

## Community Participation in Research on Seagrass Ecosystem in Krabi Province, Thailand

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Universities and research institutions in Thailand are opening up to the real problems at local communities. They are embarking on various community outreach and engagement activities involving local school students as research assistants. The present paper provides a case study on research collaboration between the Marine Biodiversity Research Group of Ramkhamhaeng University (MBRG-RU) and a local community at Koh Pu, Krabi Province in southern Thailand. The main objective was to examine seagrass community changes, especially population dynamics of an economically important gastropod *Strombus canarium*. The research plan was developed as working partnerships between the local community and the university research group in order to involve local people in planning their future of sustainable uses of seagrass associated organisms and to raise public awareness on conservation of coastal resources. The MBRG-RU provided a research fund, equipment and training a group of local school students on monitoring methods of seagrass ecosystem. The students surveyed and collected samples according to the planned schedule every month. The researchers worked and discussed with the students quarterly for data analyses. The study in details, such as identification of seagrass associated organisms and analyzing environmental parameters by using sophisticated instruments, was carried out at the MBRG-RU laboratory. The research project was strongly supported by their parents and local community leaders and the research data were used by local people for giving them the information about status and trends of their harvested species. We recommend that one important role for universities in Thailand is to empower local people for managing natural resources and environment therefore research and teaching activities should be integrated in a way that leads to a mutual learning process among all stakeholders concerned. Universities and research institutes have opportunities to conduct research relevant to local community needs and to provide service learning for local school students. Local schools and universities should offer credits for students for working on research projects as part of their curriculum. We should emphasize on enhancing local capabilities and networks among various local stakeholders through small long-term research projects. Financial sustainability for research is very important to facilitate further participation of local communities.

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