

New Phenomena on Water Resources Management of Bang Pakong - Prachin Buri – Tonelesap River Basin During 1999-2004

General Condition of the Basin

Bang Pakong - Prachin Buri – Tonelesap river basin is one of the most important river basin of Thailand that locates on the eastern region close to Cambodian border. The basin area covers 4 provinces namely Cha Choeng Sao, Nakorn Nayok , Prachin Buri and Sa-Kaew. The population in the basin includes almost 2 million. Majority of the land are paddy fields , orchards , and plantations. At the upper part of the basin is covered with dry evergreen forest within the four National Conservation Parks. Thus, this particular area is the most significant water sources, which produces the annual average runoff at approximately 8,489 cu.m. flowing through Bang Pakong river to sea at the length of 300 km. In the past, there has been huge extension on industrial investment as there is the large wharf nearby at Lam Chabang which was built up to sustain the import–export growth that resulted from the government Eastern seaboard Project.

Since 1982, this region has been set up in the national strategic plan to be the economic zone for export as well as the large raw sources for food production.

Consequently, the water demand in the basin becomes increasing to cope with the extension of agricultural production, industry, other businesses and services, as well as domestic consumption of the rural and newly urban communities. Based on the feasibility study conducted by the Department of Water Resources, it is expected that in the next 20 years, the water demand will be increased from the year 2002 to at least 15 %.

During the past development era, the water resources management in the river basin was mainly implemented and supervised by government agencies, which was consequently often dominated by the role of politicians while people participation was very low

At present, Bang Pakong-Prachin Buri-Tonelesap river basin is mainly managed by the basin committee.

New factors and situation in the 7 passing years

Thailand confronted the economic downturn during 1996 to 2000, which led to significant economic and social reform by the government such as :

- political reform by issuing the 1997 Constitution which was named as “ The People version ” that promotes 3 important elements namely people participation in management and administration, decentralization of authority to local government and available monitoring and control procedure.

- economic reform by placing emphasis on small and medium scale entrepreneurs. Also, the grass root community economic was implemented on duo tract basis i.e. to strengthen internal economic on one part and to increase taxation measures on the other part. To strengthen the internal economic, the sufficiency economy as initiated by the king was applied at grass root level. Also, the international trade capacity was improved by using financial mechanism to push and drive the overall economic system of the communities through the establishment of urban and village fund program. To increase taxation measures, extension of tax collection and motivation for tax payment was applied while decreasing internal interest rate. Legislation on asset capitalization was issued and enforced in order to increase the potential for all economic sectors to access investment fund.

- Bureaucratic Reform : this is to downsize the government agencies. The motivating measures for early retirement was launched. Also, the bureaucratic structure was improved ; the private way of working was eventually replaced. Distribution of stocks in the state enterprises was made to give more chance for public shareholders.

- Education Reform was initiated in order to allow for decentralization to local educational zones in local area and made them autonomous in management and administration. It is also encouraged the people participation in setting up the development direction and creating educational innovations that could respond to differential among each particular individual.

- There was active participation of civil society regarding economic and political development. Movement of people from grass root level and middle-class level was vital to recover the economic crisis with the support from the social investment fund. As a result, many local development agents came into existence in the region to strive to self-reliance of their communities and to comply with the enactment in the Constitution that emphasizes on people participation in the process of natural resources and environment conservation and management, in health care and in maintaining ethics and virtuous culture of the communities.

How are these 5 reforms affected water resources management today?

Following the bureaucratic reform, the Department of Water Resources was established as the core agency in water resources management and the coordinating agency among all stakeholders in the river basins.

- The national water resources Committee and the basin committee were organized in all 29 river basins all over the country. In addition, working groups on water resources management in the sub-basins and tributaries were set up in order to foster participation from all sectors. These organizations were established under the advice and support of the

Department of Water Resources as that they could manage water resources in the same direction and in harmony with felt needs of people.

- The development process in form of overall process is introduced in the direction of integrated management of water, land, air, coastal zone and forest with the cooperation of government agencies, private sectors, local communities, which has never happened before.

- The civil society was alert to assemble and set up the voluntary organization for development. They share their common interest to manage local resources, share information, exchange ideas and opinions, well coordinate among the groups, and exert some movement at the grass root level to bring about better livelihood.

New Phenomena

- Communication process for change was improved. Broad and in-depth information involving with water resources are faster and precise. The best media used in the present situation is person-to-person communication.

- Several dialogues for information interchange or so-called learning communities have been broadly organized to encourage local people participation. These dialogues assisted people to have initiatives which more or less contributed to new public policy on water resources and facilitated conflict among stakeholders of water resources management.

- Caring and sympathy among people in the basin have been eventually increased resulted in better cooperation in joining together to produce economic increment for the communities. The socialization process was becoming smoother, which could reduce gap between government agencies as the service-delivery organizations and the water users [both private sectors and local communities] in water resources management.

- It was aroused the recognition of the importance of upstream and downstream ecosystem including soil, water, forest, temperature, air and coastal zone. The negative attitude toward persistence to definite line of authority, selfishness are tremendously decreased.

Point to ponder

- These new phenomena are good . How to make it sustainable?
- Whether these new phenomena could be applied in the international river basins and how?
