

Opening Ceremony of the SEAMEO-SPAFA

Regional Workshop on Making Mangrove an Eco-Museum

19-28 March 2007

Bangpakong Bovorn Witthayayon Secondary School
Chachoengsao, Thailand

Opening Address by
Professor Dr. Wichit Srisa-an
Minister of Education of Thailand
19 March 2007

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this Regional Workshop on Making Mangrove an Eco-Museum here in my home province of Chachoengsao. It is indeed reassuring to see so many delegates from Southeast Asia as this reaffirms the importance we all attach to the careful and resourceful management of mangroves.

When we think of mangroves we think of aquatic nurseries and complex and diverse wildlife habitats. As we know, mangroves support eco-systems of biological diversity, and are sources of productivity in terms of aquaculture, fisheries and forestry. Another very important aspect of mangroves is shoreline stabilization as they can help protect coastal areas from severe wave damage and erosion. Sadly it took the tsunami of 2004 to really highlight this fact.

Establishing museums out of mangrove swamps can contribute to the conservation and management of mangrove eco-systems. And this is why we are here today.

In Thailand alone, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) latest survey estimates that mangrove coverage has shrunk from 1.14 million rai in 1961 to 446,062 rai in 2006. This is the result of encroachment for shrimp farming, illegal logging, and coastal erosion. This mangrove destruction must be stopped.

One way to do this is to establish eco- museums so that we can disseminate information to raise public awareness and appreciation of the importance of mangroves. In this way too, the local communities living near mangroves become the guardians and conservators of the mangrove plantations themselves.

This is the idea at Bangpakong. But as well as promoting community involvement we also have the unique opportunity to directly reach our youths as the Bangpakong Mangrove Eco-Museum is situated within eleven hectares of land and mangroves that also houses the Bangpakong Bovorn Witthayayon secondary school.

The school's alumni association which includes Dr. Pisit and myself as members have been advocating the development and establishment of an eco-museum here as well as a water culture and sports centre. We have been fortunate to have SEAMEO –SPAFA extend regular technical and academic assistance on this matter.

However, this is the first regional workshop to be held here and I truly believe that with your knowledge and experience a tangible outcome will be the better management of the Bangpakong mangrove eco-systems and the improved presentation and display of our mangrove eco-museum “exhibits”.

I wholeheartedly agree with the Director of SEAMEO- SPAFA that the mangrove here represents one of a number of types of resources for education. Let us take this case as an example and make other types of resources a school or community may have in plenty available for educational purposes for all.

I wish you all the best in your endeavours over the coming days and look forward to studying the outputs and recommendations arising from this workshop. I also hope that you will all have the opportunity to enjoy your stay here in Thailand.

I now have the pleasure to officially declare this workshop open.

Thank you.