



UCRSEA - Summer Research Internship Summary



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Drought Justice Research in Khon Kaen City, Thailand

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Background

Issues of climate change and natural disasters are becoming increasingly important, and discussions around how to adapt for the future are having a greater role in public policy decisions around the world. It is important however, that these discussions, and those between people everywhere concerned with the effects of changing climate, encompass more than just technical determinations of the impacts and solutions to the most obvious problems. Many of the impacts of climate change are social in nature

and often go under-the-radar of the conventional talking points.

One component of studying climate change impacts is the justice around addressing its immediate consequences. The concept of Environmental Justice has been in the discourse for decades now and more specifically Climate Justice has emerged in recent years alongside the increasing presence of global climate conferences. Given the importance of this type of perspective on the impacts of climate change and social issues in general, the research conducted for this project looked to



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better understand justice as it related to the issue of drought in Khon Kaen City, Thailand. Using principles of environmental justice (Howard 2009), interviews were conducted with different stakeholders in and

around the city in order to further explore the consequences of one of the region's most pressing climate related concerns.



For Thailand and Southeast Asia broadly, two of the most pressing climate change related concerns revolve around water; too much during the rainy season causing flooding, and too little during the dry season causing drought. As temperatures rise and weather patterns change, both of these natural disasters intensify placing strain on communities. Specifically regarding drought, this research looks to contribute to a further understanding of how certain communities are most impacted compared to others, and what other factors exacerbate these impacts. These external factors include the decisions of local governments and industry, and can be broadly described using principles of environmental justice.

Key Findings

This research used four principles of environmental justice; recognition, voice, equity, and legal framework, to

evaluate the reality of drought in Khon Kaen City. By interviewing various experts, industry professionals, government officials, and community residents, a better understanding of the reality of drought impacts in the city was able to be made. The narratives of these individuals were aggregated and used to draw three relevant conclusions to the issue of justice.

• City-Wide Awareness

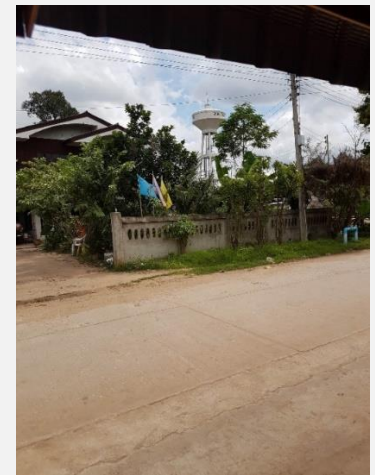
The research determined that the city of Khon Kaen was knowledgeable and aware of the varying social impacts for different groups and regions of the city. Awareness is an important aspect of justice as injustice cannot be addressed if it is something that is hidden from view.

• Disproportionate Rural Impact

Data from the interviews regularly showed that the people most impacted by drought in the region were rural residents. This knowledge and almost universal concern for a specific group is a positive note for the issue of justice in terms of drought impact. The principles of environmental justice named above reiterate the importance of recognition for the most vulnerable groups, something that Khon Kaen City would appear to have.

• Continued Concern for Justice with Further Development

The disproportionate impacts of drought on the rural populations was partially a reality because of the lagging development in the region as a whole. A lack pipe-access water in certain areas made drought situations much more impactful for them, but with plans in place to extend water access, this reality was on track to improve. As development improves across Thailand and rural areas gain better access to basic resources, those most impacted by drought will see their situation improved as long as justice continues to be considered and development does not just take place in an unguided manner.



Looking Forward

This research shows evidence that the current political and social climate in Khon Kaen City is conducive to environmental justice. As Thailand's economy continues to grow and more development takes place, it is important for projects to keep the concepts of environmental justice in place to ensure a just future for the region's most vulnerable groups.

Relevant Sources

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