

SURVEY ON

Additional and Alternative Occupations

For the Urak Lawoi of Phuket



Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute

Present to **CORDIO** and **Phuket Marine Biological Center**



Survey on Additional and Alternative Occupations for the Urak Lawoi of Phuket

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Foreword

Within the last 30-40 years, the Urak Lawoi have changed from marine hunter-gatherers to artisan fishermen who depend on motors and relatively modern fishing equipment. This requires more investment and indebtedness to middlemen or entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, for the last ten years, fishing has faced more limitations, namely, rules and regulations that restrict the fishing area, equipment, and species to fish; higher costs of fuel and fishing equipment; degradation of marine resources; uncertain income; and more health risks as the Urak Lawoi are the only group in Thailand who use air compressors for very deep-water diving. This risky diving method has made several Urak Lawoi men suffer from the bends and became paralyzed.

Various agencies have given support to Urak Lawoi communities in terms of income-generating activities and alternative occupations. It is unfortunate that data on activities, projects, experiences, successes, failures, and lessons learned have not been documented and analyzed. This study will summarize experiences and lessons learned in the past in order to recommend more appropriate directions for occupational support in the future.

The research team would like to thank those who have provided information- the Urak Lawoi, the Moken, government officers, private sector staff and others, staff of non-governmental organizations and local administrative officers. Several individuals and agencies also helped with collecting data and organizing a meeting to solicit comments and opinions from key stakeholders, and the research team greatly appreciates their kind assistance. Finally, the team would like to thank CORDIO and the Phuket Marine Biological Center for providing both financial and moral support for conducting this study.

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Executive Summary

There is only very limited knowledge management of alternative or supplemental livelihoods or income diversification projects implemented in Thailand focusing on reef-dependent indigenous communities. This is an impediment to designing occupational projects in the future as experiences and lessons learned from previous situations and approaches are lost, and information on what has been attempted is not available. This review study focuses on extracting “lessons learned” from past livelihood projects in three Urak Lawoi indigenous communities in Phuket Province, Thailand: Sapam Village, Laem Tukkae Village, and Rawai Village.

The study will recommend approaches and directions for future alternative occupation support. Research methods include a literature review, interviews and consultations with organizations, local government and other stakeholders, case studies, and a stakeholder meeting.

The major findings from the review survey and the recommendations are as follows:

- The major occupation of the villagers in the three communities is work at small-scale fisheries. Although it involves hardship and uncertainty, it is preferred by many, especially men over 30 years of age, as it is self-employment, and yields a considerable sum of money on “lucky” days. Some Urak Lawoi said they were not interested in any other occupation as their skills are in fishery work, and they do not have educational attainment or any other qualifications to compete in the job market. As former hunter-gatherers who usually go out to sea with their relatives and friends, they do not like jobs in which they are closely supervised or have to follow many rules. Nevertheless, while the men engage in fishery work, many women have much leisure time beyond doing household chores and taking care of the young.
- The main challenge for the Urak Lawoi is that fishing occupations have limitations in terms of increasing fishing restrictions (protected areas, species and equipment restrictions, etc.), the rising cost of equipment and diesel oil, degrading marine resources, debt cycle, income fluctuations, and risk factors. There has been support for Urak Lawoi fisheries in the form of adjusting or shifting fishing equipment in order to obtain sustainable fisheries, training for safe diving, support for fishing equipment (especially after the tsunami of December, 2004), and promoting conservation through local participation.

- Faced with this challenge, more and more Urak Lawoi are seeking non-fishery occupations such as daily wage work (construction, work at fish landings or factories, gardening, etc.), salaried work (dish washing, working as hotel maids, security guards, etc.), alternative self-employment (laundry, collecting recycling materials, raising lobsters, etc.), petty trade (snack stalls, selling fish bait, etc.), traditional performances like rong-ngeng singing and dancing, and tourism-related work (working on speedboats, facilitating “sea walking” along underwater trails, working as tour guides, etc.).
- In the past, there were numerous projects and activities to provide alternative or supplemental livelihood skill training and demonstrations such as boat motor repair and making miniature boats for men, and sewing, batik making, flower making, shredded fish processing, cooking and baking for women. Even useful skills such as English and haircutting were introduced to the Urak Lawoi. But most of these projects and activities were fruitless because:
 - Many were short-term activities, such as providing half-day or one-day training, with no further support in terms of equipment or raw materials/ingredients.
 - The training sessions were conducted with little market support. Even if the knowledge or skill transfer was successful, the Urak Lawoi could not gain any income from it, so they gradually lost interest.
 - Those who worked with the communities did not know the strengths and weaknesses or limitations of the villagers. In addition, there exists a deeply rooted bias against the Urak Lawoi. Therefore, project details, budgets, and success indicators did not address the real needs of the communities. There is also a lack of coordination and collaboration among different agencies or organizations working with the Urak Lawoi.
 - The Urak Lawoi are not keen on long-term investment or long-term planning, so activities that bring short-term financial rewards are likely to be attractive to them. After the tsunami, the communities received relief aid and help in various forms and under different conditions, so community organization is almost impossible, especially when money is involved.
- Priority interventions for community development and livelihood improvement include an increasing effort toward understanding and appreciating the special characteristics of the Urak Lawoi communities, coordinating and integrating work among different agencies and organizations, providing small-scale long-term alternative occupational activities while promoting the market for the Urak Lawoi’s food or crafts, and creating innovative methods for working with the communities.

- Recommendations for future alternative occupational support are as follows :
 - 1. Handicrafts** –Several forms of handicrafts have been introduced in the communities. Further support is needed for a) markets and marketing, b) skill improvement, product improvement and diversification, c) packaging design and production to add value to handicraft products, and d) revolving funds for production.
 - 2. Tourism-related work** – With their skills as swimmers and divers and their knowledge of the marine environment, the Urak Lawoi could engage in marine tourism activities. Future support should include on-the-job training or “learning by doing,” skill improvement (such as communication, languages, water safety, etc.). In addition, Urak Lawoi communities could become eco-tourism sites.
 - 3. mariculture** – Some Urak Lawoi are already engaged in lobster raising. Therefore, some forms of mariculture should be promoted amongst those who show serious interest. While mariculture has a great potential there should be simultaneous sideline activities that bring short-term rewards.
 - There is a general attitude among the villagers that their children and later generations should not continue with fisheries. The parents hope that their children will have a better educational opportunities and land a more secure and “comfortable” job in the future. Thus there may be a trend towards changing occupations for the next generations. However, there is a considerable lack of support in terms of higher education opportunities and identifying appropriate “role models” for the children and teenagers. Therefore, apart from alternative occupational support, there should be a long-term project on enhancing the value of education, encouraging long-term planning and savings, building awareness and participation in marine environmental conservation, and providing community security (such as community land rights).
 - There are still a few Urak Lawoi who remain hunter-gatherers and use traditional methods of fishing. This way of life as traditional hunter-gatherers should be protected and promoted as it is part of the world’s cultural heritage, Such a livelihood is based on indigenous knowledge of the marine environment and represents sustainable fishery work.
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