Climate Disinformation in Thailand:
Negating Indigenous Peoples' Identity

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PREFACE

Asia Centre is pleased to present the report *Climate Disinformation in Thailand: Negating Indigenous Peoples' Identity,* produced in partnership with International Media Support (IMS). This publication is part of a broader series assessing the impact of climate disinformation on Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The series comprises one baseline study for each country and a regional report.
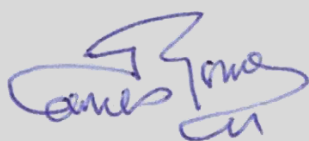
It unpacks the information disorder to identify the specific forms of climate disinformation and their corresponding impact on IPs' agency, identities and rights to protect their natural environment. The report provides targeted recommendations for a range of stakeholders, including the international community, international non-governmental organisations, governments, local civil society organisations, IPs, the media and technology companies.

Climate disinformation is an increasingly pressing issue in the Asia-Pacific, emerging alongside the broader rise of disinformation that is taking place both online and offline. In the case of climate disinformation, both digital and offline channels spread false environmental narratives whose intent is to deceive the public, distort climate discourse, and weaken inclusive and effective responses to climate change and deforestation. Disinformation, deforestation, and IPs' rights have each been individually studied at national and international levels; however, the impact of climate disinformation on IPs' ability to respond to climate change remains under-researched. This forms the rationale for this project.

The dissemination of climate disinformation is particularly concerning for IPs, who often reside in forested areas most affected by these crises and are therefore disproportionately exposed to the environmental, social and political threats they pose. This is where this series makes a meaningful contribution. It examines how climate disinformation circulates – both online through mass and social media and offline – through community-level interactions. It assesses both the direct consequences, such as exclusion from climate discourse, forced evictions, criminalisation, intimidation, physical violence and the broader contextual factors that enable such outcomes. In doing so, the series enhances understanding of how climate disinformation undermines Indigenous communities' ability to respond to climate change.

Asia Centre hopes that this report – and the others in the series – will, through the lens of climate disinformation, offer the international community, national governments, and local stakeholders a range of ideas on how to protect the environment and, in doing so, help secure the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous communities.

Sincerely,

Dr James Gomez
Regional Director
Asia Centre

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Thailand, Indigenous Peoples (IPs) have historically endured state policies and actions which suppress their identities and reclassify them as "outsiders". With rapid digitalisation, climate disinformation has emerged as a new tool of oppression. It not only distorts facts about climate change, including its causes, contributing factors and necessary solutions, but it also actively perpetuates the negation of IPs' identities.

Following the 2014 coup d'état, which positioned the military and security agencies as lead actors in the nationalistic "Forest Reclamation Policy", false climate narratives have intensified. Such false narratives disproportionately affect nature- and forest-dependent IPs, who make up nearly 14% (roughly 10 million) of the population (Thairath, 2025b) and whose survival, livelihoods are tied to ancestral lands and natural resources. Even though there were some legal developments in 2025 Thailand to advance IP rights, on the ground, the community continues to be disadvantaged.

This report examines how climate disinformation reinforces the systemic negation of IP identity, undermining traditional practices, weakening advocacy for rights and obstructing inclusive climate and forest governance by making three key contributions.

First, it identifies four distinct forms of climate disinformation in Thailand:

- One-sided reporting, where the media spotlights government and corporate initiatives while omitting their social and environmental harms, whether due to political pressure or economic incentives.

- Greenwashing, where corporations exaggerate or misrepresent their sustainability practices to obscure their ongoing environmentally destructive activities.

- False climate solutions promoted as climate action which fails to address the root causes of climate change while leaving IP communities socially and economically disadvantaged.

- Scapegoating of IPs where Indigenous communities are falsely portrayed as primary drivers of deforestation, legitimising displacement and marginalisation.

Second, it demonstrates four ways in which climate disinformation harms IPs, each reinforcing the negation of their identities:

- Exclusion from decision-making: by either barring their participation outright or dismissing their inputs in decision-making processes, IPs' Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is removed thereby negating their identities as owners and stewards of their land.

- Criminalisation: the strategic misuse of "climate change" laws to negate IP identity and erase the legitimacy of IPs' traditions and practices in environmental stewardship; and the use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) intimidate advocates for challenging climate disinformation.

- Forced evictions: conservation and development narratives justify deterritorialisation that severs spiritual, cultural and economic ties to ancestral lands which forms the core of IPs' identities.

- Intimidation and violence: harassment, threats and attacks undermining the capacity of IPs to resist projects and actions that harm them, their environment and their way of life.

Third, to address climate disinformation and safeguard Indigenous Peoples' (IPs) rights and identities in Thailand, this report outlines a list of multi-stakeholder recommendations:

- UN bodies should integrate climate disinformation into their human rights monitoring and climate action frameworks and provide guidance to Thailand on implementing its international obligations.

- The Thai government should embed safeguards against climate disinformation into national climate and environmental policies, strengthen legal protections for IPs, ensure meaningful participation of IP communities in decision-making and improve transparency and accountability in environmental governance.

- International NGOs (INGOs) should collaborate with IP organisations to map, document and respond to climate disinformation, provide sustained technical capacity-building and funding, and support advocacy and litigation to defend IP rights.

- Civil society organisations (CSOs) should monitor disinformation targeting IPs, co-develop counter-narratives with IP communities and educational content to empower both IPs and the broader public and expand legal aid support.

- The media sector should prioritise constructive and investigative journalism on climate, environmental, and IP issues; expand coverage in Indigenous languages and culturally appropriate formats; collaborate with IP organisations on fact-checking and monitoring disinformation; and amplify Indigenous perspectives through both national and international outlets.

- Technology companies should strengthen content moderation against climate disinformation, flag misleading project information and invest in digital literacy and connectivity initiatives for rural and Indigenous communities.

- Indigenous communities and organisations should build monitoring networks to identify and counter disinformation, strengthen alliances with independent and Indigenous media, conduct and participate in capacity-building workshops and use digital tools to amplify their voices and safeguard knowledge.

These recommendations seek to promote more inclusive, rights-based and evidence-informed climate governance in Thailand. They call for multi-stakeholder engagement to reimagine climate governance through a climate justice lens, grounded in transparency, accountability and civic participation.

Above all, in Thailand, safeguarding Indigenous identities must be seen as central to effective climate action: recognising IPs not as "outsiders" but as fellow Thais whose cultural knowledge and custodianship of ecosystems are indispensable in combating climate change. Only by doing so can Thailand achieve climate policies that are sustainable and just.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFNC	Anti-Fake News Centre
CPF	Charoen Pokphand Foods
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DNP	Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
HRC	Human Rights Council
IP	Indigenous People
KII	Key Informant Interview
MNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
NEQA	Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act (NEQA) (1992)
NLPB	National Land Policy Board
SLAPP	Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation
TGO	Thailand Greenhouse Gas Management Organisation
T-VER	Thailand Voluntary Emission Reduction
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programm
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1. Introduction

Climate disinformation is increasingly prevalent in Thailand and its circulation is reinforcing the long-standing efforts to "negate" – dismiss or make subservient – Indigenous Peoples' (IPs) identities. This report examines the dynamics of climate disinformation in Thailand and specifically its impact on IPs with the aim of addressing the intersecting issues of climate change, disinformation and IP marginalisation. This chapter begins by providing context on the situation of IPs, the threats posed by climate change, the digitalisation of the media and rise of disinformation in Thailand.

1.1. Methodology

The research for this report consisted of three phases: desk research, field research and review. First, desk research was conducted between June and August 2025 to examine the state of IPs, climate change, media landscape and climate disinformation in Thailand. The research was instrumental in defining terms and themes, framing the study's scope and identifying knowledge gaps. It drew on a range of primary and secondary sources in Thai (and English), including international and national legal frameworks, national development and climate strategies and reports by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and media outlets.

Second, during the field research phase, the Asia Centre team conducted 10 online key informant interviews (KIIs) between August and September 2025 to address knowledge gaps identified in the first phase. All respondents[1] were Thai speakers and included representatives from Indigenous communities and Indigenous CSOs as well as professionals from the media and academic sectors (see Annexe I for respondent profiles). A focus group discussion (FGD), amongst representatives of Indigenous CSOs, was held on 30 October 2025 (profile of FGD participants in Annexe 2) to validate preliminary findings and inform policy recommendations.

Third, following desk research and interviews, a first draft was sent by the Asia Centre team to International Media Support (IMS) for an initial review on 29 August 2025. A national convening was convened on 30 September 2025 in Chiang Mai, Thailand to present and validate the key findings. All feedback received was incorporated prior to the publication of this report.

Key Terms

"False information" can be understood through three interrelated concepts: **Disinformation**, **Misinformation**, and **Malinformation**. The key difference between them lies in the **intent** to deceive.

Disinformation refers to false information that is intentionally created and spread to mislead or manipulate audiences (United Nations Development Programme, 2022).

Malinformation, while based on real information, is shared with harmful intent, often by distorting context, exposing private data, or weaponising facts to undermine individuals or groups (Ibid.).

Misinformation, in contrast, involves the sharing of false or misleading content without the intent to deceive; those sharing it may genuinely believe the information to be true (Ibid.).

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[1] The identities of the respondents has been anonymised due to safety and security reasons.

Climate disinformation is false content deliberately spread to mislead people about climate change and deforestation for political, financial or ideological gain by those with vested interests in denying its reality or impacts (UNDP, 2025).

1.2.   Background

This section examines two key elements that shape the impact of climate disinformation on IPs in Thailand. First, it provides an overview of IP communities in the country, including their demographic distribution, geographical concentration, livelihoods and the land disputes affecting their ancestral territories. Second, it highlights how climate change – but also policies by the Thai government purportedly to address climate change – threaten the identities and livelihoods of IPs.

1.2.1. Indigenous Peoples in Thailand

In 2024, Thailand's population reached 66 million (National Statistical Office, 2023). About one in seven (around 10 million) people self-identify as IPs across 60 distinct but unofficial groups and primarily reside in three geographical regions (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2025; Senate of Thailand, 2024). First, the hill tribes from the north and north-west. Second, northeastern communities scattered across the Korat plateau. Lastly, the hunter-gatherers and fisher communities from the South (Ibid.). Their geographical diversity shapes distinct cultural identities, livelihoods and relationships with their environment.

In the northern highlands, nine *chao khao* ("Hill tribes") are officially recognised by the Thai government, including the Akha, Hmong, Htin, Karen, Khamu, Lahu, Lisu, Lua and Lu-Mien (Ibid.; Government of Thailand, 2011). The latest record of their total population, in 2002, amounted to 925,825 across 20 provinces,[2] notably Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Kanchanburi and Tak. They rely on traditional rotating cultivation[3] in forests for food security and agriculture, and rituals that cater to their animist beliefs (Sukkasame, 2021). Some tribes integrate blended elements of Buddhism and Christianity (Royal Vacation, 2024; Betgem, 2019) into their rituals.

IPs in the Northeast mainly inhabit remote lowlands in Surin, Buriram and Sisaket provinces (Joshua Project, n.d.). Communities like the North Khmer people amount to approximately 1 million individuals, while the Kuy people number up to 432,000 (Minority Rights Group, 2018). Mostly as rice farmers, their cultural heritage is linked to agriculture (Elephant Database, 2025). Around 83% of the population follows a mix of Buddhism and animistic beliefs. Another group, among many more, are the Nyah Khurs (or Chao Bon) residing in Phetchabun, Nakhon Ratchasima and Chaiyaphum.

In the South, the 13,000[4] *chao ley* (sea gypsies) people who reside along the Andaman Sea Coast, primarily in Ranong, Phang Nga and Phuket (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2025; Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University, 2021), rely on the ocean for sustenance (Granbom, 2005). Their beliefs are centred around the natural spirits of the sea. There are also roughly 350-400 Maniq hunter-gatherers living in the Titwangsa and Banthat Mountains, practising animism and sustaining themselves from their knowledge of the forest ecosystem (Ardsmiti & Loekbubpa, 2023).

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[2] The official census records those exclusively within northern Thailand. However, the actual number of IP communities and the geographical regions they reside in are estimated to be much higher. This is due to gaps in surveys, undertaken inaccurately without full and effective participation of all IP communities and stateless individuals.

[3] Traditional livelihoods and practices of Indigenous Peoples are frequently misrepresented through disinformation, particularly the false claims that they are responsible for deforestation and forest burning, as further detailed in Section 2.5.

[4] Note concerns regarding the actual number of Indigenous Peoples due to varying definitions and difficulties in measurement.

While IPs constitute a significant portion of the population, their identities and claims to indigeneity have been historically and systematically negated. For one, IPs lack constitutional recognition. Instead, each distinct IP community is referred to as "ethnic groups". Additionally, it is estimated that 95% of IPs are not legally acknowledged as citizens, with only 484,000 individuals eligible for Thai nationality (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). The Thai government only acknowledges the existence of nine hill-tribes out of all IP communities across the nation (Morton, 2016).

This systemic marginalisation stems from the nationalist belief in a singular "Thai" identity (KII02). Due to cultural and institutional mismatches, conservatives view and spread false narratives of IPs as "non-Thais" and their claims to livelihoods and identity as threats to national security (Wachpanich, 2024; KII05). For instance, IP activists seeking customary rights over their ancestral lands are framed as separatists and an endangerment to the existing political order. This is compounded by the spread of damaging stereotypes, such as framing IPs as drug dealers and obstacles to national development (Contant, 2023; Wachpanich, 2025). Consequently, not only is the indigeneity of IPs disregarded, but they are also denied recognition as Thai citizens, thereby rejecting the notion of a Thai nation that is a culturally pluralistic society where IPs are equally included (Bangkok Post, 2023).

Furthermore, IPs in Thailand face insecure land tenure due to a lack of citizenship and a formal recognition of each respective community's collective identity (Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, 2025). This issue is compounded by state forest ownership, enabling the government to control forest resources, despite many IPs relying on them for livelihoods (this will be further explored in Section 1.2.2). Consequently, the displacement of IPs living in or near forest areas is authorised, despite their reliance on the land for subsistence, income or shelter (Dutta & Khongkachonkiet, 2008).

Thailand has ratified key international treaties supporting the rights of IPs, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) (ratified in 1996), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) (ratified in 2003), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) (ratified in 1985) and the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). Despite these commitments, there are ongoing concerns regarding Thailand's compliance with its international obligations. Recommendations issued during the Universal Periodic Review across all three cycles have consistently urged Thailand to combat discrimination against IPs,[5] ensure equal access to basic services (Human Rights Council, 2011; 2016; 2022). Special Rapporteurs have also raised concerns over Thailand's failure to protect Indigenous rights, citing unresolved land conflicts, lack of consultation under the 2019 conservation laws, the exclusion of IPs from key national plans, and the ongoing impunity in cases of violence and enforced disappearance of key IP activists and advocates (Human Rights Council, 2020). Overall, Thailand's commitment to protecting IP rights falls short of the international standards it ratified. Their protective frameworks indicate international compliance on paper, while their lack of enforcement in practice stems from domestic political concerns about recognising IP communities and their demands for greater autonomy (SDG Move, 2025).

Nationally, Section 4 of Thailand's Constitution (2017) guarantees equal rights to all citizens, including IPs, and prohibits discrimination based on race, origin or social status. Section 70 states that the government should "promote and provide protection for different ethnic groups[6] to have the right to live in the society according to the traditional culture, custom, and ways of life on a voluntary basis". This has been utilised as a basis for advocacy by Indigenous CSOs to ensure the protection of IPs.

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[5] To note, the term "Indigenous Peoples" is not used in recommendations from the first and second cycle. It is used only limitedly in the third cycle. Rather, in the first and second cycle, recommendations that are related to the promotion and protection of Indigenous Peoples are couched under the terms "ethnic", "ethnic minorities" and "ethnic groups".

[6] As noted above, in the absence of the use of the term "Indigenous Peoples", "ethnic group" is instead used.

Additionally, the Cabinet Resolutions on Karen and Sea Nomads in 2010 set a legal precedent by formally recognising the traditional livelihoods and land rights of two IPs, the Moken sea nomads of the *chao ley* people and the Karen tribe (Ministry of Culture, 2010). In September 2025, the Protection and Promotion of the Way of Life of Ethnic Groups was enacted to legalise Section 70 of the Constitution and key provisions in the Cabinet Resolution. Nevertheless, the law faced opposition from some segments of society and MPs, who feared it would encourage IPs to "encroach" on forests (Sattaburuth & Wipatayotin, 2025). This resistance indicates a reluctance to acknowledge IP identity, stemming from discriminatory attitudes. Furthermore, the Act continues to undermine the indigeneity of these communities by labelling them as "ethnic groups" rather than "indigenous".

KII01 summarises the long-standing project as follows:

> *"There is a perception that Indigenous people are not Thai, even if they have lived in the area for hundreds of years. This "not Thai" view fuels ongoing ethnic prejudice and influences policies that affect Indigenous communities in Thailand, including education systems and broader social perception. This prejudice also forms the underlying perception of climate-related projects. Communities living in forest areas, speaking Thai but culturally distinct, are often viewed through this biased lens (KII01)."*

Despite strides in recognising IPs in Thailand, progress remains constrained by an entrenched nationalistic culture that negates their identities. While IPs continue to push for formal legal recognition and protection, they are simultaneously confronting emerging challenges posed by climate change and deforestation, as will be discussed next.

1.2.2. Climate Change and Deforestation in Thailand

Anthropogenic climate change is altering Thailand's temperature patterns, with an annual average rise of 0.09°C from 2011 to 2021 (Government of Thailand, 2024). If climate change is not mitigated, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts a 0.95-3.23°C temperature increase by 2100 in Thailand (Waqas et al., 2025). Despite flooding in the Mekong River basin having risen by 45% (Norris et al., 2024), Thailand remains Southeast Asia's most drought-vulnerable nation due to shorter monsoon seasons, causing longer dry spells (Shin et al., 2024). In the Climate Risk Index, Thailand ranks 30th for an annual average of 30 years (1993-2022) (German Watch, 2025). It scores relatively higher[7] than Malaysia (135th), Indonesia (115th) and the Philippines (43rd), but lower than India (6th) and Cambodia (25th).

Climate change impacts are exacerbated by deforestation, as demonstrated in Table 1, largely due to forest encroachment.

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[7] The Climate Risk Index "ranks countries by the human and economic toll of extreme weather".

Table 1: Tree Cover Loss in Thailand Between 2002 and 2024[8]

Year	Primary Forest Extent Remaining	Tree Cover Loss (% of total tree cover)	Tree Cover Loss Due to Deforestation (Kha)
2002	99.9	0.30	60.9
2005	99.5	0.42	84.3
2010	98.6	0.68	135.0
2015	98.2	0.61	121.0
2020	97.9	0.60	119.0
2024	97.7	0.71	142.0

Source: Global Forest Watch, 2025

Data from Table 1 shows that, since 2002, Thailand's tree cover loss has decelerated. However, tree cover loss from deforestation has increased, reaching 142 Kha in 2024, with permanent agriculture classified as a dominant driver. The human activity enabled by the private sector has worsened forest quality, impacting soil health and plant diversity (Osathanunkul et al., 2021). In this context, IP communities are highly vulnerable to climate change due to their connection with the natural environment.

Firstly, IPs have limited access to infrastructure, including roads, electricity, clean water and healthcare, that may shield them from the worst impacts of climate change (International Labour Organisation, 2017; Hyolo, 2024). Secondly, IPs are more susceptible to reduced agricultural output, since they largely practice subsistence agriculture in fragile agro-ecosystems (Shrestha, 2017). This increases the risks of poverty and food/water insecurity from climate shifts (Ram, 2024). Additionally, increased floods and droughts threaten essential crops like rice and coffee (Shah, 2023), with the 2023 drought causing an estimated USD 1.1 million loss and a 1.6% drop in rice production (Apisitniran, 2023).

In response to climate change impacts, Thailand has signed international climate agreements and adopted national policies. At the international level, Thailand joined the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1991 and the Paris Agreement in 2016. Its Nationally Determined Contribution in 2022 pledges to reduce emissions by 30% below Business As Usual levels[9] by 2030 or 40% with international support, covering all major sectors except land-use change and forestry (UNFCCC, 2022). Yet, challenges persist, including high technology costs, limited infrastructure and weak finance and data systems (Ibid.). Although Thailand contributes less than 1% of global emissions, its energy sector accounted for 69.06% of national emissions in 2018 (Ibid.). On climate adaptation, the National Adaptation Plan (2024) seeks to minimise climate risks across water management, agriculture, health, and tourism. However, it lacks binding regulations, resulting in weak enforcement.

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[8] Data for all three indices is available from 2002, the earliest common year, to 2024, the most recent year.

[9] Under the UNFCCC, "Business As Usual" scenarios project greenhouse gas emission concentrations in the atmosphere assuming no new emission reduction efforts are implemented. It is used in climate models to assess the future consequences of climate inaction on societies and natural ecosystems.

On the national level, Thailand's climate change governance is shaped by a wide range of laws and policies. These include the Forest Act (1941) regulating logging and the use of forest products, with the Forestry Master Plan (2014) prioritising reclaiming zones with high levels of illegal logging. The National Reserved Forest Act (1964) establishes classifications for reserved forests to increase protection. The Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act (NEQA) (1992) provides a framework for environmental management, preservation, and pollution control.

A distinctive set of measures was introduced under the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) junta regime (2014–2019) to reinforce the "Forest Reclamation Policy" under NCPO Order 64/2557 (2014), which designated many Indigenous lands as "protected zones" and sought an increased role of the military and law enforcement in order to reclaim forest areas. Laws such as the Community Forest Act (2019) outlines the inclusion of local communities in forest management located outside protected areas, but is negated by the National Parks Act (2019) which expands national parks and strengthens penalties for violations within these areas. The National Forest Policy (2019) established a target of 40% national forest cover (25% protected forests, 15% economic/community forests).[10]

With the formal transition of power from military to civilian rule following the 2019 general election, the overtly militarised form of the Forest Reclamation Policy ended. However, its core operational goals and procedures were kept and bureaucratised (FGD03). While current policies and operations are driven mainly by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment with sub-divisions such as the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation and Department of Pollution Control having direct interactions with Indigenous communities, the highly bureaucratised procedures remain.

Despite the proliferation of legal instruments, deforestation continues across national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Weak penalties fail to deter large-scale business encroachment (Samukkethum, 2015). Illegal logging operations tied to influential corporations often escape sanction (Preferred by Nature, 2017). This has produced inconsistent tree cover figures (Table 1) and revealed how reforestation efforts over the years have largely advanced corporate interests.

On the other hand, Thailand's climate and forest laws, especially as promoted under the "Forest Reclamation Policy", have legitimised forced evictions, stripping IPs of their ancestral lands and livelihoods, erased traditional agricultural practices and severed IPs' cultural and spiritual ties to the land. Economically, displacement drives communities into precarity while their knowledge of sustainable resource management is criminalised. Culturally, narratives portray IPs as polluters or security threats (Wongnithisathaporn & Worsdell, 2021). Together, these legal frameworks negate IPs' identities and deny recognition of their role as stewards of their land and environment. These practices reflect a broader state agenda to consolidate exclusive control over forest resources (United Nations Forum on Forests, 2019), enforced through militarisation and disinformation campaigns against IP communities.

As a result, despite signing international agreements and adopting national strategies, Thailand's climate response remains limited. Weak enforcement, corporate capture, and the marginalisation of Indigenous rights and identities continue to undermine meaningful progress in addressing climate change.

1.3.   Thailand's Digitalisation and the Rise of Disinformation

This section analyses the main drivers behind the emergence of climate disinformation in Thailand. First, it explores the country's digital transformation, which has led to the digitalisation of the media

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[10] In practice, however, as will be expanded in Chapter 3, increase in forest covers are gained by forced evictions of Indigenous peoples from their land (FGD03) and barring them from entering forested areas.

landscape and fostered conditions that enable the spread of disinformation. Second, it examines the underlying causes that further fuel the spread of disinformation in Thailand, ultimately contributing to the circulation of climate disinformation that negatively impacts IP communities in the country.

1.3.1. The Digitalisation of the Media Sector

The widespread accessibility of the internet in the early 2000s has dramatically transformed Thailand's media landscape. This led to the digitalisation of traditional media outlets and the pervasive use of social media and instant messaging applications.

Languages in Media Landscape

With 92.7% of the population speaking in Thai, it is the dominant language used in the country's media landscape, including traditional mass media and social media (Thai Solutions, 2024). There is also a range of English-language news sources.

Major Thai Digital Media Outlets and Their Primary Publishing Languages

Bangkok Post	Published in English.
Daily News	Published in Thai.
Khaosod	Published predominantly in Thai, with content also available in English in "Khaosod English.
Matichon	Published in Thai.
Thairath	Published predominantly in Thai, with content also available in English.
Thai PBS	Published predominantly in Thai, with content also available in English in "Thai PBS World".
The Nation	Published in Thai and English.

Thai and English news media often offer contrasting viewpoints mainly due to their audiences. Thai-language media (especially legacy media) generally reflect a traditional or pro-military stance that may use inflammatory narratives against IPs. However, relatively newer and digital platforms like The Standard and The Matter on social media are more accommodating of issues around IP rights and their land claim. English-language media, whose circulation is small and mostly serving international readers, typically frame climate-related issues through a business lens, often overlooking social impacts on IP communities and excluding discussions on IP rights and related antagonism (Srinarwat, 2019).

Between 2011 and 2024, traditional mass media[11] experienced a steady decline in public engagement. The population's reliance on television as their main news source dropped to roughly 50% (Kheokao & Kheokao, 2024). Print media has a smaller audience, with just 13% using it as the primary source. However, 68.9% of Thais still listen to the radio (Morris & Nguyen, 2022). These trends result from Thai media organisations increasingly digitising content previously available in print, television and radio broadcasts. For instance, leading newspapers like Thairath (46% share) and Khaosod (26% share) are now digital-only to reduce costs and expand their audience reach (Kheokao & Kheokao, 2024).

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[11] Traditional mass media refers to media channels preceding the Internet era, encompassing print media (newspapers) and broadcast media (television and radio).

The rapid adoption of the internet (Table 2), social media (Table 3) and instant messaging applications has facilitated this digital transformation.

Table 2: Internet Penetration Index in Thailand 2000-2023

2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2023
4%	15%	22%	39%	78%	90%

Source: World Bank, 2025

Table 3: Social Media Penetration Index in Thailand 2010-2025[12] (% of total population)

Year	Social Media (% of total users)	Facebook (% of total users)	TikTok (% of total users)	Instagram (% of total users)	X (% of total users)	LinkedIn (% of total users)
2010	27.0%	7.3%	–	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015	49.0%	19.0%	N/A	10.0%	N/A	N/A
2020	75.0%	72.0%	41.9%	26.1%	N/A	N/A
2025	71.1%	81.2%	61.92%	25.8%	18.7%	N/A

Source: Kemp, 2011; 2015; 2020; 2025

In Thailand, there are 51 million unique social media identities, which account for 71% of the total population (Kemp, 2025). In terms of accessing news information, 75% of Thais use instant messaging applications and social media as their primary source (Newman et al., 2024). For messaging applications, LINE (41%) is the leading platform for accessing current affairs information (Ibid.). Facebook Messenger follows at 20%. As for social media, Facebook (64%), YouTube (56%) and TikTok (39%) are the top three platforms relied on for news sources (Ibid.).

There is a clear generational divide with regard to how news is consumed. Older adults (aged 45 and above) prefer traditional media for news, while younger users favour social media (Sriyai & Kwanyou, 2025; Newman et al., 2024). Facebook is especially popular among 25- to 44-year-olds (Sriyai & Kwanyou, 2025). TikTok is rapidly growing among Gen Z and millennials for short-form news, with Thailand having high news consumption via the platform (39%) (Newman et al., 2024).

Despite the rapid growth of media outlets and the consumption of news online, in terms of trust, "legacy" outlets are still the most trusted. Some of the most trusted outlets are news outlets associated with TV broadcasting channels – Channel 7 (74% in audience trust), Amarin (73%) and Thai PBS (public broadcaster). Non-TV news outlets that are the most trusted include: Thairath (70%), Matichon (69%) and Bangkok Post (66%) (Kheokao & Kheokao, 2025). Yet, as Chapter 2 will show, these legacy outlets are some of the main "channels" through which climate disinformation negatively portrays IPs. The high trust accorded by the Thai public to legacy media makes it a significant medium where climate disinformation proliferates.

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[12] Social Media Penetration started to be available from 2011.

As alternatives to portrayals of IPs and climate issues in legacy outlets, Thailand's rapid digital transformation offers new – but limited – opportunities for various sectors and communities, including IPs, on social media (KII07). They have enabled IP communities to be connected to developments in other parts of the country. At the same time, social media platforms have also helped them raise national and international awareness about environmental degradation and the defence of their ancestral lands (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organistion (UNESCO), 2024). A key example is the #SAVEBangKloi campaign, which spotlighted the forced eviction of the Karen community from Kaeng Krachan National Park (Institute for Population and Social Research & Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2022; Krobtong 2024). Social media-driven outlets like Indigenous Media News (KII06; FGD01), Green News and Lanner (KII08, 09) are some newer media platforms which either are run by Indigenous organisations or see direct engagement with IPs in order to shed light on various issues through an Indigenous perspective.

Yet, in reality, driven by a lack of resources, the visibility of these platforms and their content have largely been limited, thus resulting in limited impact on the general consciousness of the public (KII10). In addition, the increased rise in volume and effectiveness of online disinformation – and especially climate disinformation – further weakens the positive impact of digitalisation of the media.

1.3.2. The Rise of Disinformation

Thailand's rapid digitalisation has concurrently led to the rise and spread of disinformation. In 2024, 6,117 cases of fake news were identified under the Computer Crime Act (Khaosod English, 2024). Separately, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society has reportedly identified over 74,892 messages to have false or misleading information from November 2019 to March 2025 (Thai PBS, 2025). Nearly half of such messages related to government policies, a third on health and around 5% on disasters (Ibid.).[13]

In response, the government has adopted a range of policies and measures. According to the government's Public Relations Department (2024a; 2024b), Thailand participates in regional initiatives to share best practices and develop strategies on combating fake news. This includes the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Workshop on Government Management in Combating Fake News. Furthermore, the Anti-Fake News Centre (AFNC), established by the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society in 2019, exemplified the government's effort to correct the surge in online information disorder content (Xinhua, 2019). However, the AFNC has been criticised for being politically misused to label civil society critics and opposition figures as "fake news" purveyors (Sombatpoonsiri, 2022). In effect, the AFNC has been used to suppress these groups from challenging the pro-government narratives that AFNC presents as factual.

As an alternative to government-based efforts, independent monitoring mechanisms like Cofact Thailand, AFP Thailand and Trusted Media Thailand (among others) have emerged to combat disinformation by verifying facts, offering media literacy training and conducting workshops (The Nation, 2022; Chongkittavorn, 2023; Songrujirapatt, 2023). This empowers citizens and journalists to critically assess information and hold authorities accountable. In addition, Indigenous networks and organisations also publish ad-hoc "factcheck" posts (KII 11) to create narratives countering false claims related to Indigenous Peoples, whether on their platforms, through IP media outlets or through bigger and more sympathetic outlets like The Standard and Prachatai. However, the impact of efforts such as these is limited. Partly, this is due to the limited resources available, but also because these efforts are inaccessible to elders and rural populations due to their complex interfaces (Thanarak & Ruangnapakul,

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[13] There is not specific categorisation or aggregation of climate disinformation.

2021). As a result, fact-checking bodies are ill-equipped to verify the rapid dissemination of disinformation (KII07).

When asked about the current status of fact-checking, the following sentiments were noted in the FGD:

> *"We want to create a "watch" [fact-checking mechanism]. There is already some work, but the mechanism is still weak. We need systematised media monitoring on this issue (FGD03).*
>
> *If disinformation appears, it must be reported to a group that can act on it. Right now, people respond individually, not systematically (FGD01)."*

Limited freedom in the country's media landscape further undermines their ability to function effectively. Asia Centre's reports *Thailand Computer Crime Act: Restricting Digital Rights, Silencing Online Critics* (2022) and *Internet Freedoms in Thailand (*2022) analysed the deliberate use of vaguely worded laws to criminalise critical reporting on issues deemed "politically sensitive". This has made fact-checking to challenge dominant disinformation-based narratives risky for independent outlets. Limited access to government data and the concentration of media ownership further restrict the reach and credibility of these organisations (Dhiensawadkij, 2018), leaving them reliant on social media and vulnerable to legal and political pressure.

In addition, fake news is, at times, deliberately proliferated by state actors such as the Internal Security Operations Command under the Royal Thai Army. Asia Centre's (2023) report *State-Sponsored Online Disinformation: Impact on Electoral Integrity in Thailand* has highlighted the military's Information Operations using fake accounts and bots to shape public opinion information, suppress alternative voices and flood the information landscape with pro-government narratives.

Furthermore, the government and military in Thailand actively suppress civic spaces, with journalists and activists facing physical harassment (Bangkok Tribune, 2024b). This intimidation extends to environmental reporting, where journalists face both physical and legal threats when covering climate change issues. A stark example is the murder of Jaruek Rangcharoen, a journalist for the Thai daily Matichon, who was killed in Suphanburi Province in 2008 while investigating connections between the military and illegal deforestation (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2008). As a result, one-sided discourses on climate change primarily circulate in the media, which will be further discussed in Section 2.1 of Chapter 2.

In this context, climate disinformation has become a significant challenge in Thailand. For example, a recurring form of disinformation involves false statements about extreme weather, including claims that Thailand will face "24 storms" or enter a "disaster phase" due to record-breaking heatwaves (AFP Thailand, 2024; Bangkok Post, 2024c). These narratives grow particularly viral on Facebook, LINE and YouTube (Bangkok Post, 2024b). These weather claims contribute to public panic, undermine trust in official warnings and mislead rural communities that rely on social media for timely information.

In addition to these unsubstantiated claims, other forms of climate disinformation prevalent in Thai society result in particular challenges for IPs, who mostly reside in the country's most forested and ecologically vulnerable areas, as will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In this regard, online

disinformation exists in addition to and proliferates narratives from the traditional offline forms of disinformation they face.

Chapter 1 has shed light on the negation of IPs identities, which further exacerbates their plights as a result of climate change and deforestation in Thailand. Additionally, it explores how the digitalisation of media and the spread of disinformation have made disinformation on climate change a growing concern in Thailand. Chapter 2 will define key forms of climate disinformation in the Thai media landscape, which will form the basis for the impact analysis presented in Chapter 3.

2. Forms of Climate Disinformation

This chapter identifies four forms of climate disinformation directed at IPs in Thailand: one-sided media coverage, greenwashing, the promotion of false climate solutions and scapegoating IPs as contributors to anthropogenic climate change. The first three forms identified fall under climate delayism,[14] while the fourth – scapegoating IPs as drivers of climate change – is a form of climate denialism[15].

> All three forms of information disorder – mis- dis- and malinformation – are relevant to the Thai context. Disinformation and malinformation are actively used to shape narratives and overwhelm the information environment surrounding climate change with distortions and selective truths. Misinformation, on the other hand, is benign in its intention to deceive and its impact on climate narratives is negligible compared to the dissemination of disinformation and malinformation. In this context, the report, in Chapter 2, focuses on disinformation and malinformation – both of which are deliberately crafted to mislead or harm their intended audience. Their defining feature lies in their deceptive intent, which not only distorts facts but also undermines public trust, disrupts informed decision-making and can incite social or political harm.

2.1.   One-sided Media Coverage

The first form of climate disinformation is the one-sided media coverage of environmental issues, which is shaped by a lack of transparency, independent monitoring and critical analysis among journalists (Dhiensawadkij, 2021). This occurs in two ways: (1) overtly positive economic framing; (2) and biased reporting that privileges government and corporate narratives. As outlined in Chapter 1 of this report, this constitutes malinformation, where selective truths are used to distort reality and produce media narratives that undermine meaningful climate action.

2.1.1. Positive Economic Framing

A form of one-sided reporting is the framing of environment-related news through an overtly positive economic or business lens. This imbalance signals how climate change is treated as a business or economic story rather than an ecological and social one where only the benefits are emphasised. A study on environmental reporting revealed this imbalanced coverage of climate-related issues in Thailand (Kunnuwong, 2020). For instance, from 2019 to 2020, the study found that 51.1% of energy-related news in Thailand that are closely related to climate change was published in the "business" section, while only 4.2% appeared in the "environment" section (Ibid.). This pattern illustrates how climate discourse is structured primarily around market logic and economic gain, sidelining the environmental and human dimensions.

Mainstream outlets frequently amplify this imbalance. For instance, outlets such as Thairath (2025a)[16] and The Nation (2025a)[17] have promoted the government's land bridge project without consideration of its social and human costs. Both news agencies exclusively highlighted the government's role in

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[14] Climate delayism refers to information that misleads the public and hinders effective climate action (Lamb et al., 2020).

[15] Climate denialism is the rejection of information concerning the existence of climate change and deforestation (Sethi, 2024).

[16] "PM meets with executives from Coca-Cola, Nestlé and DP World to highlight Thailand's potential and encourage investment expansion". Translated from "นายกฯ หารือผู้บริหาร Coca-Cola, เนสท์เล่, DP World ชูศักยภาพไทย ชวนขยายลงทุน" in Thai.

[17] "DP World ready to invest in land bridge, says Transport Ministry source".

improving connectivity between the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. Their coverage highlighted promises of regional competitiveness, foreign investment, and infrastructure development, but failed to note the absence of environmental impact assessments or the concerns of local communities (Mark, 2025).

These concerns pertain to the potential deforestation of mangroves and the subsequent endangerment of species. Additionally, they emphasise threats posed by seaport construction sites on marine ecosystems, which significantly disrupt the sustenance of fisher communities (Bangkok Tribune, 2024a). These communities, composed of IPs and stateless individuals, depend on sea resources for their livelihoods. Therefore, narratives with positive economic framing misrepresent the long-term environmental consequences and their impact on these dependent communities.

(The Nation, 2025b)   (Matichon, 2025b)

"New gas pool lowers year-end electricity prices to 3.99 baht below the National Energy Policy Council resolution"
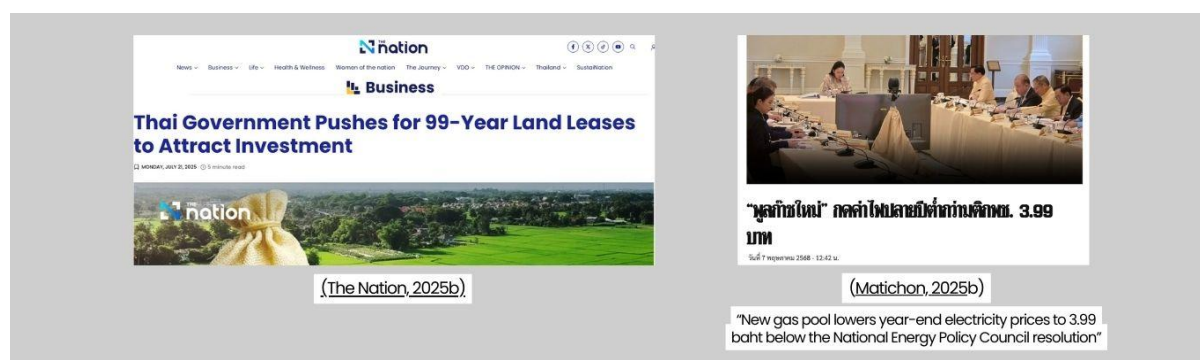
Other reporting similarly underscores "positive" outcomes while neglecting trade-offs. Matichon (2025b) emphasised the benefits of a "new gas pool" that would reduce electricity prices to 3.99 baht per unit. The framing presented lower consumer costs as evidence of successful energy policy, but avoided deeper scrutiny of long-term environmental consequences such as increased dependence on fossil fuels and the carbon lock-in that undermines climate mitigation. Such stories implicitly advance the notion that short-term economic relief outweighs environmental harm, perpetuating a cycle in which growth is privileged over sustainability.

Across stories, economic benefits are foregrounded – job creation, infrastructure expansion, energy affordability and regional competitiveness. By contrast, environmental impacts including biodiversity loss and displacement of vulnerable communities are treated as secondary or invisible.

Two factors spur the prevalence of reporting environmental issues through such a positive economic lens. Firstly, reduced advertising and engagement have led to budgetary issues in Thailand's media sector that undermine its ability to accurately report on climate change issues (Dhiensawadkij, 2018). This financial strain has caused outlets to cut 'non-core' reporting desks, such as environmental coverage, in favor of business and political news. As a result, there is a shortage of specialised environmental journalists, making in-depth policy reporting on climate change rare or often handled by non-experts (Kunnawong et al.,2020). Secondly, corporations, through their advertising clout, exert undue influence to advance their claims, including narratives surrounding climate change (Dhiensawadkij, 2018). Given that many media companies rely on advertising for economic viability, uncritical reporting of environmental issues becomes incentivised (Kunnawong et al.,2020).

2.1.2. Bias Towards State and Business Interests

The second type of one-sided reporting is the bias towards state and business interests which presents their climate policies as effective in mitigating climate change. These are often shared in the media as "environmental news", since journalists in Thailand often refer to government news sources, like press

releases from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) and the Thailand Greenhouse Gas Management Organisation (TGO), an autonomous agency under MNRE. A 2020 research (Kunnawong et al. 2020) found that 41.1% of reports on energy policy cited government announcements as the primary source, while 29.6% drew on business representatives, who use their status as "credible" voices to advance corporate agendas. This reliance on state and corporate actors narrows the scope of climate reporting, marginalising independent analysis and community perspectives, and enabling narratives that present extractive or market-driven projects as environmentally sustainable.
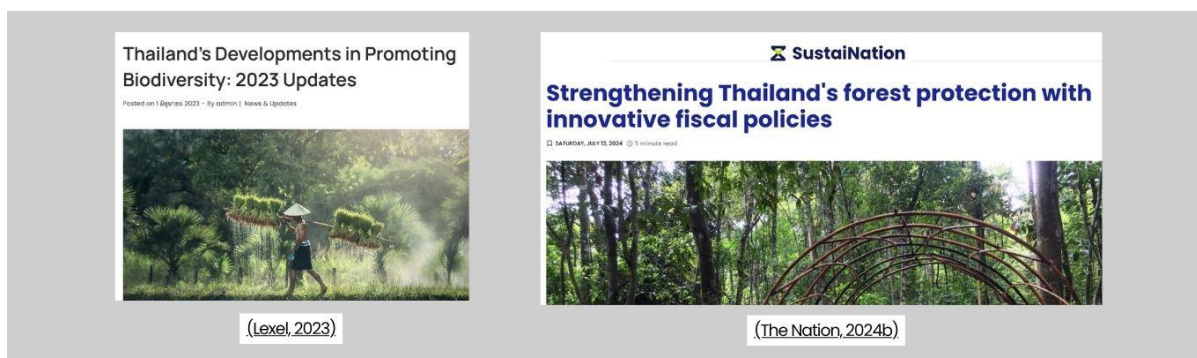
As such, these sources are reinforced as being wholly reliable and uncontested, lacking independent verification. Without critically assessing government claims, journalistic standards are compromised by enabling the spread of biased information. This skews public understanding of the negative impacts of such initiatives, thereby eroding public trust in media institutions (Dhiensawadkij, 2021; Nielsen, 2024).

For instance, Bangkok Biz News (กรุงเทพธุรกิจ in Thai) (2024)[18] reported a Memorandum of Understanding between MNRE and PTT Exploration and Production (a state-owned oil enterprise), framing this arrangement as a measure of progress towards sustainability. The Memorandum is a framework for cooperation, yet its practical implementation lacks transparency. The article overlooks this very prevalent issue in Thailand by not advocating for greater transparency in enforcement mechanisms. Most mainstream outlets also avoid calling for independent evaluations of MNRE, despite recurring concerns over weak environmental impact assessments, corruption allegations and the Ministry's inadequate response to public complaints or enforcement of environmental regulations (Lawzana, 2025). By portraying such agreements uncritically, media outlets – including online platforms and blogs – mislead the public into believing that government climate initiatives are sufficient, thereby becoming complicit in the dissemination of biased and incomplete information.

Additionally, while promoting reforestation efforts by the state, the media largely omits the simultaneous expansion of commercial activities in protected forest areas where IPs live. For example, in 2019, a national reserve forest in Saraburi Province lost its protected status for a Special Economic Zone, enabling private investors to lease the land for mining concessions used by Siam Cement Group (Saengpassa & Rujivanarom, 2019). In 2023, the government proposed revoking the protected status for over 104,727 acres of Thap Lan National Park for commercial development (Bangkok Post, 2024a). These actions, central to Thailand's climate mitigation strategy, have caused land disputes, violated IP rights and worsened inequalities.

Nevertheless, harmful effects of state-managed initiatives on IPs are largely undisclosed in mainstream media. This is evident with reports on expanding conservation zones, which is mostly framed as a strategy to protect diversity. For example, in 2022, Thailand adopted the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) to conserve 30% of the world's lands (Lexel, 2023). Articles online from platforms like Business for Nature (Kalita, 2025) and intergovernmental initiatives such as the Thai-German Cooperation (Chittapisan, 2023) highlighted widespread endorsement for the state's endeavours in environmental protection. However, this reporting has largely failed to mention concerns raised about its potential contribution to displacing residents from over 200 villages by supplanting roughly 40% of all state-registered community forest lands (Herse et al., 2024). By failing to mention that calls to include IPs in decision-making were ignored, these media reports mislead readers to believe that the state's climate actions are free of limitations while downplaying the IPs' wisdom to protect the environment.

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[18] "Patcharawat presided over MOU signing between MNRE and PTTEP to jointly care for a sustainable environment". Translated from "'พัชรวาท' เป็นประธาน ลงนามMOU 'ทส.-ปตท.สผ.' ร่วมดูแลสิ่งแวดล้อมยั่งยืน" in Thai.

Thailand's Developments in Promoting Biodiversity: 2023 Updates
(Lexel, 2023)

SustaiNation
Strengthening Thailand's forest protection with innovative fiscal policies
(The Nation, 2024b)

Concerns arising from the one-sided narratives from the media, while not new, have been accelerated. KII11 states:

> *"Both online platforms or "professional" outlets [are at fault for spreading climate disinformation]. In particular, for the latter, we expected them to be more accurate. ... Reporters enter the field without real understanding [of the issue]. ... They rely on secondhand information, which is often already inaccurate – sometimes even coming from government officials themselves (KII11)."*

These examples reveal how truthful information on climate change is strategically modified into malinformation to provide positive economic framing and to promote the narratives of selected corporations and state agencies by omitting inconvenient truths. As a result, this suppresses the whole truth and downplays the urgency to holistically address climate change, which delays meaningful action.

2.2.   Greenwashing

The second form of climate disinformation is greenwashing. This involves the deliberate misrepresentation of sustainability to enhance public image (UN, n.d.). Such practices deceive the public with misleading perceptions of progress towards sustainable climate practices, thus weakening the perceived urgency of pursuing more comprehensive, systemic climate action (Natural Resources Defense Council, 2023). As defined in Chapter 1, this falls under malinformation, since the information is deliberately manipulated to shift focus from harmful practices to true yet unsustainable "green" efforts. In Thailand, corporations, particularly in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, engage in greenwashing by funding visible "green" initiatives like forest planting, which diverts attention from the impact of their business activities on environmental degradation and climate change. Greenwashing narratives are evident in three key ways.

First, corporations often promote afforestation and other environmental projects through media platforms as a way to enhance their image, presenting themselves as aligned with climate goals (Onprom, 2024). However, these initiatives are typically small in scale, unsustained, and fail to deliver the substantial long-term benefits the public is led to believe. The marketing of such projects further skews perception, as they are frequently advertised through paid content (KII02) that resembles genuine news articles, making it hard for audiences to distinguish between real reporting and corporate-driven

narratives. Meanwhile, the core business models – the continued engagement with environmentally harmful practices – are preserved or even increased (Carrington, 2022).

Nestlé Thailand's "Water Saves Water" project in Thailand provides a clear example of this kind of greenwashing to restore the Klong Khanom Jeen water ecosystem. The initiative has garnered significant media attention (Matichon, 2023; The Standard, 2025; WorkpointToday, 2025; Prachachat, 2025; Bangkok Biz News, 2025), likely through paid advertisements and strategic media partnerships. However, these promotional pieces rarely acknowledge the project's corporate origin, and it is only in rare instances that the public can easily identify it as a PR effort. While many have recognised that this particular project has brought some real local benefits in the improvements in biodiversity and water management, these efforts do not mitigate the broader environmental harm caused by Nestlé's business practices. Specifically, the company continues to engage in the excessive extraction of water for bottled beverages in water-scarce regions (Shimo, 2018), exacerbating the very issues it claims to address. In this light, therefore, the project becomes a superficial effort to divert attention from Nestlé's larger, more destructive actions.

sustainability

เนสท์เล่ ฟื้นฟูคลองขนมจีน 10 ปี จากน้ำเน่า สู่ ต้นแบบ OECMs ระบบนิเวศระดับชาติ

By วิรัสนันท์ ถึงถิ่น | ⏱ 19 ก.ค. 2025 เวลา 17:07 น.

(Bangkok Business News, 2025)

"Nestlé revitalises Klong Khanom Jeen in 10 years, from polluted water to a national OECMs ecosystem model".

Second, many corporations set self-defined sustainability targets, creating the illusion of environmental sustainability without external oversight. This is supported by the fact that only 30% of companies listed on the Thai stock exchange have disclosed and verified their carbon footprint data to the public (Khaosod English, 2025), suggesting that most prioritise their public image over transparency.

For example, the CP group, a food and agricultural conglomerate, publicised its renewable energy farm on the Bangkok Post (2025),[19] promoting its adoption of biogas and solar energy as a sustainability initiative to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. However, there appears to be a lack of reporting from independent bodies on how effectively CP Group is reaching its targets. The article fails to address the company's management of biogas, which, if not properly handled, can lead to harmful emissions such as hydrogen sulfide and methane (Werkneh, 2022). Furthermore, it does not address the concerns raised by Thai environmentalists on the land use requirements of solar energy and its potential to harm local ecosystems in which the IP communities reside (PVknowhow, 2025). By solely linking its climate actions to sustainability goals, the media misleads the public into believing CP's methods are sufficient. This limits public access to evidence of the company's inadequacy in addressing global warming, preventing collective accountability for major corporations like CP.

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[19] "CP Foods launches first 100% renewable energy farm".

(Matichon, 2023)

"CPF aims to use 100% renewable energy for a sustainable world".

Third, greenwashing is used to shift blame for climate change onto consumers by suggesting that individual actions can solve the issue, rather than addressing their large-scale emissions (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013). PTT created a video advertisement, "#TableForest", where it advertised the "world's first growable coaster" as an individual-level campaign to counter deforestation in Thailand (PTT Public Company Limited, 2015; Bangkok Biz News, 2015). The ad, shared on Thai TV, was filled with imagery of lush forests and encouraged office workers to engage with nature by "planting a forest from [their] desks", demonstrating how environmental action can start from anywhere. While the ad was praised for its creativity, by promoting minor, individual acts of greening, PTT's campaign reflects how greenwashing campaigns are used to distract from the environmentally detrimental business model of oil companies like PTT that continue to extract fossil fuels (Global Witness, 2023).

For another instance, Thai energy company Gulf launched a TikTok challenge "#GreenMission2025", where it encouraged young users to post videos demonstrating ways that Thai people can adapt to climate change (Gulf Spark, 2025). It also uses the platform to advertise its transition to "low-carbon" energy and its reforestation project "We Protect Forests, Forest Protect Us".[20] This is despite the fact that the Gulf continues to generate electricity using mostly fossil fuel, namely natural gas (Gulf Energy, 2024).

Media outlets disseminate malinformation by presenting sustainability initiatives as genuine progress towards mitigating climate change, despite these efforts often being mere greenwashing. This misrepresentation creates a false impression of effectiveness, obscuring their failure to counteract corporate emissions. As a result, the disconnect between rhetoric and meaningful action widens, delaying the mitigation of climate change.

2.3.   False Climate Solutions

False climate solutions are the third and final form of climate disinformation under the "delayism" approach. In Thailand, this is conveyed in two ways, both of which are incomplete truths and therefore malinformation. Firstly, state-aligned media in Thailand promotes "fossil fuel solutionism", necessitating coal and natural gas for economic growth. However, this narrative omits the energy sector's contribution of 69.02% to Thailand's total emissions in 2024 (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Thailand, 2024). It also obscures how such narratives reinforce continued investment in coal and gas rather than directing resources toward more substantive green energy transitions. Secondly, the government spreads malinformation when promoting initiatives like the Thailand Voluntary Emission Reduction (T-VER) programmes as the main approach to mitigate climate change. This narrative fails to address the programme's limitations, social impacts or concerns regarding its phantom credits. In both constructions, the narratives function as forms of malinformation.

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[20] Translated from "เราป้องป่า ป่าป้องเรา" in Thai.

2.3.1. Fossil Fuel Solutionism

The advancement of "lower-carbon" fuel defers climate action, since it is legitimised as an alternative that bridges higher emission fuels and renewable energy sources. This deceptively assures a responsible use of fossil fuels that allegedly reduces carbon emissions.

Thailand's stance on coal exemplifies fossil fuel solutionism. Bangkok Post (2022)[21] reported that a state representative from the Energy Regulatory Commission claimed the government will extend the lifespan of some coal-fired energy plants to optimally reduce energy prices. Simultaneously, the Department of Mineral Fuels in the Ministry of Energy (2020) posted on "clean coal technology" on Facebook as an effective method to limit negative environmental impacts. While new technologies do reduce particle emissions during combustion, they are costly and do not limit carbon emissions, making "clean" a misleading descriptor for any form of coal energy (Hayward, 2021; Yoo, 2018).

(Department of Mineral Fuels, 2020)

"Get to know Clean Coal Technology: Pre-Combustion Technology"
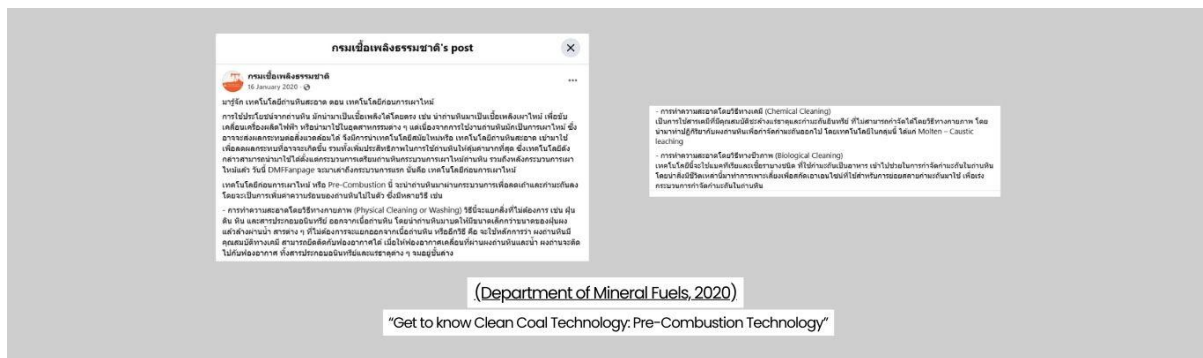
Similarly, natural gas is advanced by the media as a cleaner, more responsible choice (Leber, 2022) compared to coal. Such claims are advanced by pro-natural gas "advertorials" that are disguised as news coverage, but, in truth, are sponsored by fossil fuel companies (Bove, 2020). This includes articles in "legacy" and mainstream outlets such as "'Sarat' emphasises all 'Gulf' power plants reduce pollution and use natural gas as the main fuel"[22] (Thairath, 2020), "Gas & renewable energy: New hero of Banpu"[23] (Chosungnern, 2019) and "LNG: Clean, convenient, economical"[24] (Matichon Weekly, 2023).

While promoting natural gas, advocates in the government and private sector often omit or downplay its role in driving climate change (Areerat, 2024; Dhiensawakadkij, 2021). Although natural gas releases less carbon dioxide than coal, the combustion process releases significant amounts of methane that contribute to atmospheric warming (Climate and Clean Air Coalition, 2024). Leaks during the extraction, processing and transportation of natural gas are frequent, offsetting any benefits from lower carbon dioxide emissions.

As will be noted later in Chapter 3, the use of fossil fuel solutionism also manifests as a form of direct disinformation (KII09, FGD01). FGD01 and KII09 notes the following practice in the use of this form of disinformation:

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[21] "Thailand to rely on coal for power longer amid record gas prices"

[22] Translated from ""สารัษฐ์" ย้ำโรงไฟฟ้า "กัลฟ์" ทุกแห่งลดมลพิษ ใช้ก๊าซธรรมชาติเชื้อเพลิงหลัก" in Thai.

[23] Translated from "ก๊าซฯ & พลังงานหมุนเวียน พระเอกใหม่ "บ้านปู"" in Thai.

[24] Translated from "LNG สะอาด สะดวก ประหยัด" in Thailand

> *"In mining, [the use of disinformation] is also similar [to other "green" projects]. Companies lobby local leaders first [to consent]. In some cases, they even forged EIA reports – using children's names as signatories. … At first, some communities agreed, but later resisted because they feared losing resources and adverse climate impacts (FGD01).*
>
> *…*
>
> *More broadly, in the private sector, businesses – especially in the energy industry … use "clean" branding. [But] large projects like dams or mines, marketed as renewable or green, often impact Indigenous communities the most. So energy companies are a main driver of such conflicts (KII09)."*

Therefore, articles selectively using economic data to argue against phasing out fossil fuels overlook the severe long-term environmental and economic costs of continued consumption.

2.3.2. T-VER Programme

At COP26, Thailand pledged to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2065, promoting the expansion of forest cover as a means of offsetting carbon (Thailand Greenhouse Gas Management Organisation, 2013). The T-VER programme, launched in 2013, was identified as Thailand's core mechanism for climate change mitigation in the 20-Year National Strategy (2018-2037). The initiative encourages polluters to offset their emissions by selling them carbon credits, which permits a limited release of Greenhouse Gases. Between 2016 and 2022, the trading of carbon credits increased by 144% and purchase prices by 131% (Duangklad, 2023). The highest price growth are forest carbon credits, purchased by firms in finance, transport and manufacturing sectors (Leenoi, 2023).

Traditional media has largely promoted Thailand's T-VER programme. For instance, The Nation (2023)[25] lauded Chevron's "Foster Future Forests" project as a carbon-lowering "milestone" for contributing to carbon sequestration by restoring urban forests. The article amplifies the company's image as "environmentally responsible" rather than critically examining Chevron's offshore carbon capture projects that result in environmental violations. For instance, Greenpeace (2024) highlights how the Arthit fossil gas field – a joint venture between PTTEP and Chevron – will extract and compress CO_2 from produced gas, which not only demands significant unsustainable energy, but also poses a threat to marine life. Additionally, Matichon (2025a)[26] framed the T-VER programme's expansion into community forests as a tool for conservation that solves global warming problems. It also fails to discuss potential harms to IP communities or criticisms of expanding the programme.

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[25] "Chevron commits to a new journey towards a sustainable world"

[26] "Royal Forest Department ready to expand carbon credit trading into the market to community forests nationwide". Translated from "กรมป่าไม้ พร้อมขยายผล ซื้อขาย คาร์บอนเครดิตเข้าสู่ตลาดไปยังป่าชุมชนทั่วประเทศ" in Thai.

(LINE TODAY, 2025)
"T-VER reduced global warming with carbon credits, a key to sustainability"

Despite receiving significant attention, Thailand's T-VER programme and carbon credit projects in general, due to their nature, have a relatively minimal impact on the low-carbon transition (Onprom, 2024).

Concerns were raised about "phantom credits", which refers to the unverifiable reduction of emissions from forest projects that may not deliver the intended climate benefits (Haya et al., 2023). One estimate suggests that over 94% of global carbon credits fail to deliver genuine reductions or meaningfully contribute to forest conservation (Greenfield, 2018). Additionally, the government's focus on T-VER coincided with Thailand's climate policy rating as "critically insufficient" (Climate Action Tracker, 2022), indicating a failure to meet the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to 1.5℃. As such, Thailand's current policies, including T-VER, are estimated to increase emissions until 2030. Meanwhile, companies have used T-VER as a tool to present themselves as "carbon neutral" without significant emission reductions (Onprom, 2024). In this regard, a Thai representative of an organisation working to advocate on the use of carbon credit states, with regards to the concerns around the credibility of carbon credit in Thailand, that:

> *"Big corporations have influence everywhere, and the media is likely a major sector they aim to influence [and] there's a lot of talk by big corporations and their CSR activities. [But] we don't yet have a fully transparent mechanism to ensure accountability, so some of this information is misleading regarding the actual impact or benefits of these activities. [The problem] is that the T-VER methodologies might not be the most robust ... so businesses [in Thailand] are not discouraged from engaging (KII02)."*

Ultimately, "fossil fuel solutionism" and carbon credits in Thailand are promoted as climate solutions, with data omitted regarding potential concerns in addressing the scale of global warming issues. Hence, malinformation is deployed to validate inadequate sustainability initiatives, which, in turn, preserves industrial growth and economic interests that largely degrade the environment and delay mitigation efforts.
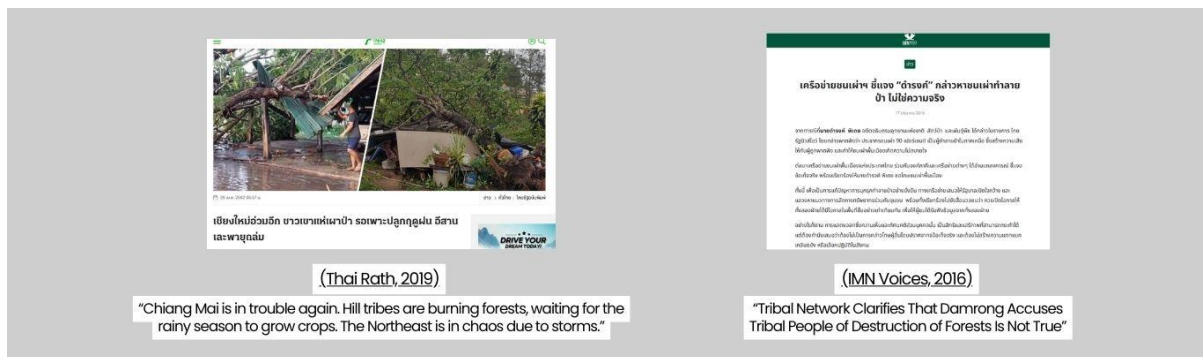
2.4.   Scapegoating IPs as Drivers of Climate Change

The fourth form of climate disinformation discussed in this chapter is the scapegoating of IPs as significant contributors of environmental degradation and climate change. Stereotypes and biases against IPs have long persisted in media, perpetuating depictions of IPs as "forest encroachers" responsible for deforestation (Mostafanezhad & Evrard, 2021). The strategic use of malinformation –

fostering an information environment that misrepresents IP practices as harmful to the environment – results in public attention being systematically diverted from systemic causes such as government inaction and industrial pollution (Zelinsky et al., 2021). This is considered "climate denialism" as it seeks to deny or minimise the contribution of state agencies and corporate interests to climate change; and rather, manufacture IPs as causes of climate change. IP practices face two main scapegoating narratives: firstly, being blamed for wildfire and, secondly, for contributing to air pollution.

Firstly, a prevalent form of climate disinformation directed at IPs correlates their traditional swidden agriculture with frequent occurrences of wildfires, as discussed in Chapter 1. In the media, this is falsely and negatively depicted as "slash-and-burn". For instance, a state official in a press conference stated that 99% of wildfires between 2019 and 2020 in Chiang Mai were caused by the practices of IPs. Despite a lack of evidence to support this claim, the public statement suggests that the government had decided to attribute blame to the IPs (Transborder News, 2020).

This narrative is reused in articles from outlets like The Nation (2024a),[27] which claims that "traditional practices of burning farm waste... clearing land for subsequent crops and the extraction of forest products are *significant contributors* to...wildfires". The article conflates the IPs' agricultural system with harmful economic activities undertaken by corporations, thus pitting IPs against environmental conservation (KII04).

(Thai Rath, 2019)
"Chiang Mai is in trouble again. Hill tribes are burning forests, waiting for the rainy season to grow crops. The Northeast is in chaos due to storms."

(IMN Voices, 2016)
"Tribal Network Clarifies That Damrong Accuses Tribal People of Destruction of Forests Is Not True"

Contrary to this discourse, studies show that protected areas are more prone to forest fires when situated farther from IP communities, since their presence acts as a protective factor in mitigating wildfire risk in Thailand (University of Warwick, 2023; Haenssgen et al., 2023). Simultaneously, the media tends to obscure the contributions IPs made to contain wildfires. For instance, a Karen leader from the Pa Pae village on Doi Chang of the Lamphun province led a village youth team to battle wildfires utilising their Indigenous wisdom to set up a water spray system (Bhandari, 2023). Working in 12-hour shifts with six to twelve people (Ibid.), the group successfully contained flames, yet their contributions receive far less attention than media narratives that falsely blame traditional farming practices for causing wildfires (Satitsongtham, 2024).

This is compounded by the lack of documentation about the vulnerabilities that IPs face from climate change. For instance, in the 2019-2020 fire season, seven people lost their lives due to forest fires, most of whom were villagers who volunteered to help extinguish fires near their land (Triyos, 2021). As a result, IPs not only contend with the increasing threat of wildfires to their forests but also face public resentment. They are often unfairly blamed for causing the very fires that jeopardise their homes and ways of life, a situation exacerbated by the escalating effects of climate change.

Secondly, there is a disproportionate attribution of blame for air pollution to the practices of IPs (The Nation, 2023a). For example, articles from Bangkok Post (2019) and Thai News (2024c) reinforce false

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[27] "Battling forest fires on International Day of Forests"

correlations between the PM 2.5 pollution and swidden agriculture, while commending the government for hindering or supplanting this method with artificial rain and "climate-smart farming". Despite IPs playing a limited role in contributing to these issues, one representative of the media sector (KII04) explains why readers find this disinformation on air pollution credible:

> *"Currently, this issue is more heavily spotlighted in the media because climate change and air pollution have become more visible and tangible. As a result, people more readily accept the disinformation that IPs are responsible (KII04)."*

While this farming method potentially contributes to smoke during the dry season, the media fails to adequately report the nuanced and complex nature of the pollution's root cause, thus spreading malinformation. For instance, a study by Chanesburi et al. (2024) claims that biomass burning in the agricultural sector contributes up to 51% of the total PM2.5 pollution during the smoke-haze period. While the majority of the smoke results from sugarcane and rice burning, it is largely contributed by industrial-scale agriculture rather than IPs who have limited land use for their rotational farming (Marks, 2021).

Mainstream media also often overlooks how large corporations pressure poor non-Indigenous farmers into adopting cheap burning practices. This includes obscuring narratives of farmers becoming indebted to large agribusinesses due to reduced government subsidies (Din Deng, 2023). Furthermore, the government indirectly incentivises burning by accepting requests of agribusiness to ease regulation on the percentage of burnt sugarcane that can be legally sold (Marks, 2021). Given the sugar industry's reliance on governmental support to remain globally competitive, state and corporate interests contributing to climate change are protected by excessively blaming IPs, generally mischaracterizing their traditional practices in the process.

For instance, traditional rotational farming practices of IPs are frequently conflated in the media with negative portrayals of so-called "slash-and-burn" practices. Rotational farming involves cultivating land for one year and then allowing it to lie fallow for six to ten years for regeneration (Nosten, 2015). However, because it sometimes entails burning small forest areas, the entirety of its practice is falsely linked to deforestation and carbon emissions. This misrepresentation persists despite the practice's sustainable forest management benefits, such as releasing nutrients into the soil and facilitating crop cultivation (Butterworth, 2025).

Scientific consensus indicates that rotational farming sequesters more carbon than other land uses, including permanent seasonal cropping or plantations that the Thai government has coerced indigenous farmers to adopt (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2009; KII10). The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation defines shifting agriculture as "forest modification", rather than deforestation (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2001). This is because the clearing of forest for shifting agriculture is temporary, whereas deforestation implies the long-term loss of forest cover and implies transformation into another land use. Furthermore, IP farmers tend to have minimal impact, with the villages like Huai Hin Lat only using 10% of the total agricultural land each year, leaving the rest to recover (Huai Hin Lad Nai, 2025).

On the contrary, state media privileges narratives of technocratic or commercial models of conservation (KII01). Therefore, the promotion of modern farming practices that align with the economic interests of the government and corporations helps justify the supplanting of "outdated" traditional agriculture

(Vaddhanaphuti, 2021). Alongside the banning of traditional IP practices that are grouped under "slash-and-burn" agriculture, communities are forced to rely on chemicals that harm soil and water. As a result, not only does modern agriculture get away with environmental damage, but the resources IPs rely on are contaminated (KII05).

KII04, a journalist in the Northeast, summarises the core biases resulting in the use of scapegoating as follows:

> *"Fundamentally, the "state" does not believe that IPs in the Isan, northern, or central regions can ever coexist with forests sustainably. They have been and are viewed as forest destroyers. In response, it uses broad legal measures to target [IPs], however, whether or not forest and ecosystem destruction occurs depends heavily … on each IP group, area and village. These blanket measures have failed to resolve the issues."*

In response to scapegoating narratives, Indigenous organisations and media in Thailand have sought to push back by producing ad-hoc and reactive fact-checks that directly challenge disinformation. They also coordinate with independent online media platforms to amplify Indigenous perspectives on issues ranging from forest management to climate policy. Of particular note, in challenging climate denialist narratives that shifts the cause of climate change – and therefore the burden of "ending" climate change – on to IPs. These efforts represent important steps in reclaiming narratives and ensuring that Indigenous voices are visible in the public sphere. However, such initiatives remain limited due to resource constraints, the small number of Indigenous media actors, and the structural imbalance in visibility compared to state and corporate-controlled or aligned outlets.

Chapter 2 examined the various forms of climate disinformation: one-sided reporting, greenwashing, false climate solutions (together forming "climate delayism") and scapegoating IPs as drivers of climate change (as a form of "climate denialism"). These demonstrate how climate narratives in Thailand are often shaped by the deliberate dissemination of either false information – disinformation – or the selective sharing of true information – malinformation – that privileges state and corporate interests often disseminated via Thailand's trusted mainstream media. The next chapter demonstrates how climate disinformation results in multifaceted impacts that marginalise IP identity, which in turn affects their agency to protect their environment.

3. The Impact on Indigenous Peoples

This chapter examines the multifaceted impact of climate disinformation on IPs: exclusion from decision-making, criminalisation, forced eviction and exposure to intimidation and physical violence. Together, these harms negate the identity of IPs and dismiss their role as rightful stewards of their lands and resources. Instead, they reinforce the vilification of Ips as threats to climate action, and silences advocates and activists from engaging in public debate. The net impact is that climate disinformation erodes the economic, cultural and spiritual ties that IPs maintain with their heritaged traditions and territories.

3.1.   Exclusion From Decision-making

The first impact of climate disinformation is how it negates IPs' identities thereby excluding them and their inputs from the decision-making processes in the policies and projects affecting their heritaged lands they have traditionally stewarded. This reinforces the perception that their concerns are subservient to the views of the authorities or project owners and their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC),[28] do not matter. This is done in two ways: from directly excluding them from decision-making mechanisms; and indirectly, by allowing them into decision-making mechanisms but then disregarding or dismissing their inputs.

3.1.1. Exclusion From Decision-making Mechanisms

IPs are directly excluded from decision-making mechanisms in the first place even before projects are initiated through the direct deployment of disinformation, which, primarily, serves to remove their identities and roles as IPs tied to their heritage lands. While at the same time also misleading communities about the benefits of development projects by concealing potential harms. This manipulation often leads communities to consent to initiatives under false assumptions, undermining Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

A common – and historical (KII01, 08) – tactic is to entice communities with promises of development. IPs have been drawn into land concession (KII06), carbon credit (KII02), forest reclamation and other conservation efforts (KII07), through monetary incentives (KII05), assurances of infrastructure investments, access to water and electricity (KII01) or the provision of agricultural tools like rice millers and fertilisers (KII08). In many cases, communities are given inflated promises that yield little benefit once a project is completed. Such practices create a veneer of inclusion while reinforcing exclusion, as communities are misled into consenting without real decision-making power.

For example, in ongoing carbon credit projects under the REDD+ scheme, the monetary benefits to the community are relatively small and, as of writing, still unassured (KII05). By withholding critical information on land use, livelihood implications and restrictions, it creates a false sense of security, leading communities to believe that their ways of life will remain intact. As such, even the fulfillment of promises may create a false sense of benefit, as the actual environmental benefit and protection of their way of life may be low.

The goal of minimising the involvement of IPs are also seen in tokenistic consultation processes that further undermine FPIC, leaving IPs without meaningful input on projects that impact their land and

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[28] This refers to the principle that ensures IPs have the right to give or withhold consent to projects or activities that may affect their lands, territories or resources, guaranteed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

resources (KII05). The forest carbon credit schemes in Thailand exemplify this, which are typically framed as partnerships between local communities and the private sector. However, Indigenous Karen communities (KII05), including the Pga K'nyau of Ban Nong Tao and Huay Ee Khang in Chiang Mai, expressed significant confusion regarding the government's carbon credit scheme (Redvers et al., 2025). This stemmed from unclear communication about land leases, as well as the communities' roles, potential benefits and imposed restrictions on land use. As one CSO representative (KII09) explained, how the negation of IPs identities impact such projects:

> *"There has been no meaningful participation of communities. Policies are imposed top-down: the government sets the terms, but doesn't ask communities how they can or want to manage the land. [For upcoming projects,] no one knows yet what the contracts will look like, or whether they will be fair. Communities worry that the burden will fall on them, restricting their traditional practices, while outsiders profit. This is a pressing issue now (KII09)."*

Beyond these two regions, respondents (KII01, 02, 03, 05) noted that these schemes – which are being rolled out in various forested areas – see communities unknowingly participating but being restricted from using woods for subsistence, like building shelters (KII05), which impacts their way of life. Similarly, the Forest Carbon Credit Management Project promoted models suited to monoculture plantations rather than IPs' ecological knowledge, effectively commodifying forests long stewarded by IPs while alienating sustainable practices (Ibid.).

More broadly, consultations around biodiversity and conservation efforts at the national level, fail to genuinely involve IP communities. Despite the opportunities these frameworks offer to integrate IP ecological knowledge into national strategies, in practice, their participation is limited or ignored. In the ground level, KII06 noted that IP groups were excluded from key discussions on a national biodiversity plan (Eakarnna, 2024), with even offers of assistance being dismissed. This is a product of a long-standing perception of IPs as outsiders and – as with other cases of exclusion – that they are not important stakeholders. Limited involvement only occurred after external pressure from international organisations like UNDP (KII06). This reinforces a pattern where consultation processes are superficial and fail to provide meaningful platforms for IPs to influence decisions that directly affect their land and resources.

Another way in which FPIC is undermined is by exploiting or subverting existing power structures of Indigenous communities. For one, state authorities have also applied pressure through village leadership. Headmen are frequently enlisted as intermediaries, tasked with relaying disinformation about the supposed benefits of projects (FDG04). In some instances, leaders themselves are misled or compelled to comply with government directives (KII01, 07). As KII01 notes:

"Most of the false news tries to reach the areas where communities live. However, usually the first people to access the information are leaders. This is how misinformation reaches Indigenous communities and gains credibility. It comes from trusted sources, so people are more likely to believe it. The problem is, the people passing along the information may not have a deep understanding, so it becomes a challenge for communities, especially those living in forest areas. They don't have systems in place to receive information early and make independent decisions (KII01)."

In others, they are incentivised with privileges in return for persuading their communities to acquiesce (KII02, 03). Such practices have been used to advance measures detrimental to IP communities, including encouraging individual rather than communal land titling (see Section 3.3), promoting participation in carbon credit schemes with unclear benefits and pressuring communities to abandon traditional agricultural practices.

These not only undermine cultural identity but also disrupt established subsistence economies, leaving communities more vulnerable to economic and social dislocation.

3.1.2. Excluding IP Inputs in Decision-making Mechanisms

Another tactic is to allow IPs to participate in decision-making mechanisms for projects that affect their livelihoods and cultural practices, but then dismiss their inputs by relying on climate disinformation to dismiss their identities and claims.

IPs are often scapegoated as environmental threats in order to diminish their claims. In 2021, IP communities in Sab Wai village in Sai Thong National Park, Chaiyaphum province, were falsely portrayed as "forest encroachers" (Labasse, 2023). In this instance, the state authorities treated consultations with the communities as procedural formalities and, eventually, dismissed community concerns about their land tenure and subsistence farming practices in the protected areas. KII02 confirms this, warning that consultations such as this are being conducted as a show of compliance with mechanisms rather than considering the concerns of IP communities. Only after information was uncovered pointing out that the villagers' concerns were misrepresented did a counter movement – the #SaveSabWaiVillagers hashtag – take hold to shed light on the issue.

In Ban Sop Lan Village, conflict over land rights intensified with the proposed expansion of Ob Khan National Park, an initiative dating back to the 1970s (Besst, 2023). In 2022, villagers filed a complaint against park officials for conducting inadequate consultations on the park's expansion, alleging that information was withheld from IPs prior to the assessment of public opinion (Ibid.). The Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) consistently declined to disclose the impact of the park's expansion on IPs to the media, while referring to false misconceptions of swidden agriculture and rotational farming as evidence of requiring state interference in preserving the environment (Ibid.).

Another tactic used by both the state and business interests is the outright denial of claims from impacted communities, aimed at diminishing their concerns and bypassing FPIC. The case of Kaeng Krachan provides a stark example of a concerted effort to deny their voices. Long a victim of state and business encroachment (KII06), the Karen IP in Kaeng Krachan, Phetchaburi province, has faced

continued disregard for their FPIC through several key measures. In 2021, DNP submitted the nomination for Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex's World Heritage status to UNESCO (Bangkok Tribune, 2021). Karen residents reported poor consultations due to a lack of disclosure on the nomination's implications, including the government's increased authority over forests, which may result in more displacement of IP communities (Bangkok Post, 2021). This climate disinformation enabled the dismissal of IP demands and perpetuated the violation of customary land rights, including the burning of traditional Karen homes (Readfearn, 2021).

In 2025, a dolomite mining project posed another threat to the Kaeng Krachan area, with a private company applying for mining rights in the region. The company submitted its request in July 2022, and in December 2023 and February 2024, the company and the local industrial office conducted public consultations. However, local residents reported that these consultations lacked transparency, with insufficient information provided about the project. Community members expressed concerns that the project could harm the environment, water resources and their way of life (Sangkhaman, 2024; Dannafueng, 2025); however, the concerns were dismissed, and the mining project is, as of writing, still in operation.

In the private sector, greenwashing as a form of disinformation was used to conceal the environmental impacts and prevent IPs from fully understanding the consequences. In Chiang Mai's Omkoi district, the Kaebadin IP first learned of a proposed lignite coal mining project in April 2019, after the project's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was already completed – despite legal requirements for community consultation (Gefeke et al., 2022). The EIA relied on outdated and misleading data, making it difficult for the community to understand the environmental risks, including potential loss of river access, groundwater contamination and health hazards. The EIA also included signatures from those who could not read the impact assessment in Thai as well as by minors who could not consent (FGD01). KII08, a human rights lawyer, notes:

> *"Local communities had long been conserving the forest [in Omkoi] and maintaining its condition. But villagers cannot legally register their right to use the land. By contrast, private companies – who had done nothing to conserve the area – were legally granted permission to exploit it. The justification was "for national economic benefit". But ultimately, this reveals how the legal system favours state and corporate actors, not ordinary people (KII08)."*

Local NGOs later exposed the dangers of the coal mining project, revealing how disinformation legitimises projects that infringe on IP rights for profit. Despite these tactics, the community, led by youth activists and supported by civil society networks, fought back for over five years, filing legal complaints and exposing the fraudulent EIA. As a result, the Supreme Administrative Court issued a preliminary injunction in 2022 (EnLaw, 2024) and, only in 2025, Siam Cement Group issued a notice to phase out buying coal from the mining project (GreenPeace, 2025).

In another instance, private companies greenwash by centring their initiatives as sustainable, while obscuring their human and environmental costs (KII09). A biomass plant operating since 2020 by Gulf Chana Green Co. in Ban Khu was presented as a green and community-inclusive initiative (Chandran, 2021). However, the Ban Khu village in Southern Thailand claimed otherwise, reporting its proceedings without adequate consultation. Furthermore, the company failed to account for community concerns regarding pollution, health risks and access to clean water, with residents feeling excluded from the

project's purported benefits (Ibid.). In response, the company asserted its thorough assessments and "transparency" with the backing of the Asian Development Bank (Ibid.). This case highlights how obtaining FPIC from IPs is undermined by the word of influential institutions, giving weight to their voices instead of holding them accountable by an independent monitoring body.

Taken together, the exclusion of IPs or dismissing their inputs in decision-making mechanisms show how the various types of climate disinformation function as a tool to exclude IPs from decision-making. Instead of enabling meaningful participation, state and private actors manipulate information, exploit community leadership structures and construct hostile narratives to secure compliance. This erosion of FPIC transforms "participation" into performance – masking dispossession while denying recognition of IPs' vital role in climate mitigation. In doing so, they negate IP identity by stripping away agency in decision-making mechanisms, thereby weakening cultural traditions and severing the bond between communities and ancestral lands.

3.2.   The Criminalisation of IPs

The second impact of climate disinformation is the systematic criminalisation of IPs, by negating their identities as stewards of the lands and instead falsely criminalising them as the perpetrators of environmental degradation. This climate disinformation strategy – intensified with the Forest Reclamation Policy – cast IPs as "encroachers", "destroyers" or "agitators". In doing so, climate disinformation negates their identities and instead recasts them as threats to nature. This section explores the selective enforcement of forestry and environmental laws against IPs and the use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) to suppress advocacy.

3.2.1. The Misuse of Forestry and Conservation Laws

The main ruse of criminalisation is the misuse of forestry and environmental laws. While intended to protect natural resources and mitigate climate change, these laws are disproportionately weaponised against IP communities, penalising subsistence farming, foraging and small-scale land use. Typically filed by state forestry officials, the prosecutor represents the state as the injured party (KII08). Therefore, instead of safeguarding ecosystems, they serve as punitive tools that dismantle cultural traditions and transform IP identity into a criminal one.

IPs have been charged by a range of forestry laws described in Chapter 1.2.2, the most common ones being The National Park Act, The National Reserved Forest Act, and The Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act (KII08). The accelerated use of these laws under the NCPO junta regime from 2014 onwards – as mentioned in Chapter 1.2.2 – has resulted in at least 46,600 legal actions by 2021, targeting villagers, predominantly IPs, whose land overlaps with forest preserve territories (Kuaycharoen, 2021). Of these, 29,000 cases were prosecutions for "encroachment" under the Forest Reclamation Policy (People's Party, 2025). To note, there is no available information on cases from 2022 onwards. As mentioned in 1.3.2, many respondents in the legal sector (KII08, 09) and those working with IPs (KII01, 04, KII10) note that the coverage of the cases is minimal due to the active suppression of evidence that may tarnish the reputation of state or corporate actors. This downplays the frequency of these incidents, which are still happening. However, the sidelining of evidence points to the extent to which disinformation prevails in the media landscape. This makes it easy to scapegoat IPs, blaming them for climate incidents that are a result of poor state management (KII06). In addition, several KIIs (KII03, KII07) have also observed that cases of criminalisation have decreased. Nonetheless, it remains important to reference past cases to illustrate their long-term impacts, which are still felt today.

In 2021, the Sab Wai Village cases (discussed in Section 3.1) saw 14 villagers prosecuted for alleged encroachment on Sai Thong National Park (Triyos, 2023a). The Supreme Court issued guilty verdicts, including prison sentences without parole. The villager's community leader was sentenced to 3 years of suspended jail term, alongside a THB 190,000 fine. Another villager was sentenced to almost two years in prison. These punishments were disproportionate to the small-scale land use involved, essential for community subsistence (Ibid.).

In November 2024, a local farmer from the Phamon community, Mae Hong Son province, was arrested for illegally clearing land within the Pai River Wildlife Sanctuary for rice farming, an act that violated the Forest Act (Naewna, 2024). While authorities stressed the legal justification under the law, as with other cases, this incident highlights two key problems: first, the government's failure to clearly communicate the boundaries and conditions of the protected area, which led to confusion among local residents about where they were permitted to farm. Second, the lack of effort to ensure that "protected areas" do not overlap with land traditionally inhabited by IPs (in this case, the Karen Pga K'nyau people) exacerbated the issue. As a result, IPs that rely on these lands for their livelihoods are unfairly penalised.

IPs have faced long-standing consequences from these lawsuits. Harsh penalties such as long prison sentences and crippling fines have resulted in bankruptcy, loss of ancestral land and the distressing separation from relatives during lengthy legal battles (Triyos, 2023a). As noted by KII07, a representative of a faith-based NGO:

> *"There is also damage to dignity and cultural identity [when IPs are labelled as criminal], as they are stigmatised as forest destroyers. This undermines community pride, especially among children. [Younger generations are now] los[ing] connection with their roots [and] trying to adapt to urban life. This has a long-term impact on their way of life (KII07)."*

In addition to criminalisation, KII01, 05, 08 and 11 note that criminal charges for encroachment are increasingly accompanied by civil lawsuits demanding exorbitant compensation for "environmental damages" via environmental civil litigations under NEQA. In these cases, authorities use a calculation method that involves a computer model to estimate and monetise the impact of temperature increases from the activity in question. However, during the FGD with those working in IP organisations, it was noted that many cases are not reported in traditional and mainstream media outlets.

One of the civil lawsuits in 2025, dating back to a criminal case brought in 2015, was filed against three Lisu villagers in Chiang Mai province, after a criminal case was sought. Prosecutors sought over THB 600,000 from IPs for allegedly damaging 6.26 rai of Sri Lanna National Park (IMN Voices, 2025). However, the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand and independent academics (KII05, 08) found the model scientifically unsound in this context, which is intended only for forest-restoration budgeting (Ibid.). Regardless of its discredibility, in 2025, the court adjudicated the order for the IP villagers to pay the initial fine, THB 150,000, plus interest (Khaosod, 2025).

According to an estimate, 1,000 climate change lawsuits were filed against IPs in Thailand between 2005 and 2018 (Ekachai, 2018). In an earlier case in December 2016, DNP filed a civil lawsuit against the Huay Khonta village in Phetchabun Province, Northern Thailand, under the NEQA (Phonpinyo, 2017). IP villagers were fined approximately THB 150,000 per rai for allegedly "causing" temperature increases, erosion, soil nutrient depletion and hydrological damage. In total, the villagers were found to be liable for baht 2.2 million (around USD 70,000) in climate "damage", a huge sum that they have

struggled to pay (Ibid.). Detrimental impacts are accompanied with suppressing IPs from practising traditional agriculture (KII06).

3.2.2. Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP)

Governments and corporations have also used SLAPPs to intimidate individuals who speak out against policies or business operations, or who call for accountability, by burdening them with significant legal expenses (Supratya, 2024), with the intent of suppressing public discourse. These lawsuits often rely on disinformation to initiate litigation; and although they are generally dismissed by the courts, the resulting harm and fear experienced by IP communities remain evident, as dissenters are scapegoated as disseminators of false news.

SLAPPs undertaken by corporates aim to achieve two goals: firstly, to foster a climate of self-censorship by sowing fear of legal harassment, and, secondly, to compel the dissemination of pro-corporate disinformation. Between 1997 and 2019, 212 SLAPP cases were reported, out of which 97% opted for criminal prosecution over monetary damages to silence critics (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020). 32% of SLAPP lawsuits concerned environmental issues during the period 2002-2024 (Thai PBS Policy Watch, 2024).

Firstly, corporations abusing SLAPPs use disinformation to foster an environment where journalists self-censor in fear of legal harassment. As noted by KII06, a representative of an IP CSO:

> *"SLAPPs silence Indigenous voices and reinforce harmful narratives that portray highland communities negatively, labelling them forest destroyers, drug traffickers, or national security threats. It helps these stereotypes to continue persisting (KII06)."*

This is exemplified by the defamation lawsuit against Wut Boonlert, a Karen community leader, and Suracha Boonyeim, which lasted from 2014 to 2023, and exemplifies how SLAPPs discourage public interest advocacy through legal costs. The case stemmed from 2014 Facebook posts in which Boonlert alleged, and Boonyeim re-shared, that local Thairath reporter Surapon Naknakorn had a conflict of interest in his coverage of deforestation activities (Farrington & Kaewjullakarn, 2024). In response, Naknakorn filed a criminal defamation complaint in 2020, claiming the posts damaged his reputation (Ibid.). Over nearly nine years, they endured the stress, expense and uncertainty of criminal prosecution, ultimately agreeing in 2023 to apologise publicly and pay THB 100,000 in compensation to avoid further court proceedings (Ibid.).

Similarly, In October 2024, Non Mueang Pattama Subdistrict Administrative Organisation, Mayor Nipon Nilkan, filed a lawsuit against a community-based organisation of villagers known as the "Khon Rak Ban Kerd Dan Khun Thot Group". The prosecution was designed to hush environmental concerns publicised on Facebook, regarding the Thai Kali Co., Ltd potash mining project (Protection International, 2025). Government officials, who had approved of the project, undermined the advocacy group by framing their documentation on the negative effects of potash mining as a dissemination of "fake news" (Ibid.). While the lawsuit was dismissed due to a lack of evidence, cases like this impose large social, economic and psychological burdens on targets (United Nations Development Programme, 2023), intimidating media outlets and CSOs to self-censor on controversial issues in fear of legal retaliation by corporate or government actors (Smith & Perry, 2020).

Secondly, SLAPP lawsuits can be used to pressure journalists into retracting or "correcting" critical reporting using pro-corporate disinformation. In 2020, Pratch Rujivanarom posted photos on the GreenNews Facebook page of a Myanmar tin mine, along with a link to an article reporting that the Thai mining firm, Myanmar Pongpipat Co., Ltd., was ordered to financially compensate Dawei villagers for environmental damage (Ibid.). In December 2021, the company filed a complaint with an inquiry officer, prompting a public prosecutor in Nakhon Pathom to initiate a criminal defamation case (Ibid.). After the court accepted Myanmar Pongpipat as a co-plaintiff, the company demanded 135 million baht in damages and asked the court to compel Rujivanarom to publish "correct and truthful information" in three daily newspapers and on his and GreenNews's Facebook pages (Kunnuwong, 2020). Even though the compensation request was ultimately withdrawn, this case demonstrates how the defamation law can be weaponised to counteract independent, scientific evidence that challenges pro-corporate disinformation.

The threat of SLAPP also impacts Indigenous media, as many cases go unreported due to fear of legal retaliation. This creates a chilling effect, particularly in cases involving corporations, who are often more prone to initiating SLAPPs. To counteract this, some reporters choose to only gather and provide the information, passing the data to national outlets where the risks of legal action are lower (Asia Centre, 2025). This strategy helps ensure that the stories are still heard while minimising personal and legal risks for local journalists.

As noted by KII08, a legal advocate, SLAPPs by corporates are strategically deployed against individual advocates and Indigenous communities with weaker organisational capacity and limited resources. Hence, effectively using the legal system to impose financial and administrative burdens. This selective targeting underscores that SLAPPs are not random but deliberately designed to suppress dissent where resistance is most difficult to sustain.

Alongside corporate-initiated SLAPPs, the Thai government has also weaponised restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly to suppress dissent and weaken IPs' ability to advocate for their land rights and environmental stewardship. Under the junta and its successors, peaceful protests, public assemblies, and even online expressions of criticism have been curtailed. These measures, justified through the use of disinformation, provide legal cover for criminalising IP-led demonstrations and silencing community voices that contest state-backed climate and forest governance.

In April 2025, leaders from the People's Movement for a Just Society and allied groups received police summons for allegedly violating the Public Assembly Act after staging a peaceful protest outside Government House in Bangkok. The demonstration, organised by forest-dependent communities to demand legal reforms addressing the impacts of conservation laws on overlapping forest territories, had been properly notified in advance. Authorities blocked over 100 protesters from approaching Government House, citing a 50-metre restriction zone and threatened legal action while recording participants (Lanner, 2025a).

SLAPPs against IPs not only silence individual voices but also undermine their collective identity by delegitimising their environmental defence. These costly legal battles, initiated by corporations and states, divert attention from ecological damage to fabricated disputes over credibility. This process shields polluters, enabling their projects that disrupt IP cultural and identity ties to their ancestral lands and traditional livelihoods.

3.3.   Forced Evictions

The third impact of climate disinformation is how it facilitates forced evictions – a mechanism used to erode the economic, cultural and spiritual foundations of Indigenous identities which are tied to their

land. This is facilitated by two forms of climate disinformation that justify the removal of IPs from their ancestral lands: one-sided media coverage and the scapegoating of IPs. These narratives often obscure the social, cultural and environmental consequences of forced evictions, presenting them as necessary measures for environmental protection. Meanwhile, government authorities offer unsustainable solutions to brush off criticisms around forced evictions.

First, as uncovered in Section 2.4, climate disinformation is deployed to portray IPs as environmental threats, thereby legitimising their dispossession under the guise of conservation or national development. By recasting long-settled Indigenous villagers as outsiders threatening "green" land, such disinformation campaigns erase their history of stewardship and deny their identity as legitimate inhabitants.

This is exemplified by the online campaign "Save Thap Lan" in 2024. The issue dates back to the 1990s when long-settled villagers in Thap Lan National Park, Nakhon Ratchasima province, were evicted, but mass protests had forced the government to halt the plan (Ekachai, 2024). Although park authorities later admitted they had wrongly included villages within park boundaries and promised to rectify it, no changes followed during Prayuth's premiership despite decades of negotiations and field surveys (Ibid.). To solve the land dispute, the Thai cabinet approved a proposal to adjust the park's borders and return about 265,000 rai to local farmers in 2023 (Thai News, 2024a). However, this prompted the "Save Thap Lan" campaign in 2024, where state authorities spread dramatic wildlife photos. Key state figures in this effort include Chaiwat Limlikhitaksorn (Post Today, 2024b; Prachartai News, 2025) and Damrong Pidech (Amarin TV, 2024; Matichon, 2024). They actively disseminated disinformation through various channels, promoting the false idea that the state needed to protect the environment from external dangers. This narrative involved conspiracy theories, including the claim that the proposal had a hidden agenda for developers to destroy untouched forests (Ekachai, 2024). In reality, the disputed land consists of long-established communities and farmland, not untouched forest (Thai News, 2024b).

Similarly, the disinformation surrounding the Sab Wai Village case – mentioned in Section 3.1 – obscures how national park expansions result in the evictions of IPs. National park officers then coerced villagers into signing papers agreeing to vacate the land. While the government promised forest titles for five villages to stay in the national park for 20 years, Sab Wai villagers have had to suffer social, financial and mental costs from harassment and a prolonged legal process (Chandran, 2021). Such coerced agreements fragment community belonging and sever their intergenerational claim to land, reducing Indigenous presence to a temporary, conditional allowance of residence in the government's land.

Second, uncritical media reporting often minimises or sidelines the harms experienced by IPs, reducing public awareness of the violations and reinforcing dominant state and corporate narratives at the expense of the historic claims to land the Indigenous Peoples and communities possess and forms the core of their identities.

For instance, false portrayals of carbon credit schemes as community-inclusive obscure how their operation on unprotected forest areas disrupts land use for IPs, severing their access to essential resources for their sustenance and cultural practices (KII02, 05). Additionally, a lack of reporting on the marginalisation of IPs has emboldened eviction lawsuits against them. An example of this trend is the series of lawsuits filed between 2014 and 2022 (Kanittakul, 2022), which sought to evict the Orang Laut IP from Lipe Island in Satun province. Despite generations of living and fishing on the island, the IPs' homeland was reclassified as private property through unclear, unconsented procedures (Ibid.). Mainstream media fails to cover the common minimisation of their FPIC and land rights, since it would contradict the state's false perception of IPs as "ethnic groups" (Thai PBS World, 2025). This enables private claimants to abuse their rights, leading to the forceful eviction of IPs and disrupting their vital land stewardship, which is essential for environmental protection. Replacing this with tourist

development further jeopardises the ecological landscape of the island (Manushya Foundation, 2023; Pukkalanun et al,, 2013).

In a 2022 lawsuit, the landowner initiated a lawsuit against fifteen Orang Laut families. Using a contested deed for a 3-rai plot, which was intended for resort construction and was part of a larger 81-rai parcel, she ordered their eviction and the demolition of Orang Lauts' homes (The Exit Thai PBS, 2023). However, in 2024, the Satun Provincial Civil Court dismissed the latest lawsuit, citing overlapping deeds and the plaintiff's failure to show how the titles originated (Ibid.). In August 2025, the Supreme Court upheld this dismissal as well (Andaman Sea Gypsies Network, 2025). Despite these rulings, the Orang Laut remain susceptible to future threats due to a lack of formal recognition of their land rights.

In another instance, the Tai Dam community in Ban Na Doem, Surat Thani, faced eviction pressures, dating back to 1986, when officials wrongly marked more than 4,000 rai of their farmland as public land (Manyusha Foundation, 2025). The state expanded this claim in 2004 and 2005, even though families had lived and farmed there for generations (Ibid.). However, in March 2025, local officials posted signs again declaring the area state property and ordered 135 families to leave within 30 days, ignoring a 2023 cabinet resolution that called for a negotiated settlement (Ibid.). Villagers who return to their fields, consequently, risk arrest and say they can no longer fish, farm, or fertilise their soil (Weber, 2025).

One-sided reporting on the marginalisation of IPs narrowly focuses on their vulnerability without acknowledging the underlying issue of land insecurity (Sunuwar, 2024). Their dispossession arises from the state's assertion of ownership over IP lands, which cannot be considered ancestral due to the negation of the community's Indigeneity (Manushya Foundation, 2023). This ongoing dynamic allows state actors to evade accountability, leading to forced evictions of IPs in the perceived interest of the state. Despite calls for a pause in evictions in April 2025, initiated by Tai Dam protests, IPs remain anxious about the state renewing title deed reviews, largely due to a lack of governmental transparency. (Ibid.). Additionally, the continued dismissal of their land rights as IPs makes them vulnerable to development zone plans that cause displacement, with Surat Thani being considered for inclusion in the Southern Economic Corridor (Ibid.).

KII01, a representative of an IP NGO, notes:

> *"The stated goal of "forest reclamation" is to increase forest cover. On paper, that sounds good. But in practice, it means forests [are shifted to] belong[ing] to the state, not the people. Even though the policy is supposed to target big investors or illegal land users, in reality, it's the small communities – those living in forests – who get hit first. Farmlands and housing areas are seized. Since this policy began, I've heard there are tens of thousands of cases across Thailand, affecting both Indigenous and rural forest communities. So instead of reclaiming land from capitalists exploiting huge forest areas, the policy becomes a tool against ordinary villagers (KII01)."*

While authorities continue to use climate disinformation narratives, they also advanced "solutions" in order to deflect away criticism of forced eviction. Yet, these "solutions" advanced fail to address the root causes of land insecurity and often entrench uncertainty over land rights. Rather than granting broad exemptions for land traditionally inhabited by IPs – such as removing these areas from national park designations – authorities frequently route discussions through the National Land Policy Board (NLPB),

which reviews claims on a case-by-case basis (KII11). This mechanism, which is slow, fragmented and lacks a holistic, community-level approach, coerces IPs who were evicted under the Forest Reclamation Policy during Prayuth's premiership to resort to its use. This leaves IPs with uncertain and often unconfirmed land rights while forced evictions continue (KII11). Even in communities where permissions are given, there are strict conditions regarding the use of the land and forested areas, as well as a time limit of only 20 years (FDG02; 04). FGD04 also notes the use of public rebukes against community leaders who decided not to pursue the NLPB mechanism to request land use. The key goal is to shame individuals into accepting the terms laid out and preferred by authorities. In practice, these measures do not resolve the problem but instead perpetuate cycles of displacement.

In 2025, local villagers from Mae Hang and Santi Suk filed complaints against the reliance on the NLPB mechanism, highlighting its detrimental impact on their land rights. The mechanism's rigid framework failed to account for the cultural and social dynamics of local communities (Lanner, 2025b). As a result, access to land and resources was severely restricted, leading to the erosion of identity and traditional ways of life, as communities were forced to comply with state-imposed regulations that disregarded their historical connection to the land. In response, civil society groups and affected communities have instead advocated for communal land titling under a Prime Minister's Regulation in 2010, which offers a more collective and culturally appropriate form of land management than the NLPB framework. Here, FGD02 notes:

> *"[Many advocacy] groups refuse [the NLPB] system. They demand that the government issue community land titles instead. A community land title would be managed collectively by the community. Decision-making and management powers would remain with the community. Unlike NLPB deeds, land couldn't be sold to outsiders, only within the community. If someone really needed to sell, there would be a land bank or fund to buy it and resell within the community. That's the idea, and several organisations are advocating on this (FGD02)."*

Taken together, these cases illustrate how deliberate climate disinformation, media neglect, and state-led false solutions converge to normalise forced evictions and perpetuate the dispossession of IPs. Beyond the material loss of homes and livelihoods, forced evictions negate IP identity itself: by severing the ancestral, spiritual, cultural and economic bonds between people and land, they erase recognition of Indigenous belonging and continuity. This systematic denial reduces IPs to temporary occupants on their own lands, while legitimising state and corporate claims as permanent and superior.

3.4.   Intimidation and Violence

The fourth impact of climate disinformation is how it enables intimidation and violence, thereby removing IPs' identity as the traditional authority of the lands. One-sided media coverage that upholds the state as the sole guardian of Thailand's forests distorts reality and legitimises intimidation, violence and enforced disappearances, creating a climate of fear. This is further enabled by narratives that portray IP practices as drivers of global warming, recasting their heritaged cultures and practices as criminal. This combination allows state and corporate actors to negate IPs' identities as the traditional authority of their territories, disrupt daily livelihoods, and instill fear that limits public advocacy. This section traces two impacts: first, the "everyday" intimidation that disrupts IP livelihoods and enforces social subjugation; and second, violence and enforced disappearances that terrorise communities and suppress their continued assertion of identity and rights.

3.4.1. Intimidation

Tactics of intimidation against IPs are facilitated by disinformation that scapegoats their agricultural practices as drivers of climate change. Such disinformation provides justification for state actors resorting to extreme measures, negating the identity of IPs by subjugating them as second-class citizens. The two common forms of intimidation – verbal threats and acts of vandalism – are used to disrupt IPs' cultivation and silence challenges to state-backed narratives that deny their human rights.

Firstly, state officials often rely on verbal threats to deter IPs from contesting these false narratives. In this regard, FGD03 notes:

> *"These incidents happen when communities refuse to submit to policies. That's when enforcement escalates. … Sometimes it is direct, sometimes indirect – like public shaming of village leaders at district meetings if they don't follow orders. That too is violence, because it humiliates them in front of others (FGD03)."*

For example, Maitree Chamroensuksakul, an IP human rights defender, received death threats after seeking justice for Chaiyaphum Pasae, a Lahu activist killed by military officials in 2017 (Protection International & Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, 2018). Police later raided Maitree's home under the guise of an anti-drug operation (Ibid.), demonstrating how state integrity is protected through one-sided stories and how threats are provoked by those who question their negation of IP identity and rights.

Similarly, KII04 reported that verbal warnings of legal action, forced evictions, and violence are frequently employed in Thailand's northeast and other regions as a first step to force compliance with state or corporate agendas. These threats can escalate into physical acts of intimidation that are justified by online climate disinformation.

Between 2019 and 2020, for instance, seasonal wildfires were falsely attributed to IPs' swidden farming, creating a pretext for raids and property destruction. In April 2020, the Royal Forest Department's Phayak Prai team in Omkoi District, Chiang Mai Province, attacked Karen villagers and seized their farming land (Khamchamnan, 2020). This coincided with the Zero Burning ban enforced on IPs, which utilises scapegoating narratives to incriminate their practices as environmentally destructive. Images of the raid were released on social media, with advocates claiming that the operation was carried out on IPs to falsely incriminate them as wildfire perpetrators (Ibid.). This was allegedly done to divert attention from government mismanagement and inaction, exacerbating the wildfire issue.

Similarly, in 2024, three armed officers of an unknown agency, dressed in black, damaged the shifting cultivation areas in Huai Hin Lat village, which belong to the Karen people (The Active Thai PBS, 2024). The community discovered that items used in rituals during the rotation farming season had been desecrated, and water tanks on hillsides, vital for extinguishing firebreaks, were destroyed (Ibid.). When posted on online spaces like Facebook, public opinion demonstrated divided perspectives on the incident, with some interpreting it as a justified act of retaliatory violence against the Karen community (Sathitsongtham, 2024). These examples illustrate how misrepresenting IPs as forest destroyers has led to public support for violence against them, sowing the belief that they deserve chastening (Kuhnlein & Chotiboriboon, 2022).

The dismantling of property set up for local tourism – usually small homestays, villas and resort-type accommodations – has become another regular form of intimidation (FGD03), citing laws and regulations that restrict such businesses in "protected" land areas. In one case in August 2022, over 300 forestry officers forcibly demolished structures in the Mon Jaem area, Chiang Mai, despite the Hmong community's longstanding presence in the region (Prachatai, 2022).

Altogether, intimidation, fueled by climate disinformation, actively undermines IP identity as the authority of their heritage lands. This is achieved by portraying IPs as criminals rather than stewards of their ecosystems, thereby fostering a constant environment of fear which subordinates them as outsiders in their own lands. Such intimidation not only discourages the defence of land rights and cultural practices but also solidifies their treatment as second-class citizens, allowing their voices and identities to be disregarded under the guise of environmental protection.

3.4.2. Violence and Enforced Disappearances

Climate disinformation in Thailand also enables a fertile ground for violence and enforced disappearances of IPs. IPs identities are subverted and are instead portrayed as environmental threats via one-sided media coverage that fails to hold state brutality accountable and shed light on the viewpoints of IPs. Hence, state and corporate actors gain cover to not only justify their attacks and abductions but also obscure them from public scrutiny, allowing perpetrators to act with impunity. Even dated cases remain powerfully relevant presently because the fear they generated still shapes the lives of IP communities.

Firstly, one-sided coverage that depicts IPs as illegal encroachers has emboldened direct physical assaults (KII04, 06). For instance, in 2020, Luan Yeepa, a Lisu man from Chiang Mai, was brutally beaten by eight patrol officers from the Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary for collecting fallen branches for firewood on his own land (Wongnithisathaporn & Worsdell, 2021). His fellow villagers rushed him to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with a serious head injury and required urgent hospitalisation (Ibid.). Such attacks thrive where media narratives highlight forest protection while downplaying IP land rights, making it easier for officials to frame ordinary subsistence activities as criminal acts. In this regard, KII10 notes that such violence occurs regularly but may not receive media attention:

> *"The situation [of violence] is further exacerbated by media agencies deliberately leaving out information under monetary pressure from politicians (KII10)."*

Climate disinformation is also used to protect those who forcibly disappear IPs when they oppose state policies or business activities impacting their communities. Thailand ranks fourth in Southeast Asia for enforced disappearances, with state officials frequently detaining people in secret and concealing their whereabouts (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Such disappearances often occur outside formal detention facilities, exposing detainees to a high risk of torture.

In 2019, Eakachai Itsaratha, a Thai activist renowned for his efforts against mining operations, was abducted. This incident occurred prior to a public hearing in Phatthalung on a proposed rock quarry project in the Southern Province. The project was deemed a significant threat to natural resources and, consequently, to the livelihood of the IP communities in the South, such as the *chao lay* people (Quinley, 2019). He was detained until the conclusion of the hearing and was threatened not to report the abduction to the police as a condition of his release (Ibid.). This demonstrates how attempts to

challenge disinformation – particularly one-sided reporting that omits the environmental consequences of business operations – often result in harassment aimed at protecting that disinformation. According to Itsaratha, local sources linked these men to eight killings in a prior mining dispute (Ibid.). Eakachai's case, like many, sowed fear amongst local residents from protesting and voicing their rejection of the quarry project (Ibid.). Without strong mechanisms to hold influential perpetrators accountable, IPs remain susceptible to threats when advocating for themselves. Without resistance, it sustains a skewed image of IP identity – continuing to cast them in a negative light.

These individual attacks reflect a broader national crisis of violence against rights defenders. According to the UN, 90 cases of enforced disappearance have been attributed to military or government agencies, 77 of which remain unsolved (UN, 2023). Most victims were known for defending environmental and IP land rights, and because bodies are seldom recovered, legal accountability is rare (Yongcharoenchai, 2020). Since 2003, around 62 community-based rights defenders and lawyers have been killed in Thailand for their advocacy (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, 2023). The retaliatory response to their dissent can be deemed as state violence, which is the use of coercion against groups to maintain control or achieve political goals (Renzetti & Edleson, 2008).

Extreme cases of violence are exemplified by the enforced disappearance and murder of Porlajee "Billy" Rakchongcharoen (KII01, 10), a Karen land-rights defender. In 2014, Billy was gathering evidence for a lawsuit over the 2011 burning of Bang Kloi village homes when he was detained by Chaiwat Limlikhitaksorn, former head of Kaeng Krachan National Park (Yongcharoenchai, 2020). Chaiwat justified the detention by claiming Billy was illegally collecting wild bee honeycomb (Ibid.) – an accusation that weaponises disinformation of IPs' subsistence as "encroachment," used to incriminate them as disruptors of forest management. However, five years after Billy vanished, charred bone fragments – later identified as his – were discovered near an oil tank, suggesting he was burned to death, a method often used to silence dissidents (Pratchathai, 2019).

In September 2023, Chaiwat was sentenced to three years in prison for dereliction of duty, not murder, as the court found insufficient evidence for abduction, murder or evidence destruction (BBC, 2023). Thus, evidence of his attempt to dispose of Billy's remains in an oil drum, meant to erase the crime, could not secure a murder conviction (Ibid.). This outcome demonstrates how biased information and the deliberate destruction of evidence perpetuate scapegoating narratives. These narratives criminalise IP sustenance while protecting the integrity of state perpetrators. Chaiwat's lenient sentence further reinforces the marginalised status of IPs, whose lives, rights and identities are devalued and dismissed while false pretexts of forest protection are used to justify more extensive use of harassment against IPs. The impact of this case is still felt in recent years, with IP networks holding seminars about Billy's murder and advocating for the Bang Kloi villagers' return to their ancestral lands (IMN Voices, 2023).

A similar fate of forced disappearance was suffered by Dehn Khamlae in 2016 (KII04), exposing how "forest conservation" narratives mask state land grabs and erase IP identity. Despite generations of farming their ancestral land in Chaiyaphum, Dehn and his wife, Suphap, were labelled "encroachers" due to forest-reserve designations in 1998 (Buppawath, 2025). From the mid-1990s through the 2010s, Dehn organised villagers against evictions for timber concessions and the 2014 Forest Reclamation Policy (Ibid.). However, in 2016, he vanished after collecting forest products; his bone fragments were found four months later, but the cause of his death remains undetermined (Triyos, 2023b). The case was closed due to insufficient evidence. Meanwhile, Suphap was jailed for forest encroachment, showing how conservation rhetoric is still distorted to criminalise IP sustenance (Ibid.). With limited media coverage keeping the mystery from wider public scrutiny, the ancestral claims of IPs continue to be negated.

Together, these cases show how climate disinformation and selective media silence normalised violence and enforced disappearance as tools to suppress IP identity as environmental defenders. By casting IPs as threats rather than stewards, these narratives enable authorities and allied interests to intimidate, injure, and even kill with minor accountability. The lasting fear from both recent assaults and older disappearances continues to marginalise IP communities (FGD03), denying them not only their land but also the recognition of their identity and their right to speak as equal citizens.

All in all, climate disinformation systematically undermines IPs, resulting in their exclusion from environmental decision-making, criminalisation, forced evictions and exposure to intimidation and violence. Documented cases reveal how these false narratives reinforce the negation of IP identity, portraying communities as threats and justifying their political and social marginalisation. As climate change intensifies, this misrepresentation increasingly frames IPs as environmental liabilities, eroding recognition of their role as stewards of ecosystems. Moreover, such disinformation facilitates land appropriation by state and corporate actors under the guise of sustainable development, despite evidence of environmental harm. Building on this analysis, Chapter 4 turns to strategies for safeguarding Indigenous identities as a mechanism to promote inclusive and effective climate action.

4. Recommendations

This chapter presents a set of actionable recommendations to address the rise of climate disinformation and its disproportionate impact on IPs and their identities in Thailand. Grounded in the findings of this report, these recommendations aim to support more inclusive and evidence-informed climate governance. They are directed at key stakeholders who play critical roles in countering disinformation, protecting IP rights and ensuring IPs' meaningful participation in climate action.

The United Nations and International Human Rights Mechanisms should:

- Acknowledge that asserting Indigenous identities is climate action.

- Provide technical guidance to Thailand on implementing UNDRIP and the Convention on Biological Diversity, explicitly recognising that climate disinformation undermines IP rights and climate governance.

- Integrate monitoring of climate disinformation into HRC Special Procedures mandates and ensure Thailand-specific attention during country visits.

- Convene regional consultations with IP representatives, civil society, and UN bodies to map disinformation patterns and develop global guidance.

The Relevant Ministries of the Government of Thailand should:

- Amend the Constitution and associated laws to officially recognise "Indigenous Peoples" as distinct communities with generational ties to ancestral lands, cultures and traditions in line with UNDRIP.

- Introduce guidelines to implement the Protection and Promotion of the Way of Life of Ethnic Groups Act (2025) and implement capacity-building activities for government authorities.

- Engage with existing Indigenous networks to start the process of enacting an Indigenous Council Act.

- Reform laws associated with the Forest Reclamation Policy to align with constitutional and international human rights standards, including FPIC requirements.

- Prevent misuse of conservation and environmental laws against IP defenders by introducing clear criteria (scale, intent, scope of damage) and oversight.

- Create enabling environments for community media, including easing restrictions in broadcasting regulations and reducing tax burdens/funding barriers.

- Champion existing government mechanisms that have been more supportive of IPs (e.g., Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre) and scale their positive approaches across agencies.

- Use official platforms to produce narratives that accurately recognise IPs as integral members of Thai society, highlighting their ways of life and resource management, while avoiding stereotyping or generalising individual actions as representative of entire communities.

- Investigate and sanction intimidation, harassment or violence against IP advocates by state or military officials.

- Embed safeguards against climate disinformation in climate/environmental policies, ensuring IP voices are central.

- Establish independent oversight mechanisms for programmes in the T-VER mechanism (and other carbon credit projects) to prevent negative socio-economic impacts on Indigenous communities while ensuring transparency in carbon credit generation in line with international mechanisms.

- Engage directly with IP communities to understand their traditional practices, and work collaboratively to identify ways the state can protect, support and enhance these practices to ensure their cultural, environmental and social effectiveness.

- Strengthen efforts to push towards the democratic decentralisation of government to enable context-specific management and solutions that reflect Indigenous communities' ways of life, while ensuring local decision-makers are informed and accountable to both IPs and broader environmental objectives.

INGOs should:

- Provide sustained support to IP-led organisations to advance both climate and cultural objectives.

- Adopt an explicit "do no harm" and IP-centric methodology (not just IP-involved approaches) in programmes and advocacy.

- Submit coordinated shadow reports to UN mechanisms documenting the role of climate disinformation in IP displacement, FPIC violations and criminalisation.

- Provide funding and technical support for Indigenous and community media to centre IP stories, languages, and heritage.

- Facilitate safe convenings of IPs, CSOs and defenders to share knowledge and map disinformation networks.

- Support strategic litigation and advocacy against disinformation practices undermining IP rights.

Civil Society Organisations should:

- Document cases where climate disinformation cases undermine the rights of IPs and share these with regional and international advocacy networks, such as INGOs.

- Collaborate with educators, artists, and journalists to produce content that challenges exclusionary narratives and normalises the idea that IPs are integral to Thai society.

- Collaborate with IP communities to develop culturally and linguistically appropriate training programmes that help IPs identify, question and counter climate disinformation.

- Partner with INGOs, legal aid groups, and IP rights organisations to offer legal support to IPs facing harassment, prosecution, or criminalisation related to environmental or land rights activism. Media coverage should also spotlight cases to build public pressure and solidarity.

The Media Sector should:

- Reinvest in specialised climate, biodiversity and IP coverage, ensuring depth and accuracy.

- Investigate and expose malinformation used during consultations or environmental projects, particularly high-impact cases, collaborating with civil society and international partners.

- Uphold ethical and constructive journalistic standards by independently verifying state and corporate claims, with journalists given full access to data, affected communities and consultations.

- Produce constructive content in Indigenous languages and formats accessible to local communities.

- Move beyond discriminatory, exoticising, sensationalist or pity-based portrayals; instead, normalise IPs as integral to Thai society.

- Support – technical and financial – Indigenous media outlets working directly with Indigenous communities.

- Invest in Indigenous journalists as well as IPs citizen journalists, ensuring both professional and grassroots perspectives.

- Feed accurate and constructive content to larger national and international media houses to safeguard the grassroots and citizen journalists as well as to amplify Indigenous perspectives.

- Produce constructive content in Indigenous languages and culturally appropriate formats to ensure accessibility and wider understanding among affected communities employ IP journalists or directly work with Indigenous communities.

- Establish accountability mechanisms within media houses to prevent the dissemination of misleading narratives on climate or conservation.

- Develop clear and transparent policies for paid advertisements and sponsored content relating to climate, environment and conservation, including public disclosure of sponsors.

- Support the development of fact-check tools and collaborate with Indigenous organisations to systematise monitoring and verification, including climate disinformation as a separate category and systemic fact-checking with Indigenous media.

Technology Companies should:

- Prioritise moderating climate-related disinformation targeting IPs, particularly false narratives blaming them for deforestation or pollution.

- Develop tools to flag incomplete or misleading information in project impacts shared online, ensuring transparency and access to credible and diverse data.

- Provide financial and technical assistance to Indigenous initiatives countering climate disinformation, including capacity-building and information-sharing networks.

Indigenous Communities and Organisations should:

- Build community-based monitoring networks to identify and track disinformation and tokenistic consultations, documenting violations of FPIC.

- Develop culturally and linguistically appropriate workshops on climate disinformation (online/offline), led by trusted CSOs and delivered in Indigenous languages.

- Engage with independent and community media to disseminate accurate accounts of land disputes, project impacts and ecological knowledge.

- Strategise with research partners to craft communication plans amplifying Indigenous voices and traditional ecological knowledge.

- Strengthen cross-community advocacy on FPIC violations and disinformation by building transparent, national-level networks.

5. Conclusion

In September 2025, Thailand made two notable strides in protecting Indigenous Peoples. First, on 11 September 2025, the Lower House passed the first reading of an amnesty bill for those impacted by the Forest Reclamation Policy (The Active, 2025). Secondly, and more critically, after parliamentary approval in August, on 18 September, the "Protection and Promotion of the Way of Life of Ethnic Groups Act (2025) was gazetted (Thairath, 2025) to "protect Thai "ethnic groups" to have the right to live in accordance to their own culture, traditions and way of life, voluntarily and peacefully, without being disturbed".

While these steps theoretically advance IP land rights and cultural protections, gaps remain: Thailand continues to see IP identities being suppressed, subverted – and ultimately negated – leaving their ancestral ties to their land and heritage unacknowledged and undermining their right to self-determination.

This report has examined this systemic negation of IP identities through the underexplored lens of climate disinformation. Starting from the 2010s, with the rapid embrace of the internet and social media platforms in Thailand, the digitalisation of the media sector has seen climate disinformation increase disproportionately. Such false narratives disseminated via state-aligned media, corporations, online platforms and offline networks manipulate public opinion on climate and deforestation.

In Thailand, climate disinformation manifests in four broad forms: one-sided reporting that omits harmful impacts of state and corporate climate initiatives; corporate greenwashing that obscure destructive practices; false climate solutions, such as fossil fuel "solutionism" and carbon credit schemes; and scapegoating narratives that falsely attribute the effects of deforestation to IPs. This enables state and corporations to discredit IPs, supplanting their image as environmental stewards with false portrayals as outsiders or threats.

There were four major impacts of climate disinformation on IPs in Thailand. First, the exclusion of IPs from decision-making, both directly in decision-making mechanisms and dismissing their inputs when they do participate in consultation processes. Second, criminalising IPs through the misuse of environmental laws and SLAPP lawsuits – with no factual basis – to scapegoat IPs as environmental offenders and purveyors of disinformation. Third, forceful evictions of IPs that rely on media neglect and false climate solutions to undermine IP land rights. Lastly, intimidation and violence against IP communities and defenders that gain cover from a lack of media scrutiny. Together, these impacts entrench state control over their ancestral lands and negates IP identity by subverting their cultural and economic traditions. This, in turn, systematically undermines their capacity to protect their environment.

Beyond the core findings on Thailand, the research confirms key observations applicable across countries in the region.

First, climate disinformation is not a passive communication phenomenon experienced by IPs but an intentional strategy deployed by state and corporate actors against IPs. By presenting state-led climate and conservation initiatives as inherently "progressive," disinformation masks the dispossession and environmental harm that accompany them. This narrative redirection shifts public scrutiny away from corporate logging, extractive industries, or flawed conservation models, and instead recasts IPs' traditional practices as the true drivers of deforestation. In this way, climate disinformation legitimises

land grabs and forest reclamation policies by erasing the ecological value of Indigenous stewardship and denying the cultural, spiritual and political recognition of IPs.

Second, unlike wholly fabricated untruths, the dominant form of climate disinformation that is spread among IPs is malinformation: the manipulation of partial truths, selective framing and omission of critical context. In an era of rising public awareness of climate change, Indigenous rights and corporate malpractice, outright falsehoods are increasingly less persuasive. Instead, manipulation blurs fact and falsehoods and creates narratives that appear credible while eroding the legitimacy of Indigenous voices. Malinformation entrenches the perception that IPs are obstacles rather than allies in addressing environmental crises.

Third, the primary target of climate disinformation campaigns is the broader public. By saturating media narratives with images of IPs as forest destroyers, security risks and lawbreakers, climate disinformation ensures that the public not only internalises these views but actively endorses state and corporate actions against them. Public acceptance of these narratives, in turn, creates space for harsher measures against those who resist – ranging from criminalisation through restrictive laws, to intimidation and harassment, to physical violence and even enforced disappearance. In this way, climate disinformation produces a feedback loop: it convinces the public of IP culpability, generates social licence for repressive state responses and is used to silence advocates who challenge these distorted narratives.

Overall, these findings underscore that reimagining Thailand's climate governance must involve confronting the deeper power structures that negate IP identity. Tackling climate disinformation therefore means dismantling the legal, economic and media systems that criminalise IP stewardship, erase ancestral land ties and reduce IPs to "ethnic minorities" without political standing.

Only by centring Indigenous self-determination, securing land rights and embedding plural knowledge systems can Thailand move toward climate action that is genuinely inclusive, rights-based and ecologically sustainable.

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Annexe I: List of Respondents

Interview Code	Respondent's Background	Date of Interview
KII01	Representative of Thai Indigenous CSO	31 July 2025
KII02	Representative of INGO climate change	1 August 2025
KII03	Representative of Thai Indigenous CSO	4 August 2025
KII04	Female journalist working in the Northeast	4 August 2025
KII05	Representative of Thai Indigenous CSO	25 August 2025
KII06	Representative of Thai Indigenous CSO	10 September 2025
KII07	Representative of international faith-based organisation	12 September 2025
KII08	Representative of international legal aid organisation	15 September 2025
KII09	Representative of international legal aid organisation	
KII10	Representative of regional Indigenous CSO	17 September 2025
KII11	Representative of Indigenous media outlet	19 September 2025

Annexe 2: List of Participants of Focus Group Discussion

Interview Code	Background
FGD01	Representative of Thai Indigenous CSO
FGD02	Representative of Thai Indigenous CSO
FGD03	Representative of Thai Indigenous CSO
FGD04	Representative of Thai Indigenous CSO

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