

**THE ROLES OF NGOs AND PRIVATE SECTORS IN  
THE THAI CIVIL SOCIETY TODAY:  
Its implications for Unicef Programmes\***

*Prinn Prachayanuporn\*\**

**1. A brief review of Thailand's present economic and social situation:**

***The economic growth and the inequitable and non-sustainable development.***

Thailand's sound economic position is internationally recognized. It has achieved an exceptional record of economic development over the last 3 decades as witnessed by the rapid expansion of the national economy at an average rate of 7.8% per annum. Its average per capita income reached 68,000 bahts in 1995 compared with only 2,100 bahts in 1961. The drop in the number of people living in absolute poverty has fallen to only 13.7 per cent of the population in 1992 compared with 20% by the end of 1996 as targeted in the Seventh National Economic and social Development Plan. Sustained public investment in economic and social infrastructure has made a significant contribution to an overall rise in incomes, living conditions and wider access to both economic and basic social services.

Despite the impressive rate of economic growth and development efforts, most of Thailand's economic activity and prosperity has remained concentrated in Bangkok and the surrounding provinces. The average per capita income inside the Bangkok

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\*\* Assistant Professor, The Graduate Program in Human Resource Development, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA)

Metropolitan Region is almost 12 times higher than in the country's poorest region—the Northeast, and the gap between the rich and the poor has also widened. In the four years from 1988 to 1992 alone, the top 20% of households saw their combined income rise from 54% to 59% of gross domestic product (GDP) while the combined income of the bottom 20% of household—the country's poorest—dropped from 4.6% to 3.9% of GDP over the same period. This growing disparity reflects that an increasing number of Thais are being excluded from the general improvements in quality of life.

As reported in the UN/ESCAP Development Paper No.16, after the Sixth Plan (1987-1991), certain population groups such as the hilltribal people, minority groups inhabiting sensitive border areas, migrant workers, landless peasants, small farmers, fisherman and low-income urban groups have not been benefited fully from social services that are often not readily accessible or are underutilized. This is reflected in higher than national average infant mortality rates among mountainous people in the North (91 per thousand live births) and among Thai-Muslims in the South (60 per thousand live births); in second-and third-degree child malnutrition rates of 8, 6, and 4% in the Northeast, North and South respectively. Unregistered children in urban slums and the children of seasonal migrant workers have no access to schools since proof of residence is a prerequisite for admission. In 1980, the illiteracy rate was 21% in the South; 20% in the North; 19% in the Northeast compared with only 1.7% in Bangkok (UN/ESCAP, ND.).

Accelerated rates of economic growth have also resulted in the rapid depletion of natural resources and deteriorating environmental conditions, threatening the traditional Thai values and ways of life which in turn have contributed to the collapse of families, communities and local cultures. All these incidents are proving to be the major obstacles to equitable and sustainable national development.

Looking specifically at children's problems, although the government has worked towards the goal of having all children complete primary school (grade 1-6), not all children are able to complete grade 6. Some children never attend or withdraw from school at an early age. Some of these youngsters become street children, child workers

or child prostitutes. Their rights are not being protected, and their families are poor and facing numerous problems. The children are subjected to legal and cultural discrimination (National Council for Children and Youth Development and UNICEF, 1995). These problems prompted concerned government and non-governmental organizations to find ways to provide the children with better and more appropriate living conditions to which they are entitled according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child acceded by Thailand.

## **2. Towards a Civil Society: The Government's Policy and Guidelines: *Creating Opportunities and an Enabling Environment for the Development of the disadvantaged and of Popular Governance and Popular Participation.***

To deal effectively with the present unbalanced pattern of development and the challenges to realize the long-term vision of Thailand becoming a fully developed country by the year 2020, the Eighth Economic and Social Development Plan sets the objectives, targets and strategies specifically for development of the disadvantaged and of popular governance and popular participation, among many others, as follows:

### **2.1 Development of the Disadvantaged**

This includes enhanced protection of, and opportunities for, such vulnerable groups as children in serious need, young people of both sexes and adult women engaged in commercial sex, particularly those suffering intolerable conditions, women facing sexual discrimination, the physically, mentally and emotionally disabled, old people with no relatives or other means of support, urban and rural people living in extreme poverty, probationers and convicts, as well as minority ethnic groups from a wide range of cultures. This strategy is designed to ensure a uniformly decent standard of living, emphasizing human dignity and enabling a more participatory role in national development.

## 2.2 Promoting Popular Governance<sup>1</sup> and Popular Participation

Development of popular governance that contribution to the holistic development of the nation means addressing the present problems in public administration by developing a more efficient public sector, which is committed to upgrading the development potentials and capabilities of the Thai people. Government officials must be perceived as the allies of the people, working towards the sustainable development of the economy, society, culture and environment.

Promoting popular participation in regional and rural development will provide opportunities for local people to improve their potentials for independently finding solutions to problems that benefit individuals, families and communities. This will, in turn, ensure more timely and evenly distributed development. To this end, the Eighth Plan focuses on measures to promote self-reliance in local communities and the creation of relatively secure community economies, which will serve as solid bases for long term improvements in income and quality of life. The private sector, NGOs and people's organizations should be encouraged to cooperate with the public sector to combine their efforts in the interests of development (Government of Thailand, ND).

## 3. Thai NGOs and Civil Society: *Thai NGOs are challenged today to expose the human impact of Thailand's 'economic miracle'*

Right through the history of Thai NGO development, there has been a broad unifying factor that has provided the basis for unity and collaborative struggle. This unifying factor has been the NGOs consistent opposition to the military and anti-

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing this paper, the constitution amendment mission for the country to become more democratic is on going. Several draft laws aimed to protect human rights (including children and women rights—the main concern of this study) and access to development as a foundation of democracy are in the making process. Hence this paper will focus more on the issue of popular participation than the issue of popular governance although they are closely interrelated.

democratic reforms. Thus, popular democracy and fundamental human rights have always been the focal points of NGO in reacting to Thai politics.

NGO work in Thailand has shown that while conventional NGO ideology and community organizing strategies laid the foundation for people's organizations in the past two decades, today the challenge is to develop innovative, multi-sectoral and culturally appropriate perspectives and ways of working for total human development, particularly the disadvantaged in a predominantly consumerist and competitive social environment (Thai NGO Support Project, 1995).

### **3.1 An Overview**

At present, there are approximately 8,000 NGOs in Thailand whose objectives are for social welfare and development. Some are extremely small, running micro-projects, while others (such as the Population and Community Development Association) are much larger operating at the national level in multi-sectoral programmes. The two most active types of NGOs today are: (1) Development oriented groups that focus on the unequal income distribution and the impact of development on disadvantaged groups, and (2) advocacy groups working on the issues of environment, people's participation, and democracy.

These NGOs, no matter what types they are, have different and various roles and functions-ranging from the philanthropic and charitable organizations to the radical protest movements. Some encourage people to create self-awareness and develop activities by providing education and knowledge, especially on how to control and prevent important social problems found in local communities. Others focus on encouraging services, counseling education and information for specific groups as well as the public, family planning services, home care, primary health care, non-discriminatory promotion of human rights, and recently AIDS prevention and control. Their main target groups include children and adolescents, women, minority groups, labourers, rural people and slum dwellers (The Government of Thailand, 1995).

### **3.2 Children and Youth Development**

There are approximately 113 registered NGOs working for children and youth development in Thailand today. These NGOs can be roughly divided into 2 groups: (1) large organizations and (2) small organizations. The first group are NGOs with at least 50 staff members, being supported by permanent funding agencies and using professional management system. The second group are NGOs with less than 25 staff members who work on a temporary basis and do not have any permanent financial supports. The major roles of these NGOs, both large and small, fall into 3 categories as follows: (1) provision of services; (2) coordination of children and youth development efforts; and (3) advocacy of children and youth rights and acting as 'watchdogs' on related issues. The major limitations of these NGOs are not much different from NGOs working in other areas, i.e., financial viability and availability of professional and experienced workers (Chaiumporn, 1996).

### **3.3 Coordinating Bodies and Networking**

In general, NGOs implement their activities autonomously. Recently, however, efforts have been made to coordinate these organizations according to their focus of interest, and set up an information system which will keep track of exactly what activities are undertaken by whom and where. There are about 10 coordinating bodies and the most well-known is the National Coordinating Committee of NGO Coordinating on Rural Development (NGO-CORD) with regional sub-committees and a total membership of 220 organizations. Others include working groups of children and women organizations, primary health organizations, human rights organizations, and slum development organizations. Memberships of these other coordinating bodies range between 10-20 NGOs.

Networking is now the dominant feature of NGOs working on specific issues. Many women's networks have been established. Networks of consumers' associations, networks of organizations working on sustainable development and networks of natural resource conservation groups are some of the networks established and maintained

through regular exchanges of activities. Some of these networks may be identified as follows: (1) Parent NGOs having branches in different provinces of the country (e.g. Red Cross, Rotary, Lions); (2) Councils of NGOs coordinating individual NGOs with similar objectives (e.g., Catholic Council, Church of Christ Association, National Women's Council, Council of Social Welfare Associations, Council of Children and Youth NGOs); (3) The Joint GO-NGO Coordinating Committee organized under the umbrella of NGO-CORD (as previously mentioned); (4) The Thai Volunteer Service Foundation (who coordinates and provides training services for member NGOs; and (5) International NGOs functioning as funding and development organizations (e.g., The Asia Foundation, CARE, RED BARNA) (Pongsapich and Kataleeradabhan, 1994).

### **3.4 Cooperation with Government Agencies**

NGOs have also been coordinating and working with the government, and this partnership has had a great impact on community development and quality of life improvement among the grass-roots population. The greatest potential for NGO services is on complementing government activities in areas where government extension cannot reach (such as the hilltribal people in the North and other minority groups) either because of distant locations, inadequate budgets, or the lack of qualified personnel. Development workers also point out that NGOs are serving, among many others, as 'watchdogs' where government development policies and strategies have an adverse impact on the people and society. This function has been facilitated in recent times as the government has become more progressive and has agreed to have NGOs help in monitoring government implementation programmes.

NGOs are also attacking problems that are location-specific; for example, government agencies have difficulty identifying small projects for specific locations such as small-scale water resource or income generation projects. NGOs usually work well in specific locations where personnel establish ties with local people and help them solve their problems on an equitable basis. A number of NGOs have proved to be skillful organizers and effective advocates for specific disadvantaged groups. They

have shown that they can play the role of mediators, channeling demands and concerns from the grass-roots to the decision makers and vice versa (The Government of Thailand, 1995).

#### **4. The Emerging Roles of Private Sectors in Social Welfare and Development in Thailand: *The need and the will to "return some of the profit to society"***

Data from a survey of 108 large firms (both national and multinational) in Thailand during 1991-1992 indicate that most of them view philanthropy in a traditional way. The firms that provide corporate funding have been in operation for more than 10 years and have provided support for social activities in one form or another for the same time. They can be categorized into 5 groups according to the nature of their business as follows: (1) Consumer products (food, garment, electrical); (2) industry (agro-industry, petrochemical, ore, wood); (3) finance (bank, insurance); (4) service (hotel, hospital, packaging, newspaper); and (5) others.

##### **4.1 The Need and the Will to Provide Corporate Funding**

Since corporate funding is somewhat new in Thailand, most firms have neither definite plans nor specific allocations for donations and only few of them have annual allocation of donation. The amount of donation ranges from less than 50,000 bahts to more than 1 million bahts. Both national and multinational firms do not differ much in the types of support they provide. Many firms, particularly whose operations are related to the environment (e.g., petrochemical plants or producers of alcoholic drinks) make donations and support activities that will give the firm a good image. Some other firms provide support for social development activities because of their personal contact with local people and the availability of their personnel while others operate their activities independently. The willingness to help support social development among these corporate funding firms appears to be positive but how to do it is yet a question to be answered. In any case, some of the firms think that the social activities



they support should be related to the activities of the firm for good public image, indirect personnel development and indirect product promotion.

#### **4.2 Types of Support**

Most of the firms in the survey give support to education, research, and publication projects as well as vocational training, religion, music, arts and sports. Although many firms still follow the traditional pattern of donations and support for development activities is still limited, some of them do support activities related to rural and urban development and resource conservation. Less frequently seen are their supports to activities regarding political action, science, technology, and social welfare. The manufacturing firms and financial institutions provide more support to education and research than to other activities. Firms in the services sector, on the other hand, give priority to vocational and skill development and urban environmental activities. Financial institutions also provide support to religious activities while other types of corporate firms do not.

#### **4.3 Target Groups**

Because donations seem to be viewed as philanthropic and intended for disadvantaged groups, most of the firms identified rural areas as the target for development activities to be supported while very few of them state that their target groups are in the urban areas. Besides, most of the them indicate not having specific age groups or sex preferences in mind when providing support while very few firms identified specific disadvantaged groups such as the disabled.

#### **4.4 Projects and Working Groups**

Some administrators of the surveyed firms express their awareness that the activities of their businesses involve exploitation of natural resources in one way or another. They also express their attitude towards the need for environmental conservation and discuss some mitigation measures to avoid the unnecessary destruction of the environment. The administrators of the ten large firms interviewed

seem also to recognize the role of corporate firms in social responsibility. Different business administrators express different interest to take part in social development activities as follows:

(a) Oil or petroleum-related firms emphasize activities that raise public awareness of environmental conservation and road safety by supporting campaigns and education programmes through mass media. An Industry Environmental Safety Group (IESG) has been established to protect and conserve the coastline environment. Some firms join hands with the National Disaster Protection Office and give support of oil spills clean-up training and exercises;

(b) Mining and refinery firms seem to feel responsible for development activities of the areas surrounding the mines or the refineries by supporting school and temple activities; and

(c) Agro-industry firms give support to and cooperate with university researchers in research and development activities, including providing training programmes for youth to promote certain farm techniques, seeds, and other products.

Apart from the development projects and activities supported and participated by some major corporate funding business firms, there are also other forms of corporate funding for rural development. Some of them are the following:

(a) The Thai Business Integration to Rural Development (TBIRD) Project is initiated by the Population and Development Association. In this project, firms are encouraged to provide financial and personnel support for development activities in particular villages and revolving funds may be provided as seed money to help villagers help themselves.

(b) Several government organizations (e.g., the Department of Internal Trade—MOC, the Department of Industrial Promotion—MOI, the Department of Community Development—MOI and others) offer to administer development projects if private firms help provide financial support. Income-generating activities and village stores are set

up to provide marketing channels for the products. Training in management is offered to provide the villagers with marketing and management skills.

(c) Some of the firms provide donations to the royal projects either through specific projects or through the general fund, i.e., "The Royal Projects," Sai Jai Thai Foundation, and the Royal Handicraft Project. Scholarships and cultural activities are traditional targets for donations still practiced by most of the firms; and

(d) There are many other innovative educational programmes aimed at promoting rural development, e.g., summer camp projects of college students for the construction of schools, bridges, wires, health centres, and village sala (meeting halls). Some of the firms identify certain districts or provinces as their target areas.

#### **4.5 Corporate Funds**

Although most of the interviewed administrators of the firms agreed that the idea to pool resources for 'central funds' or 'corporate funds' is feasible, none of them is willing to take initiative or responsibility for managing the funds. Rather, most of them agree that the funds should be initiated and established by a reliable and secure unit, e.g., a government organization. If the government provided the initial funds and personnel for its management, corporate firms are more likely to provide additional support (Pongsapich and Kataleeradabhan, 1994).

### **5. Implications and Recommendations**

#### **5.1 The Pursuit of Distributive Justice**

The adoption of economic adjustment policies in many countries of the Asian and Pacific Region, including Thailand in recent years has resulted in cutbacks in social development programmes for specific disadvantaged groups. Even where cutbacks have not been experienced, needed programmes in a number of social sectors have, in many cases, not been pursued. Because of such constraints in the delivery of social services, governments have increasingly recognized the role of NGOs in

complementing their efforts to implement social development programmes and policies aimed at specific disadvantaged groups. In these circumstances, the strengthening of cooperation between government agencies (GAs) and NGOs has particular significance for Thailand's development. As many GAs face increasing difficulties in generating adequate resources for the effective implementation of social development programmes relating to children, women, the poor and other disadvantaged groups, the government has found it increasingly useful to strengthen GA-NGO cooperation. Therefore, it is the right time now for Unicef to gear its effort and programme to reinforce the GA-NGO linkage to enable favourable social change and to ensure that all Thai citizens have equal access to all social services.

## **5.2 The Protection and Development of Children**

The careful nurturing of children and youth to transform them into responsible and productive citizens will shape the future of the nation. Yet, investment in child and youth health, nutrition and education continues to receive not much attention. Furthermore, large numbers of children and youth live in especially difficult circumstances, characterized by neglect, exploitation, abuse and abandonment. Pursuit of the objective of distributive justice requires that these conditions be remedied urgently (Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs, 1993). To take part in this pursuit, Unicef should assist in making the following development guidelines, particularly for the protection and development of children in the Eighth Plan realized:

### **(1) Development for Children in Difficult Circumstances by:**

(a) Accelerating legislation to make the minimum age for labour 15 rather 13 years, and ensure its prompt enforcement. The formulation of protective measures and provision of decent welfare benefits for young labourers, both in the agricultural sector and informal sector, must be assured;

(b) Assuring a thorough understanding of the issue of child labour by community leaders and labour union leaders; encourage them to assist in protecting

young workers, preventing and reporting cases of abuse of child labour and of violations of the rights of children;

(c) Encouraging employers to provide or improve the welfare of child employees on a continuing basis, particularly regarding adequate education, skills training, recreation and development of quality of life.

(d) Developing an efficient and systemic process for protecting the safety of child wanderers, based on concerted efforts by the public and private sectors and religious institutions;

(e) Developing a system for collection and maintenance of valid and updated information about children in especially difficult circumstances in Thailand; apply this knowledge in social planning;

(f) Giving due consideration to the amendment of laws and regulations regarding the protection of children; design comprehensive measures for effective and timely action in this regard.

(g) Encouraging an improvement in the attitudes and working methods of public officials in promoting the improved status of distressed children, eg resolving the problems of educational documentation for child wanderers; redesigning patterns and methods of investigation and judicature be more suitable for young people.

(h) Strengthening the understanding of communities and school societies about HIV/AIDS, thereby improving the acceptance of children who come from Aids—affected families and the willingness to treat them in the save way as other children. This will depend on a joint effort involving the public and private sectors, religious institutions and communities in generating a secure social environment for these children while avoiding investigation of their serological status.

(i) Strengthening the capacity of families, kinship groups and communities in giving health care and primary nursing care to children with AIDS, through joint planning and supportive relationships between families and health service centres or private care-giving agencies.

(j) Developing a process for assisting and supporting indigent children in rural areas and children in difficult circumstances to have access to further education and job training, taking into account the needs and potentials of each target groups, and the local resource endowment.

(k) Advocating systematic occupational development for rural youth, making available a job-opportunities information service, and developing skill in making use of such data for selecting appropriate employment.

**(2) Development Aimed at the Problem of Children and Women Engaged in Commercial Sex and/or Subject to Violence, and Eliminating the Sexist Suppression of Women by:**

(a) Promoting the networking of people's organizations, particularly at the village level, committed to exploring grading, dissuading and assisting children and women who are likely to be induced or deceived into commercial sex work.

(b) Carrying out campaigns and apply public relations techniques, through the mass media, to increase public understanding of the problems associated with commercial sex, promote a shift away from exiting values which condone or promote the availability of commercial sex; while, at the same time, integrating a deeper understanding the values of a successful and supportive family life into educational curricula at all levels.

(c) Assisting those engaged in commercial sex by: building insight into the risks and impact of their occupation; providing health surveillance, counseling services, and alternative occupational training. Make alternative employment available, and provide capital for those intending to quit the sex industry. In this connection, attention is to be given to the use of communications media appropriate to each target group and locality.

(d) Advocating the elimination of gender prejudice and discrimination in response to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination Against Women, and to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the UN Operational Plan for Progress of Women.

(e) Blocking the recruitment/enticement of children and women, both Thai and foreign, for the purpose of commercial sex, especially along the border routes between Thailand and its neighboring countries.

(f) Providing parents with knowledge of the law regarding preventive and remedial measures against commercial sex.

**(3) Development of the Urban and Rural Poor by:**

(a) Increasing the access of urban and rural poor children to basic educational services through special provisions including the following: making scholarships available; granting subsidies to indigent families as a replacement for the opportunity costs of sending their children to school; developing educational approaches more suitable to these target groups.

(b) Encouraging the establishment and development of people's organizations and a variety of community funds; local fund-raising to provide local solutions to local problems.

(c) Promoting improvements in the environment of densely populated communities; provide residents with adequate social services; diffuse knowledge about disease prevention and health protection, particularly in reference to HIV/AIDS; assist in the abatement of pollution.

(d) Encourage rural inhabitants, particularly small-scale farmers, to engage in small- and medium-sized cottage industries and community industries (Government of Thailand, ND).

In practice, Unicef should develop and adapt its action plan according to the guidelines of the National Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in Thailand (National Declaration on Children), emphasizing the popular participation approach (see Appendix: Enhancement of Popular Participation), particularly in working with GA-NGO-Private sector linkage to mobilize development

and deliver necessary social services to the need in an efficient and effective way and means (see National Council for Children and Youth Development and UNICEF, 1995). At the same time, the action plan should be set to assure the rights and the opportunity for development and access to social services of the disadvantaged. Apart from the question 'why,' the plan should be clear of other questions as follows:

(a) 'Unicef is to do **what**:

- roles and activities (funding, coordinating, collaborating, implementing, supporting, monitoring, advocating, etc.);
- areas of interest and concern (health, education, employment, etc.)
- targets (child labour, child prostitute, etc.)
- levels (village, sub-district, district, province, regional, etc.)
- goals and objectives

(b) with **whom** (which GAs, NGOs, networks, coordinating bodies, universities, private sectors, local people, etc)

(c) **where** (area or location specific)

(d) **when** (priority, time frame)

(e) **how** (by what ways and means, and how much money, how many personnel involved)

In this connection, while the National Plan of Action has specified a list of related GAS to be responsible for particular tasks and areas of action, Unicef should work on locating appropriate and possible NGOs and other private sectors (including their coordinating bodies and networks) who share Unicef concerns and policies and are willing to work for the disadvantaged, particularly the children. A roster of key and feasible NGOs and other private sectors (including their coordinating bodies and networks) should be developed, using various themes to map them out according to the Unicef programmes and action plans, e.g., location, areas of interest, target groups, etc as explained above.



A survey of these NGOs and other private sectors (including their coordinating bodies and networks) needs of support, assistance or cooperation with Unicef may be worth consideration, especially on the 'how' question.

### **5.3 The Implementation Management of the Eighth Plan**

As assessed in the Eighth Plan, Thailand's drive toward national development over the last three decades has unfortunately seen development plans suffering from poor implementation. One of the principal reasons for this has been the very centralized bureaucratic structure of government services, where administrative authority has not been delegated to units functioning at grass roots level.

Today, new extra-governmental forces are emerging in Thai society, which have shown growing willingness to participate in every stage of the national development process, including political and community groups and NGOs. From the statement made in the Eighth Plan, these forces represent an invaluable resource for future development efforts, and it is the first National Economic and Social Development Plan to incorporate them into its overall development concept.

If the implementation of the eighth plan is to be more effective than that of its predecessors, it is essential that the public sector development administration is restructured in the long term. However, this will require amendment of all relevant laws and regulations, which will be very time-consuming. In the meantime, the parties involved in translating the Plan into action will have to operate under the existing constraints and public administrative structure, and instead adjust their own budgeting, administration and human resourcing to ensure greater flexibility (Government of Thailand, ND.). Adherence to the area-function-participation approach and the mobilization of popular participation shall be respected as the principal criteria in formulating development programmes under the Eighth Plan (see Appendix).

Unicef can play a great role as coordinator, mediator, supporter, facilitator, advocator and, in some very specific and special areas, mentor, coach, educator and trainer along the process to incorporate political and community groups, NGOs and

private sectors into the national overall development effort. In this connection, however, Unicef should be aware that 'the new trend' (which consists of decentralization and creation of 'new power relation' between the centralized state and local groups and between bureaucracy and the people) are in the making process in the Thai society. In this respect, Unicef may initiate or response to the following five major popular demands which are increasingly prevalent in the Thai society right now as deemed appropriate to its programmes. In doing this, it's primary objective and ultimate aim should be geared to enhance popular participation to the efficient and effective delivery of development services, rights and opportunities to the disadvantaged, particularly the children, the women and the poor.

(1) Decentralization of power to local government through election of and control over local administrative organizations;

(2) Decentralization of power over resource management to local administrative organizations in terms of 'community rights';

(3) Decentralization of financing, taxation and income distribution to local administrative organizations;

(4) Decentralization of education management to communities and local people; and

(5) Decentralization of incomes, opportunities and information or access to information (Local Information Centre for Development, Nakhon Ratchasima Chamber of Commerce, NDI and FNS, 1994).

It should be noted, however, that despite the Eighth Plan's recognition of the need for NGO participation and cooperation to achieve the Plan's goals, it is not clear that other government officials understand or fully support the following: (a) NGO development and welfare functions; (b) the advantages of NGOs in working at the grass roots community level; (c) the potential contribution of NGOs to human and institutional capacity-building; and (d) the potential roles NGOs could play in carrying out the Plan's decentralization objectives.

A major issue concerning NGOs, and indeed other development issues throughout the Eighth Plan, is how to achieve its objectives and how to implement and manage the activities called for in the Plan. This is an important point, which Unicef could play an active part to work with both GAs and NGOs to develop conceptual framework for practical implementation. Although the Plan has clearly set forth its goals and strategies, it also needs to:

(a) design mechanisms to generate bottom-up development, in which NGOs can play an important role;

(b) propose ways and means in which the government and the private sector can help NGOs to help people help themselves;

(c) identify NGOs problems in the technical, management and administrative fields with practical solutions;

(d) strengthen the information data base relating to NGOs and development; and

(e) enhance the role of the media in the process of communication and education on NGOs and development matters (Prachayanuporn, 1995).

#### **5.4 Support and Development of NGOs**

Realizing the significant role of NGOs in social welfare and development, government agencies now provide more opportunities and support to NGOs in order for them to participate more fully in the national development. Several activities have been arranged to support and develop NGOs with the objectives of creating more social services, which can control and prevent social problems and fulfill the increasing need for social services. In particular, the government attempts to develop NGO institutions, personnel, financial means, supervisory monitoring systems, and closer cooperation. The government has established a Joint public and private coordination on Social Development Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister and composed of Minister involved social development and representative from NGOs. The National Committee on Social Welfare chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, and committee

members comprise representatives from both governmental and non-governmental organizations (United Nations, 1989).

The government in recent years recognized that without the cooperation and implementation efforts of NGOs, sustainable social development at all levels would be extremely difficult. However, there are some constraints in personnel, budgets, equipment, work space and lack of integration. Some existing conflicts in development ideas and working strategies which need time and effort to reach mutual understanding and effective cooperation in the future still remain.

Another important matter for NGO endeavour is the development of networks of organization and volunteers working in local, provincial, regional and national level. These organizations and volunteers should be empowered in their working capacity and encouraged to learn from each other's experience. This is because these processes are the basis for participation, sustainable development and self-reliance, as well as the fundamental instrument for the evolution of people's democratic way of life. Besides, NGOs are also challenged to adopt a more professional approach in their development work in keeping with the increasing sophistication of the new economic and social order in the region to be able to work effectively with GAs, private sectors and the people (United Nations, 1994).

The potential roles Unicef can play to support and develop NGOs have already been outlined in 5.2. In any case, one of the most important weak point of NGOs is their funding. In the past, NGOs received financial assistance mainly from foreign countries and international organizations. Over the last few years' foreign assistance has drastically decreased as a result of news about the wealth of Thailand. To support and promote the primary mission of NGOs, i.e. improving the lives of the poor, Unicef can provide financial as well as technical support for NGOs' development work for the rural poor. Provision of financial assistance to NGOs in this programme will be the first concrete and most needed implementation of the government policy on promoting cooperation between GAs and NGOs in rural development (Na Chaingmai, 1996). In undertaking development activities for the poor, NGOs will promote initiatives in rural

communities by linking the public sector, the private sector and the universities with the people themselves. This will directly enhance institutional development of NGOs to be a stronger social and political force in rural development. As a consequence, political institutions will also be urged to be more responsive, as NGOs are quite efficient in articulating and communicating rural people's needs to political parties and the government.

Other areas with which Unicef may as well look into the possibility to cooperate are:

(1) The sub-committee on promotion of development-oriented non-governmental organizations appointed by the National Cultural Development Board (NCDB) in 1992; and

(2) Related GAs and NGO-CORD on the ideas of setting up a 'Non-government Organizations Promotion Foundation' with a certain amount to yield interests to be used by NGOs in carrying out development activities for the rural poor.

### **5.5 Collaboration with Private Sectors in Social Welfare and Development in Thailand**

During the last decade, Thai public, particularly corporate firms have become aware of the need to promote rural development activities, reflected in the national development plan as well as other governmental and non-governmental promoted activities. Donations for rural development projects now receive more attention than urban development although the most outstanding complaints in joining in the activities lie in the area of cooperation between firms and government agencies. Data from the survey of corporate firms indicate that some executives of the corporate firms express their willingness and positive policy to take part in philanthropy but they have not been offered innovative alternatives to the traditional patterns of giving donations. In this light, a few implications can be drawn from the survey for Unicef to consider as follows:

(1) A brain storming or seminar session may be organized to invite some of the leading firms to provide input on the feasibility to establish 'corporate funds'. Since many of the firms have no intention to establish their own foundations, the central funds would be a good alternative for them to support social development and activities in financial terms and ease them out of other time-consuming obligations. This option may be appropriate with the traditional form of philanthropic donations and many firms may agree with this pattern of philanthropic making. Anyhow, some firms with existing foundations or are already members of trade association or particular industrial councils do not support this idea of 'corporate funds'.

(2) Unicef may cooperate or collaborate with some corporate firms and assist in the coordination task when dealing with Gas officials, villagers and other target groups to make development activities more effective and productive. Data from the survey reveal that some administrator of the corporate firms such as the mining and refinery firms express preference for the pattern of donation that involves them in the nearby community and social development activities because it creates a sense of partnership and belonging and the feeling of mutual responsibility for the society thus this kind of project or activity should be encouraged particularly among corporate firms whose business enterprises are operated in a close complex within community such as industrial estates (Pongsapich and Kataleeradabhan, 1994).

(3) If Thailand is to advance in appropriate technology and children and youth are to be given the opportunities to develop themselves, as well as to fulfill this goal, drawing support for research, technical support and development projects given to universities, and training programmes for youth to promote certain farming techniques, seeds, natural energy development (e.g. solar cell), herbs and other products needs to be encouraged. This can also extend to certain cottage industries, using local wisdom, resources and skills that deemed suitable to promote.

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## **Appendix: Enhancement of Popular Participation**

1. Popular participation refers to the full and active contribution of all the people to development. It refers to the people's opportunity, acting individually, as family and community members, and as citizens, to express their views, develop and use their skills, practise self-reliance, and exercise leadership in advancing their own development. In particular, it focuses on the people's participation in the decision-making processes that affect their future, including social development policy-making processes that affect their future, including social development policy-making, planning and programming. The active and full participation of the people themselves in contributing to the management and execution of development is thus the objective of this strategy.

2. A constructive partnership among all sections of society is required if the people themselves are to play an active role in all aspects of development. Governments, for their part, need to evolve is of responding in an egalitarian and constructive manner to the voices that represent all social groups. In accommodating to the fullest extent possible the expressed aspirations of all the people as active participants in the determination of their individual and collective future, governments will fulfill their responsibilities to their national constituencies.

3. For the disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups, in particular, popular participation offers the possibility of achieving the rights that have traditionally been denied them as a result of both formal and informal patterns of discrimination. Non-government organizations, including community action groups, local voluntary associations, social service agencies, religious bodies and the like play an important role in this respect. As the representatives of those sections of society that ordinarily lack direct access to development policy makers and planners, non-governmental organizations can serve as an effective voice of the people.

4. The fullest possible participation of non-governmental organizations in the development policy-making, planning and programming process is thus required if popular participation is to succeed. While non-governmental organizations, in carrying

out their work, will need to function within the overall national policy and planning framework devised at the highest level, their comparative advantage in designing and executing programmes and projects according to needs and expectations at the grass-roots level should be recognized and respected. Partnership arrangements between governments and non-governmental organizations will promote the people's self-reliance while contributing to more efficient, intersectorally coordinated approaches to integrated social development policy-making, planning and programming.

5. All initiatives undertaken to enhance popular participation should be responsive to the people's felt needs and empower people to analyze and solve their own problems. They should reflect sensitivity to the diverse social conditions and cultural situations in the region and should offer solutions to local development problems that respect those differences. Prescriptions based on the expertise and judgement of outsiders can be helpful, but the ultimate proof of successful participatory development is action at the community level, based on popular awareness and local demand, in effective pursuit of the people's hopes and aspirations for an improved quality of life.

**Source:** United Nations, 1994.