

# AIT joins the FreshCo Partnership



**A**IT's two Danida-supported Programs – *Integrated Tropical Coastal Zone Management (ITCZM, SERD) and Modeling Tools for Environmental Resources Management (MTERM, SCE)* – have joined the United Nations' Environment Programme (UNEP)'s FreshCo Partnership. AIT Newsletter talked to Dr. Ole Pedersen, an Associate Professor, ITCZM, AIT-Danida Co-operation, SERD, and Dr. Somsak Boromthananat of ITCZM/Aquaculture and Aquatic Resources Management Field of Study, about the partnership.

FreshCo Partnership is a partnership initiative on linking Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) to promote more efficient methods for management of fresh, coastal and marine water resources,



*Dr. Ole Pedersen*

including protection of the productivity and biodiversity of aquatic ecosystems. The proposal of this initiative was launched by the United Nations Environment Programme's Global Program in Action (UNEP/GPA) and UNEP Collaborating Center for Water and Environment (UCC-Water) during the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in August-September 2002. UNEP – through GPA and UCC-Water – serves as both the initiator and the leading partner of the partnership.

“The FreshCo Partnership is about linking freshwater and coast,” Dr Ole Pedersen told the AIT Newsletter. It may seem very simple to manage, but in reality the administration and control of freshwater like rivers and lakes, and coastal areas are separated in almost all countries. It's managed by different ministries, line agencies and in many cases, people do not care who's managing it. They are just using their resources, and in Asia where there are many people in a limited area, there's a stronger need for proper management of these open access resources.”

FreshCo Partnership will work through North-South and South-South cooperation between governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, communities and private sector representatives. The partnership is open to all interested parties. Cooperation and links will be

established to other relevant networks and partnerships. In addition to UNEP, member organizations presently include FAO, IOC/UNESCO, EU, IUCN and the World Bank.

Many of the world's coastlines are suffering badly because of human activities. About 50 percent of all human populations live within 200 km of the coast line, and more people are coming to coastal zones every day.

"There are important linkages between freshwater issues in the upstream river basins and water issues in adjoining coastal zones," Dr Pedersen continued. "Changes in stream flows caused by irrigation, hydropower and water supply have impacts on salinities in estuaries and lagoons. Furthermore, land use changes like deforestation and intensive 'green revolution' agriculture have also increased load of sediment, nutrients and toxic pesticides. There are discharges of household wastewater and toxic industrial chemicals, which are deteriorating the water quality and causing significant negative impacts on coastal ecosystems, and on the living conditions of millions of poor people who depend on coastal fisheries.

"To solve such problems, we need integrated approaches-



*Dr. Somsak Boromthanarat*

integrated water resources management (IWRM) and integrated coastal zone management (ICZM). However, the Rio Declaration on Agenda 21 in 1992 noted that the fragmentation of responsibilities for water resources development among sectoral agencies is proving to be an even greater impediment to promoting integrated water resources management than had previously been anticipated," Dr. Pedersen added.

Talking about recent FreshCo Partnership activities, Dr. Pedersen mentioned a technical workshop organized in Songkhla in January 2003. The workshop was attended by participants from North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and many places in Asia. The purpose was to pick a few good case studies and results and later present them in the Third

World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan, in March 2003. The Songkhla Lake basin was chosen as a key case story.

"Some of the most interesting cases came from Africa, Denmark and from India. Although cases come from different continents, they share common problems. What we can be proud of here in Thailand is that we are ahead of action to solve the problems, compared to Japan, Denmark and Africa. And I think it's mainly due to cultural differences. In Denmark and Japan, you can decide in the government or in the parliament that from now on you have to do like this and then people just do it, more or less. In Thailand, you can do nothing without involving people in the solutions. Of course, you can always press a solution on people, but it won't last longer than the funding of the project," Dr. Pedersen noted.

Another activity of the FreshCo Partnership was its involvement in the Third World Water Forum in March 2003, where further activities to be carried out by the FreshCo Partnership were identified, including involvement of more partners. With the Third World Water Forum now completed, the Partnership will further develop and maintain a public (internet based) ICARM

## Partnerships

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(integrated coastal area and river basin management)

ToolBox based on experiences and best practices. It is a virtual toolbox that is a systematic collection and dissemination of experiences and lessons that can be accessed by the institutions such as AIT to solve practical problems or access it in order to present relevant case studies to educate future generations of coastal managers.

Some more immediate activities of the Partnership include the identification of case studies, practices and experiences with respect to integrated river basin and coastal area management (ICARM) and the establishment of a discussion group in the Virtual Water Forum on ICARM.

How did AIT become part of the FreshCo Partnership? Dr. Somsak noted that the partnership did not have a capacity building component in the region, and this offered a possibility for AIT, as a regional institution. “It’s good that AIT should be part of the FreshCo Partnership. We saw the gap. FreshCo was established one year ago. They have been working in Africa and now they are looking to work somewhere in Thailand. They have been



working with the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning, under the Ministry of Science and Technology, which is now the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

“They invited us to join the partnership since we are a regional institution. They are looking for some experience in doing case studies. AIT has a lot of experience here. This subject is a learning process, involving sharing of experiences. At least, our ITCZM program here needs to be publicized, and will be more exposed to the outside world,” Dr. Somsak continued.

There are certain linkages between the Partnership and AIT’s Danida-funded ITCZM and MTERM Programs, since the FreshCo initiative is supported by a Danish government agency through UNEP.

Dr. Pedersen continued: “If we already have a lot of experience in Thailand which we deeply feel that other countries could benefit from, why not try

to move Thailand and move AIT into a position where we can make it visible to the surrounding world. FreshCo is probably the best forum to do that.”

Since January, AIT and the FreshCo

Partnership have tried to develop the case studies together, agreeing in principle to use Songkhla Lake as an international learning base.

There is also another candidate from Africa. However, AIT will participate in any case that has been chosen. “Eventually, we will pick two or three cases to work on. One would probably be from the developed world – Japan, Denmark or Holland, perhaps. Then, we will probably end up with an African and an Asian case. And for sure, the Asian case will be Thai,” Dr. Pedersen added.

“Integrated approaches are still so new that people do not agree on how to interpret the basic principle. AIT still has the opportunity to put our fingerprint, put our personal, AIT’s, Thailand’s, the region’s fingerprint on how to deal with these issues in the future. That is a strong driving force for me personally, because we can see that the work we are doing is making a difference to people’s livelihood.” (by *Natnipha Vimuktanon*)