



# THE CURSE OF INDUSTRIAL ESTATE IN MAP TA PHUT COMMUNITY

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**Economic growth plays a vital role in a country's development. Industrial estate development is imperative to connect with local and foreign investors to generate income for the country's growth. Equally, there are enormous amounts of environmental and social impacts happening. A country's development should not only be focused on the economy. It also has to consider the local communities' concerns on environmental and health impacts.**

In 1989, Map Ta Phut opened as a government project in Rayong province. Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate has already been running for over three decades. At present, the industrial estate is home to large factories, including petrochemical plants, oil refineries, coal-fired power stations, and iron and steel facilities. It creates job opportunities and is promoted by investors as a model for infrastructure development. However, the industrial estate has significantly made an undesirable impact on land acquisition and the health of villagers and surrounding communities. For many, the industrial estate is considered a curse.

## **Unlawful land acquisition**

The Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate was built on farmlands and local communities. Villagers had been moved without any resettlement and fair compensation to make way for the

development project. The local communities also were not adequately informed by government agencies and investors.

Noi, an 83-year-old community leader of the Eastern People's Network, said, "They did not announce what kind of law and policies they applied to take our land. There was no explanation and no negotiation. Other villagers disagreed with them and were forced to leave their land without compensation."

The villagers did not get a chance to participate in the planning process for the Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate. Moreover, the local communities were not aware of the process of calculating the compensation. Even though compensation was unfair, there was no mechanism for them to raise their voice. There was no negotiation and no public participation. The decisions were made top-down.

***"The authorities came. They just said they would take the land with a specific compensation. The amount could have been higher in the normal market. It was an unfair compensation. I don't know in detail how they calculated it. I don't know their process. They just called us to get money. I went there, signed the document, and took the money."***

*- Noi, a community leader*



*Community leader Noi at the meeting*

Losing land rights has directly threatened the livelihoods and food security of the local community. Before the industrial estate came, the primary income sources for the Map Ta Phut community were fishing and agriculture, such as cassava, rice, and coconut farming. After the villagers' lands were taken, the community members became landless and had lesser incomes, with some being jobless.

### **Living in a poisonous environment**

The local communities have been impacted not only by unlawful land acquisition but also by the toxins and pollution released by the industrial estate. In 2017, according to the World Resources Institute, Map Ta Phut was one of the most toxic and polluted areas, with a history of industrial accidents, illegal hazardous waste dumping, and toxic factories. It comes without a surprise that many villagers in the local community have been suffering from health-related issues because of toxins and pollution. According to the provincial health office, there was an increased number of birth deformities, disabilities, and chromosome abnormalities in 1997-2001. The company or government did not take responsibility for medical treatment, and the impacted local community had to look after themselves.

Noi said, "Most community members are suffering from lung cancers, skin diseases, and breathing issues. My mother, mother-in-law, and son-in-law all have lung cancer. When my son-in-law got sick, he went to hospital. But before he received the diagnosis, he died."

### **Oil spill incidents**

In 2013 and 2022, the oil spills in the sea impacted not only the marine life and livelihood but also the health of fishermen.

Lamon, a leader of a fishermen group in the Paknam Village, said, "The oil spills caused much damage to the ecosystem and marine life. Moreover, when fishermen went fishing, they got skin allergies, and some got sick".

### **The communities' demands**

The communities want the government to support and take action to restore the environment. Moreover, they want access to information, including detailed impacts of the hazardous waste and the timeline of the release of waste.

Noi said: "I want the investors and government to think about the benefits and livelihoods of local people. They should provide support to us. The government never supports us. If they are looking at economic development, they should also look at the community or grassroots development."

**Disclaimer:** *This paper represents the opinions of the authors based on their interviews with the community members during the EarthRights School learning field visit in 2023. This paper does not represent the position or opinions of EarthRights or any of the organization's staff. The authors bear responsibility for the accuracy of content in this paper.*