



## Research Article

# CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE PEOPLE: A CASE OF POWER PLANT IN THAILAND

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### Abstract

The purposes of the study were: 1) to study situation of conflict between the state and the people on the power plant project; 2) to seek causes of conflict between the state and the people; and 3) to offer guidelines to conflict management between the state and the people. A qualitative methodology was used in this study. Key informants were residents living around the project, and a semi-structured interview instrument was used to conduct in-depth interviews with 12 key informants. Results of the study revealed that the current conflicts resulted from the irrationality of the benefits that people obtained from the project, and the environmental, societal and cultural issues. Besides, the conflict in the community is caused by interference of third parties/actors. The causes of the conflict are rooted in three aspects: firstly, the structural bureaucracy; secondly, the attitude and performance of government officials; and finally, the lack of participation of the people. The guidelines to conflict management are divided into two groups: the first group is guideline for the management of within the bureaucracy; the second group is guidelines for the management of relationships between the state and the people in the area.

**Keywords:** management; conflict; state; people; power plant

### Introduction

The development of Thailand from over 50 years ago to the present was based on the 11<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan which places emphasis on three strategies: (1) fully open economic strategies; (2) free market strategies; and (3) industrial development strategies (Attakorn, 2010; Santasombat, 1996; Chamarik, 2006). However, the industrial development strategies are imbalanced as the development of Thailand primarily invests in industrial development, the market sector, and the urban sector while neglecting the agricultural sector and the rural sector. It is believed that the distribution of development benefits will occur, but as a result of the imbalance in development strategies, the benefits have not been evenly distributed (Santasombat, 1996; Chamarik, 2006). Consequently, cases of severe pollution have occurred at the expense of urban development, and the people in the country are burdened by taxation in order to address these issues of pollution (Attakorn, 2010). Besides, the disparity and inequality in terms of access to resources have caused conflicts of interest and led to violence in society. For example, the cases of Chana gas separation plant, power plant and port; because of this, there is a need

for change in the approach to development (Kumpeera, 2008; Wantanachareankij, 2008).

Accordingly, the results of the monitoring of human rights (which have been confirmed by many scholars), revealed that many projects cause impacts to the community because the projects do not reflect the real needs of the people (NHRC, 2009). Moreover, because local people are not allowed to participate in the project, the community becomes divided. The pollution of water, air, and noise from these development projects has affected the ecosystem of the sea, the shoreline, and the livelihood of the people. The effects are experienced in terms of their work, income, resource degradation problems, having to adapt from rural to urban society, and escalating socially-related problems, such as family disputes, drug problems, and insecurity of life and property (Malaisri, 1998; NHRC, 2003; TCE, 2005; SAT&TCE, 2009).

Based on the problems mentioned above, the following questions were formed for this stage of the study: (1) How did the situation of conflict between the state and the people on the power plant project?; (2) What has caused the problem or what factors have affected to conflict between the state and the people on the power plant project?; and (3) What is a valid approach to manage the conflict between the

state and the people on the power plant project? These questions result in three specific objectives for this study: (1) To study situation of conflict between the state and the people on the power plant project; (2) To seek causes of conflict between the state and the people; and (3) To offer guidelines on conflict management between the state and the people. These three objectives will be especially useful to meaningfully plan the development of the country. When the needs of the state and the needs of the people are in the same direction, they can be mutually beneficial and empowering. The country will have a more developed and prosperous future.

## Method

### Study Area

The study area is conflict management between the state and the people on the Chana power plant project in Songkhla Province, Thailand.

### Key Informants

Twelve key informants were selected by purposive sampling as stakeholders of the project. The key informants were divided into four groups, which consist of agencies of the residents, local leaders, officers from the central government, regional or local authorities and the executive or staff involved in the project as show in Table 1.

### Data Collection

The researcher has determined the steps to data collection as follows (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011):

1. Using sampling procedures, this study, the researcher has determined the criteria for key informants, who has experience and can give a lot of information about the phenomenon to study. The key informants, who should not be deviants or extremists.
2. After obtaining permission, the researcher requested cooperation for data collection from key informants, and arranged an appointment date, time and place for the interview.
3. Collecting information, this study would focus on the use of the qualitative instrument. In-depth interview and semi-structured interview instrument were arranged for data elicitation. Three broad questions were employed in the in-depth interview: (1) how did the situation of conflict between the state and the people on the power plant project?; (2) what has caused the problem or what factors have affected to conflict between the state and the people on the power plant project?; and (3) what is a valid approach to manage the conflict between the state and the people on the power plant project?
4. Recording the data, the researcher used audio recordings and made field notes at the same time.
5. Administering the procedures, the data were discussed with anticipated data with the literature of the past.

**Table 1:** List of the key informants

	Name		Position
1	Miss Chanita	Madsor	Resident in Kogmuang village, Paching, Chana, Songkhla
2	Mr. U-then	Manlem	Resident in Kogmuang village, Paching, Chana, Songkhla
3	Mr. Tharadon	Maanmaad	Resident in Kogmuang village, Paching, Chana, Songkhla
4	Mr. Sen	Inmaan	Resident in Kuan-hua-chang village, Krong-peau, Chana, Songkhla
5	Mr. To-hed	Manlee	Resident in Kuan-hua-chang village, Krong-peau, Chana, Songkhla
6	Mr. Gem	Manlem	Resident in Kuan-hua-chang village, Krong-peau, Chana, Songkhla
7	Mr. Soranon	Manlem	Resident in Kuan-hua-chang village, Krong-peau, Chana, Songkhla
8	Mr. A-nuwat	Wang-lae	Head of Kuan-hua-chang village, Krong-peau, Chana, Songkhla
9	Miss Paweena	Bunyaratana	Teacher of Kuan-hua-chang Masjid Education Center, Chana, Songkhla
10	Mr. Cha-ran	Kochakiridechkrai	President of Krong-peau Sub-district Administrative Organization
11	Mr. Kree-tha	Panyapanich	Head of Communication and Public Relationship of Chana Power Plant
12	Ms. Pannipa	Sothipan	Director of Songkhla Forum (NGO)

**Data Analysis**

The researchers used phenomenological analysis from data collected by in-depth interviews. The principles in the analysis are as follows (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009):

1. From the many perspectives of key informants, the researchers need to find the essence of the phenomenon studied.
2. Find meaning from appearances until the essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experiences of key informants.
3. Descriptions were made of experiences, not analyses or explanations
4. The investigator has a personal interest in the entity under investigation; therefore, the process is necessarily autobiographical.

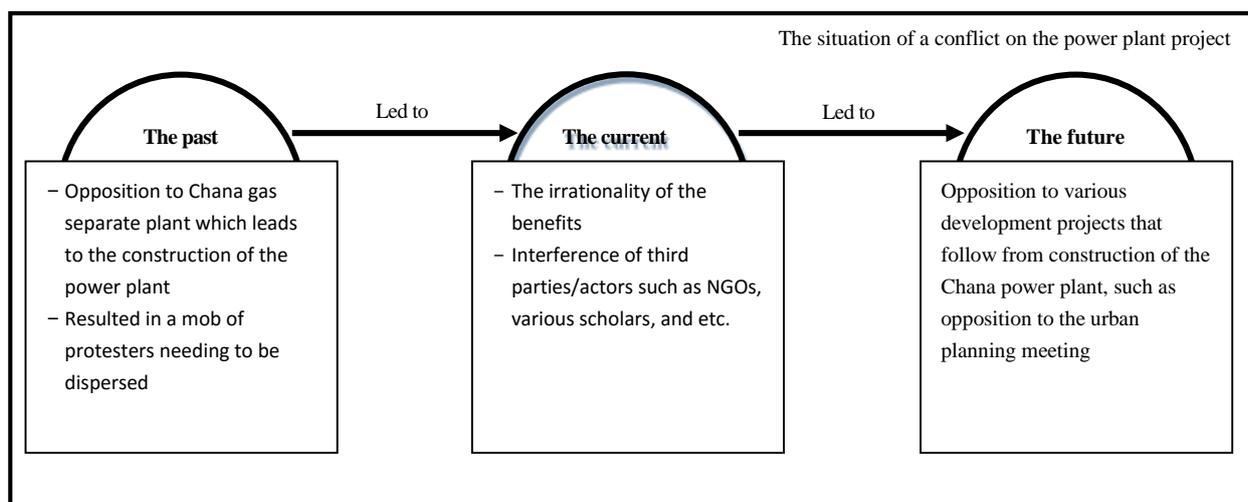
**Results**

The results from the in-depth interviews reveals 3 main issues; 1) The current situation of a conflict between the state and people 2) Factors causing a conflict between the state and people and 3) Guidelines to conflict management between the state and people. These are explained below;

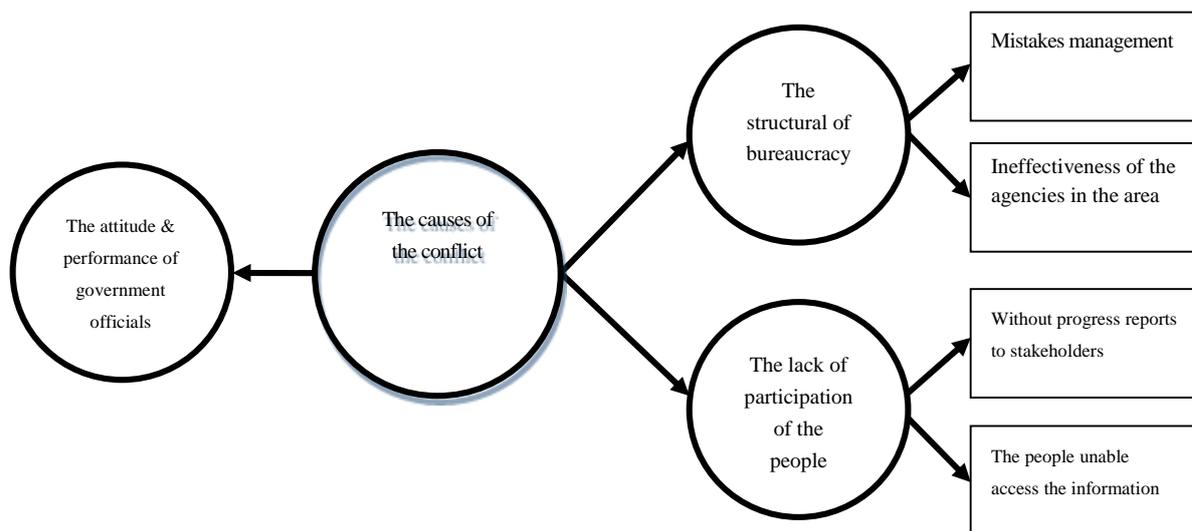
**The current situation of a conflict between the state and people on the power plant project**

The results of study found that the power plant was opposed by residents and non-government organizations (NGOs). Started during 2002-2003 against Chana gas separate plant, this situation led latterly to opposition to the power plant. The purpose of the construction of the power plant is insufficient demand. Chana power plant was constructed

following the energy development plan of the government in 2004 to support the use of electricity in Thailand by developing four power plants, including Bangprakong, Pranakorntai, Pranakornneau (Wang-noi) and Songkhla. The current situation of a conflict has arisen from the irrationality of the benefits that people obtain from the project. This can be seen in the following reflections by Mr.A-nuwat Wang-lae, who said “. . . *The most important is budget allocation, because we feel that it is unfair to us and we are risk more than other areas. . .*” and Mr.Gem Manlem supported that “. . . *Our village near by the wall of the power plant, so supporting budget to restore our village is the most important. . .*” In addition, conflicts occur from environmental, social, and cultural issues; moreover the conflict issues in the community are due to interference of third parties/actors in the area such as NGOs, various scholars, and others. This can be seen in the following reflections by Mr.To-hed Manlee said “. . . *Interference of NGO, I believe that they are received the advantage... we agree with the anti-ideology, let us against, if the against ordered by someone else, do not against better, because after against them out of the area. . .*” consistent with Mr.Soranon Manlem said “. . . *Outside groups often incite the people, sometimes we have the feeling that we are a tool. . .*” However, there is still opposition to various development projects that the residents think will result from construction of the Chana power plant in the area. Recently, this occurred against the urban planning meeting, meaning that the meeting had to end eventually (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1:** Situation of conflict between the state and the people on the power plant project



**Fig. 2:** Causes of conflict between the state and the people

**Factors causing a conflict between the state and people on the power plant project**

The results of study found that the causes of the conflict are rooted in three aspects: Firstly, the structure of bureaucracy; Secondly, the attitude and performance of government officials; and finally, the lack of participation of the people. These are explained below;

Firstly, the structure of bureaucracy: sometimes conflicts arise from mistakes in management and ineffectiveness of the agencies in the area. This can be seen in the following reflections by Mr.Sen Inmaan, who said “. . .There is no one who dared interfere private factories, this points...Why would someone with authority withdraw the license? Never interfere in private whether they building a billion never interfere at all. You go around location private factory, meadow area is dead. . .” and Mr.Soranon Manlem supported that “. . . We also wonder why the government cannot manage. That obvious. . .”

Secondly, the attitude and performance of government officials: the government officials also believe that the people did not understand the project. This can be seen in the following reflections by Mr.Kree-tha Panyapanich, who said “. . . People still have misconceptions certain about plants, such as understanding that plants make the fish reduced. While people have many techniques for fishing in the area around the power plant, which is mainly causing of fish reduced sharply. . .” and Mr.Cha-ran Kochakiridechkrai, who said “. . . The conflict arises from some groups lose benefits, especially politicians, both national and local. That means some people may lose and advantages benefits. . .”

Finally, the lack of participation of the people: The government agencies come to study the environmental impact in the area, but without progress reports to stakeholders. The people unable access the information of

government agencies. This can be seen in the following reflections by Mr.U-then Manlem, who said “. . . *The public hearing is only to perform the full process, to build legitimacy the implementation of government. The government has already targeted. . .*” and Ms.Pannipa Sothipan supported that “. . . *The government tries to block the participation of people. . .*” (see Fig. 2)

**Guidelines to conflict management between the state and people on the power plant project**

The guidelines to conflict management are divided into two groups: the first group includes guidelines for management within the bureaucracy; and the second group includes guidelines for the management of relationships between the government and the people in the area. These are explained below;

For the first group: one solution is to establish a neutral agency to coordinate between the people and the government. The neutral agency is an intermediary in the activities that the people would consider to be unfair, or resulting from incorrect information from the project. In addition, they should pay attention the project after completion project, otherwise the conflict will remain forever. This can be seen in the following reflections by Mr.Tharadon Maanmaad, who said “. . . *We want to solve this, the provincial governor is the chairman and called for the executive of power plant, factory operators to talk, but now, no one dared to interfere in a private factory. . .*” this corresponds with Miss Chanita Madsor said “. . . *The solution approach is the mediator was taken. . .*”

For the second group, the government must focus on understanding of the policy on the development of the area and the country, as it is perceived by the people. In addition, the government should focus upon the ways of life of the people. Moreover, the government should ensure that the people, who are participating in the project, reveal

information about the project to the people in the area. This can be seen in the following reflections by Miss Paweena Bunyaratana, who said “. . . *The power plant should be sincere and public relations about the information to comprehensive and completely accurate. Also, should be pointed out the advantages and disadvantages arising from the implementation of the power plants. . .*” and Ms. Pannipa Sothipan, who said “. . . *Our actions, our final goal are to encourage people in the area has participated to the project. . .*” (see Fig. 3).

## Discussion

The researcher reveals 3 main issues; 1) the current situation of a conflict between the state and people 2) Factors causing a conflict between the state and people and 3) Guidelines to conflict management between the state and people. These are discussed below;

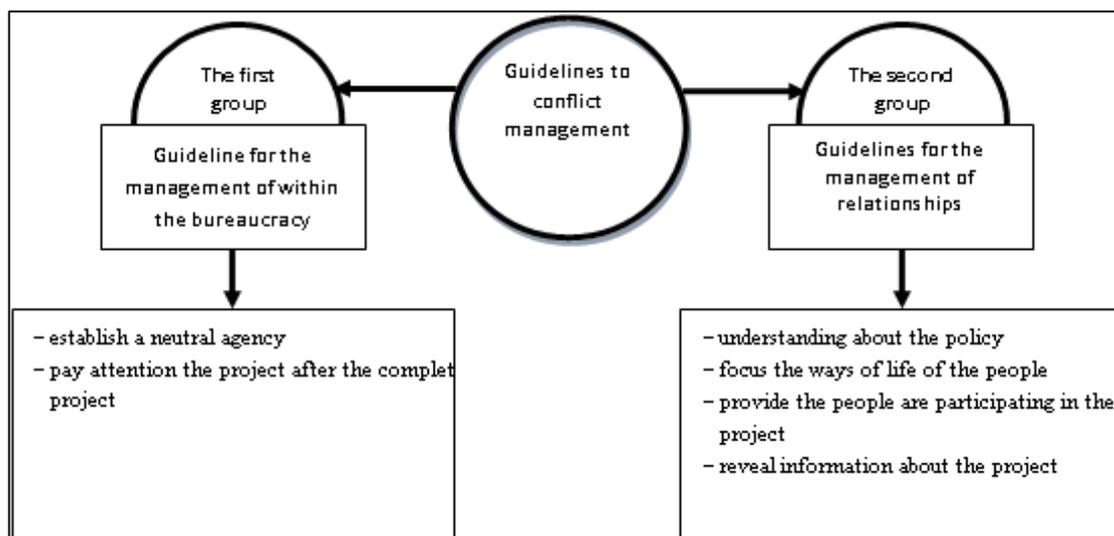
### *The current situation of a conflict between the state and people on the power plant project*

The results of the study found that the current situation of a conflict results from the irrationality of the benefits that people obtain from the project, because of their communities adjacent to the power plant and there is a feeling of unfairness about the budget and as such will lead to conflicts. This corresponds with Morris (1993), Nye et al. (1997), and Zhang et al. (2007)'s findings that the efficiency of budget spending is awareness of the budget spending between the areas and the differences amongst groups, which were created the equality in spending budgets. Besides, allowing people to satisfy and trust in the operation of the government, it made the operation of the government successful, too. Moreover, the conflict issues in the community due to interference of third parties/actors in the area such as NGOs, various scholars, and others. This leads to inducing people in the community to oppose the power plant. Meanwhile, people in the area are concerned about the dangers that might happen already, so it is easy to induced such concern. In addition, the lack of public relations of the power plant to the impacts that may occur, means that this is still unclear which can lead to conflicts. Stohl (1995), Johnson et al. (1998), Stuckenbruck (1988), and Bruckmeier (2005) explain that when communication processes between individuals or groups is unclear, this may cause misunderstanding in terms of both content and intent of the message and lead to conflict in the end. However, there is still against various development projects that the

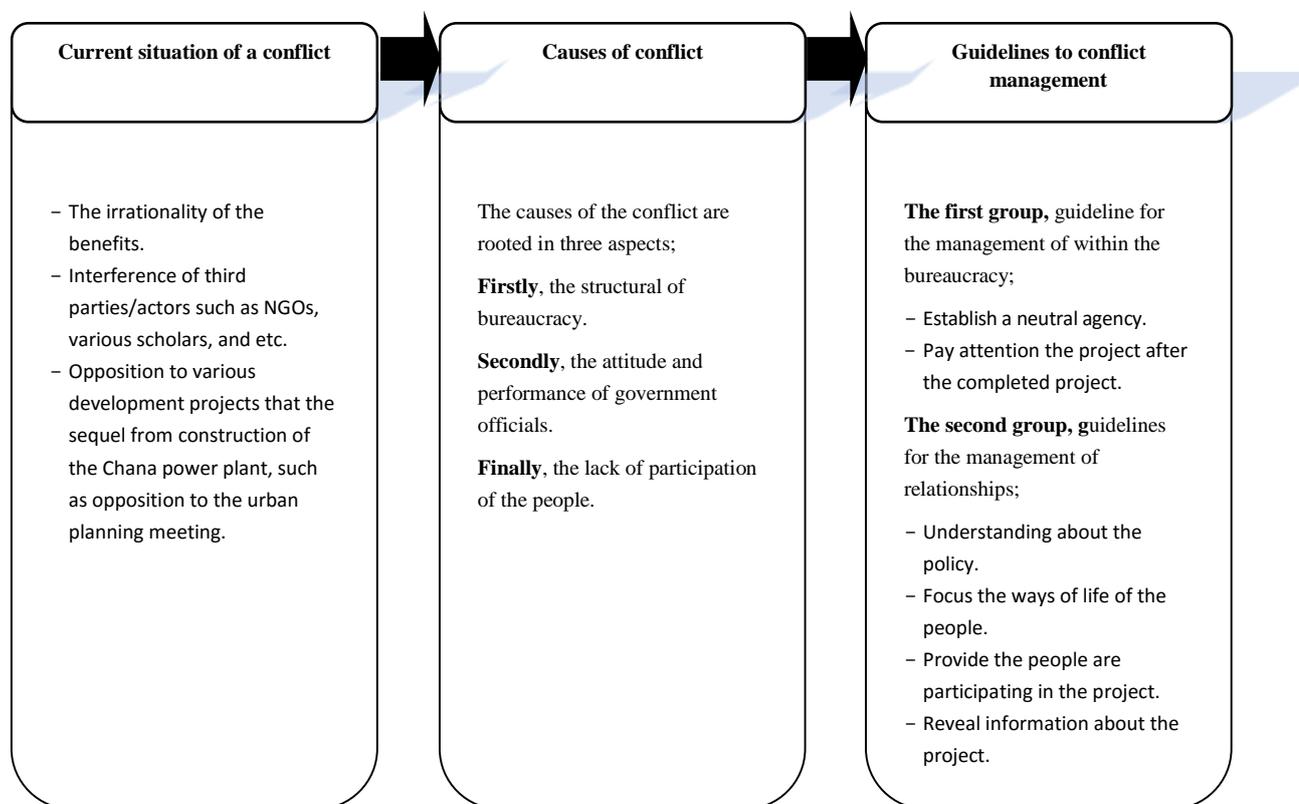
residents think can follow from construction of the Chana power plant in the area. The recent opposition to the urban planning meeting effect to the meeting had to end eventually.

### *Factors causing a conflict between the state and people on the power plant project*

The results of study found that the causes of the conflict are rooted in three aspects: First, the structure of bureaucracy. The ineffectiveness of the agencies in the area are key to creating a conflict to occur in the area. In addition, the allocation of resources from central government is still not sufficient, so the operation to solve problems also relies on central government. This corresponds with Kesarat et al. (2014)'s findings that in cases of solving the problems of coastal erosion, the local governments have insufficient knowledge about various measures to solve the problems of erosion that require technical and specialist knowledge in the matter. Meanwhile the local government, who should have the power to solve the problems of erosion, does not have sufficient budget to fully carry out their plans. Second, the attitude and performance of government officials: the government officials also believe that the people did not understand the project. The attitudes of government officials are that their ideas are better than the ideas of the people. According to a NHRC (2003) report, government officials and politicians still have the old attitude; and often take their own opinions and own decisions. People must obey and not act in violation or against authority. These attitude and understandings possibly become a problem in the future. This corresponds with Morris (1993), Norton (2005), and Kazenbach & Smith (2006), who explain that attitudes, perspective, values, beliefs and expectations of the individual are the sources of conflict. Finally, the lack of participation of the people: The government agencies come to study the environmental impact in the area, but without progress reports to stakeholders. The people are unable access the information of government agencies. According to a NHRC (2002) report, the problem arises from the process of consideration of environmental impacts, because the specialists vote against the social issues, due to lack of linkage, it was holistic which blocked the alternative of community. The community does not seek to develop the most appropriate choice for themselves. However, Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning approve the report.



**Fig. 3:** Guidelines to conflict management between the state and the people



**Fig. 4:** Situation of conflict, causes of conflict, and guidelines to conflict management between the state and the people

**Guidelines to conflict management between the state and people on the power plant project**

The guidelines to conflict management are divided into two groups: The first group, guideline for the management of within the bureaucracy: one solution is to establish a neutral agency to coordinate between the people and the government. Moreover, they should pay attention the project after completed project. If so, a good internal management systems, such conflicts may be recedes. According to Pereira & Azevedo (2011) claim that government may be required to healed or compensate for the damage that occurred to the people who affected is fairly

and appropriate. The second group, guidelines for the management of relationships between the government and the people in the area: the government must focus on understanding of the policy on the development of the area and the country and they should focus upon the ways of life of the people. Moreover, the government should ensure that the people, who are participating in the project. This corresponds with Maxwell (2000), Bruckmeier (2005), Selin et al. (2007), and Ross (2009)’s findings that the collaboration of all stakeholders can be solving the conflicts. And Basiago (1998) support that the collaboration rather than pushing for competition among people will

contributes to building the economy, social, and environmental sustainability

From the study about conflict management between the state and people on the power plant project. The researcher found the current situation of a conflict, factors causing a conflict and guidelines to conflict management. These are summarized as Fig. 4.

## Recommendations

Results of the study revealed that the causes of the conflict are the structural of bureaucracy, the attitude and performance of government officials, and the lack of participation of the people. Therefore stakeholders, especially who have the power to decide on the implementation should recognize and give priority to these causes and should recognize to the guidelines to conflict management are management of within the bureaucracy and management of shared between the state and the people in the area.

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