

HUMAN SECURITY AND THAI NGO & GOVERNMENTAL ROLES

Jane J. Simmons

Background

The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a new international world order. Among the changes was the shift from a bi-polar world of a capitalist West and a communist East to a world in which the United States is the sole superpower. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, new states rapidly emerged. For example, the glue that had long held Yugoslavia together was its fear of the Soviet Union evoking the Brezhnev Doctrine should internal strife become untenable in the eyes of the Soviets. Consequently, with the disintegration of the USSR, new states within Yugoslavia, a nation that was

glued together by the Treaty of Versailles following World War I, have come into being through internal conflict that eventually brought about foreign intervention.

With the fall of the USSR, capitalism spread throughout the world and globalisation and interdependency became the new buzzwords. Globalisation made possible the uncovering and potential development of new 'growth areas'. Among these growth areas is the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), a part of which lies in Thailand. This growth area, like the EU, hopes to encourage economic co-operation and aims to reduce trade and

The author has a Honors Degree in Journalism from Southern Illinois University, USA. She continued her Graduate Study at the University of Leeds, where she specialized in Asian Pacific Studies. Ms. Simmons is bilingual in English and Thai, fluent in Japanese and Mandarin.

regulatory barriers in search of a competitive edge. It desires to attract domestic and foreign investment and to promote exports for the mutual benefit of the areas and countries involved (East Asia Economic Unit 1995).

The concept of human security emerged in response to global tragedies and social upheavals, along with the rise of globalisation, economic co-operation and growth areas. Recent threats of globally organised terrorism add to the current problems faced by the international community. Although these may not be new problems, modern communication and transportation have effectively interconnected the world in ways that were unimaginable just a century ago. Today, a problem in one country can and often does spill over into a neighbouring country and may affect an entire region or even the entire international community. Countries face situations in which even internal and inter-country disputes may now bring about outside intervention. During and before the Cold War, these disputes were almost the sole concern of the governmental authority of that particular country. Human security calls for international co-operation and involvement of non-state actors such as international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in dealing with these problems.

In this paper, human security issues in Thailand and how NGO-government relations bear on the human security

issue will be discussed. Although Thailand may have achieved stable and rapid economic growth over the past three decades, human security problems abound, as most of the created wealth is concentrated in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR). Moreover, income inequality between the urban and rural areas has been worsening with many if not most people living in the rural areas still “lacking basic amenities such as toilet facilities, piped water, and electricity” (Girling 1996: 72). In addition to poverty in the rural areas, AIDS is prevalent especially in the North and Northeastern provinces. Insurgencies still occur along the Thai-Burmese border. Compared to other GMS countries, Thailand has a vibrant civil society with active NGOs, but it was only after the Cold War that they became more active on issues concerning the environment and poverty alleviation.

Since human security is a relatively new concept, put forth by the United Nations for the first time in its United Nations Development Report in 1994, there are currently relatively few studies on the topic. One major difficulty appears to be the lack of a precise definition for the term. Although most scholars agree that human security is the concern for the welfare of human beings, it encompasses a broad range of interests such as education, poverty and healthcare. The scope and vagueness of the term presents a difficult challenge in

trying to develop a workable definition. When scholars do try to study human security, the focus tends to be on issues associated with Africa, and more recently, with Afghanistan and Central Asia. East Asian countries other than the new ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar) have received less attention from the international community concerning human security mainly because they have achieved substantial economic growth and development in a relatively short span of time. World bank data indicates that GDP growth rate averaged at 5.3% and the proportion of people living in extreme poverty dropped from 29% to 23% for the period of the year 1990 to 1999 in the East Asia and Pacific region (World Bank 2002). The financial crisis that struck in 1997 resulted in negative growth rates and political turmoil in some East Asian countries.

The vagueness of the human security concept also makes it difficult for researchers to assess or measure its effectiveness in policy implementation. Some scholars such as Gary King and Christopher Murray attempted to deal with poverty as a major challenge for human security in their article, "Rethinking Human Security", based upon their justification that "because security is based on the risk of severe deprivation, it depends heavily on the concept of poverty." (King and Murray 2001: 593) To assess policies regarding human security in fighting poverty, King and Murray proposed a detailed

measuring scheme using various economic concepts (see article under the section 'Measuring Human Security' for details).

Although the concept remains unclear and difficult to measure, the author aims to address the questions: can the Thai government really co-operate with the NGOs to ensure human security in Thailand? And, can the Thai NGOs really perform effectively in present day Thailand? To do so, current definitions of human security will be given. Some recent developments of civil society and NGO activities in the region will be explored and the relationship between the Thai State and NGOs will be addressed in terms of problems and challenges in order to assess their developments in the region.

Perhaps the most difficult problem faced while writing this paper was securing reliable information. The Thai NGOs, for example, do not put much, if any, concrete data on its inter-net web pages and certainly no financial or budgetary data. Speaking to staff personnel was almost useless. Standard Thai non-answers and promises to give information were given and of course they were never forthcoming. Foreign NGOs often include budgetary information on their web pages. A friend who is employed as professional staff at a major embassy was asked about NGOs in Thailand. That person had no specific information, but mentioned that when asking about NGOs among staff who should know

only found out that it was a hot topic. A report was conducted on NGOs and their leadership, organisation, operations, effectiveness but that report was classified and not open to the public.

Definitions of Human Security

The definition of human security as given in the 1994 United Nations Development Report stated in its report that human security is intrinsically linked with human development, though they are not identical. Human development is defined as “a process of widening the range of people’s choices. Human security means that people can exercise these choices safely and freely – and that they can be relatively confident that the opportunities they have today are not totally lost tomorrow.” (UNDP Report 1994: 23). This is an obscure definition at best.

Four characteristics were used to describe human security: 1) human security is a universal concern; 2) the components of human security are interdependent; 3) human security is easier to ensure through early prevention than later intervention; 4) human security is people-centred (UNDP Report 1994: 22-3). From these characteristics, one could infer that human security affects the livelihood of people and that it requires co-operation from the international community. The report outlines seven categories of threats to human security:

economic, health, food, environmental, personal, community, and political. (UNDP Report 1994: 24-5). It is interesting to note that the UNDP report did not specifically include religious intolerance and persecution as a human security threat despite the fact that religion plays a major role in the lives of many people and religious clashes are a major problem in many parts of the world.

Economic conditions are stressed as a foundation of human security in the UNDP report that states: “all people should have the opportunity to meet their most essential needs and to earn their own living.” (UNDP Report 1994: 24) Poverty, of course, is well represented in the economic security category of human security. Poverty can obviously prevent ordinary citizens from having access to food (food security), health services (health security), and sanitation (environmental security). It also lies at the heart of forced child labour and prostitution (personal security). For this reason, many of the international organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations aim to make poverty alleviation and eradication one of their primary objectives.

The Human Security Network, founded in 1999 by Canada and Norway, two strong proponents of human security, stated that humans must be free from threats to their rights and safety in order to be secure. “It does not offer a single definition of

human security but proposes to bring a more diversified perspective to security interests. Human security is about recognising the importance of the security needs of the people [concomitant] with those of states, minimising risks and taking preventive measures to reduce human vulnerabilities, and taking remedial action when preventive measures fail.” (Human Security Network)

According to Caroline Thomas, Professor of Global Politics at the University of Southampton, “human security describes a condition of existence in which basic material needs are met, and in which human dignity, including meaningful participation in the life of the community can be realised. Such human security is indivisible; it cannot be pursued by or for one group at the expense of another.” (Thomas 2000: 6) Professor Thomas’ definition has the advantage of being succinct as long as “basic material needs are identified.

Though there have been many attempts to define the concept, there has yet to be a precise definition of it. Current definitions are quite numerous and all too inclusive. This makes it difficult for policy-makers to come to grips with it and prioritise their concerns. Is education more important than healthcare? Is education a basic need? Despite the ambiguity of what constitutes human security, Roland Paris pointed out that the concept served as “...glue that holds together a

jumbled coalition of ‘middle power’ states, development agencies, and NGOs ...” It is precisely because the concept is broad and ambiguous that all perspectives and objectives of the coalition members are included (Paris 2001: 88).

The definition given by Professor Thomas that human security requires both qualitative and quantitative aspects will be used. The quantitative aspects include the ability to afford basic necessities identified as food, shelter, education and health care (Thomas 2000: 6). This list, of course, includes what the Thais call *Pajjai-see* or the four necessities of life: food, shelter, clothing and medicine (health care). The qualitative aspects refer to the “...achievement of human dignity which incorporates personal autonomy, control over one’s life and unhindered participation in the life of the community...” (Thomas 2000: 6). In short, the author defines human security as the ability of the people to acquire and retain the basic necessities of life and to live life free from degradation and dehumanisation.

Nature of NGOs

The World Bank defines NGOs as organisations that are not part of a government and do not work for a profit. The Commission for Human Security stated that “...non-state actors are particularly well suited to engendering human security in the new

world context.” (CHS) State actors normally function and manage policies and issues at the national level with the objective of benefiting citizens overall as a group. This implies that certain groups will be overlooked and lose out. If human security, in principle, deals with people at the individual level, then it seems that it should not be left in the hands of the public sector. The NGOs have always campaigned for issues previously neglected or given short shrift by the state such as protection of human rights, poverty alleviation and clean environment – issues that human security encompasses (Acharya and Acharya 2000). Therefore, it would seem reasonable to assume that increased attention to human security issues could best be addressed by the NGOs.

The NGO could play a critical role in spurring the development of human security in rural Thailand. Clark describes the ways NGOs could influence mainstream development as follows:

- 1) encouraging official aid agencies and government ministries to adopt successful approaches developed within the voluntary sector;
- 2) educating and sensitising the public as to their rights and entitlements under state programmes;
- 3) attuning official programmes to

public needs through acting as a conduit for public opinion and local experience;

- 4) operational collaboration with official bodies;
- 5) influencing local development policies of national and international institutions including decentralisation and municipal reforms; and
- 6) helping government and donors fashion a more effective development strategy through strengthening institutions, staff training and improving management capacity (Clark 1997: 44-5)

Before we move on, a few words concerning the Thai Government's elected officials and the 'civil service' are in order.

Nature of the Thai Government

Thailand is a democracy and the people elect the government, but the civil servants or *kha-ratchakarn* (the servants of the crown) for the most part see themselves as 'masters of the people' and certainly not as civil servants as the concept exists in the West. Thai Governments come and go but the civil service just goes on. These bureaucrats include the provincial government officials including non-elected governors. They deal with the

local people through “local powers”. The bureaucracy or civil service is the key to long-term policy implementation because, unlike the frequently changing coalition governments, the bureaucrats normally hold on to their positions for long periods of time. Thus, these bureaucrats are the ones providing continuity to social programmes.

When a government seeks to address issues such as poverty alleviation and environmental degradation, the state will normally find that its macro-instruments are inadequate for the task (Clark 1997: 43). In the case of Thailand, policies concerning rural development are often neglected because of bias in policy prioritisation. Industrial activities and urban development are favoured over agricultural activities and rural development (Girling 1996: 71). During its years of rapid growth, industrialisation was seen as the key to development and the government made that its priority – hence the extended gap in development and income of two areas of today. Therefore, in failed states, and to a large extent in Thailand, the NGOs are sometimes the only actors available to speak up for and protect vulnerable groups.

It is precisely because of perceived governmental inadequacy and bias in policy-making that NGOs emerged as important actors in Thai civil society. Thai NGOs often represent unheard voices of the people, usually powerless peasants. When people are directly and

adversely affected by state-sponsored projects, they sometimes hesitate to protest. To understand why ordinary Thai are incapable of or unwilling to stand up to authority, one must understand Thai culture. “Wealth, power, seniority, rank, and ‘being the boss’” play a very important part in the lives of the Thai (Mulder 1994: 46). It is ingrained in the Thai culture that one fears (*kreng-klua*) and respects (*kao-rop*) authoritative and powerful people because “...to the Thai, authority and power are natural and reflect the moral and ethical excellence of the holder...the traditional organisation of Thai society was built on lines of command.” (Simmons 1997: 19)

Thai also tend to avoid confrontation, often choosing to ignore the problem and hoping that it would automatically disappear. Buddhism, the dominant religion in Thailand lies at the root for this type behaviour. Buddhism is a religion that emphasises self-discipline. Non-confrontational tactics are equated with self-discipline. Keeping cool and avoiding loss of face (*karn-sia-na*) and/or offending the other party are admired attributes. Therefore, strong leadership is necessary to mobilise the Thai masses and NGOs may at times be able to provide leadership. According to Suchit Bunbongkarn, “the main objective of the NGOs is to reduce the power and authority of government agencies and to give more power to the community.” (Suchit 1996: 100)

Need for NGO-Government Relationships

Accordingly, the relationship between NGOs and states is often strained. States sometimes perceive NGOs as a threat to their political power and even to national security itself. Conversely, NGOs remain suspicious of the government's motives and intentions (Clark 1997: 47). Both sides may have some valid reasons to hold these views since there are many and varied situations that lend credence to these beliefs. Regardless, to maximise the benefit of the people and for social agendas to work, co-operation between the public and the non-profit sectors is needed. According to John Clark, an environment of co-operation rather than competition and a healthy relationship between the public sector and the non-profit sector is most conducive to effective policy implementations of human development (Clark 1997: 44). Professor Thomas, however, proposed an 'alternative approach' to the current neoliberal approach to development. In this approach, the ultimate goal is 'participatory local democracy' where the people can exert control over their own lives. This can be achieved through politics, rather than market or civil society, because "national governments are mandated to represent citizens, they are accountable to citizens and they are responsible for the human security of citizens." (Thomas 2000: 123)

Naturally, it depends on the kind of government in place where this "alternative approach" is to be enforced. Professor Thomas did make it a point to remind readers that the 'alternative approach' will work only if the state has a well-developed mechanism for encouraging participation within its political structure. She also did not totally dismiss the role and significance of NGOs and civil society. (Thomas 2000: 124) Her points are well taken, but Thailand does not have a government that has a well-developed mechanism for encouraging participation among the masses.

Even in a democracy, government-led social policies are not always efficient and effective. There are certain things that are simply beyond the reach and scope of the public sector. Though the government may express poverty alleviation or rural development as major objectives, such projects, in order to be effectively implemented, require a grassroots approach. Even if they wanted to, Governments usually do not have the resources, manpower or framework to deal with these projects at that level. Moreover, government projects often require unnecessary overhead costs (Adelman 2002). Red tape and corrupt government officials and bureaucrats are common enough to render many public sector projects ineffective. To the contrary, NGOs were founded and operate on humanistic principles that work best at the grassroots level.

However, NGOs face many difficulties and challenges that also impede their activities and effectiveness. In short, both the public sector and the non-profit sector are often ineffective, but each has its own sphere of operation in which it can act more effectively than the other. Often, real effectiveness calls for collaboration and co-operation between the state and the NGOs, but this does not mean that collaboration and co-operation will actually take place.

In fact, NGOs and the Thai government have begun to work together witness the participation in the promulgation of the eighth and ninth national development plans. That said, there is the ever-present problem of corruption should the relationship become too cosy. Should the NGOs rely too much on the government, whether for funding or other incentives, NGOs risk giving up some of their autonomy and thereby lose credibility by having to overly compromise their positions in order to keep their activities in line with the government's agenda. On the other hand, if the NGOs maintain their distance, a lack of communication may result along with an uncoordinated effort in trying to achieve similar goals. Generally, the Thai are very verbally oriented and face-to-face communication is the norm. Even in verbal communications problems abound due to cultural factors. According to the value classification analysis prepared by Sitaram and Cogdell, peace is a primary value in Eastern cultures whereas it is a

tertiary value in Western cultures. Not surprisingly, frankness is a primary value in the West but a secondary value in the East (Ronen 1986: 36). Since frankness would almost certainly bring about confrontation, most Thai would go to great lengths to avoid it. Thai politicians are the exception and do confront those of other political parties on a regular basis. The Thai general public accepts this because the politicians are "big" people. Face-to-face communications between the NGOs and the bureaucrats will almost always lead to a cosy or antagonistic situation depending on the personalities of those involved.

These shortcomings may seem to doom NGOs and place them at a severe disadvantage when trying to work with government officials and working toward their organisational objectives. But, by and large in Thailand, the converse is also true as the government is notoriously poor at co-ordination, lacks good management and qualified staff and holds negative attitudes toward the NGOs. Actually, when NGOs are small and one issue oriented co-ordination and the top down, hierarchical situation is of much less importance in running a successful operation

Barriers to NGO-Government Relationships

Any Government that is serious about improving the human security of

its people should realise that NGOs can play an important role. It should be in the best interest of the Thai government to attempt to establish good work relationships with the non-governmental organisations. NGOs, for their part, need to realise their weaknesses and should also try to build a co-operative links with the State in order to enhance their performance and better influence governmental policy decisions. However, there are some barriers to the building of a healthy NGO-State relationship that should be considered as they attempt to collaborate. These barriers, according to Clark, include policy environment, government factors, NGO factors and donor factors (Clark 1997: 49-52) It appears that Clark really didn't address a key factor: the NGO-Government-Business (NGB) relationships. In a democracy that has a capitalistic economic system this triad cannot be overlooked. In Thailand, one might say that the Government already has a cosy relationship with business since many previous and the current Prime Ministers and Cabinet Ministers have included a number of wealthy businessmen.

1. Policy Environment: An environment of tensions and mistrust because the NGOs and government come into direct conflict with each other.

In the GMS provinces, the Thai government, with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), is

actively promoting development in infrastructure, energy, transport, and tourism. For example, the Oxfam Community Aid Abroad reported in its newsletter that representatives from the ADB, NGOs and the Mekong Basin community attended a conference in June 2000. The Thai environmental NGO, TERRA (Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance), headed by Witoon Permpongsacharoen questioned the Bank's role in the region. The NGOs and the community members argued that ADB-funded projects impose stringent conditions on loans made to the Thai government for infrastructure projects. One recent loan required privatisation of water, an economic measure which Witoon and other NGO members believed would hurt small-scale farmers. The Thai government claimed that subsidies for the community's use of water results in the distortion of the free market. The NGOs countered with the argument that large corporations receive subsidies from the government. The community was also upset in that they were excluded from the decision-making process of projects that directly affect their livelihood. The NGOs in the GMS are presently in opposition to the government's water privatisation law (Lowe 2000).

2. Government Factors: Factors that include the level of commitment from the government to participatory development and co-operation with NGOs

As already noted the Thai government has shown it to be more committed to human security and rural development and has become more co-operative with NGOs than it was prior to 1997. However, there are several major barriers to a healthy government-NGO relationship: corruption, nepotism and the Thai bureaucracy. In Thailand, there are groups of local elite such as the *gam-nan* and the *nai-umpur* (village and district officers), large landowners, commodity dealers and others, who, through “community participation”, co-operate with government agents by serving as middlemen between bureaucratic provincial officials and local villagers. The local elite grows rich and powerful as they accumulate wealth through illegal means and direct or indirect government patronage (Girling 1996: 74). The money is then used to establish relationships with strategic superiors and these “local powers” normally end up in local politics (Girling 1996: 75)

Cases abound that illustrate abuses of power and authority by bureaucrats. One example, the governor of the northern province of Khampaeng Phet was accused of harassing the Hmong villagers, a hilltribe ethnic minority in Thailand. According to the villagers and NGO representatives, Governor Siva Saengmanee had abused his authority by sending in 73 military and border patrol police to stop the villagers from farming. The villagers asserted that three elderly women had died from fright relating to the incident. The

governor claimed that the villagers’ method of farming destroys the environment and encroaches into land not belonging to them. Provincial authorities and the villagers finally reached an agreement, but the troops never left and the villagers claimed that the governor remained uncooperative (Bangkok Post 1996). Other incidents of bureaucratic boorish behaviour toward the disadvantaged are commonplace and are reported in the press and even shown on National T.V. As often happens, when government officials or police officers et al ill and even illegal behaviour catches the attention of the major media and the situation is about to reach the boiling point they are invariably transferred to another part of the country.

3. NGO Factors: When NGOs refuse to co-operate with the government out of mistrust or contempt, they risk being isolated.

There are laws and legal policies that should facilitate co-operation among government agencies and NGOs. For example, the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environment Quality Act (ECNEQA-1992) provides a legal basis and gives policy guidelines to enhance interaction between government agencies and NGOs. The Act allows the public the right of access to information and participation in certain environmental issues with local authorities by establishing volunteers to assist government agents, and by giving the

opportunity for NGOs to register as NGOs with MOSTE (Riska 1999).

These laws and regulations may sound impressive, but how they are implemented into the day to day interactions between the actors is another thing. Social Scientist Adul Wichiencharoen call Thai “bad Law-abiders.” Mr Wichiencharoen wrote: “They (Thai) never take rules regulations or law seriously either as law enforcer or law abider...Violation of law and order is so frequent that sometimes Thai people take it as part of life.” (Simmons 1997: 19)

In addition, there are official and unofficial organisations that co-ordinate the interaction between NGOs and the Thai government. These include The National Council of Social Welfare, established in 1960, and the NGO-Co-ordinating Committee on Rural Development that was set up in the 1980s. Some ministries have created NGO liaison offices to include and work on NGO matters; however, since local governments are not legally required to co-operate with NGOs, co-operative efforts are voluntary (Riska 1999). Not being a legal requirement just about insures that not much will be accomplished especially in those areas under the auspices of old line, traditional government civil service bureaucrats.

Despite some signs of co-operation between the Thai government and NGOs, there remains a strain on the

relationship. Each side tends to continue to view the other negatively. A recent example of this strain was reported in the Bangkok Post when some 300 NGO members gathered in front of the government house for a 2-day rally called to protest the government’s decision of permitting the use of force against opponents of state projects. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, one of Thailand’s richest businessmen, refused to meet NGO members and criticised the NGOs for staging a rally to gain media publicity to “...show the outside world they were doing something” in order to acquire funding (Supawadee 2002). Statements of this nature give credence to those who believe that the government does not see the real value of NGO activities.

4. Donor Factors: Factors that lead the government into thinking that recipients of external donors are foreign agents, causing some governments to fear that they are being excluded from the decision-making process.

This was particularly true of Thailand in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the NGO movement took off with strong support from foreign donors of whom the Thai government was suspicious. The availability of foreign funds in the early years lessened the need for Thai NGOs to seek local funding (Juree 2001). At that time, “many government agencies were concerned that liberal non-profit organisations were being penetrated by

foreign funders. Labour movements and advocacy activities were viewed as being initiated and financially supported from outside Thailand having externally developed agendas. This led to tightened rules and regulations.” (Riska 1999)

Unfortunately, International NGOs and some foreign donors started pulling out of Thailand when the Thai economy grew to levels to which they believed were sufficient for NGOs to be able to become self-supporting. Even before the 1997 economic collapse a slowdown in NGO growth was underway. The international NGOs and donors have yet to return in any significant numbers. A major problem of many NGOs is, in fact, the lack of funding. This lack of funding presents a major obstacle to NGO participation in activities relating to human security. If Thai NGOs could solve their funding problem then they could become a more powerful force for enhancing human security in Thailand.

Obstacles to Fund-raising for Thai NGOs

1) There exists a negative perception of NGOs among the public. Many Thai have accepted the idea that NGOs are “agents of foreigners whose aim is to undermine Thai society and the Thai way of life.” (Juree: 2001) An article in the Bangkok Post described NGOs engaged in rural development and natural conservation as annoying some

people both within and outside the government because their activities are often in direct conflict with businesses and government agencies. Of course, one could argue that NGOs should have a kind of adversarial relationship with businesses and government agencies. The public, many of whom hold orthodox views of development, has problems in understanding these ‘noisy’ activities fostered by NGOs because they do not understand the work of NGOs and thinks that these activities interfere with national development (Wasant 1998). Of course, some global NGOs may well have political agendas of their own that have nothing to do with serving the interest of the Thai people. As long as these negative perceptions persist, many of the NGOs will have a difficult time raising funds from the public.

2) The numbers and location of middle-class Thai are also a factor in the fund-raising problem. Middle-class Thai are educated and tend to care for and support many social causes and programmes that NGOs advocate. They have the capacity to differentiate between the NGOs and not fall prey to blanket charges. However, the Thai middle-class is small as compared to the general population and there are numerous NGOs seeking funding assistance. The interest groups that are to be served by the NGOs cannot afford to contribute money to their programmes. Moreover, the majority of the Thai middle-class resides in the BMR.

3) Therefore, the NGO activities they support are most likely to be activities that serve needs in the BMR and not those in rural areas or in the GMS. This makes it difficult for NGOs operating in the rural areas where the needs may be greater, but donors are almost non-existent.

4) Cultural factors also serve as a deterrent to fund-raising. The concept of philanthropy in Thailand is quite different from that of the West. Buddhism does stress *karn-tam-boon* (merit-making or alms-giving) as one way to be reborn into a better and more comfortable life. One might suppose that this fact would help NGOs in their fund-raising, but this is not the case. A Thai Buddhist believes that he or she makes the most merit by donating money to *Wats*, or Buddhist temples, rather than donating money to charities or NGOs. They also offer small gifts of money in a one on one situation -- as to beggars and street urchins. The wealthy Thai in addition to making donations to *Wats* and governments schools and the like also donate money to the royal charities. They often do this to gain face with the public and in hope of earning titles and other honours bestowed by the royal family.

5) NGOs lack public relations skills. NGOs strive to gain a positive reputation yet they are hesitant to give out information or even to answer direct questions. Exploring Internet sites we can find NGO budget information

readily available from non-Thai NGO, but not from any of the Thai NGOs. During this research, many attempts for interviews with Thai NGOs were made without much success. As Keith Ross, a management consultant who once was an executive for a Thai NGO said, "NGOs, or any organisation in Thailand for that matter, are not happy about releasing accurate information to outsiders. They are all paranoid about giving their competitors any help." It would seem that NGOs should welcome a chance to have their say and the opportunity to enhance their reputation in the eyes of the public.

One avenue of fund raising still in its infancy is simply that NGO's go into business, according to the Asia Foundation "...many of non-governmental organizations are conducting income generating activities ...Some have joint ventures with private companies...Many private companies have joined hands to provide assistance such as free consulting and training and some provide financial support. Nongovernmental organizations will also play a key role in bridging the business groups with the communities." (Asia Foundation, 1998)

Human Security Situation and Civil Society in Thailand

Numerous military coups and constitutions mark Thai politics. Since the 1932 coup ended the absolute monarchy, up until 1998, there have

been nine successful military coups and nine abortive ones, 16 constitutions, 30 revisions to various constitutions and 87 general elections. (Dixon 1998: 258). Based on the foregoing, one might think that Thailand is a mecca of instability

The real stability of Thailand is due to its constitutional monarch -- King Bhumibol Adulyadej and to the state within a state -- the Thai civil service or bureaucracy. As the world's longest ruling monarch, His Majesty has been on the throne for over 50 years and is beloved and revered by the Thai masses. Operating behind the scenes during chaotic periods, King Bhumibol has been a key stabilising force.

Thailand's most recent military coup was staged in February 1991. In 1992, General Suchinda Kraprayoon took office. This incident resulted in mass demonstrations led for the first time by the Thai middle-class. The 1992 pro-democracy demonstration was not the first time that people took umbrage with military involvement in political life to the streets. A student led demonstration in 1976 was just as bloody but they succeeded in ending the military government of Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn. The 1992 demonstrations also marked the first time that NGOs took an active part in opposition to a coup. It was His Majesty that offered opposing parties a TV broadcast face saving solution that effectively ended the coup without added bloodshed. Immediately

following the coup, a number of NGOs joined a labour federation and formed the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) whose main task was to speak against the new constitution that was being drafted by the military (Callahan 161). In addition, Poll Watch was established by the CPD in 1992 to monitor elections and report fraud. When the unelected General Suchinda initially took office, Poll Watch acted through the CPD to organise peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations throughout the country (Callahan : 161-2). This event demonstrated that NGOs can be in certain circumstances, effective in organising and co-ordinating their efforts for a common cause and marked the beginning of a vibrant civil society in Thailand.

Another turning point in the development of a civil society in Thailand occurred during the 1997 financial crisis. Due to its severity and the effect the crisis had on other East Asian countries, the Thai constitution was revised, once again, that same year to accommodate changes brought about by the crisis. This constitution is said to be the most human-centred constitution yet proffered. More specifically, as unwanted by-products, "the crisis dramatically increased the incidence of poverty, undermined the gains made during decades of development, caused widespread political instability, and aggravated economic competition and interstate tensions over refugees and illegal migration." (Acharya and Acharya 2000) Moreover, the crisis

brought into focus the complexity created by globalisation and world integration and demonstrated that Thailand had lost some of its ability to control its own destiny. This loss of control has caused many to rethink and question its desire to pursue further integration into the global community. The crisis resulted in the loss of many jobs and reduced incomes of others and thus pushed many people back below the poverty line. This tragic economic reversal led policy makers to place more importance on communities, social capital, and grass-root organisations while allowing a higher degree of stakeholders' participation and autonomy than before (TDRI: 10). Since many Thai NGOs had opposed globalisation, these groups benefited and their image was enhanced in the eyes of the public.

Hence, the stage was theoretically set for a more active civil society. Thai NGOs began to gain clout in influencing national policy development. At the State level, a human-centred approach to policies was first introduced in the Thai Eighth National Development Plan (1997 – 2001), but much of the emphasis was still placed on infrastructure development (Dixon 1998: 247). Prior to the financial collapse, the Thai economy had decades of sustained growth. The Eighth Plan was also significant in that for the first time, thousands of representatives from NGOs along with other community leaders were included and involved with the drafting of the

plan. Thus, the Plan was more focused on the problems of disadvantaged people (TDRI: 8). The financial crisis of 1997 forced the government to make choices. Rightly or wrongly, it chose to divert resources from rural and human development to what they considered more immediate financial problems (TDRI: 8).

According to Acharya, the crisis further served as a catalyst for added interest in human security. Besides the obvious outcome of a surge in political unrest and loss of jobs and income, the crisis “underscored the crucial need for social safety nets for the poor, something ignored in the heady days of growth.” (Acharya and Acharya 2000) In short, the financial crisis threatened the economic security of people in Thailand. In respect to human security, Thailand took a positive step by joining the Human Security Network, thus becoming the only Southeast Asian nation in the organisation. Subsequently, they incorporated elements of human security in its Ninth National Development Plan (2002 – 2006).

The Chuan Leekpai administration (1992-1995) also advocated governmental co-operation with NGOs. These efforts, according to the 1998 Asia Foundation country report, included:

- The appointment of a minister attached to the Prime Minister's Office, creating a channel for information exchange and

recommendations between the government and the non-profit sector.

- Income generating projects in rural areas that would allow the local communities to be involved in decision-making and enjoy ownership. “Non-governmental organisations will play a significant role in bridging the government and private sectors with local communities, and provide support to strengthen many development functions of community organisations.”
- The establishment of the Community Organisation Development Institute to oversee funds and activities of community groups.
- Increased support from international institutions such as the Asian Development Bank and multinational donors that are trying to develop good relations with the non-profit sector in Thailand. (Thailand Country Report 1998)

Thus, it seems that NGOs are gaining influence in Thailand. Not only are the NGOs becoming more active in Thailand, the government is demonstrating that it wants to co-operate with NGOs in improving the lives of those living in under-developed rural areas. As put forth by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “... as a

developing country, Thailand’s most immediate policy goal is to eradicate poverty and ensure quality living for the people.” It stresses that it advocates human security on the basis of freedom from fear and wants in accordance to the UN’s definition of the concept. Furthermore, “human security is comprehensive in nature and intertwined with human rights and human development. Human rights, human development and human security are mutually reinforcing factors.” (MFA Foreign Policy Statement)

On January 21-22, 2002, an intersessional meeting of the Human Security Network was held in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting’s theme was centred on the issue of HIV/AIDS as a human security threat in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS).

Importance of GMS

The GMS is a region that comprises Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Yunnan Province of the People's Republic of China with a total population of about 240 million. In 1992, the six countries in the region entered into a programme of sub-regional economic co-operation with the assistance and support of ADB. The region is rich in natural resources and is a growth area with a huge potential for development. “The programme has contributed to the

development of infrastructure to enable the development and sharing of the resource base, and promote the freer flow of goods and people in the subregion.” (ADB)

The Northern and North Eastern provinces of Thailand are located within the GMS. Currently, Thailand’s wealth is principally concentrated in the BMR. As mentioned, most development money has heretofore been spent within the BMR, thus leaving the GMS provinces underdeveloped. Although uneven development and concentration of wealth in the capital cities is characteristic of many developing and less developed countries, according to Dixon, “Bangkok is almost certainly the most primate city in the world, and the national pattern of urbanisation the most uneven.” (Dixon 1998: 190) According to UNDP sources, in 1999, the poverty rate in Bangkok was 0.2% whereas the rate in the Northeast, Thailand’s poorest region, was 30.8% (UNDP).

The GMS is a region ripe for economic development. The 4,200 km Mekong River is teeming with fish, while along its banks wildlife and vegetation exist in abundance. Most countries in the region are also just opening their borders to trade and are looking to exploit the region’s resources and to lure foreign investment. Mya Than identified two motivating factors for the GMS development plan: *pull* factors and *push*

factors. According to Than, the push factors “include the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), fear of protectionism, the US embargo and competition for foreign direct investment (FDI).” The pull factors are “geographical proximities, existence of old trade routes, historical links, cultural and ethnic ties, language affinities, [the] thawing of political tensions as a result of the end of the Cold War [and] economic reforms...” (Than 1997: 43).

Since the GMS is now deemed crucial to development in Thailand, it is understandable that the Thai government considers problems in the GMS as national issues. At present, there are several factors that are preventing human security from developing more fully in the GMS. Those involved must take these factors into consideration when planning social policies in the GMS. These factors and potential problem areas include:

- 1) Co-operation among the governments of the GMS. The GMS is a huge region, comprised of six states having varying levels of development and different political systems. These Political systems with different ideologies normally approach human security issues from different perspectives and priorities. Less developed governments may prioritise tangible aspects of development such as

constructions of roads and bridges over those of human development and security.

- 2) Policy of non-interference. This policy is embedded in the agreement among ASEAN members—five of the six GMS nations are members of ASEAN. This policy requires ASEAN countries not to interfere with or intervene in each other's internal affairs and not to criticise or support any opposition group. However, if development and human security in the region require close collaboration, non-interference policies might serve as a barrier to communications and may prevent things from getting done.
- 3) Corruption of government officials and local elites. Though many NGOs have been established to counter this problem, corruption remains systemic and prevalent in Thailand. Embezzling of funds and abuses of power and authority by officials and local elites undermine efforts to improve the lot of the people and their human security situations.
- 4) Persistent negative attitudes and misconceptions of many NGOs in Thailand remain. Misconceptions by the government and the public concerning NGOs along with cultural impairments lead to a lack of understanding of and support for its activities. NGOs are not always perceived to be agents of progressive change, but are considered a nuisance and even as a deterrence to development. Many Thais hold the orthodox view that industrialisation is key to development and belittle NGO activities and efforts.
- 5) Lack of funding for developmental projects. Lack of support from the public means lack of funding. The International NGOs and external financial support pulled out or were greatly reduced in Thailand during its boom years and they have not returned. External funding of NGOs can be a two edged sword. One edge is positive in that NGOs not being able to raise adequate funds from internal Thai sources can continue to operate and aid in the human security process. The other edge, has a negative connotation in that it reinforces the view that NGOs are agents of foreign powers and should not be supported by Thais.
- 6) Poor management, organisation and co-ordination. NGOs are usually small in size with committed but inexperienced staff members and leaders with poor managerial skills. Competent leadership is lacking, in part, because funding is a problem. Staff members with demonstrated

managerial skills are often lured into the private sector by promises of better salary and a chance for mobility that usually means a job in Bangkok.

- 7) State interference in the roles to be played by the NGOs. There is still a tendency to rely on the state for most of the developmental projects in Southeast Asia, primarily because that is the way it has always been done and local NGO operations are still in their infancy in the region. If human security is to be ensured, NGOs need to be allowed to operate more freely because they have the potential to be more effective and efficient than the State at working at the grassroots level.

Many problems in the GMS are related to human security issues. The majority of the people in the region live on minimal subsistence. Poor living conditions and lack of work lead many young people to migrate to the Bangkok area, thus adding to its problem of overpopulation. The Mekong region itself is rife with cross-border trafficking in drugs and forced prostitution of women and children. Poverty, lack of education and lack of access to health services and facilities contribute to the prevalence of AIDS in the region.

Botswana is a case in point that dramatically illustrates the effect that an AIDS epidemic can have on human

security. Botswana was a real African success story that saw its once heady economic and social successes in human security evaporate due to the ravages of AIDS. Its growth rate as measured by per capita income, educational levels, and life expectancy has all but been destroyed. (Thurow 2002)

Thailand and the other GMS countries must learn from Botswana's and others' mistakes. They need to tackle this pervasive social and economic problem head on. It is not only the morally right thing to do, but an economic necessity as well.

Examples of Successful Thai NGOs

Some NGOs have been successful in both mission success and with their fund-raising activities. This is especially true for prestigious non-profit making religious schools who use tuition, fees and "tea money" to raise needed funds. Some funds are then redirected toward programs that benefit society and the disadvantaged. They have grown in terms of size and scope of their activities. To mention two other successful NGOs: the Thai Environment and Community Development Association (TECDA), and the Duang Prateep Foundation (DPF). Among the successful religious schools are: The Brothers of St. Gabriel Foundation and a number of Catholic girls schools such as Mater Dei and St. Joseph's. Khun-ying (Lady) Chodchoi

Sophonpanich, leads the TECDA and Prateep Ungsongtham Hata heads the DPD. These NGOs present interesting examples of how different NGOs can succeed in fund-raising through different methods. By most measures, all these NGOs have been successful in serving their target groups.

TECDA (<http://www.magiceyes.or.th>) was founded by Chodchoi Sophonpanich, the daughter of one of Thailand's great business leaders and founder of Bangkok Bank the deceased, Chin Sophonpanich. Chodchoi founded TECDA in 1984 using her own personal wealth and funds solicited from business people. The NGO is best known for its Magic Eyes Campaign, that aims to instil in the public a sense of ecological responsibility through education and to: promote environmental conservation, human waste pollution control (trash disposal), and tree planting. Her campaigns and activities seem to be targeted only at the general public and not at major business and industry polluters. Considering the donors to this NGO, and the extended ties of the Sophonpanich family to many facets of business and industry it should not come as a surprise why raising funds from business leaders probably is not a major problem. It may also help explain why industrial pollution and polluters have not been major targets in the various campaigns conducted by the NGO. The NGO's web site indicates that there are no campaigns directed toward eliminating or controlling pollution caused by

industry. Therefore there does not appear to be any effort spent on getting business and industry to 'clean up their act.' One of TECDA's campaigns, the Magic Eyes Ambassador, was sponsored by a business company – Lion Co.Ltd. Some may suspect that the business community may actually be using the NGO to enhance their reputation and concern for pollution issues. In any case, cleaning up pollution no matter where it is found is very important especially in Bangkok where pollution is a top health concern. The TECDA's success relies on close relationships and connections with local business leaders. Khunying Chodchoi's approach to the business community is a key element in building successful coalitions in that she is working with, not against, the business community and with the public at large.

Prateep Ungsongtham, who was born and raised in the Klong Teouy Slum in Bangkok, founded the Duang Prateep Foundation (DPF) in 1978. She gained recognition and support from the people when she negotiated with the slum landowner to keep her neighbourhood from being evicted. She caught the attention of various embassies in Thailand who went to her aid with donations and moral support.

After she won the prestigious Magsaysay award for Public Service in 1978, she used the prize money to establish her Foundation and started out by building schools for slum children. She went on to become the first Asian

citizen to win the Rockefeller award for Outstanding Contribution to Mankind. Her reputation soared and even a grand daughter of Chin Sophonpanich served as a volunteer in her day care centre

Because of her international reputation, it was possible for the DPF to acquire foreign funding. Members of the German Embassy were very early supporters of her activities. Her fund raising has been aided simply because the NGO deals primarily with children in poverty. The NGO has begun to expand into the rural areas and new activities are being added including campaigns for AIDS control and women's rights. The DPF web site is written in four different languages: English, Japanese, German and Thai, whereas the TECDA web site is in Thai only.

The DPF has succeeded because it has had a charismatic leader, a rare person who rose from poverty without forgetting her roots. Thai from all walks of life have come to recognise what a unique person she is and today she serves as an elected member of the Thai Senate. This political position gives her added clout and creditability when working with the Thai bureaucrats. Thus, we learn that the DPF's recipe for success was charismatic leadership that led to the garnering the support of the foreign community in Thailand. International recognition followed along with the concurrent respect of Thai from all classes.

The prestigious Catholic schools include, among others, the Brothers of St. Gabriel Foundation. The Foundation also operates thirteen primary and secondary schools. Funding has been relatively easy since they collect tuition and fees from the middle and upper class families. Assumption University, the only tertiary educational institution of the Brothers of St. Gabriel Foundation pours the surpluses generated back into expanding its capacity and infrastructure. It alone also spent more than US \$2 million last year on aid to students from the less affluent families.

The other St. Gabriel Foundation schools probably do as much or more to help in the human security arena since they have been in existence for a long period of time and new investment in buildings and infrastructure is significantly less since the schools have reached maturity. Some of their primary and secondary schools are located outside BMR and a lot of their attention is given to children. In addition, the University working with other NGOs such as the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia and the Open Society Foundation and others including the Thai Government have given scholarship assistance to others from outside Thailand many from GMS countries.

From the NGOs discussed a Thai heads all. They all have different methods for raising the bulk of their funds. All three have connections to

the political world of Thailand and at least TECDA and AU have strong links to the business community. These NGOs have been successful and the DPF and AU have experienced great growth rates using different approaches to raising money.

Summary and Conclusions

To recap, NGOs operating in Thailand currently have a somewhat favourable policy environment. However, tensions between the government and NGOs persist because both sides hold negative views of each other and, not surprisingly, a different set of priorities. NGOs sometimes come into opposition to the government on a number of issues and priorities, but such is the nature and design of NGOs and politics as the Thai parliament is certainly not a monolith but a conglomerate loosely held together by warring parties and individuals. The pouring in of foreign funds to NGOs has all but ceased due to the belief of previous contributors that the Thai economy is big enough to support itself. Cultural factors make raising of fund from internal sources difficult but new approaches to fund raising such as establishing some local business enterprises often with the help of the business community has potential.

Human security lacks a precise definition, which makes it difficult for definitive policies and policy implementation. However, the

importance of putting emphasis on individuals rather than on generalised and, often, obtuse problems can help the government focus on constructing national plans that develop and protect its citizens' well being and livelihood.

It appears that Thailand has taken positive steps by instituting the concept of human security into its major policies and it has involved NGOs in many of its developmental activities. However, considering the values Thai place on presentation and gaining 'face', along with the lack of respect for laws, whether or not such co-operation is real and effective remains to be seen. Thailand is a democracy, but there are many limitations to what the Thai State can do to ensure human security. The Thai bureaucracy and systemic corruption complicate the process. The government, as well as many of the NGOs, lacks co-ordination and qualified and competent staff. The government officials have top-down attitudes that complicate communications because government ministries need to co-ordinate and communicate horizontally. In contrast, NGOs may over-rely on their leaders, but because their organisations are small and their activities are usually focused and specific, top-down communications does not present a major problem with co-ordination. Therefore, the Thai government is not yet developed enough to single-handedly manage social policies.

To conclude, Can the Thai Government co-operate with NGOs to ensure 'Human Security?' If they can, synergistic opportunities are much more likely to occur. The question is actually open-ended and the answer is a simple yes and no. They can co-operate when their interests coincide in the short run or if the Thai civil service agrees to co-operate in programs that will take a long period of time to implement. Some NGOs have a much easier time gaining government support because of their personal contacts within the Thai government and bureaucracy. Other NGOs are headed by elected government officials and if their party is a member of the coalition in power they may be able to get things done.

That said, the Thai government and most all governments be they Eastern, Western, Northern or Southern have difficulties with NGOs. NGOs want things done immediately and are often focused on specific issues. They cannot or refuse to understand that other issues may be more important to society as a whole than theirs. A real problem is simply the squeaky wheel effect and often the most annoying or loudest voice gets attention to the detriment of those who have no voice at all but may be the most in need of attention. The government has many interest groups vying for their limited resources obviously they cannot satisfy everyone and meet all needs. For example, the Governments will always argue that national security issues outrank human security issues because without national

security there can be no human security. The two sectors may share similar goals regarding social policies and human security, but they often disagree on the means of achieving those ends. The bureaucracy and the government, through corruption and abuses of power and authority, complicate the process. Thailand and many other nations are replete with examples of this fact. Within this author's own family, corrupt Thai government officials have been encountered and the appropriate, negotiated bribe paid. That said, on rare occasion he ran into a bureaucrat that actually walked an extra mile and exercised very humanistic and pragmatic judgement to get things done. Afterwards those bureaucrats even refused small gifts that were given from the heart in recognition of exemplary behaviour above and beyond the call of duty.

Examples presented in this paper should demonstrate that there is still a great deal of animosity between the two, but that is often the norm when it comes to NGO - Government relations whatever the country. Cultural impediments such as the diffidence towards authority along with Buddhist precepts inhibit the establishment of good relationships between the rural poor and the bureaucrats.

Can the Thai NGOs perform effectively in present day Thailand? Again, no clear answer can be given. NGOs have had some successes

organising against government abuses such as the 1992 pro-democracy demonstrations. Some NGOs seem to do quite well especially if they can garner support from those they represent and from other donors to support their programmes. Those who garner support often represent non-controversial groups and projects such as aid to slum children. Others, without some competitive advantage will have difficulties if they challenge the in groups such as powerful business or military interests groups. All they can manage is to organise some local demonstrations -- to become squeaky wheels --and even this can prove difficult unless local leaders support them with the needed manpower. The problems of management and cultural inhibitions are also factors that affect efficient and effective NGO operation.

In any case, the NGOs can play a significant role in improving the human security of Thai, but how to raise funds remains a stumbling block for many. To help those most in need of help, funds must eventually be made available by the small but growing middle class. As mentioned earlier philanthropy is not in the Thai Culture. There are few, if any, Rockefeller or Bill Gates or Henry Ford et al Foundations in Thailand. The few successful Thai Foundations do not, as a rule, fund other NGOs but use their limited resources within their own organisations.

Recommendations

- NGOs must be more active and aggressive watchdogs. Some are monitoring the State's moves to ensure that economic growth and that investment in projects take into consideration the people's welfare.
- Increased emphasis must be spent on research of failed and successful programmes. Mistakes committed in the BMR should not be repeated in the rural Thailand. NGOs being focused should do more specific research. Rapid growth without careful planning and foresight can be harmful to the welfare and human security of the people at large as well as for those who are supposed to benefit.
- NGOs should more actively seek funding from abroad but they must be more transparent and forthcoming in providing concrete answers that reflect reality. Initially, many NGOs were funded from abroad, but as Thailand reached a certain GDP level funding often dried up for these NGOs. Potential overseas donors must be made aware of Thai cultural constraints to money raising. A great deal of effort needs to be directed on education of the public. This is no easy task since Thai culture impedes strategic planning, as it is known in the West. But, the rapid strides made in education, especially at the tertiary level, should help

expand the middle class and make it easier to communicate and solicit help on a wider scale.

- NGO's need to explore opportunities to establish business ventures either their own or by bringing business groups into contact with the communities in joint ventures or in an advisory capacity.
- Further NGO and human security research in Thailand should be conducted by academics. Comparative studies of the similarities and differences between foreign operated or directed NGOs and those run by Thai might prove valuable. A study on how Thai NGOs interact with the public may also prove to be useful in assessing the strengths and effectiveness of 'people power' and what the two groups, together, can achieve in bringing about social changes.

In ending this paper the author wishes to point out that Kofi Annan the Secretary General of the UN said at the closing of the Johannesburg Earth Summit that, the participation of the business community was necessary since they are "stakeholders." He said, "We have to be practical...Governments and NGOs cannot do it on their own," This observation is certainly a truism especially in a capitalistic society. At present, in Thailand the elected officials and the business community are often

one and the same, therefore Thailand should have much less of a problem in this area than many other countries where professional politicians dominate the political parties.

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