

River Basin Committees Development in Thailand: An Evolving Participatory Process (EPP)¹

Background

1. River basin management was first initiated in 1994 when the Government allocated a budget to study and prepare a strategic plan for water management in the Chao-Phya river. After the completion of the study a sub-committee for establishing organization/committee to manage water in the Chao-Phya basin was appointed in 1998 with the task to establish a river basin committee (RBC) in the Chao-Phya.
2. The sub-committee organized two workshops with participants from line agencies and provincial officials as well as other stakeholders to explain about the idea and seek feedback from the workshops. It was then agreed to establish pilot river basin committees in the Upper Ping, Lower Ping and Pasak sub-basin. The three RBCs were established in April, 1999.

Development Process

3. The organizational setup and members of the three first RBCs were very much of the Government domain in that majority of the members were government officials; only a small number were non government representatives.
4. After a series of consultative meetings it was decided that the three RBCs will be responsible to under take seven activities, namely; (1) information/ data base; (2) Policy and planning; (3) regulation; (4) technical; (5) public relation and coordination; (6) conflict resolution ; (7) monitoring and evaluation.
5. A number of workshops and meetings were organized to jump start the working process. However, little progress was achieved as the government officials could not concerned devote much time for the RBCs and the overly-ambitious work plan of the seven areas.
6. The turning point came in 1999 when the World Bank supported a study to look into the Pasak sub-basin committee and to strengthen its capability. A team of foreign and local experts prepared a survey of existing successful RBCs and recommended the appropriate linkage between Pasak RBC and the government agencies, define responsibilities and operation procedures. A series of consultative meetings were organized to present findings and recommendations as well as to obtain feed back.
7. The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative entered into a loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank for agricultural restructuring program. Under the loan agreement, consultants were engaged to study and prepare proposals for water sector as well as agriculture sector. Upper Ping and Lower Ping sub-basins fell under the ADB study.

The views expressed in this paper are the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), or its Board of Directors, or the governments they represent. ADB does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper and accepts no responsibility for any consequences of their use. Terminology used may not necessarily be consistent with ADB official terms.

¹ Prepared by Dr. Apichart Anukularmphai, Chairperson, GWP-SEATAC

8. Through the consultative meetings, the RBCs became more interested to perform their duty, and it became apparent that in order to start the working process, it was necessary to scale down the tasks assigned to the RBCs. Therefore it was agreed to set up three working groups responsible for preparation of basin plans, collection of base line data and maintain basin information, conduct public relations and awareness raising campaigns.
9. With respect to organization of RBCs, it was agreed that in each sub-basin smaller units should be identified for planning and management purposes. Hence for the upper Ping basin which consists of many small watersheds, the basin was further divided into 15 sub-basin/watershed working groups. Lower Ping which is located further down was divided into 18 district working groups. Pasak basin cover areas of 3 provinces, and 3 provincial working groups were adopted. It should be noted that the division of sub-working groups was decided by the stakeholders themselves rather than by officials.
10. The three working groups held three subsequent workshops/consultative meetings in 2000 in order to prepare basin plans of the three identified areas for submission to line agencies to be included in their budget requests. It was noticed during these consultative meetings that line agencies were reluctant to include the projects of the working groups as each agency already had its own plan. Therefore, in order to have a real basin development/ management plan with stakeholders participation, it was necessary to give RBCs authority to prepare and approve basin plans. (This is one of the reasons leading to the development of Water Sector budgetary request process)
11. Also through the long series of consultative meetings/workshops, it was quite apparent that the stakeholders must play a higher role than government officials. Hence the composition of members of RBCs was changed by having more stakeholders, NGOs and academicians. But at the same time since the projects were implemented by line agencies, the representatives of line agencies in the RBCs still remained necessary.
12. The new line up follows either of the two models below;

<u>Model 1</u> suitable for larger basins and high degree of competition for water	
Government officials	18
Stakeholders	18
Academicians and NGO	6
<u>Model 2</u> suitable for smaller basins and low degree of competition for water	
Government officials	15
Stakeholders	15
Academicians and NGO	3
13. The chairman of the RBC is the Governor of one of the Provinces in the basin, and other members from the government sector are appointed from main agencies. Members of stakeholders and NGO as well as academicians follow a selection process which allows the local people/stakeholders to select their own representative. In some case the process evolved into election style.
14. The organizational structure of RBC was further developed by having representatives from the lower local administrative level down to village. The new initiative will broaden the base of RBC and provide better communication flow as well as cooperation.
15. The set up of river basin working groups at various levels follow a bottom up process. Starting from the village, one representative per village will be selected by the user group and these representatives form the sub-district working group. Each sub-district working group will select one representative to work at the district working group. Each district working group select three representatives to work in the sub-basin working group and finally each sub-basin working group selects three representatives to work in the three

planning working groups of the RBC or one representative in each group (a flow chart of the selection procedure of the Upper Ping is attached as Appendix A).

16. Through the series of consultative meetings of the various RBCs, guidelines for selection of representatives and composition of working groups at various levels were recommended and being put into practice. The basic principle is to have more members from the user group while keeping only the relevant government officials in the working group to provide technical support. (The recommended directive for upper Ping is attached as Appendix B).
17. ONWRC obtained a budget in 2002 to hire temporary staff to support the secretariat offices of the RBCs and for provision of office equipment such as computer and fax machines. Budgets for hiring consultants to prepare over all frame work for basin water resource management, identification of potential large projects, compilation of basin plan based on the needs of local people with consent from RBC and compilation of basic data/information for future use of the secretariat of RBCs were also obtained. Four studies covering four sub-basins are currently on going.

Analysis of the evolving process

18. The analysis considered changes from the various stages of the RBC establishment from 1998 to 2002 with key indicators in organizational structure, composition of member, operational mode and meeting method.
19. At the initial stage the government agencies and ONWRC center managed the RBCs by organizing top-down type of meetings in communication with RBCs. However, due to the diversity of members from various agencies and no real driver with little inputs from stakeholders, little progress had been achieved.
20. The start of changes came around in 1999 with the World Bank and Asian Development involvement, wherein consultants were engaged to study and formulate RBC model and operational mode. It was during these studies that the flaws of the organizational set up and operational mode were identified. More importantly, it was apparent that the various modalities of RBC from other countries may not really be useful to local RBC, instead a more simplistic set-up was initiated with the aim of slowly introducing the concept and allow flexibility in changes. Motivation of the stakeholders towards active participation was the objective.
21. The real turning point was when three working groups for preparation of basin plans with respect to basin plan, information, public relation and awareness raising were established. The stakeholders started to realize their roles, and their desire to have their share in the planning and decision making process. The motivation of stakeholders was successful in that key players from the stakeholders started to surface and play leading roles in many consultative meetings.
22. Through the workshop exercises, the stakeholders began questioning the roles of government agencies and their contribution to the RBCs. It was soon followed by the demand for changes in the organizational set-up and composition of members. A new organizational set-up and composition of members were discussed and agreed upon during a series of workshops. Hence new appointment orders were issued in 2001.
23. The selection procedure for stakeholders participation was soon challenged in that the representatives in the RBC or working groups may be not the real representative of the majority of users. Hence, it was necessary to broaden the base by expanding representatives down to the village level and the selection process could be by election

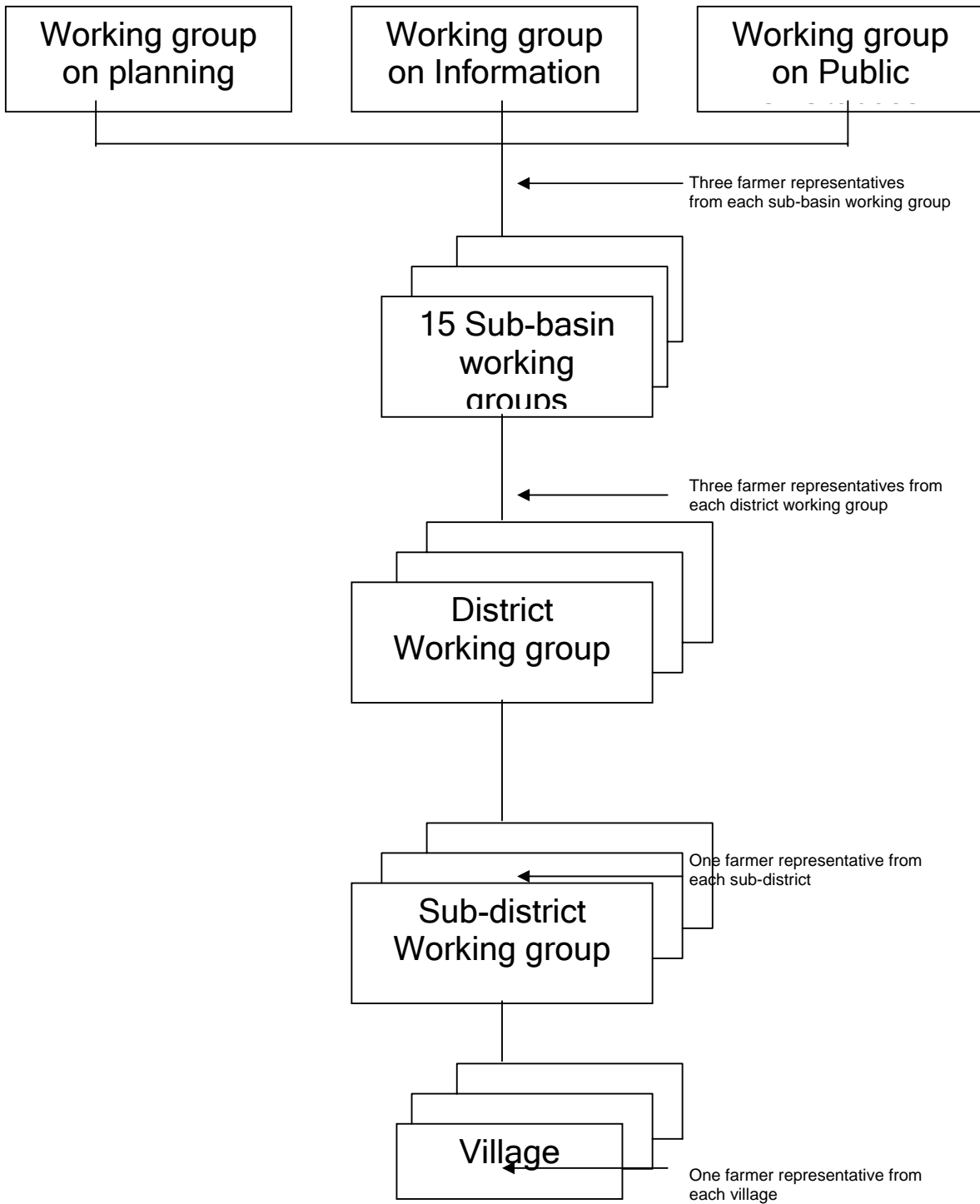
style or popular consent. This issue got serious attention that some RBC are still going through this process in order to ensure transparency and get real active representative.

24. The latest evolving process came by the hiring of consultants to prepare basin water resource management framework. The consultants were given clear directive that their tasks were not to prepare the basin plan themselves, but rather to assist the basin working groups and stakeholders to identify their own needs and their own ideas of how to solve their problems. The consultants were asked to hold grass roots level workshops as well as to build local capacity in planning processes.
25. It can be concluded that the outputs in basin plans of the RBCs are still a long way to go with respect to perfection. However, the participation process of stakeholders already has taken root, and this is a very important step in the right direction of applying basin management concept. There is no doubt that many changes are yet to come, but if they are the genuine desire of the local stakeholders then changes should be encouraged. The evolving participatory process may be appropriate for finding the suitable models of RBC for Thailand. It may be slow and unorthodox but it will be the model that will suit Thailand's conditions. (The evolving process is shown in a flow chart as appendix C).

Application of basic IWRM principle

26. Enabling Environment : the tools used are
 - Political decision to establish RBC
 - Provision of budget to support RBC
 - External support through World Bank and ADB program
27. Institutional role : the tools used are
 - Set up RBC with decentralization of authority
 - Evolving participatory process by allowing and promoting non-government stakeholders to actively participate
 - Involvement of stakeholders to the lowest level
28. Management Instrument : the tools used are
 - Technical support in terms of experts to assist in organizing workshops and designing work programs
 - Technical support in collecting village level data and development of basic data base including GIS
 - Capacity building through workshop, training, and public forum.

Appendix A
Selection procedure of representatives to participate in the working groups at various levels of upper Ping



Appendix B

Directive for appointment and composition of the working groups at various levels

1. To appoint working groups at sub-district, district and sub-basin with the following composition
 - 1.1 Sub-district working group
 - (1) one farmer representative from each village
 - (2) sub-district chief
 - (3) chairman of Tambon administrative organization (TAO)
 - (4) sub-district community development worker
 - (5) sub-district agricultural extension worker
 - (6) District officer responsible for the sub-district
 - (7) Respected local person i.e. teacher or monk
 - 1.2 District working group
 - (1) One farmer representative from each sub-district working group
 - (2) District community development worker
 - (3) District agricultural extension worker
 - (4) Representative of local administration
 - (5) District officer responsible for planning
 - (6) Respected person i.e. teacher, retired official, or monk
 - (7) Representatives from commercial and industrial sectors
 - 1.3 Sub-basin working group
 - (1) District officers responsible for planning
 - (2) Three farmer representatives from each district
2. The district selects three representatives from the district working group to work with the three RBC working groups i.e. one for each working group (planning, information, public relation and awareness raising)
3. Farmer representatives in the three RBC working groups select from among themselves 15 members to work in the river basin committee (RBC).

Appendix C
Analysis of the evolving process

