
Northern Thailand: a bridging meeting in London

In June 1998 we published a special WRM bulletin focused on the environmental and social problems affecting the lives of highland people in Northern Thailand, including a critical response regarding a previous article published in WRM bulletin 11. We are pleased to inform that a number of people, both from within and outside Thailand, got together on October 2nd in London, with the aim of clarifying the differences in analysis and approach of the wide number of actors involved directly or indirectly with this very complex situation. The meeting, designated as "A Consultation on Conservation and Conflict among Tribal Peoples, Lowlanders and the State in Northern Thailand" also discussed a number of possible ways forward.

'The meeting heard the views of NGOs, conservationists, Karen and Hmong leaders and a number of Thai and British academics. The debates highlighted a number of different aspects of the dispute, including the scientific uncertainties regarding the environmental impact of highlander economies and the degree to which perceived reductions in water flow and rising siltation in the lowlands are the result of upland agriculture or other factors such as intensified land use in the lowlands. The highlanders emphasised the way they are modifying their own land use practices to moderate their impact on upland forests. All parties to the meeting agreed that forced relocation of highlanders was unacceptable but there remained disagreement as to whether relocation was necessary and what 'voluntary resettlement' might mean. Above all the meeting made clear the need for clearer information and improved dialogue between all parties, although the present polarised nature of the dispute is making this increasingly difficult.

Notes of the meeting are available upon request from the Forest Peoples Programme or from the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests.