CIVIL SOCIETY AND FOREST GOVERNANCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:
Towards an Alternative Model in Addressing Transboundary Forest-Related Conflicts[1]

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Abstract

This paper inquires into, and offers models about, the potentials of civil-society based processes and structures in fostering regional and global cooperation, and in the promotion of human security and the prevention of conflict among states. The inquiry is located in the environmental domain, particularly in the security implications of the problem of transboundary illegal forest products trade in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. As an exploratory study, the paper looks into the historical antecedents as well as contemporary examples of civil society participation in conflict resolution. It also explores the role which civil society plays in the promotion of alternative concepts of security to serve as impetus for policy change not only within states, but also across and between states in the arena of diplomacy, and in the promotion of social welfare and development. The focus on forests in Southeast Asia is warranted by the growing importance of environmental concerns in security discussions, as well as the strategic importance of the region.

Introduction: The Potentials of Civil-Society Based Mechanisms in Environmental Diplomacy

The relations between states and civil societies[i] have long been established as a critical and complex one. States emerge and gain legitimacy from civil society institutions and processes, even as the state limits civil societies through legal-bureaucratic mechanisms manifested in law and public policy. With the increasing role of civil society institutions in recent years, state policy, including foreign policy, has become a new domain for civil society engagement. However, the increasing participation of civil society not only in domestic but even in regional environmental governance in Southeast Asia occurs in an interesting, albeit difficult, context. In Southeast Asia, seen particularly in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), states assume the central role of being diplomatic actors (or subjects) as well as objects. With its policy of non-interference, it is a challenge for ASEAN to deal with

transboundary environmental concerns, such as the problem of seasonal haze and of transboundary illegal trade of forest products. This is because all these problems are deeply rooted in problematic governance arrangements, a critique of which can be interpreted by member states as forms of interference. There are indications that the annual forest fires that ravage most of Sumatra and Kalimantan are outcomes of state policy on land use. The illegal timber trade in the Mekong Region is also an indirect result of both social, economic and forest policies or the lack of it. In a context that is averse to diplomatic intrusion and wherein consensus politics is valued, desirable outcomes would be reactionary[ii] in nature and not long-term steps that substantially address the root of the problem.

Regional and global discussions on peace and security have long been focused on the state as an actor. Diplomatic discussions are conducted between and among states through global and regional fora, such as the United Nations and ASEAN, or what is known as the Track 1 mode[iii]. Furthermore, the object of diplomatic influence remains to be the formal policies of states, through their governments. However, it is a fact that civil society institutions, which thrive at the sub-national, national, regional and even international levels, have become visible not only in being participants in formal governance structures, but also in providing the foundation for social transformation of communities and societies. The effect of the latter is the creation of forces in society that have bearing on political and economic change. Thus, civil society mechanisms have the potential to directly influence regional cooperation through exerting influence to their respective states, or as a regional group to the ASEAN seen in Track 2 modes such as that of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)[iv]. What is, however, missing is the mode wherein civil societies interact to influence each other in order to build solidarity and capacity to influence public policy and to provide venues for social transformation which will provide the impetus for policy change, or what can be considered as a Track 3 mode.[v]

Homer-Dixon (1991) posited that high levels of social conflict engender the condition for environmental decay. However, the relationship between the two is dynamic, considering that

ecological degradation can also lead to social conflict and political insecurity. He argues that "social ingenuity", or what can be considered as "social capital"[vi], can enhance the capacity of society to with such insecurity, and to recover from crisis conditions. Thus, a strong civil society, with strong social ingenuity and social capital, in this context becomes necessary for achieving environmental and human security. When this is taken to a regional context, a regional civil society-based collective has the potential to foster regional security.

It has been shown, particularly through examples from Thailand and the Philippines, that a strong civil society can have enormous influence in reforming public policy. Even as civil societies provide states their legitimacy, civil-society based processes at the sub-national levels have interacted with regional and global civil society structures. This heightens their potential to become venues for regional and global dialogue on important issues. In fact, parallel civil society fora have been held simultaneously with all major international UN conferences. This is proof of the recognition of the role which civil society plays in the promotion of cooperation and peace, and in social development, as well as in its important participation in domestic and regional governance arrangements. The key strength of civil society is evident in the areas of promoting democratic transformation, and in enhancing stakeholder participation in political processes. However, despite these developments, international diplomacy remains predominantly state-centered and focused. Much of the process is still controlled by state parties, while the outcomes are basically calls for action aimed at states.

It is a known fact that civil societies in many parts of the world remain marginalized and weak, or worse, suppressed by authoritarian or strong states. Others are co-opted by state apparatus in the form of state-sanctioned associations no longer operating autonomously from the state. It is in this context that the goal to create mechanisms, by which civil societies can be strengthened through regional and global processes, not brought through state mechanisms, but through inter-civil societal interactions, becomes both difficult and important. Thus, as a Track 1 mode in international relations exists wherein states interact and seek to influence each other, and

a Track 2 mode wherein civil society forces interact to influence their states, there is a need to inquire into the potentials for a Track 3 mode wherein civil society forces interact to influence, help build and strengthen their own capacities.

This paper will focus on the role of civil society based processes in promoting environmental diplomacy in the context of transboundary forest governance in Southeast Asia, particularly in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. Forestry issues are increasingly becoming central in environmental security discussions, particularly in the context of global warming and climate change. Southeast Asian Forests are considered as potential carbon sinks. They are also home to a high level of biodiversity. However, they also serve as a breeding ground for social conflict. Hence, this paper will be located in the context of one of the theoretical debates in political science and international relations, particularly between neo-realist theories in international relations with the school of thought that values non-state, sub-national actors. It takes a position allied with the latter, in that it hopes to provide additional argument for the expansion of the concept of security to go beyond issues of war and the military, and include environmental, social and other political domains, and to create a space for non-state actors in promoting these kinds of security issues.

However, before addressing the issue of transboundary forest trade, there is a need to inquire into the historical and conceptual contexts for the development of civil society based models in environmental diplomacy.

Historical Antecedents and Contemporary
Models for Track 3 Mode of Diplomacy

The development of a Track 3 mode of diplomacy necessarily emanates from the failure both of Tracks 1 and 2 modes to meaningfully accommodate the voices of civil society and to critically engage the State. While Track 1 indeed focused on formal state-centered mechanisms, and was very much captive of the culture of non-interference in ASEAN, Track 2 modes were in

fact more promising in accommodating civil society voices. In fact, Track 2 was even described as a method of diplomacy that is:

> …always open minded, often altruistic, and …strategically optimistic, based on best case analysis. Its underlying assumption is that actual or potential conflict can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to good will and reasonableness. (Davidson and Montville, 1981-82, p. 155)

In the context of Southeast Asia, Track 2 diplomacy led to the development of the ASEAN Regional Forum (or ARF), even as the latter became a site for the furthering of this type of diplomacy. Other examples of Track 2 venues are the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), through its regularly held Asia Pacific Round Table, and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). All of these venues provided an opportunity for government and non-government actors, acting in their individual and private capacities, to participate in meaningful discussions about peace and security in the region.

However, while Track 2 processes have been useful to the ASEAN process, in that they fostered a closer relationship between non-governmental and governmental processes, this close affinity has also undermined the process, particularly when it compromised the independence and critical thinking of non-governmental actors (Kraft, 2000). It is in this context that Track 3 approaches emerged.

Track 3 modes generally involve people to people diplomacy conducted through transnational advocacy networks of individuals and organization (Yamamoto, 1995). They provide venues for discussions, which become domains for the production of alternative social meanings, usually critical of state-centric discourses. In this context, Track 3 modes are usually more adversarial, and go beyond policy recommendations to include an action program for political mobilization and advocacy. They rely on a network of global advocates, and on the use of information, such as hosting web sites, printing publications and holding public fora to disseminate their positions. Track 3 processes usually involve transnational organizations and networks that are involved in advocacy on social issues and concerns. Their activities are focused

on alternative concepts of security, such as human and ecological security, and are critical of the traditional concepts and state-centered notions of political security. Southeast Asia is host to many of these organizations and networks. Most of these emerged during the 80s up to the mid-90s, during the wave of democratization that occurred in the region.

One of the issues that Track 3 organizations address is the issue of human rights, particularly of marginalized sectors. The Asia Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is one of these organizations. Formed in 1986, APWLD's main agenda is to enable women to use law as an instrument of social change to achieve equality, justice and development. To achieve this, APWLD has collaborated with various women's groups, human rights advocates, and development NGOs in the Asia-Pacific around issues surrounding the promotion of the status of women.

Some organizations start out as regional offshoots of national organizations. One example of this is Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA), which was established by the Project for Ecological Recovery (PER), an organization established in 1986 to support the local communities in Thailand in their protection activities of their resources and livelihoods. TERRA was formed in 1991 to focus on environmental issues confronting local communities in the Mekong Region, particularly Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The main strategy of TERRA is the building of alliances through the exchange of experiences, mainly drawing on the experience of Thailand. The agenda of TERRA reflects its views on social justice, rights, development, and sustainability, and is critical of the neo-liberal ideology of development. It pushes for the active participation of civil society in debates about these issues, and gives emphasis on indigenous knowledge and rights as basis for decision-making. Both TERRA and PER are registered as the Foundation for Ecological Recovery (FER).

Another organization, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-Asia) was organized in 1991 as a vehicle for cooperation among various human rights and development groups in Asia. An offshoot of this group was the Alternative ASEAN Network on

Burma (Alt-SEAN). In 1993, the Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor (APCET) was formed. A year after, the Peace, Disarmament and Symbiosis in the Asia-Pacific (PDSAP), a network of academics, NGOs, and progressive parliamentarians organized in 1994 the Manila forum entitled "From the Cold War to the 21st Century: Towards a New Era in the Asia Pacific."

In 1995, Focus on the Global South (FOCUS) was established to address the growing concerns by academics, NGOs and people's movements on issues surrounding economic and financial liberalization, security and conflict, state-market-civil society interactions, and culture and globalization. FOCUS is also active in critically engaging the dominant-state-centric notions of security that subsisted on the realist assumptions about politics. It went beyond the traditional concepts of security and sought to locate human insecurity in the context of socio-economic and gender inequality, environmental degradation, and political exclusion.

Some Track 3 processes are done as reaction to the failure of the more formal mechanisms to address their concerns. For Example, in 1996, the Working Group for An ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism was established by human rights activists and lawyers who were frustrated by the failure of ASEAN to pass a human rights charter. Most Track 3 processes rely heavily on regional and multi-country social mobilization to further their advocacy. This was particularly seen in the various protest activities led by the People's Forum against APEC during its summit in various years, some of which went beyond Southeast Asia.

One mechanism that emerged is the promotion by Track 2 organizations of Track 3 venues for people-to-people interactions on a regional scale. An example of this is the ASEAN People's Assembly (APA) that began in 2000, which was sponsored by the ASEAN-ISIS. The Assembly is done annually, and has the following goals.

- To promote greater awareness of an ASEAN community among various sectors of ASEAN on a step-by-step basis;
- To promote mutual understanding and tolerance for the diversity of culture, religion, ethnicity, social values, political structures and processes, and other elements of ASEAN's diversity among broader sectors of the ASEAN population;
- To obtain insights and inputs on how to deal with socioeconomic problems

affecting ASEAN societies from as many relevant sectors of ASEAN societies as possible;

- To facilitate the bridging of gaps through various confidence-building measures, including participation in the APA, between social and political sectors within and across ASEAN societies on a step-by-step basis, and,
- To assist in the building of an ASEAN community of caring societies as sought by the ASEAN Vision 2020.

However, despite encouraging results, forums such as this were seen at best as symbolic gestures. Some observers (Badenoch, 2002) noted that while Track 3 mechanisms provided a venue for solidarity building among civil society actors, they did not provide any meaningful opportunity for actual direct contributions to ASEAN deliberations.

This is just one problem that Track 3 processes confront. In addition, Track 3 organizations and networks are prone to divisive conflicts within ranks, due to the nature of cause-oriented politics—that is, the tendency to be ridden by ideological debates and rifts. Moreover, their confrontational and critical nature lends them unable to influence government policy, and in fact makes them vulnerable to government hostility and crackdown. For example, most of the regional organizations such as APWLD, FOCUS and TERRA are based in Thailand, where the government has increasingly become hostile to NGO activity. This stance has significantly challenged the potency of these NGOs to further their activities. Fortunately, those who operate as a network, such as FOCUS, are able to further their activities in areas where the political climate is more conducive, like the Philippines.

Context for Alternative Diplomacy: Human and Ecological Security

As evident in the previous section, the operation of Track 3 processes that allow for civil society based mechanisms focus largely on issues that go beyond traditional notions of security. In fact, these processes are critical of the dominant discourses of security. It is in this regard that human and ecological security (HES) becomes an appropriate context for the operation of Track 3 processes.

Alternative concepts of security began to be imagined after W. E. Blatz (1966), a Canadian psychologist, posited the theory of individual security, which argued that security is an inclusive and pervasive state of mind that reflects the manner by which individuals compensate for vulnerabilities and insecurities. Since then, the term human security has become a focus for alternative and critical theorizing. In 1994, the UN Human Development Report argued that human security includes the state within which people are safe from "chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the pattern of daily life." The concept of human and ecological security later emerged as an expanded conceptualization that included physical security of individuals as well as economic, health and environmental concerns both of individuals and of collectives. It includes the expansion of the capacity of people to take measures to reduce their vulnerability from violent and nonviolent threats, as well as freedom from structural violence and other non-territorial security threats. Thus, it includes as it focus a rich array of issues that confront human societies, such as environmental degradation, hunger, epidemics, population explosion, human rights violations, and ethnic and inter-group violence and hostilities, among others.

The development of alternative concepts of security also laid the foundation for a critiquing of the state, and of state-based processes that are mainly focused on neo-realist assumptions in dealing with armed conflict. The alternative security constructs debunked the claim by traditional security theory in which the locus of political interaction were the formal processes of the State, and the domain were the "big pictures" associated with "hard" security concerns such as nuclear proliferation, armed aggression, and pre-emptive strikes. Lying at the root of these alternative discourses were issues of social stability and cohesion, as well as resilience that largely were undermined by poverty, political inequality and injustice, and ecological degradation. Thus, the focus of human security was not mainly national survival being defined as a state of freedom from war and aggression, but extended into the broader constructs associated with human survival and the capacity to overcome threats to human existence.

Cognizant of the limitations of state-based processes, particularly in its lack of capacity to take into account cultural and social dimensions of human vulnerabilities, alternative security concepts necessarily broadens its discursive location to go beyond the state, and to relocate its focus on civil society processes. This is further encouraged by the globalization not only of economic and political interactions, but also of the social and cultural aspects of human life that effectively challenged state-centric politics. As Wendt (1992) has suggested, it has become apparent that international political interactions are no longer conducted exclusively by states, and have been extended into various levels of international civil society. Human security discourse has revealed the limitations inherent in state structures and processes that weaken their capacity to meaningfully address the security problems of modern times (Brown, 1998). This paved the way for the possibility of taking diplomacy out of the sole prerogative of formal Track 1 channels, and effectively allowing civil society, both transnational and national, to participate in informal discussions with state actors in Track 2 processes. Furthermore, and of particular relevance to the concerns of this paper, it enabled people's organizations and NGOs to directly interact with their counterparts in what traditional security language can call as bilateral and multilateral talks, to constitute what is now called as Track 3 approaches.

In this context, human and ecological security (HES) becomes a framework. The primary objective of human and ecological security is to establish sustainable communities, the features of which are presented in Box 1.

Box 1. Features of Human and Ecological Security

Social Security: Quality of Life and Human Well-Being

- Increased sense of self-worth and pride
- Strong sense of place and belonging
- Adequate human infrastructure needs such as housing, health care, education, credit, and transportation
- Healthy and clean physical environments
- Safety, peace and order

Economic Security: Sustainable Livelihoods

- Presence of diverse sources of incomes
- Environmentally sound and economically viable livelihood activities
- Self-reliance

Political and Institutional Security: Empowerment with Responsibility

- Increased organizational capacity to mobilize resources and people
- Increased Autonomy in decision-making
- Sustainability of organizations and processes

Emergence of New Environmental Regionalism in Southeast Asia

ASEAN remains as the core regional institution that drives multilateral interactions in the region. However, despite its strategic position, ASEAN alone could not adequately address the complexity of environmental issues that emerge. Furthermore, its policy of non-interference has seriously compromised the capacity of ASEAN to deal with environmental problems the root causes of which lie in the policy of component states. It is in this context that new environmental "regionalisms" emerge, which include top-down interactions involving state actors, mainly on the Track 1 route, as well as more bottom-up approaches that locate their main impetus in local stakeholders and actors.

The development of regionalism in the region follows a long historical tradition that begins as early as 1947, when the ECAFE, which was renamed later as the Economic and Social Commissions for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), was formed. Ten years later, the Mekong Committee was established in 1957. The acceleration of regional interaction was further enhanced with the establishment of the Asian Development Bank in 1966 and the formation of the ASEAN in 1967, through its original five founding members (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore). Since then, the ASEAN has expanded to include other countries in the region, which culminated in 1999 when ASEAN 10 was created with the entry of

Cambodia following that of Vietnam in 1995, and of Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and of Brunei Darrusalam earlier.

The period of the 1980s was a watershed of political developments in the region that saw regime changes in the Philippines, and the onset of democratization movements in Thailand and Indonesia. The 1986 people power mobilization in Manila became a watershed for civil society activism that eventually led to the formation of regional NGOs that sought to go beyond state-centered, an by connection, ASEAN-based, regional interactions. In 1986, APWLD was founded while TERRA was organized in 1991 as a regional organization counterpart of PER, a Thai NGO. FOCUS, another regional NGO was formed four years later in 1995.

The development of regional mechanisms for civil society interactions occurred at a time of increasing attempts by ASEAN towards political and economic integration. In 1992, ASEAN members agreed to establish the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), which aimed to eliminate tariffs in regional trade by 2018. Another economic agreement was later signed in 1998 to establish the ASEAN Investment Area, which sought to fully open ASEAN economies to all investors by 2020.

In 1992, the ADB began its program that sought to forge more regional cooperation among the countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). In 1995, the Mekong River Agreement was signed and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) was established with Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam as original members. It is also in the same year that a regional impetus was established towards environmental concerns in the GMS, when the ADB regional Technical Assistance (TA) Project focused on specific environmental issues, giving emphasis on information, monitoring, strategic frameworks, wetlands, and transboundary issues, among others. Around 1996, the ASEAN Mekong Basin Development Cooperation Agreement was signed by the concerned parties. In 1999, the MRC began the process for the development of a Mekong River Water Utilization Agreement.

These formal, Track 1 mechanisms facilitated through ADB were soon joined by civil-society based mechanisms. In 1997, the Development Analysis Network (DAN) was established as a mechanism to foster collaboration among policy research institutes. In the same year, the International Mekong Research Network (IMRN) was formed, primarily as an electronic based network emanating from Canberra that sought to facilitate exchange of information among researchers and scientists. It was evident that both networks enabled the development of regional epistemic communities. Together with the activities of regional organizations such as TERRA, and FOCUS, and others such as Forum Asia, and the Asian Regional Tenure Network (ARTN) these various networks of civil society based organizations have provided a rich base to launch Tracks 2 and 3 processes in the Mekong Region.

Environmental issues are at the forefront of the agenda of many of these regional networks and organizations (Dore, 2003). These, in turn, provide a potential venue to encourage interactions among grassroots organizations around issues surrounding the environment. This paper will now examine the prospects for this collaboration in the context of addressing the problem of illegal transboundary trade in forest products in the Mekong region.

Prospects for Civil Society Based Diplomacy:
The Case of Illegal Transboundary Trade in
Forest Products in the Mekong Region

Forest trade in the Mekong Region has always been in existence even prior to the development of the modern state structures. The trade in timber, wildlife, and other forest products across communities around the border areas, which was a main source of livelihoods for these communities, was later circumscribed within the ambit of official state processes and subjected to the formal limits and norms of bilateral trade. Forest trade has always been a major source of capital for states in the Mekong Region. The process of state building in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam has relied on forest resources for a significant period in their histories.

One significant element of trade in the Mekong Region is the emergence of Thailand as a core economic player. In fact, while it is a net timber importer, its increasing reliance on imported timber from Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar since its banning of logging operations in the country in 1989 has effectively positioned it to become a predatory forest economy in relation to its neighbors. The dependency on timber of foreign progeny is not limited only to those that are legally imported. This also includes those that are illegally transferred across the border, often with active participation by Thai military officials and corporations (Rigg and Jerndal, in Parnwell and Bryant, 1996; Bryant, in Hirsch and Warren, 1998). Furthermore, Thai capital has been successful in procuring concession rights to operate outside its borders (Bryant, 1998). Thus, while on the one hand Thai's mode of forest governance is able to secure for itself a space to articulate a social and environmental agenda for managing its forests, it is on the other hand directly involved in the conduct of practices which severely threaten the environment and the communities dependent on forests of its neighboring countries.

Another significant factor to consider is the growing incentive for local forest-based communities, particularly of Laos and Myanmar, and even Vietnam and Cambodia, to intensify their reliance on trade in their forest products as a source of capital. This was seen during the economic crisis in 1997, when trade in forest products increased (Donovan, 1999). It was also during this period that a significant increase in the frequency of illegal forest trade has been observed, although no official statistics is available considering the circumstances within which these transactions operate. As Donovan articulates, there was hope that the economic crisis could reverse the increasing demand in exotic meats and traditional medicines derived from rare and endangered animals and plants, considering that the crisis has severely reduced the purchasing power of the middle class, traditionally the consumer base for these products. However, even as the crisis hit this sector of society and led to the decline in the demand in some countries, China's economy continued to be robust, and provided the base for consumption, and even processing and distribution, of these raw materials. This consequently provided an attractive incentive for local

communities to intensify their extraction and trade of forest products, often illegal in nature, across their borders to China. The crisis also heightened the repatriation of unemployed urban workers back to their rural roots, which further fueled the need of local families and communities for income.

There are other factors, both internal and external, that drive illegal trade in forest products in the Mekong Region. Aside from being caused by high demand and strong incentives for short term and intensive exploitation, illegal forest trade is further influenced by the presence of porous borders and the weakness of enforcement mechanism in the countries involved, coupled with corruption and rent-seeking activities of some sectors of the political and economic elites within countries (Badenoch, 2002).

While formal Track 1 mechanisms can ideally address the issue of illegal trade in timber products, there has been no serious attempt to address this both in bilateral engagements, as well as in multilateral engagements through the ASEAN. While ASEAN has formally declared its environmental policy through a series of agreements, it has not formally recognized the presence of illegal timber and forest products trade as an issue worth a formal statement.

With the emergence of new structures of regionalism, such as the MRC, there is an opportunity to foster a healthy atmosphere for environmental diplomacy in the region. However, as Badenoch (2002) argues, certain approaches should be taken by regional institutions and national governments to achieve any meaningful regional environmental governance mechanisms. To enhance institutional structures for regional cooperation, Badenoch identifies the following strategies:

- Define the environment in broad terms
- Cooperate to identify which transboundary environmental problems are to be handled at which level of governance
- Take advantage of the regionalism trends that provide opportunities for linkages among environmental, political and economic cooperative efforts
- Promote the institutionalization of transboundary environmental impact assessments and the participation of local governments and communities in it

Furthermore, the following strategies are necessary to enhance governance:

- Continue to increase transparency
- Increase the involvement of the public through multi-stakeholder processes
- Deepen downward accountability mechanisms

It is apparent in the strategies that the attainment of meaningful governance strategies rests not only on open and democratic state processes, but also more importantly on the development of strong civil societies.

In this context, it is important to look at the role of Thailand. Thailand, perhaps second only to the Philippines, is considered as the logical core for civil society activity in Southeast Asia. In fact, it is already at the core of the emerging civil society community, it being the host to many regional NGO networks, such as APWLD, FOCUS and TERRA among others. Furthermore, and more specific to the issue at hand, Thailand occupies a key position in addressing the problem of illegal transboundary trade in forest products. As evidence suggests, it is a key player in this, in as much as some of its policies have directly or indirectly encouraged the unauthorized movement of forest products across borders.

Several venues have opened to address this issue. For example, the Indochina Biodiversity forum initiated by WWF in 1997, with the objective of enhancing biodiversity protection and increase stability in border areas, provided a venue for mutual cooperation and dialogue to promote understanding that went beyond state actors. It enabled the participation of scientists, academics, local government representatives and people's organizations (Dillon and Wickramanayake, 1997). However, it was noted that the adoption of non-state based processes are encountering problems associated with weak technical capacity, and weak political will due to the perception by the state that joint conservation efforts might erode national sovereignty.

The confrontational stance of most NGOs and regional environmental networks do not in any way ease this fear of states. Furthermore, while environmental concerns appear to occupy an important place in the agenda of most of these NGOs, the issue of illegal forest trade has yet to be seriously addressed. NGOs tend to focus their attention to the illegal trafficking of women and

children, as well as the transboundary structural implications on livelihoods of communities of infrastructure projects such as dams. It appears that NGOs are uncomfortable to address the issue of illegal trade in forest products, particularly if these are done as survival strategies by marginalized local communities.

It is, therefore, a challenge for NGO networks to devise mechanisms to address these issues. Some NGOs have adopted a model wherein alternative livelihood strategies of communities along the borders are promoted as a way to ease their economic burdens. Another civil-society model, albeit with State participation, is the enhancement of the capacity of local governments and communities towards cross-border interactions. In Yunnan, China, some local communities, through the assistance of their local governments, are now engaged in meaningful transboundary relations with their counterparts in Laos to promote, through authorized channels, trade in forest products as well as in the promotion of alternative livelihoods through technical cooperation and farmer exchanges (Ting, 2002). The latter enhances a more knowledge-based approach in dealing with local environmental issues, and benefits not only from academic science, but also from grassroots knowledge. Here, the emergence of localized epistemic communities becomes an added feature of a civil society based model in dealing with transboundary environmental problems.

The other challenge that confronts civil society based processes is the growing hostility of Thai authorities towards NGOs, particularly those that are perceived to operate across borders. This was particularly seen in the manner civil society activity was restricted during the APEC meeting, and even prior to it, when the Thaksin Government issued preventive, if not threatening, policies towards NGO activity. Thaksin, in several occasions, has labeled NGOs as "trouble makers." This is significant, considering that Thailand is the core of the activities of many NGO networks addressing issues of human and ecological security in the region.

Concluding Remarks

The ultimate challenge, therefore, is to continue to engage state structures in creative and less confrontational ways, without compromising the agenda of human and ecological security, to address the crucial task of linking forest and environmental governance to the political process of democratization. Another challenge is to provide spaces within which indigenous knowledge systems of local communities can be recognized as valid knowledge in these processes. Furthermore, there is also a need to bring in more women into the discussion. The potential for this is promising, considering the fact that there already exist networks in civil society that address development concerns and are committed in engaging the state in the development of policies.

These are the key challenges. There is still much to be done to link these networks and mechanisms across countries in the region, and to involve not only NGOs but also a similar network of natural and social scientists who have an appreciation of their crucial role in the development of alternative governance systems and sustainable development processes both within countries and across countries. These epistemic communities will have to be developed to foster science-based policy, even as it has to be reconfigured and deconstructed so that Western scientific knowledge can accommodate local knowledge and the voices of the marginalized. Through this, these communities can become mechanisms to further the agenda of alternative politics and sustainable development, and to strengthen the knowledge basis for the attainment of human environmental security through alternative Track 3 modes that rely on people to people models of diplomacy.

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[i] Here, civil society should be seen as the web of autonomous institutions independent of the state that bring citizens together in pursuit of common interests (Korbonski, 1996). Thus, it can mean to be the totality of social life as a whole that goes beyond the domain of the private but is not within the state's purview. Hence, it would include NGOs, people's organizations, religious institutions, academe, media, business, social movements, and basic communities.

[ii] Examples of this include as the establishment of bilateral Forest Fire councils or of bilateral agreements on how to render mutual assistance when fire breaks out.

[iii] In international diplomatic discourse, Track 1 diplomacy refers to state-to-state level of interactions.

[iv] Track 2 refers to civil society to state level of interactions.

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[v] A Track 3 mode is now being conceptualized as a civil society to civil society level of interactions.
[vi] Social capital is defined as the capacity of communities to foster collective action towards a common goal (Coleman, 1990),