Abstract

This study was carried out with the objective of answering the question of; “How is civil society action used to struggle against industrial water pollution in the case of the Dong Nai River Basin, Vietnam?” To address this objective, the study not only delineated the various forms and actions of informal civil society networks on industrial pollution, but also explored which factors influence their actions. On the basis of this background, the factors were assessed: (i) the conflict or co-operation among actors who carried out civil society action, state and company over water pollution; (ii) the efforts to carry out the civil society action.

In grappling with the actor oriented political ecology approach, hypotheses set to test these factors include: (i) interest, which drives the relationship between actors and the implementation of environmental regulations which impact on civil society action; and (ii) the activities based on the informal networks and the position of individuals of civil society action in higher education and government offices.

These directions were brought out by using qualitative methods; in-depth interview, observation and group discussion. Pollution of Dong Nai River was addressed on the basis of case studies by comparing among four companies: Vedan (producing seasoning powder-MSG) and Sonadezi Vietnam (managing waste water treatment plant for 42 companies); AB Mauri Vietnam (producing yeast and another baking ingredients) and La Nga Sugar Cane (producing sugar); which are foreign and state owned companies respectively. The study interviewed 160 people, such as farmers, officers of farmer association, lawyers and journalists and local officials. Results indicate as the state and companies have same economical interest, especially to state companies. Thus, they cooperate to hamper civil society action against water pollution. However, findings show that civil society action that were constituted by interaction between farmers, lawyers, journalists in informal ways changed from passive to active actions which brought about positive results. Furthermore, the study also indicates that individuals who carried out civil society action in higher education and government offices can facilitate their networks as well as actions. These being the starting points, many questions remain, opening more rigorous subsequent empirical studies.