

Public Participation for Environmental Conflict Management in Developing Coal-Fired Power Plant Project in Thailand

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Abstract

Natural resources have been used as major cost in development activities and projects for the development of Thailand's economic and industrial growth. Thus, massive natural resources have been destroyed and denigrated, especially by large development projects that have massive impact on the environment and that cause severe health problems to the people in developing regions. Public participation, as one of the key principals of good governance, can help to solve the problems regarding environmental conflict management. In many cases, citizens who are directly impacted by the development have no opportunities to participate in decision-making process. This research aims to study the causes of environmental conflicts of thermal power plants from coal in the south of Thailand and propose ways in managing environmental conflicts to create justice. This research is a qualitative study and data were collected through in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. The research findings revealed that the problems and obstacles that prevent good governance and public participation in making decisions involving Thailand's developmental projects are top-down commands, the lack of encouragement from the government, the lack of transparency in the projects' management, the limited scope of permission for stakeholders to participate, and a low level of participation from the people. These problems and obstacles lead to ineffective participation and conflicts in the society caused by unaccepted decisions. It is necessary to switch from the monopoly of commands to a bottom-up approach.

Keywords: Environmental Governance, Public Participation, Coal-fired Power Plant, Environmental Conflict