

Network of Asian River Basin Organizations
Training Program on Integrated Water Resources Management
Thailand, 26 July – 6 August 2004

OPENING REMARKS

by Wouter Lincklaen Arriens
Lead Water Resources Specialist
Asian Development Bank

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the ADB I join the previous opening speakers in warmly welcoming you to this first training program organized by NARBO, the Network of Asian River Basin Organizations. Thank you for taking the time to come to Thailand to participate in this program, to contribute your knowledge, experience, and views to what is an exciting opportunity for all of us here. I also thank you for helping to make this training a reality by contributing to the costs of the event. This is an essential part of working together in a network like NARBO.

At ADB, we are very excited about this training, and about NARBO. Why? I will give you three reasons.

First, integrated water resources management or IWRM is a corner stone of ADB's water policy "Water for All". At ADB, we regard water as a

resource and as a service. The sustainable management of water resources needs to go hand in hand with the efficient delivery of water services, including drinking water supply and sanitation, and irrigation and drainage. The needs of the poor need special focus in all our water operations, in resource management and in water services.

We recognize that river basin organizations are essential instruments to help plan and implement IWRM. Many of ADB's water projects are now undertaken in a river basin context and involve capacity building of existing or new RBOs, for example in Viet Nam, Laos, and Indonesia, and also in many other countries throughout the Asian region. We are excited that many more countries in the region are now taking river basin development seriously, and are investing in sustainable water resources management.

Some years ago, ADB made a small contribution to helping Thailand establish its first river basin organizations, and it is very encouraging to see the progress made by the Thai agencies and water stakeholders in this country to introduce IWRM at national and basin levels. Thailand's progress is the reason for offering this first NARBO training program right here in Thailand.

The second reason that we at ADB are excited about this training and about NARBO is that we are in the business of Change in development. We are promoting and catalyzing good practices and good examples of how water can be managed better than in the past. Networking is a good opportunity for cost-effective learning based on the sharing of examples and good practices. Training and exchange of experience can provide

incentives for change by comparing performance against new standards or benchmarks. We hope that this training program will help to set new standards for the work of river basin organizations in the countries of this region. New standards in your river basin organizations.

The third reason, and the most important, is all about you and the organizers spending time together this week and next week! This is not going to be a theoretical training, nor a free-for-all workshop where you can sit back and relax. We hope that you will participate actively, and that this training will actually change your mind! Change your mind about water management is about, how it affects your organization, and most importantly, how it affects you personally in your work. The success of networking and training depends on “what’s in it for me”, and that is a question that you should all be asking yourselves during these two weeks.

At ADB, we believe that water management starts with changing people’s minds. Some of you already have long experience in a river basin organizations. For others here, working in a river basin organization is still a new experience. Did you think that water management is only about water and technical issues? I hope you’ll get new ideas then during this training. There is much to learn in IWRM about institutional, financial, and technical matters, but ultimately it is about people, people like you and me. If we jointly develop a better understanding of IWRM that works for us personally, then our organizations can do a better job for IWRM. Then NARBO can contribute to a better future for water management in the Asia-Pacific region by changing the way we work, plan, make decisions, and implement them.

We at ADB hope that networking among RBOs, among people like you, can help a new generation of water managers make IWRM a reality in our region's river basins. So NARBO is about changing people and institutions. If we build capacity in the RBOs today, young people will have the right challenges, incentives, and skills to enjoy a career in RBOs for improved water management tomorrow. That's what this training is about, and it starts with you personally.

All of you will have assignments to complete during this course. These will be introduced to you in the course of the morning. There will be individual assignments, and group assignments. These will help you to digest the presentations and materials provided, and turn these into insights and methods that can help you personally. Of course there is much to learn from doing this together with fellow trainees from neighboring countries in our region.

In the next session, Dr. Apichart, the President of the Thailand Water Resources Association, will be introducing the concept and process of IWRM. The concept of IWRM covers many things, and we'll look at IWRM from all sides during this week. At the end of the training, you will get the chance to tell the group what your definition of IWRM is, the definition that makes sense to you personally, and that you will be able to work with in your river basin organization.

Ladies and gentlemen: IWRM is not a luxury or interesting subject for academic study. The need for a better approach to water management is

strongly felt in this region, where the stark realities are that one in three Asians does not have safe drinking water, and one in two does not have adequate sanitation facilities. The poor often have problems to secure water rights, and they are also hit hardest by water scarcity, pollution and floods. Improving the water security of the poor in our region is a critical challenge for all water activities, including those supported by ADB.

Likewise, the establishment of RBOs is no luxury, but an essential part of the implementation of better water management. How to create stronger, better resourced, and more effective RBOs is a major challenge. Water resources management does generally not attract enough government budget, and in many countries the water consumers, the general public, is not interested to pay for it either through user charges. There are exceptions, and I invite you all to pay close attention to the experience of the RBOs in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Japan.

Ladies and Gentlemen: we are very pleased to co-organize this training program with our colleagues of the Japan Water Agency, the ADB Institute, the Thailand Water Resources Association, and the Royal Irrigation Department Institute. We also deeply appreciate the contributions made by all the other organizations that will join in these two weeks. This includes the Mekong River Commission, the International Water Management Institute, the Global Water Partnership, UN-ESCAP, IUCN, KOWACO, and others.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that training and capacity building in river basin organizations is very important to us at ADB. To my colleagues here

from Laos, we are working with you in the Nam Ngum river basin organizations. To colleagues from Viet Nam, we are working with you in the Red River and Dong Nai RBOs. In Cambodia, we are working with you in developing the Tonle Sap basin initiative. In the Philippines, we are keen to work together with the Laguna Lake Development Authority in supporting the establishment of further RBOs in the country.

In Indonesia, we are developing new projects that will involve collaboration with several RBOs, including in the Citarum river basin. And right here in Thailand, we are closely watching the evolving Thai experience with IWRM, and the lessons learned from applying it in 25 river basins. ADB is supporting a pilot demonstration project in the Bang Pakong river basin not far from Bangkok. And we remain keenly interested in the further development of the Ping river basin in Northern Thailand, which you will see next week, and for which ADB supported the establishment several years ago. Thailand's unique participatory approach to IWRM will certainly be very interesting to all of you.

ADB is committed to support NARBO in connection with our water operations. We will continue to draw on ADB's Cooperation Fund for the Water Sector to support specific NARBO activities like this training program that meet the criteria of the Fund.

In closing, I would like to compare IWRM and NARBO training program to a flowing river. I encourage you all to "listen to the river and to the river basin" and to keep an open and flowing mind for opportunities for learning, changing, and adopting new solutions in working to realize our vision of

“Water for All”. Rivers need care, and river basins need careful development. Better water management starts with people, with you.

I wish you all success and much enjoyment in this first NARBO training program on Integrated Water Resources Management.

Wouter Lincklaen Arriens
Lead Water Resources Specialist
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For further information about ADB’s work in the water sector, visit our website at <http://www.adb.org/water>