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Park-People Relationships and the Importance of Forest Products in the Livelihood Strategies in Rural Thailand



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BACKGROUND

Thailand has experienced severe deforestation since the 1960's. It is estimated that between 1961 and 2005, the total forest coverage in Thailand decreased from 53.3% to 31.5% [1]. In the 1980's there was an increasing environmental concern about forest degradation [2]. These concerns led to new policies which entailed the establishment of protected areas. In these policies which aimed at conserving or restoring forest areas, a narrative about forest communities being forest destroyers exist - the "criminal encroachers". Hence, the policies objective may be conserving the forest but it might contradict and deprive the livelihoods of communities living inside or around these forests [1,3]. To both achieve conservation and sustain rural people's livelihoods, more research is needed to understand the role of forest products in maintaining or improving the livelihoods of rural households.

OBJECTIVES

The study objectives were to identify the use, role and potential of the forest in the livelihood strategies of Ban Wang Nam Khiao villagers.

Two main questions were asked:

- *What characterizes WNK villagers' access to forest products, and how is this access mediated?*
- *What role does the forest have in the villagers' livelihood strategies in WNK?*



LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

Only 3% of the respondent ranked forest products as their main income generating activity. The number of HHs using this strategy increased as it decreased in importance for the second (2) and third activity (5). Employment remained the main income generating activity for 47% of respondents.

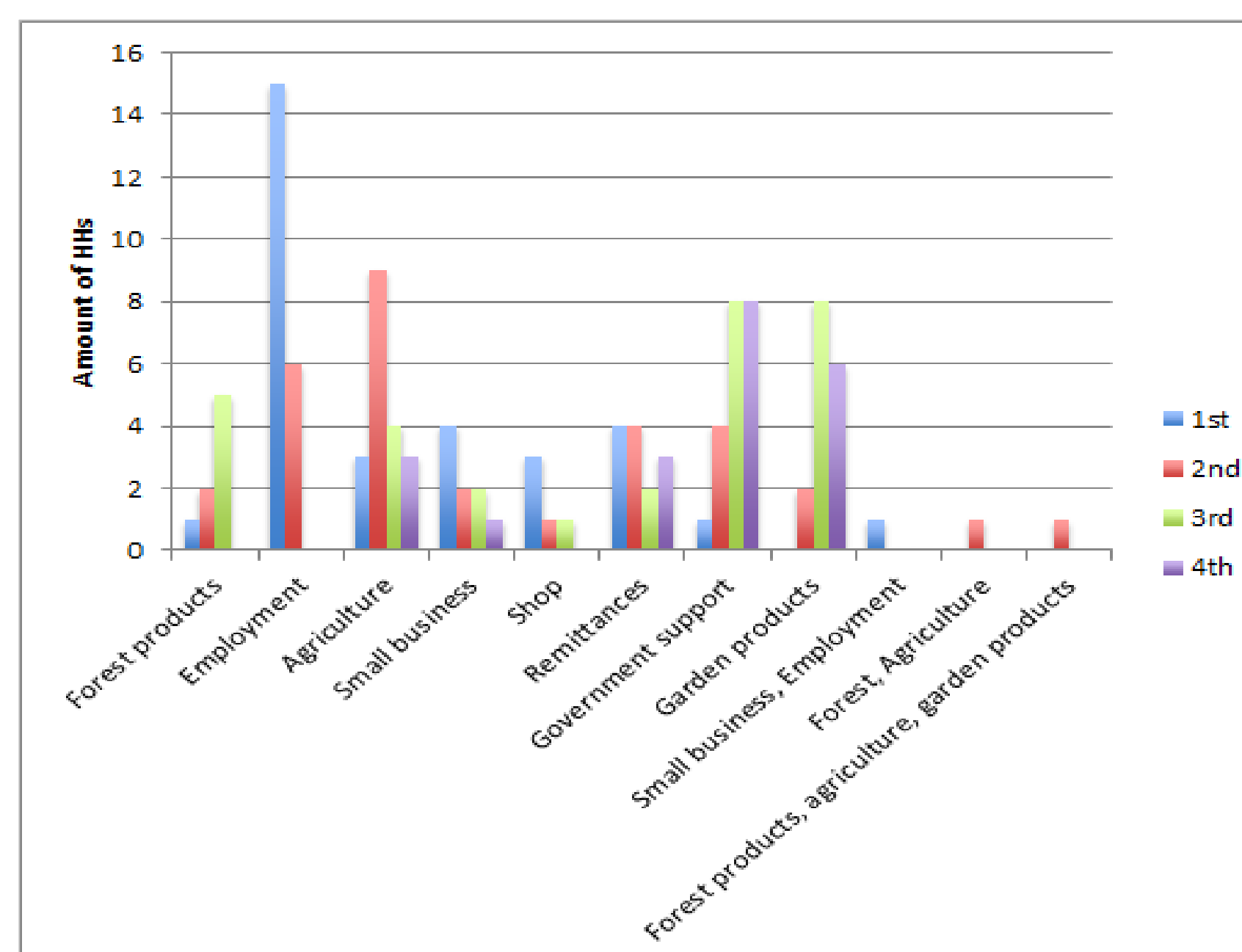


Figure 4. Income generating activities by order of dependence

LAND TENURE ARRANGEMENTS

Our questionnaires showed that 42 % of the HHs who collected forest products owned land, in contrast to 70 % of the HHs who did not collect forest products. These data indicate that HHs that collect forest products are less likely to possess land than HHs who do not use the forest. In addition, the HHs who did and did not collect forest products had respectively 3 and 6 rai (1 rai equals 0.16 ha) calculated as the median. Hence, even though some of the HHs that collect forest products did possess land, they had less land than the non-collecting HHs.

Regarding land titles, the HHs collecting forest products only had temporary land titles (Sor Por Kor), in contrast to the HHs who did not collect forest products, which had mixed land titles including both temporary (Sor Por Kor), secure (Chanote, Sor Kor 1, and Nor Sor Kor 3) and insecure (Por Bor Tor 5). Hence, it may indicate that having a secure land title has an impact on the villagers' use of the forest.

METHODS



Figure 1. PRA session: Seasonal Calendar

Questionnaires:

32 questionnaires were completed by participants that were randomly selected. Participants of the other methods were selected based on the results of the questionnaires.

Interviews:

To key informants:

- Headman of the village
- Officials from protected areas
- Officials from the sub-district

To four households: Different preferences of income-generating activities with different rationales.

Tracking and Participant Observation by joining the villagers on their usual routes to collect forest products. What forest products the villagers collect, how and where?

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) consisted in a Seasonal Calendar and a Participatory Forest Collection Mapping Session to obtain information about collection of forest products (seasonality, diversity, location and quantity). Only villagers who collect forest products participated.

Focus Group: 8 participants divided in two groups answered several questions about forest products, the rationales behind its collection, the access to the forest and their opinions about future ecotourism plans.

Presentation to the villagers: The results were shown to the community to get feedback and to clarify remaining doubts they or us might have had.



Figure 2. A woman collecting ants' eggs

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DEPENDENCY AND RATIONALES

Forest products were not the main income for many households, though it was still an important income source. Some villagers were quite dependent on forest products, since they did not have other opportunities and were lacking human capital, such as education, good health or family members in the working age.

The villagers had different rationales for collecting forest products; it has relatively low investment cost, it gives security in case of failures from other income activities, it takes less time and physical work, it is something they had always done since their childhood, and it is a supplementary income. For almost all households collecting forest products was for economic purposes, but for some it had a great cultural value and were done for pleasure.

Hence, the forest had a gap filling function, a safety net function, supported current consumption or was a supplementary income source, and for few households it was the main income.

ACCESS

The access to surrounding protected areas for collection of forest products differed:

In **Thap Lan National Park**, managers apply the laws and regulations with flexibility to achieve a win-win situation with the villagers, even though the laws are very restrictive regarding the collection of forest products.

In **Sakaerat Biosphere Reserve** local people are not thought of as important actors in the politics of forest conservation. Therefore, more restrictions in the collection of forest products are present, even though sometimes the access to these resources is legal.

Lack of communication between actors arises as an important conflict that can be found in both protected areas. This leads to several conflicts such as the illegal collection of certain forest products (frogs) and the illegal entry to some restricted zones in the protected areas. That could be solved by informing effectively the villagers about the laws and the division of zones in both protected areas.

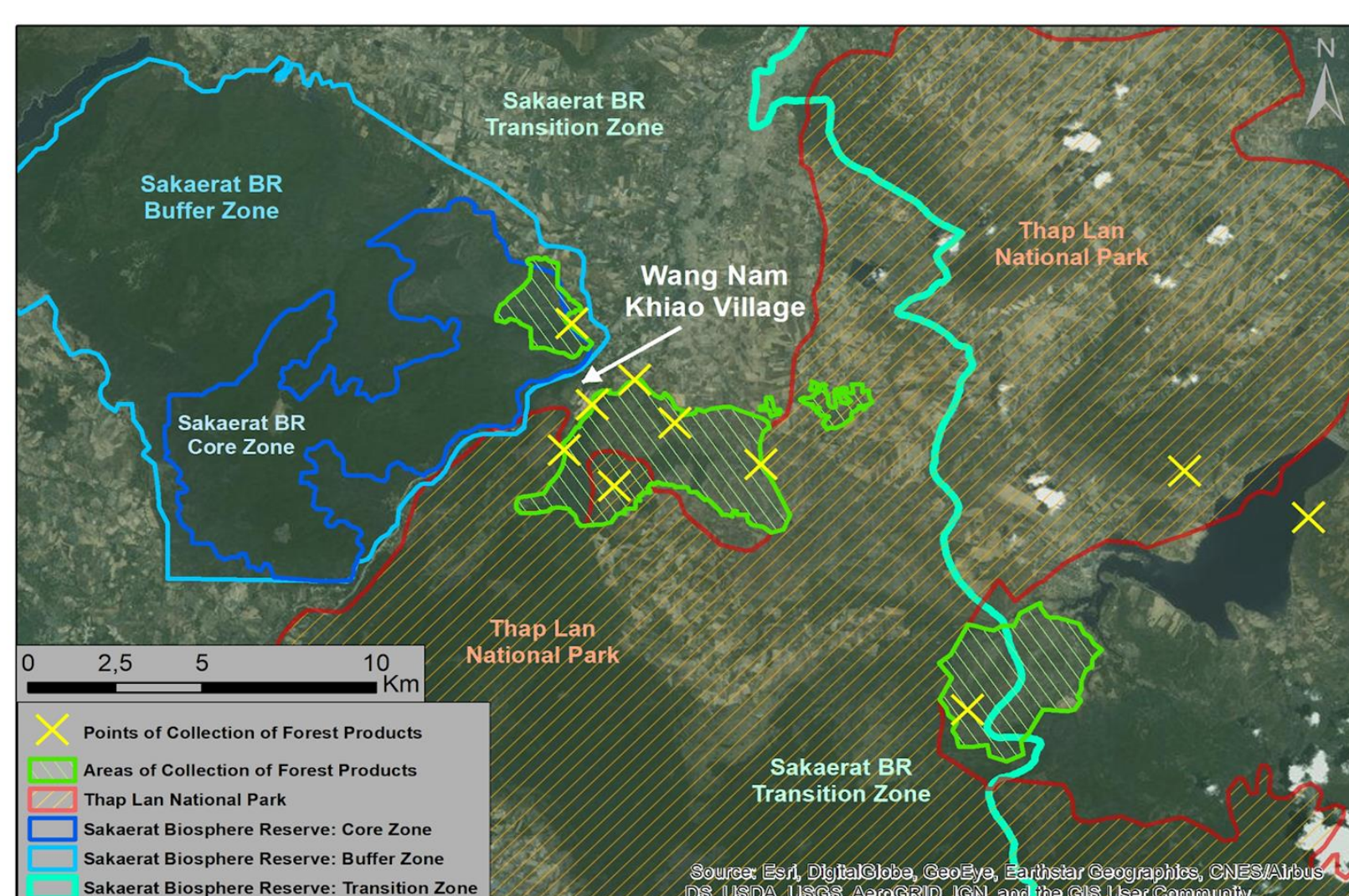


Figure 3. Map of areas of collection of forest products. Results from the PRA

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