

# OFFICIALIZING STRATEGIES: PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES AND GENDER IN ADB'S CAPACITY-BUILDING IN THAILAND'S WATER RESOURCES SECTOR

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## 1. Introduction

Authority over natural resources, as argued by the proponents of sustainable development and good governance, must be transparent, accountable, representative, and participatory. In recent years, "participation" has become orthodoxy in sustainable development initiatives and resource management policies. This focus on participation is part of many efforts to ensure that the benefits of development are accessible to those who have in the past been marginalized by it. In light of environmental governance, stakeholder participation is also a key component of ensuring that the management of natural resources is in the hands of direct users of those resources. Moves to devolve the management of resources from a central state to local groups and communities are an integral part of emerging institutional arrangements of regional environmental governance.

Local groups and communities are not homogeneous, but instead are differentiated by gender, class, ethnicity, and so on. The impact of program interventions on natural resource management would therefore have gender- and/or class-specific effects. Meanwhile, at higher levels where these local interventions are conceptualized, certain assumptions and biases based on gender<sup>2</sup> underlie the creation of regional formations and their policies.

Supra-national, regional, or transboundary institutions, by and large, have historically been male spaces<sup>3</sup>. History has also shown that the formation of the modern state was itself a gendered process: the state developed the capacity to organize, regulate and reproduce gender relations by means of the apparatuses of law and policy, police and academy, thus producing a distinct "gender order" (Connell, 1990). The evolution of regional institutions or transboundary spaces of governance shows similar patterns. Regional governance and natural resource management are inherently *gendered* processes, reflecting gender relations in society. They are also *gendering* because they reproduce those relations and their unequal nature (Roche, 1998: 176). Regional environmental governance institutions must consider gender as central to their agenda if "decision-making over environmental protection is to be representative and participatory" (MREG, 2000: 5). We therefore locate our study within the nexus of participatory development and gender issues in the context of regional environmental governance.

In light of these specific trends in regional environmental governance and positing that governance is inherently gendered, this paper will explore participatory processes in the context of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) technical assistance in capacity building in Thailand's water resource sector

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<sup>2</sup> Joan Scott (1988: 25, 42) points out that gender organizes all of social life according to some notion of sexual difference; and that female and male identities are socially and culturally determined. The differences between women and men constitute and are constituted in hierarchical ways, that is, gender is a relationship of power and inequality.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, during the decades of the 1960s-1980s, perceptions of threat from the socialist nations dominated national and regional security debates. Regional formations such as NATO, ASEAN and SEATO emerged to respond to this threat through military and ideological means. In later years, at a time of increasing globalization of trade, regional trade blocs such as NAFTA, the EU, and an expanded ASEAN are all negotiating for more liberalized terms of trade among nations and between regions in different degrees. Intra-regional trade of forest, marine, and wildlife resources has also stepped up. Whether and how intra- and inter-regional trade and inter-regional security affect women was, and still is, not an issue of concern for regional leaders and active players.

(TA 3260). This falls under the rubric of ADB's policy to realize the goals of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) among its developing member countries (DMCs). The objective of TA 3260 is to assist the Thai government in developing a unified water management system that will strengthen integrated water resources management and improve water service delivery in irrigation. Moreover, participation has been envisaged as the cornerstone of ADB's country water sector strategies where institutional arrangements for participation, particularly at the community level, will be strengthened (ADB, 2000: 14).

In this paper, we attempt to study the dynamics of participatory approaches set into motion by ADB's TA 3260 as these build capacities for integrated water resources management. We will look at the place of gender in these participatory processes at different levels, and will link gender with issues of participation in regional environmental governance as a whole. We argue that participatory approaches and the ways they are currently practiced may tend to overlook and conceal power relations in general, and unequal gender relations in particular. Thus current participatory practices within regional environmental governance, while basically well-intentioned, may inadvertently build on and reinforce existing social inequalities.

We have employed ethnographic tools to examine participatory processes at different levels of interaction, such as participant observation, interviews, and focused group discussions in three villages of the Upper Ping River basin in northern Thailand, as well as with key informants from the consultants' groups and ADB personnel. This study, however, does not have the benefit of prolonged, in-depth investigation due to the limited period of research and resources to do so. At best, this is an exploratory exercise to bring to the forefront the issues, linkages, and problems related to decentralized governance, participation, and gender in ADB's technical assistance for water services delivery and management.

This paper is divided into three parts: first, a discussion on the genealogy, debates, and critiques of participatory development and their gender implications; second, discussion and analyses of the different levels of interaction among actors within the implementation of TA 3260; and finally, conclusions and recommendations.

### *1.1 Participation and Gender: Challenges to the Orthodoxy*

There are several meanings of participation, which suggest the elusiveness of the term. Gardner and Lewis (1996: 111) put forward the following: First, participation may refer to a process in which information about a planned project is made available to the public and in which a dialogue ensues regarding project options. Second, participation might include project-related activities other than mere information flows. This may involve labor contributions or long-term commitments by local groups to manage services and facilities or planning for future use. Third, participation rests on people's own initiatives and these could fall outside the scope of the project agenda. The boundaries of these definitions may blur, however, and the functions could often overlap. The participatory approach employed in TA 3260 would fall under the first definition.

Leeuwis (2000: 933) suggests that a variety of arguments are used to advocate a participatory approach in intervention processes, demonstrating that the rationale for employing participatory methodologies can vary considerably. These arguments are: (a) *instrumental* in nature, in that they boil down to the wish to gain access to relevant information, networks, and target groups; (b) *theoretical*, positing that people never change without motivation or "involvement" of some kind or other; (c) *ideological or normative*, resting on the notion that actors have a wish, moral right, and/or duty to participate in an effort to change their situation; and (d) *political* in the sense that participation is employed as an approach to emancipate and empower particular groups in society. Nelson and Wright (1995) differentiate between the use of participatory approaches as a *means* (that is, when instrumental arguments prevail) or *as an end*—when participation empowers participants to determine their own future (that is, when political arguments prevail).

Participatory development emerged from the growing recognition of top-down development approaches and management. In the 1980s, it became apparent that externally-imposed and expert-oriented forms of planning and policy research were ineffective. Particularly influential in putting forward the trend

towards more participation in development was the work of Robert Chambers in such renowned publications such as *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (1983); and *Participatory Rural Appraisal: Challenges, Potentials and Paradigm Shift* (1994). The aim of participatory approaches was to make people 'central' to development by encouraging "stakeholder" involvement in programs that affect them and over which they previously had limited control (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). In short, Chambers' work represented a shift to more populist approaches in managing development.

Scholars and development practitioners have since put forward a number of critiques of both the discourse and practice of participatory development.

These critiques may be classified into three types (ibid: 5-7). First, among the advocates of participatory development, there is support for ongoing "self-critical epistemological awareness" that looks into the quality, validity, and ethics of participatory approaches to guard against slipping standards and poor practice. Second, again among the advocates of participatory development, is a strong plea for recognition of diversity and differentiation in communities of stakeholders<sup>4</sup>, especially those differences based on gender. And third, a more radical critique emerges from the awareness that participation could lead to political cooptation and may mask continued centralization under the banner of decentralization. This third critique has challenged participatory development, labeling it the new "tyranny" in development (ibid). At the same time, insensitivity to and exclusion of women's interests and the privileging of men's knowledge and experience cut across all three types of criticisms of participatory development.

In practice, the discourse of participation may be misused, keeping real power in the hands of outsiders. For example, participation can legitimize a project by gaining the sanction or formal approval of key people—dominantly men and upper class women—in the community. This then feeds back into project appraisal criteria and validates the "success" of the project as having been participatory and representative. Similar problems arise when extension agents attempt consensus-building. There are likely to be problems defining "needs" without addressing underlying inequalities from which they arise. Women and men may have different needs in their resource use activities and it is possible that men's needs are likely to be favored over women's. Furthermore, different participants may have different priorities so consensus may not be possible (Mayoux, 1995: 241).

The discourse itself of participatory development is full of connotations of power. It assumes that power resides in conventional sites, such as the central state, or in multilateral development agencies like the ADB. However the exercise of participatory approaches may be blind to power relations at the local level and thus unable to assist in transforming these. In development discourse, local peoples and their communities have been often constructed as marginalized by the development process and in need of assistance for their emancipatory projects. Arturo Escobar (1995) refers to participatory development as "the use of the language of emancipation to create systems of power in a modernized world." While participatory development may be an attempt to redress inequalities between those marginalized by development and those who plan it, in its most instrumental sense, it is also an exercise of power over those who have been defined as powerless.

## 1.2 "Participation at Work"

ADB's Technical Assistance (TA) Number 3260 is titled "Capacity Building in the Water Resources Sector." It is a component of the Agriculture Sector Programme Loan (ASPL) contracted between ADB and the Thai government in 1999 for US\$300 million. The ASPL's objective is to increase productivity, enhance export competitiveness, and improve governance and management in the agricultural sector of Thailand. Significantly, this marks the first time that the ADB and the Thai government have employed a participatory approach during lending processes in Thailand, according to Craig Steffensen, resident Advisor of ADB's Thailand office. The policy matrix for the loan was drafted based on "literally hundreds of interviews" with farmers, merchants, students, local government officials and NGOs (Watershed, 2000: 8).

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the works of Guijt and Shah (1998) and Cornwall (1998) where critiques to participatory development derives from a gender perspective.

Within the ASPL, TA 3260 is intended to provide advisory support to the Office of National Water Resources Committee (ONWRC), the Royal Irrigation Department (RID), and an inter-ministerial task force covering the following areas:

**Table 1 Summary of Tasks under TA 3260**

	Activity
Part I	<b>Developing a unified water management system at the national level. Strengthening of ONWRC to carry out its mandate to serve as the sector apex body</b>
Part II	<b>Decentralizing water resources management in river basins</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Developing guidelines for decentralized water resources planning and management</li> <li>➤ Review of watershed classifications and how protection and management can be improved through interagency cooperation and stakeholder involvement</li> </ul>
Part III	<b>Reorienting and reorganizing service delivery operations in irrigation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Preparing guidelines to strengthen participation of farmers and water user groups in irrigation</li> <li>➤ Analyze opportunities for the decentralization, contracting out and privatization of certain RID functions to support unified water management system objectives.</li> </ul>

Source: Halcrow Water, 2000b.

This study addresses aspects of the participatory processes employed in Parts II and III as well as the separate task of conducting stakeholder consultations. The advisory assignment is carried out by an international consultancy group (ICG) contracted by ADB, while a separate contract was given to a local consultancy group (LCG) to conduct a series of stakeholder consultations among water users and interested parties on water use, development, and cost recovery.

The need for a coordinating body for water at the national level was recognized as early as 1979 when the National Water Resources Committee (NWRC) was established to “serve as the apex body for setting policies and plans for national water resource development” (Halcrow Water, 2000a: 11). Seven years later, the Office of the NWRC (ONWRC) was set up to act as its secretariat and is located administratively under the Prime Minister’s Secretariat (PMS).

TA 3260 is also concerned with reorienting and reorganizing the operations of the Royal Irrigation Department (RID) for improved water services delivery in irrigation. In the agricultural sector, the RID is the major water sector agency in charge of storing water and providing irrigation and flood protection services. In its Development Policy Letter to the ADB, the Thai government further envisages the RID as establishing organizational units for participatory irrigation management and establishing procedures for beneficiary participation in the design, operation, and management of facilities complete with the training of staff.

River Basin Committees (RBCs) are being established as key organizations at the local and regional levels to function as the decentralized decision-making structure for the unified water resources (Halcrow Water, 2000b: 28). Four responsibilities have been envisaged for the RBCs: (a) to promote public education and sustainable resource management; (b) to address priorities in water resource issues; (c) to facilitate local public consultation with stakeholders and beneficiaries; and finally, (d) to engage in conflict resolutions and problem-solving between the sub-river basins and between related local and regional agencies (ibid: 28, 34). The members of RBCs come from traditional irrigation committees (*muang fai*) and local government offices. A closer examination of the *muang fai* and livelihood patterns in three

northern villages will provide us some understanding of the possible configuration of power relations within the RBCs.

## 2. Gendered Participation in the Muang Fai and in the Northern Villages

The terrain in the Upper Ping River Basin is undulating and rolling. Lowlands comprise irrigated and non-irrigated portions while the uplands are largely rain-fed. Farmers utilizing large-scale irrigation services, covering 67% of the total cultivated area grow rice and its glutinous variety, as well as soybeans, ground nuts, onions, shallots, garlic, tobacco, and fruit trees such as lychees, longgan, and mangoes. Farmers who utilize medium and small-scale irrigated water grow rice and vegetables for household consumption. They also grow fruit trees such as bananas, pomelo, jackfruit, and tamarind (CUSRI, 2001).

**Table 2** Irrigation and Land Size in Lowland Farming in the Upper Ping

Type of Irrigation	<i>Rai</i>	% of total cultivated land
Large-scale	1,067,900	67
Medium to small-scale	140,350	32
Non-irrigated (rainfed)	611,690	1

Source: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI), 2001

About 85% of the total water supply in the Upper Ping Basin is used for agriculture, compared with domestic consumption, industry, and services. Sources of water for agriculture are from various providers, such as the RID, the Accelerated Rural Development Office, and the Department of Energy Development. Aside from agriculture, water from irrigation is also used for industrial purposes (CUSRI, 2001).

Chiang Dao is one of the districts in the north of Chiang Mai province. The Ping River begins here and flows down south until it joins another river in Nakonsawan Province to form the Chao Phraya River. There are seven sub-districts (*tambon*) in Chiang Dao. One of them with the same name, Chiang Dao, has 16 villages. Our research site covers only three villages, Baan Moang Kong, Baan Dong, and Baan Thung Lung. There are a total of 3,626 persons living in these villages and about 250 households. The Wang Hi irrigation dam was built on the Ping River in Baan Moang Kong to supply water to these three villages for 200 farmer households cultivating 1,012 *rai*<sup>5</sup>. There are 451 farmer households cultivating 1,399 *rai* who do not depend on the dam for irrigation. Farmers cultivate an annual rice crop and, for the rest of the year, cultivate dry season crops such as soybeans, groundnuts, glutinous rice, and fruits such as longgan and lychees from orchards.

The dam must have been built a hundred years ago. The Irrigation Committee chairman thinks it was built around 1897 when Prince Ratch of Chiang Mai visited Chiang Dao. The Wang Hi Irrigation Committee (IC) or *muang fai* was formed 60 years ago to manage the irrigation system in these three villages. The committee has had ten chairmen since it began. Initially, chairmen of the IC were elected annually. Recently, members decided that each new chairman would have a four-year tenure in order to have ample time to continue the work he had started. A representative from each village becomes a candidate for chairman. Once elected, the chairman chooses men from the villages to comprise the IC, with one of them acting as his assistant. To date, all chairmen have been male. The IC is traditionally a male organization, since it is believed that irrigation matters are men's concerns. This is associated with the heavy labor needed to build and maintain the dam and irrigation system. Heavy labor has always been identified as male labor.

The all-male IC is a very powerful body. To allocate water and clean the ditches effectively, the IC usually convenes in the dry season. They plan the allocation of water for each irrigation canal and set a date for cleaning. They also monitor the water flow in each canal for a season. The violation of rules such as the illicit use of water or the absence of one's labor contribution for cleaning ditches and repair of the dam requires fines.

<sup>5</sup> Approximately 1,600 sq. meters or 0.4 acres

The dam is 74 meters long and 60 meters wide. The collection of fees, materials and labor provision from farmers for the maintenance of the dam is as follows: 20 baht for each *rai*; provision of one male laborer for every 10 *rai* cultivated; 10 poles of 50 cm (height) for each *rai* cultivated; 5 poles of 100 cm (height) for each laborer; 3 poles of 150 cm (height) for each laborer and 2 poles of 400 cm (length, for making bridges) for each laborer.

There are a number of female-headed households where women are either widowed, divorced, or whose husbands have temporarily migrated. For a female farmer to use irrigated water, she must hire male labor as her contribution to the repair and maintenance of the dam. The male laborer is paid 160 *baht* per day. If she is short on cash with which to pay the male laborer, she instead pays him 10 kilos of rice per work day. The allocation of water during the dry season is based on the type of crops grown (e.g., every fifteen days, water is allocated for groundnuts or soybeans).

The annual *muang fai*, or IC, meeting is held every March 14. Meetings take half a day. Every farm household has to send at least one representative to the meeting lest they be exacted a fine of 150 *baht*. Non-farming households may attend the meeting but they do not have voting rights. Each farm household is entitled to one vote. In the last meeting, members discussed the previous year's account, the number of poles needed to repair the dam and the number of days necessary for this, and the proliferation of water hyacinths slowing down the river current. There were 165 people who attended this year's meeting; 21 of them were women representing their absentee husbands. Only one household member usually attends the meeting so that livelihoods are not disrupted and earning opportunities are not lost. Those who attended recalled that there has been only one conflict among the villages eight years ago when a period of water shortage in the summer triggered some competition over its use. The IC resolved this by diverting the irrigation flow to the village experiencing the most severe shortage.

Although much of the land in these parts is arable and devoted to crop cultivation (cf. Table 2), only a fraction of farmers use water from the Wang Hi irrigation dam.

**Table 3 Land and Water Use by Farm Households in Three Upper Ping Villages**

Source of Irrigation	Number of Farm Households	Cultivated Land by Size ( <i>rai</i> )	Cultivated land per capita ( <i>rai</i> )
Wang Hi Dam	200	1,012	5.06
Other sources	451	1,399	3.1

Source: Chiang Dao Agricultural Office

Table 3 indicates a concentration of both land and water use in these villages. Thus the *muang fai* is largely composed of relatively elite members of the villages who have more access both to water and land resources.

Traditionally women have not been recognized as the principal caretakers of irrigation facilities. Water, especially for agricultural use, has always been considered a 'male' resource. Women, for their part, plant, harvest, and weed paddy fields where an annual rice crop is cultivated. Men prepare the fields for planting, apply fertilizers and insecticides when available, while repairing canals and managing the flow, quantity and direction of water. Both women and men hire out their labor for rice or cash wages. However, during labor bottlenecks in peak farm periods, men rely on their wives to engage in reciprocal labor arrangements so that they are free to sell their own labor power. Women's involvement in reciprocal labor arrangements allows work on the fields to continue uninterrupted while their husbands earn a wage, repair irrigation canals and work on the dam. When problems occur in the irrigation system, the women would therefore have to single-handedly do farm work or hire others. This means that women would have to repay hired labor with terms equivalent to their own labor, a rice wage, or cash procured through their own means or earned by other family members. Women also prepare meals for labor parties during planting and harvesting. They also engage in commercial enterprises, often selling food in nearby markets. They rise early to cook the food to bring to the market and often stay up late the night before to pre-cook the merchandise and prepare ingredients for the next morning's cooking. They also take care of the children as part of their domestic chores.

When flooding occurs, both women and men replant rice seedlings in dry portions to avert a total crop failure. However difficult the consequences of flooding are on their farming lives, these do not deter the women from continuing their trade. In fact, this non-farm activity assures their households of a continued source of income in the event of a total crop loss.

Women from poor, landless households usually work in agriculture for their survival. They may engage in trade like the other women, but their hands are full combining wage labor, domestic work, and farm work on their rented rainfed fields. Fetching water for their homes from distant wells and other water sources is part of their domestic repertoire since husbands are either working in Chiang Mai or busy doing paid farm work. As argued elsewhere, in poorer households, the gender division of labor is less rigid due to the exigencies of survival (Resurreccion, 1999). Thus it is possible that fetching water for both agriculture and household use becomes a woman's responsibility though culturally, it is considered men's work.

It appears then that women are directly and indirectly affected by changes in the water system both for home consumption and agriculture depending on the gender division of labor, their access to water sources, and class status. When men have to work on the irrigation system, women's unpaid labor is intensified in farm work. Moreover, their non-farm incomes become safety nets for their households during periods of severe flooding and crop loss. It may be inferred that when additional costs for water are imposed on users, such as cost recovery, the burden could likely fall on women's shoulders. Recent explorations on the feasibility of a cost recovery scheme assert that most farm households in Thailand increasingly generate higher cash incomes from non-farm enterprises than from agriculture (Halcrow Water, 2000b). The failure of agriculture to provide adequate incomes has been traced to the high price of farm inputs and the corresponding low farm gate prices of agricultural products. Thus, any cost recovery scheme would therefore have to factor in its possible effects on women's incomes from non-farm activities and the degree of additional labor they would have to expend to raise additional funds.

Women from poor households, on the other hand, have no direct access to irrigated water and water wells for household use. Thus, water is only regularly accessible to wealthier and more landed farmers (cf. Table 3). Women from the poorest households are the most affected since they shoulder farm work and domestic tasks more heavily in the face of scarce resources, including water.

Women are farmers and water users by virtue of their daily tasks and responsibilities. However, they are being discursively referred to as housewives, sometimes traders, while men are recognized as farmers and water users. It follows that women may have legitimate interests as water users and farmers and thus, a holistic approach to water resources management requires recognition of such interests. These interests may complement men's, but it is worthwhile to note that poor women's interests may differ from all others, and these also deserve attention and action if water resources management and service delivery is to be labeled inclusive and "participatory."

Women are not only excluded in water resource management at the community level, but their participation in public spaces within the village is also very limited. Since they are mostly identified as housewives, the only public space for them is the Housewives' Association organized in each village. Started by the wife of one of the village headmen, the organization pools women together to cook for the temples during religious festivals, wear their traditional costumes to welcome visiting government officials, and extend help during funerals and other community gatherings. This association has so little political clout in the village that even the women themselves refuse to be elected to head the organization. None of the leaders of the association were ever elected or appointed to the more powerful Irrigation Committee or local government units.

Women's participation at the community level is influenced by the gender division of labor and discourses on women's "place" in society. Their participation is seen as an extension of their domestic roles and responsibilities. No attempt has been made, either by the government or local NGO, to change this. In fact, the local government has further reinforced this gender division of labor in both public and private spheres by giving loans to the association only for those income-generating projects that are related

to women's household work, such as baking and food processing. It would not be surprising if women have internalized their marginal role in the public sphere and themselves regulate their political participation in the community within their position as housewives. It is suggested that changes and continuity in the gender divisions of labor and gender identities have fed into and themselves have been constructed, maintained, and validated through government intervention programs.

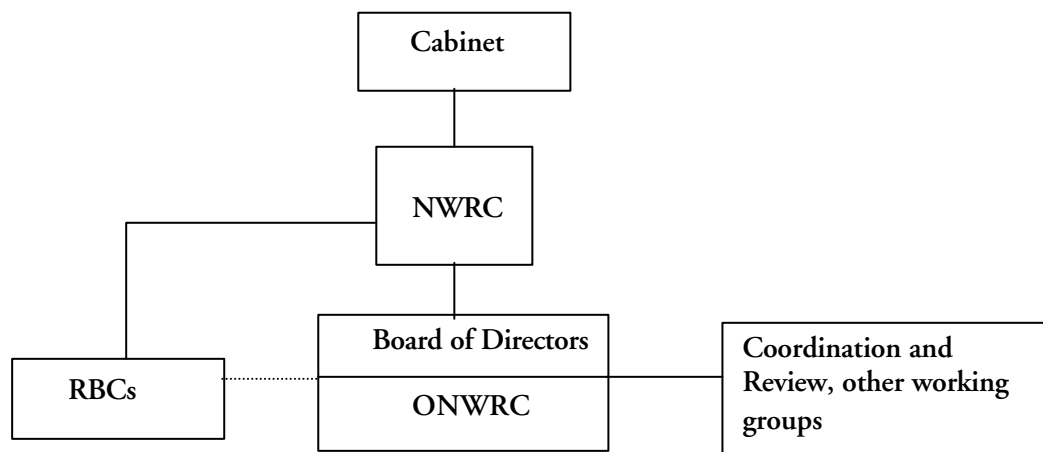
The preceding discussion on the *muang fai* bears heavily on the formation of river basin committees (RBCs) since membership in RBCs draw from traditional water user and irrigation management groups such as the *muang fai*. The following section discusses the RBC formation in the Upper Ping in more detail.

### 3. Bureaucratizing Communities: Decentralizing Water Resource Management through River Basin Committees (RBCs)

River Basin Committees have been organized to serve as the key organizational unit for water resource management at the local and regional levels in Thailand. This is a step towards decentralizing water resource management in the country. To date, ONWRC has established three RBCs in the Upper Ping, Lower Ping, and Pasak rivers; the target is to establish 25 RBCs. This is considered a manageable number for adequate water resource decision-making and management<sup>6</sup> (Halcrow, 2000: 25-26). The establishment of RBCs is in step with current efforts to institutionalize a more bottom-up, participatory, and decentralized approach to water resources management. It is part of a new normative order of regional environmental governance that seeks to distribute the powers of state governance (MREG, 2000: 3).

The international consultancy group (ICG) tasked to draft a strategy for unified water resource management in Thailand has proposed the following structure (Fig 1) which may enable the coordinated functions of the ONWRC, the NWRC (whose members are senior interagency Thai officials), and the RBCs at the local level. Note that the structure was geared to forge a strong linkage between RBCs and national senior government officials of the NWRC. It is an attempt to institutionalize closer coordination and communication between the top levels of policy-making and the local level of implementation. It is also an interim arrangement since RBCs are envisaged as autonomous units for management of water resources in the long-term, as indicated by the tentative, dotted line linking the RBCs to the ONWRC as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1<sup>7</sup>



<sup>6</sup> There are 7,955 *tambons* (sub-districts), 876 *amphor* (districts) and 75 *changwat* (provinces) in Thailand.

<sup>7</sup> This structure was proposed primarily to rid senior officials in the NWRC of technical working group responsibilities and instead take up high-level policy discussion based on material prepared for them by the ONWRC and a separate Coordination and Review group.

Four types of meetings and workshops have been designed to forge closer links between RBCs and the ONWRC, as well as to integrate water management plans at different levels: (a) regular meetings to prepare ONWRC-RBC quarterly work plans and reports to the NWRC; (b) technical workshops where ONWRC will provide technical knowledge for RBCs on general topics of unified water resource management; (c) planning and stakeholder consultation workshops organized by the LCG envisaged to strengthen the RBCs through dialogues with other concerned groups and individuals from NGOs, academic institutions and other stakeholders; and, (d) plan integration workshops where coordination and integration at three levels by RBC at the river basin level, the provincial development council (PDC) at the provincial level and the TAO at the sub-district level will be organized (Halcrow Water 2000b: 31-32).

The Upper Ping River Basin is located in northern Thailand and its catchment area is about 25,000 sq. kilometers and is divided into 15 sub-river basins, covering 230 sub-districts in two provinces. The Upper Ping RBC was established in August 2000 at the initiative of ONWRC personnel. The RBC pilot model and implementation is based on the membership and representation of the sub-river basin. It also draws management support from a close partnership between ONWRC, RID, and the Provincial Office as an interim secretariat office to plan and implement the RBC establishment.

While the mandate of the RBCs in relation to other agencies has been confined to efficient water management at local and regional levels, the ONWRC has kept the structure of the pilot RBCs flexible to allow for some appropriate adjustments during the pilot operation. As designed, there is room to make adjustments in the structure to improve representation and accountability based on recommendations from the ONWRC, the ICG, and current members of the RBC.

There are 31 members of the Upper Ping RBC and 15 sub-river basin committee members appointed by the governor of the province after a series of consultations. Fifteen members were appointed to represent all sub-river basins on three working groups (Policy and Planning, Information and Public Relations, and Participation Working Groups) by the ONWRC. In total, there are 45 members involved in the three working groups. In both the Upper Ping RBC and the sub-district working groups established in Chiang Dao, only two women are members, rendering the composition as largely male. The women were appointed by virtue of their stature in stakeholder institutions, not because they represent women's interests. The members of the committee were also appointed in their capacity as representatives of RID, *muang fai* leaders, village headmen and representatives of other water-concerned state agencies. These political units are already male-dominated; hence the negligible representation, in terms of number and issues, of women in these water management committees.

In an interview, a member of the ICG clarified that in the pilot structure of the RBC, current members of the committee are expected to review the selection, composition, representation, qualification, and processes of decision-making of the RBC and recommend changes to ensure maximum participation among stakeholders. Issues such as women's stakes in water use and management are also left to the committee to take up and address. Interviews with some members of the committee indicate that there is a lack of interest among the present members to include women and their concerns. Again, this stems from a male-centered construction of water users, the predominantly male selection and composition of the committee, and the lack of gender sensitivity among the current members.

Consultations done through "management and technical meetings," "technical workshops," "planning and consultation workshops," and "plan integration workshops" organized by ONWRC and the ICG with the intent of improving participatory water management by integrating the technical experiences among the TAO and local government, *muang fai*, and the RID will not provide opportunities for women's involvement. Rather, these exercises are vehicles of technological transfer that further consolidated male knowledge and representation in the RBC, reinforcing existing inequalities based on class and gender.

The formation of RBCs is an attempt to "bureaucratize" local communities and draw them into the vortex of state and subsequently regional governance of water resources. This process could eventually spawn hierarchical and functional lines of authority, points out Gauld (2000), in a study done on policy

construction of community-based resource management in the Philippines. He refers to such a “bureaucratizing” process as being less redistributive and equity-based, despite its populist rhetoric of participation. Rather, the process implicitly emphasizes efficiency through decentralization.

The formation of RBCs and the social history of irrigation management through the *muang fai* at the local level demonstrate that power does not only reside in the state or in macro centers but is everywhere (Foucault, 1980). Power is found in the creation of norms and practices at all levels that translate into particular (gender and class) inequalities. In this case, while the participatory approach is an attempt to redress power inequalities between the central state and local people by instituting a more decentralized form of resource management organization, it does not address inequalities that may exist at the local level and may, instead, inadvertently reproduce them. This power imbalance is further maintained by the lack or absence of capability-building programs to recognize possible marginalized members within our outside RBCs and address inequalities among them as direct or indirect water users. Participatory development may thus unintentionally build on power inequalities shrouded by the “myth” of a unified, resource-using community.

#### 4. Participation through Stakeholder Consultations

One of the components of participatory development today is eliciting the views and feedback of stakeholders as a means to redress the communication gap between policy makers and local groups.

A local consultant group (LCG) was contracted under TA 3260 to conduct stakeholder consultations in river basins throughout Thailand. Here, we will limit the discussion to the LCG’s underlying assumptions on the nature of stakeholders and the ways in which information-gathering were conceptualized.

The LCG defines stakeholders as those who directly benefit from and use water. They are the water users. The water users were also classified as either direct or indirect users who engage in livelihoods within the ecological boundary of the river basin<sup>8</sup>. In our view, these definitions were broad enough to encompass the multiple types of water users but failed to translate into the pointedly gender-aware practice of selecting a more or less equal number of male and female respondents. They actually conducted these meetings with mostly male ‘stakeholders;’ one consultant admitted that there was no deliberate move to seek the women and their groups. The consultants appeared to have been led to choose respondents by the same cultural norm and tradition that defines water as a male resource. By implication, then, stakeholders were assumed to be male.

The LCG established contact with grassroots stakeholders through a referral system handled by existing networks whose members have transacted the use, management, and maintenance of water resources over time. These are the RID, the *muang fai* members and leaders, the village headmen and representatives from other water-concerned state agencies<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the LCG was also guided by the same social context that defines men as principal water resource managers, oblivious to the fact that water users are also female—and that any disruption in the water control system would inevitably affect women and men in different ways given their division of labor, access to water and land, and specific livelihoods. Methodologically, information-gathering can be influenced to a large degree by the social location of one’s network of informants, brokers, and mediators. This process of selecting respondents and the manner in which consultants reach them is a gendered in that it is propelled by implicit assumptions about whether women or men ought to participate. These networks may act as gatekeepers of information and contacts, thus fencing out those who do not fall within their domain of influence and stakes. Stakeholder consultations, if not handled properly, may thus unwittingly further the social exclusion of women by edging them out of the process. The result: authoritative knowledge on the use, control and the prospects for the management of water resources is spawned by men’s views and experiences, thus granting men the epistemic privilege (Narayan, 1989).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> They have been loosely referred to as farmers, members of the business sector and local government personnel

<sup>9</sup> The RID has had several infrastructure projects in these parts that made collaborations with local people and representatives from other government offices possible.

<sup>10</sup> Granting epistemic privilege implicitly legitimizes one type of knowledge as valid, true and authoritative over others.

According to the LCG, one of the purposes of stakeholders' consultations was to arrive at a consensus on crucial matters such as cost recovery, role, function, and organizational structure of the RBCs. Conducting these meetings are in the first place, "public" events where only a select number of people actively participate. These events are far from informal, everyday life. Most likely, this formality will impose partiality on the kind of information provided by the respondents. Moreover, in every community, there are public and private spaces which women and men differentially define; both women and men normally know the boundaries around and between them. Confining consultations to the normal public spaces of men will inevitably exclude women.

Further, the perspectives of these select few are likely to dominate not through overt competition of ideas, but by arriving at consensus. This exercise of consensus-building may blur the differences in views among local people and may not always reflect the perceptions of those who may have been excluded in the consultations. These may be considered "officializing strategies," in which the particular (predominantly male and upper class) interests of key sections of the community become identified as *the* general interest (Bourdieu, 1977: 38). Participatory approaches may therefore actually become a new means by which people in authority can "officialize" private interests by representing them on record as dominant, consensual views by the community (Mosse, 1994: 509).

Consensus-building as officializing strategy may also be reinforced by the exercise of "feeding back" the views gathered "from the ground" to national bodies, one of the functions of the LCG. In an effort to bridge information and foster opinion sharing between national and local groups, the LCG has served to bring the views of local stakeholders to influential decision-making bodies in the hope that this will influence policy design and planning in water resources management. If not handled with sensitivity, however, feedback from the ground up may only serve to legitimize the success of a preset agenda by the participation of grassroots actors. Mechanisms must therefore be in place to ensure that feedback from local groups and communities are given ample hearing, understanding, verification, and subsequently, effective action. The bottom-up flow of information is only one step of many.

## 5. GAD in the Asian Development Bank

The Gender and Development (GAD) policy of the ADB first began as Women in Development (WID) policy in 1985 following the UN's 3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference on Women in Nairobi. The revision from GAD to WID followed the UN's 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference in Beijing in 1995. Gender-responsive policies today owe their genealogy to the engagement of women's social movement advocates with multilateral development institutions.

The GAD approach utilizes gender analysis<sup>11</sup>, which is the tool for analyzing the specific nature of gender differences by asking basic questions such as who does what, with what resources and returns, and who controls what. Such questions enable an assessment of gender differences in activities, resource ownership, use, and control. On the basis of this knowledge, appropriate policy, project interventions, strategies, and mechanisms can be designed to improve women's inclusion, status, and productivity (ADB, 1998: 31).

The Bank's policy on gender requires gender issues to be addressed in all Bank operations (ADB, 1998: 15). Moreover, one of the Bank's directives is to: Take account of the role of women and the effects projects may have on them at every stage of the project cycle, particularly project identification, preparation, appraisal, implementation, and postevaluation (ibid: 18).

For its part, the ICG contracted for TA 3260 also acknowledges that "Women play an important role in domestic and agricultural use of water. They need to also participate in a culturally appropriate way in decision-making and management." Likewise, the Thai government cannot be said to adopt a stance against women's right to political participation. However, while the ADB and its implementers are well-intentioned insofar as incorporating gender issues, this may be constrained by both structural and

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11 Gender analysis has also been used in this research to investigate gender differences in resource use and management in the study site in an earlier section discussing the *muang fai*.

individual choice factors as have been studied in other multilateral institutions like the Food & Agricultural Organization (FAO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Ford Foundation, International Labor Organization (ILO), and the World Bank by Kardam (1991), Harrison (1997), and Miller (1998). Gender specialists within multilateral organizations like the ADB are largely responsible for the understanding and practice of gender analysis in loan packages and technical assistance to developing member countries (DMCs). However, advancing the gender agenda within these institutions is far from straightforward. These specialists operate within particular institutional constraints. They often translate gender concerns into actions and programs that have legitimacy within their institutional contexts. Constraints put on them by the institution's dominant development paradigm<sup>12</sup>, degree of attention given to social development, and to the place of gender as a cross-cutting social and sustainable development concern, determine the nature of their institutional presence and programs.

Social development, or the social sector, has traditionally been considered a “soft” area within multilateral lending institutions like the World Bank and ADB (Miller, 1998). Thus, the number of gender specialists employed and their ability to influence policy at various levels can be constrained. Within the ADB, there are three Gender & Development technical specialists<sup>13</sup> who concentrate on their Bank-wide advisory role and select strategic projects to monitor. However, they generally lack the capacity to monitor all of ADB's projects and technical assistance packages from their design and planning stages to post-evaluation. Within their limited capacity, GAD specialists try to ensure that gender issues are adequately represented in the preparation of projects. To do this, they provide project teams with checklists that would ensure the proper attention to gender issues in different aspects of ADB's loan and technical assistance interventions such as in water supply and sanitation, agriculture, education, and health. Several staff members in social sector positions in other departments involved in project implementation have technical gender skills; however, these specialists have uneven experiences, skills, and regard for the importance of gender issues since their terms of reference do not focus exclusively on gender.

Given these constraints, ADB's gender specialists have channeled their efforts towards introducing a gender awareness component within project implementation seminars for national government offices of DMCs—something considered as one of the new spaces for gender advocacy within the Bank. Other spaces available include gender seminars for newly-recruited staff to ensure that consciousness for gender is properly inculcated at the outset of their careers within the Bank. It is not clear, however, whether these seminars explicitly steer staff into integrating substantive gender concerns and applying technical gender skills within their line of work or whether these seminars are confined largely to awareness-raising.

The lack of explicit guidelines and terms of reference in TA 3260 for its consultants that would ensure gender-sensitivity at all levels of technical assistance and participatory processes indicate a tenuous relationship between technical gender specialists and the TA's planning board. Moreover, the field of water resource management and services delivery, as such, is still considered a “male” purview and discipline. Harrison's (1997) study of the FAO shows how disciplines related to agriculture have fundamentally masculinized the agricultural producer. In the same vein, consultants and technical specialists have viewed water users and stakeholders as implicitly male. Water services delivery and resource management have also been traditionally regarded as the terrain of (largely male) engineers and technicians in the days when the emphasis of development and modernization lay in infrastructure development and technology transfer. The synergy between social and technology development is a relatively recent phenomenon. Today, ADB technical specialists speak of a holistic and integrated approach to water resource management and services delivery that recognizes stakeholder interests, legal frameworks, and incentives through decentralized decision-making. How these processes and

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12 In Miller's (1998) study of the World Bank, for example, domestic violence was regarded as “the physical and mental abuse of women as having deleterious effects on their productivity, causing women of reproductive age to lose significant percentage of healthy days” (World Bank, 1995: 25-6 in Miller, 1998: 164). Gender concerns then were justified on the grounds of cost-effective human capital development and efficiency within the World Bank's central concern for “market optimism.” WID policy in multilateral lending institutions had been based on promoting efficiency by building human capital through education and health care and giving women access to credit facilities. Efficiency was premised on mobilizing the other half of human populations, that is, women for economic growth and production.

13 The GAD technical specialists work within the Social Development Division of the ADB.

mechanisms unfold and are realized will determine whether these populist phrases will remain virtually trapped on paper or see the light of day.

Aside from efforts at decentralization, another central feature of TA3260 is to ensure that the apex body for integrated water resource management—the NWRC—will gradually comprise members coming from both the government and NGO sectors. This has taken place in Sri Lanka, for example, where half the members of the National Water Resource Council are from government and the other half from NGOs. However, one ADB technical specialist cautioned that this might not be possible in all countries, especially where there is no long tradition of NGO presence. While the ADB policy on water recommends parity between NGO and government membership in apex bodies, it is ominously silent on the need to mainstream gender in these bodies. Mainstreaming gender in these bodies will ensure a balance between male and female members, and, more crucially, could provide a mechanism for addressing gender issues at the national level on water use and management. Such a structure will guarantee that gender-specific feedback from “below” through the structural coordination between local RBCs and the ONWRC will be properly dealt with and implemented.

As internal specialists hold the gender fort within the Bank, dialogues and linkages with the wider women’s movement could further enable an environment conducive to strengthening and sustaining the normative framework for gender equality within policy-making in multilateral institutions like the ADB. This largely depends on the gender specialists themselves and the women’s civil society groups who are willing to engage the ADB. Is gender-responsiveness really mainstreamed in the social movement, and, in particular, among Thai civil society groups that have recently challenged the Bank’s programs?

## **6. Visible by Non-Participatory Means: Thai Civil Society Groups**

In recent years, opposition to ADB policies and programs by Thai civil society groups has been on the rise as evidenced in the series of demonstrations held last May 2000 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, during the ADB’s annual conference. These protests are linked to an international movement against globalization. Globalization has been defined as a political and ideological construct that promotes the opening up and integration of national economies into a neo-liberal market economy that fails to address equity issues within and among nations and individuals. Initially, much of the resentment of Thai civil society groups has been directed towards the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which were held responsible for the rapid growth of the Thai economy and its eventual collapse during the Asian financial crisis in 1997 (Bello, 2000: 10 cited in Tadem, 2000: 1-2).

The criticisms toward multilateral agencies have spread to include the ADB, the third-largest provider of loans and assistance to Thailand after Japan and the World Bank. These groups see that ADB prescribes the same neo-liberal economic growth model that they deem socially inequitable or ecologically unsustainable. The resentment arises out of the perceived failure of this model, additionally pointing to the interventionist manner with which the Bank and other multilateral agencies have imposed political and economic reforms. Further, the criticisms against ADB are leveled against development projects, particularly those devoted to infrastructure development such as building dams and roads, which have been assessed as “socially and environmentally destructive projects” implemented with limited public accountability, transparency, and participation (Statement of the Peoples’ Forum 2000:2000, cited in Tadem, 2000: 8).

Rooted in these polarized ideological positions between the Bank and civil society groups, a number of Thai NGOs have taken an official position of non-engagement with the ADB and non-participation in the implementation of its projects. “We don’t want to engage the Bank because the terms of engagement had already been pre-determined. ADB has already set the agenda of capitalist development through (boosting) agricultural productivity in the rural areas. Besides, we don’t want to have any part in their so-called participatory processes since they might believe we are recognizing their legitimacy,” said Khun Phom, an NGO worker in northern Thailand. NGOs in the same civil society group network as Khun Phom are generally concerned with issues of natural resource management such as land, water, the market of agricultural products, the rising debt problem, and forest denudation. These groups are conducting

their own awareness campaigns and consultations with grassroots groups outside the orbit of the Bank's recognized stakeholder networks and, moreover, claim to represent their interests.

The notion of participation is being contested as these civil society groups have entered into this polarized struggle with the ADB. On one hand, the ADB treats participation as a set of processes that will enable dialogue between local groups and national planning bodies, departing from earlier top-down approaches at governance and water resources management. For their part, these civil society groups reject the ADB's brand of participation and treat it as one more legitimizing tool for co-opting the NGO community and grassroots actors. In fact, in this research, the Thai NGOs working in the study site have categorically stated that they refuse to be interviewed since by consenting to be interviewed, they would then be legitimizing the ADB's projects. For civil society groups, the ADB's participatory discourse is nothing more than what Gardner and Lewis (2001) refer to as "softening top-downism." While the ADB attempts to empower stakeholders by enabling them to participate in consultation processes, the civil society groups, on the other hand, are being empowered by taking an official stance of non-participation in ADB projects. This is a subversion of the conventional idea of participation, conveying that "participation" is inevitably shifting in meaning, socially constructed and contested.

In taking a stance against the ADB, a number of civil society groups claim that they represent the interests of the farmers. This is another type of officializing strategy designed to validate their role as representatives of these interests. Civil society groups are not limiting their role to being conduits of the interests of their constituents. Rather, these civil society groups have actively conducted consciousness-raising activities to popularize their positions. They have served as critical gatekeepers of information on State projects, including those supported by the ADB, especially in communities where government agencies have failed to provide information on these projects. In this process of disseminating information, these groups have passed on their political biases and influenced the opinions and interests of their constituents. Eventually, a confluence of interests evolves which generates these groups' claim that these are "the *consensual* interests of the farmers." Implicit in this assertion is a homogenization of the varying interests of different actors that is invoked by some of these groups to legitimize their representation. In this case, while the discourse and practice of participation has been a means with which to pursue the ADB's and the Thai government's objectives in water resource management, the discourse of *representation* by civil society groups also makes for a powerful assertion of legitimacy. Participation and representation are, therefore, political and symbolic resources; "the struggle over resources is also a struggle over meanings" (Agarwal, 1997; Berry, 1988).

People active in social movements, in order to muster a strong and polemical statement of protest, must also conduct politics as if their identities and the identities of those they represent were fixed and uniform. This usually involves a reduction to class identity (Dirks, et al., 1994: 32). "The People", "the grassroots", "the farmers", have all been stripped of their other subject positions. In the opposition between Thai civil society groups and the ADB, the positions are projected as unified, black and white ideological positions for or against a neo-liberal paradigm of development. Problems related to class are acknowledged in this context while those pertaining to gender, ethnicity, and other identities are made invisible in the debate. Scarcely addressed and thereby invisible are the issues of women in resource management in these emerging civil society protest actions. Mainstreaming gender in these groups has therefore also been a rather elusive project.

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

ADB's TA 3260 explicitly intended to lay the ground for the decentralization of water resource management and water services delivery by employing participatory approaches. The findings in this study show that women have been largely excluded in practically all levels of consultation and participation. One reason for women's exclusion is that the premise of participation rested mainly on distributing power from national centers of power to local communities by creating decentralized units of management such as the River Basin Committees. The formation of RBCs has, however, overlooked the fact that these communities are socially organized along the axes of gender and class—and that women are direct and indirect water users but have been represented as otherwise, while men are recognized as the main stakeholders. The underlying impetus to adopt participatory methods in TA 3260 appears to have

been to mobilize people to get involved in the decentralized management of water. It was by no means an effort to simultaneously push forward a transformative agenda that would address the inherent disparities between people and their stakes in water use and management. This is referred to as the theoretical and normative aspects of participation, as Leeuwis (2000) suggested in an earlier part of this study.

To redress the exclusion of women in RBCs, gender teams could be created within each of the three working groups to ensure women's substantive participation within decision-making processes and to spur sensitive attention to the impacts of decisions made on women and men in the villages. In preparation for the formation of such teams, gender awareness-raising and technical training could also be conducted within the villages, perhaps in Housewives' Associations as starting points—and later among *muang fai* members. Pursuant to the preparatory work for participatory irrigation management within the RID, a gender component should also be introduced, taking into account complementary roles and direct and indirect use of irrigation and water facilities by male and female farmers, as well as studying the effects of cost recovery on women and men in households. Such a component could later be formalized within the functions of the RID as it proceeds to realize reformulated principles in decentralized irrigation management. Unless there are participatory structures for decision-making within which findings in stakeholder consultations can be implemented, participatory development in the water resources sector will simply remain a window dressing.

Stakeholder consultations, the study shows, relied on a network of brokers and mediators who reproduce gender norms in private and public spaces, resource use, and management, and who act as gatekeepers on selected information. Furthermore, consensus-building in these consultations may have been utilized as a form of "officializing strategy" whereby the particular (predominantly male and upper class) interests of key sections of the community have become identified as *the* general interest.

Scholars have recently developed methodological devices with which stakeholder consultations could proceed with more rigorous reflexivity by being sensitive to ongoing social dynamics. The "development as process" approach, for example, assumes that the social reality in which externally-planned interventions are embedded are complex and unpredictable. Therefore, a closely monitored intervention process may provide clues into the immediate effects of planned intervention and the kinds of social dynamics and relations that are reproduced and created (Mosse, Farrington, and Rew, 1998). A number of development anthropologists have done work on a similar approach, which is referred to as "continual ethnography." This approach requires continual data collection in the course of an activity, such as participatory planning. This exercise attempts to make sense of the new and old power relations that emerge within the project—and the possible impact these would have on project outcomes (Pottier, 1993). Leeuwis (2000) has developed a "negotiation approach" that recognizes and emphasizes the existence of different stakeholders in a problem situation of resource competition and conflict, which most participatory methodologies often overlook and have no capacity to address. Finally, we suggest that consultations with women should take place separately in their defined spaces, usually in neighborhood niches and informal assembly points, since they are often not able to publicly express their needs and interests. This method departs from efforts at consensus-building. Even if women are present in local, formalized units such as the RBCs and their working groups, the forms and aims of women's participation may be often determined by male priorities and agendas. Thus, the need to confer with them as a separate group is important to piece together a fuller social profile and enable their unfettered participation in voicing their views and goals.

Overlooking gender issues within TA3260 was also due to the lack of explicit guidelines and terms of reference that would ensure their inclusion. The ADB has yet to consolidate its gender mainstreaming efforts especially in traditionally male-oriented enclaves such as resource, technology and infrastructure management and development in DMCs. ADB's current emphasis on participatory processes as the 'heart' of water policy is part of a strategy to rectify former fragmented, subsectoral approaches to water resource delivery and management into a more integrated, holistic framework involving key stakeholders. However, this meaning of participation is limited to establishing direct lines of coordination between national bodies and local RBCs, as well as reorganizing the apex body to include non-governmental members, thus paving the way for possible grassroots representation. As a result, these plans overlooked the need for a balance between the number of male and female members and the inclusion of gender

advocates and specialists in the NWRC. Inasmuch as RBCs could evolve local gender team units, this has to be matched by similar commitments to push forward the gender agenda at the national level, so that gender-responsiveness at local levels becomes effective and sustainable.

At the regional level, an external advisory body on gender concerns and mainstreaming could be convened to act as a support group to ADB's internal gender specialists. This group could include representatives from NGOs and academic institutions who have had substantial experience in the region especially in macroeconomic, environment, and infrastructure development. As an external group, they could provide an independent forum for assessing and monitoring Bank policies and programs, to arrive at innovative ways of engendering these to help push gender concerns more closely into the core of the Bank's policy-making processes. In short, an external advisory group could provide additional intellectual and ethical moorings to meet the goals of gender equality in development.

By studying key actors and participatory processes in a capacity-building assistance project by the ADB, this study has demonstrated that the processes of transboundary environmental governance inherently gendered. They are *gendered* because these processes function in ways that reflect gender relations in society. They are also *gendering* because they reproduce those relations and their unequal nature. The reproduction of gender relations is embedded in the hierarchies and bureaucratic layers of institutions, in the terms and requirements for access and participation, and in their incentive and accountability mechanisms.

While criticisms have been leveled at participatory development and its vulnerability to abuse and misuse, its slipping methodological standards, and undesirable outcomes, we argue that ethically, it is still a step in the right direction. Chief among its tenets is to depart from expert-led development and to open up spaces for local citizen groups to have a hand in shaping their development-mediated futures. Thus, the alternative—that is, disengagement and non-participation—as proposed and practiced by a number of civil society groups is untenable for as long as multilateral institutions like the ADB continue to influence development in the Asia Pacific Region. Despite being elbowed out of the higher decision-making bodies, the presence of technical gender specialists, gender policies, and gender units in these institutions clearly indicate that the women's social movement has made inroads into these mainstream institutions, and that the goal of gender equality is now an overriding institutional norm. In the current and deliberate strides towards poverty alleviation by the ADB and other multilateral institutions, gender advocates today have unassailable intellectual and organizational starting points, and therefore now have far more scope for critical engagement than in the past.

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