

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN FOREST MANAGEMENT IN THAILAND: CONSTRAINTS AND THE WAY OUT

Pearmsak Makarabhirom.*

ABSTRACT

The centralized management of the forest and natural resource responding to national and international interests for timber by the State, has brought many problems to forest communities and has failed since it lacks the participation of people. This paper aims to analyze the constraint of people's participation in managing forest and natural resources. "Participation" in forest management means active involvement of individuals, groups and organizations in the whole management process including receiving information, identifying problems, planning and management, monitoring and evaluation and solving problems of forests and natural resources management as stated in the present Constitution of 1997. The term *participatory forest management* means the management of forests and natural resources with the full participation of local community and the involvement of real stakeholders. The author identifies and herein discusses the 7 external constraints of people's participation in forest management. They are : 1) the State's authorities, 2) centralized management decision, 3) attitudes towards people and forest use, 4) trust and strong commitments, 5) knowledge and skills to work with people, 6) incentives, and 7) policy, law and administration support. The author suggests that promotion of people's participation in forest management requires concerted efforts from different actors. Motivation and incentives should be built in. Limitations and constraints should be removed. Fundamental issues on livelihood security (living, cultivation and community forests) should be provided and supported by the State. The author strongly recommends a participatory action research as a practical tool to build and strengthen capacity of the field worker.

INTRODUCTION

Forests provide fundamental services including the provision of food, medicine, firewood, and water. According to the culture, local communities have long managed and used forests for their livelihood. However, governments have primarily managed forests to respond to national and international interests for timber. In many cases, forest management planning has no linkages to the ecological system, the community, economics and politics. This has caused many problems for the community since it has lacked local people's participation.

* Ph D. Program coordinator, Thailand Outreach Program, Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC), Kasetsart University, Bangkok, Thailand. P.O. Box 1111, Bangkok 10903, Thailand Tel 9405700 ext 1228 email address: ftcpsm@nontri.ku.ac.th

It is the intention of this paper to analyze the constraints on people's participation in managing forest and natural resources. The word '*participation*' is defined as the involvement of an individual, groups and organizations in receiving news and information, identifying problems, planning and management, monitoring and evaluation, and solving problems of forests and natural resources management, as stated in Thailand's present Constitution of 1997. The term 'participatory forest management' means the management of forests and natural resources with the full participation of local community and the involvement of real stakeholders.

SITUATIONS AND ISSUES

For a long time, the management of forests in Thailand has lacked proper involvement and participation of local people, which has caused many problems for the forests and the people. Over the long-term, accumulated problems have caused an enormous loss of forest cover over the last four decades and heightened environmental degradation in the last two decades. At present, this has tremendously affected Thai society as a whole; the number of poor people has increased while the quality of life has decreased. There have also been conflicts between rural and urban people over differing views on management objectives and benefit-sharing. (Punyarachun, 1998: Sukwong, 1998: Makarabhirom, 1999)

The State has managed forests in Thailand since 1886, for over a century. Long-term forest concessions were created between 1886 and 1989, including the Economic Forest Plantation Program started in 1906. More recently, various forms of forest conservation and rural development programs were created, such as the Forest Village Project from 1975 to 1993; the Sor-tor-kor (Rights for Cultivation) Project from 1982 to 1993; the Kor-jor-kor (Land Allocation for the Poor) Project from 1990 to 1992; and the promotion of private forestry, such as the Four Sectors (government, private business, financial institutions and farmers) Cooperation Program from 1987 to 1992 (revised in 1993).

It appears that government assistance through forestry programs/projects has neither reached the people nor restored forests. Most projects have been terminated or slowed down, because local people neither wanted nor participated in these projects (RDI, 1993: Chuntasen et al, 1995: Sasaki, 1999). For example, with the Four Sectors Program, farmers did not gain proper benefits. On the contrary, they ended up with a debt to financial institutions. And there have been serious problems with corruption among officials like those involved in the Small Scale Forest Plantation Promotion Program (Techa-artig, 1996). Major issues have arisen as a result, including problems with land tenure, biodiversity loss, cultural degradation, water shortages, and large-scale forest fires. These all remain under debate.

The consequences of top-down forest and resource management can be seen nationwide. In the northern region, for example, following government policy, highland watershed forests have been cleared for large-scale monoculture such as maize (since the early 1970's), cabbage (early 1970's to present), and ginger (since the late 1980's), as well as various kinds of fruit trees. There have been many serious conflicts in this region, including the Doi In-thanon area in Chiang Mai province, Doi Luang in Chiangrai and Phayao Provinces. Moreover, national park area proclamations make community living, cultivation and forest use illegal, particularly for ethnic communities. Cases of these disputes including the Karen and Lahu ethnic tribes in Pang Deng village in Chiang Mai

Province and the Lisu at Pai district in Mae Hong Son Province are evidence of this, and remain unresolved. Conflicts between the government and local people result from the state's attitude that local people have no role in setting policy and law, or in developing methods to control and manage protected forest areas. The number of ethnic people being accused and jailed for subsistence cultivation, mostly rice, has increased. (Northern Development Foundation, 1998).

In the southern region, more than 5 million rai of forest land has been converted into rubber, coffee, orchards and palm plantations. Mangrove forests covering 2.3 million rai in 1961 have shrunk drastically to about 900,000 rai in 1997 due to forest concessions for charcoal and poles, brackish-tiger prawn farming, urbanization, etc. (RFD, 1989). At present, problems continue with uncontrolled mangrove tree cutting, the use of destructive pushing gear, the near-shore fishing of trawlers and push-nets, etc., which destroy fish, coral, seagrass and mangrove ecological systems. Even small-scale fisherfolks face serious problems, because the government does not strictly enforce the law to punish wrongdoers, nor hand over resource management authority to local people (Yadfon Foundation, 1999; Sukunsin, 1998; Rithipornpun, 1994).

In the northeastern region (forest concession of 1968-1987) 87 per cent of the total regional land area is in a degraded condition and has led to new forest settlements. Community forests and public lands were destroyed for the cultivation of cash crops and Eucalyptus woodlots. This is particularly evident in the middle of the region, such as the Nong Yor forest in Surin Province and the Dong Keng forest in Yasothon Province. The government does not accept the rights of the local communities in managing and using forests. The people lack the awareness that the resources belong to them as well. Therefore, the forests in this area have decreased more rapidly than in other regions (Department of Environmental Quality Promotion, 1999; Kaewsong, 1994; Premrudeelert et al, 1994).

In the central region, rich forests have been destroyed by long-term forest concessions for timber, followed by slipper concessions, oil and resin harvesting concessions, the expansion of export crop cultivation and large-scale eucalyptus plantations. An extensive forest rehabilitation program through forest village and forest plantation projects failed because the local people did not participate (Puntasen, 1996; Sasaki, 1999).

As for the eastern region, in 1957, the forests covered an area of more than 5 million rai. At present, there are less than 500,000 rai remaining, since the government proclaimed and managed the forests with no awareness of the community and local participation. They set up many committees to plan and manage the forests, but did not include representatives from the community. Thus, the local people did not cooperate properly (RECOFTC, 1994).

More than three million rai of forest area in the western region that were inhabited by many local ethnic groups were proclaimed as protected areas, and then "world heritage" sites. The Royal Forest Department set up committees to plan and manage these protected areas as "the Western Forest Complex", again with no involvement of local people and organizations (Alonglod, 1999; Punya et al, 1998).

In summary, most forests in Thailand have been managed without proper technical considerations and people's participation. In every region, especially the border areas, the government, through its regional army units, use the policies of national security, drug control and suppression to set up management frameworks for the forest areas. As a result, the local communities have had to relocate and move out of the forest.

These policies have very much discouraged local people from participating in forest management.

POLICY, LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORKS

Major policy frameworks concerning people's participation in forest management in the Constitution, the National Economic and Social Development Plan, and the National Forest Policy were identified and reviewed.

The present Constitution of 1997 gives authority and responsibility to community and local organizations to manage resources. For example, item 46 establishes the rights of local communities. Item 56 gives management rights to individuals. Item 58 states the rights of an individual to access news and information. And item 59 gives the opportunity to people to openly express their ideas. Moreover, item 79 cancelled the former government role of controlling resources and environment, and instead emphasizes its role in promotion. According to this item, the government must promote and encourage people to participate in conserving natural resources and the environment in and outside their localities, in case these affect the living and the quality of environment of people in their own area (Constitution of Thailand 1997).

As for the National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP), the fifth NESDP encouraged the participation of people in managing forest resources for community benefit. The sixth NESDP emphasized the roles of the private sector and local people in managing and developing forest resources. The seventh NESDP encouraged the issuing of the Community Forest Bill and the current eighth NESDP states that people and the community should have more opportunity to participate in managing natural resources and environment. Nevertheless, most NESDP plans were not followed. The government agencies continue to stick to their own policies and working approaches.

The present National Forest Policy aims at long-term, sustainable management of forest resources in accordance with other natural resources (RFD, 1985). The policy emphasizes the cooperative roles of the government and private sector, but has nothing to do with people's participation.

In summary, the national development plan encourages the participation of people. In the present Constitution, people have rights to receiving news and information; planning, managing, following up, and solving problems. However, these measures have not been fully implemented. For example, the Community Forestry Bill has been in the draft stage for about ten years, but remains debated. Therefore, although enshrined in the Constitution, participation of local people in forest management continues to conflict with former laws and policies.

CONSTRAINTS AND THE WAY OUT

Sustainable forest management strongly requires the participation of local people and organizations, the cooperation of concerned agencies and strong support from the government and NGOs. Outside agencies have a significant role in encouraging local people and organizations to manage their forests. However, there are some limitations and constraints for furthering forest management. External constraints concerning people's participation are discussed below.

1. State Authorities

Over-use of state authority is considered a large constraint for people participating in forest management. For example, overnment agencies use the following laws to authorize its officers to manage and control the forest, natural resources and environment: the Civil and Commercial Code, Article 1304 (4) for public treasures; Land and forest acts for forest and land uses and measures in land use planning, land consolidation for agriculture, stipulation of forest reserve and protected areas, watershed classification, etc.; the Wildlife Protection Act (1960); the Fishery Act (1947); the Mineral Act (1967); and the Petroleum Act (1971) for all mineral resources including petroleum. After exploiting local resources, the government agencies have usually left the area without proper care or rehabilitation. Prevention and pollution control remains the responsibility of local administration only. If the state manages forest and natural resources ineffectively, they often blame the local people (Office of Senator's Secretariat, 1994). As a result, conflicts between the State and people arise. This creates an inappropriate management environment resulting in the uncontrolled use of resources and the loss of large forest areas, as witnessed in areas such as the Salwin Forest, Mae Hong Sorn Province.

This constraint requires striking a balance of authority within government agencies and between the state and the people. The devolution of forest management rights and authority to local communities is strongly recommended. At the local level, community organizations must be promoted in various forms, such as a village committee board, a community committee, a sub-district council, and a sub-district administrative organization. Roles and responsibilities must be given to these committees so that they can participate in decision-making and development, as well as monitoring and investigating the operation of government officials (Center for Social Development Study, 1995).

2. Centralized Management Decision

Centralized decision-making is an additional constraint on people and community rights in managing local forests. Presently, forest management planning is conducted by a few high level officials in the national-level committees such as the National Forest Policy Committee, the Wildlife Protection Committee and the National Park Committee. The objectives and policies set up by these committees do not comply with the problems and needs of local people. People have no opportunities to participate in making decisions. In addition, these committees are appointed by the political sector, so forest management depends mostly on politics.

This constraint can be removed through decentralization processes so that the authority of the central department is transferred to local organizations at various levels. At the national level, it is necessary that community representatives and NGOs be appointed as members of committees to balance those from the governmental sector.

3. Attitudes toward People and Perceptions of Forest Use

Some government officials have negative attitudes toward local people, particularly the poor, who depend on the forests. They often assume that the poor are most likely to destroy forests. Besides, they misunderstand that forest use is the same thing as

forest destruction. They do not understand the way local people manage forests. Therefore, people don't participate in forest management, because they are not permitted to use the forest. They are only permitted to help the government in forest protection.

This constraint can be easily removed by having local officials attend social activities in the communities (RECOFTC, 1994). This allows government officials to understand people's perception and their relationship to the forest.

4. Trust and Commitments

No trust nor strong commitment of the government agencies to sustainable forest management is recognized. Past experiences have shown the failure of government-controlled forest management and allowed forest land to be converted to other uses, resulting in tremendous loss of abundant forest and forest areas. The government forest officers are not well recognized by the people and have no well-managed forests as evidence of their competence. Furthermore, strong forest protection and crime suppression measures create negative impacts on people's feelings and attitudes towards the officers.

The way out of this constraint is that the government should review related policies, programs and commitments with the people. Long-term commitment and agreement should be encouraged at the local level so that new initiatives can be implemented in cooperation with local people and all stakeholders.

5. Knowledge and Skills to Work with People

It is apparent that the governmental officials do not sufficiently understand new concepts, strategies and participatory methods of forest management, such as buffer zone management (Gilmour, 1994), agroforestry and joint/collaborative forest management (Banerjee, 1992; Fisher, 1989), community forestry and community-based natural resource management (Bartlett et al, 1992; DENR, 1996), as well as the monitoring and evaluation of sustainable use of forests. They also lack working experience with public, particularly in organizing and developing groups and organizations in a community. The officers are not properly trained. Consequently, people are not well organized to manage and solve forestry problems. With this evident, a participatory learning process for government official and the people must be encouraged. It is also necessary to train both parties to help them understand concepts and new participatory approaches and techniques. Government officers such as District Forest Officers and Forest Protection Officers must be given support in performing their new roles in promoting people's participation.

6. Incentives

There are very few incentives for people to participate in forest management. Most governmental projects explain why *they* want a project. They do not help people realize the importance and value of forests, as well as the benefits they will obtain from their participation in forest management. Protected forest management is very strict. All activities are prohibited, even for subsistence living. In the domestication of trees in farm areas, some people are afraid that if their fields become forested or full of forest trees, the government might take over their lands to be forest areas under the control of the

government. Another case of teak and dipterocarp tree planting promotion is that the farmer can plant trees, but must go through a long process to get permission for cutting, processing and transporting their own wood.

Therefore, the government must create incentives to ensure that they will obtain proper benefits from participatory forest management and gives people more moral support in many forms.

7. Policy, Legal and Administration

At present, the laws and regulations related to forest management do not support people's participation, especially in government-proclaimed protected areas where people cannot use the forest, as it violates the law. Moreover, forest management by people may be against the law. In addition, the current law and regulations have double standards. The government gives priority to the private sector, but the poor people in the upcountry are seen as enemies of forests. Therefore, the government should give up or improve old laws to create incentives.

These seven issues related to constraints of forest management are not new. They have long been discussed. However, no governmental organization has taken them into serious consideration, especially during the last ten years before Thailand's economic crisis. The government departments concerned with forest management receive large budgets to manage forests and a lot of plans and projects are set up without asking people's opinion. As a result, forest management programs have not been successful, as is widely known.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The external constraints on people's participation in sustainable forest management can be attributed to seven major factors: the State's authorities, centralized management decision-making, inappropriate attitudes towards local people and forest use, lack of trust and strong commitments, lack of knowledge and skills to work with people, non-existent or uncommunicated incentives, and a lack of legal support.

The promotion of people's participation in forest management requires concerted efforts from the government, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, the business sector and the people. In the short term, the State should build up incentives so that the people see value and gain some profits from their participation. Limitations and constraints should be removed by recognizing and utilizing new concepts, including participatory approaches, methods and techniques to manage forests. Fundamental issues such as security of livelihood (living, cultivation and community forests) should be provided by the State. In the long run, forestry reform is highly recommended by way of revising goals and improving policies, laws and regulations, and definitely revising institutions to implement the new policies. The development of parallel institutions to promote forest management to meet various conditions and objectives of the community is recommended.

Local people should be encouraged to participate in the development of forest management agreements and forest management plans so that villagers understand their roles and responsibilities in protecting and managing forests. Local participation in collecting and analysing information is an important step leading to the development of

forest management options that are suitable to their needs (Mather, 1998; Durongkadej, 1996).

In this respect, participatory action research in community forest management is strongly recommended as a practical tool to build and strengthen the working experience with the community, then leading to the wider participation of local people. Community forest management provides basic needs, generates income and helps strengthen the capacities of the community in managing forests, natural resources and environment. Hence, community forests contribute to the development of human resources in terms of awareness-raising, proper attitudes, knowledge and skills through a participatory learning process that eventually lead to balanced and joint decisions of the central government and local communities.

REFERENCES

- Banerjee U (1992) Social Forestry Management in West Bengal: Experiences and Issues. In a proceedings of seminar on Sustainable and Effective Management Systems for Community Forestry, Jan 15-17, Bangkok. 41-54pp.
- Bartlett AG, Nurse M.C, Chhetri, RB, and Kharel, S (1992) Towards Sustainable Community Forestry: An Evaluation of Community Forestry Through User Groups in Central Nepal. In Proceedings of a seminar on Sustainable and Effective Management Systems for Community Forestry, Jan 15-17, 1992, Bangkok. Pp. 55-68.
- Center for Social Development Study, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University (1996) "Can Land Reform helps Solving Land and Forest Problems. Proceedings of a seminar."
- Chunwongsa Jaron and Wuthichai Piroonsunthorn (1997) Community's Participation in Forest Management : A Case Study of Muang Wan Village, Nam Pong District, Khon Kaen Province, Khon Kaen Divisional Forest Office, RFD.
- Department of Environmental Quality Promotion (1998) Northeastern Community Forest. Bangkok.
- Department of Environment and Natural Resources (1996) Rules and Regulations for the Implementation of Executive Order 263, otherwise known as the Community Based Forest Management Strategy (CBFMS), Philippines.
- Durongkadej Sripin (1996) Concepts of Public Participation in Community Forest Management. In: RECOFTC Community Forest Newsletter 3 (6), pp. 17-22.
- Fisher RJ (1995) Collaborative Management of Forests for Conservation and Development. IUCN and WWF, September.
- FAO (1992) A Framework for Analyzing Institutional Incentives in Community Forestry. Community Forestry Note no. 10.
- Gilmour D and Blockhus JM (1993) Buffer Zone Management: Concepts and Issues. In: a proceedings of seminar. Buffer Zone Management in Thailand, RECOFTC.
- Hardin G (1968) The Tragedy of the Commons. Science, 162: 1243-1248.
- Makarabhirom Pearmsak (1999) Conflict Resolution : A Case Study on Sustainable Forest Management in Thailand. Research's progress report.
- Makarabhirom Pearmsak (1999). A Case Study of Forest Law Enforcement in Thailand. Paper presented at the Mekong Basin Countries Symposium on Forest Law Enforcement held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, June 14-16, 1999

- Makarabhirom P and Mochida H (1999). A Study on Contract Tree Farming in Thailand. Bulletin of Tsukuba University Forest No. 15, March 1999, Japan.
- Mather R (1998) Local People's Roles in Collecting Biodiversity Information for Protected Area Management, Lessons Learned from Thailand and Laos PDR. In: RECOFTC Community Forest Newsletter 5 (10) p 46-56.
- Northern Development Foundation (1998) Impact on Relocation of Ethnic Groups in the Northern Thailand.
- Office of Senator's Secretariat (1994) Report of the Parliament's Environmental Subcommittee on the Study of Impact of Environmental Degradation on Natural Resource and People's Quality of Life.
- Premrudeelert Deecha et al., (1994) Management of Natural Resource and Environment by Local Organization in the Northeast Thailand. Progress report, LDI, Khon Kaen University.
- Punya Opas et al., (1998). Community and Natural Resource Management in Western Thailand. Faculty of Environment and Natural Resource Science, Mahidol University.
- Puntasen Apichai and Srimora Danai. 1996. Conservation of Forest and the Regeneration of Green Areas Through People's Participation. Thailand Environmental Institute.
- Punyarachun Anun (1998) Good Governance and Thailand Sustainable Forest Management. In RECOFTC Community Forest Newsletter 5 (11) pp. 4-8.
- Rayanakorn Kobkul (1998) Laws and Natural Resource Management. Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University.
- RECOFTC (1994) Eastern Forest. Proceedings of Seminar. Bangkok.
- Royal Forest Department (1985) National Forest Policy.
- Sasaki Taro (1999) Personal contact
- Sukunsil Watana (1998) Community and Coastal Resource Management in the South Thailand. PSU Pattani.
- Techa-Atig (1996) Report of the Evaluation of the Promotion of Tree Planting by Farmer in the Northeast Thailand. Royal Forest Department.
- Yadfon Foundation (1998) Mangrove Community Management: A case study of Tung Tong Village. Bangkok.