
Strengthening the Mechanisms of Water Resources Management (WRM) at Local Levels

The 16th National Health Assembly having considered the report on strengthening the mechanisms of Water Resources Management (WRM) at local levels¹

Acknowledges that water resources are crucial and urgently needed by Thai people from all walks of life, in particular the poor and the vulnerable. Water resources are useful for consumption and various uses. Yet, people living outside communities or irrigation zones lack access to water resources, including rainwater, surface water, underground water and seawater. This is considered inequality in many dimensions, including social, economic, health and conflicts in the use of natural resources. More importantly, uncommon severe effects caused by global warming, such as shifts in the timing of seasons, severe weather conditions, flooding, and drought, have become common and have far-reaching impacts on people across the country;

Realizes that water resources management should be based on a participatory approach and undertaken throughout the whole system, including public water resources, headwaters, reservoirs, waterways, flooded areas, and manmade or natural canals and swamps. The key components of water resources management are data and information management system, basin/waterway planning, water allocation, stakeholder participation, supporting system, pollution control, efficiency monitoring, economic and social management, and water security. Water resources are an indicator for population's needs, security, sustainability, and sufficiency for livelihood. Therefore, they should be accessible to all;

Acknowledges that apart from domestic water resources management, some zones or basins, like the Khong and Salween River Basins, need international collaboration. This can be achieved by conducting research, exchanging knowledge on dealing with climate change, disaster risks, and water system conservation, as well as setting up international mechanisms for water resources management linked to Thailand's basin ecosystem. The collaboration should aim to promote mutual uses of water resources and to support community participation mechanisms in order to solve problems and lessen impacts of international water resources management in a continuous and sustainable manner;

Appreciates that the National Health Assembly Network agreed to move forward with two National Health Assembly (NHA) resolutions that are NHA resolution 4.4 on sustainable sub-watershed resources management through a participatory process of networks and partners in all sectors; and NHA resolution 1.7 on the role of local administrative organizations in the management of health, natural resources, and environment. The endeavor of the NHA network leads to generating evidence, developing further public policies and mobilizing the work of the basin river committee, the provincial water resources subcommittees, local water users' organizations, government and private sectors involved, such as the Utokapat Foundation under the royal patronage, the Thai Public Policy Foundation, Siam Cement Group (Public Company), and Rak Thai Foundation. All of them have contributed to water resources management in crises, maintenance, conservation and revival of water resources for stability, security and sustainability;

Acknowledges that the Office of the National Water Resources and organizations involved have worked toward the 5th component of the 20-year Master Plan of Water Resources Management, focusing on management as a key strategy in setting up water resources management organizations; updating laws; developing a database for decision making; supporting basin organizations; encouraging information exchanges among government and private sectors, irrigation management, research and preparedness; promoting public relations and public participation; raising awareness of water resources conservation; and promoting R&D, innovations and technology, and value-added in the service sector, for efficient and comprehensive water management throughout the country;

Views that water resources management, in particular strengthening the mechanisms of Water Resources Management (WRM) at local levels is key to creating neutral spaces for exchanges of ideas among all stakeholders. People from different groups can have their voices and demands heard. Participation of all stakeholders in water resources management, the body of knowledge and local research networks are the driving force at the local level. Local administrative organizations, or community as a sub-district unit, should collaborate with a family unit which is the smallest unit in water management. This unit must have a good understanding of the water management principle that is an equitable access and fair use.

Thereby, adopted the policy statement:

Strengthening the mechanisms of Water Resources Management (WRM) at local levels should be in partnerships among the government, local administrative organizations, the private sector, civil society, and relevant networks and emphasizes a participatory approach. This can be achieved through having an integrated plan with the Water Basin Committee, the Provincial Water Resources Subcommittees, and Water Users' Organizations. This approach is a way for good water resources management that guarantees the right to access to water resources equally and fairly. Ultimately, it could lead to economic development, quality of life, ecological and environmental conservation, and revival.

The key contents of the policy statement are as follows:

1. Supporting the process of strengthening the mechanisms of water resources management (WRM) at local levels. This can be realized by creating partnership among local administration organizations, local government agencies, and communities in water management and water plans at community levels. Database and information System are required for decision-making and provincial planning. The capacity and roles of water users' organizations and water users' groups should be enhanced to become key actors in implementing useful projects, and make decisive decisions in solving problems at the river basin level.

2. Moving forward for the integration of plans and the creation of neutral spaces in water resources management to suit local contexts through mechanisms established by the Water Resources Act B.E. 2561 (2018). The participatory public policy process together with a neutral space for information exchange will facilitate local voices and initiatives to feed into local development plan and further becomes a policy of the province and that of local administration organizations, resulting in implementation, budget allocation and granting projects and activities in solving water resources problems that responds to local needs. This is in compliance with the Royal Decree on integrated area-based administration B.E. 2565 (2022). The integration of work among local administration organizations, water users' organizations and networks will bring about a balanced share of water resources fairly and sustainably.

3. Promoting holistic water resources management to create opportunities in economic development, quality of life, and quality of environment. This can be achieved by building knowledge and understanding of water resources management, adaptation to climate change that has impacts on local water systems, and efficient use of water resources for consumption, personal use and commercial use. Focus should be given to proper water resources

management systems that suit different local socio-geographies and landscapes for higher water productivity, reduced losses from water disasters, and more water security. This will subsequently contribute to occupation development, income generation, and quality of life of people in the areas.

4. Promoting participation in and awareness of wastewater and environmental management at the local level. All parties should be aware of their responsibilities in the management of wastewater and waste from households, manufacturing plants, industries, agriculture and livestock farming. Communications and public relations are essential in announcing community rules, regulations and laws on water issues, including preventing releasing wastewater and all kinds of hazardous waste into waterways, which may have impacts on health and the environment. Additionally, monitoring of the quality of natural water resources should be conducted regularly and constantly.

5. Supporting the use, development, management, maintenance, revival and conservation of water resources and preventing trespass on natural water resources. This can be done by applying information and technology in the management system and building networks for maximizing use of waterways collectively and effectively from upstream, midstream and downstream of waterways, in particular natural water resources, water source forests, mangrove forests, and wetlands including small-scaled infrastructure built in harmony with the natural ecological system, biodiversity and local wisdom. Development that creates negative impacts on the ecological system must be avoided. Raising awareness of water resources management and conservation among people of all ages, including children, youth and people at all levels to maintain the water balance in the ecological system and the balance of water budgets effectively.

6. Supporting research and the use of research, innovations and technology in water resources management at local levels. Research, knowledge generation and dissemination, human resources development and the use of community based participation research can contribute to holistic problem-solving and management. In particular, monitoring and assessment processes should be developed to promote deeper studies, innovations and technology to address challenges and improve local areas with concrete solutions. Local wisdom should also be integrated with academic knowledge for water resources management fairly and sustainably.

The resolution of the National Health Assembly.

1. To adopt the policy statement and the key contents of the statement on the strengthening the mechanisms of Water Resources Management (WRM) at local levels as proposed.

2. To report the progress in the implementation of this resolution to the 18th National Health Assembly.