

Abstract

This study was undertaken for the Subcommittees of Land and Forest Management of the Nation Human Rights Commission of Thailand. It aims to explore the practices and implications of the 'New Forestry Villages Project', implemented by the Ministry of Resources and Environment according to the cabinet agreement of July, 2 2004 and August, 10, 2004. This study looks at 3 case studies within this project: Huayplalod village, Tambon Danmaelamao, Amphur Maesod, Tak; Huaykonta village, Tambon Pakchong, Lomgsak, Petchaboon; and Taptaharn village, Tambon Prasong, Tachana, Surathane. The workings of the project in each of these villages are different.

The New Forestry Villages Project claims to conserve forests by ostensibly providing for people's local participation. Many local people view the project negatively. For instance, they do not understand the project because of insufficient or negligible information provided by state officials; they worry that the project will affect their livelihood; they are disturbed by official bans on their use of non-timber products and to farm the land; and they doubt that the project will be able to conserve forest despite the huge budget allocation for this purpose. Additionally, the project's operation in some sites, e.g. Huaykonta, has aggravated previous conflicts between these people and state officials. In case of Huayplalod, the local people think that the achievement of forest conservation is due to their own practices, and not because of the project. In case of Taptaharn, while people there do illegal loggings, they do not think that the project itself will resolve that problem. Moreover, in several instances state officials associated with the project have violated human rights and community rights. Further, the civil society also critiques the 'new' forestry village project for being not different from the state's previous forest management projects. For them this project has the same problems of monopolization, spatialization, and separation of local people from forest. In the project local people and civil society are not allowed to participate in forest management, and it does not incorporate customary rights and local community right.

The suggestions of this study are that: the project should be stopped immediately in the places where there are conflicts; the government officials should disclose information and make the plans of the project transparent; the project should be based on people's participation and take into account the complexity of their rights for natural resources management throughout its entire processes of the operation; and the government should reconsider laws and policies that do not promote community rights in natural resources management.

For now, the project has been temporary stopped because the government has not allotted funding for it in the budget.