the 2,700 communities living illegally on protected forested areas or the national park (Rattanakrajangsri, 2014). The largest group is the Karen people, found in diverse areas located close to the national boundaries of both northern and western Thailand. The government views all indigenous people of Thailand as “Ethnic People”, or in the Thai



language, “*Chon Phao*”. Also, the use of the terms “*Chao Khao*” or “Highland People”, it reflects the double standard which denies the rich cultural diversities of indigenous people. Therefore, the indigenous people have had to struggle to develop their life and under the social and political environment of the Thai state. For example, in 2010, around 296,000 indigenous people lacked Thai citizenship causing them to lose opportunities to access a basic health service, education and welfare (Rattanakrajangsri, 2010). Also, the lack of citizenship is a factor leaving them more defenceless to human rights violations.

The Problems Facing the Karen in Thailand

The Royal Forest Department (RFD) officials have blamed ethnic minorities as the ‘Rotating Cultivators’ for the rapid loss of forests. This may be because the Karen are the largest ethnic minority group; thus the image of the Karen becomes one of “Forest Destroyers”. Santasombat (2004), nonetheless, noted that in the past the image of the Karen was as forest guardians and conservationists, while Delang (2003) noted that the images of the Karen within the environmental discourse were as “Wild People” (*Chao Pa*) or as “Hill Tribes” (*Chao Khao*) and as “Nature Conservationists”. The state still has problems with the Karen’s circumstances in the highland settlement, seeing them as a subculture with lower status than people in mainstream culture, even as having a low social condition, worthless, meaningless or even uncivilised. Those problems may be summarised into five significant points (Ganjanapan, 2004).

Firstly, the problem of the negative image of the Karen as “Tribal” held by Thai citizens, growing and trading opium, as well as causing deforestation and being a threat to border security. These images do not correspond the facts of Karen life. Secondly, the problem of resources management and loss of the right to land, resulting from the national development policy to modernise and promote commercial mono-agriculture. Furthermore, the Karen lack the opportunities and the rights to contribute in the planning of resources management that straightforwardly affects their lives. Thirdly, the problem of legal status and citizenship. The majority of Karen in Thailand have a problem with nationality, because the nationality verification process has a gap between the action of state officials and the Karen, partly due to the remoteness of the Karen communities. Fourthly, the loss of ethnic identity, cultural potential and Karen wisdom, with the creation of “*Thainess*” through the education system, where the Karen culture is not accepted. Therefore, the Karen are losing their ethnic identity in some places. For the Banggloy Karen, some of their activities are integrated into Thai national culture such as singing the national anthem. Finally, the problem of Karen education management. The state lacks an understanding of the Karen way of life. The Karen are hardly participating in their educational development and have to go to the town to study, and some of them are cut off from Karen community life.

Land and Forest Rights

In 2008, 29% of Thailand was categorised as protected areas (Tamee & Khongkachonkiet, 2008, p. 306), and this figure is increasing every year. The large number of indigenous villages are located on highland and forest areas, which have been declared protected areas and are controlled by the RFD (Erni, 2002, p. 276), who launched the concept of natural resources management to protect the forest. Then, the rights to manage natural resources became a key controversial issue between indigenous people and the state, in the form of the forestry law called the “Community Forest Bill”. However, there are various laws Thai status uses to protect the forest and wildlife, leading to all forest land being under state management. The particular concern is that the regulations conflict with existing forestry laws and indigenous people in protected areas such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.



The indigenous people are facing with a major challenge. Under the Act, the state regained control of the forest; however, there are those who have been affected by the state's policies, particularly the poor and indigenous people. They believe that the Act might result in other violation of their communities' right to manage natural resources. Also, they are restricted to limited areas or allocated plots of land, and many Karen currently fear that they might even be evicted from their land (Prachathai English, 2014). Some Karen were arrested by forestry officials because they farmed hill rice without permission, causing the degradation of forest land and damage to a water source. For decades, indigenous people practising rotating cultivation have been arrested every year, and they are also accused of contributing to global warming (Rattanakrangsri, 2010). Although the Karen's forest management method is well known and being studied by many academics, revealing the Karen's ability to live in harmony with the forest, the state still turns a blind eye to these studies.

Research Area

Banggloy village is an official village under the Thai nation and is located in the national park, Huaymaepriang sub-district, Kaengkrachan district, Petchaburi province. The Huaymaepriang sub-district consists of six villages; four of these – Pusai, Nhongdam, Dan-Ngo and Huaypai – are located outside the national park, while Banggloy and Pongloug villages are in the national park. The original land is divided into two areas: *Banggloy Bon* and *Jaipandin*. Banggloy Bon is known as a Karen village located in the north of the district near the Phetchaburi river (Figure 1). The history of Banggloy is not clear in terms of official documentation, because it is located in the deep forest. The second area is “*Jaipandin*” in the Thai language or “*Kajueku*” in the Karen language. Both are the name of the original land; *Kajueku* means “the top of the mountain”, following the geographical aspects of the landscape consisting of the high hills and cliffs, and the name *Jaipandin* meaning “the heart of the land”. Today, the Karen from the original land separated into three groups. The first group moved to Myanmar. The second group moved to Puragum village in Ratchaburi province. The third group moved to Banggloy village.

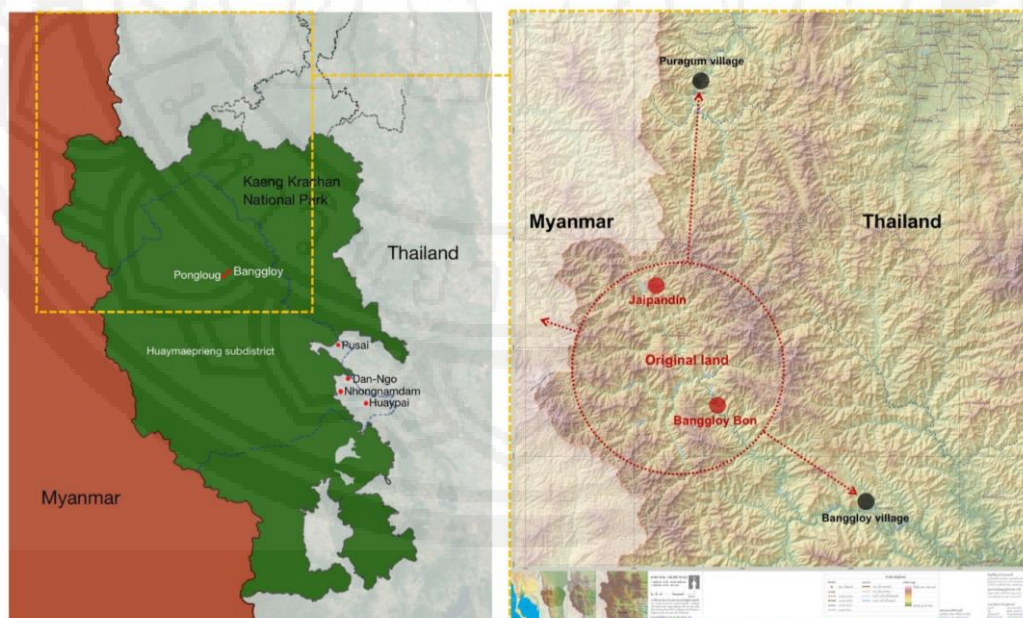


Figure 1 Maps Show the Position of the Villages and the Original Land.

Left: Position of Six Villages of the Huaymaepriang Sub-district.

Right: Evacuation of the Banggloy Karen between 1996 and 2011.

The Karen Moved to Settle New Dwellings in Different Places: The Myanmar Border, Puragum and Banggloy Villages.

Source: Sustainable Development Foundation (Northern Thailand)

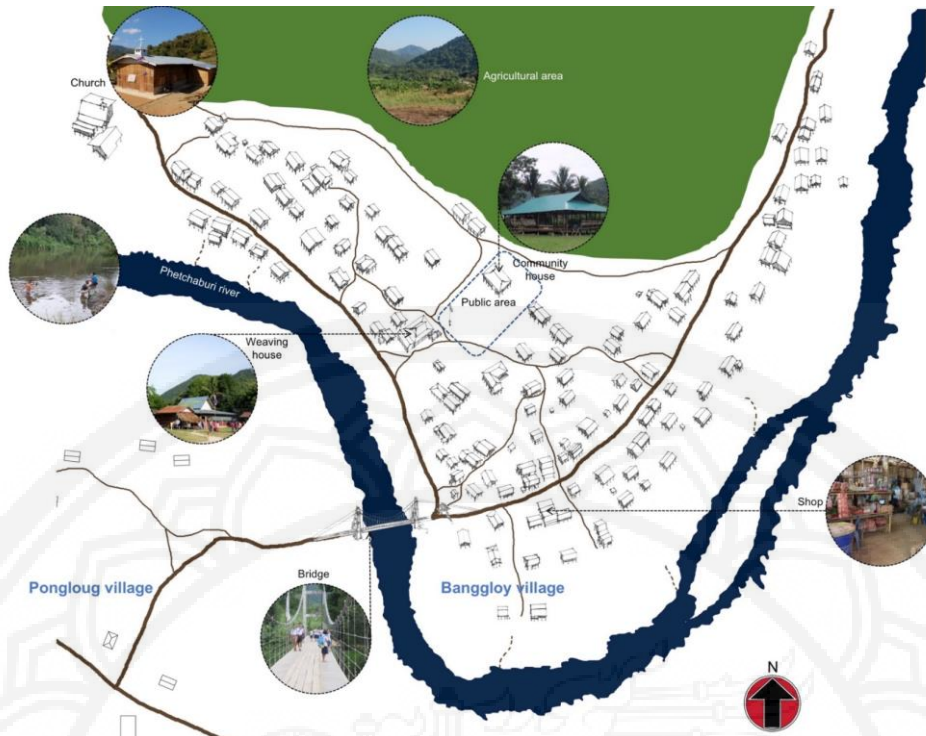


Figure 2 The Banggloy Community in 2017.

Source: Sadanu Sukkasame

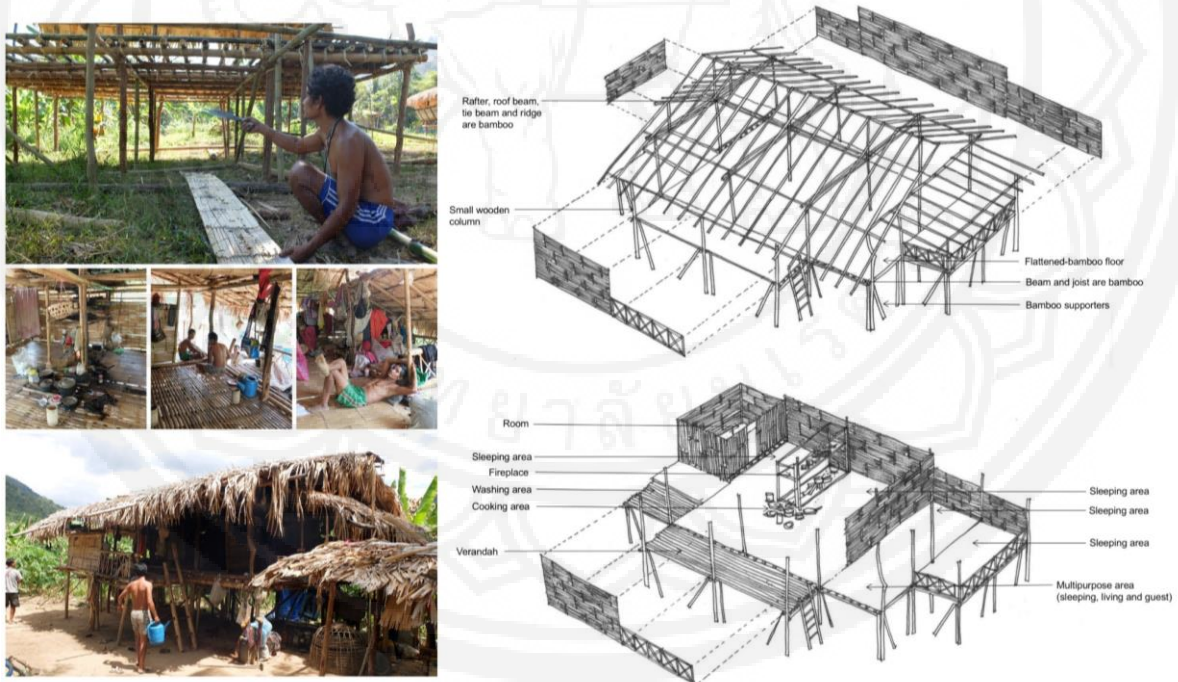


Figure 3 A Traditional Karen House.

The Figure Shows the Spaces in the Traditional House. The Cooking and Eating Areas are at the Centre of the House.

There are Multipurpose and Living Spaces on Both Sides of the Cooking Area.

The Verandah is the Entrance that Connects to the Multipurpose Space.

A “Room” refers to an Enclosed Space for Sleeping and Storage.

Source: Sadanu Sukkasame



Methodological Considerations

In 2014 the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) approved funding for the Karen Housing Project to improve their dwellings, and I volunteered to lead the project. The project was carried out between 2014 and 2018. Therefore, my role was not only a researcher and also was a facilitator to do the housing project with the Karen to develop the community. This paper employs participant observation, interviewing and focus group methods to construct the narratives to understand the social world and the meaning behind circumstances, providing a means to explore the different points of view of the Karen people. It is two-way communication between interviewer and the Karen to collect data (Bryman, 2012). The aim of an interview is to understand the life-world of the Karen. Interviewing provided a route to create empirical data by questioning the Karen. The key strength of the interview was accessing in-depth information. An electronic sound recorder was employed to assist me in reporting conversations more accurately than by only taking notes. Although the interviews were recorded, taking notes during the fieldwork was still an essential technique to recheck alongside the sound recording. Additionally, focus group created a variety of way of communication for the Karen, identifying the situation and culture of the Karen. Further, both methods enabled the Karen to speak and express their thoughts, impression and information gained from groups.

Challenging Issues for Dwelling Security and Conflict Resolution

The Challenges of an Allocated Piece of Land

The current settlement has been considered to be the setting for new life and dwellings for the Banggloy Karen. They do not have right to select the land and settle the dwellings themselves; in other words, the manner of the settlement is dependent on the national park. However, the Karen house cannot be seen in isolation from the settlement; it is included as a part of the total social and spatial systems. The understanding of the extent of the settlement pattern is essential to interpret the form of living. The impact of the change in the natural environment and built environment relates to socio-cultural conditions and political concerns. The problems can be categorised into three aspects. The first is livelihood and well-being. The weather and climatic pattern have become more unpredictable. It is becoming hotter and colder, and the rainy season has become erratic, with declining soil moisture and ultimately a reduction in crop yield. Additionally, the people have to deal with new species of insects in the fields that cause destruction of many crops. Limited water sources have created a difficult farming situation, leading to rice failures and hardship. The second aspect is local knowledge. Some parts of the planting and harvesting seasons, associated with certain cultural ceremonies and traditions, have been lost or rarely practised. This has challenged people's abilities, knowledge and practice to cope with the changes. Also, the loss of traditional land use systems has contributed to unsustainable livelihoods, insecurity of food and lack of biodiversity conservation. The last aspect is limited access to resources. The Karen have minimal opportunity to obtain access to national resources due to national park regulations. In the same vein, they have changed strategies for gathering foods and hunting animals. A Karen villager reflects this below.

[...] We hunted, it is true. We hunted for eating, not for selling. So, we hunted an animal; we shared it with friends and relatives. This is our way of life. Furthermore, if one family carried out rotating cultivation, they also shared the rice with others who did not have enough rice to consume within the household [...] we need to return to the original land and live as we did in the past.



Comparing the original land and the present land, the settlement of community is completely different. On the original land, people lived within groups of relatives and families. Each group consisted of around three to six houses. Some groups of houses were far away, about a half day's walk. These groups of houses were scattered in the forest. At present, the people have no choice; they have to live in an allocated area as a group in a village.

As mentioned, one of the remarkable features of the Karen is an agricultural community that people in the village hold in common interest, which strongly influences house forms. One of the themes of settlement is always concerned with people building a sense of community that differentiates itself from the original community. Traditionally, the Karen people have correlated with their livelihoods, farming, forest products and rotating cultivation on the hillside. During the fieldwork between 2013 and 2017, we found that the rice production failed to meet the needs of the Karen because of soil and water problems and limitations of cultivation space. The strength of traditional land use systems is the diversity of local crops and practices. This means that traditional cultivation plays an essential role in producing food security in the Karen village because a high number of irrigated species are grown in traditional farming. In terms of the role of gender, the relationship between land use and the male Karen in the farms did not change, because of the cultural ideology of the Karen and region and ritual activities in which the male Karen are dominant as managers of land.

In contrast, in 2016, only two households were cultivating rice on the low-lying land by employing a wet-rice method. Currently, most villagers' fields grow bananas and limes; the banana price is dependent on the market in the town. Most of the agricultural land is on slopes with poor soil, causing some Karen to give up due to their land problems. They ignore the land and let it become overgrown with weeds, while some Karen farmed stealthily in the forest, which is illegal. If the national park officials knew about this, they might be arrested.

The government claims that rotating cultivation acts as a driver of deforestation and contributes to carbon emission. However, a serious problem was caused by stopping rotating cultivation, leading to many families not being self-sufficient in rice. The traditional land use lay in the diversity of crops; in contrast, present land use emphasises limited crop species. It can be seen that individual households depend heavily on growing bananas and limes and their earnings from wage labour outside the village. Furthermore, traditional wisdom and agro-biodiversity are disappearing somewhat, challenging people's future way of life.

Landlessness: The Change of Livelihood

The Karen suffer spiritually, physically and economically from the relocation policy. Forced evacuation to an allocated plot of land destroys their ability to be economically self-sufficient, causing social problems and eroding traditional culture. In the same vein, the concept of sustainable development of the national park does not include the Karen's life, economic principles and cultural heritage, because the officials focus only on the protection of the forest and its natural resources.

The scarcity of land is the force behind the current livelihood changes of the Karen, which is a critical issue, making it challenging to sustain traditional cultivation. Loss of land is the result of land and resources rights not being recognised by the state. Also, a small number of the Karen have enough land for farming to sustain a traditional way of life following traditional land use, whereas *"the strength of traditional land use systems lies in the diversity of locally adapted practices and crops are grown adopting to the local environmental and climatic conditions"* (Erni, 2015, p. 8). The impact of landlessness is the limitation of traditional farming that affects the customary livelihood systems and increases food insecurity. As a result, many families are not self-sufficient in food, particularly rice, which is a core food of the Karen.



Is Rotating Cultivation Bad?

Many arguments are brought forward against rotating cultivation; for instance, it is claimed that it is an uneconomic, disorganised and environmentally destructive practice. But these claims have been proven inaccurate and outright wrong (Erni, 2015, p. 2). Many scholars have confirmed the value of the Karen's knowledge about land use and management practices. However, policies have hardly changed (Erni, 2015). Additionally, global warming discourse has become part of the consideration on rotating agriculture, which is blamed for causing carbon emissions. Although rotating cultivation is technologically primitive, it modifies the forest. It contributes to biodiversity enhancement and food security because it traditionally relies on a large number of crops. It also increases the edible wild plants in the forest as compared with the primary forest, contributing significantly to food security as shown in the statement below.

[...] In March–April, we will grow vegetables, dividing [them] into three periods. The first is short-period crops such as Chinese kale. The second is medium-period crops such as beans, pumpkins, corn, etc. The third is long-term crops such as sugar cane, taro or potato. After that, we will cultivate rice [...]

(Karen Group Discussion, interviewed, September 2, 2017)

Many researchers (Delang, 2002; 2003; 2005; Tungittiplakorn, 1995; Santasombat, 2004) over the past decades have produced empirical evidence against the prevailing biases of the state that rotating cultivation is inefficient and destructive to the forest as well as causing carbon emissions. However, the state still ignores this and focuses only on preserving the forest without considering the indigenous people. This leads to the Karen suffering from land restrictions on cultivation of rice, contributing to partially losing their cultural practice causing vast changes in the community.

The limitations on traditional farming cause many Karen to stop farming. Some were arrested because they carried out rotating cultivation beyond their allocated land. This evidence makes the Karen afraid of the regulations, while the present land cannot support rice successfully. What happens if they cannot cultivate rice (which is an immense, crucial question)? Fundamentally, rice is extremely tied to the Karen life, and they respect rice as much as their god. For example, before farming, they commonly carry out a ceremony to worship the rice spirit and pray for a beautiful harvest before cultivating the rice.

In terms of traditional culture, today some ceremonial activities and rites relating to rice cultivation are at risk and may be lost; for example, the eating of sprouting seeds, offering food for the spirits, offering food to ward off criminals or the ceremonial to eliminate the evil spirit. Furthermore, it affects the change of dwelling; for instance, in the present village, no one has built a barn in the village to collect paddy rice, and agricultural equipment is used less, causing the people to produce less. It can be said that today they cannot carry out rotating cultivation as in the past due to the limitations on their land, although traditional farming plays an essential role based on spiritual and cultural practices in providing livelihoods and food security in the Karen community.

Fear after Karen Activist Goes Missing

Porlajee Rakjongjaroen, known as “Billy”, was my Karen colleague who helped me to collect data to prepare the housing project in 2014. He also held the position of a member of the Sub-district Administrative Organization (SAO) as a local government agency. Porlajee has been missing since April 2014 after he was detained by national park officials at a checkpoint because he had unlawfully taken six bottles of wild honey allegedly found in his possession. After that, he had been released and disappeared after that. He also held evidence of officials’



abuse of authority, particularly against the former chief of the national park regarding the alleged burning of houses of more than 20 Karen families living on the original land in July 2011. He became a target because of his role in defending the rights of the Karen regarding them being forcibly evicted from their homeland (Khaosod English, 2014). His disappearance has inflicted serious damage on the Karen Banggloy and his family, and also increased the sense of insecurity and fear. Today, the Thai authorities provide no information about him and we do not know at all where he is.

The Karen's fear rises in response to their living conditions and future threats leading to the confrontation. The process of cognition of fear generates appropriate behavioural responses. The people fear to be arrested and go missing like Porlajee; in turn, this also generates more conflict between the Karen and park officials.

Are We Forest Destroyers?

A female Karen was arrested by national park officials at Banggloy Bon (on the original land) in June 2017 as a forest destroyer and hunter. She has a house in the village but she does not have a plot of land for farming; therefore, she had to return to the original land to farm. She cultivated rice, chillies and pumpkins around the football field. I had an opportunity to interview her on the afternoon of 8 July 2017. A Karen leader, was a translator.

"I returned to the original land and lived there around one month and then I was arrested as a person who intruded into the conserved forest. After the arrest, the officials destroyed my stuff, agricultural material, paddy rice and house as well as the fields", she said.

I asked her where she lived before building a new house in 2015.

"I lived at Banggloy Bon. Actually, I moved in 1996 and lived in Banggloy village for ten years. Then, my husband and I moved back to Banggloy Bon again. But my children still lived in the village because they had to go to school. Then, I moved back to the village again in 2012", she further said.

"The last time I went to my land at Banggloy Bon was around two months ago and I stayed there for a month. And then I was arrested and brought to the police station in the town. The police informed me of the allegations as a destroyer of the forest. A Karen teacher bailed me out of the police station. In the next month, I have to go to court to acknowledge the verdict. [...] I went to the farm only and came back to the village. I farmed bananas, corn, chillies, pumpkins, beans and rice, etc. My house was close to the field which was around a football field. But officials destroyed all. They also demolished the house, burnt clothing, poured salt and rice away, and destroyed cooking equipment", she said.

"A newspaper reported that officials found an old gun, gunpowder, lead shot and muntjac deer meat. Did they belong to you?" I asked.

"Actually, it was not muntjac deer meat, it was wild boar meat. People who walked past my house to come to this village gave me meat, around ten pieces. [...] The gun and gunpowder belonged to my husband, he passed away two years ago. I cannot shoot, I do not know how to shoot. I just need to keep it because it belongs to my husband. I tried to escape the park officials but I stumbled and my breasts hit the ground and I was knocked unconscious. So, officials found and arrested me", she said. "Are you scared?" I asked. "I was not scared but I was angry", she said.



“Do you know you were charged?” I asked. “Yes, I know, but I do not know what I should do. I cannot speak the Thai language at all. I cannot work in the town. Today there is no job for me. I also do not have Thai citizenship”, she responded.

(A Female Karen, 40 years old, interviewed, July 8, 2017)

This case indicates again that the Karen cannot return to live on the original land or even cultivate rice in the forest. Also, they are all labelled as forest destroyers by officials. The Karen leader used to say that *“no one need go hungry and die here, we all search for possible ways to survive, we will even take the risk”,* like her.

World Heritage Status

An additional concern of the Banggloy Karen is that in 2011, the Thai government submitted a proposal to UNESCO to inscribe the Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex (KKFC) as a natural World Heritage site. Most of the villagers living in the KKFC areas were concerned about this project because they received little information regarding the proposal. Their concern includes a lack of participation; therefore, the Karen need to know both the benefits and drawbacks of establishing the World Heritage site. In 2015, the proposal was rejected by UNESCO because it did not uphold the rights of the Karen people, requiring resubmission. Furthermore, many problems of the Karen have still not been resolved, such as the forced disappearance of Porlajee, and securing land and resource management rights for the Karen. However, according to UN Article 18, the Karen should be allowed to participate in decision-making on the use of land and natural resources in their areas that affect their lives and the cultural heritage of the Karen communities in the region should be taken into account (United Nations, 2007). However, the national park is still ignoring the Karen's rights, issues and concerns, and decisions are being implemented without their input; in other words, they are often excluded from the decision-making processes.

Kinship Groups and Social Networks: Community Space

The house is a constituted architectural unit or a social unit associated with the family or kinship structure (Bourdieu, 1973; Fox, 1993; Rapoport, 1969; Waterson, 1990; Gillespie, 2000). Oliver (2003) notes that changes of vernacular house relate to family and cultural factors, such as ancestry, inheritance, age, religion and belief systems. Waterson (1990) believes that the analysis of kinship systems can be clarified by looking at them as house-based systems, and how the house function shapes and identifies the kinship group. In turn, I shall argue that understanding the kinship systems of Banggloy village is to understand the organisational layout of the community. The kinship acts as the operating agent of a system of matrimonial change within the community (Lévi-Strauss, 1965, p. 14). He further states that the primary function of a kinship system is to define categories from which to set up a certain type of marriage regulation.

The primary part presents the representative of each kinship group who still lives in the village. There are three main kinships in Banggloy village: *Mimi*, *Paleukor* and *Kreajee* (Figure 4). Their descendants also get married to each other and expand the families and kinships; on the other hand, a few Karen get married outside the village—both to Karen and Thai people—because they work outside the village. The kinship system contains an element that manifests among the Karen as the prohibition of incest. Another positive aspect of getting married within the village is that this creates strong relationships and avoids divorce because their parents know each other; thus, family problems can be solved by their parents.

Furthermore, the original kinship groups play a crucial role in Banggloy Karen society. The concept of the kinship of the Banggloy Karen demonstrates the concept of the community-based society. It reveals the relationships in the house-based kinship system. Undeniably, significant relationships have occurred in marriage,

family and kinship, offering a valuable clue to the building house process. Also, the Karen elders have an influence on community relations and the power of the generations as spiritual leaders.

The house is a type of social structure (Lévi-Strauss, 1982) that refers to a group of people associated with the spatial locus (Gillespie, 2000). Thus, a focus on the house can move beyond kinship as the privileged component of the human relationship. Then, the family structure is considered as a support system that helps each other within groups and ties household members together.

The relationship between the individual and groups shows that the Karen build the house or space following the social structures and kinship groups. Getting married across the kinship group in the village contributes to people in the village relating to each other. It becomes a large group of relatives. With regard to a Karen family, it is a group consisting of parents and their children. During their lifetime, most Karen people are members of two different types of family group: the family into which they were born and the family that they create when they marry. When the Karen marry, the woman remains in her parents' house, and husband moves into her house. However, currently the extended family rarely lives in the same house as the parents. They usually build a new house, separating from the parents after marriage, even if the new house seems temporary or is a small building.

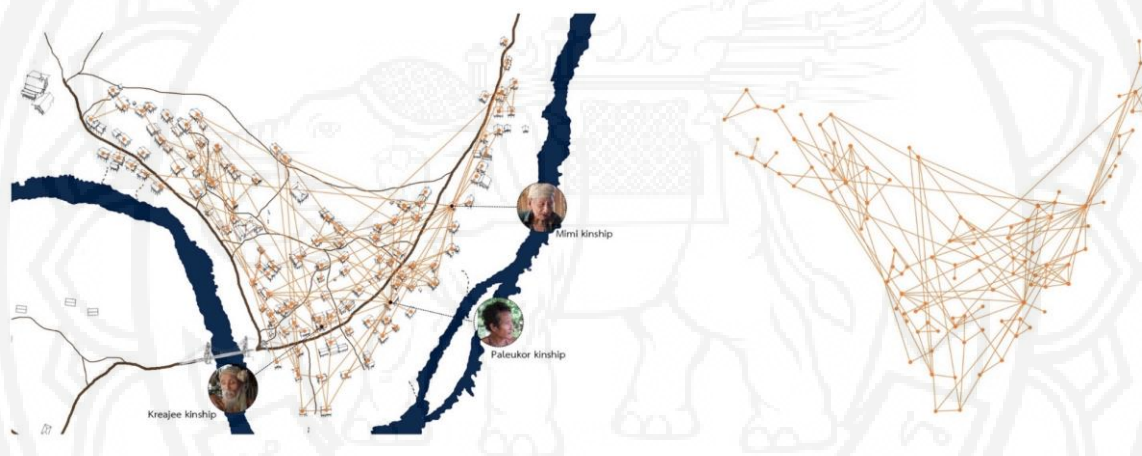


Figure 4 A Social Network of the Banggloy Karen Community.

The Diagram Shows the Elderly Karen who are the Heads of the Kinship Groups.

Source: Sadanu Sukkasame

Role of Other Actors

Since the establishment of the Kaeng Krachan National Park in 1983, the state has engaged in a concerted policy of harassing and forcibly evicting the Karen communities from their original land. The state claims that traditional farming methods are inconsonant with conserving the forest, and the migration of non-Thai citizens from Myanmar is a border security risk. Therefore, the national park holds a legitimate use of power to approve any project due to the legal status of the national park law. This, of course, puts pressure on the Karen, who need to do projects or social activities in the national park. Moreover, many NGO networks are helping the Karen to solve their problems in different ways; for instance, the Karen Network for Culture and Environment (KNCE), the Northern Farmers' Network, the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association, the Indigenous Knowledge and People Networks. All of these try to assist the Karen to obtain their rights, focusing on the human rights of indigenous people.



Additionally, the Pid Tong Langpra Foundation (PTLF) is the notable organisation that has adopted King Bhumibol's principle to assist the Karen by emphasising people's participation in agricultural practice (Thailand Sustainable Development Foundation (TSDF), n.d.). The PTLF has assisted the Karen since 2011 after the last Karen group was evicted from the original land to the present village. However, some PTLF projects have failed to meet the needs of the Karen. For example, the rice terrace in 2013–2020 had expectations of a positive outcome of producing sufficient rice for the people to consume; nonetheless, it failed due to soil problems and lack of water. Therefore, the PTLF adjusted the strategy by encouraging the Karen to grow other crops such as bananas, limes and durians, because these crops can survive in this soil condition. Meanwhile, the PTLF's project was criticised by many NGOs, in that they were taking the wrong approach because rice was the most important crop in the Karen's life. The Karen have to sell crops to generate income to buy rice to consume within the household. Furthermore, the PTLF also encourage the Karen to raise livestock to consume within households, such as chickens, pigs and fish. However, from a positive viewpoint, the PTLF has power to protect the Karen in some ways and can reduce the tension between the park officials and the Karen. As mentioned, each organisation has different roles that influence the Karen directly and indirectly to develop their community. They engage in activities to work with the Karen to plan and act how to achieve their objectives. However, some organisations conflict with each other regarding development perspectives and Karen rights.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This paper has examined the challenges of indigenous Karen people focusing on settlements and political issues. The traditional livelihood systems of the indigenous Karen peoples are based on traditional farming and knowledge, and other cultural practices. They have experienced the various form of human right violations from the state policies. Law and regulation are the obstructions of traditional practice. Land allocation is also a part of the policy that reduces the shifting cultivation. What should the state realize? From the voices of the Karen, the state should provide clear guidance within a human right framework and ecological approach and respect for the traditional knowledge and rights of indigenous communities including sustainable livelihoods. For example, the policies to reclaim the forest and relocate people are also a problem for those inhabiting the forest, who might be evicted. The conflict between the Karen and park officials is still the critical problem today. This leads to difficulties building trust with each other. For example, the fear after the disappearance of Porlajee increases distrustfulness; also, Karen people are still arrested due to farming on the original land. These problems have unavoidably affected the living conditions. Hence, an alternative solution is the participation of indigenous Karen people. The state should encourage the Karen people to participate in local development, especially the human rights framework and sustainable resource management systems. The importance of participation is an effective way that goes beyond cultural, economic and politic concerns to establish learning platforms on practices, knowledge and innovations, and share the information and education. Collaboration between indigenous peoples, state agencies, NGOs, researcher and academic institute should body in sustainable planning and dwelling development at local and national levels. For future practice, the participation of local people is the significant stage for local development especially the human rights framework and sustainable resource management systems.



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