



RTC-TH Jun 2011 Flood Update

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Community-based environmental education for the self-sufficiency and sustainability of small rural family farms

ชุมชนตามสิ่งแวดล้อมศึกษาเพื่อการพึ่งตัวเองและยั่งยืนชนบทขนาดเล็กครอบครัวฟาร์ม

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Floods and Flood Plains

Life and civilization need water to survive. History shows a strong link of human settlement to rivers and flood plains. Annual floods were a source of revitalizing soil. Living in close proximity to fields and crops had obvious advantages and disadvantages. The key disadvantage is the impact of floods on material possessions of the flood victims and loss of life in some instances. Yet people persist in rebuilding in the flood plain.



A flooded farm house next to the Nan River.



A farmer coming to grips with the flood in his fields.



Corn planted 2 m above the river level now underwater.

The RTC-TH advocates use of the Geographic Systems Model to assess the geo-hazards of any particular location. People still have the choice to take risks or to minimize them. But it is one thing to knowingly take a risk and completely another to unknowingly put yourself in harm's way. Of course, we are assuming that people making conscious decisions are also willing to accept the consequences of their actions.

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The traditional Thai house is built on stilts to get air circulating under the living spaces on the upper level. So long as the stilts exceed the height of the flood water, all is well. Crop land directly adjacent to the river is at the highest risk of damage or loss. Farmers gamble when planting here.

The RTC-TH also advocates emergency preparedness. There are stark differences between emergency services in Thailand to those in the US. One major difference is the integration of emergency services across governmental agencies from local to national levels---a key advantage of the Kingdom. For example, in our area, the organizational structure begins at the village level with the village head (man or woman based on village election). As a flood threatens, the village contacts the local sub-district administrative office for assistance (SAO). If the problem escalates, the SAO contacts the District Office, who in turn can contact the Provincial level, which can opt to call for National assistance.

As we visited various friends who live on the Nan River flood plain and were displaced by the flood, we saw relief workers ranging from local village volunteers, to SAO, District, and Thai military personnel moving in unison.



We bought food to donate to this station where volunteers cooked food for flood victims and relief workers.



Flooded main street of Thawangpha; night 26 Jun

Nam Yang at Ban Na Fa Bridge



Top photo: 17 Jun; bottom photo 26 Jun the morning after the 150 mm of rain.



Flood debris on the bridge pylons indicate water level as about 3m.



The Nam Yang is off the left edge of the photo. These flooded fields are at the south foothills of the river.

Nam Yang at the Bridge near Ban Kong



The Nam Yang water levels in the dry season (top photo) and on morning of 26 Jun after the rains (below).



The fields next to the road normally have chilis in the dry season. Many were recently transplanted with rice.




Recently transplanted rice paddies are flooded by the excess water from the Nam Yang.



The Nam Yang flowing past the sand and gravel quarry next to the bridge.

Nam Yang at Hwy 1080 Spillway

The Nam Yang spillway is just south of the Thawangpha Hospital at the Highway 1080 bridge. (See 2011 Apr 2011 RTC-TH Update Report, p. 3-4 for more photos of the reservoirs above this spillway during the dry season.) Rain swollen tributaries spill into the Nan River increasing the threat of floods to down stream communities and the Nan Provincial capital where Saifon's 2nd elder sister Sunisa lives with her husband Alan. 



The spillway of the Nam Yang showing the water level in the dry season (12 March, 2011).



The same spillway on morning of 26 Jun 2011 after 24+ hours of the rain totaling about 150 mm.



Nam Yang from the Hwy 1080 bridge flowing toward the Nan River

Nan River at Hwy 1148 Bridge



Flood waters enter the riverside park adjacent to the District Offices on higher ground (to left out of the photo)



Nan River Thawangha pumping station in dry season (top photo) and in the recent flood (bottom photo)



Near Ban Hua Dua



The side road from Hwy 1080 goes to the floodplain and gets inundated by the Nan River flood waters.



Saifon brings lunch for the aid workers on site.



Saifon and Greg donating lunch to relief workers.



Food and relief supplies come from the SAO.



Many hands make the work a little lighter.



SAO workers and volunteers load them into boats.



A boat load of food and supplies ready to go.



In the midst of the flood, livestock still need to be fed and tended to while flood relief efforts continue.



It becomes apparent why they call it a flood plain.



Narrow roads seem narrower during floods.



A local aid reception center set up by the SAO.



Parking on high ground is at a premium

Sections of the Nan River Valley turned into a vast lake. Selected side roads from the main highway became staging points to ferry food, water, relief supplies, and people to safety on either side of the valley. The relief workers operated out of their vehicles on the narrow road. Pick up trucks loaded with supplies inched their way along the narrow muddy road. Most had to back up as the road was too narrow to turn around. It took a bit of shuffling to get loaded and empty vehicles in and out of the loading area. 🌐

Near Ban Don Ton



Another submerged road becomes a boat landing for the shipment of supplies to the other side of the valley



Flood relief officers manning radios powered by a small generator.



Relief workers coordinating the movement of supplies



Soldiers taking a break from manning and loading boats

On the road to Ban Don Ton from Hwy 1080, we found some of Saifon's high school classmates riding out the flood. They evacuated to homes of relatives on high ground. But their homes on the Nan River flood plain were underwater. We brought lunch for the group of relief workers at this site as well. The higher portion of the road was the

staging area for the relief operations. This paved road was wider than the one at Ban Hua Dua allowing trucks to be parked on both sides and still have room for traffic. Luckily the rain has stopped and weather was mild. The wide open flat terrain would make foul weather operations at this site miserable. 🌐



A mini-class reunion on a road to submerged villages



We bring lunch to this team of relief workers



Boats of all sizes are pressed into service to get relief supplies to the stricken villages



Evacuees disembark to reach high ground.



Thai military finished unloading a truck load of supplies.

The Pa Khuang Bridge on Hwy 1080

The Pa Khuang bridge is a key choke point on Hwy 1080. In previous years, farmers protesting low corn prices blockaded Hwy 1080 here essentially cutting off the traffic between the provincial capital and northern Nan Province. In the great flood of 2006 and this flood, the Nan River water level rose high enough to submerge the bridge cutting off relief supplies. The bridge was closed in the early morning hours of 27 Jun. By mid morning, water levels receded but a section of Hwy 1080 approaching the bridge from the south was still flooded, but was passable for those willing to try. 🌐



The downstream view of the Nan River from the Pa Khuang Bridge



Flood waters got half way up the bridge railing.



An automated river level monitoring system



A flooded section of road approaching the bridge.



Drivers braving the deep water.

The Sop Nhong Bridge off Hwy 4007

We reached the Sop Nhong Bridge by taking Hwy 4007 off of Hwy 1080 at the Pa Khuang Bridge. This put us on the west bank of the Nan River (the previous photo groups were taken from the East Bank). 



Vehicles from flooded villages parked on high ground



The East end of the bridge descends into flood waters



The Nan River when looking upstream from the Sop Nhong bridge.



A road way converted to a water way.



A submerged corn field.

Rainy Season Special Treats!

The monsoon rainy season brings floods, flash floods, and landslides to parts of Nan Province. It is an annual cycle of long standing for the people here. Life goes on. And along with the rainy season comes food. It is the season for planting. But in addition to raising crops, Thai people also enjoy fish and other native food that also appears in the rainy season.

It is very common to see folks with dipping nets along the flooded rivers, streams and irrigation ditches. They are catching small fish 5-13 cm / 2-5 inches.



Ready to find a fishing spot along the river.



It's a repetitive process of dip, wait, lift...and if any fish is caught, scoop and put them in a bamboo basket.



Some folks set a long net across a flooded rice paddy and periodically check the net to get their catch.

At home, the fish are washed/rinsed in clean water. Then skewered and put on the grill. A light roasting makes them into a tasty meal with sticky rice. Some people like put a fish into an elongated roll of sticky rice making a “grilled fish in a blanket” snack.



Some families have an electric roasting appliance. But a charcoal fire gives an all together different flavor that is more suitable for those favoring traditional taste. These small grilled fish are a real treat for Thai families in our area. The bounty is readily shared. Once these fish were off the grill, phone calls went out to various relatives to come and get some to take home. The communal family spirit is alive and well in our village and family. But the real treat was yet to come.



The rains bring life. And one of the forms of life also means a very special treat for northern Thais---Maeng Da Giant Water Bug (*Lethocerus indicus*). These critters are caught at night using a light trap placed in or around rice paddies. They are attracted to the light and fall into the trap. Farmers will collect their “harvest” the next morning.



The bugs are skewered for the grill. Afterward, they are crushed into a paste and eaten as a dip. The pheromones given off by this insect is a key attraction not only to potential mates, but also to the Thais who relish this dish.



The rhythms of life in rural Thailand have been going on for eons. Thais realize they cannot control nature, and perhaps this makes them “easy going” in that they take the plus and the minus of life as a natural rhythm. The rains and floods bring with it plus and minus. The plus, in terms of the food, seems to help offset the minus of the flood losses. The sharing of the bounty among the family builds the solidarity at the core of the flood relief work we see going on around us...strong family and community bonding. It's all a part of the cycle of life in rural Thailand. 🌐