

## **First Announcement**

### **RCSD Conference**

# **Politics of the Commons: Articulating Development and Strengthening Local Practices**

**July 11-14, 2003**

**Chiang Mai, Thailand**

Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD)  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University

Political changes, as upheavals or planned reform, are critical processes affecting commons. In some cases, changes are taking areas out of common management and privatising them, in others putting them in control of the state, and in still others returning significant control back to local communities. Interventions in the name of development or modernization, by the state, a wide variety of non-government organizations, international banks, and business continue to drive changes to the economic and politic context in which local practices operate.

Institutional reform towards good governance has been recently promoted as the solution to sustainable development and natural resource management challenges. In practice, however, the way political changes unfold, can both open and close the public policy process. The outcome can be new opportunities as well new barriers to effective local participation in management and decision-making.

Some elements of this institutional reform package seems to be obvious goods in their own right, i.e. improved downward accountability, enhanced participation, tenure reform, and decentralization of power. It certainly seems to tackle head-on the power of the old resource management regimes, which many see as a key obstacle to more participatory and people-centered sustainable development.

Despite its seemingly incontestable good, the institutional reform package has attracted considerable criticism among academics and critics of the major development agencies. The RCSD Conference in 2003 to be held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, will focus on the intersection between natural resource management of commons and political changes with a special emphasis on how development is articulated and the consequences of these interactions for local practices.

The conference will be organized around five key themes as follows:

*1. Situating the commons in post-colonial and (post)-socialist thinking/articulation*

Coordinators: Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Pinkaew Laungaramsri and Janet Sturgeon

How have common property regime and development trends changed in the era of post-colonialism and (post)-socialism in Asia? How have the history and political economy of resource and livelihood in this region been deployed within the influx liberal and neo-liberal

economy? What are the articulating grounds, connection and disjunction, tension and ambivalence within the changing socialist nations and postcolonial settings of Asia? Situating the common in the context of political, economic, and cultural transformation of the post-colonial and (post)-socialist thinking, assess the complex and dynamic interaction between the colonial legacy, socialist practice, and the development establishment of the modern era.

## *2. Transnationalizing the commons and the politics of civil society*

Coordinators: Santita Ganjanapan and Philip Hirsch

Globalization and regionalization have helped to bring into focus, and in some cases to create, transnational commons. There are three main aspects to transnationalization of the commons. First, there are the transnational common properties such as shared river basins, or globalised industries such as shrimp farming that depend on appropriation of local commons, or intellectual property rights in bio-materials, whose management regimes and implications transcend national boundaries. What are the issues of grassroots participation in response to transnational impacts? Second, there are transnational discourses of the local as well as global commons, such as those coming under the increasingly mainstreamed rubric of community-based natural resource management for example IASCP agendas. What are these transnational discourses and associated practices, and what quandaries do they present in relation to tensions between local context or specificity, on the one hand, and general principles or universality, on the other. Third, transnationalization of civil society, in part in response to transnationalized resource development, competition and conflict, and in part in response to wider globalization agendas and opportunities, presents new challenges. What scale issues are associated with the politics of civil society's engagement with the material and discursive dimensions of the transnationalized commons?

## *3. Local voices in the globalising market: cultural diversity and pluralism*

Coordinators: Anan Ganjanapan, Yos Santasombat and Somchai Preechasilapakul

In the globalising market, state policies increasingly manage natural resources, particularly the common as commodities while ignoring local rights and the negative consequences in the lives of local people. On the other hand, the global market also encourages more population movement which reinforces the trans-border problems of people's health as well as local rights. A big part of local rights is tied up with local identity, ethnicity, gender and social movements. Will this be lost in the global market/ is there such thing as the global market and how do local voices react to such encroachment on their lives? What complexities are found in relation to such interactions? In what ways do cultural diversity and legal pluralism play a role in these problem areas in various parts of Southeast, South and East Asia?

## *4. Politics of Tenure Reform*

Coordinators: Jamaree Chiengthong and Peter Vandergeest

Over the last decade international development agencies have supported or pushed institutional reforms in many developing countries, such as decentralization and accountability of governing institutions, participation of civil society, and the clarification of property rights, under an umbrella of 'good governance'. Many NGOs have also been convinced that these kinds of institutional reforms are fundamental to achieving sustainable and democratic development. At the same time, many questions have been raised about these reforms, for example, the way that they are often linked to loan conditionalities, the top-down ways in which they are implemented, and their appropriateness in Asian political contexts. Questions that papers in this theme might address include (1) What are some Southeast Asian/South Asian/East Asian examples of institutional reforms based on good governance package, how are they working, and what effects do they have on people's access and management such as in forests, land, water, and other resources? (2) Do these

reforms address the more important causes of unsustainable development, resource degradation, and conflicts over resource rights? Do they challenge existing resource rights, for example, unequal land distribution? (3) Particularly in tenure reform, what are the impacts of these reforms? Under what conditions might they have a positive impact and under what conditions might they produce impoverishment or displacement? Do property right reforms contradict other elements of the institutional reform package-*ie.*, are they centralizing or decentralizing? Participatory? Do they address the fundamental problems underlying resource degradation and marginalization?

#### *5. Crisis and access: critical times for the commons*

Coordinators: Chusak Wittayapak and Louise Lebel

The importance of access to commons (upland and coastal forests, waterways, coastal fisheries) for the wellbeing of poor and marginalized people is often greatest at times of ecological, social or economic crisis. Opportunities to re-design or introduce novel institutional arrangements affecting access, rule-making and decisions about the commons are infrequent, and often coincide with political crisis. Our understanding of social and ecological processes during periods of crises and re-organization is not well integrated, and the consequences for commons is not well understood. How do different kinds of crises, and the way they are socially constructed and defined, affect and constitute dependencies on commons, and consequently the sustainability of livelihoods? What are the political determinants of access? How have citizenship, land tenure, and stewardship rights and responsibilities been bundled and unbundled over-time, and what have been the consequences of this for the poor responding to crisis? How have power relation been played out and renegotiated in the axes of gender, ethnicity, caste, and class?

### **Organized by**

The Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University

### **Date and Venue**

11-14 July 2003. The conference will be held for the first three days and the fourth day there will be a field trip. The venue will be Lotus Pang Suan Kaew Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand

### **Format of the Symposium**

The conference has opted for a structure that will facilitate interaction, often in smaller groups. Participants should come away from the meeting with an improved appreciation of the diversity of perspectives on theories, actions and policies about development, political processes and institutional changes in Asia

Proposal for panel sessions within the above theme areas as well as individual submissions are encouraged.

### **Synthesis Papers**

One of the specific products of the workshop will be a set of synthesis papers on each of the main conference themes. A first draft of the main ideas of these papers will be presented during the final session of the workshop. The preparation of these papers will be coordinated by the theme leaders, but other participants will be invited to join as co-authors. A small budget will be reserved from the main conference budget to allow one small follow-up working group meeting for authors of each of the themes. This meeting will be held within 3 months of the completion of the conference, and the paper submitted soon after that.

## **Funding**

Full funding is available for only a limited number of participants from countries in Asia.

## **Important Dates**

- 1 December 2002: Deadline for submission of panel proposals
- 15 January 2003: Deadline for pre-registration and submission of abstract
- 1 February 2003: Announcement of abstract accepted for the conference and travel grant recipients
- 15 April 2003: Deadline for paper submission and a specific announcement
- 11-14 July 2003: Conference Registration

There is no registration fee. All participants are expected to present papers.

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