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Environment, conflict, and security problems in Thailand's Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan*

Supamit Pitipat and Surat Horachaikul

Abstract

This paper illustrates the connection between environmental problems, social conflict, and security problems, both individual's security and state's security. It argues that environmental and security problems are not a result of natural resource depletion, environmental degradation, or of a failed state only, but are also caused by the modern sovereign state exercising its rights to possess and manage natural resources over the rights of community. There are two factors that lead to social conflicts and that question the state's legitimacy, which will eventually become a legitimacy problem that challenges the state's security. These factors are: the lack of public governance in the implementation of the state's policy concerning the utilization, management, and preservation of the environment; and no opportunity for stakeholders, who lack power in the policy process, to gain effective participation in the formulation and implementation of policies that affect them.

Introduction

In the case examined in this paper, environmental problems are not very severe and state mechanisms are capable of policy making and implementation, yet social conflicts still occur. How then to explain

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the origin of these conflicts and security problems? The case of Thailand is chosen not only because it is the country that the authors know about, but because it fits these conditions.

Perhaps nothing can better reflect the problem about injustice and the legitimacy of the Thai government than starting with a comment from Kornuma Pongnoi, a member of the Rak Bo Nok Group (a people’s organization formed of local people of Bo Nok subdistrict) and the wife of Charoen Wat-aksorn, leader of a protest movement against a power plant project, who was assassinated in June 2004:

All through the battle, we know that we are fighting with the government’s policy and this fight will continue as long as the state doesn’t change its policy and the way it thinks. In our fight, one must have courage and self-devotion. These two characteristics are at the core of the people’s fight. There must also be the feeling of love for your hometown, a conscience every local person has, in order for us to withstand the struggle.... We must keep learning because if the civil society is not strong, it will give way to the state and capital....

The state still doesn’t change the way it thinks and carries out its own policy. Worse than that, it decided to make Prachuap Khiri Khan Province into an industrial city, a Western Seaboand. This creates other protest groups in Bang Saphan, Thap Saka, Kuiburi, and Sam Roi Yot. Today, every group works together to fight with the state’s development plan because we know that each group cannot fight alone. We must sense the state’s schemes and realize what the Western Seaboand is because we have learned a lesson from people in Rayong. We must not fight only for ourselves and ignore other people’s business. We must also encourage people to fight together because this development plan is enormous, consisting of several projects including the Bang Saphan metal smelter, a 4,000 megawatt power plant in Thap Saka, and the announcement to continue to extend the gas pipeline from Ratchaburi. These projects clearly serve the heavy industry in Prachuap Khiri Khan. Dam projects, motorway, a double-rail train—all linked to the industrialization of the province.

Now we are trying to persuade people in the four districts to understand that we cannot fight separately. At the present, people are divided and governed into each separate district and it makes
them care only about matters inside their areas. However, if we look with a bird’s-eye view, it is clear that there is no such a thing as a boundary, and pollution has no boundary either.

Thailand is following the world’s mainstream in which GDP is the indicator of development. If Thai people were not fooled by the state and received accurate and comprehensive information, I believe people in the city would understand that this developmental path does not serve the interest and well-being of the whole country, and that the way we foster our economy will only pressure the majority people of Thailand. GDP [per capita] is just a gross domestic production number divided by the number of population. It’s like the state combined the income of a person who earns 1 million baht with the income of another who earns 1 baht, and divide the sum by two. This sounds like a fair way to measure, but in reality, the person who earns 1 million still has 1 million baht and the person who has 1 baht still has the same. GDP is just a calculation that does not imply that there is a fair distribution of income among Thai people. The rich are getting richer and the poor will remain poorer. Therefore, we need to clarify the definition of the word “nation.” Nation isn’t what the state has tried to tell you. When the state issues any policy, it often claims that such policy is for economy and national interest. I’m telling you that the “nation” means all the Thai population, but the “nation” of the state might mean only a few families, a few surnames.

Today, food insecurity is an important issue in the world, while Thailand’s strength is that we are an agricultural country. If we refrain from blindly following the world’s mainstream of industrial development and instead follow a correct path, making use of our strong points, Thailand can also become a wealthy nation.¹

In the past few decades, there have been protests against the use of state power, leading to questioning of the state’s legitimacy. The problem that causes these protests is the country’s development policy, which uses state power to manage local communities’ resources in order to implement policies and the “National” Economic and Social Development Plan. This leads to acute social conflicts between local people, state authorities, and private businesses that want to invest in and “develop” the local communities’ areas. This also affects and alters...
the lifestyle, environment, ecological system, and personal hygiene of local people in many areas of the country.

The government acknowledges the social conflicts and problems of injustice that pose questions about the legitimacy of the state and the environmental costs arising from unbalanced and unsustainable development policy, as well as the demands of the “people” about their desired path of development, as seen in Kornuma Pongnoi’s comment. Proposals for fixing these problems can be found in the Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007–11). This plan contains development strategies for preserving the environment, biodiversity, and a secure natural resource base. In designing this strategy, the planners relied on five principles as a strategic framework. These principles are: 1. the Sufficiency Economy philosophy; 2. building balance or a middle path between the conservation and utilization of natural resources by developing moderately and not consuming natural resources beyond their capacity to recover and eliminate pollution; 3. upholding justice in the possession, access, and utilization of resources, and the allocation of interests among stakeholders; 4. utilizing common knowledge of every sector to manage natural resource and environment; and 5. participation of every stakeholder in the process of resource management.

With these principles as a framework for strategic planning and situation analysis of Thailand’s resources and environment, the Tenth Plan proposes three strategic approaches to development based on ensuring biodiversity, a secure resource base, and the environment as follows: 1. maintenance of the resource base and the balance of ecosystems to keep a balance between conservation and utilization of resources; 2. creation of a good environment to upgrade people’s quality of life and sustainable development; and 3. improvement in the value of biodiversity and local wisdom to lay the foundation of economic structural changes as long-term biodiversity-based development.

The Tenth Plan also specifies measures for implementation in order to achieve the results stated in the three approaches. These measures can be grouped into three categories:

The first group consists of measures that create an “immunized system” of ecology and natural resources. These include measures that aim to rehabilitate deteriorated environments, to encourage the sustainable utilization of resources within the limits of ecology,
to protect the biodiversity of resources, and to control and eliminate pollution and waste that damage the environment.

The second group consists of measures that create an "immunized wisdom," which equips people with knowledge in all areas of natural resource management including preservation, utilization, innovation using appropriate technology, and the development of a geographical environment and resources database. All of these approaches will go side-by-side with the recovery of local wisdom that manages the local resource base and creates alternatives for development.

The third group includes measures that create an "immunized society" by strengthening the community through community rights, participation, and the expansion of networks of cooperation that secure the natural resource base, environment, and biodiversity, as well as supporting the developmental path that leads to the self-reliance of the community for the well-being of the people in the long term.

The Tenth Plan also identifies the essential conditions that will lead to the success of the Plan's strategy. These conditions are: the participation of development partners and stakeholders from all sectors in putting the strategy into action; an adjustment in the state's role at the central, regional, and local levels, from being a determiner and a supervisor to being a coordinator and facilitator; and the decentralization of power and an increase in the participation in management by development partners from other sectors, especially the local community.

All of this shows that the state mechanisms, or Thailand's bureaucracy, are still functional; thus, it is not a "failed state". However, there is still a question why the state fails to solve social conflicts, injustice, and illegitimacy problems resulting from resource and environment management policy.

The next section will assess problems that have occurred during the implementation of the strategy. There are specific problems that are found only in the case of Thailand and general problems that drive social and state's security conflicts.

Implementation of the Tenth Plan’s strategy, and remaining conflicts

The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) clearly put effort in to collecting, evaluating, and
synthesizing various resource and environmental demands, taking into account both conservation and utilization. The NESDB then formulated a strategy designed to maintain the quality and biodiversity of ecology, protect the existence of local communities whose lifestyles rely on those ecological systems, and to use resources for development.

Nevertheless, there are several limitations that tend to cause problems or hinder the implementation of the plan. The main limitations are summarized below.

The first limitation lies in the political and bureaucratic context. The Tenth Plan covers a period of four budget years from 2007 to 2011. However, since 2005, conflicts and instability in Thailand's politics have escalated. The acute political conflict led to a coup d'état in September 2006. A temporary government was established to prepare for the drafting of a new constitution, and a new election was held in December 2007. Because of the political instability and the realization that General Surayut's government, which came to power by a coup, would stay in power for only a short period of time, projects and programs under the Tenth Plan were halted or postponed, especially projects and programs that were not urgent. State agencies knew that the elected government replacing General Surayut's government would re-formulate the strategy. This did not take place until February 2008.

Moreover, it is also important to consider the views that the subsequent government's leader, Samak Suntaravej, expressed in public several times. He stated that environmental and natural resource preservation should not impede the development and growth of the national economy. He viewed NGOs that work on environmental conservation and rehabilitation issues as obstacles to the country's development. Samak's views conveyed to state agencies that environmental conservation and rehabilitation would be less important than other objectives of the government's policy. In addition, Samak's viewpoint made it difficult to predict whether development partners would participate in implementing the environmental strategy of the Tenth Plan, which was an important condition for the plan's success.

When political authorities allocate budget among policy areas, it sends signals to state agencies about which aspects of policy are more important. It is futile for state agencies to propose projects under the Tenth Plan framework if the possibility of receiving an adequate
budget is low, no matter how remarkable the Plan is. Furthermore, agencies are more inclined to respond to a plan that has come from the ministry to which they belong. If the minister or senior officials have little interest in the plan or certain parts of it, the agencies within that ministry will not show much interest in implementing projects and programs according to the Plan.

The second limitation is that, even if politics were stable, the implementation of the Tenth Plan's environment and natural resource strategy would still face difficulty because there are flaws in the plan’s content, including lack of awareness of factors that are essential for the formulation and implementation of an effective strategy.

The Tenth Plan proposes several detailed measures for implementation such as:

Issue an emergency declaration to temporarily refrain from using severely destroyed resources to provide them some time to recover themselves and to make the resources sustainable. In some areas that are highly important, they must clearly be declared as protected areas.

Prevent and relieve flood problems by constructing ‘Monkey Cheeks’ (community water storage systems) for handling floods and upgrading prevention systems and water drainage systems in urban communities.

Control and relieve problems of wastewater by recovering and increasing the capability of large public wastewater disposal systems; enacting a law for efficient control and disposal of wastewater; promoting the disposal of wastewater from its origin both from houses and groups of buildings; as well as levying a wastewater disposal service fee.

Unfortunately, there is no indication where these measures are to be carried out. There is no mention of the nature of the problem in different places, the relative urgency of each area, the responsible agency or department, and how or under what process each party should cooperate in order to achieve the Plan’s goals.

These proposals also create some problems of their own because of
the way that they set specific courses of actions to be taken for each situation (for example, solving flood problems with Monkey Cheeks), and thus place possibly unsuitable restrictions on the state agencies. In extreme cases, some areas are required to bear a heavy burden for the solution of a problem, such as areas required to accommodate drainage in order to prevent Bangkok from being flooded.

By contrast, some parts of the plan lack sufficient detail. The plan outlines the environmental concepts that are embodied in its objectives without giving a precise definition of each concept. For example, the concepts of biodiversity, sustainable development, sufficiency economy, and ecological balance that appear in the Plan's objectives and targets are macro-concepts that cover a wide range of issues at different levels. They reflect a varied set of values in ecology, economy, and society. These sets of values need social agreement and mutual understanding, which can only be achieved by employing scientific facts and knowledge of local problems, as well as enlisting people's participation in problem evaluation, cost-benefit calculation of different development approaches, consideration of alternatives, and the distribution of good and bad outcomes amongst stakeholders.

Take for example the concept of sustainable development, which appears as the main concept in the environment strategy of the Plan. Sustainable development has become a well-known term, but what exactly does sustainable mean? There has been no consensus on its definition—whether it means development that is long term, development that preserves the environment and natural resources without damage, development that ensures the environment serves economic growth and national prosperity, or any other definition. We do not know how the NESDB understands this concept and whether the implementing agencies understand it in the same way.

Within academia, there is wide-ranging debate about the varied definitions and significance of the concept of sustainable development. One oft-cited definition, which appears in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, defines sustainable development as a balance between environmental, economic, and social objectives. It requires a stable economy that provides well-being for society and equitable benefit-sharing without harming the environment, which is the foundation of the economy and society.²

In practice, achieving the balance between the three aspects of the
Tenth Plan's objectives (economy, society, and the environment) needs certain principles as a framework for policy formulation and implementation. In our view, these principles are:

1. The environment should be viewed not as a sector that produces primary resources for the economy, but rather as a biosphere that supports the existence of human society. Each sector is correlated and affects the others. The consideration of environmental issues, whether soil, water, forest, air, minerals, animals, or crops must be comprehensive, seeing each as part of an interlocking whole. As a result, the formulation and implementation of policy must consider the correlation of every sector of the environment, including the relationship between each sector of an ecosystem at local, national, and global levels.

2. Environmental and social costs are to be included as a part of production costs

3. Production and consumption are to take into consideration the equal distribution of losses and gains from development

4. Planning should consider the next generation as a stakeholder in the present development policy

5. Stakeholders in every sector should have more opportunity to participate in the process of problem evaluation, selection of alternatives and development approaches, policy formulation, and implementation.3

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit) in 1992 defined sustainable development to include changes in production and consumption systems, distribution of wealth at both the domestic and international levels, mechanisms and calculation methods for cost and price, and monitoring and regulation by different kinds and different levels of organizations, including those that are not state agencies.

Sustainable development is not just a means for the state to conserve resources or solve environmental problems, but rather a process of social transformation that involves changes in values, concepts, and practices, and the establishment of social institutions that correspond to this transformation.

We may never find out whether the compilers of the Tenth Plan understood the significant points about sustainable development because the Plan does not mention them. It only proposes detailed
measures on various subjects and a long list of recommendations for operating agencies to choose according to their ability or preference, without showing any systematic relationship between those measures.

The Plan does not seem to be based on any assumptions about Thailand’s ecological and social limitations, since nowhere in the Plan are these discussed. There is no mention of ecological carrying capacity, capacity to rehabilitate damage, and patterns and behaviors of resource consumption and production. Hence, we cannot assess whether the Plan is workable or effective. Neither do we find any assessment of social limitations on the ability of institutions to adapt their structure, values, beliefs, and habits, or of behavior patterns in society when encountering these limitations. Therefore, we cannot tell whether Thai society has the flexibility to make the required adjustments.

Other concepts in the Plan, such as sufficiency economy or biodiversity, also lack clear definition. The concept of biodiversity is no less complex than the idea of sustainable development. Biodiversity has many levels of application, namely the regional landscape, community ecosystem, population species, and genetic level. There must be measures to monitor, gather information, and solve varied problems within each of these levels. Merely mentioning biodiversity in the plan does not clarify at what level of organization and in what area of biodiversity’s abundance and depletion should “the development strategy on the foundation of biodiversity” be operated.

The presentation of these concepts in the Plan without giving clear definitions will not create common understanding among development partners, and will not contribute to efficiency in implementation. It is therefore difficult to know whether implementation will yield the expected results in conformity with the Plan’s objectives of sustainability, sufficiency, and biodiversity.

In addition, the Tenth Plan’s environmental strategy also specifies targets for each objective, focusing on the utilization of resources to create more value, the preservation and recovery of natural resources and the environment, equitable benefit-sharing, and the readjustment of Thailand’s economic structure towards economic development that recognizes a basis of biodiversity. These targets are based on different ideas and different sets of values. The plan needs further clarification on the practical and concrete meaning of these targets derived from
various concepts. Even more importantly, clarification is required on how to achieve a compromise between each objective, how to balance between different sets of values, and how to adjudicate when contradictions arise. The lack of clear objectives and targets may result in various agencies working as they prefer without cooperating, and in the end achieving results different from what the planners had intended.

The third limitation is the institutional constraint on the formulation and implementation of Thailand’s environmental policy and strategy.

The unclear definition of the main environmental concepts in the Tenth Plan’s environmental and natural resource strategy, such as biodiversity and sustainable development, reveals that the formulation of this strategy lacks a clear framework of environmental concepts to assess and compare problems existing in different areas. It also fails to link concepts to research and analysis of specific issues (for example, biodiversity of landscape, plants, and animal species). Information about each of these problems can be found from different information sources, research projects, and academic centers. It could also benefit the planning of strategy if the importance and urgency of each area and issue was clearly ordered and prioritized; for example, which areas or problems need to be closely watched, which areas need rehabilitation and preservation of their natural resource, and which areas are already degraded.

The lack of a clear environmental framework and the failure to use available knowledge and information databases to assist the strategy formulation further implies that the Tenth Plan’s environmental strategy still puts economic development as a priority and considers biodiversity, the environment, and natural resources as a means to support that development, rather than putting environmental issues as the main priority and preparing an approach to development that is in accord with the preservation of the ecology as a biosphere. Thus, it is not surprising to find that the NESDB has claimed that the Tenth Plan’s strategy arises from processing the varied opinions of development partners, rather than using those opinions as a foundation for systemic analysis of the relationship between ecology and the mainstream concept of development. The NESDB did not use environmental science or social knowledge as a basis for co-assessment with development partners before finalizing the environment strategy.
This problem reflects the institutional structure of the NESDB, whose main role is to plan national economic and social development. The NESDB sees ecology and the environment as resources which have potential to create value, to serve as a base for economic development, not as a biosphere that has significant value in itself. This particular way of thinking has never changed. Moreover, the strategy reveals an instrumental rationality that seeks techniques and methods that are most effective for achieving policy targets. This kind of rationality or perhaps instrumental rationality can be found generally in modern bureaucracies. However, a more appropriate approach based on communicative rationality should be encouraged. In this, the NESDB would communicate to, listen to, and learn from various different perspectives, sources of information, and interests that realize environmental issues have high complexity and uncertainty. These complexities and uncertainties arise from limited information and knowledge about factors affecting ecology (for example, it is quite evident that environmental impact is neither linear nor immediate). Wrong decisions are made because of attitudinal failures including: not expecting the problems could occur; not being able to see the problems; not trying to solve the problems, albeit knowing that the problems exist; and not evaluating whether the measures taken might are sufficient and appropriate. These attitudes further complicate the problem of identifying the public interest and setting the right policy goals. Definitely, instrumental rationality alone will not bring about true understanding of environmental and resource problems.

The strategy of the Tenth Plan introduces several environment and development concepts without deeply and comprehensively analyzing the problems in each area. Instead, there is only a brief strength-weakness-opportunity-threat (SWOT) exercise, which results in the strategy not addressing fundamental problems about the agencies and actors involved but instead skipping ahead to propose measures to deal with environmental problems. The most important fundamental problems on issues of property rights and access to resources are left unanswered. These rights relate to natural property and the environment and include the rights of the state, the private sector, and the community, and also incorporate public property that does not belong to anyone (such as air, wild animals, and marine life).

Overlapping claims, contention over access to resources, and viola-
tion of rights, as well as the tragedy of the commons, are big problems that are directly related to the environment and natural resources. An environment and natural resource strategy that avoids considering problems about property rights, utilization rights and their effects on the state's environmental and natural resource management will always face problems during implementation. Any effort to strengthen the community's ability to manage and preserve their natural resources and ecology is less likely to succeed and might even create increasing conflict with the state if there is no discussion of the rules and regulations about overlapping legal rights and traditional property and utilization rights. Conflicts can only be solved when every party has a mutual understanding and a sincere respect for each other's rights.

The state's ownership over natural resources makes it like an absentee landlord with power to grant subsets of those rights to private agencies, such as the Ministry of Industry which has the authority to grant mining concessions or the Cabinet which has the power to approve mega projects such as a hydropower plant. Under these circumstances, the state and its concessionaires have rights which supersede those of local people who bear the effects of these decisions.

The state cannot effectively act as a mediator when a conflict arises because it is directly involved as a party to the conflict and possibly also as a beneficiary. There is little chance that every stakeholder will participate equally in the decision-making process of any particular project, or will take equal responsibility for solving problems that arise. The state can adjust rules to support state-backed projects, even though they cause problems for local communities.

The various members of a local community may be affected very differently by a particular project, and may have different interests in the project's implementation. However, when the power to decide, as well as possession and utilization rights, is not in the hands of local people, the community is unable and unauthorized to decide by itself. In that case, the rules and norms that the community has developed as a mechanism for making decisions, managing resources, and solving conflicts are meaningless. These rules and norms cannot be applied to actors from outside the area, such as state agencies or private concessionaires, because these actors do not accept that the local norms are applicable to themselves. The development of mega-projects, which usually cause people from outside the community to migrate into the
locality in order to seek economic opportunity, can gradually change a community’s demographic structure and “sense of community,” and consequently cause the deterioration of local norms and practices that the original community had always used to manage their resources and to solve problems.

When natural resources such as forests, mountains, rivers, mangroves, coastal seas, and national parks are state-owned properties and are under the authority of a state agency, the state becomes the direct opponent of local communities in a conflict over possession and utilization rights. Moreover, the Thai bureaucracy is fragmented into units which lack mechanisms of coordination, information sharing, and effective management. These factors result in fragmentation of power to formulate strategy and policy, to proceed with projects according to a Plan, to monitor the effects on the environment, and to resolve environmental problems and disputes arising from such projects. The fragmentation of power leading to fragmented implementation of environmental strategies by different bureaucratic agencies eventually brings about results that are far from reaching the Tenth Plan’s goals to preserve the environment and natural resources.

The attempt of the government to solve the fragmentation problem within the Thai bureaucracy by restructuring ministries and departments and systematizing the regional administration into groups of provinces can partly diminish the problem, but not completely. In the case of environmental and natural resource management, these reforms may not help much because administrative divisions do not match ecological divisions, even after restructuring. For instance, river basins usually cover more than one province, or even span the country, and the factors affecting the ecology operate over broad areas beyond the authority of any particular department, ministry, or even the state as a whole. Accordingly, the state may be either too small or too large to efficiently handle environmental issues.

This problem makes it hard to prescribe indicators to evaluate, control, and monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental and natural resources management because it is difficult for one particular state agency (or even the state as a whole) to influence the factors that determine the quality of the environment. Therefore, the indicators and monitoring systems used to evaluate each state agency’s performance on environmental issues are often loose and broad. As a
result, state agencies are not under pressure to achieve environmental management goals since they can claim that there are many factors beyond their control. State officials, or even the head of government, often give priority to other goals over environmental issues.

If these problems on the formulation and implementation of environmental and natural resources policy continue to persist, Thailand may soon face state failure, market failure, and community failure in protecting the sustainability and biodiversity of the environment and natural resources.

The fourth limitation is in the participation process. As with other concepts mentioned in the NESDB's Tenth Plan, the concept of participation is not clearly defined, indicators to measure the extent of participation in practice are not prescribed, and operating agencies are under no pressure to realize the importance of participation as a condition for successful implementation of the plan.

However, the UNDP has guidelines on participation which can be used as a means of evaluation. UNDP divides the degree of participation into seven levels.

1. One-way information: people are informed about their rights, responsibilities, and options. The drawback of this level is that emphasis is placed on one-way communication, with neither a channel for feedback nor power for negotiation.

2. Two-way consultation: this level is a two-way communication process, where the stakeholders have the opportunity to express suggestions and concerns, but no assurance that their input will be used at all in the decision-making process or used for further research.

3. Consensus-building: stakeholders can interact in order to understand each other and arrive at negotiated positions which are tolerable to the entire group. However, the drawback of this level is that the party that has more power and information gains advantage and there is no assurance that the vulnerable individuals and groups' interests will be respected and protected.

4. Decision-making: an improvement of the third stage, in which there is a consensus through collective decisions, to the level where every individual and group participates in the decision-making process.

5. Risk-sharing: this level builds upon the preceding one, but expands beyond participatory decision-making to mutually encompass the effects of the results, both beneficial and harmful. In other
words, this level emphasizes accountability, and those with the greatest leverage must not pass responsibilities and risks to the more vulnerable.

6. Partnership: this stage sees every stakeholder as equal and respects their rights and interests when performing any actions to pursue a mutually accepted goal.

7. Self-management: this is the pinnacle of participatory efforts, where stakeholders interact to find the optimal approaches for the well-being of all concerned.

The implementation of the Tenth Plan's environmental and natural resources strategy through conducting several projects and programs provides little opportunity for development partners to participate beyond the second level in the UNDP classification. Moreover, participation often occurs in the form of community meetings where government officials inform the representatives of stakeholder groups about the government's decisions, plans, and projects. There may be some elements of discussion about concerns and problems, yet this type of meeting mostly does not provide opportunity for people to: set goals and strategic approaches; make decisions and choose the projects or plans that will fulfill their goals and strategies; take part in the implementation of the plan; change, revise, or adjust the implementation approach that has negative effects; or learn together to find the optimal way to improve the well-being of the people.

People's participation is of a low quality because of several limitations. The principal hindrances are as follows:

The first hindrance is the unequal access to information and knowledge of each stakeholder. Even in cases where information is accessible, it often comes from studies that are not comprehensive and did not take into account the problems and concerns of the community as a priority. Therefore, the information does not offer alternatives or help to create an understanding that would inform the consideration of alternatives. These studies have often been conducted to further the interest of those who want to gain access to the community's resource base. Furthermore, much information about environmental effects is technical and quantitative, and difficult for the general public to understand. There are also several other information problems, including: that each development partner uses different information databases; that information about a particular issue is yet to reach a
consensus; and that there is often no verification of data. Even worse, the authorities do not use data about the environmental impact as a foundation for decision-making, but pretend otherwise in order to silence the people who cannot access these data.

The second hindrance to the effective participation of people is that the framing of the issue is within the authority of a particular party. The power to frame issues is often in the hands of government, not other stakeholders. If environmental issues are framed about the utilization of natural resources, value creation, efficiency and effectiveness, or management of the environment to prevent problems such as flooding, the cost-benefit calculation and “public interest” will surely be different from when the environment is framed as a biosphere using an ecological perspective with both scientific and cultural values. The issue of framing not only affects what interests are taken into consideration and gives different weights on the legitimacy of each stakeholder’s demand, but also defines how society understands environmental problems, and eliminates or silences other ways of defining them. Participation is not effective if one party has a monopoly on framing the issue based on that party’s perspective and interests alone.

The third hindrance is a result of the inequitable power to make decisions and manage natural resources. The government has the most power to manage environmental issues. Any change to laws on environmental management has both positive and negative effects on environmental problems, and also affects the participation of stakeholders in such processes. For instance, water from natural water sources is used by many groups of people, with the state as the overseer. However, in such cases as the Bangpakong River in Prachinburi Province, the state believed that using a market-based mechanism in water management by letting the private sector control and allocate water instead of the state itself would make the allocation and utilization of water more efficient. By adopting this approach, the state did not have to invest in water infrastructure, nor become a direct party in conflict with local people about resource competition. Environmental management through market mechanisms not only changes the roles and relationship between the state and the public, but also transforms natural resources into merchandise that can be bought through market pricing mechanisms. In this way, people can “participate” in the resource management process as a “client”
who has purchasing power to buy merchandise, or, in this case, resources. Participation thus changes from the rights of every individual into the individual’s purchasing power within the market place.

**Conclusion**

Although the state has formulated its policy on natural resource and environmental management with good intentions, its strategy still leads to problems and cannot solve social conflicts, which in turn become problems between the state and local people.

The first issue is about the knowledge and discourse of environment and natural resource management. Policy implementation is an intervention in human activity and in the physical and social environment in order to create desired changes. Such intervention happens under conditions of uncertainty which affects the results at different levels. How well do policy practitioners understand the problems? Who analyzes the problems? From whose perspective? Which set of knowledge is used to seek solutions or policy adjustments, and is there any objection to them? What approaches are adopted and how are they translated into project operations and plans of implementation? These are important questions that need to be answered.

Scientific knowledge about the cause and effect of problems, technologies that are tools to solve problems, as well as social knowledge about structures of power relations, rules and norms that are embodied within social institutions, and the behavior of individuals and groups, are all significant to the formulation and implementation of policy. Scientific knowledge is the academic foundation for the understanding of any problem’s nature in order to formulate strategy. It also offers alternative solutions to the problem and provides data for monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of policy implementation.

The second issue concerns the institutional context that regulates policy formulation and implementation, and the relations between various participants, namely: the strategy formulators and policy makers; the policy practitioners; groups, areas and issues that the policy aims to change; and stakeholders of that policy or strategy.

Here, importance should also be paid to the institutional context which encompasses the mutual understanding or acceptance of rules,
rule systems and governance, both official and unofficial, that determine the relations, roles, power, rights, functions, prohibitions, and permissions within which stakeholders operate, as well as the regulations imposed on each party involved in policy implementation.

Under such a structure, there are many sets of rules, both official and unofficial, both legal and traditional, that form an institutional context which regulates policy implementation and relations between stakeholders, including law that indicates the boundary of an area and the people who are included and excluded; law that determines the roles, functions, rights and power of people who have a different status in the formulation and implementation of a policy; law for monitoring and controlling compliance and punishment for violation; law about storage, disclosure, and access to information; law framing the participation in the decision-making process, which gives a particular party the power to control the policy's formulation and implementation; law about the allocation of beneficial and negative effects resulting from the policy implementation; and law about conflict resolution.10

Long ago Fred Riggs made an observation that still remains true in the present day for many areas of policy implementation in Third World countries where the bureaucracy is dominant. Riggs stated that, because people cannot assemble to pressure or influence changes in the laws that shape policy formulation or make the government consider a problem from their viewpoint, they turn to strategies that pressure the operating agency to stop the implementation of policies, or bargain to get the government's attention to solve more of their problems quicker.11 As James Scott has concluded, in developing countries, many policies implemented do not satisfy the people's demands, but instead cause problems that generate demands from and movements by the people.12

Notes


2 Mark F. Imber, “The Environment and the United Nations,” in John Vogler and Mark F. Imber, eds., The Environment and International Relations (New York:
Environment, conflict, and security problems in Thailand’s Tenth Plan


7 Anan Kanjanapan, “miti thang sangkhom khong ngoenkhai lae panha nai kan mi suanruam khong prachachon nai prathet thai” (Social Dimension of the Conditions and Problems in Participation of People in Thailand), in *thammapiban lae kan mi suanruam khong prachachon lae krabuankain thang sing waedlom* (Good Governance and People’s Participation as well as Environmental Process) (Bangkok: Saitarn, 2001), pp. 337–55.


