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POVERTY, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS: MAKING HUMAN PROGRESS IN THAILAND

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INTRODUCTION

1. This paper is a result of an attempt to assess the strengths and weaknesses of international anti-poverty, from a human rights point of view, and determine where fuller use of human rights principles and methods will make such program more effective in practice. The research explores how human rights concerns and respect for human rights can be integrated, in practical and meaningful ways, into programmes and projects that seek to eliminate poverty. The draft guidelines on integrating human rights into poverty reduction strategies and the UN understanding of the human rights-based approach to development co-operation are used as framework for analysis.
2. Three major questions are addressed in the report
 - How do human rights analysts, development experts and economists define poverty? How do they assess and measure beneficial and harmful outcomes?
 - To what extent do international poverty-reduction programmes, such as those based on PRSPs employ human rights principles and methods, explicitly or implicitly?
 - In what ways might anti-poverty programmes become more effective if they used a human rights framework? What practical steps can officials and others involved in such programmes take to apply human rights principles and methods when they design, implement, and assess anti-poverty programmes? An additional question on this particular point is whether or not international and national human rights are used as the basis for application and/or implementation.
3. The research was carried out by using four major methodologies:

- Documentary research. Most of material used in this report are official documents relating to national economic and social development plan, poverty reduction strategies, programmes and projects, already implemented, and being implemented as well as official reports of various ministries and independent evaluation teams.
 - Interviews. Over 20 informants 70 % of whom are government officers, 15 % are officers of international organisations, mainly UNDP and the international financial institution; the World Bank, while another 15 % are NGOs working mainly in development field and with the poor.
 - Group discussions mainly with the NGOs and villagers at various occasions, in various provinces.
 - On site visits. Two visits were conducted. One in Mae Hong Son to study how MDGs was carried out, and another shall be done together with lead researcher and the researcher from Bangladesh.
4. This report is divided into four parts. The first part looks at political and socio-economic background and context, development experience, as well as poverty reduction programmes and strategies. The second deals with salient issues in human rights and development, the roles of civil society shall be highlighted. In the third part, four case studies shall be presented. They are the cases of Social Investment Fund - SIF implemented after the economic crisis in 1997 and terminated in 2003, the Poverty alleviation program and MDGs pilot project in Mae Hong Son supported by UNDP, and the Project for Revitalization of the Deteriorated Environment in Land reform Areas Through Integrated Agricultural Development implemented with support of JBIC. The fourth part attempts to analyse experience of a rights –based approach to poverty eradication in Thailand. Conclusions and recommendations shall be drawn from the study.

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Political Background

5. Since the absolute monarchy was abolished in 1932, the Thai political system has been called a democracy. For many decades the word democracy veiled the existence of military and bureaucratic rule. Student uprising in October 1973 brought down the military regime. But the democratic interregnum lasted only for three years when in 1976 the students were massacred in the campus of Thammasat university and several rural leaders were killed. During this short period, progressive academics, students, workers, etc, forged alliances with emerging rural activism including farmers. From early 80s onward the student upsurge had generated pressure for democracy which gradually gained successes.
6. It is important to note that in Thailand until 1973 the contest for political power merely took place within factions of military rule. The absence of colonial rule and military dominance in Thai politics had considerable impact on the process of institution-building. No constitutional arrangements have been able to survive for very long, and bureaucratic and military cliques and their power struggles shaped the structure of the regimes. Interest articulation and participation of other groups from society has been limited, and elites in the bureaucracy have maintained a dominant position in the political system. Riggs called it a bureaucratic polity.¹
7. Economic development started in early 60s led to a significant structural change in the Thai economy. Changing economy brought about the emergence of new economic elite who, since late 70s, has been increasingly represented in parliaments and other political and economic

¹ Marco Bunte, Consolidating Thai Democracy, in Michael H.Nelson (ed.), Thailand's New Politics KPI Yearbook 2001, KPI & White Lotus, pp.188-189.

institutions. During the period of a so-called semi-democracy (under the premiership of a General) there was an unexpressed agreement between the old elite of bureaucracy and the new economic players, co-operating with each other for their mutual benefits. Growing importance in politics of new economic players led to a confrontation of interests in the 1980s, when both tried to assume political control. In the same time, some political space was open for NGOs and other civil society groups.

8. After 10 years of semi-democracy and a last successful military coup in 1991, a significant change occurred in Thai political system. After black May 1992, the May movement's calls for new constitution and democratisation grew louder both in centre and periphery. It could be said that the struggle for democracy of 1992 set momentum for political reform. In September 1996 the constitutional amendment was approved by the Parliament and the Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) was established. The drafting process of the new constitution was accompanied by a vibrant discussion in society. Politicians, the public, and NGOs all over the country actively participated in the drafting. The "People's Constitution" was promulgated on 11 October 1997. It is believed that the new Constitution "aims to strengthen the peoples' ability to exercise their rights, to enjoy the liberties, to participate in public decision-making, and to hold elected politicians accountable, and hence pave the way for cleaner politics and participatory form of democracy".²
9. The Constitution, in fact, prescribes the establishment of various autonomous institutions, be they the Election Commission, Ombudsman, the Anti-Money Laundering Office, the National Human Rights Commission, the Constitutional Court, Administrative Courts, and Counter Corruption Commission. While rights and liberties of Thai people are enshrined in section 26 to 65, the Constitution also recognises rights of communities. Section 46 and 56 guarantee community rights to access to natural resources. Other sections attempt to empower the individuals and communities. What is innovative in the 1997 Constitution is the Chapter on "Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies" which mandates the State to strengthen communities and promote their participation in national decision making. Section 50 of the Constitution gives opportunity to people to propose the laws directly to the government and/or the parliament. With 50,000 signatures people can directly propose the draft law to the Parliament. The members of parliaments both of lower house and the senate shall be elected, ending a long tradition of appointed military dominated senators.
10. It does not imply in any way that the "People's Constitution" is perfect. While it prescribes the autonomous institutions which are supposed to be independent from the state, the loopholes provide ruling party to intervene or even dominate the institutions. It recognizes rights, dignity and liberty of people but constrains in the same times their exercise of rights. It also emphasizes on the stability of the government which in many cases at the expense of people's freedom of expression and association. It does not provide any room for the opposition to submit motion of censor against the prime minister which means that who ever happens to hold this position, he or she will be free from scrutiny and does not need to be accountable to the people.
11. The 2001 elections, the first after the promulgation of the new Constitution, brought Thaksin Shinawatra, leader of Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT or Thai love Thai), the richest business man in Thailand, to power. For the first time in Thai political history a party got majority vote. TRT formed a coalition government with about 2/3 majority leaving the opposition in a very difficult situation. In the latest general elections held on 6 February 2005, TRT won 377 seats out of 500.
12. With landslide majority and his CEO style of running the country, Thaksin gives fear to many academics and activists as well as well aware middle-class. Thirayuth Boonmi, former student leader of Oct 14 (1973) in his talk given on 6 October 2003 said "*the prime minister is introducing a*

² Prudhisana Jumbala, quoted in Marco Bunte, *ibid.*, p.197.

dramatically new style of dictatorship to Thailand, one which is self-serving and destructive as those that preceded it. The government's policies could lead to totalitarianism and not social equality as has been promised". For Thirayuth, Thailand is now deploring the looming possibility of one-party rule and populist projects that could further weaken the country at the grass-roots level. The populist projects would only strengthen patronage system. The politics which is being exercised in Thailand is a politics of exclusion not an inclusive where diverse voices are heard".³

13. It is becoming increasingly evident that under Thaksin's government voices can be hardly heard. Because of financial pressure some medias become vulnerable. A so-called independent television channel was bought by Shin Corps which belongs to Shinawattra family. Media critics are deprived of opportunities to express their views. For quite some years already, the most popular radio program in Thailand has been "prime minister Thaksin talks to the Thais", on air every Saturday and shall be repeated by televisions and other state dominated or owned radios throughout the rest of the week. Without check and balance corruption rampants, structural corruption or corruption at policy level in particular. Under the present government, we see the deterioration of the rule of law, the erosion of sound governance and lack of fair competition. Thirayuth said "*the Thaksin's administration has systematically demolished the very foundations of the country's democracy*".⁴ The political system that Thailand has now is a democracy with an autocratic ruler.

Economic and Social Development

14. Since 1950s Thai economy has dramatically changed. The trajectory of Thailand's economic development, like that of other developing countries, has been to adopt the model proposed by international financial institutions. To start with, the country underwent the initial step of imported-substituted industrial development, which reached its peak in the 1980s. Next was the promotion of export-oriented industries, accompanied by concrete measures to offer to domestic and foreign investors numerous incentives.
15. Starting from the 5th National Economic and Social Development Plan, Thailand's economy has undergone rapid economic growth and has become an integral part of world economy. The 6th National Development Plan (1987-1991) aimed at turning Thailand into the financial centre of the region. To achieve this aim, Thailand needed to lesson its control and regulations over trade, investment and financial sectors facilitating free flow of investments, and build confidence among foreign investors. In 1993, the Finance Ministry approved the establishment of the Bangkok International Banking Facility in order to facilitate the financial liberalisation.
16. The premature liberalisation of late 80s resulted in the influx of foreign investment beyond effective control of the then government. These measures and the use of fixed currency rates resulted in a huge influx of foreign capitals into the country. Thai economy and investment market went through a boom. Foreign loans were drawn upon to fulfil the high demand of capital. Unfortunately, only a small proportion of foreign currencies came in the form of foreign direct investments. The larger part was constituted by short-term loans. By 1997 the country's foreign debts accumulated to more than 97,000 million US dollars, about 80% of which was short term private loans that needed to be paid back by the end of the year.
17. To make the situation worse, by second half of 1996, the outflow of foreign currencies started. The volume of exports, which used to be Thailand's main source of foreign exchanges, decreased due to fixed exchange rates and inflation. Amidst these problems, the Bank of Thailand decided to maintain the value of Thai currency by injecting money from the national reserves into exchange market while engaging in currency buy-sell swaps. By mid 1997, the attack on Thai

³ The Nation, October, 6, 2003.

⁴ The Nation, July 29, 2004.

currency was so devastating that the bank of Thailand, on 2 July, decided to adopt a different approach to exchange rate management, the managed float system, devaluating the Thai baht. Thailand entered into the financial crisis and by August the government was obliged to seek a bail out from the IMF.

18. The description of the Thai financial crisis offered above does not provide a complete picture of what happened. Other crucial factors that accelerated the crisis include the so called political business system, cronyism and corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, the lack of ethics among business people, inefficient investment in sectors other than real production, as well as limited capacity of economist. Among many explanation of the problem, Prawase Wasi, a very respected medical doctor and social critics, winner of Magsaysay award argued that *“the crisis resulted from bad development policies which undermined the foundations of society. The idea of development which originated from the West promoted capitalism, industry, and greed. In so doing, it destroyed the “foundations of society” which were local communities, the natural environment, morality, and social harmony: “In search of big money, we do not hesitate to oppress, exploit, or destroy just about anyone and anything that we can turn into money”. This development created an economy which was “heavy at the top but shaky at the bottom” and eventually collapsed...”*⁵
19. From 1959 to 1996, Thailand’s annual GDP increase averaged 7.8 % and never fell below 4 %⁶. The pace of economic structural change was gradual at first then became more accelerated following the implementation of the 5th National Economic and Social Development Plan. What Prawase pointed out just confirmed that the development strategies carried out by the Thai governments produce consequences which have been harmful to the poor. It is damaging because
20. The State’s policy to promote large scale business through cash crop production with the aim to transfer the surplus of the agricultural sector to urban industrial sector has resulted in negligence of rural development, rampant destruction of natural resources, rapid growth of urban sector, and fast expansion of a mono-cash cropping areas. The network of roads and many other economic infrastructures constructed with loans from United States and the World Bank during the 1950s-1960s have fuelled these changes.
21. The promotion of large scale, exported-oriented agro-business has been seriously harmful for small farmers who have been further disadvantaged by the state’s modest investment in agricultural sector as a whole.
22. Industrial sector has been growing very fast. New types of industries, namely petrochemical and electronic production, depend heavily on imported raw materials and technologies. Ownership of these industries remains largely in the hands of transnational companies or foreign-dominated ventures, allowing foreign business to have control of industrial and agricultural production as well as service sector. Statistics from the Board of investment reveal that about 71 % of the volume of investment in Thailand in 2000 came from foreign sources and Thai-foreign joint ventures. Foreign business became influential in shaping the future of domestic economy while technocrats took control of the formulation of policies and plan.
23. The growth and expansion of Thailand’s industrial sector are based on cheap labour. The government’s support for skill development of the labour forces has been unimpressive. Meanwhile, the less-skilled labour has suffered from low wages, inadequate welfare benefits, and substandard working conditions. More seriously, more and more low-income people, mainly women have been employed in informal sector in which working security is not guaranteed.

⁵ Pasuk Pongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand’s Crisis*, Silkworm Books, Chaing Mai, 2000, p.11

⁶ Ibid., p.17.

Among workers, illegal migrants are in a very vulnerable situation and subjected to exploitation both by Thai and foreign employers.

24. What we see here is that the development policies and plan geared towards industrialisation and modernisation which are biased in many aspects. Bias against the agricultural sector, leading to privileging of the industrial and service sectors. This is despite the fact that the majority of population still works in the agricultural sector. Bias in favour of the urban population, leading to a huge gap between the urban and rural. And, bias in favour of certain geographical regions over others in terms of development.
25. The crisis which hit Thai economy after nearly three decades of rapid economic growth led to many severe and sudden impacts. It affected not only the financial and corporate sectors but also society in general, with many households enduring losses of wages, jobs, and opportunities. In fact, the financial crisis pushed about 3 million people under the poverty line. According to the Asian Development Bank's assessment, in 1999 unemployment reached 2.8 million persons, 8% of the total labour force. However, economy showed some positive signs of recovery in the beginning of 1999. NESDB reported that real GDP registered a positive growth rate of 0.8 % and 3.5 % in the first and second quarters of 1999.⁷ By the end of 2004, the World Bank's report on Thailand revealed that because of higher oil prices and SARS (Severe Acute respiratory Syndrome), the country's real GDP growth for the whole year was about 6.4 %, compared to 6.8 % in 2003. The Bank predicted GDP growth rate at around 5.8 %.⁸ It seems, according to economic indicators, Thailand had fully recovered. It does not mean, though, that the country does face any challenges. One of the challenges, for the poor in particular, is the "going bilateral and international policies" of the government.
26. Since 2001 under Thaksin Chinawattra's government Thailand has been aggressively pursuing bilateral trade agreements with various countries across the region. So far, Thailand has engaged in 19 bilateral trade agreements 4 of which were already concluded including ones with Australia and China. In the means time, Thai government is engaging in the negotiations with USA, Japan and some others for FTA and Closer Economic Partnership which covers both FTA and technical co-operation. Apart from bilateral framework, Thailand has been actively participated in both regional and sub-regional economic co-operation such as AFTA, APEC, ASEM, BIMSTEC, AFTA-CER, GMS, etc.
27. Most of bilateral agreements that Thailand engages aim at reducing or eliminating tariff and non tariff trade barriers, on goods in particular. Several modalities have been adopted such as an early harvest mechanism, positive or negative approach. The reduction of non-tariff barriers such as quotas, export subsidies and domestic subsidies is a crucial factor in FTA negotiations. Other features are recently added in the negotiations namely the issues of investment, trade in services, liberalisation in financial services, information technology and digital products, etc.
28. The key features of FTA between Thailand and partner countries differ. The agreement with Australia which was concluded in November 2004 focuses on the elimination of tariff and non tariff barriers in trade and goods, the liberalisation of trade in services. With the conclusion of the agreement more than half of Thailand's 5000 tariffs will be eliminated on products such as instant food, car and jewellery. The remaining tariffs shall be eliminated by 10 on products such as canned tuna, textiles, footwear, auto-parts, steel, chemical products and plastic with some sensitive items to be phased out by 15. On Australia side, 83 % of tariffs shall be cut to zero in 2005 with the remaining categories to be cut by 15.

⁷ Asian Development Bank, Country Assistance Plan (2000-2002), Thailand, December 1999, p. 1 & p. 3.

⁸ The World Bank Group, Thailand Economic Monitor, November 2004.

29. With regards to FTA with China, the two countries signed the agreement in June 2003. The objective is to free trade in goods, services and investment. The agreement covers the elimination of tariffs on all fruits and vegetable products subject to HS chapter 07 and 08 amounting to 116 items within 3 months. The rule of origin which is based on wholly obtained principle is also applied.
30. Examination of the impact of FTA on agricultural products shows that the possibility that the Thai farmers are put into direct competition with Australian agribusiness companies is very high. Small farmers in Thailand can never compete with larger Australian farms. As for the FTA between Thailand and China it has tremendous effects on Thai farmers as well. Since late 2003 the import of fruits and vegetable from China increased for about 300% in particular apples, pears, garlic and onions. The most concrete impact is seen in garlic production. The farm land for garlic has decreased about 50,000 rai within a short period of time. Chinese agricultural imports have sent hundreds of Thai small farmers out of business. In two cases what would happen is that there will be a social erosion of the social fabric in the rural areas. Failed farmers will be forced to come to Bangkok seeking for job. Their livelihood will be lost.
31. Moreover, once FTAs which include new features like IPRs are concluded it would be problematic for poor farmers. Their right to food sovereignty will be seriously attacked. They will not be able to define their own food and agricultural policies, to decide the way food should be produced or what should be grown locally or what should be imported. The demand for food sovereignty and the opposition to the patenting of seeds has been central to small farmer's struggle over the past decade. By putting IPRs and GMOs into trade agreement and/or negotiations the Thai farmers and agricultural system will be put under occupation of developed countries.
32. Impact of FTA and the process of FTA conclusion are felt in many other areas of rights. While FTA itself calls for transparency the conclusion of FTA has not been transparent. There was a fight even to see the final document. Freedom of expression has been frequently curtailed when it comes to organise the farmers.
33. FTA is seen as radical liberalisation which is now going on in the region. The FTA Watch, and NGO stress that *"it comes so quick that we do not have time to democratize the institutions needed to monitor the processes. We are now witnessing the situation where small producers are being sacrificed for larger Thai business because they are strong enough to capitalize on such liberalization. Liberalization without scrutiny nor transparency has serious implication on the rights of people and will definitely put people in deeper poverty"* if there is no clear policy to review.

The Economic and Social Development Plan

34. The first development plan, covering the period of 1961-1966, was launched in 1961. This plan and its successors, especially from the 5th five-year plan, put the priority on economic growth achieved primarily, as already pointed out, through the development of industry and the urban economy under private enterprise. Government's role was to develop the basic infrastructure for growth and to encourage investors. Looking from growth perspective, these plans could be considered successful. Thailand achieved high growth rate which sustained over four decades. The average income multiplied seven times. Thailand was transformed from one of the more backward and agrarian countries into a candidate for NICs.
35. Until the 7th national economic and social development plan the development in Thailand was growth based, top down, and urban biased. The concern with urban growth and national security, in particular during Indochinese conflicts pushed other goals such as participation,

environmental protection, and equity to the sidelines. The high rate of growth came at a considerable cost in terms of depletion of natural resources, environmental degradation, relocation of people, neglect of agriculture, and widening gap between the rich and the poor, and urban and rural.

36. In early 1990s, demands for greater openness and social justice challenged both the political framework and the direction of economic policy. Middle class, democracy activists allied with NGOs to campaign for constitutional reform. The constitutional revision has major impact on development approach both in terms of process and contents.
37. The 8th Plan (1997-2001) marked a dramatic change in the formulation of the plan and its substance. *“This was a deliberate change in plan formulation in order to move away from the top down approach practiced by the public sector in the past. This can be considered the beginning of a new era in planning which emphasizes collaborative efforts of the whole population”*.⁹ For the first time, the NESDB held nine regional seminars inviting local NGOs leaders, development workers, academics, business, community leaders, monks, and bureaucrats. The “people’s development plan” was adopted in March 1996. The plan aimed to shift from a growth orientation to “holistic people centred development” through measures to promote self-reliance in local communities and the creation of relative secured community economies. It included a chapter focusing on “promoting popular participation and upgrading the capabilities of local communities to play active roles in local development. With the crisis, much of its ambition was blunted by the imperatives of short-term crisis management imposed by IMF.
38. The 9th plan (2002-2006) was prepared after a process of national consultation, though less extensive than its predecessor. The plan retains commitment to “people centred development” and repeats many of the same aspirations of the 8th plan. The plan has also heavily focused on restoring economic growth after 1997 crisis. Community empowerment is an explicit theme of the plan, particularly in proposals to alleviate poverty, improve environmental management, and generate sustainable development. However, when compared to the previous plan, the role of community is much diminished. In fact, the plan is more or less confined to rural development. In UNDP’s Thailand Human Development Report 2003, it was commented that the language of and tone of the on-going plan as a whole is a reversion to more traditional style, not only in its emphasis on economic growth, but also in its calls for discipline and unity in the task of recovery.

POVERTY, THE POOR, POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES AND THE ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY. POVERTY AND POVERTY REDUCTION POLICIES IN THAILAND.

39. Despite the impressive economic growth the 8th Plan recognised that most of Thailand’s economic activity and prosperity has remained concentrated in Bangkok and the surrounding provinces. The average per capita income inside BMR is still much higher than those found outside, and almost 12 times higher than in the country’s poorest region, the Northeast. The gap between rich and poor in the Kingdom has also widened over the last decades. In the four years from 1988 to 1992 alone, the top 20 % of households saw their combined income rise from 54 % to 59 % of GDP, while the combined income of the bottom 20 % of households – the country’s poorest – dropped from 4.6 % to 3.9 % of GDP over the same period.¹⁰
40. As already pointed out, before the Fifth national development plan, the development philosophy of the country concentrated on economic growth by emphasising investment efficiency and economic achievement. Rural development was not given a priority. The least important

⁹ Summary, The Eighth National Economic and Social development Plan (1997-2001), p.3.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

development when it had concentrated mainly on public welfare. In 1981 for the first time the Poverty Alleviation Plan (PAP) was initiated and it subsequently became the major program of the 5th national development plan. The plan recognised that “*although rural development has been a major priority for many years very limited real progress has been made in improving the situation. More than ten million people in the rural areas of the upper North and the Northeast of Thailand live at or close to the poverty line. The Fifth Plan, therefore, places the highest priority on the reduction and eventual eradication of rural poverty*”¹¹ The Plan introduced 5 main principles namely:

- An area-based approach whereby high priority is accorded to areas with high concentrations of poverty;
- Concentrating on meeting basic needs in order to raise the standard of living of people in the poverty areas to above subsistence level;
- Emphasising self-reliance in order to improve the ability of people in the poverty areas to help themselves;
- Promoting appropriate technology whereby the government will support the use of development techniques which are not in conflict with traditional agriculture and community development practices;
- Encouraging citizen participation so that people take an active part in planning, deciding and implementing projects.¹²

41. The program’s objective was to improve the quality of life for 12,562 poor villages in the Northeast, Northeastern and Southern regions. The PAP was targeted at high poverty concentration areas with 288 districts and sub-districts in 38 provinces being included.¹³ Four key programmes were implemented, rural job creation, village development projects/activities, provision of basic needs, and agricultural production programme.
42. Poverty remained priority of the subsequent plans. The 6th Plan under the Rural Alleviation Programme (RPAP) classified poor villages into three levels of development namely:
 - Backward or poor areas where people faced four or five problems which regards to transportation, no land holding for agriculture, low agricultural productivity or low income, poor health, inadequate clean drinking water, and ignorance of quality of life improvement. There were 5,787 villages in this category.
 - Intermediate areas where people faced one to three of the problems mentioned for the poor areas. 35,514 villages in this group required government input.
 - Advanced areas where people are economically better off and have production potential, facing few of the problems mentioned relating to the poor areas. 11,621 villages were classified and the private sectors were encouraged to invest in the areas.¹⁴
43. The Plan targeted economic aspect by increasing income and reducing seasonal unemployment, social aspect by providing basic social services, necessary for welfare in career, safety of life and security, participation in development, and living standards that meet basic necessities. It also targeted security aspect as to eliminate the cause of rural security problems by co-ordinating economic, social and security policies.¹⁵
44. One can observe that to solve the poverty problem, the Thai governments have used the area approach. Socio-Economic Surveys (SES) were used as data base to classify the areas. Poverty

¹¹ NESDB, Summary of the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1982-1986), Bangkok, p.4.

¹² The Government of Thailand, Social Development in Thailand, A National Report, March 1995, p.11.

¹³ Ibid., p.18.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.19; Summary, NESDB, The Sixth National and Social Development Plan (1987-1991), p.17.

¹⁵ NESDB, op cit.

line was the main instrument for classification. The poverty line was first applied in 1988 and it was adjusted every two years. The poverty line applied in 1988 was 633 baht per person per month. The poverty line which is now being applied by NESDB is 1,230 baht/person/month.¹⁶

45. As poverty was measured by using two different sets of data, the SES or household consumption and income as well as poverty line, the strategies used focused mainly on the stimulation of rural economy and provision of basic services inspired by basic needs approach. Participation which was mentioned in both Plans was rather limited. Plan and implementation of projects and programmes were mainly handled by the central agencies with little concession to participation. The government still concentrated on building capacity of government agencies and other centralised institutions.
46. It is important to add that until today the profile of poverty does not change much. According to social development report, poverty incidence, as measured by the proportion of households living below poverty line decreased from 39 % in 1968/1969 to 31 % in 1975/1976 and 23 % in 1981/1982 but jumped to 29.5 % in 1985/1986 due to low economic growth rate and second oil shock.¹⁷
47. However, the statistics on poverty incidences seem rather confusing. In Thailand's Social Report the incidence of poverty in 1990 was 17.7 % while the ADB in its Country Assistance Plan said that overall poverty level reduced rapidly. The population below poverty line declined from 27.2 % in 1990 to 23.2 % in 1992 and further to 11.4 % in 1996. The trend has been reversed as a result of the crisis. Poverty incidence increased to 12.9 % in 1998.¹⁸ It was mentioned in the review of economic and social development of the 8th Plan that "the drop in numbers of people living in absolute poverty has surpassed all expectations, falling to only 13.7 % of the population in 1992, far outstripping the 7th Plan's target of 20 % by the end of 1996".¹⁹ The 9th Plan targeted to reduce absolute poverty to less than 12 % of the total population by 2006.²⁰
48. However confusing the statistics are, the overall profile of poverty incidence has been clear. The rate of poverty incidence varies among regions and communities. The Northeast has the highest poverty incidence while Bangkok Metropolitan Area exhibits the lower. Poverty incidence in the Central Region (7.7 %) and the North (9.0 %) is much lower than in the Northeast (23.2 %) or South (14.8 %), and the poor account for only 0.6 % of the population in Bangkok and its vicinity²¹. The Thailand's Social Report concluded that "*the severe poverty in Thailand is mainly a rural phenomenon*".²² It might be too quick, nevertheless, to make such conclusion since the same report admitted that "*although poverty in Thailand is much more a rural than an urban phenomenon, the government must also give special attention to upgrading the urban poor and improving their quality of life*".²³ Most of urban poor have migrated from rural areas in search for better job opportunities and better life. Like rural poor, the majority have a low level of education,²⁴ high dependency or family with disadvantaged characteristic. Majority of the poor are in agricultural sector and landless farmers. In 2002, among households below poverty line, 70.1 % are indebted²⁵. When compared with rural poor, the urban poor have much less advantage for their situation is more vulnerable and

¹⁶ National Statistic Office, Social and Economic Surveys, 2004.

¹⁷ The Government of Thailand, Social Development in Thailand, A National Report, March 1995, p.16.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.16 ; ADB, Country Assistance Plan (2000-2002), December, 1999, p.4.

¹⁹ Summary, The Eighth National Economic and Social development Plan (1997-2001), p.5.

²⁰ Ibid., p.7.

²¹ ADB, op.cit, p. 4.

²² The Government of Thailand, op.cit, p. 17.

²³ Ibid., p.21.

²⁴ 24.7 % of head of poor HH have no education, 12.9 % attain lower primary education and only 0.5 % has higher education. NSO, compiled by NESDB, in NESDB, Thailand Poverty Profile & Poverty Reduction Strategies, March 2005.

²⁵ Ibid.

precarious relying mainly on wages with no natural social safety net which is more or less available in rural areas.

49. What is interesting when studying how the Plans presented the poverty and strategies to address. The approach to poverty reduction has changed dramatically in the 8th and 9th Plans. The current Plan provides that “poverty eradication efforts should emphasize empowerment of the poor”, creating enabling environments which include provision of access by the poor to government services; provision of access by the poor to natural resources; development of social safety nets to enhance security of poor people; development of grassroots economies to create opportunities for the poor and enhance local self-reliance; adjustment of government management systems to enhance the creation of opportunities for the poor; and acceleration of legal and regulatory reform.²⁶
50. The question is how this beautiful plan has been actually translated into practice. In the Thai Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS), three interventions are recommended by NESDB based mainly on the Thai Rak Thai policies. They include income generation, reducing consumption expenditure and increasing opportunity. The PRS targets 16,555 villages throughout the whole Kingdom.²⁷ What are exactly the three strategies? Many government interventions have been done so far.
 - Income generation involves OTOP (One Tambon One Product) and TAMC, free livestock (one million heads of cows)
 - Increasing opportunity includes People Bank, Village Fund, and Micro Business Development Bank, changing asset (of the poor) or turning liquidity into capital;
 - Reducing Consumption Expenditure covers 30 baht health care scheme²⁸, provision of housing²⁹, and debt forgiveness & debt moratorium.
51. Apart from direct interventions, the current government, since 2003 before its second term, declares **WAR ON POVERTY**. A National Center for the Implementation of Poverty Eradication was set up. The same kind of Center with the same structure was also set up at every levels down to the provinces, districts, and sub-districts. “*It models after the Center dealing with the WAR ON THE DRUG (dealers)*”³⁰ said Pol.Maj.Gen.Somchart Sawangnetr who is now serving as secretary of the national centre which is chaired by the deputy prime minister and minister of interior. Apart from the Center, various committees at national, provincial, district and sub-district levels were already appointed. Most of the members of the Committees are government officers from all ministries. Some NGOs and few academics were included.
52. In order to win the war on poverty within 6 years, Thaksin government has also invented two new interventions. The first one was launched on December 6th, 2003 – the Registration of the Poor-. It aims to invite the poor to identify themselves and their most pressing needs. The pilot project was launched in 8 provinces. The complaint registration covers seven areas of problems namely 1) lack of land, 2) homelessness, 3) the intrusion of illegal business such as prostitution and gambling dens, 4) students taking inappropriate or illegal jobs for extra income, 5) household debt, 6) lack of housing or sub-standard housing, and 7) workers cheated by job-placement agencies. In the early stages of the government’s fight against poverty, 8 million people across the country registered as being below poverty line. They were broken down into people burdened by person-to-person debt, families without their own land and squatting on

²⁶ Summary, The Ninth National Economic and Social development Plan (2002-2006). P.15.

²⁷ 6476 in the Northeast, 5946 in the north, 2923 in the Central and 1210 in the South.

²⁸ 30 baht health care per visit

²⁹ Under the slogan Aue Athorn or “We care” projects including Aue Athorn Housing, Ban Mankong Housing, Taxi Aue Athorn, Computer Aue Athorn, Bicycle Aue Athorn, and so on.

³⁰ In the war on the drug dealers, about 2,500 were killed.

government property, homeless people and vagabonds.³¹ The registration was already completed in 2004 and the government starts the “re-x-ray programme” in order to verify if those who have already registered are really poor. Thaksin has now changed the strategies used by NESDB and all previous governments during the last four decades from area-based approach to target-based approach.

53. The second new intervention is sending “poverty relief caravans” around the country. The main objective is to meet the poor, re-x-ray, and help them with debt restructuring, job training, employment scheme, etc. This poverty relief caravans were launched in late 2004 just before the elections. The chief district from all over the country will be trained on how to manage the caravans and effectively knock on the door of the poor. The full-fledged launching is now being implemented. Some doubt if in the attempts to respond to specific needs of every households would create greater demand and the state will have the capacity to tailor its policies down to the level of individual households.³² With all innovative projects and interventions Thaksin announced “*I will bring the Thai people out of poverty. Four years ahead, there will be no poor people. Won't that be neat?*”³³

Defining Poverty

54. The strategies for poverty reduction or elimination of poverty eventually reflect the way people define poverty and/or the poor. Traditionally, poverty was and still has been seen mainly from income perspective and measures proposed are mainly dealt with economic solutions. In the case of Thailand, at least on the paper and in the views of people concerned poverty is perceived in a rather broad sense of the term. Nevertheless, however broad interpretation of poverty the policies and strategies are all about political agendas.
55. The definition of poverty is not mainly changed in the paper but also in the mind of the technocrats, academics including economists, NGOs and the poor themselves. For the first time at the TDRI (Thailand Development Research Institute) yearend conference which focused on “Poverty Reduction Strategies” held in November 2001, people from communities were invited to present their papers prepared by themselves. The villagers were asked to give their own definition of poverty and identify the root causes as well as propose the solutions. For the villagers, poverty is about job and housing security, saving, access to loans, land rights, health conditions, access to information and education, etc. When it comes to causes of poverty, the villagers emphasised on the lack of social justice and the opportunity to make a living. They talked about “structural poverty”. In order to solve the problem, the villagers said they needed the government to make changes at the policy level to provide them with land rights, equal access to basic infrastructure and education, as well as control over natural resources. All these were echoed throughout the conference and long after. Of course, not all farmers think the same way. The fact that almost 8 million have registered themselves as poor shows rhetoric and reality.
56. In the same conference, a well-known legal academic said “*participants had neglected the legal aspects of the problem, leaving the discussion floating in the air. Empowerment is the key to tackling poverty. It is focused on the rights of the poor- how the law helps or hinders them from accessing the tools they need to lift them out of poverty. Law creates power. The legal system should be promoted if we really care about alleviating poverty. We also need to use the law to promote local economies. The Thai legal structure needs to be revised*”³⁴

³¹ The Nation, May 2005.

³² The Nation, October 27, 2004.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The nation, November 25,2001.

“Poverty could not be measured only by using poverty line. In Thailand, we have been using the basic minimum needs as a basis to identify the poor. However, for me basic indicators of poverty lie on 3 components namely basic rights, 4 basic minimum needs, and opportunity to generate income” (Suwannee Khamman, community nutrition, NESDB)

“I don’t think that income is the only indicator to measure poverty. Several problems of poverty are social issues not economic ones. Well-being can be obtained only through middle path, a Buddhist path. To tackle poverty, we need to create employments, open opportunity, and access to public services as well as natural resources”. (Supot Laowansiri, political science, Governor of Mae Hong Son province).

“Poverty can be seen from three dimensions. The first one is income poverty based mainly on the purchasing power of 4 basic minimum needs. The second is structural poverty relating to the equal access to public services, and opportunity to demand. The third dimension is lack of human dignity, lack of recognition”. (Somchai Sakdavekhiisorn, Agricultural economist, NESDB).

“We should not define poverty for it leads to nothing. What we need to do is to identify who are the poor. Villagers in the village will have to identify and screen among themselves. We don’t have concrete measures to identify who are the poor. Identification of the poor requires the whole process” (Bundhorn On-Dam, rural developmentalist, Academic turned NGOs, advisor to AOP)

“Poverty is lack of access to natural resources, lack of opportunity and bargaining power”. (Bamroong Kayotha, technician, NGOs, farmer leader).

“Poverty is a lack of opportunity, opportunity to learn in particular” (Werachai Narkviboonwong, political science, ALRO –MoAC)

“Poverty is the root cause of social problem. However, we avoid to define it. If I have to define I would say it is a lack of basic needs.” (Pol.Maj.Gen.Somchart Sawangnetr, ONCB , police, Secretary, The Center for the Implementation of Poverty Alleviation (War on poverty program)

“Poverty is a lack of basic needs” (Kirida Bhaopichitr, economist, the World Bank, Bangkok)

“Poverty and human rights are two same issues”. (Somsuk Boonyabanacha , architect,CODI - ACHR)

“Poverty depends on subsistence. Using the same poverty line or the same standard to classify or identify poverty is not appropriate. Both income and spending should be taken into consideration. Participation is vital and must be promoted” (Kanchanawan, education, Dept. of Community Development.)

57. The collection of definition of poverty given by different people having different backgrounds and holding different position reflects that economists and non-economists began to speak the same language. There are at least three common features in those definitions, 1) poverty is not only about income, 2) access to public services and basic needs is the key to poverty reduction, 3) opportunity is important in order for the poor to develop themselves. Some interviewees suggest rights dimension and see participation and empowerment as a key to tackle poverty. The definition advanced by NESDB which is also reflected in the Poverty Reduction Strategies adopted by the government covers quality of life, well-being, and structural poverty which would have impact on capabilities of people to live their life. The structural poverty includes lack of education, lack of access to natural resources, lack of land, lack of freedom of assembly, lack of political participation, lack of information and knowledge as well as skills. Dependency and inequality in the access to public services and welfare is a root cause of economic and social inequality.³⁵

³⁵ NESDB, The situation of poverty and framework for poverty reduction, (in Thai), July, 2001.

58. We see that this definition focuses on deprivation of people. NESDB admitted that even though poverty line introduced by the World Bank is still applied to define poverty but what is now more influential in the thinking of NESDB is the dimension of quality of life and human deprivation. In co-operation with UNDP, the agency is developing Human Deprivation Index. It is expected that the index will be used to indicate the progress, stagnation, or regression of human development.
59. It seems that there is not much difference in the understanding and definition of poverty. The approach and ways to tackle vary, though. For Pol.Maj.Gen. Somchart *“the poor are suffering and we have the duty to end it. Our strategy is to address their problem and needs. Participation is a good method but it requires a long process. Interventions by the government are necessary in order to accelerate the process if we want to reach our goal”*. While Somsuk does not refuse intervention but rather reluctant. For her *“poverty is not easy to tackle. We need to first look the question why poverty. We need to address the root causes. What we really need to do is to transform the poor into actor or subject. Change must come from within and if we see strength of change in people, eradication of poverty is possible. In many cases intervention may not lead to change nor transition”*. This view is shared by Dr.Pornthep, Senior advisor to the Ministry of health who criticize the government strategies. *“It’s totally wrong. They just use capitalist approach by injecting all kinds of fund. They don’t make people learn how to help themselves. It would not sustain. The poverty eradication policy must emphasize on equipping the poor with rights and duties not only demand from the government”*.

Poverty, Civil Society, and the Language of Rights

60. Reactions to conventional approach of poverty eradication began in late 60s when Puey Ungphakorn, an economist, former Governor of the Bank of Thailand and Rector of Thammasat University objected to the Sarit style of development which emphasise growth, developing cities at the expense of countryside. He found, in 1969, the Thailand Rural Reconstruction Foundation. It dedicated to rural uplift through self-reliance. Political freedoms that the Thai enjoyed during 1973-1976 provided space for activists and students to debate whether development policy should be changed by political activism or independent grassroots work. In the same period many international relief organisations entered Thailand to help Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese refugees. It gave impetus to progressive Thais to form themselves. The activities expanded in the 80s and several Thai NGOs were established. They saw by that time that the extent of environmental and social damage became apparent. Local people arose over debt, land tenure, access to water, and mega-development projects. Rural people mobilised and were mobilised for change. Several of these activists seized on the idea of community to serve as a basis for alternatives to the top-down and destructive policy of development begun in the 50s. They urged that development should begin from the community upwards, should pay attention to local wisdom, and should respect local cultures and history in order to rebuild the community’s identity. The slogan has been *“the community is an answer”*.
61. In the late 1980s, the NGOs movements developed two streams. The first assisted people’s movements and co-ordinated networks and protests. Through 1990s, the number of rural protests expanded. May new network organisations were formed such as the Northern Farmers Network, Association of Small scale Farmers of the Northeast, and the Network of Coastal fishermen in the South. The founding of the Assembly of the Poor in December 1995 was a landmark.
62. The second stream of NGOs movements sought to influence government decision- making at the center. Several established figures lent weight to this stream such as Paiboon Wattanasiritham, an economist who left a banking career to head the Thai rural Construction Movement in 1988. He has been listened by most governments and NESDB. By early 1990s, these NGOs were gaining access to policy making in the areas of health, education, poverty

eradication, and community development. At the same time, influenced by prominent academics, some technocrats became more concerned about the destruction of environment, widening income gap, etc. *“I was influenced by Ajarn Pramase, said Thanin Pa-em and Somchai Sakdavekiisorn of NESDB.*

63. Although the two streams pursued different strategies, they co-operated and exchanged information. More importantly, both streams adopted the thinking that local community was the important unit for changing policy-making from top-down to bottom-up perspective. Leading academics and activists joined the community idea together with human rights to make a powerful argument for community rights-particularly over natural resources. Other thinkers gave community idea more weight by linking it with Buddhist value. Sufficiency economy based on Buddhist principle and introduced by the King was adopted both by civil society and the government. The sufficiency economy is the key of the poverty reduction strategies of the current government.
64. Two major factors empower civil society and people participation in Thailand. Not only the people’s constitution enshrines rights and liberties of the people but it mandates the state to strengthen local communities and promote community participation in national affairs. Section 76 of the constitution stipulates that “ the State shall promote and encourage public participation inlaying down policies, making decision on political issues, preparing economic, social and political development plans, and inspecting the exercise of State power at all level”. This provision gives impetus to civil society, the Assembly of the Poor in particular to organise among themselves the committee on poverty eradication with the objective to monitor the government policies in relation to poverty strategies and plans.
65. The 8th and 9th Plans also recognise the roles of civil society. The two plans emphasise the strengthening of a relationship between the government and the people, through collaborative and participatory efforts of all parties of the society, the provision of guarantees for freedom, human rights and equity, and the settlement of conflicts through peaceful means.
66. Although the development plan and the constitution are extremely positive to civil society to play their role, it is not always easy under the current political context. The public space provided by the constitution has been taken by the government. The policies of direct sell used by Thaksin make participation more problematic. This is not to mention the attitude of officials.

EXAMINATION OF THE PROJECTS

67. The first foreign mission for technical and economic assistance to Thailand in early 1950s was from USAID and the World Bank. With assistance, in forms of loans and grants as well as technical advice, from the World Bank and some other sources in particular, Thailand has successfully developed economic infrastructures necessary for economic development. As for UNDP, the organisation has been supporting Thailand’s development since 1955 with primary goal of promoting sustainable development. However, since late 1980s, the assistance from both multilateral and bilateral donors has been decreasing. In some cases, Scandinavian countries and EU for example, Thailand has graduated from their aid. The only major donor which is still playing significant role in the country is Japan.
68. The Thailand’s crisis brought some donors back to the assistance scene. Some donors like the World Bank and the Japanese agencies played active roles in assisting Thailand to recover. The largest crisis relief measure was initiated by the World Bank and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation. The assistance was designed to mitigate the impact of structural adjustment imposed by the IMF.

69. When Thaksin became Prime Minister, he determined to pay back the debt to IMF before it was due. He did it in 2003. He also, in early 2004, announced and later circulated the memo to all government agencies that Thailand would not, from now on, accept any assistance from any donors be they bilateral or multilateral. Thai agencies were requested to refrain from seeking assistance from outside. He said *“Thailand will not be recipient but will work with those countries and organizations as partner on equal footing”*. This position was reiterated soon after Tsunami. Thaksin announced that *“we don’t need financial assistance from any country. What we need is only technical advice on early warning system and forensic science”*. In the same time, Thailand will extend her cooperation and assistance to other developing countries.
70. The projects examined below deal with poverty reduction or conducive to poverty reduction. The three projects are the Rural Poverty Alleviation Program supported by UNDP, the Social Investment Fund (SIF) funded by the World Bank, and the Project for Revitalization of Deteriorated Environment in the Land Reform Area through Integrated Agricultural Development funded by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation. The implementation of the first two projects was completed since 2003. The third is still continuing to its second phase. The study will also give a brief look at how MDG was carried out and interpreted in Thailand.

Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme - UNDP.

71. The examination of this program is based mainly on the review of project proposals and the report of in-depth evaluation commissioned by UNDP to the team led by Prof. Apichai Puntasen and comprising Dr. Patamawadee Suzuki, Mr. William A. McCleary, Dr. Pongsathorn Tantirittisak, and Ms. Kritaya Sreesunpagit.
72. The Rural Poverty Alleviation Program was initiated with the overall objective to build capacity of key ministries, departments and agencies at national, regional, and community level to implant an enhanced program for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. The program was divided into two phases. The preparatory phase was carried out during January – December, 1998, and Phase II was the implementation which was done from 1999-2002. There were three sub-projects under this umbrella.
73. Capacity Building in Sustainable Agriculture Project. The project aimed at increasing community self-sufficiency through mobilising and strengthening local farmer organisations to undertake sustainable agricultural activities. The project was executed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and implemented by the Department of Agricultural Extension in 21 provinces across the regions. NGOs with proven experiences in community mobilisation are sub-contracted to assist in the participatory process for community planning and assessment. It focuses on sustainable agriculture, natural resources management, and community business.
74. Capacity Building for Income Opportunities through Community Industry. The objective of the project was to increase capacity of government agencies, the private sector, civil society organisations, and poor rural communities to work together to ensure employment and income opportunities through the creation and support of rural community industry. It was executed by the Ministry of Industry and implemented by the Department of Industrial Promotion. The Research and Development Institute, Khon Kaen University acted as consultant providing services to improve capacity of local CSOs in supporting community industry groups. The project focused mainly in the Northeastern part of the country.
75. Expansion of Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities for Poor Rural Communities in Five Southern Border Provinces. The project had three specific objectives; 1) assisting coastal fishing communities to preserve their resource base in order to ensure future sustainable livelihood; 2)

assisting farmers to reduce risk and increase rural employment and livelihood opportunities through the adoption of integrated and sustainable agricultural production; and 3) assisting in the provision of sustainable off-farm employment and income generating opportunities for poor families throughout the area. It was implemented by mandated line agencies at local levels under the co-ordination of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center³⁶, Ministry of Interior. The Prince of Songkla University provided consultancy services.

76. It is important to note that the program was initiated just after the promulgation of “people’s constitution” which introduces political reform and emphasises decentralisation, participation and empowerment of local communities. In the same time, the 8th National Development Plan suggests the shift from an earlier emphasis on the acceleration of economic growth to a new sustainable people-centred development. UNDP also started its first Country Cooperation Framework (CCF) from 1997-2001. The CCF emphasises the needs to provide support to critical policies related to sustainable human development for poverty eradication and to assist line ministries in the implementation of operational plans linked to the 8th Plan.
77. The program was evaluated by external evaluators in 2002. The team has assessed
 - The relevance of program designed and strategies, emphasising its relationship to the objectives of UNDP Thailand CCF and to the 8th Plan related to poverty reduction policy;
 - The achievements of the program against objectives set forth including
 - capacity of targeted communities in identifying, planning, and implementing their livelihood activities through participatory process
 - capacity of all agencies concerned in responding to the needs of rural poor
 - extent to which gender issues are mainstreamed into project design and implementation
 - The implications and impact of programme strategies, best practices and lessons learned from its implementation on national policies and strategies on poverty reduction, in rural sector in particular.
78. Although the evaluation did not attempt to assess the projects from a rights-based approach, it did give importance to participation and capacity building both of the officers, NGOs and the poor themselves. Looking from rights based angle, we can extract some interesting points in the process of implementation as well as outcomes.

Strengths

79. The projects, the Capacity Building in Sustainable Agriculture in particular, are based on the existence of substantially locally-based knowledge. The officers of the DAE at districts and sub districts levels have been always working closely with the communities.
80. In many cases, existence of informal local networks opens opportunities for exchange of information and learn from each other not only across the communities but also across the provinces and the regions.
81. The design of the project, according to the evaluation team, contains several building blocks. The approach was designed to be participatory and democratic and project ideas were to come up from below.³⁷ The report said “*building up from the group level increases the possibilities that villagers are*

³⁶ The Center was abolished under Thaksin government.

³⁷ Apichai Puntasen et al, In_Depth Evaluation for UNDP Rural Poverty Alleviation Program, A report, September, 2002. p.3.

able to improve the development process. They are also able to request the type of advice that they are getting and increases the pressure on government officials to provide information that is useful and responsive to their needs". The report commented that "participation and democratic methods used at the group level instils in villagers idea that collectively they can solve their own problems and also alters the relationship between villagers and government officials – less top down and more partners in development process".³⁸

82. The implementation process has been clear and precise but flexible to accommodate local differences. It seems that the project focuses on the community plan. Five-step process was fixed. They include selection of role model areas according to set criteria, an exploration of community potential, development of community participation process, criteria of community plan, and the implementation of the plan. Each community works according to its own comfortable pace.
83. The role of NGOs has been fundamental. They work with officials to identify role model communities and target communities, formulating operational plans at provincial and sub-district levels, organizing the community participatory learning process, and facilitating the formulation and implementation of community plan. They also involved in monitoring and evaluation, constructing data bases and producing material to be disseminated. In most cases, they act as intermediary between officials and communities and as listeners and facilitators. A new triadic relationship has been formed – village groups + officials + NGOs. In two projects a four-party relationship has been formed. It includes academics. In many cases, academics can act as middleman between government and NGOs. It is becoming a usual practice and combination in Thailand.
84. The **poverty alleviation program** needs not be strictly interpreted or implemented in a usual meaning of the term. It needs not to focus on poverty. The value-added of the project lies on the fact that it emphasises on capacity building which helps support institutional building in rural areas.

Weaknesses

85. The fact that the target villages were divided into three groups³⁹ depending on their state of readiness to implement the project though it allowed the slower groups more time for preparation but it would very well end up with excluding the poorest of the poor from the process. Not only the poor will be left out but strong groups or strong networks which oppose government's projects and demand from the government shall be probably excluded.
86. Very often the report required by the government agencies are full of statistics. It focuses more on quantity rather than quality. It usually looks at the number of participating provinces and Tambons, number of village groups, community plans, number of personal, seminar held, meeting of various groups, etc. In the experience of the researcher, the statistics provided by the officers have been mostly their own invention. It has nothing to do with the project outputs.
87. Like the evaluation team, we are always sceptical about changing behaviour of officials. Experience in doing works with health and educational officers show that most of them resist changes and after the completion of the project, they will go back to their own style of working - a top-down - because it is easier to produce the outcomes. This reservation is shared by a high

³⁸ Ibid., p.4.

³⁹ The classification is done on the basis of three criteria; 1) strength of community organizations and/or community organization networks; 2) good cooperation between local entity or strong trend in direction; and 3) basic understanding among local people organizations and local officials about the operation of the project. Ibid., p.5.

rank officer of MoAC itself. Werachai said in his interview that “ *the most difficult problem we have been facing when implementing a participatory project is the attitude of officials. Only about 10 % seem to be receptive to change and ready for change*”. Annual performance review for promotion of the officials come from their higher ranking officers. Villager evaluations do not count.

88. Because of Ministry of Finance’s regulations, it is difficult to use national budget or funds channelled through the government to employ unregistered NGOs or CSOs directly. Most of NGOs and very few CSOs in Thailand are not registered. The strategy of pushing them to register as official consultant with the MOF seems to be problematic. As rightly observed by the team, while it might serve as motivation for the organisations to develop and to make themselves more systematic, but the registration is time consuming⁴⁰ and it might not suitable for development work. They may not be able to maintain their flexible nature. The villagers themselves may not want to see NGOs or CSOs as official consultant.
89. Many officials, at national and provincial levels in particular are still reluctant to adopt and adapt to a collaborative approach. They are more willing to co-ordinate with their officials colleagues but not NGOs.
90. Gender has not been mainstreamed. Ultimately, gender equality and women participation can be achieved only when women have equal opportunities, access to political voice, and economic resources. In many cases, in the project implemented in the five Southern most provinces in particular, women do not to appear in the public affairs. “*It always takes more time for women to decide to come at the front and to be recognized by the male fellows*” Chintana, one of the leading women human rights defenders said.

Millennium Development Goal in Thailand - UNDP

91. In his foreword of the first “Thailand Development Goals Report 2004”, Prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra advanced that “ *this report provides a powerful account of how Thailand has achieved most of the internationally agreed MDGs. I am confident that our experience can make a significant contribution to international efforts to meet development goals and targets*”.⁴¹ Actually he got some thing to be proud of since the report itself said: “*Thailand’s first MDGs report 2004 is a story of success, ambition, and tough challenges. Thailand has made remarkable progress in meeting most if not all MDGs. The internationally set targets for poverty, hunger, gender, HIV/AIDS, malaria, have been achieved more than fifteen years ahead of schedule. The education goal is likely to be achieved soon. And, progress is being made in reaching the targets of child and maternal health, as well as environmental sustainability*”⁴² Not satisfied with these achievements, Thailand commits itself to a set of more ambitious targets – called MDG Plus – that go beyond the internationally agreed MDGs. Thailand is one of the 10 developing countries conducting MDGs according to the UN’s standards.
92. Apart from MDGs Plus target, the Thai government has been going beyond the standard by attempting to apply MDGs at provincial level. Together with NESDB, UNDP put Mae Hong Son, in 2003, under pilot project for MDGs. The director of international economic unit said, “Mae Hong Son was selected because it was one of the poorest provinces in the country and in the North. The province has a very limited infrastructure and various ethnic minority groups. The NESDB would collect information on this northern border province relating to the UNDP goals, and assess the data obtained so as to produce the most suitable development strategy for it”.⁴³

⁴⁰ The researcher and friends spent 3 and a half year to register a foundation.

⁴¹ UNRC and NESDB, Thailand Millennium Development Goals report 2004, Bangkok, 2004, p.iii.

⁴² Ibid., p.xi.

⁴³ Bangkok Post, July 24,2003.

93. UNDP provides financial support for the implementation of the project. According to the plan the project would be completed within 8 months. UNDP and NESDB would choose a consultant team to carry out the project. Their task would be mainly collecting data and information in relation to MDGs in Mae Hong Son through participation of all parties concerned. TEI (Thailand Environment Institute) was commissioned to conduct the research. The draft report was presented to NESDB early May.
94. On the phone, the person responsible for MDGs session said *“if you want to contact someone who takes care of human rights section you would have to contact my colleague at governance and human rights section. She would be able to answer to your questions. I have nothing to do with human rights”* (UNDP’s MDGs’s desk officer, Bangkok). However, she kindly invited the researcher to observe the meeting organized by NESDB to consider the draft report submitted by TEI officers. Unfortunately, my presence was not welcome by the chair of the meeting, the NESDB officer. The reason given was that it was an internal meeting.

“The project is useful for Mae Hong Son. Complete data on all indicators would be helpful for CEO governor like me. We have problem of gathering data from different sources and agencies. Data and information are quite confusing. We need a unified data compiled by professional researcher. It would help us mapping and formulating strategies and plan”. (Supot Laowansiri, Governor, Mae Hong Son)

“MDGs and SES are not that different. The value added of MDGs is that it provides a more systematic data and problem analysis. It also makes recommendations and forecast. We expect to have a more tangible data not an abstract one”. (Sithichai Prasertsri, Deputy- Governor, Mae Hong Son).

“As far as I know, the data collected is mainly from secondary sources. The research team has set up an office at the Provincial house but no full time research staff. From time to time some would come from BKK. There were some meetings (but not many) in order to check data, mainly with government agencies concerned. Working through participatory process in Mae Hong Son is difficult. The main problems are communication and transportation. There are many ethnic groups who speak different languages, not many speak Thai. Many places are not accessible and it requires a lot of time to get there.”(Sithichai Prasertsri).

“I don’t think that learning process is a major component of the project. The research emphasizes on the collection of data related to quality of life. Participation aspect is not given importance” (Sithichai Prasertsri).

95. Interview got from the Deputy Governor was confirmed by another officer of provincial Community Development Department. He said *“ I don’t have much ideas about MDGs. The only participation we have so far is to provide the researchers information available”.* But, may be, because I just start my work in this province about 4 months ago”, he added. (Somdej Paichitkunchorn, Community development officer).
96. We wonder if finally UNDP and its partners have thought or sought to apply a rights-based approach to MDGs. We also wonder if MDGs is only about the production of report not about building a process of learning and participating in the analysis of people’s problems.

Social Investment Fund – the World Bank

97. In the aftermath of the economic crisis communities were placed at the centre of the problem. Many projects were initiate in order to alleviate the social impact and to create what the World Bank calls “social safety net”. Among relief projects introduced by international communities, Social Investment Fund (SIF) was supported by the World Bank.

98. The objectives set forth for SIF combined both short-term and long term. The short-term objectives are employment and income generation as well as addressing social needs by providing social welfare. The long-term objectives are multifold:
- to encourage social reform through the decentralisation of authority to include community participation in development;
 - to strengthen the local management capacity through participatory decision making at the community level;
 - to promote multi party partnership between government and people;
 - to promote self-reliant economy systems;
 - to stimulate local participation in social development including the promotion of civil societies and the concept of good governance.
99. The World Bank and the Japan Bank for International Co-operation (JBIC) decided to channel part of the funding through government agencies mainly into employment generation scheme. The major part was channelled directly to community-based projects. Social Fund Office was established and placed under the Government Saving Bank headed by Paiboon Wattanasiritham, an economist, the former banker turned community activist.
100. The funding included a Regional Urban development Fund amounting to 30 million dollar for loan to municipal governments, and the SIF of 120 million dollar for grants to community organisations. The management of the fund was placed under a 16-member board including academics, NGOs, officials, and six community representatives. Community organisations could directly submit the proposals to the board. Community organisations here were interpreted roughly to mean any grouping which has existed for one year. Monitoring and evaluation were done mainly by academics.
101. From 1998 to early 2002, SIF supported over 7,200 projects with total funds of 4,100 million baht. Half the funding was channelled to projects for immediate welfare. The remainder was distributed over a broad range of projects to build social capital. The number of beneficiaries (according to the application forms) was over 12 million. It was the first time a large sum of public resources was transferred to support community-led initiatives where funds were directly managed by grassroots organisations.⁴⁴
102. SIF was operated in five menus:
- Capacity and learning development in community development and community economy such as recycling, eco-tourism, community enterprises demonstration centres, agricultural demonstration centres, saving group networks, etc;
 - Community welfare and safety such as senior citizens health centres, child development centres, self-reliant alternative medicine treatment or herbal treatment centres, and so on;
 - Restoration, protection, management, and promotion of culture, environment and natural resources;
 - Group and network capacity building such as development and processing local products, establishment of information centre, community radio, etc;
 - Immediate community welfare project for the needy which emphasises the provision of immediate assistance directly to beneficiaries affected seriously by the crisis.

103. It was not easy to get the project fully started for many reasons;

⁴⁴ UNDP, Thailand Human Development Report 2003, Bangkok, 2003, p.58.

- Many strong NGOs and people's organisations were reluctant or even refuse to cooperate in the project funded by the World Bank. *"it's money from the demon. We don't want it"* said Bamroog Kayotha, a leading farmer leader and leading anti-IFIs group.
- The World Bank imposed very strict working guidelines under central control. The regulations however, were relaxed afterward. The screening and monitoring works were subsequently decentralised to eleven regions and then down to the provincial levels.

104. It should be noted that the committees were volunteer bodies were manned by people from all walks of life be they lawyers, social activists, business persons, religious and spiritual leaders, teachers, journalists, and so on. They screened, appraised, and monitored the projects. Some observed, however, that *"the screening criteria and process were too taught. It did not have much rooms for emerging groups. To ensure their success, the board tended to support the groups which were already strong"* (Napaporn Havanond, Srinakharin Wirot University). The researcher share this observation.

105. It is also important to reiterate the fact that SIF was the first which used the new method of funding community projects. Community had to come together and learn how to write a project proposal. NGOs were the major facilitators and helpers. Villagers from Petchaburi (Central) and Pitsanulok (North) a Nakornsriathammarat (South) echoed during our visits that *"SIF helps strengthening community groups. Applying for SIF is the whole process of learning."* (voices from the group meetings in those provinces). *"It helps building social networks"* (Somsuk – CODI)

106. In 2002, SOFO has come up with a report entitled "999 Days of Learning: Social Investment Fund." It listed some INDIRECT benefits of the project namely;

- Learning about the rights and responsibilities of individual and of the government organisations to the community;
- Learning about community power in self development and community development;
- Participation in every stage of implementation process resulting in a sense of ownership and desire to maintain the activity or structure that was created;
- Emergence of the process of identification and application of **social capital** that in some cases is personal expertise that will soon be lost.⁴⁵

107. If some of those comments are difficult to verify many evidences still remain. Strong people organisations are still active throughout the country. What is more difficult lies on the fact that many of those groups exist and are strong before SIF was operated. It is noteworthy that the Community Organisations' Development Institute, set up in 2000, established a network of community - level activists to develop regional and community plans and provide helps to weaker communities to deal with government.

108. As it was the first time that such a large fund went directly to people organisations bypassing the government structure, officials, mainly at local level, saw the SIF as a rival to their own work. The reality of the thing is that they are not used to work with others. By the same token, SIF volunteers and NGOs were/ are reluctant to work with officials. This kind of situation still prevails until today, though there is some improvement.

109. Networks and organisations built and strengthened by SIF could be weakened by the government project-the one million baht one village scheme-. This village fund is managed and allocated by a village committee but it did not emphasise on building social groups. This revolving fund is provided to individual and households. However, not all villages accept the fund. They are afraid that the sum would tear community apart. The government might believe that by providing the people capital, it helps empowering them. Empowerment has its true

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.59.

meaning only when it involves the process of empowerment both at individual and community levels, at least in Thai case.

The Project for Revitalisation of the Deteriorated Environment in Land reform Areas through Integrated Agricultural Development – JBIC

110. The Japanese ODA has been always important for developing countries in Southeast Asia including Thailand. For more than three decades, Thailand ranked in the first top five or top ten countries recipients of Japanese ODA. Japan has been the major donor for Thailand. Japan has seen its ODA as a tool for advancing their economic and commercial interests.
- 111.108. The end of the cold war brought about some changes in the Japanese ODA. For the first time in 1992, the Japanese government has announced its ODA Charter. In the fourth principle, it was mentioned that *“full attention should be paid to efforts for the promoting democratization and the introduction of a market-oriented economy, and the situation regarding the securing of basic human rights and freedoms in the recipient country”*.⁴⁶ In fact, not many even the Japanese themselves are aware of the existence of the Charter and definitely not human rights aspect of it.
112. The Project for Revitalization of the Deteriorated Environment in Land reform Areas Through Integrated Agricultural Development is particularly interesting for many reasons; 1) it is still an going project; 2) The Japanese side put three conditions on the implementing agency - the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) - that the project must include three components namely participation, sustainability, and NGOs (Werachai, ALRO); 3) the project might be among the first in which collaboration between officials and NGOs is imposed by Japanese donor.
113. The objectives set forth in the project, however, does not reflect much those principles. It aims to 1. introduce integrated farming, livestock, fruit tree cultivation..... and increase diversified cropping in the irrigated farmland; 2. implement agricultural infrastructure development plan particularly provision of the farm pond for each farm household; 3. provide training courses including training for the agricultural production, formation, management and strengthening of farmer’s organisations; 4. provide training for income generation to farmers such as small scale agro-processing industries; 5. provide rural infrastructure particularly road system.
114. Looking at the objectives mentioned above, one can say that those objectives reflect typical Japanese style of providing assistance. It was not clear where and when participation and the role of NGOs is integrated. However, the project has identified the factors affecting successful implementation of the plan. The success requires farmer’s participation, collaboration of and with NGOs in development, development of farmers’ leadership, and gender in development.⁴⁷
115. The project receives 1,400 million baht in the form of loan from JBIC. It is now in its second phase after six years of implementation. The project was extended for another 3 years. The implementing agency is AMRO. The project has been carried out in four provinces in the Northeast – Mukdahan, Sakon Nakhon, Khon Kean, and Mahasarakham.

“Since it is a loan project, the Bank has sent the experts and consultants to monitor and give us advice. In the past, those consultants were mainly engineers. It has changed now. Although we have opportunity to lay down the framework for implementation but the structure was determined by the donor and consultants”.
(Werachai, the project’s director, ALRO)

⁴⁶ Japan’s ODA Charter, June 30, 1992.

⁴⁷ Sanyu Consultants Inc, et al, the Project for Revitalization of the Deteriorated Environment in Land reform Areas Through Integrated Agricultural Development / Stage I, ALRO, MoAC, April, 2001, pp.3-3 – 3-4.

“Their assistance still focuses very much on hardware, building the roads, ponds, etc. The works have been done by Japanese firms or their sub-contracts. I don’t think we learn from the Japanese about participation. Rather they learn from us. However, we are happy that they learn from us. They said that they will use this project as the model for other countries”. (Werachai, ALRO).

116. It is not very clear when it comes to participation. *“Project management has been determined by Bangkok. The bidding is done in Bangkok. However, it is the farmers who decide and tell us where the pond will be built. They decide on activities they want to carry out. They decide by and for themselves”* (Suwit Laohasiriwongs, Agricultural consultant, Khon Kean University). *“Don’t forget that this is a loan project. It difficult to expect that it is open for full participation. Already, at a very beginning, the Japanese did the feasibility study and the Thai ministry designed and decided on the project”.* (Suwit).

117. How much women participate in the project? *“It is true that they are not really visible. It is always men who tell us what they want to do”* (Suwit).

“What is innovative in this project is that we involve NGOs into the process of implementation. But they have different style of working. We will have to live with it. The officials could learn from them”. (Werachai and Suwit).

118. In the implementation process, any project which attempts to involve NGOs will have to face the same problems, rules and regulations imposed by the bureaucracy.