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State – community relations and the integrated
water management in Northern Thailand:
The case study of the People Council of Ing River

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Introduction

Water is an important resource for economic and social development, as well as for sustainable livelihood and environment. In general, state gets mandate and has authority to allocate water among users, regulate water rights and use in the public interest, ensure maintenance of water quality, and support users and institutions with research and knowledge. However, water-use right believed, promoted, and practiced at the local level, which is critical for local living, sometimes has different meaning. As noted by FAO, at the local level, livelihood and ecosystem compatibility will determine patterns of water use while at the regional level, consideration of land and water planning and environmental regulation are also included as factors for agricultural development and water-use management. For the macro picture of national level, policy objectives of economic development, food security, poverty reduction, and conservation of nature will be important drivers. (FAO, 2011) Based on these different perspectives, then, the discrepancy between national, regional, and community's policy and direction regarding development and water use is always found. And due to this discrepancy, water allocation is the most controversial and highly affected issue among users, which, in many cases, has led to critical conflicts not only among stakeholders, but also between state and communities.

Integrated water resource management (IWRM) approach defined by the Global Water Partnership as *“a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystem”* (UNEP, 2009) is supposed to be an appropriate method for water use management. In order to apply and promote this approach, partnership among policy makers, regulators, water users, and other stakeholders at both national and local levels has played a significant role.

In Northern Thailand, water use right and water management has been a conflict between state and communities for long time. Since early 2000s, the integrated water resources management approach has been applied by the government. As a result, several committees and mechanism were established. In following, a number of activities had been conducted in order to lessen the degree of conflicts as well as to promote the local participation in decision making process of agricultural development and water management.

The study of Heyd & Neef in 2004, however, had concluded that the participation of local people in development activities and in the natural resources conservation and management was limited and passive due to the lack of awareness among the people and communities as well as the negative attitudes of government officials towards local people, particularly the ethnic minority, and their unwillingness to devolve their authority and responsibility to lower level for fear of power lost. (Heyd & Neef, 2004) Again, five years later, the study of Anukulampai had suggested that, as a process, IWRM needed time and flexibility for implementation. In addition, public participation and awareness-raising were crucial tools to strengthen partnership and ownership among relevant stakeholders. (Anukulampai, 2009)

This paper will extend the studies of Heyd & Neef and Anukulampai to understand the changes and progress of participatory performed by local people and communities in water management process by investigating the evolvement of **People Council of Ing River** in Chiangrai and Phayao recently. As a preliminary study, it will try to display the evolution of this local movement and its interaction with state, including the participation, negotiation, confrontation, and compromise. The main features of the Council which have developed from lesson learned in the past as well as from other movements in other areas will be elaborated. At the end, the paper will also try to explore the conditions that prevent partnership among all actors in the process of integrated water management, focusing on the different principle and direction of development between the government and local communities, political involvement and constraints, as well as the specific geographical characters of the river, watershed, and area around.

Documentary research and in-depth interview are main method of the study. As a preliminary report at this stage, the explanation in this paper is not yet completed and based mainly on documentary research and content analysis. In addition, it was found out that data documented by local communities and those provided by the government are different. Therefore data verification must be done again later. Regarding interview, although in-depth interview had been conducted, data was not yet sufficient either. More interviews and observation are planned to be conducted in the following months.

Ing River and the emergence of “People Council of Ing River”

Ing River and its significance

Ing River is originated from Phi Pan Num in Phayao Province, flows through Phayao and Chiangrai Provinces upward to Mekong River. Geographically, Ing River is divided into 3 parts: the upper, the middle, and the lower parts, covering the total areas of 4773.34 square kilometers within 2 provinces. The upper part is 34 kilometers long, starting from the original up to Phayao Lake, which covers the areas of 892.96 square kilometers. There are 2 important reservoirs along the river, Phayao Lake and Nong Lek Sai. The middle part of Ing River is flowing from Phayao (Phayao Lake) through Chiangrai. With its 158 kilometers long, it covers the areas of 2,182.72 square kilometers. And the lower part which mainly is in Chiangrai Province, is 133 kilometers long and covers the areas of 1,697.93 square kilometers. As a tributary of Mekong River, Ing River flows up north to join Mekong River at Chiang Kong District in Chiang rai. (RBC of Kok and Mekong River Basins, 2012)

Along its 325 Km long¹, there are 23 small tributaries flowing in, which create a large area of wetland with plenty of natural resources including forest, wild life, birds, fishes, and plants. The water from Ing River has contributed to the survival and livelihood of people on the riparian as it is a source of food, daily consumption, and social values. Local people use water for agriculture, husbandry, washing and cleaning in daily life, as well as for worship in traditional beliefs. The history of settlement in the area along the river can be tracked back for several hundred years. Local people include Thai and ethnic minorities who have earned their lives by utilizing the existing resources concurrently preserved them based on the sufficiency philosophy and nature dependency. (Yeunyong, n.a.)

As a tributary of Mekong River, particularly the lower part, changes of water current of Mekong River caused by either nature or human's activity will affect the water current of Ing River and area around. From political point of view, Mekong River is an international river with 6 riparian countries while Ing River is under Thai state's sovereignty. However, geographically, the interconnectedness between these two rivers cannot be divided by politics. Therefore, water manage of Ing River is more complicated and involves wider groups of stakeholders. Thai government by River Basin Committee of Kok and Mekong River Basins (RBC-The North) has classified Ing River as a part of Mekong River Basin, and issued the Kok and Mekong River Basins Integrated Development and Management Framework 2014-2016 in which the integrated water management approach is applied and will be implemented by related organizations at the local level. (RBC of Kok and Mekong River Basins, 2012)

Water degradation and its impacts: Different perspectives

Recently, it is witnessed that the degradation of rivers and watershed becomes more serious. The River Basin Committee of Kok and Mekong River Basins (RBC - The North) had identified and categorized the causes of degradation of Ing River and its watershed into 3 parts according to the geography: the upstream, midstream, and downstream. The main problems for the upstream water degradation were deforestation for agricultural expansion and soil erosion while the water shortage and flood were critical problems for midstream water management. Regarding the downstream, the quality of water was the most serious problem due to the contamination from agriculture and residential areas. In addition, the RCB-The North also indicated that the inefficiency and conflict related to water management had occurred due to different interests and perspectives among several actors and stakeholders. In general, the competition for water for both agriculture and daily consumption among water users usually occurred between the upstream and downstream of the river. Concurrently, there existed the conflict between local communities and government officials regarding the water management and development projects in the area as well. (RBC of Kok and Mekong River Basins, 2012)

According to the RBC-The North's document – the Kok and Mekong River Basins Integrated Development and Management Framework 2014-2016, it can be seen that with the realization of severe water degradation and shortage, RBC-The North has attempted to solve the problems by giving priority to water supply management. Namely, the construction of reservoir, wells, and pipe system is recommended as a response to water shortage while dyke, dam, and dredging are planned for flood prevention. (RBC of Kok and Mekong River Basins, 2012) The core idea underlines these

¹ Data from local document indicated that the river is only 260 kilometers long.

suggestions and plan is to manage water by increasing the amount or control the amount by technology and construction. These methods may be able to solve the problem in short term, but certainly, in long term, these activities will lead to other problems due to the changed course of river and the river current. However, the recommendation and plan of RBC – The North should not be considered as an independent plan and separated from other government’s development policy and plans.

Apart from construction, RBC-The North also has a plan to promote reforestation and natural resources conservation in the upper Ing watershed. In addition, with the application of the integrated water management approach, the RBC-The North also recognizes the importance of local participation in the process of water management and concrete plans are supposed to be implemented during 3 years of the plan. (RBC of Kok and Mekong River Basins, 2012)

Contradictory to the government’s views, local people have noted that the degradation of wetland along Ing River occurred as a result of agricultural expansion and development projects implemented by the government. With the increasing amount of population, the demand for water has been sharply increasing. Concurrently, following the government’s guidelines as key sectors for income generation, the agricultural expansion as well as tourist promotion has been intensified in 2 provinces – Phayao and Chiangrai, which contributed to the excessive water use, water exploitation, as well as the competition for water among several groups of water users. Therefore, from local perspective, the root of the problem lies not only on the method of water control and allocation among several users and between upstream and downstream in different periods, but also the path of development which focuses on income growth and intensively utilization of natural resources (Yeunyong, n.a.)

In fact, for local people, the degradation of natural resources along Ing River is considered much more serious and covers wider scope than the issue of water. As their livings depend on river, for them, the meaning of river degradation includes food insecurity and economic vulnerability in long term. Therefore, for their sustainable life, local people demand for a holistic and integrated approach as well as a comprehensive and long term plan for development, utilization and preservation of natural resources including forest, water and land. (Viset & Boonserm, 2004) In addition, although the mechanism implemented by the government to solve the problems, namely the construction either to respond to water shortage or for flood prevention, are considered important, it is rather doubted by local people about the efficiency and transparency. (Yeunyong, n.a.)

The emergence of “People Council of Ing River”

Based on the facing condition of water degradation and different perspectives regarding water use and management, local people found it necessary to establish the river community network as a helpful tool to deal with the problems and negotiate with government officials. Information from document showed that river community networks had existed long before, but the river community networks of Ing River in Phayao and Chiangrai had actively emerged since 1990s. As noted by Heyd & Neef and Anukularmphai, the democratic political environment with the liberal constitution and decentralized administrative policy since late 1990s had provided an opportunity for local voices to be heard. (Heyd & Neef, 2004; Anukularmphai, 2009)

Interestingly, data from content analysis displayed that in many cases, the conflict between state and community regarding the development policy and direction was the key drive pushing local people to cooperate and establish a network in communities along Ing River. As explained by Rakyuttitham, state-community conflicts can be seen from 2 dimensions: resources preservation and economic development. With the intention to preserve the natural resources, the government declared the preservation area without consideration of prior settlement of local people in the area. Once the declared preservation area overlapped with the agricultural or fishery area where people earned their living, the conflict and confrontation occurred. With the legal support, the government officials considered local people as offenders and tried to force them to leave the area while local people lacking of any authority and power found themselves as victims. To survive, local people formed the group or network to fight against the government. The case of “village fishery project” initiated by Fishery Department in 1987 was one among others that brought up the protest against the project and the forthcoming act during 1996-2000. At the end, the government had reconsidered this project. Regarding economic development, to promote income and growth, agriculture and tourism were promoted resulting to the increasing demand for water. To support this economic development policy, irrigation system was given priority in order to increase irrigated area and amount of water. The increasing irrigated area might contribute positively to the large scale producers, but for small scale farmers, irrigation system affected their lives negatively. Unexpected flood and water shortage happened due to changes of river course and water current resulted from dykes, dams or canals. The examples of Phayao Lake and lower Ing wetland were some precise cases. From local perspective, while the government’s development projects focused on growth and maximized resources utilization, the local people searched for the sustainable development and sufficiency-resources utilization. This different perspective led to the anti – government sentiment and later network formation with the purpose of community based resources preservation and allocation. Instead of applying legal rules and regulations, the community network used traditional ritual with indigenous wisdom and belief to unite people and encourage their participation. (Rakyittitham, 2000; Yeunyong, n.a.; Viset & Boonserm, 2004)

Another critical issue that drove people along Ing River to establish the network was the non-participatory process of development plan and projects implemented by the government. Being residents in the affected area where the development projects would be conducted, local people believed that they had right to be informed for preparation or adjustment. However, this expectation was not fulfilled, which disappointed local people who foresaw the negative impact of those development projects. Certainly, this situation led to the suspect and mistrust on the government’s projects and officials. Among others, the most serious project was the Kok – Ing – Nan Water Diversion. The objective of the Project was to diverse water from Kok and Ing Rivers to Nan River which is a tributary of Chao Praya River to support the irrigated area in the middle part of the country. (Rakyuttitham, 2000) In fact, the Royal Irrigation Department with support of JICA, had commissioned the consultant companies to conduct the feasibility study, but the result of the study was not disseminated. The NGOs and local people had doubted about impacts of the Project, particularly flood, water shortage, and competition for water. In addition, this Project also raised the questions from people in the North regarding the development direction of the government which had given priority to the Center by the loss of the North. In order to prevent the Project implementation, communities along Ing River cooperated, set up the river community networks, and negotiated with the government. The demand for information disclosure and right to manage

natural resources by community was proposed through several seminars and meetings with the government officials. At the end, this Project was postponed. This situation reflected the fact that the top-down approach was not accepted by local communities. In addition, it also illustrated the strength of community networks as a tool to negotiate with the government and demand for their right to protect the community resources which belong to all. (Viset & Boonserm, 2004)

Apart from those two factors, local people and communities along Ing River were also inspired by other communities in other parts of the country which faced the same problems and shared the same experiences. Information sharing and lesson learned from other community networks has confirmed that to manage the “commons” by one community alone is impossible, and therefore, tighter and deeper cooperation among community networks is necessary. This leads to the initiative of People Council of Ing River in 2013. (Rakyuttitham, 2000) Moreover, due to the scarcity of natural resources, local people have realized that their sustainable lives depend on resources sustainability as well as efficient and fair allocation of it. This will not happen without an active participation of local people and communities. Therefore, the demand for rights to access to common natural resources and the community based management with the sufficiency philosophy and nature dependency become a core principle of community networks as well as a tool to balance between resource preservation and utilization in the communities participated in the networks. (Yeunyong, n.a.)

In general, the structure of river community network consists of committees in which representatives from several communities join. Meetings and consultation are main mechanism to run the community network. The basic function of all networks is to manage water for their daily lives as well as to monitor the government’s development policy and projects which may affect their livelihood. By agreement among community committees, rules and practices for natural resources management in the communities, including allocation, utilization, preservation, and penalty are set and enforced. Coordination among networks of river communities; for example, network of Ing River community, network of Kok River Community, and network of Sai River Community, also exists, and joint activities are conducted from time to time. (Rakyuttitham, 2000)

Regarding the network of Ing River community, in particular, it comprises of several groups and networks in both Phayao and Chiangrai provinces. For the Upper and Mid Ing River, there are Phayao Lake and Watershed Preservation Group, Love Lao River Network, Love Yuan River Network, the Network of alternative agriculture in Phayao, the Network of traditional fishery in Phayao Lake, the Network of natural resources of Phayao province, the Network of Mid-Ing River, while in Chiangrai, there are the Network of Local people in Lower Ing River and the Network for conservation of Lower Ing River (Rakyuttitham, 2000) Some networks had short life; for example, the Love Ing – Lao Rivers Group, while some networks are active and can transform themselves to be a more solid organization later; such as, the Network for social life and environmental studies established in 1993 to follow up the Kok-Ing-Nan Diversion Project, which developed to be the People Council of Ing River in 2013. (Viset & Boonserm, 2004)

In the year 2011, the Network of Ing River community together with the Network for natural resources and cultural conservation in Mekong and Lanna areas had organized the meeting of all networks along the Ing River. In this meeting, the idea of People Council of Ing River was initiated in order to develop or upgrade the local movement from “network” which was a loose cooperative

form to a more consolidated unit of “council” with its permanent secretariat. Although the idea was widely discussed, there was no concrete action until 2013 when two meetings were convened again in order to establish the People Council of Ing River to be a forum and a process for local people to participate in the Ing River management and policy making process, to extend and strengthen the network of knowledge learning and sharing, and to expand the conservative areas along Ing River. The main principle of the Council is to provide opportunities and encourage local people to take part in the process of natural resources allocation and preservation along Ing River with fairness and sustainability. The working method comprises of several activities, namely natural resources and cultural preservation; the establishment of the Council Foundation; participation in policy making process of development projects along Ing River; and drafting the Council’s proposal for Ing River development and management. The strategic plan of action includes preservation and restoration of watershed forest of Phayao Lake, demarcation and expansion of the fish preservation area, diversion of water from Mekong River to Ing River for agriculture, and data base to maintain the traditional knowledge. (Viset, 2013)

The emergence of this Council signifies the cooperation between upstream and downstream communities on water management, which was believed to be difficult or impossible to happen. This also reflects the new stage and feature of local movement. It confirms the fact that cooperation is the best method to maintain and protect mutual interests, and for local people, with their long experience of “try and error”, it proves that network is possible, important and necessary. At the same time, experience also teaches local people that knowledge is important both to deal with the government officials, and to support their activities. Therefore, the Council has an intention to closely work with the universities and academic institutes in the area. The interview with the leader of the Council illustrated an attempt to institutionalize this local movement and turn it to be a knowledge-based one as a response to the claim of incapability and non-educated unit. Concurrently, learning from the failure of other movements in the Northeast, the Council will utilize knowledge, rather than the strength of mass, to legitimize its right and negotiate with the government regarding resources management of Ing River and its wetland. The future success or failure of the Council will extend the study and argument debated by Neef & team whether local community can manage water resources sustainably. (Neef *et al.*, 2004)

The government’s responses

National plans for water management

While changes and progress at the local level regarding the water resources management is seen, the same movement at the national level is rather limited. Although the integrated water resources management approach (IWRM) was announced as a guideline for water management of the country since early 2000s, the cooperation and coordination among related agencies was not much improved. At the policy level, at least 4 agencies have involved in drafting water management plans, namely the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), Royal Irrigation Department (RID), River Basin Committee (RBC), and Water Resource Association. Interestingly, each agency has produced its own plan, which partly duplicated and partly inconsistent with each other. At practical level, project implementation by each agency is conducted independently. As the IWRM requires cooperation and coordination among related organizations, it becomes a critical challenge for them to accomplish this mission.

The National Economic and Social Development Plan No. 11, 2012-2016 (NESDP No.11, 2012-2016) had addressed the severe problems of natural resources degradation, unequal opportunity to access to natural resources, as well as unfair allocation of it. In terms of management, the NESBP also identified the problems of incoherent policy, lack of coordination among responsible agencies, fragmented mechanism, as well as inefficient enforcement and non-transparency. The NESDB had suggested that during the Plan No. 11 (2012-2016), in order to manage natural resources and environment to achieve sustainability, communities and local government are the key actors. Therefore, it is necessary to empower communities and support local rights to utilize natural resources in a balanced and sustainable manner. In addition, in order to support communities, regional universities, vocational institutions, and NGOs will be encouraged to participate in community development plan and projects. (NESDB, 2012)

It should be noted that the essence of the Plan No. 11 has supported the activities conducted by networks of river communities including the People Council of Ing River recently. However, at practical level, the Master Plan on Water Resource Management 2012 drafted by the Strategic Committee for Water Resource Management under the NESDB, had given the different picture. In details, this Master Plan gave priority to flood prevention and management by focusing on physical structure, efficient system and mechanism, and emergency preparedness. Although the role of people and community was indicated, the objective was to create understanding, acceptance, and participation in large scale flood management, not the water resources management for their livings. (Office of the Strategic Committee, NESDB, 2012)

Regarding the Royal Irrigation Department (RID) which has a direct responsibility on water management, according to RID Strategic Plan 2013-2016, the core mission of the organization is to develop the water sources and increase irrigated areas. Concurrently, the integrated water management focusing on prevention of natural disaster caused by water, and an appropriate, sufficient, and fair water allocation method is also promoted. In order to achieve this goal, the participation of people, community, and related organizations is encouraged; for example, an initiative on participatory process prior the construction, during construction, and post construction. However, it is interesting to note that while RID realizes the importance of IWRM, it also perceives that IWRM is a challenge for the organization. This challenge is elaborated in 2 aspects: participatory and integrated institution and authority. Regarding the participatory, according to the plan, when SWOT analysis was conducted, the result showed that RID perceived NGOs and people movement as a threat that prevented the water development project. Regarding institution, RID realized that there was no integrated institution, authority and command for water management which weakened the management process particularly during emergency; therefore, RID proposed to set up the river basin committee to carry out the task. (RID, 2013)

Although it is widely realized that the fragmented organizations and management system regarding water resources decreased efficiency, an attempt to consolidate these organizations and authority failed. In contrast, the result of such an attempt was the newly born ministry and department, adding more agencies in the list of organizations dealing with water management. Department of Water Resources under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment was established in 2002 in order to be a core agency to implement IWRM. Under this department, 25 River Basin Committees were established to take responsibility of 25 important river basins of the country. Ing River, as a tributary of Mekong River, is looked after by the Kok-Mekong River Basin Committee or

River Basin Committee – The North. To conduct activities according to its mission and mandate, RBC – The North also has its own plan, namely the Kok – Mekong River Basins Integrated Development and Management Framework 2014-2016. Although this plan had identified several critical problems of Ing River including water degradation, water shortage or water excess in some periods, and inappropriate water allocation, the solution suggested by the plan concentrated on physical management (construction and technology), rather than institutional management (criteria for water allocation). (RBC – the North, 2012) From local people's perspective, according to the interview with the leader of People Council of Ing River, this strategy does not contribute to the long term sustainable water management of Ing River.

Water Resources Association is another agency involved in water management. According to the Water Resources Management Strategies and Action Plans of Thailand proposed by this Association in 2004, water management included water utilization, water source conservation, and monitoring and preservation of water quality. Therefore, it was suggested that the study and establishment of the water-use criteria for suitable and equitable water allocation for all water use sector should be done. In addition, to encourage local organizations and stakeholders to participate in development and rehabilitation of water resource is also important. (Water Resource Association, 2004) It is observed that although these suggested strategies seemed to be reasonable responses to the core of problems, any concrete action still was not clearly seen accordingly.

Chiangrai – Phayao Provincial plans for Ing River management

As Ing River flows through 2 provinces – Chiangrai and Phayao, development and management plans at provincial level directly affect the River. Chiangrai has positioned itself as a prosperous border city by promoting trade and tourism. In addition, as a natural resources rich province, there is a plan to preserve and manage natural resources by applying an integrated approach and participatory process. In order to implement the strategic plan on resources preservation, the province has initiated a number of projects and requested for budget from the central government, the local government, as well as the private sector. However, it should be noted that among 73 projects indicated in the natural resources preservation and city development plan during 2015-2019, there are only 18 projects that focus on water resource preservation and management. It also should be noted that the plan for water management of Chiangrai gives priority to water supply and flood prevention, not water allocation. (Chiangrai Integrated Administrative Committee, 2013)

Phayao positions itself as an area for safety food production. Tourism is also promoted, particularly in the area of Phayao Lake which is the upper part of Ing River. Development plan and projects initiated by the province emphasized on water supply management and flood prevention. This included the dig and dredge projects as well as the construction of dyke and wall. As indicated in the plan that water resources management would be conducted by participatory process, local governments were encouraged to take part in those development projects. In addition, Phayao Lake and Nong Lek Sai are the focused area for several development projects emphasizing on natural resources preservation. (Phayao Provincial Committee, 2014)

Regarding Ing River, information from document and websites showed that there are 21 Tambol Administrative Organizations (TAO) from 62 in both provinces where Ing River flows through, having development plans and projects. 43 projects are planned to be implemented by those 21 TAOs during 2014-2017. However, it should be noted that all these projects focus on water preservation

and flood control or prevention; there is not even a single project on water allocation, particularly the criteria and rule for appropriate water allocation.

The integrated water management: Coordination, participation, and partnership as “mission impossible” ?

The main feature of IWRM is cooperation, coordination, and participation. In order to achieve this goal, partnership at all levels is prerequisite. And this becomes a critical challenge for both People Council of Ing River and related government agencies.

For People Council of Ing River, partnership among networks of river community must be encouraged, particularly between those in the upstream and downstream. Due to different interests, conflict regarding water use and allocation is highly possible. Therefore, while “trust” must be created in order to facilitate partnership, “mutual benefits” must also be maintained in order to secure their livings. Then, the balance between “trust” and “mutual benefit” is crucial. To ensure this balance, frequent meetings, consultation, and exchange of visits are absolutely important and necessary.

For government, as admitted, coordination and division of labor among organizations must be seriously practiced. In order to avoid duplication and inconsistency, the coherence among plans of all related organizations must be improved. In addition, with respect to regional diversity within the country, the development plan and mechanism regarding water management should address and accommodate this factor so that different natures of areas as well as different demands of people are responded. Although it is believed that democracy and decentralization have contributed positively to the inclusive plan formulation and implementation, the recent political situation under martial law and the unclear future of decentralization policy becomes a new condition for water management, particularly in the North in which Ing River is located. However, as mentioned by Anukularmpai that *“It should be cautioned that there is no blueprint for IWRM that will suit all countries, and that each country has to develop and adjust a particular approach that suits political, social-economic and cultural conditions of the country”* (Anukularmphai, 2009, p.3), then, Thai government has to re-design the IWRM of its own.

Regarding participatory process, the past experience since early 2000s showed that people participation in policy and plan making process of water management existed, but the question of quality of this participation was also raised. Specifically speaking, public hearing alone did not signify and guarantee local people’s interests and demands. Thus, the key point is how to in-cooperate and mainstream the ideas and practices of local people into the water management plan and implementation. In this process, partnership is an inevitable tool.

At practical level, the relationship between government and local people based on “trust” is the most important principle to facilitate partnership as well as to encourage people participation. However, due to the existing negative attitude towards each other, it is difficult to promote such kind of principle. In fact, the root of the mistrust lies on the different perspectives of development and resources use between the government and local people. Concurrently, that the government’s limited recognition of people’s water use right on one side, and people’s suspicion on government’s efficient and transparent development policy and plan on the other side, have deepened the misunderstanding and mistrust. Therefore, as suggested by Viset & Boonserm, to manage the water,

river, and wetland does not mean only “geographical management”, but also “social management” because those areas are “social area” in which state-community- people exercise their relations based on their rights, values, and responsibility. (Viset & Boonserm, 2004)

Conclusion: Tomorrow of the “People Council”

The People Council of Ing River had organized an event in February 2015 in order to promote the Council as well as to gain response and support from the public. It should be noted that although a number of adjustment and improvement have been done in the process of the Council evolution, those are responses to government’s argument or claim. For the future, in order to get recognition and legitimacy, the Council has to move beyond being an anti-government based organization to be an organization for resource-use- right- protection. And to do so, knowledge and commitment are required. Therefore, people and community empowerment will be an urgent task that the Council has to carry out.

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Interview

Mr. Niwat Roikaew

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