

Local Capacity for Managing Risks and Vulnerabilities in the Thai-Lao Border Area

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Abstract

The border area where the Mekong River runs between Thailand and Laos has become a channel of economic and social development. Since 1980's, most of development projects have been taking place along the upper Mekong River. These projects were part of "Go West" and "Lanchang Economic Belt" policies, which are regional policies. The projects have led to the creation of a cascade hydropower dam, various industrial estates, and the upper Mekong navigation channel improvement project. They have caused extensive negative impacts to the ecological system on the river and destroyed the natural balance that once existed on the river, also impacted local communities and their livelihood.

This paper describes a research project in sociology that applies concept of modernity, risk society, and includes risk and vulnerability to analyze the negative impacts of modernity. It examines the hidden damages that dispute people who live along the river with social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities. The objective of this qualitative study is to explore the present status of social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities along the river, and examine how the people and community confront and adjust to these situations. The analysis will propose a concept of risk and vulnerability management and provide practical guidelines for policies in the border area.

1. Introduction

The approach of modernity brought about the changes in economy and society which expanded worldwide. In consequences of the power of a new economy and the capitalism in the society has made many countries unable to sustain their economy and society solely which they need to rely on the global economy and target themselves to become the modern countries. (Sonthaya Ponsri, 2002) In the modern era which focused on the economic growth and the industrial development, it is regarded as the requirements of knowledge and the development in sciences and industrial technology are an important strategy. Consequently, this made the economic system and institutes growth rapidly, severely, broadly, and more complicated in particular the market institutes and industrial products. There were more diversified in types and styles to extremely response in market satisfactions which are likely to higher and changed rapidly. (Giddens, 1991)

The countries at the Great Mekong Subregion (GMS), comprises five continental Southeast Asian countries; Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand, as well as Yunnan province of China, needed to open countries to the global markets and had the targeting operation to develop their economic system which greatly required a regional collaboration in order to compete with other regions. The policy determination for GMS basically emphasize on the industrial economy development inevitably which is related to the liberalism – the economic system solely focused on the growth or distribution markets. (Peerapoj Ratanamalee, 2006)

The challenges of modernization and globalization for development, has been taking place along the upper Mekong following the implementation of "Go West" policy and the Lancang Economic Belt policy (which are GMS's policies). These policies have led to the creation of cascade hydropower dam project, industrial real estates and the upper Mekong navigation channel improvement project. The goal of the project was to allow large cargo ships

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to navigate from Simaoin China and Luang praban in Laos PDR. This project includes rapids blasting.

Before the implementation of the projects, ecosystem in the upper Mekong River was pristine. The estuary of the river that forms the border between Thailand-Laos and Burma has been home to many complex ecological systems and considered one of the most important wildlife sanctuaries in Southeast Asia (Southeast Asia Rivers Network, 2006). These areas are rich in their biodiversity, and are sustaining the livelihood of local people and communities along river.

These development projects have directly impacted fish, plant species and the livelihood of the people who live on both sides of this river. They have caused extensive negative impacts to the Mekong's ecological system and the natural balance. The local people who live along the river are trying to adapt their lives to the new environment and new situation and they are uncertain of their future. They have lost some of their ways of live and the conventional. They confront many of social problems i.e., crimes, debts and poverty. The current social environment does not adequately support the wellbeing of the local people along the river. It is uncertain whether regional development can improve the quality their lives (Thai Baan Research; villagers in Chiang Khong and Wiang Kaen districts, 2004).

Since the border has become a channel of economic and social development, it appears that, on the one hand people at the border have been advantaged from the growth. On the other hand, social problems have been also resulted consequently as the negative impacts to the community living. Moreover, it is not only the risks from insecurity and inexperience which harm peoples' economic livelihood. But the risk of unpredictable future from growing economic development also ruin the natural resources and environment including the society, cultures and lifestyle changes in the community.

This paper describes a research project in sociology that applies concept of modernity, risk society, and risk and vulnerability to analyze the negative impacts of modernity. It examines the hidden damages that confront people with social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities. The research project is guided by the following questions: what the social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities are impacting people and communities in the Thai-Laos border and how the people and communities confront and adjust to the social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities.

The objective of this qualitative study is to explore the present status of social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities along the river, and examine how the people and community confront and adjust to these situations. The analysis will propose a concept of risk and vulnerability management and provide practical guidelines for policies in the border area.

The general lay out of this paper is divided into 4 sections: Introduction section proposes on the background of research problems and research objectives. Next, explores a brief literature review related on the regional development and social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities which are concepts and theory that will be used in the research and then presents the research design, methodology that will be used and lastly conclusion section

2. A brief of literature review

2.1 Concept of modernity

The approach of modernity brought about the changes in economy and society which expanded worldwide. As a result of the power of a new economy and the capitalism in the society made many countries unable to sustain their economy and society solely which they needed to rely on the global economy and targeted themselves to become the modern countries. (Sonthaya Ponsri, 2002)

The modernity was called as the modern society or industrial civilization which was the social condition changing to industrial civilization and the modern society along with the followings: 1) the attitudes of the community towards the various global changes with the rights to express ideas and freedoms obviously, 2.) The highly complicated economy in particular the market institutes and industrial products with many types and styles to response the various needs which change severely and quickly. It was said that the modernity is dynamic, complicated, and high-technology. The modernity resulted in the change of economic order that comprised of Capitalistic Economic Order and Politic Order with bureaucratization. The information or Military Power management had changed with high-technology. The procedures or the concepts are related to the modernity as follows: (Giddens, 1991)

1. Industrialization is the procedure of sciences and technology development in order to produce products in the massive markets which bring the machineries and the professional labors for the production.

2. Urbanization is the following procedures: an urban change to be a city, the mobility of populations or jobs from the urban to the city, and the distribution of boundaries, populations, or business growth. For example, the community lifestyle has received the modernized distribution in electricity, water supplies, road constructions, radios, televisions, or computers.

3. Democratization is philosophy or social system emphasizes on people participation and the business control organizes by local people in regardless of social classes, status, and property possession. It is also needed nation state and mass democracy.

4. Bureaucratization is the distribution of the administration managed by the position consequently and need to be under the control of a chief. This is accepted for both government and private sectors and it is believed that this administration is more likely to comply in the future.

In addition, the modernity might generate the marginalization because the procedures of the modernity bring about the social and cultural changes and made more different in society. It could say that there were some people who got the benefits from changes while some people got lesser or did not get any benefits finally were exploited to be the marginalized people in the society.

Trust and Risk qualified for the modernity (Giddens, 1991). We would feel little risky if we had trust. On the other hands, if the risk was founded, it we would have less trust. Basically, Trust and Risk were related in terms of time and place. We felt risky when we did not know what the future happened. Since, everything changed rapidly and caused effects continuously. There were two contents of risk comprising the explorer status, they would feel risky when they were in the unfamiliar places and the business people status, they would feel risky when they knew what the future was and found out the undisciplined and unclear future plans.

The concept of modernity will be used in this research for explain the changing area, particularly the rapid change in the area that used to call border or margin of state. In consequences of the capitalism which focus on the economic growth and industry development to bring about urbanization, industrialization, democratization and bureaucratization. The resulted from modernity has been generated social and cultural problems and hidden dangers which make people confront with risks and vulnerabilities in their livelihood.

2.2 Concept of Risk

The definition of Risk had been changed depending on the social and cultural situations or context which defined in different meanings by the people in each community and period. The discussed definition in terms of social and history fields obviously founded that "Risk" had the root from "Riscum" – Latin term and many countries including German used this word. Luhman (1993) mentioned that "Risk" founded in German language in the mid of 17th century. Most of critics said that the concept of Risk related to the shipping industry in early period in the Pre-modern period. This period defined the word of "Risk" as the possibility of an objective

danger or the practice of God which were the natural events without human causes. Therefore, the mentioned concept was not included the mistakes and the responsibility of humans which recognized as the natural events such as storm, flood, or epidemic not from the human commitments. Basically, human needed to accept the situation but they tried to predict roughly on the possibility to happen the events in order to reduce the effects. Lupton (1999) said that the changing in the definition and usage of “Risk” was related to the modernity beginning in the 17th century and was more accepted in the 18th century.

In the period of the 18th century, the concept of risk was defined as sciences by applying in new knowledge, for examples, the Probability in Mathematics, the development of risk calculation in Statistics, and the growth of insurance industry in the early modernity period. In the 19th century, the definition of “Risk” was broader in the fact of the social relationships. (Edward, 1999)

The concept of risk in the modernity period was to express the new way to have the attitudes towards society, the disordered problems happening in the future and the uncertainty. According to the basic concept, the unexpected events resulted from human actions more than natural events which included good and bad risks. As the mentioned aspect, the risk was the Neutral concept which means the possibility of happening events with loses or benefits. It was able to be good risk or bad risk.

As the different problems in the modernity society at present, Giddens – the sociologist – thought that the meaning of risk was discussed generally especially in the globalization period which has generated new characteristics of risks and increased gradually. There are two types of risks comprising external risk and manufactured risk. The difference between two types is the external risk caused from the natural risk while the manufactured risk caused from the results of sciences and technology usage.

2.3 The concept of Risk Society

The term of “Risk Society” was firstly used by Ulrich Beck, the German sociologist, mentioned in his book called “Risk society: Towards a New Modernity”, (1992). The main objective of the book was to criticize the industrial society regarded as the modernity at the moment. To identifying the factors generated new modernity, Beck mentioned in his book that the industrial society generated risk which was the bad side returning to destroy itself while this risk would lead to the new modernity or another name as “risk society”. Beck mentioned that the modernity period of western society was able to describe into two patterns. The first pattern was the industrial society which Beck agreed with Marx’s aspect. Marx said that the industrial society was the class society. The position in the society was unfair which mostly were from the possession of economic factors unequally. Beck gave the definition as “Good” which resulted in the starvation and hunger which obviously made the class consciousness at the same time. So, the society needed to eliminate starvation and poverty by distributing the factors equally. Another pattern was called as “the risk society” as he thought that at present the risk factors distribution had been more equal (not meant that the unequal status would disappear but it was still exist especially between the general people and the capitalized group). The middle-class people increased numbers obviously which greatly eliminated the social class level. However, the important thing was the class consciousness which had gradually disappeared. He differentiated his opinion from the class society and said that the risk distribution became the significant issue in the risk society. Beck compared that while the people was talking about the distribution of goods, the distribution of bad caused more problem in the society. As for the risk distribution, it reflected clearly from Beck’s saying that poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic. In the risk society, shared joint consciousness in joint effects from risks which was called as risk consciousness. Therefore, the main ideal target of the risk society was to eliminate permanently.

The arguments in the theory of risk society can be grouped into three. (Beck, 1997) First, the cultural and political dynamics of a global risk society begin with the *end of nature*, i.e., the end of external risk. The threatening aspect of bird flu or mad cow disease is not only that involuntary health risk are shifted onto the populace but, most of all, that these risks are not fate, but the results of decision and options that were taken in industry, science and politics. It seems a number of risks that appearance in the midst of everyday life and which have to be coped with by a whole series of institutions. It is part of the characteristic of internal risks that, they are the results of efforts to *control risk*. Secondly, the dynamics of risk society begin with the *end of tradition*: that is, where moral surroundings are replaced in the wake of advancing processes of modernization and individualization. People find themselves forced to hold, or better, together their lives on their own initiative. The concept of risk society assumes decisions and options. The more decision, the more risk. Accordingly, the theory of risk society is closely linked to phases of individualization in the field of work, family, gender relationships, reflexive biography and self-identity. Lastly, the theory of risk society investigates how these two connected groups have changed the epistemological and social status of science and politics. The sciences are actively tied in three contradictory ways into the advancement of risk society. Science, as applied technological science, causes a particular type of internal modern risk; it also specifies the language and methodological standards under which these risks are known and acknowledged. At the same time, technological science profits from these risks by building up new research fields and markets upon them. Of course, this transforms society into a laboratory in which no one organization controls the conditions and results of any ongoing experiment.

As Beck (1995) mentioned that the expectation on the risk society was unsecured life because the results of happening risks at present in the national or international level were the same while the method of risk production would be such as health and environment issues. The sample related to global was the nuclear explosion of Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine in 1986. It made people (all age, social status and genders) lived near the plant get the radioactive effect. Plus, its effect expanded into Europe broadly and sustained for a long time. The procedure of modernity was not intended and desired to cause the dangers or effects on humans but the risks was still exist in itself, for example, the procedure of industry and the risks of science and technology innovation and the risks from the natural resource deterioration and the destroyed environment.

In response, Beck argues that there has been 'a social surge of individualization'. People has become compelled to make themselves the center of the conduct of life, taking on multiple and mutable subjectivities, and crises are seen as individual problems rather than socially based. He calls this 'reflexive biography', or biography that is self-rather than socially produced. This does not mean, argues Beck that social inequalities have disappeared. Instead they have become viewed as individualized, perceived as 'psychological dispositions: as personal inadequacies, guilt feelings, anxieties, conflicts, and neuroses. With the breakdown of traditional certainties structuring the life course, a plurality of new risk is generated, such as unemployment or underemployment and the destabilizing of intimate and family relationship, accompanied by high levels of anxiety and insecurity. Therefore, the decision making behavior reflected the individual reliance such as marry which at the present people needed to confront with risks more than in the past. The decision on the appropriate education also was the risk. As a result, it was difficult to predict on our skills that if it would be value for the rapid changes in economy.

For Beck (1992), the risk was generated by late modernity are also the result of dramatic changes in the structuring of private lives. Traditional that once shaped key aspects of the life course, such as marriage, the nuclear family and lifetime employment, have now been weakened and challenged which described as the rapid change procedure and was regarded as the new pattern of risk. The risk society described by Beck did not determined only in environment and health but it included changes of the whole relationship of the social livings including

employment method, the career insecurity, the original tradition and cultures decline and the deterioration in family tradition. People in the future might be fixed less than in the past.

2.4 Risk Society and Environment

‘The environment’ is routinely accepted as one of the principal issues of public and political concern—placed somewhere alongside issues such as the economy, health, education, crime and so on.

From the early 1960s to the mid- 1980s, the public was offer two principal ways of understanding the environment. Firstly, the technocratic approach of the political and business class treated environmental issues as essentially engineering and administrative problems. Marginalization was here part of the message. Secondly, the green movement compounded this problem by making the environment the centerpiece of new utopianism. Raising environmental crisis to the status of fatal flaw in capitalist society, the green ideology of this period saw salvation only in the ending of economic growth and materialist consumerism. (Jacobs, 1997)

Next, the concept of ‘sustainable development’ was first introduced by the World Conservation Strategy of 1980 that means development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. It has rapidly become the organizing principle of modern environmentalism. The concept protecting the environment requires fundamental change in the direction of economic progress and the institutions of government policy, but it argues that is compatible with continue economic growth in a global capitalist system. In this sense sustainable development represent a ‘historic compromise’ between the ideology of capitalism and its environmental critique. It has been achieve at a political cost, so that sustainable development has not succeeded in making the environment into the central political issue. (Jacobs, 1997)

In the risk society theory, Beck’s analysis is concerned with the environmental hazards posed by new technologies. Whereas previous forms of industrial pollution were localized and relatively easily controlled, the new technologies, such as nuclear power, the production of synthetic chemicals and genetic engineering, pose risks on qualitatively different scale. These hazards are global, respecting neither national boundaries nor class divisions. They are pervasive, arising in the midst of everyday life, in foods, plastics and other materials. (Beck, 1992; Jacobs, 1997)

The theory of risk society thus gives environmental issues a central place in the analysis of contemporary world, in two senses. Firstly, at an organizational level it highlights the direction of technological advance, pointing out the central place of environmental degradation in modern economies. Beck (1992) argues that the industrial societies have entered a phase of ‘self-endangerment’, as their environmental consequences grow increasingly large and uncontrollable. Secondly, at a social-psychological level, environmental hazard is one of the dimensions of risk or uncertainly which are changing people’s outlook on the world and on politics. It is a key factor in the anxiety people feel about the future, and the lack of capacity of governments to manage it.

In conclusion, the risk society has made lifestyle, traditional and culture change to the pattern and characteristics in the social relationship. Plus, the family pattern and type also has been changed and found more family problems and been likely to be higher. Consequently, we can determine the factor of risks in the risk society as following:

1. Lost in social cost: Natural pollution and the deterioration of environment are regarded as the severe fundamental problem in long term of the human which can not evaluate lost correctly.

2. Lost in mental health: The modern technology at the present is significant part to determine the human behaviors to make people decrease the basic needs. It is obviously noticed from the lost of understanding capacity and circumstance management in humans which

resulted from the depending on complicated technologies. Furthermore, as the rapid and severe changes of modernity and many risks surrounded people, these make people serious, worried, depressed, suspicious and unsecured and led to conflicts in family, community, and nations.

3. Effects on lifestyle, traditional and culture

2.5 Concept of Vulnerability

we can trace the linguistic roots of the term vulnerability, The Collins English Dictionary (Second Edition, 1986) defines vulnerability as, *inter alia*, the capacity to be physically or emotionally wounded or hurt'. The origin of this word lies in the Latin *vulnus*, meaning 'a wound', and *vulnerare*, 'to wound'. Particularly, the word vulnerable derives from the Late Latin *vulnerabilis*, the term used by the Romans to describe the state of soldier lying wounded on the battlefield, i.e. already injured therefore at risk from further attack. (Adger and Kelly, 2000) Vulnerability in this classic sense is defined primarily by the prior damage (the existing wound) and not by poorly defined, future stress (any further attack). Then, the vulnerability of any individual or social grouping to climate stress, in line with the definition employed by Blaikie et al. (1994) perspective, the emphasis must clearly be on identifying existing damage which might limit the capacity to respond, rather than an assessment of impacts, sensitivity and adaptive options in some speculative future.

Social vulnerability is a negative state endured by individuals or groups. In the broadest sense, vulnerability occurs because livelihoods and social systems are exposed to stress and are unable to cope effectively with the stress. Though most evident in times of crisis, vulnerability is chronic and pervasive state related to the underlying economic and social situation, not only in term of lack of income and resources but also with respect to a range of factors determined by government policies, social trends and so on. (Adger and Kelly, 2000)

For developing countries, the process of rapid urbanization and industrialization place enormous stress on urban infrastructure, human well-being, culture integrity and socio-economic arrangement. They also face significant environmental and social problems as a consequence of urbanization. Several cities are experiencing problems of poverty, unemployment, rural and urban migration and homelessness, that are similar to the megacities, but these problems are situated in very different social and physical contexts, which give rise to geographically situated vulnerabilities. (Cocklin and Keen, 2000)

Within the literature, urbanization has been identified as a process that has implications for both environment and security. Brennan (1999) aimed to identify the linkage between population growth, urbanization, public health, the environment and international security. Pirages (1997) also referred to the links between urbanization, environment and security, noting that urbanization in the less economically developed countries could increase 'ecological security'. He suggested also that a combination of crowding within cities and a lack of economic opportunities poses a threat to social order. Brennan (1999) refers to the prospects of crime and violence arising out of economic disadvantage, overcrowding, and social exclusion; social dislocation within cities have the potential to lead to wider instabilities, which might extend across national border.

In conclusion, Thai-Lao border has changed and became a risk society because the economic growth in the region that tries to compete with other developed regions. The people and community have been confronted with the negative impacts of the modernity and the hidden dangers that put the harms to the community. Consequently, the community is needed to determine the strategies to deal with risks and vulnerabilities. The following is a list of events that may happen from risk society:

Social risks are following.

1. End of indigenous knowledge: The new developments will normally rely on the knowledge, expertise, and innovative technology from external factors. Therefore, they will change the traditional ways of lives i.e., hand-made skill, local wisdom, and old heritage.

2. Encourage the individualism: the people in individualism would realize on only themselves and less think of family, friends, and public. This might change in population and people lifestyle which brings about the culture destroys.

3. Lost in mental health: the modern technology at the present is significant part to determine the human behaviors to make people decrease the basic needs. It is obviously noticed from the lost of understanding capacity and circumstance management in humans which resulted from the depending on complicated technologies. Furthermore, as the rapid and severe changes of modernity and many risks surrounded people, these make people serious, worried, depressed, suspicious and unsecured and led to conflicts in family, community, and nations. The economic development in the modernity People will turn themselves to be slaves of time and lack of freedom in their life.

4. Social unequally: income distribution, lost opportunity of career. The new economy has required a large capital in order to compete in the market system which needs to rely on raising a large amount of funding. The people cannot run their own business because they turn themselves to work for the huge companies including the foreign companies which run the developing projects. It also may bring a losable in the economic power it is compared to a new strategy of colonization from the developed countries.

5. Social problems: the gap of development will become the source of poverty, crimes, extravagance, drugs, human trafficking and other social problems.

Environmental risks are following.

1. Ecological system and biodiversity loss

Base on the village researchers of Chieng Khong District, CheingRai province, Thailand, were able divide the complex ecological system of Mekong River along the Thai-Laos border into 11 subsystems including river rapids, whirlpools, beach, swamp, reef, by the river creek, by the river bank and lake. Each of this ecological subsystem is highly complex and be home to important aquatic plants and animals. (Thai Baan Research, 2004)

The water level in each season is important for the people who use resources from the river. So the normal fluctuation of water in the Mekong River is an essential part of the complex ecological systems of river that are essential part of the food chain of the people on both side.

When the water is low, during the middle of dry season, from late January to early March the villagers, particularly the women, children and the elder come to collect Kai which is fresh water algae that grow on the rapids and reefs. The women learn to preserve Kai and sell it for generate their income and turn it back home for cooking food. The water fluctuation is not normally now, one day the water raises but, the other day the water dry. Because of the dams construction and the rapids blasting on the upper river have caused unnatural sudden and severe fluctuations in the river.

Base on the village researchers of Chieng Khong District, they found that the abnormal fluctuation of Mekong have caused fish to stop migration for feeding and spawning. So the people have become very hard to catch fish because fish migration pattern has been disrupted. All men of working age were engaged in using traditional gear to catch fish in 10 years ago, there were variety of fish. The income from fishing helps the people to sustain livelihood of their families. In the past, there were many fisher folk and lots of fish, they could earn up to 5,000 Baht per month. It's not too much, but enough for survival, they were not indebted, so it was more comfortable. But now, they are heavily indebted. They have to keep looking for money.

The number of fish folk has reduced because they can no longer catch enough fish. The number of fish has reduced also, not because the number of people has increased, but because the river has changed. The other reason is the people fear the wave from the Chinese cargo ships will capsize their boats. (Thai Baan Research, 2004)

2. **River bank and change in water way:** that is dangerous for local navigations and change the local way of life.

3. **Water quality change:** A man who lives on the side of Mekong River all his life said, about 10 years ago, water from Mekong River was still drinkable, but now, it gets very muddy and itches him when he bath in the river. It can cause diarrhea. Water from Mekong used to be medicine, now it has become toxic. (Southeast Asia River Network, 2006)

4. **Deforestation and forest degradation:** has caused soil erosion and fertility loss that has resulted in water shortages and flood.

5. **Natural pollution and the deterioration of environment** are regarded as the severe fundamental problem in long term of the human which can not evaluate lost correctly.

3. Research Methodology

The grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation or a theory of process, action, or interaction shaped by the view of large number of participants (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Thus, the grounded theory, constructivist approach, will be used to examine the present social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities along the river and determine what the social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities are impacting people and communities in the Thai-Laos border, how the people and communities are confronting and adjusting to the social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities.

The population in this research is the people who live along the river and use resources from the river for their livelihood such as farmers, fishermen and communities along the river. To achieve the research objectives, the data collection will be from two sources. Firstly, primary data will be from in-depth interviewing and interviewing that both of structural and non-structural interview and observation in both of participant and non-participant observation. Secondly, the data collection will be from secondary data that are all related published data.

The interview and observation guidelines are designed for the respondents who will be the data sources which compose of key informants, household leaders, organizations, experts and local politicians. The contents of the interview and observation guidelines will involve of the general profile of the respondent, the respondent's perception of himself, his family, or his community that the economic growth and development projects affect his living or the community livelihood, perception of changes of community including the perception of uncertainly in his life and what the respondent has done to get ready due to the changing.

The study area is in the Thai-Laos border along the Mekong River, Mukdaharn Province, Thailand where the channel of the regional development. There is the second friendship bridge that is a part of East-West Economic corridor (EWEC) project, one of regional development project, to link all countries in the region. The duration of research will be one year after submit research proposal.

4. Conclusion

Since the border of country has become a channel of economic and social development for the regional cooperation, on the one hand people at the border have been advantaged from the growth; on the other hand, social problems have been also resulted consequently as the negative impacts to the community living. It is not only the risks from insecurity and inexperience which harm peoples' livelihood. But the risk of unpredictable future from growing economic development also ruin the natural resources and environment including the society, cultures and lifestyle changes in the community.

This paper describes a research project in sociology that applies concept of modernity, risk society, and risk and vulnerability to analyze the negative impacts of modernity. It examines the hidden damages that confront people with social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities. The research project attempt to answer the questions: what the social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities are impacting people and communities in the Thai-Laos border and how the people and communities confront and adjust to the social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities.

The grounded theory approach will be used in this qualitative research design. The objective of this research is to explore the present status of social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities along the river, and examine how the people and community confront and adjust to these situations. The analysis will propose a concept of risk and vulnerability management and the research has the expected outcomes to provide practical guidelines for policies in the border area.

The findings will show the social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities impacting people and communities in the Thai-Laos Border and how the people and community in the area confront and adapt the risks and vulnerabilities. The findings will assist people and local organizations to better understand in the situation of social and environmental risks and vulnerabilities. It will be able contribute to the local policy makers to use for development projects.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region (CERP), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University, Thailand, to support me a funding for the first part of my dissertation in literature review, basic field surveys and so on. I would also like to thank all of my teachers in Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University, who have given me lots of knowledge and the best academic experiences. Particularly Asst. Prof. Dr. Yaowalak Apichartvullop, my dissertation adviser, for her kindly advices and supports.

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