Collaborative action between communities and students is oftentimes a challenge because communities’ populations, resources and struggles constantly change. The Collaborative Community Consultation Report (CCC) serves as an up-to-date reference on communities that the Center for International Educational Exchange (CIEE) works with in Northeastern Thailand. The report provides the history and current statuses of these communities, specifically in a human rights context. In addition, the document identifies specific issues communities face and outlines possible next steps students can take towards collaborative action with the communities throughout their semester. The CCC concludes with a collection of possible project ideas, which are thought to be helpful to the community and that the community members have suggested and encouraged. This document is not meant to be all-inclusive or final; it is a guide to possibilities.

By: Claire Coddington, Liam Dixon, Charlotte Friedman, Larissa Gaias, Ann Kam, Bijal Makadia, Jenna Mendell, Leslie O’Bray, Ilse Pukinskis, Amy Saekow, and Esther Sosa
The Thai word for river is “meh nam,” which translates literally into “mother water.” For villagers living in Rasi Salai, a rural community in Northeastern Thailand, this is exactly what the Mun River means to them. The culture and way of life of these villagers are dependent on the rivers’ ecosystem and the surrounding wetlands. The wetlands contain fish, vegetation, small animals, and medicinal herbs. It is also where cows and buffalo graze. For generations, villagers were able to sustain themselves from these resources and in doing so, cultivated a deep connection to the land and to their neighbors.

The relationship between villagers and the river suffered when the Thai government constructed the Rasi Salai Dam. In the 1960s, the Thai government pursued a development strategy that involved the construction of infrastructure such as power stations and roads. These initial projects led to a shift towards state control over natural resources in the 1980s. One of the greatest examples of this shift is the Khong Chi Mun Project (KCM). The KCM is a government water management scheme that aimed to build 14 dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries, which includes the Mun River. The ultimate goal of the KCM was to irrigate water to 4.98 million rai of land and 13 provinces in the Northeast.

In 1989, the government approved the construction of the Rasi Salai Dam, but it did not conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or consult villagers. No survey of the area was conducted to evaluate an actual need for the dam. When construction began in 1992, under the Department of Energy Development and Promotion (DEDP), villagers were initially told that a 4.5 meter rubber weir was being built on the Mun River to solve the perceived problems of water scarcity. In 1993, when construction was finished, instead of a small rubber weir, a 9 meter concrete dam with 7 sluice gates was now towering over the river. Water from the dam is used on less than 10,000 rai of land, and very few residents in the region have actually received the promised irrigation benefits.

The Rasi Salai Dam divided the Mun River into three parts: upstream, reservoir, and downstream. This unnatural division has created a variety of problems, most prominently flooding and the extreme loss of river and wetland diversity. The creation of the reservoir has engulfed the villagers’ treasured wetlands on which they relied for food, and put the region’s most valuable soil under water. The position of the reservoir on an underground rock salt deposit has also contributed to the salinization of surrounding water and soil, which has severely hindered the villagers’ ability to grow crops. In addition, the ecology of the Mun River has experienced a tragic transformation, resulting in depleted fish resources and unnatural water patterns. The dam has interfered with the river’s natural flood cycles that used to regulate soil fertility, enabling vegetation to thrive. It has led to waterlogging, creating soils that can no longer sustain rice fields and other plant life. In a region where 13 varieties of rice have been traditionally grown for generations, a mere three varieties are left to struggle in these new harsh conditions.

Prior to the construction of the dam, the wetlands were rich in biodiversity and served as the “supermarket” of Rasi Salai. The livelihoods of villagers included fishing, wetland rice farming, and gathering a diverse array of vegetables, medicinal herbs, and other resources needed for everyday life. The primary source of food came from the land in excesses that were either shared with neighbors or sold for an extra income. Working togeth-
er, year round, in the rice fields, river, and in the wetlands fostered a deep sense of community between villagers who were unified by the common resources, and felt connected to each other and the land. The creation of the dam single-handedly destructed this sustainable way of life and this sense of community. The people of Rasi Salai are no longer able to depend on the land for food and economic security and must seek alternative solutions. This has resulted in villagers migrating to big cities such as Bangkok for the pursuit of low paying labor jobs leaving their traditional agrarian way of life and weakening their ties to family, culture, and their neighbors. For those villagers that choose to stay in Rasi Salai, the land is no longer able to provide the variety and quantity of foods it previously could, forcing people to purchase low quality products at the market which further increases their expenses and debt.

The construction of the Rasi Salai dam has resulted in the violation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights including the Right to Food, the Right to Work, the Right to Proper Development of Agrarian Systems, and the Right to Culture. Prior to the construction of the dam, villagers had an adequate and secure supply of a variety of resources from the river and the surrounding wetlands. The creation of the dam resulted in the elimination of the region’s biodiversity, increased flooding, and increased soil and water salinity, severely limiting access to food resources that used to exist, a clear violation of the Right to Food. In addition, the loss of these resources have severely limited the villagers’ traditional livelihoods of farming, fishing, and gathering, forcing many to seek alternate forms of employment, a violation of the Right to Work. The inability for the villagers to farm in the most efficient and productive way is a violation of the Right to Proper Development of Agrarian Systems. Lastly, the loss of the natural resources has put a strain on Rasi Salai and weakened their sense of community and ties to their families, neighbors, and tradition, a clear violation of the Right to Culture.

The construction of the Rasi Salai Dam has resulted in a devastating impact on the surrounding communities and ecosystems, affecting an estimated 17,000 villagers from the provinces of Srisaket, Surin, and Roi Et. After many protests and years of struggle by villagers, the Royal Irrigation Department, which currently controls the Rasi Salai Dam, continues to keep the dam gates closed for eight months out of the year. Villagers wait for promised compensation and continue fighting for their obstructed rights.

**CAMSING NOLASAN**

Farmer

Camsing Nolasan, 65, sits under a thatched roof next to her rice patties with her husband. This is the house where they come to relax after a hard day of work in the rice fields. However, before the dam was constructed they would not be found resting in the late-afternoon on a Monday in March. “I should be harvesting rice now. Once they closed the dams, our lives were taken away. I couldn’t collect rice because of the flooding.” There should be three others accompanying her husband and her in the patties, but all of her sons had to move to Bangkok, because there wasn’t enough work to do in the fields after the construction of the dams. “They send money back, but not enough, because they don’t get paid a lot in their factory and tourism jobs in the capital.”

When confronted about the government’s plan to raise the dam dikes, she was aware. Raising the dikes would help contain the water that currently floods, but this project has been taking a long time. “The Ministry doesn’t really help at all; their promises are never fulfilled.”
SANAN CHUSAKUL
Advisor to the villagers

Sanan Chusakul, 50, has spent his life fighting for justice. When asked about his background, Sanan paused trying to remember his resume from the early 1980s. When he answered, the long list of organizations and projects he had been involved in was impressive.

From border conflicts to nature conservation, from small-scale farming to large-scale foundations, Sanan’s activism has led him to a number of diverse issues. Most recently, he has been involved with a community that has been forced to deal with the negative effects of a government-built dam.

Since 1992, Sanan has been working alongside villagers from Rasi Salai. When asked about his role in the community, Sanan answered, “I’m an advisor for the village. My real role is to encourage, to get information, help analyze alternatives, and to support [the villagers] in presenting their own issues.”

Sanan’s support has gone a long way. “I think [the villagers] have really developed in their thinking, their knowledge, and their ability. I believe I’ve seen the growth of the villagers,” he says. This growth empowers the villagers and gives them leverage to fight for their own rights.

Sanan sees his work with Rasi Salai as a small part of the bigger picture. He explains, “I see the small things we can do on a community level and I see that there are lessons that larger society can take from communities.” Sanan goes on, “I think society is going to grow by all of these small examples coming together finally.” However, in order for these small examples to coalesce, Sanan notes, “communities have to rise up and create power.”

Rasi Salai has begun to rise up. This is what gives Sanan hope.

BANYA KHAMALAP
Citizens’ media/PR

The feeling of oppression is not foreign to Banya Khamalap. At 34 years old, he knows what it is like to have no voice. As a young adult, Banya witnessed his farming village in Udon Thani be ripped to pieces by a mining company. He comments, “I have been taken advantage of personally.”

This experience has brought Banya closer to others fighting for their human rights. “I can understand how it feels,” he explains. “When I see [the Rasi Salai] people being cheated by the government I think, this is not right.” Banya goes on, “I am able to relate to these people even if it’s not the same issue. The feeling is the same. The only difference is the problem.”

Banya has set out down a path where he hopes to help solve these problems. He understands that although he may be familiar with the feeling of oppression, many others around the world are not. Banya has made it his life’s work to connect others to these issues.

As a reporter, Banya aims to educate and engage a wide audience. “I think it is very important to help others understand problems,” Banya states. “If it weren’t for this reporting, people wouldn’t know about these issues. By using the media, high society will come to see the problems.”

Apart from connecting others with issues, Banya uses his reporting as a political tool. His strategy is simple: “Whenever there’s a meeting or a protest, I will always ask the Minister [of the Department of Agriculture], ‘Did you watch the news?’ These government officials are scared of looking bad, so they have to move fast.” Banya explains that this strategy helps move the villagers’ demands along.

Banya thinks that his next story will most likely be an update. He wants to keep people informed about how the villagers are doing, and let followers know if they are still having problems.
“I was born in this area -- who better than I to work and address the needs of these people?” exclaimed Sirin Pasan, the 54 year old Head of the Irrigation System for the Hua Na Dam. Mr. Pasan became interested in irrigation and in the planning of rivers when personally affected by overflowing rivers. Mr. Pasan describes, “When I was young during the rainy season, the river would overflow and my house would flood. I would have to build small channels to get the water out of my house and into the streets.” Mr. Pasan also mentioned his fascination with American movies that portrayed the destruction of dams.

Sirin Pasan is content with both the work that he is doing and the relationship that he has established with the villagers. One of the proudest moments in his career was being able to provide the villagers with legal compensation for the loss of their land caused by the dams. Members of the Assembly of the Poor received 785 million baht as a form of compensation by the central government. He is excited about providing the Assembly of the Poor with 30 rai of land for a community center: “We have a good relationship with the villagers; during their protest in 2007 we were able to coexist peacefully in the same place, and we even had a big meal outside this building after we reached an agreement.”

Mr. Pasan is not only happy with the work he is doing, but he also sees value in the construction of the dam. Although he believes that the dam has affected some livelihoods this has only been a means to an end. For example, because of the dam, other farmers are able to get water to grow crops and nearby villages now have water for personal use. Pasan argued, “Because of the dam, we are able to provide water to people on 10,000 rai of land. Farmers that once were unable to farm during the dry season can now grow and have an income.” Although Pasan admits to the government selling the water to farmers and other villagers, he makes it clear that the government subsidizes this water: the government pays 60% of total irrigation costs while farmers must pay the remaining 40%. He supports this “participatory agriculture” to make sure that people do not waste water. If farmers are given everything for free they cannot be held accountable, Mr. Pasan adds.

Sirin Pasan is concerned with making sure all parties are represented and satisfied with the outcomes of their decisions. Pasan states, “We try to hear every voice and make sure everyone is on the same page about the decisions made about the dam.” Several projects are in place for the dam. In September, the Department of Irrigation plans to raise the height of the dams so that more water can be stored in the reservoir. The dikes currently hold 114 meters of water without overflowing. The Department of Irrigation wants the dikes to hold 119 meters of water. Six new pumps will be built by 2011 to reach new surrounding areas that currently do not have sufficient amount of water. Mr. Pasan is optimistic and excited about the future because, “Currently we provide water to people in 50,000 rai of land. By 2011 we will provide water to people in 100,000 rai of land.”
We gathered in Meh Rampan Chantarasorn’s house in Rasi Salai, Srisaket province without even meeting her. However, as soon as she was introduced at the end of our consultation, the importance of her role in her community was immediately evident. Meh Rampan, 40, is the chairperson of the Wetlands Handicraft Group and the treasurer of the Wetland People Fund. Her husband is the head of the Agriculture Group. “I am proud that we have two community leaders in one house, but it’s a headache sometimes,” she laughs.

The Wetlands Handicraft Group started in 1993 with Rampan’s mother’s generation, as they were beginning to fight against the construction and use of the dam. The group uses materials from the wetlands to make handicrafts, showing society the value of wetland resources. “It’s a way of life that comes from our ancestors. We, as affected people, are trying to tell society.” The Wetland Handicraft Craft Group includes 156 women from two districts and eight villages, and large value is placed on exchanging knowledge and traditions across communities. Rampan speaks to the empowerment that women can feel through this work. “Men’s hands are not dexterous enough. They collect the materials, but we make the crafts. It is a way for us to bring in income.” “[Our power] transforms natural wetland resources into something.”

Meh Rampon also empowers her communities through the Wetland People Fund. Instead of relying on the government for money to fund important life events, community members pay one baht per day so members can draw from these savings in order to support their families during birth, sickness, and death. There is currently 500,000 baht in the savings fund. It can be used for string tying ceremonies for newborns, funerals for the deceased, and the sick. Every villager is eligible for 100 baht for each night they are hospitalized. “It is a way for people to help each other. We started with 43 villages, so it’s a way to get everyone involved. We get together every fifth of the month. Since we are spread over three villages, we wouldn’t be able to see each other enough otherwise. Together, we can solve common problems and learn from each other.”

If Meh Rampon and the dam communities achieved one thing from the protest, it was a renewed emphasis on the importance of community building. “Sometimes you can’t figure out something on your own, but you can find a solution together,” she says.

Meh Rampon appreciates the increase in her own involvement with her community. Before the protest, she did not attend meetings or participate in community groups and events. The protest helped her discover that although government negotiation is not one of her strengths, building community and doing “cool work,” as she called the organizations she ran, was the area in which she could be most beneficial. She believes that this “cool work” happens on a more concrete level, which will in turn assist the community negotiators. “I have participated in adult education, and I have a new family and I am proud of that. Everywhere I go, people know who I am.”

**KEY PLAYERS**

**RAMPAN CHANTARASORN**
Rasi Salai Chairperson/treasurer

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MEH PA
Organizer, Assembly for the Poor

“I want people to know that what I have experienced is real. It fully changed my life, my whole life.”

Meh Pa is a leading figure in the Assembly for the Poor, an organization that consists of NGOs and villagers. Although Meh Pa is a passionate and dedicated activist who is fighting for human rights, she is also a full-time farmer and a grandmother of six. Meh Pa has two jobs; she grows rice and sells health insurance. She is 56 and has three children all of whom live in a nearby village. Meh Pa was born and raised in Rasi Salai, and as a result, she has experienced the effects of the dam. The dam has decreased the food supply of the village and has damaged community dynamics.

Meh Pa has dedicated her entire life to fighting for her rights and the rights of her friends. She exclaims, “We all have rights, although sometimes I feel like I am a little person fighting a big state which feels like they have the right over all the land.” Meh Pa was an activist before the construction of the dam, she says that her community has always been marginalized and taken advantage of because they are poor and do not know their rights.

The construction of the Rasi Salai Dam violated the rights of Peh Ma and many other villagers in her community. The dam has destroyed local ecosystems; and raised water levels have submerged land previously used for farming and gathering plants such as herbs, bamboo and other goods. The loss of these resources has meant the loss of a vital source of food and income for villagers.

Meh Pa reminisces on what her village used to be and looks with sadness at what it has become. “The dam has done more than just taken our food, it has most importantly taken the sense of community and has broken the bonds and responsibility that we once felt for one another.” Meh Pa explains that her community before the dam would share what they found in the wetlands and did not have to buy anything. Now, because people must work hard to earn money, they have a sense of ownership over their things and care less if a person in their community fails. There is no longer an emphasis on relationships and kinships, but rather on surviving. People are constantly, as Meh Pa explains it, buying and selling. “Everything can be turned into a commodity. For example, if you grow rice for personal consumption you also must sell it. The scariest part of this all is that we didn’t even realize when this change happened.” This change has happened in three different provinces and six sub-districts.

Meh Pa is concerned for other villages that have dams that are being constructed. She says, “The villagers in these areas do not believe the effects that the dams will have on their livelihood.” Meh Pa goes to these villages and uses Rasi Salai as an example of what will happen to their community if they do not fight against the construction of these dams. The villagers in these communities, however, are skeptical. They do not think the dam will be put into effect or that it will affect them in the same way.

Despite her struggles Meh Pa is optimistic about the future. She plans to keep on fighting for the rights that are mentioned in the constitution. Her hope is to keep creating awareness about dams and their effects and to keep building relationships with other students so that they can learn about the issues and make change.
PRATUENG PONGAM
Hua Na community leader

Despite its construction in 1994, the gates of the Hua Na dam in Srisaket have yet to be closed, thanks largely to community leader, Paw Pratueng Pongam. As a leader selected by villagers of the Assembly of the Poor, he attends meetings with other leaders and government officials. Additionally, he attends workshops in different communities and brings back new information to villagers.

Before the dam construction, Paw Pratueng was not interested in community issues, but has gained a wealth of knowledge applicable to the Hua Na Dam by working with the Rasi Salai dam community. “I have learned so much by traveling to every region in the country. Whether it’s learning about fishing in the South, dam issues in other places, agriculture issues in the north—I’ve been able to learn about all of them.” When the Hua Na Dam was proposed as part of the Khong Chi Mun Project, Rasi Salai villagers were sent to Hua Na to start inter-community collaboration and education, so Paw Pratueng immediately got involved.

He was able to successfully postpone, if not prevent, the government’s action. A negotiation requires that a Social Impact Analysis and Environmental Impact Analysis be completed before the dam could be used. These documents are currently being created with the collaboration of three universities. Surveys conducted for these reports state that the water level of the reservoir should be 112 meters high. Paw Pratueng claims that at this level, 400 or 500 people will be negatively affected by the use of the dam. “The proposed water levels are so unclear, so the village is fighting against the use of the dam at all. Those gates will never close.”

Arguing over water levels has been Paw Pratueng’s greatest challenge, as government officials are constantly lying and regardless of the level, people will always be affected. On the other hand, there are villages that will benefit from the water reservoir. Fighting with other villages, in addition to the government, has been a great source of frustration for Pratueng. Great conflict has arisen between these communities, but Paw Pratueng believes a negotiation or compensation system can benefit everyone. He would suggest that villagers near the dam receive compensation for loss of land, but the compensation system is so untrustworthy. Paw Pratueng thinks a community irrigation system could work. However, he jabs, it is unlikely to happen because politicians do not have the same opportunity for corruption as they do with big irrigation projects.

In addition to learning and representing his community’s struggle, Paw Pratueng farms and tends to his orchard. He has three children, and although the oldest two are grown and out of the house, they continue to fight for their father and their community. “I want my kids to join in on the struggle.”
UPDATE ON THE SITUATION

Update as of March 23, 2010

* The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) of the Rasi Salai Dam was completed in December 2009. Three groups were involved in the creation of the SIA: the Assembly of the Poor, state officials and academics hired by both the Assembly of the Poor and state officials. The assessment includes effects of the dam and recommendations on how to restore biodiversity, control flooding, create job opportunities, revitalize natural resources and support community organizations. The SIA was approved by the national cabinet but Thailand’s political unrest has slowed the formation of a committee to address these issues.

* The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been started but not yet completed.

* The Irrigation Department is in its second phase of constructing the Khong Chi Mun project which aims to build 14 dams along the Mekong, Chi and Mun rivers to address Isaan’s issues of water shortage, drought and poverty. Started in 1989, it is projected to be completed in 2031.

* According to the Head of the Rasi Salai and Hua Na Irrigation System, Siri Pasang, his office plans to increase the water level on the reservoir from the Rasi Salai Dam from its current height of 117 meters to 119 meters in the upcoming rainy season. In order to hold the increased amount of water, they plan to construct dykes along the river.

* In 2005, a local politician collected 6,000 signatures, successfully petitioning to have the dam closed 8 months of the year and open 4 months for irrigation purposes. It is usually open during the rainy season, and closed for the rest of the 8 months of the year. However, these are flexible according to negotiations between The Assembly of the Poor and government officials.

* In 2007, thousands of villagers carried out a 189-day protest at the Rasi Salai Dam demanding negotiations from the government. During this time, the villagers created a savings welfare system where each person donated 1 baht per day. This savings fund is often used for those who are sick or elderly, to subsidize costs of funeral ceremonies and new born children. It is a mechanism through which villagers strengthen their communal bonds and support each other in times of sorrow and joy. The villagers are working on organizing a state matching program.

* After the protest, the most significant amount of compensation ever was paid, but it still has not reached everyone yet. They got 32,000 baht per rai. However, once a villager gets compensation, she or he loses their right to their land.

* The Agriculture Ministry gave 33 rai of land to build a village learning center near the Rasi Salai Dam and 200,000 baht. The villagers have begun planning for the center.

* The villagers are working on a community irrigation project which aims at digging deeper ponds to store water. It is to be an alternative way to irrigate water without destroying nearby forests.
Water powers countries, nourishes farmers’ crops, supports cities in the desert, not to mention sustains all life on this planet. Water issues can take on many forms. Our world’s increasing population size, rapid development and unprecedented climate change all contribute to the fact that water stands to become an even bigger concern and potential source of conflict in the near future. As the International Rivers Network notes, the idea that we are living in “the midst of a ‘world water crisis’” has become a common sentiment in the past few decades. Water holds a unique position in our world not only because it is the basic component of life but also because water knows few boundaries.

Much of the water problem is an issue of simple supply and demand. The world’s human population is growing exponentially. The world’s supply of freshwater however, is practically constant at 2.5% of all water—and almost two-thirds of that water is stored in ice caps. The fact that we are running out of freshwater is unavoidable. As Jacques Leslie noted in his article “Running Dry,” “In the last century we humans have so vastly expanded our use of water to meet the needs of industry, agriculture and a burgeoning population that now, after thousands of years in which water has been plentiful and virtually free, its scarcity threatens the supply of food, human health and the global ecosystem.”

As of 2000, there were 40,000 large dams and 800,000 small dams in the world with many more future projects lined up. In 2000, one fifth of the world’s agricultural land was irrigated, and this land accounted for roughly 40% of the world’s agricultural production. Whereas dams were once a ‘smart’ solution to anticipated water scarcity, they are now, “beginning to push against an absolute limit.” One of those limits is space. Dams all over the world have displaced an estimated 40 to 80 million people. Roughly 2 million people are being displaced every year by new big dam projects. These numbers are in terms of physical displacement from homes, not taking into account all those whose livelihoods have been impacted by dams.

In Asia, 65% of all dams were built for irrigation purposes. The only other region that constructs the majority of its dams for irrigation purposes is Africa (52%). During the Southeast Asian monsoon season, rivers often become 10 times larger than during the dry season. In a region with such a strong dependence on agriculture and a varied climate, dams are constructed to store water from the wet season for the arid dry seasons.

The development of the Mekong River has become a source of interest and concern for many in Southeast Asia. Over 60 million people live in the lower Mekong River Basin, many of whose livelihoods, cultures and customs are directly tied to the river. China is in the process of building eight dams along the Upper Mekong. Undoubtedly, these dams will produce profound negative effects for not only local Chinese communities but also those who live down-stream.
stream in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia. Already, communities along the Thai-Lao border have seen declining fish populations and fluctuating water levels as a result of China’s dams.

Plans for dams are also being pursued throughout Southeast Asia. Thailand itself is in the midst of a major project. The Khong Chi Mun Project, diverting water from the Mekong to the Chao Phraya in an attempt to provide irrigation to villages between the two rivers. The International Rivers Organization reports that, “Since mid-2006, the Governments of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand have granted approval to Thai, Malaysian, Vietnamese, Russian and Chinese companies to investigate 11 mainstream hydropower dams.” Laos has plans to build more than 30 dams along its Mekong tributaries as well as four projects on the mainstream as part of its attempt to become “the battery of Southeast Asia.” Vietnam is building a series of dams along its Mekong tributaries, which will severely impact ethnic minorities in Vietnam as well as downstream Cambodian villagers. Cambodia itself has plans for dams on both the Mekong tributaries and mainstream river. As more and more dams are built along the Mekong and its tributaries, there is a serious concern over the future availability of water throughout Southeast Asia. Even Burma is planning to build a dam along the Salween River, Southeast Asia’s last major undammed river.

There is a strong international movement for countries to make more thorough assessments of the social and environmental impacts of future dam projects as well as to decommission current dams that are causing more harm than good. Organizations such as the International Rivers Network place a strong emphasis on recognition and protection of the rights of affected communities. The World Commission on Dams, created in 1997 is “an international panel that provided the first independent and comprehensive assessment of dams.” It spent two years researching and creating a plan for dam development that would make affected communities the main beneficiaries of dam projects. It created a framework that can help countries and aid organizations make appropriate decisions about dams.
1. Learning Center

The Royal Irrigation Department has given the Assembly of the Poor 30 rai of land for the construction of a learning center. The purpose of this center is to preserve and spread local wisdom to both community and non-community members. Several villagers and P’Sanan, a local NGO leader working with these communities, expressed their interest in CIEE students helping to develop this center. The role CIEE students would have in this development includes, but is not limited to:

* Researching existing learning/cultural centers in areas around the world that are applicable to Rasi Salai. This information will be presented to the villagers on April 3rd, 2010.

* A meeting will be held on April 3rd, 2010 with representatives from CIEE, communities affected by lower Mun River dams, NGOs, and Thai students. At this meeting, the research on various learning centers will be presented and discussed. This research will provide villagers with a background on which they can develop a concrete plan.

* Once a plan is developed, ideas for students’ involvement include surveying local culture and organizations, photographing indigenous flora, and youth education.

2. Website Translation

Currently, there is a website, www.esaanvoices.net, that provides updates concerning lower Mun River dams. The website, however, is in Thai and there is an opportunity for CIEE students to translate existing material to English and include documents such as this report, profiles, and media.

3. Exchange with farmers

Approximately 65 Rasi Salai farmers have transitioned to organic farming with the help of the Alternative Agriculture Network. We came to a consensus with the villagers that an exchange with transitioning organic farmers from Ban Dong Dip, or other communities, would be beneficial. We would help plan this exchange.

4. International Rivers

It has been expressed that it would be beneficial for students to write a piece documenting the 189-day protest which took place last fall. This piece could be submitted to internationalrivers.org, an organization that protects rivers and defends the communities that are dependent on them. The villagers have stated that this piece would serve as visible proof of our efforts to assist them.

5. Thai students

Two Thai students accompanied our group on this trip. One was Dai, a Public Administration student from KKU and the other was Sofa, a law student from Roi Et University. Their presence in our exchanges brought a different perspective that was valuable to our discussions. In the future, we should make an effort to invite more Thai students to engage in our exchanges.

FOOTNOTES

Background
3. Ibid., 6.

International Context
9. Interview, P’Sanan. March 21, 2010