Written by Administrator
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Bangkok - 14 October 2011. As floods continued to rise and threaten to spread to other vulnerable parts of the Thai capital, participants from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia gathered at the first civil society workshop on carbon markets in Bangkok. They called attention to how CDM failed to reduce emissions through projects being implemented under the scheme that are producing more environmental harm, such as hydropower dams. They wanted a stronger role for civil society in the CDM validation and implementation process, and to set up a grievance mechanism, particularly a venue for public scrutiny throughout project implementation.

The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) allows emission-reduction projects in developing countries to earn carbon credits, each equivalent to one tonne of CO2. These credits can be traded and sold, and used by industrialized countries to meet a part of their emission reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol. The CDM has two objectives: to reduce emissions and to contribute to sustainable development. This claim is being challenged by climate justice activists.

“The CDM has never been designed to reduce emissions” said Jacques-Chai Chomthongdi of Focus on the Global South. “Even worse is that there are no measures in place that address negative environmental and social impacts.”

Case studies presented during the workshop showed the reasons for the critical stance of local communities. In Cambodia, the Kamchay Dam, a large scale hydro-electric dam which is currently under validation, is expected to flood 2000 hectares of lands including the Bokor National Park, which is known for its rich biodiversity.

Dr. Carl Middleton of Chulalongkorn University explained that “the project has secured investment in 2006 from the China Exim Bank and is expected to be operational. It is impossible to assume that this project is additional. Moreover, no intention has been communicated to address the severe environmental impacts it will cause.”

Scrutinized too was the Isabela Bio-Ethanol project in the Philippines, which is currently considering CDM funding. Rhoda Gueta from the Asian Peasants Coalition said that “the land used for this biofuel project belonged to indigenous people.”

Joining the critical audience, a panel of CDM market participants pointed out that the CDM will play a role in the future and agreed that the CDM was not designed to reduce emissions. They also acknowledged that rules in place had not been strong enough to address the expressed concerns and that there is a need for more dialogue between civil society organisations (CSOs) and other CDM actors.

Responding to a question from the floor, a representative from the Thai DNA TGO said that she

will explore the opportunity for including a CSO representative in the TGO Board to strengthen assessment of sustainable development. There was also a proposal from the panel for increased sustainability and an accelerated CDM validation process through the setting up of sustainability criteria for CDM projects at the international level.

“Local people are the ones who continue to suffer—from pollution, from lack of access to water resource,” said Nichakan Yuenyao, a local researcher from a community affected by air pollutants and reduced harvest as a result of biomass project in Surin Province in Thailand.

Patrick Burgi, a representative of South Pole Carbon Assessment Co., a leading actor in the CDM commented “some of these environmental impacts could be easily addressed, for example by adding dust nets or sprinkling water. The problem is that there is no enforcement mechanism in place.”

A representative of the CDM Watch also remarked that “This shows that public scrutiny is needed throughout the CDM project implementation to ensure that requirements are not only met at the validation stage.”

Participants to the workshop also mentioned that some of their past experiences in engaging consultation processes in development projects indicated that participation did not guarantee improvements in the projects and fundamental change in institutions. They have engaged, and still are engaging, various processes of their governments and international financing institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Some countries in the region even have very advanced environmental laws that were put in place as a result of civil society campaigns, but these have been often set aside when powerful interests are at stake.

Such processes have not recognized the right of people to say “no” to projects that can harm their environment and destroy their livelihoods. Although improvements in the CDM practice can come out from engagement, the mechanism itself has failed the litmus test of climate justice, as it could not prove the additionality principle, which is a basic requirement. CDM does not reduce carbon emission, does not help in transforming the hugely unequal relations between the power of money and rights of people in developing countries and will not produce sustainable development, were the key messages that emerged from the workshop.