

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Human has for centuries relied on forest resources for food, housing, clothing and medicine. However destruction and reduction of forest area affect people who rely on the forest as their some of food (FAO, 1989). In Thailand, it was found that only 26 percent of total land were left as forest in 1993 (The Royal Forestry Department, 1994), declining from 40 percent in 1982. The loss of biological diversity was reported to be widespread.

Non timber forest products (NTFPs) are very important to rural people especially forest dwellers. Data and information on utilization of forest in Thailand are scare and incomplete. Most data are NTFPs utilization of Karen tribes while data about forest utilization by Hmong tribes are scare.

In upland communities of Thailand, people's livelihood depends heavily forests and on the natural resource. People's indigenous knowledge was created by experience and learning for a long time. They have knowledge of natural resource utilization and transfer these knowledge from generation to generation. Such knowledge covers not only the use of plants or animals, but also the value of cultural believes (Santasombat, 1999). Indigenous knowledge is related to society, culture, natural resource conservation, and management. Therefore, the reduction of forest area will affect the loss of biodiversity and indigenous knowledge of natural resource utilization. It will affect the change of people's livelihood, production system, belief, culture, and social structure (Boonchai, 1997).

There are many studies about indigenous knowledge of various tribes in term of wild plant utilization such as food, medicine, belief and medical treatment. Most of

the studies were conducted on the knowledge of local medicine and treatment (Pornsiripong, *et al.*, 1996). While the study on utilization of herbal plants and food plants in term of biodiversity in Thailand has not been widespread or widely published (Paisatchayaperk, 1995).

1.2. Rationale

In upland communities, forest products are very important for hill tribe people in both wood and non – wood forest products (WFPs and NWFPs) because most of hill tribe people are in the forest. The research focuses on wild plant utilization by Hmong women and their role in household food production because they spend time collecting wild plant and other NWFPs and prepared food for household members.

Concerning social aspects of Hmong community, most of Hmong men are household' heads and take charge in decision making in the household such as household income and expenditure, fieldwork, and communication with outsiders while Hmong women take charge mostly role in housework. Hmong women must get up early for preparing food for household members and animals. Then they go to household field and work together with men. After they work on fieldwork they must prepare food, cloths for all household members, childcare, and do housework.

Because women cook food for household members, they prepare ingredients for cooking such as meat, vegetables, and some plants for food. They work in home garden growing corn, bean, cucumber, taro, and other food crops. In some households, women work on medicinal plots around their house, they grow medicinal plants for food and medicine. Thus, women would know about species of food crops and other plants for household use. In the same time, women will know species of wild plant for food and medicine.

There are studies about hill tribe communities are about Karen community, most studies focussed on their history, language, traditional beliefs, costumes, and livelihood of Karen communities. The study about Hmong community is fewer in number.

There are many studies about the Hmong tribe but most of the studies are about their livelihood, health, history, traditional clothes, ceremonies and beliefs. There are very few studies about NTFPs utilization. On the other hand, the studies about Hmong women often involve social aspects include social status of women, health care of birth, and handicrafts such as sewing their traditional clothes. There are few studies about responsibilities of Hmong women in household food consumption and/ or agricultural production.

Because of this reason, this study focusses on forest utilization especially with wild plants by Hmong women because utilization of some wild plants is an important factor about household food consumption. Because of Hmong women spend time preparing food for household members and their animals. They collected and gathered some wild plants for daily household consumption and other purposes based on their indigenous knowledge.

1.3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the relationship between wild plant utilization and household production and consumption by gender. The study focuses on the relationship between household tasks and production tasks and wild plant utilization of women and men. The household can get food and income from crops, livestock and other activities. In the same time, they can get food from the forests. They will gather wild

plants for household consumption as food, medicine, and other purposes and they get money from selling some wild plants and other forest products.

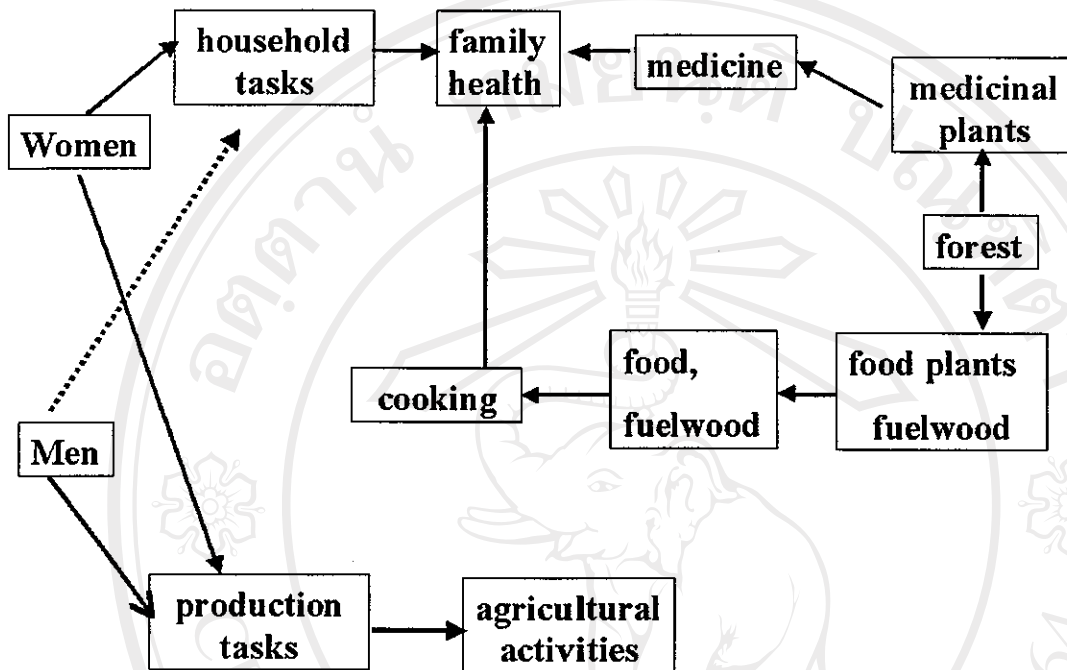


Figure 1 Conceptual model of production system

This study would like to answer the question following;

Who engages in different farm activities?

Who has important role in wild plant utilization and consumption and what are the different roles between men and women in these aspects?

Who has access to and control of available wild plants?

Who makes decision in relation to forest resources?

1.4. Scope of the study

This research focuses on the important of indigenous knowledge of wild plant utilization especially medicinal plants and food plants, which are used in Hmong communities and the diffusion process of knowledge. This research emphasizes the utilization of wild plants by Hmong women for household consumption and other purposes. This study is concerned about women's role in wild plant utilization compared with men's role. This research will evaluate only direct use value of these wild plants.

1.5. Objectives of this study

1. To describe women's and men's roles in food production system and their utilization of forest resources.
2. To identify uses of wild plants.
3. To examine women's indigenous knowledge and its roles in forest resource management.
4. To identify women's access to and control of resources and how this affects household production and consumption.
5. To evaluate economic values of wild plants which are used in household livelihood

1.6. Usefulness of this study

The study of indigenous knowledge and gender roles in utilizing the diversity of wild plants created understanding of the importance of the forests among the villagers. Planners and policy makers can make use of the information for effective

planning and implementation on the relation to the aspect of biodiversity conservation and rural development.

1.7. Definition

Indigenous knowledge means as local knowledge, which is accumulated for along time in community. This study focus only on local knowledge about wild plant utilization for household uses.

Non wood forest products defined as all biological materials other than timber that are extracted wild or semi – domesticated sources in forest for human use such as shoot, barks, tuber, flower, leaves, root of plants, gum, honey, and wood for special uaes.

Wild plants mean plant, which can growth in the forest by nature and are not perennial tree. They are plants, which are not use as timber wood.

Food plant means wild plant and forest products, which villagers use for food

Medicinal plants mean wild plants which villagers use as medicine for reduces general symptom.

Fodder means plants and forest products which villagers get from the forest or their fields as food for their animals.