

DEVELOPMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND NGOS

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A lecture delivered to a group of government officials in Bangkok on 24 April 2000 as part of a course on Development and Public Policy Analysis, organised by Emeritus Professor Richard Mulgan of the Graduate Programme in Public Policy, ANU, financed by IDP, Australia.

We have obviously reached a critical point in our attempts to develop Thailand for the benefit of everybody. Look at what is happening today with all big development projects. Several new projects to build irrigation dams have been suspended because local people have opposed them. The two big power-plant projects in Prachuab have become a big problem: the contracts are signed, but the local villagers don't want them, the communities are divided, and the dispute has occasionally become violent. Big waste-disposal projects face the same problems. The Genco plant in Rayong is facing opposition again, and new projects cannot find sites. Big new industrial estates have the same problem. The existing sites, such as Maphaphut, face big criticisms for pollution. And local protesters are already gearing up to fight against the proposed big new Thai-Malaysia project in the south.

1. How did we get into this mess?

In the past, government assumed the sole right to make decisions on large projects such as dams, power plants, waste disposal facilities, airports, major highways. It assumed that government had the right and duty to identify the 'national interest' in such cases, and that it had no duty to consult with, explain to, or ask permission from other parties involved.

In making such decisions, government employed a relatively narrow assessment of the projects' economic value as expressed in cost-benefit analysis. Very often, such assessments paid little or no attention to the loss of benefits suffered by people whose residence, way of life, quality of life, or health were in various ways prejudiced by the project.

Moreover these losses were often long-term losses of *livelihood* and *future opportunities*. Fishermen in the case of the Pak Mun dam lost their means of livelihood as freshwater fishermen. Other lost their land which had to be submerged in the flooded area. Villagers living near Mae Moh power plant, among other things, lost their good health and their asset base, as the price of their land fell to zero. A large number of villagers around the Bo Nok planned power plant will lose out in as far as coastal fishing and tourism are concerned. And so on. Yet none of these people receive 'sufficient compensations' due to them. Further it is debatable whether any compensation is truly 'adequate', as the value

people attached to their loss differs from one person to the next. How can one monetise and compensate for 'a way of life'?

Government could get away with this sort of treatment for two reasons. First, because people had little chance of effective resistance. The politics of the cold war period did not give opportunity for people to voice their opinions and protests. The media lacked freedom to expose the issue, and assist the public in voicing their grievances and values. Second, because at that time, we were operating in a land rich situation. The availability of free land meant that the best recourse for those affected was migration.

Very often too, the project assessments paid little or no attention to the long-term environmental damage. Again this appeared more tolerable as long as natural resources were not perceived to be under any serious threat. But the damage was real nonetheless.

Moreover the environmental impact might extend far beyond the immediate area of the project and the people immediately involved. For example, I as a member of the public feel the loss of over 50 rapids in the Mun river after the Pak Mun dam was built, even though I am not living near the area. I am sure many other people feel the same. The loss of one of Thailand's largest freshwater fisheries, a virtually free gift of protein from nature, is a permanent loss to society which will be very difficult (or very costly) to repair.

Like all non-transparent decision-making processes, this one fostered abuse. Private companies which supplied the inputs in terms of capital equipment, consultancy and raw materials lobbied for go-ahead decisions by the different departments in various ministries, sometimes offering bribes and commission fees to the officials and politicians concerned. Estimates were padded. Contractors paid backhanders to secure the assignment. Substandard materials were used. Fortunes were made on land speculation. Moreover, over time such abuses tended to become public, as rivals for the corruption traded counter-allegations.

These practices gave rise to the feeling that the use and management of natural resources are unfair, and devoid of the principles of social justice. Many little people are told to make their personal and community 'sacrifice' for the benefits of the 'nation'. Yet those who directly benefit from the project (shareholders, investors, beneficiaries) are not required to pay the full value for the use of the valuable natural resources, which the 'nation' may have to lose forever. Often also the attempts of the losers to express their grievances or their 'values', which are deemed to be their natural rights, are not only ignored, but suppressed by various means, judicial and extra-judicial, and sometimes violently.

It is this feeling of unfairness and social injustice which is at the core of the conflicts, and which can divide and alienate people from one another.

2. How did the problem emerge

Over the last twenty years there has been a complete change in the opportunities for public expression. This has come about as a result of the collapse of the cold war, the end of military dictatorship, the strengthening of parliament and other representative institutions, and the development of press freedom.

At the same time, there has been a general perception that Thailand has changed from a country in which natural resources were abundant to one in which resources are finite, threatened, and fragile. This perception has been formed both by direct local experience, and by increased sharing of information through a global movement of environmental concern. Moreover, the perception of resources under threat has increased as urbanization has accelerated since the early 1980s, and as urban demands for natural resources (land, water) and urban output of pollution (air, noise, water) have vastly accelerated.

As one part of this strain on resources, people no longer have the opportunity of migrating away to avoid the impact of a big project on their livelihood, way of life, or quality of life.

As a result of the twin trends of resource pressure and political liberalization, more and more people have been moved to protest against big projects in order to defend their own livelihood, way of life, or quality of life. Indeed, for many people still at the periphery of organized formal politics, such impositions on their life have been a major politicizing factor.

3. How we failed to confront the problem

This process has been going on for a long time. The landmark protests against the Nam Choan dam project took place over fifteen years.¹ Government has adjusted to these changes. But there is a growing conviction that government has not changed with a full heart and full commitment.

Government has accepted the idea of environmental impact studies of projects, and has passed a major legislation designed to protect the environment. But there is a growing feeling that these moves have not prevented completion of big projects which inflict large environmental damage. The controversy over the Pak Mun dam makes this abundantly clear.² There is also growing evidence that this comes about because environmental impact assessments can be easily abused. Some consultant companies tend to give the project-owner a favourable report because they know this will increase their chance of

¹ The Nam Choan project in the western forests was abandoned in 1989 after a long protest campaign.

² The Pak Mun dam project, sited close to the confluence of the Mun river with the Maekhong, was completed in 1994 in defiance of strong protests by local communities and environmental groups. It has now become clear that the dam has done much damage to one of Thailand's richest source of fresh water fishes, and if the project has been properly assessed in terms of its real costs and benefits, it should never have been built.

gaining more commissions in the future. Some simply have too narrow a focus, such as the Pak Mun report which ignored over 50 stretches of rapids which would be flooded with disastrous results for fish breeding. Some are simply careless, such as the Bo Nok report which failed to identify a large coral reef.

Besides, the definitions of environmental impact are rapidly changing and becoming more sophisticated. The conventions in current use concentrate very closely on the direct impact of the project. But large projects often have wider impacts whose effect will be felt in the future. Often they destroy environmental resources irrevocably. Often they deny the use of resources to people in the future. Perhaps they contribute in a small but additive way to the loss of biological diversity, the increase in global warming, or some other long-term environmental deterioration on a global scale. Such impacts are not assessed and computed in the cost-benefit analysis.

The government has adjusted to accept the principle of compensation to those whose livelihood is affected. But again the assessments have often been narrow, and the process has been grudgingly carried out. The assessment for compensation has often been a summary accounting of resources destroyed, with no accounting for the long-term loss of livelihood. Officials have resorted to subterfuge to deny compensation to some people in order to reduce the project costs. Promises of resettlement have often led to disappointment. Land was unavailable, already occupied, hopelessly inadequate for agriculture, or otherwise inappropriate. Grants to help people restore their way of life have been meagre.

The government has also adjusted somewhat to the principle that people must be informed and consulted about projects which will affect their lives and futures. But again the processes have often been carried out without full and sympathetic commitment. Project-owners try to manipulate local politics to ensure support for their objective. They mobilize money, influence and sometimes violence. The authorities have gradually come to accept that these procedures need to be formalized. But they remain reluctant to accept any strict process of public hearings. Ultimately they retain a paternalistic attitude and are reluctant completely to abandon the principle of bureaucratic right.

This reluctance to confront whole-heartedly the issues of environmental impact assessment, proper compensation, and proper procedures have led to a gradual decline of trust in the government authorities to handle decision-making on big projects. Projects are still built where the cost-benefit calculation is marginal, the environmental impact is not properly valued, compensation arrangements are mean, and consultation procedures are evaded. These facts inevitably create an impression that the projects are motivated not by a fair and proper assessment of the full costs and benefits, but by vested interests which have built up in the decision-making processes in the past. Government departments want to protect their reason for existence. Consultants want to ensure they are hired on future projects. Land speculators and contractors want to protect their sources of income.

As a result of the authorities' grudging and incomplete adjustment over a long period, there is now a wholesale challenge to the right and competence of government authorities to handle such projects. No large project can now escape challenge. Local affected groups have access to the knowledge and experience of those who have suffered from previous projects, and to the technical skills of people who have analyzed the errors and omissions in previous projects.

At present authorities are tending to confront this new opposition by political means. In particular, they try to raise political support for their projects often through public relations, exaggerated promises to client groups, and techniques of divide and rule. But ultimately these are short-term strategies which only contribute to the longer-run decline of trust.

5. This is not only our problem

Thailand has not been the only country facing these sorts of problems. That is because during the cold war period, many countries adopted a top-down approach to development planning, and found themselves in the same difficulty. So internationally, over the past few years, a different approach has become popular: the idea of development from below, grassroots development, development as if people mattered.

The new approach focuses on the concept of participation and cooperation, known as the bottom-up approach. This new approach requires that government officials allow participation of the people in the decision-making process and in the implementation of development projects. They may also have to cooperate with other social groups in the community, such as local saving groups, women's groups.

This new approach requires that government officials change their ways of looking at and doing things, from thinking that government officials know best and that people are ignorant to viewing the roles of government officials as supporting and facilitating and accepting that people have their wishes and their ways of doing things which may be more effective. Thai government officials for instance may even have to learn not only from the people in Thailand, but also from experiences of other governments working with their people in other countries.

In more recent years NGOs have increasingly played roles in working with peoples at grassroots levels. They have had advantages over government officials in some respects such as knowing the local situations and culture and being able to work with and in some cases receiving people's trust. In many cases, governments of developing countries increasingly cooperate with NGOs to achieve development objectives, or to achieve their working targets. So government officials have to work not only with people, but also with NGOs. Therefore a proper understanding of the relationship between development, state, NGOs and civil society is in order.

6. Civil society and NGOs

Let us look at the term civil society. This term in Thai is being translated as *prachasangkhom* or *sangkhompracha*. In general usage, the term civil society has come to refer to social groups outside the government. It includes institutions and varied social relationships, including households, trade unions, voluntary organisations, NGOs, hospitals, temples, markets, business associations, bankers' associations, vendors, saving groups, local urban communities (different *chumchon* which is being established in many slum communities all around Bangkok), women's groups, AIDS patients group etc. In Thailand, however, *prachasangkhom* has been used to refer to cooperative work between government, people, NGOs and business, such as in the case of *pracha sangkhom changwat* (Please see *Prachasangkhom thassana nak khit nai sangkhom thai*, edited by Chuchai Suphawong, Yuwadi Khatkanklai, Samnakphim Matichon, 2540). In this lecture I shall use the term to refer to the general usage, meaning groups outside government.

So when we talk about the roles of civil society, this is the same as talking about the roles of social groups outside the government circles. NGOs are a part of civil society.

NGOs are non-governmental organisations which carry out social works. NGOs workers may work as volunteers or they may get paid a small amount of salary from a charitable organisations or foundations which operate with no intention for profit.

NGOs originated in the west in the post WW II period with the aim to help those being adversely affected by the war. Many of the early NGOs were initiated by the churches such as the Catholic Relief Services (1943), the Church World Services (1946). CARE is another NGO originated in the post WWII period to assist people affected by the war. CARE is not related to any church. These three organisations are the origins of non-governmental organisations or what is now known as NGOs today. Later many similar types of organisations sprang up in the west to serve many different purposes, many aiming to assist the poor. For example Techno Serve was set up in 1968 to assist poor farmers, OXFAM America focuses on helping poor rural people; World Vision and Lutheran World Relief both have a policy of helping the poor in general.

In the beginning many of these NGOs operated in Europe and North America. Later they moved to work in developing countries, seeing that most of the poor are concentrated in these countries. They had a paternalistic belief. They wanted to see poor countries grow like developed western countries. They believed that unless these countries become like the west, poverty will not go away. Thus in the beginning solutions to the poverty problems were imitations of development experiences of the west. Later when these early efforts were not successful, they began listening to the voice of the local people. In more recent years western NGOs have changed their tactics. They mostly provide the financial support and other logistics to locally initiated NGOs which carry out development projects and programmes at the grassroots level. According to a study, NGOs spread in developing countries, because governments of these countries could not satisfy the demands of their people.

International NGOs may be divided into three types. First are the big NGOs. These are associated with various churches such as Catholic Relief Service, Church World Service, with the original aim of relief work, but later moving into developmental areas. The second group focuses on technical work. They are quite small and are not related to any church. Examples are Techno Serve and Dental Health International. The third group comprises many small NGOs which focus their work on making network for development purposes. These NGOs believe that development is not something which can be imitated easily, but must result from the reality of the local situations and the wishes of the local community. Examples are Trickle Up Program TUP, which tries to get people to develop programmes and projects for themselves. TUP wants people to develop small community businesses of their own. TUP will lend credit to a family or a group of families up to US\$100 to start a business. TUP will provide advise on technical matters, but most of the decision makings must come from the borrowers themselves. Between 1979 and 1998 TUP supported 52,000 small businesses in 103 countries.

NGOs which support projects in developing countries work at the grassroots levels in many varied areas, including on matters relating to economic development, human rights, environment protection, health, anti-corruption. They all receive funding in the form of donations from people in developed countries. Some NGOs receive financial support from their own government. USAID for instance gives part of its funding for developing countries via US NGOs. German government gives financial support to foundations like Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Konrad Adenauer. From 1989 the World Bank began working with NGOs, as a part of its policy to encourage the civil society to pressure government of developing countries to reform its bureaucracy and to adhere to the principle of good governance and transparency. In general the World Bank will not give direct funding to NGOs, but will do it via the government of that country. Sometime it specifies that certain project be implemented with the help of local NGOs, such as in the case of the Social Investment Programme (SIP) which was given to Thailand to counter the impact of the recent economic crisis. The World Bank specified that the loan under this programme be operated by local NGOs or local civil society. A World Bank-NGO project which is expanding rapidly is the micro finance which lends to small producers.

In total funding for NGOs around the world increased five fold in the last 20 years from US\$1,000 million in 1970 to US\$5000 million in 1990.

7. NGOs in Thailand and their activities

Sapha unalome daeng, established by Queen Sripitcharintra in the reign of King Rama V to assist soldiers wounded in WWI, was Thailand's first NGO. This organisation later developed into the Thai Red Cross. Other NGOs in this early period included an orphanage established with a private fund from a royal family member. Activities of these early NGOs were confined to social welfare work. In the post WW II period, more NGOs were set up with the aim to coordinate social welfare works and to engage in development activities in rural areas. One such early NGO in developmental work is the munnithi burana chonnabot established by Dr Puey Ungphakorn in 1967. But the proliferation of NGOs in development works really began after the student uprising in

1973, and much more after 1980. For those interested in the history of Thai NGOs, please read, *NGOs 2000*, edited by Narong Petprasert, published by the Political Economy Centre, Chulalongkorn University.

At present (2000) there are 17,000 NGOs, which are registered as foundations and associations in Thailand. Many of these may not be active at all. Most of the foundations do some charity works. Active NGOs may number about 140. In 1985 these active ones joined together and formed a NGOs co-ordinating body, in order to co-ordinate their work with government. In each region, there is also separate co-ordinating body. Active NGOs work in varied areas including children, women, health, slum, environment, small farmers, integrated farming, human rights, workers' rights, women workers' rights, farmers with land problems, consumer protection, anti-corruption, anti-violence against women, animal protection, and so on.

Dr Suthy Prasatset divided the activities of NGOs in Thailand since 1981 into four major areas: (a) the search for alternative livelihood; (b) networking of NGOs and peoples' organisations; (c) policy advocacy for people's plan, community rights to manage local resources and for sound environment and (d) strategic alliance building with other social forces.

(a) the search for alternative livelihood

In the early 1980s, most development NGOs were involved with solving the basic livelihood problems of small farmers. The strategy used in this period was focused on the principle of self reliance and people's participation. People were encouraged to organise themselves into activity groups such as cooperatives; formation of rice banks, fertiliser banks, buffalo and cattle banks; saving groups; community revolving funds for village stores, for rice mills; local handicraft groups. "The answer is in the villages" was the major slogan of most NGOs at the time. Marginalised farmers and NGOs workers worked together to seek new alternatives for their livelihood. They had some idea that their new occupations should encompass some or all of the following: they should produce enough for their own needs first and sell the surplus to markets; their production methods should be ecologically sound, that is not harmful to environment; and their ways of living should be based on local community culture.

The basic thinking behind these ideas was that by focusing on producing for their needs first and market second, people will be able to protect themselves from the negative sides of markets. There was an attempt to revive the study of local history and culture; to search for local wisdom or indigenous knowledge system for improvement of rural conditions. NGOs workers and villagers together synthesized various farming practices into mixed farming system or integrated farming, as an alternative agriculture for small farmers. Awareness and practices of traditional herbal medicines were promoted as a means for managing the village primary health care. Groups and community businesses were promoted, based on production of local handicrafts, weaving and sericulture, and other activities. Inter-village visits were encouraged as a means to learn from experiences of one another and to exchange successful methods of production and farming

organisation. Local wise persons were invited to participate as resource persons and in disseminating knowledge and ideas through seminars, workshops on rural development both at local and national level.

(b) Networking of NGOs and POs.

In the search for alternative livelihood at local level, rural NGOs tried to link up various sectoral activities into networks for sharing of experiences and information and coordinating their activities. With such efforts several networks of people's groups and organisations were formed. There are many of such networks, for example:

- networks of farmers engaging in integrated farming;
- networks of cattle-raising groups
- networks of local handicrafts groups
- networks of weaving/sericulture groups and other handicrafts
- networks of revolving fund groups
- networks of local wise persons
- networks of traditional irrigation organisations (muang fai)
- networks of community forest campaign groups
- networks of development monks
- networks of environmental protection groups
- networks of small fishermen groups, ect.

The networking of these groups and organisations facilitates a process of mass mobilisation in times of protest rallies for certain common causes and campaign, such as in anti military-dominated government (Suchinda) and in the campaign for democratisation in Thailand in the 1990s.

(c) Policy advocacy on rights to resources, sound environment and other issues.

Thailand went through an economic boom, based on exports of manufactures, tourism and agri-business growth, in the period from 1987 to the mid 1990s. The economic boom raised the demand for land and its prices to unprecedented levels. Small farmers and minority groups with insecure land rights were evicted, or were pushed aside, as land speculators, with support of local influential people and some government officials scrambled for lands in strategic locations for tourist resorts, golf courses, housing development and agri-businesses. The period saw an increase in resource conflicts pitting the state and corporate sector against the small farming sector and minority groups. In this intense conflicts, NGOs have come to defend the rights of small farmers and local community by undertaking active policy advocacy works as well as bringing the plight of affected farmers and minorities into public debates.

Within the context of sharpened conflicts, the people and NGOs have devised certain strategy for campaign in the form of policy advocacy at national level to effectively solve their problems. Several areas of policy advocacy work involve (1) the proposal of people's development plan, which demanded the state recognise the rights of local community to manage their local natural resources and their local affairs, to adhere to the

principle of gender equity, and protection of decent livelihood for the majority of the rural population; (2) asking the government to accept the sapha kasettakon rai yoi (Small Farmers' Assembly), which was jointly established by a number of farmers' groups in the northeast with support of a large number of NGOs, as representative of small farmers, instead of the government's proposed sapha kaset haeng chat (National Farmers' Council), which was designed to benefit big agri-business firms rather than small farmers; (3) the proposal of community forestry bill, which will enable people to live in and jointly help the government nurture and protect the community forests, without having to be evicted from the forests; and (4) the proposal to involve people in decision-making process of projects, which affect environment and large numbers of peoples such as dams, industrial waste disposals, large energy plants and other big projects.

(d) Strategic alliance building.

Apart from creating network among different peoples groups in different regions of the country, NGOs also maintain close links with intellectuals, academics, and the media as well as other social groups in order to gain wider support and legitimacy for their activities. As for political links, while a few NGOs forge ties with certain politicians and political parties in order to achieve some of their aims, the majority of NGOs have tried to work independently of politicians and political parties.

Some of the achievements of the NGOs in Thailand.

The followings are some of the achievements which Thai NGOs themselves think they have accomplished so far.

(1). NGOs have contributed towards strengthening the organisation among people in various ways. By helping provide information, arranging meeting and seminars which enable people to exchange views and ideas, NGOs have helped create networks of people's organisations. The strength of people's group may be judged from the ability to identify the causes of their problems, the ability to be self reliant economically, the ability to manage local resources, to organise and network with other social groups and organisations, as well as the ability to bargain with outside organisations and government agencies.

(2). In the area of environment, NGOs have contributed towards helping the local people protect and recuperate their environment, such as in the case of the Siew and Nampong Rivers. They have helped protected the Tung Yai Naresuan National Park, the Kaeng Sua Ten, the recuperation of coastal natural resources in Southern Thailand and in Songkhla Lake. NGOs were instrumental in campaigning against the construction of the Pak Mun Dam, which has now proven to be very damaging environmentally, and was not worth building had it been properly costed. Most important of all, in the situation where both government and corporate sectors view the rural sector merely as sources of materials and cheap labour and are not really interested in developing it for the people who live in it, NGOs becomes the only valuable friends in need of the rural people.

(3). In areas of alternative means of livelihood, NGOs have worked with the people to introduce integrated farming as a sustainable agriculture for small farmers. This was later accepted by government. NGOs further facilitate exchange of different types of integrated farming within the regions.

(4). In areas of women and children, Thai NGOs have promoted many women groups to enhance their means of livelihood, by setting up saving groups, handicraft businesses. AIDS patients are encouraged to form into self-help groups. A network of women in the informal sector are formed, including those working in garments making under sub-contract in shophouses and in slums in Bangkok and in the northeast and north. The purpose is to increase the bargaining strength so that they can demand a change in labour protection law to their advantage. Besides Thai NGOs work hard to set up some welfare facilities to assist women who are abused by their husbands, women who are lured into prostitution. Many NGOs work to enhance women's rights as workers, as mothers. Thai NGOs were instrumental in helping coordinate the women workers' movement to demand the right to take up to 90-day maternity leave. On children's welfare Thai NGOs have succeeded in setting up welfare facilities to assist street children, children who are abused by their parents, abandoned or neglected children, disabled children and so on.

(5). NGOs and the campaign for democracy.

In Thailand many grassroots NGOs have played very important roles behind the democratisation processes. This is seen in their key roles in the struggle for democracy during the crisis of 1991-1992, and in the movement to demand the 1997 constitution. Many NGOs have continued to be active in overseeing that supplementary laws are passed to ensure that the conditions and spirit written into the new constitution of 1997 are followed. Moreover there are also NGOs working to protect and enhance human rights. In the present context where none of the political parties has paid attention to developing their support among the grassroots membership, NGOs fill the vacuum in helping the people connect to politics, and work with people to push for political reform.

8. NGOs and government.

The relationships between NGOs and government in Thailand are varied. The writing of the Eighth Plan with assistance and cooperation from many NGOs is an example of a good relationship, which could be a model to other countries. But in other areas, there is still a lot of antagonism between the two. For example the relationships between NGOs working for small farmers (such as the Assembly of the Poor) and environmental NGOs and the Irrigation Department and the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand are not so good.

At present several environmental NGOs are in conflict with the Irrigation Department over the proposal to build several dams. If the costs of the environmental and social impact of these dams were taken into account properly, the costs would far outweigh the estimated benefits to farmers. Many NGOs are in conflict with the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand over the proposals to build large energy plants which have serious

environmental repercussions, and which are opposed by local people who were not consulted at the planning stage. The decisions were taken and the construction contracts issued before local people realised what was going on. Some government officials have taken the view that had it not been because of these NGOs, villagers would continue to be compliant and not be able to oppose the government's big project. This view is rather one-sided and neglects the fact that NGOs will not be able to get villagers' support at all if the villagers do not appreciate the work that NGOs do.

9. Why do NGOs gain support among the people?.

NGOs in Thailand have often been criticised as being too radical, receive outside help. Some conservative elements among government labelled some Thai NGOs as being part of the communist plot. Certainly not all NGOs are successful. Neither do they get on well with government officials. Some of their working people may not be very efficient or effective. Some may appear to be rather idealistic. But it is rather far fetch to see them as being a part of communist plot in this day and age.

In more recent years NGOs in Thailand have gained more public support. Well known ones include those working for children, d for women's rights, for human rights, for environment and for democratic movements.

Evidence of the Thai people's appreciation of the NGOs work may be seen in the number of long-term, committed NGO workers who were elected in the recent senate election.

NGOs in Thailand gain support from people for many reasons.

Their work affects the people positively. Many NGOs work to improve the livelihood and to protect the rights of the under-privileged groups in society, such as the slums, AIDs patients, children, women, in consumer protection, in human rights, in helping minorities group, workers, and so on.

By working closely with people, NGOs have been able to appreciate the culture of ordinary people. At the same time, people learn from NGOs how to form into groups, how to organise meetings, rallies, as well as means of communication and new knowledge. NGOs have helped them engage in networking and increasing the strength and confidence to solve their own problems.

NGOs not only create linkages among different peoples' groups, but also create links between people and academics and in some cases with government officials. They bring the issues affecting small people into the public arena, via the media, meetings and seminars, academic research projects, and so on.

In alternative agriculture, NGOs have worked with villagers to synthesise methods of integrated farming. They have helped to link villagers with consumers and community businesses. Although there is still a long way to go to succeed, villages who would like to

continue with sustainable agriculture as a means of livelihood come to have more confidence to fight for their survival.

In areas of environment and conservation of natural resources like forests and water, many NGOs work hard to make the society appreciate the issue of environmental concerns. Some of them have been instrumental, together with cooperation from academics, to draft a legislation to help protect environment, such as in the case of community forest and the amendments of the present environmental laws.

In areas of human rights, NGOs have worked hard to fight for the respect of human rights in such issues as rights for housing, rights to livelihood, women's and workers' rights in self expression and other basic human rights of people.

In sum it can be said that NGOs in Thailand have now become an important part of Thai society. They have worked in development issues and have become important partners in development, which government can no longer deny.

10. How we can move forward

Participation by people from the beginning of development plans and big project initiatives is a must. But participation to be meaningful requires the Thai state, its technocracy and the middle class to change their attitude to accept the principle of participation, democracy, governance and accountability.

The principles of participation, social justice, legitimate methods of resource management further require rethinking about the true values of natural resources - not only immediate market values but also the sustainable values over the life of the resources; not only the principle of polluter pays but also user pays; rethinking about alternative methods of providing services; rethinking about a variety of different systems of ownership, management, and participation. The society must also provide participatory channels for people to voice their feelings. Accountability must be adhered to by all parties including government and technocrats.

While making good legal frameworks, and rules and regulations are important parts of the whole process, the change in the decision making process along democratic lines is even more fundamental. This can only be achieved within a democratic process where dissenting voices can find expression and be truly listened to, and where ways forward can be discussed and worked out with all parties participating.

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