Development in Practice, Volume 14, Number 4, June 2004

Carfax Publishing
Taylor & Francis Group

Officialising strategies: participatory processes and gender in Thailand's water resources sector

Bernadette P. Resurreccion, Mary Jane Real, and Panadda Pantana

This paper examines participatory processes in an Asian Development Bank (ADB) technical assistance package in Thailand's water resource sector. The authors analyse various levels of social interaction in the local community, in meso-level stakeholder consultations, and in opposition to ADB's environment programmes expressed by civil society organisations. While participatory approaches are employed to promote more bottom-up management regimes in water resources, the authors find that local power and gender differences have been overlooked. Evolving institutions of resource governance are constituted by gender, reproducing gender inequalities such as regarding water intended for agricultural use as a 'male' resource. Finally, it is argued that understandings and practices of participation legitimise particular agendas in a politically polarised arena.

Introduction

The 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 therefore become orthodoxy in sustainable development initiatives and resource management policies. It is part of many efforts to ensure that the benefits of development are accessible to those who have in the past been marginalised by development initiatives. In the light of environmental governance, stakeholder participation also envisages the management of natural resources to be in the hands of the direct users of such resources. Moves by central states to devolve this management to local groups and communities are therefore an integral part of emerging institutional arrangements.

This article will explore participatory processes in the context of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) technical assistance for capacity building in Thailand's water resource sector, referred to as TA 3260. The paper will examine both the idea and the practice of participation in different levels of social interaction from a gender perspective: at the local community level, in meso-level consultations, within the ADB itself, and the involvement of civil society groups opposing the ADB. We argue that participatory approaches, and the ways they are currently

ISSN 0961-4524 print/ISSN 1364-9213 online 040521-13 © 2004 Oxfam GB
Carfax Publishing DOI: 10.1080/09614520410001686115

practised and understood, 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.

In the five-month research period on which this paper is based, we used ethnographic tools with which to examine participatory processes at the different levels of interaction such as participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions in three villages of the Upper Ping River Basin in northern Thailand, as well as with key informants from consulting groups, NGO actors, and ADB personnel.

Participation has several meanings, which suggests the term's elusiveness. 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 where dialogue ensues regarding project options; second, participation might include project-related activities other than mere information flows. This may involve labour 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 project agendas. The boundaries of these definitions may, however, become blurred and the functions often overlap. The participatory approach employed in TA 3260 would fall under the first definition.

Scholars and development practitioners have also made a number of critiques of both the discourse and practice of participatory development, particularly in relation to the absence of a gender perspective (see, for instance, Cornwall 1998; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Guijt and Shah 1998; Mayoux 1995; Mosse 1994).

In practice, the discourse of participation may be used to keep real power in the hands of outsiders. For example, participation can legitimise a project by gaining the sanction or formal approval of key people in the community—predominantly men and upper-class women. This approval then feeds back into project appraisal criteria and validates its 'success' as having been participatory and representative. Another instance is when extension agents attempt to build consensus. There are likely to be problems in defining 'needs' without addressing the 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 favoured over women's. Second, different participants may have different priorities so that consensus may not be possible (Mayoux 1995:241). Creating institutions to govern the use and management of natural resources is also a gendered process—gendered because these processes function in ways that reflect gender relations in society, and gendering because they reproduce those relations and their unequal nature (Roche 1998:176).

The discourse of participatory development is itself full of connotations of power (Escobar 1995). It assumes that power resides in conventional sites such as in the 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 so unable to assist in transforming these.

TA 3260

The ADB's TA 3260 is entitled 'Capacity Building in the Water Resources Sector', the objective of which is to assist the Thai government in developing a unified water management system that will strengthen integrated water resource management and improve service delivery in irrigation. Public participation has been envisaged as the cornerstone of the ADB's country strategies in the water sector, whereby institutional arrangements at the community level will be strengthened (ADB 2000:14).

Table 1: Irrigation and land size in lowland farming in the Upper Ping

Type of irrigation	Size (in *rai*)	Percentage of total cultivated land
Large scale	1,067,900	67
Medium to small scale	140,350	32
Non-irrigated (rain fed)	611,690	1

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

River Basin Committees (RBCs) are being established as key organisations at the local and regional levels to function as the decentralised decision-making structure for the unified water resources (Halcrow Water 2000b:28). The RBCs are to have four responsibilities: (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 (d) potentially to engage in conflict resolution and problem solving between the sub-river basins and between related local and regional agencies (Halcrow Water 2000b:28, 34). The membership of RBCs is drawn 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 some understanding of the possible configuration of power relations within the RBCs.

Gendered participation in the *muang fai* in the northern villages

Lowlands comprise irrigated and non-irrigated portions of the Upper Ping River Basin while agriculture in the uplands is largely rain fed (see Table 1). Farmers using the large-scale irrigation services that cover 67 per cent of the total cultivated area grow rice and its glutinous variety as well as other fruit and vegetable crops, whereas farmers with access to medium- and small-scale irrigated water grow rice and vegetables for household consumption (CUSRI 2001).

About 85 per cent of the total water supply in the Upper Ping River Basin is used for agriculture as opposed to domestic consumption, industry, or services. Sources of water for agricultural use include providers such as the Royal Irrigation Department (RID).

Chiang Dao is one of the districts in the north of Chiang Mai Province. The Ping River begins here and flows southwards 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 covered three of these villages, Baan Moang Kong, Baan Dong, and Baan Thung Lung. These villages have a total population of 3626 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 farming households cultivating 1012 *rai* (approximately 1600 m^2); the remaining 451 farmer households cultivate 1399 *rai* and do not depend on the dam for irrigation. Farmers cultivate an annual rice crop and for the rest of the year dry-season crops.

The dam must have been built 100 years ago and has been managed by the Wang Hi Irrigation Committee (IC) or *muang fai*, formed 60 years ago. The IC has had ten successive chairmen since its inception, all of them men. The IC is traditionally a male organisation since irrigation matters are regarded as men's concerns, largely because the heavy labour needed to

build and maintain the dam and irrigation system is regarded as male labour. Initially, the elections were annual, but members recently decided that each chairman would have a four-year tenure in order to be able to see his work through. A representative from each village may stand for election. Once voted, the chairman chooses villagers to comprise the IC, with one of them acting as his assistant.

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, planning the allocation of water for each irrigation canal and setting a date for cleaning. The IC also monitors the water flow in each canal for a season. The violation of rules such as the illicit use of water or the failure to contribute labour for cleaning ditches and repairing the dam is met with harsh fines.

The dam is 74 m long and 60 m wide. The collection of fees, materials, and labour contributions from farmers for the maintenance of the dam is as follows: 20 baht (approximately €0.40) for each *rai*; provision of one male labourer for every ten *rai* cultivated; ten poles of 50 cm for each *rai* cultivated; and five poles of 100 cm, three of 150 cm, and two of 400 cm (for making bridges) for each labourer.

There are several households headed by women who are either widowed, divorced, or whose husbands have temporarily migrated. For a female farmer to use irrigated water, she must hire male labour as her contribution to the repair and maintenance of the dam. The labourer is paid 160 baht (€3.20) per day. If she is short of cash, the woman gives him 10 kg of rice per workday. The allocation of water during the dry season is based on the types of crops grown (e.g. every 15 days water is allocated for groundnuts or soybeans).

The annual *muang fai* meeting is held every 14 March and takes half a day. Every farm household must send at least one representative or risk a fine of 150 baht. Only one household member usually attends so that earning opportunities for that day are not lost. Each farm household is entitled to one vote while non-farming households may attend but do not have voting rights. In a typical meeting, members discuss the previous year's accounts, the number of poles and days needed to repair the dam, and the proliferation of water hyacinth slowing down the river current. The 2000 meeting was attended by 165 people, 21 of them women representing their absent husbands. Participants recalled that there had been only one conflict among the villages in eight years, when a period of water shortage 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 (see Table 1), fewer than half of the farming households use water from the Wang Hi irrigation dam.

Table 2 indicates a concentration of both land and water use in these villages, showing that the *muang fai* is composed largely of relatively elite village members who have more access to such resources.

Women have not traditionally been recognised as the principal caretakers of irrigation facilities. Water, especially for agricultural use, has always been considered a 'male' resource. Women plant, harvest, and weed paddy fields where an annual rice crop is cultivated, while men prepare the fields for planting, apply fertilisers and insecticides when these are available, as well as repairing canals and managing the flow, quantity, and direction of water. Both women and men hire out their labour for rice or cash wages. However, during labour bottlenecks in peak farm periods, men rely on their wives to engage in reciprocal labour arrangements so that they are free to sell their own labour. This allows work on the fields to continue undisrupted while the woman's husband can earn a wage, repair irrigation canals, and work on the dam. When problems occur in the irrigation system, the women either do the farm work single-handed or hire labourers, repaying these workers in terms equivalent to their own labour—either a rice wage or cash procured through their own means or earned by other

Table 2: Land and water use by farm households in three Upper Ping villages

Source of irrigation	Number of farm households	Cultivated land by size (in *rai*)	Cultivated land per capita (in *rai*)
Wang Hi dam	200	1012	5.06
Other sources	451	1399	3.1

Source: Chiang Dao Agricultural Office.

family members. Women also prepare meals for labour parties during planting and harvesting, and engage in commercial enterprises, often selling food in nearby markets. They rise early to cook this food and often stay up late the night before to prepare it in advance. 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 for their lives, women are not deterred 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 survive by earning money as agricultural workers. They may engage in trade like the other women but their hands are full combining wage labour, domestic work, and farm work on their rented rain-fed fields. Fetching water from distant wells and other sources is part of their domestic repertoire since their husbands are either working in Chiang Mai or busy doing paid farm work. In poorer households the gender division of labour is less rigid due to the exigencies of survival (Resurreccion 1999), meaning that fetching water for agricultural as well as household use becomes a woman's responsibility whereas culturally it is considered men's work. Women from poor households have no direct access to irrigated water or wells; water is regularly accessible only to wealthier and more landed farmers (see Table 2). Women from the poorest households are the most affected since their farm work and domestic tasks are more burdensome in the context of overall scarcity of resources, including water.

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 labour, their access to water sources, and class status. When men have to work on the irrigation system, women's unpaid labour 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, too, that when additional costs for water are imposed on users, such as through cost-recovery schemes, the burden is likely to fall on women's shoulders. Recent explorations into the feasibility of such a scheme assert that most farm households in Thailand increasingly generate higher cash incomes from non-farm enterprises than from agriculture (Halcrow Water 2000a). 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 should factor in its possible effects on women's non-farm incomes and the amount of extra work they would need to undertake in order to raise the additional money.

Women are clearly farmers and water users by virtue of their daily tasks and responsibilities, and therefore have legitimate interests at stake. However, women are discursively referred to as housewives, and sometimes traders, while it is the men who are recognised as farmers and water users. A holistic approach to water resource management needs to acknowledge

women's interests. These may complement men's, but the interests of poor women may well differ from all others, and deserve attention and action if water resource management and service delivery are to be equitable and 'participatory'.

Women are not only excluded in water resource management at the community level but their participation in village public life is also very limited. Since they are mostly identified as housewives, the only public space for women is the local Housewives' Association. Started by the wife of one of the village headmen, these Associations pool women to cook for the temples during religious festivals, wear traditional costumes to welcome visiting government officials, and help during funerals and other community gatherings. The Housewives' Association has so little political clout that women themselves refuse to be elected to head the organisation. None of its leaders has ever been elected or appointed to the more powerful IC or local government units.

Women's participation at the community level is influenced by the gender division of labour 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 to change this either by the government or by local NGOs. In fact, local government has further reinforced this gender division of labour in both public and private spheres by giving loans to the Association only for income-generating projects related to women's household work such as baking and food processing. It is not surprising, therefore, that women should internalise their marginal role in the public sphere and regulate their own political participation in the community from the perspective of their position as 'housewives'. Thus it would appear that change and continuity in the gender divisions of labour and gender identities have both fed into and have themselves been constructed, maintained, and validated through government programmes.

The preceding discussion focuses on the formation of RBCs, since their membership draws from traditional water user and irrigation management groups such as the *muang fai*. The following section discusses RBC formation in the Upper Ping in more detail.

River Basin Committees (RBCs)

River Basin Committees serve as the key organisational unit for water resource management at the local and regional levels in Thailand. At the time of our study, three RBCs had been established in the Upper Ping, Lower Ping, and Pasak Rivers, and the target is to establish 25 RBCs. The formation of RBCs is very much in step with current efforts to institutionalise a more bottom-up, participatory, and decentralised approach to water resource management.

The Upper Ping River Basin in northern Thailand has a catchment of about 25,000 km^2 and is divided into 15 sub-river basins, covering 230 sub-districts in two provinces. The Upper Ping RBC was established in August 2000 as an initiative of the Office of National Water Resources Committee (ONWRC), the national apex body. 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 the ONWRC, the RID, and the Provincial Office as an interim secretariat office to plan and implement the establishment of RBCs.

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. In both the Upper Ping RBC and the sub-district working groups established in Chiang Dao there are only two women, so these are predominantly male structures. The women were appointed by virtue of their stature in the sub-district organisations and the committee members were appointed in their capacity as representatives of the RID, *muang fai* leaders, village headmen, and representatives of other state agencies concerned with water issues. These political units are

themselves male dominated, hence the negligible representation—in terms of numbers and issues—of women on the RBCs and working groups.

Interviews with the male members underline their lack of interest in including women or addressing their concerns. Again, this stems from a male-centred construction of water users, the predominantly male selection and composition of the committees, and the lack of gender sensitivity among the current members.

Similarly, discussions with women in the Housewives' Association demonstrated women's apparent indifference towards being active in other committees, such as the RBC. It is interesting to note that women may also reproduce male domination in their organisations. For instance, they may acquiesce to male-dominated arrangements due to their own limited freedoms and the inertia deriving from practices that ensure relatively stable relationships, or believe that undue assertiveness on their part would weaken the family's interests as a whole, or perhaps simply accept that such arrangements are 'natural' (Bourdieu, cited in Risseeuw 1991).

Consultations through 'management and technical meetings', 'technical workshops', 'planning and consultation workshops', and 'plan integration workshops' organised by the ONWRC and the Local Consultative Group (LCG) in order to improve participatory water management by integrating technical experience into the TAO and local government, the *muang fai*, and the RID will not provide opportunities for women's involvement. Rather, these exercises serve basically as vehicles of technological transfer that further consolidate male knowledge and representation in the RBC, reinforcing existing inequalities based on class and gender.

The formation of RBCs and the social history of local irrigation management through the *muang fai* demonstrate that power does not reside only in the state or in macro centres but is everywhere, including 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 decentralised form of resource management organisation, it does not address local inequalities and may, instead, inadvertently reproduce them. This power imbalance is further maintained by the lack of capacity-building programmes to recognise people who are possibly marginalised within or 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 (Guijt and Shah 1998).

Participation through stakeholder consultations

One of the methodological approaches within participatory development involves eliciting the views and feedback of stakeholders as a means to redress the communication gap between policy makers and local user groups.

The LCG, tasked with conducting stakeholder consultations in river basins throughout Thailand, defined stakeholders as those who directly benefit from and use water, namely water users. These water users were also classified as either direct or indirect users who engage in livelihoods within the ecological boundary of the river basin, and were loosely referred to as farmers, members of the business sector, and local government personnel. These definitions were in themselves broad enough to encompass the multiple types of water users but failed to translate into the gender-aware practice of ensuring an equal number of male and female respondents. The LCG's consultations were mostly with male stakeholders; one consultant admitted that there was no deliberate attempt to seek the women and their groups. The consultants appeared to have chosen respondents according to the same cultural norms and traditions that define water as a male resource. By implication, therefore, stakeholders were assumed to be male.

The LCG established contact with grassroots stakeholders through a referral system handled by existing networks whose members had been involved in the use, management, and maintenance of water resources over time—the RID, the *muang fai* members and leaders, the village headmen, and representatives from other water-concerned state agencies.[1] At this level, too, the LCG was guided by the same social milieu 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 the gender division of labour, access to water and land, and specific livelihoods. Methodologically, information gathering can be influenced by the social location of one's network of informants, brokers, and mediators. The process of selecting respondents and the manner by which consultants reach them is a gendered one, propelled by implicit assumptions about whether women or men ought to participate. These networks may act as gatekeepers of information and contacts and may thus unwittingly serve as agents of social exclusion—most especially by edging women out of the process. The result: authoritative knowledge on the use, control, and prospects for the management of water resources is shaped by men's views and experiences, thus granting men the epistemic privilege (Narayan 1989).[2]

According to the LCG, one of the purposes of stakeholder consultations was to arrive at a consensus on crucial matters such as cost recovery, and the role, function, and organisational structure of the RBCs. These meetings are in the first place 'public' events where only a select number of people actively participate, quite different from informal, everyday life. Very often this formality will impose partiality on the kind of information provided by the respondents. Moreover, as public spaces are assigned to men, confining consultations to these spaces may, therefore, exclude women.

Further, the perspectives of the selected respondents are likely to dominate not through open competition of ideas but by arriving at consensus. This exercise of consensus building may blur the differences in views among local people and not always reflect the perceptions of those who may have been excluded from the consultations. Such consultations may be considered 'officialising strategies' whereby 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 'officialise' private interests, by representing them on record as consensual community views (Mosse 1994:509).

Gender and development in the Asian Development Bank

The Gender and Development (GAD) policy of the ADB requires gender issues to be addressed in all Bank operations (ADB 1998:15). One of the Bank's directives is to '[t]ake 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 post-evaluation' (ADB 1998:18).

However, while the ADB and its implementers are well intentioned in attempting to incorporate gender issues, their efforts may be constrained by both structural and individual choice factors, as has been found in other multilateral institutions like the FAO, UNDP, the ILO, the World Bank, and also the Ford Foundation (Kardam1991; Harrison 1997; Miller 1998). Advancing the gender agenda within these institutions may be far from straightforward. Gender specialists operate within particular institutional constraints and will often translate gender concerns into actions and programmes that have legitimacy within the institutional context. Constraints placed upon on them by the institution's dominant development paradigm,[3] and by the 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 effectiveness within the institution and its programmes.

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), and hence the number of gender specialists and their latitude for influencing policy at various levels may well be limited. At the time of the study reported here there were three GAD technical specialists based in the Social Development Division of the ADB. They concentrated on their Bank-wide advisory role and monitoring of strategic projects, but lacked the capacity to monitor all of the ADB's projects and technical assistance packages from their design and planning stages to post-evaluation. However, within their limited capacity, GAD specialists try their best to ensure that gender issues are adequately represented in the preparation of projects, for example by providing project teams with checklists to ensure proper attention to gender issues in different aspects of ADB's loan and technical assistance interventions in water supply and sanitation, agriculture, education, and health. A few of the staff in social-sector positions in other departments that are involved in project implementation have technical gender skills; however, these specialists have uneven experience, skills, and regard for the importance of gender issues since their terms of reference do not focus exclusively on gender.

In view of their limited space for influencing policy, ADB's gender specialists have channelled their efforts to introduce a gender awareness component within project implementation seminars for national government offices of Developing Member Countries (DMCs)—considered one of the new spaces for gender advocacy within the Bank. Others include gender seminars for new staff to ensure that gender awareness is properly inculcated at the outset of their careers within the ADB. It is not clear, however, how far these seminars explicitly steer staff into integrating substantive gender concerns and applying technical gender skills within their line of work.

The lack of explicit guidelines and terms of reference for consultants contracted under TA 3260 to gender sensitivity at all levels of technical assistance and participatory consultations indicates a tenuous relationship between technical gender specialists and the TA's planning board. Moreover, the field of water resource management and services delivery is still considered a 'male' purview and discipline. Harrison's (1997) study of the FAO shows how disciplines related to agriculture have fundamentally masculinised the agricultural producer, just as water users and stakeholders have apparently been viewed by consultants and technical specialists as implicitly male. Water services delivery and resource management were also traditionally regarded as the terrain of (largely male) engineers and technicians in the days when development and modernisation tended to emphasise infrastructure development and technology transfer. The synergy between technology and social development is a relatively recent phenomenon.

As internal specialists hold the gender fort within the ADB, dialogues and linkages with the wider women's movement could facilitate an environment conducive to strengthening and sustaining the normative framework for gender equality within which policy making in multilateral institutions takes place. This largely depends on the gender specialists themselves and on the women's advocacy groups who are willing to engage with the ADB's policies. But is such gender responsiveness really mainstreamed in the wider social movement and among Thai civil society groups who challenge the ADB's programmes?

Visible by non-participatory means: Thai civil society groups

Opposition to ADB policies and programmes by Thai civil society groups has grown, as was seen in the big demonstrations in May 2000 in Chiang Mai during the ADB's annual

conference. These protests are linked to an international movement that challenges the neo-liberal, market-driven economic growth model that is deemed socially inequitable or ecologically unsustainable. Criticisms of the ADB were levelled against development projects, particularly infrastructural development such as dams and roads, which have been assessed as 'socially and environmentally destructive projects' implemented with limited public accountability, transparency, and participation (Statement of the People's Forum 2000, cited in Tadem 2000:8)

A number of Thai grassroots-based NGOs have taken an official position of non-engagement and non-participation in the ADB's projects. Khun Phom, an NGO worker, explained:

> *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 recognising their legitimacy.*

Other NGOs in this civil society network are conducting their own awareness campaigns and consultations with grassroots groups outside the orbit of the ADB's recognised stakeholder networks and, moreover, claim to represent grassroots interests.

The notion of participation itself is therefore being contested. On one hand, departing from earlier top-down approaches, the ADB treats participation as a tool that will enable dialogue between local groups and national planning bodies. On the other hand, these civil society groups reject the ADB's notion of participation and perceive it as another way of legitimising its neo-liberal agenda by involving grassroots groups. They regard the ADB's participatory discourse as nothing more than what Gardner and Lewis (1996) refer to as 'softening top-downism'. The meaning of 'participation' as a notion and practice therefore depends on who is using it, and is thus a contested term.

In opposing the ADB, some civil society groups claim to represent farmers' interests. This is another type of officialising strategy that validates their oppositional role. These groups have conducted consciousness-raising activities to popularise their positions and have provided information on state projects, including those supported by the ADB, especially in places where government has failed to do so. In disseminating information, these groups also transmit their own political views, thereby influencing their constituencies. A confluence of interests gradually evolves, strengthening the groups' representational claim. Whereas the discourse and practice of participation has been a means by which the ADB and the Thai government have pursued their objectives in water resource management, the discourse of *representation* by civil society groups also makes for a powerful assertion of legitimacy. Participation and representation have become political and symbolic resources: 'the struggle over resources is also a struggle over meanings' (Agarwal 1997; Berry 1988).

In order to muster a strong and polemical statement of protest, people active in social movements must also conduct politics as though their own identities and those they represent were fixed, collective, and uniform—invoked in terms such as 'The People', 'the grassroots', 'the farmers' (Dirks et al. 1994:32). Thus 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 become invisible in the debate. Scantly addressed and thereby rendered invisible in these emerging civil society protest actions are the issues of women in resource management; mainstreaming gender within these civil society groups has therefore been glossed over.

Conclusions

The ADB's TA 3260 was intended to lay the ground for the decentralisation of water resource management and water services delivery by employing participatory approaches. The findings of this study show that women have been largely excluded at practically every level of consultation and participation. One reason for women's exclusion is that the premise of participation rests mainly on distributing power from national centres to local communities by creating decentralised units of management such as the RBCs. The formation of RBCs, however, overlooked the fact that these communities are socially organised along the axes of gender and class—and that women are in fact direct and indirect water users but have been represented as otherwise, whereas men are recognised as the main stakeholders. This is also because the underlying impetus to adopting participatory methods in TA 3260 appears to have been to mobilise people to get involved in the decentralised management of water. It was not by any means an effort to push forward a transformatory agenda that would redress the disparities between people in the use and management of water.

Stakeholder consultations, as observed, relied on a network of brokers and mediators who reproduced gender norms in resource use and management, and who acted as gatekeepers on selected information. Further, consensus building in these consultations may have been used as a form of 'officialising strategy' whereby the particular (predominantly male and upper-class) interests of key sections of the community are identified as *the* general interest.

Overlooking gender issues within TA 3260 was also due to the lack of explicit guidelines and terms of reference to ensure that they should be addressed. 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. The ADB's current emphasis on participatory processes as being the 'heart' of water policy is part of a strategy to rectify former fragmented, sub-sectoral approaches to water resource delivery and management into a more integrated, holistic framework involving key stakeholders. However, the currency of participation is limited to establishing direct lines of coordination between national bodies and local RBCs, overlooking the need for a balance between the number of male and female members and the inclusion of gender advocates and specialists in the ONWRC and RBCs.

By studying key actors and participatory processes in an ADB capacity-building assistance project, this article has demonstrated that environmental governance, even at the regional level, is constituted by gender—gendered because these processes function in ways that reflect gender relations in society, and 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 involved, in the terms and requirements for participation, and in their incentive and accountability mechanisms. The same may also be true of civil society groups who oppose huge projects being implemented under the aegis of the neo-liberal economic model. Employing a political discourse that invests these groups with representing a collective mass of grassroots stakeholders, such as farmers, obscures the fact that women farmers and water users may also be affected by changed water resource management regimes, whether initiated by RBCs, ADB technical or loan packages, or by government policies.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on research conducted in 2000 under the World Resources Institute Mekong Regional Environmental Governance Project (WRI-MREG), and contributed to the

book by Nathan Badenoch entitled *Transboundary Environmental Governance: Principles and Practice in Mainland Southeast Asia*, published by the World Resources Institute in 2002.

Notes

1 The RID has had several infrastructure projects in these areas facilitating collaboration with local people and representatives from other government offices.
2 Granting epistemic privilege implicitly legitimises one type of knowledge as valid, true, and authoritative over others.
3 In Carol 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 a significant percentage of healthy days' (World Bank, cited in Miller 1998:164). Gender concerns, then, were justified on the grounds of cost-effective human capital development and efficiency within the Bank's central concern for 'market optimism'. Women in Development (WID) policy in multilateral lending institutions seeks to promote efficiency by building human capital through education and healthcare and giving women access to credit facilities, in order to mobilise 'the other half' of human populations, namely women, for economic growth and production.

References

Agarwal, Bina (1997) 'Environmental action, gender equity and women's participation', *Development and Change* 28(1):1–44.
Asian Development Bank (ADB) (1998) *Policy on Gender and Development*, Manila: ADB.
Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2000) *Water for All: The Water Policy of the Asian Development Bank*, Manila: ADB.
Berry, Sara (1988) 'Concentration without privatization? Some consequences of changing patterns of rural land control in Africa', in S. Reyna and R. Downs (eds.) *Land and Society in Contemporary Africa*, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
Bourdieu, Pierre (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: CUP.
Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI) (2001) 'The Ping River Basin', unpublished report, Bangkok: CUSRI.
Cooke, Bill and Uma Kothari (2001) *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, London: Zed Books.
Cornwall, Andrea (1998) 'Gender, participation and the politics of difference', in I. Guijt and M. K. Shah (eds.) *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, London: ITDG Publishing.
Dirks, Nicholas, Geoff Eley, and Sherry Ortner (eds.) (1994) 'Introduction', in N. Dirks et al. (eds.) *Colonialism and Culture*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
Escobar, Arturo (1995) *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Brighton: Harvester & Wheatsheaf.
Gardner, Katy and David Lewis (1996) *Anthropology, Development and the Post-modern Challenge*, London: Pluto Press.
Guijt, Irene and Meera Kaul Shah (eds.) (1998) *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, London: ITDG Publishing.
Halcrow Water (2000a) 'A Strategy for Unified National Water Resource Management in Thailand', unpublished report, Bangkok: Halcrow Water.

Halcrow Water (2000b) 'Capacity Building in the Water Resources Sector Project: ADB TA 3260—THA Mid-term Report August 2000', unpublished report, Bangkok: Halcrow Water.
Harrison, Elizabeth (1997) 'Fish, feminists and the FAO: translating "gender" through different institutions in the development process', in A. Goetz (ed.) *Getting Institutions Right for Women*, London: Zed Books.
Kardam, Nuket (1991) *Bringing Women in: Women's Issues in International Development Programs*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
Mayoux, Linda (1995) 'Beyond naivety: women, gender inequality and participatory development', *Development and Change* 26(2):235–258.
Miller, Carol (1998) 'Gender advocates and multilateral development organizations: promoting change from within', in C. Miller and S. Razavi (eds.) *Missionaries and Mandarins: Feminist Engagement with Development Institutions*, London: ITDG Publishing.
Mosse, David (1994) 'Authority, gender and knowledge: theoretical reflections on the practice of participatory rural appraisal', *Development and Change* 25(4):497–526.
Narayan, Uma (1989) 'The project of feminist epistemology: perspectives from a non-Western feminist', in A. Jaggar and S. Bordo (eds.) *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Constructions of Being and Knowing*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
Resurreccion, Bernadette P. (1999) *Transforming Nature, Redefining Selves: Gender and Ethnic Relations, Resource Use and Environmental Change in the Philippine Uplands*, Maastricht: Shaker Publishing.
Risseeuw, Carla (1991) 'Bourdieu, power and resistance: gender transformation in Sri Lanka', in K. Davis, M. Leijenaar, and J. Oldersma (eds.) *The Gender of Power*, London: Sage.
Roche, Chris (1998) 'Organizational assessment and institutional footprints', in A. Thomas, J. Chataway, and M. Wuyts (eds.) *Finding Out Fast: Investigative Skills for Policy and Development*, London: Sage.
Tadem, Teresita Encarnación (2000) 'The anti-ADB struggle and social movements in Thailand', paper presented at the Asia Fellows' Conference, October, Bangkok.

The authors

All three authors have been involved in policy-related research and advocacy work in gender and development. Bernadette P. Resurreccion is Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Gender and Development Studies at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok. Contact details: Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Gender and Development Studies, School of Environment, Resources and Development, PO Box 4, Klong Luang, Pathumthani 12120, Thailand. <babette@ait.ac.th>. Mary Jane Real is Regional Coordinator of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) in Chiangmai. Contact details: APWLD, Santitham YMCA Building 3rd floor, Room 305–308, 11 Sermsuk Road, Soi Mengrairasmi, Chiangmai 50300, Thailand. <mjreal@apwld.org>. Panadda Pattana is a freelance researcher based in Chiang Mai.