

INVOLVING LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN COASTAL WETLAND RESTORATION: A CASE STUDY OF MANGROVE REHABILITATION EFFORTS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND By Paul L.A. Erfemeijer¹ and Nukul Ratanadukul²: ¹Wetlands International - Thailand Programme, P.O. Box 21, Si Phuwanat, Hat Yai 90113, THAILAND, ²Faculty of Science and Technology, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani 94000, THAILAND:—Intensive logging and conversion for shrimp aquaculture have caused a rapid loss of large areas of productive mangrove forests and other coastal wetlands in Thailand over the past three decades. Although detailed information on the techniques for mangrove reforestation is available, and the government as well as private sector appear to be willing to invest huge amounts of money into mangrove rehabilitation, the success of these efforts are often limited, in terms of time and area. Besides technical and financial constraints, the success of coastal restoration efforts may be hampered by issues relating to land ownership, land-use conflicts, and the lack of follow-up and attention after initial planting. An increasing number of projects and initiatives have emerged throughout Thailand that are involving local communities in the planning and implementation of mangrove reforestation efforts. Recognition of the user-rights of these communities in sharing the benefits of the rehabilitation (*e.g.*, extraction of non-timber products) through the granting of community forest status, can provide an important incentive for their active involvement in replanting and follow-up, to ensure high rates of survival and success. This paper examines three case studies of community participation in mangrove rehabilitation in Trang, Songkhla and Pattani provinces, Southern Thailand. The three examples differ in approach and in stage of progress (timescale), ranging from a low-key long-term grassroots initiatives with NGO support emphasising community capacity building for self-reliance, to ICZM style projects with major technical, academic and financial inputs from outside. All three examples clearly demonstrate the benefits of community participation in mangrove rehabilitation. The building of confidence and understanding within the community may be time-consuming and hamper immediately measurable progress in replanting. This investment, however, will pay off in the long term because it builds a strong sense of ownership and commitment within the community and therefore ensures the long-term sustainability of the rehabilitation. By combining the rehabilitation with environmental awareness building and socio—economic development activities, this approach will not only ensure successful reforestation of mangroves but also contribute to the prevention of further degradation.