

**นโยบายการกระจายรายได้และสวัสดิการสังคมใน
ประเทศไทย: หลักการ ความเป็นจริง และข้อถกเถียง**
***Income Redistribution Policy and Social Welfare
in Thailand: Ideology, Reality, and Controversy***

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Abstract

Redistributive policy and welfare services constitute an important function of the government. While production of goods and services is mostly left in the hands of the private sector, the government usually redistributes resources among social classes. Morality and justice often comprise arguments for the redistribution function of the government. Moreover, inequality causes poverty which, in turn, leads to other social problems. Democratic Socialism favors the setting up of a welfare system through welfare states. On the contrary, due to some efficiency costs of welfare and resource distribution, such as a reduction in work effort, Social Darwinism generally argues against governmental welfare services.

In Thailand, a non-welfare state, a wide income disparity exists across individuals and regions. Modernization Theory, Dependency Theory, as well as corruption in the government and the private sector can explain this disparity. Thai economic policy has long emphasized growth through attempts toward modernization, industrialization, and exports. The lower class poor have had to bear the burden of the economic growth, as wealth and income are mostly concentrated in the upper class. Social movements of the lower class, with some assistance from NGOs, emerged to demand a more equitable income distribution, as well as other political reforms. Along with these movements emerged stronger civil society which has led to positive changes in Thai politics. Civil society, as people sector, has also increased its role in social welfare by delivering some welfare services through NGOs and POs. However, despite more involvement of the people and the disadvantaged in Thai politics and administration, unequal resource distribution continues to be a serious social problem, particularly during the economic crisis. Political will of the state to allocate more funding to help finance welfare services rendered by non-state sectors may lead to better fulfillment of the redistributive objective. Adequacy of social welfare has however become and continues to be a public policy issue in a non-welfare state like Thailand.

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The United States' former President Lyndon B. Johnson once said, "No American should ever go hungry. America has the food, the knowledge, and the compassion to banish hunger and malnutrition." (Congressional Quarterly Almanac: 1967: 435) This statement was made during the Johnson Administration which was some years ago. Has the United States been able to solve the hunger problem in America? Perhaps some of it, but not totally. Similarly, elsewhere the problems of poverty and hunger persist. And the poverty problem is more severe in some parts of the world than in others. In Thailand, which is considered by the World Bank to be a middle-income country, hunger which is part of a bigger category of problem-poverty-is somewhat more severe than in the United States. Unequal income and resource distribution, which is mostly responsible for the poverty problem, will be the focus of this paper. A lot of questions and theories have been addressed at the issue of unequal income and resource distribution in Thailand. This paper, therefore, outlines theories and concepts which lead to arguments for and against income and resource distribution, as public policy. Then, the paper will discuss contemporary income and resource distribution in Thailand.

บทคัดย่อ

นโยบายการกระจายรายได้และสวัสดิการสังคม จัดเป็นหน้าที่สำคัญของรัฐบาล ในขณะที่การผลิตสินค้าและบริการ ส่วนใหญ่เป็นภาระของภาคเอกชน รัฐมักจำเป็นต้องทำหน้าที่กระจายรายได้ระหว่างบรรดาชนชั้นต่างๆ ในสังคม หลักศีลธรรมและหลักการของความยุติธรรมมักจะประกอบเป็นเหตุผลที่รัฐจะต้องทำหน้าที่กระจายรายได้ นอกจากนี้ ความไม่เท่าเทียมระหว่างชนชั้นต่างๆ ยังเป็นตัวการก่อให้เกิดปัญหาสังคมอื่นที่จะตามมา สำนัก Democratic Socialism จะเห็นด้วยกับการจัดบริการสวัสดิการสังคมโดยผ่านระบบรัฐสวัสดิการ แต่ในทางตรงกันข้าม สำนัก Social Darwinism จะไม่เห็นด้วยนัก กับการจัดหาสวัสดิการสังคมในรูปแบบต่างๆ โดยรัฐ ด้วยเกรงว่าผลกระทบด้านลบอาจเกิดขึ้นได้อันเนื่องมาจากนโยบายการกระจายรายได้และสวัสดิการสังคม เช่นการสูญเสียประสิทธิภาพบางส่วนในระบบเศรษฐกิจ ดั้งเดิมอย่างของการลดลงของชั่วโมงทำงาน

ประเทศไทยซึ่งไม่จัดเป็นประเทศที่มีรัฐสวัสดิการที่ครอบคลุม มีความแตกต่างของการกระจายของรายได้และความมั่งมีอย่างชัดเจนทั้งระหว่างประชาชน และระหว่างภาคต่างๆ ของประเทศ ทฤษฎีความทันสมัยและทฤษฎีการพึ่งพารวมทั้งการคอร์รัปชันในภาครัฐและภาคธุรกิจเอกชนสามารถอธิบายความแตกต่างของการกระจายรายได้ของประเทศ นโยบายเศรษฐกิจของรัฐบาลได้มุ่งให้ความสำคัญแก่การเจริญเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจอยู่เป็นเวลานาน โดยการพยายามทำให้ประเทศทันสมัย ทำให้ประเทศมุ่งสู่การเป็นประเทศอุตสาหกรรม และเน้นการส่งออกสินค้าไทยผู้ต่างประเทศ แต่ในขณะเดียวกัน ชนชั้นล่างที่ยากจน ต้องแบกรับผลกระทบของการเจริญเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจของประเทศ เพราะรายได้ที่มาจากความช่วยเหลือของเศรษฐกิจกระจุกตัวอยู่ในบรรดาชนชั้นนำ การเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมของกลุ่มชนชั้นล่าง ด้วยความช่วยเหลือส่วนหนึ่งจากองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชน ได้เกิดขึ้นด้วยจุดประสงค์ในการเรียกร้องให้มีการกระจายรายได้ที่เป็นธรรมมากขึ้น พร้อมกับกับการเรียกร้องให้มีการปฏิรูปทางการเมือง และด้วยการเคลื่อนไหวที่กว้างขวางนี้ ประชาสังคมไทยจึงมีความเข้มแข็งขึ้น อันส่งผลสู่การเปลี่ยนแปลงที่ดีของการเมืองไทย ประชาสังคม ดันมองได้ว่าประกอบเป็นภาคประชาชน ยังได้เพิ่มบทบาทในระบบสวัสดิการสังคมไทย โดยการมีส่วนร่วมให้บริการด้านสวัสดิการสังคมในทางรูปแบบ ผ่านองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนและองค์กรประชาชนต่างๆ อย่างไรก็ตาม ถึงแม้ประชาชนโดยเฉพาะผู้ด้อยโอกาสในสังคมจะมีส่วนร่วม ทางการเมืองและการบริหารประเทศมากขึ้นในปัจจุบัน แต่ปัญหาของการกระจายรายได้ที่ไม่เท่าเทียมก็ยังคงเป็นปัญหาสังคมที่รุนแรง โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในขณะที่ประเทศประสบกับวิกฤตการณ์ทางเศรษฐกิจ ความตั้งใจจริงของรัฐที่จะจัดสรรงบประมาณที่เพิ่มขึ้นเพื่อช่วยเหลือองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนที่ให้บริการด้านสวัสดิการสังคม น่าจะทำให้รัฐสามารถบรรลุเป้าหมายของการกระจายรายได้มากขึ้น ความพอเพียงของสวัสดิการสังคมยังคงเป็นประเด็นสำคัญในเชิงนโยบายสาธารณะต่อไปสำหรับประเทศไทยซึ่งยังไม่มีสวัสดิการสังคมที่ครอบคลุม

The problem of income and resource distribution

Unequal income and resource distribution constitutes a large category of social problem. Public policy is created to respond to social problems such as income and resource distribution. Ripley and Franklin (1986) categorize governmental policies into four large types. Redistributive policy and programs constitute one type of public policy that is intended to readjust the allocation of wealth, property, rights, and some other values among social classes or racial groups in society. According to Ripley and Franklin (1986), the redistributive feature enters because most redistributive policies require the transfer of resources and income from one segment of population to another (Ripley & Franklin: 1986: 77). One may refer to the distribution of resources as social welfare policies which comprise the provision of resources and services to people (Jansson: 1990: 18). Regardless of names, income and resource distribution constitutes a crucial governmental function intended to reduce inequality, deprivation, and despair in society. Income and resource distribution is also a crucial government's duty because many other social problems are closely linked to the problem of deprivation, inequality, and poverty. For instance, inadequate income, housing, and food; marital conflict; lack of education; lack of

access to services and medical care; lack of civil rights and liberty; illnesses; and disabilities are ultimately related to unequal resource distribution. Without correction, these problems finally result in despair and helplessness of a large section of population, which is a serious situation in poor countries.

Arguments for income and resource distribution

Firstly, income and resource distribution is traditionally the sole function of government. In a capitalist society or a free market economy, private production and consumption of goods and services are emphasized. The government is usually responsible for the tasks that cannot be fulfilled by the private counterpart. With market mechanism, the market, if left on its own, will be able to allocate scarce resources efficiently. However, the resource distribution function is foreign to the market; therefore, the government must intervene the market to fulfill this function. In a capitalist society, a small portion of population usually enjoys the luxury of large amount of resources, wealth, and income, while a large portion of population are deprived of those resources. This phenomenon is usually more rampant in developing countries like Thailand than in developed countries like those in Europe and the United States. Market intervention is intended to decrease the

despair of the poor and disadvantaged.

Secondly, social problems are inter-related and can easily spread all over society. One problem leads to others. For instance, the poor usually try to find ways to ameliorate their conditions. Drug dealing, prostitution, theft, and corruption, as well as various other crimes comprise some of these means to ameliorate the suffering (Krisada: 1998: 134). These problems which are closely related to the problem of poverty and unequal income distribution can indirectly affect the whole society. Other manifestations of despair and desperation of the disadvantaged are in such forms as home-lessness, street wandering, slums, low levels of education, and unskilled labor. Even the small affluent section of the population is indirectly affected by these chain reactions of poverty and unequal income and resource distribution problems such as

theft, prostitution, and drug dealing and addiction.

Thirdly, some countries, particularly the developing ones, experience a higher degree of inequality than do other more developed ones. Table 1 shows income distribution in some developed and developing nations. In Thailand, the economic crisis in recent years affects these figures in such ways that even widen the income disparity among the rich and poor sections of the population (National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB): 1999). Germany, on the other hand, experiences more equal share of resources among the richer and poorer sections of the population than do less developed countries like Thailand and the Philippines. An explanation could be its redistributive policy and comprehensive welfare system.

Table 1 : Income and wealth shared by classes of population in different countries

Country	Survey year	Lowest 20%	Second 20%	Third 20%	Fourth 20%	Highest 20%
Thailand	1996	4.5	7.9	12.1	20.1	55.4
Philippines	1994	5.9	9.6	13.9	21.1	49.6
Germany	1989	9.0	13.5	17.5	22.9	37.1
U.S.A.	1994	4.8	10.5	16.0	23.5	45.2

Data from: World Development Report 1988/1999: p. 198; and Narong Petchprasert (ed.): 1998: p. 255

There is a traditional difference in welfare policy and ideology between developed and developing countries. In less developed countries, which are mostly traditionally agrarian societies, Residualism or the Residual Model of welfare is the welfare ideology applied to these countries (Titmuss: 1974: 30; Kittipat: 1995: 12; Somkiat: 1993: 33; Macionis: 1995: 308). In the Residual Model, the problem of poverty and other related forms of hardship is addressed usually after the problem becomes conspicuous, widespread, and severe. In addition, people of these societies often rely on themselves, family, friends, relatives, and communities when hardship arises. The state will intervene usually when there are natural catastrophies. Moreover, Residualism believes that the disadvantaged themselves are responsible for their own fate. Responses to social problems in the Residual Model of welfare are often unsystematic and inadequate. As a result, hardship and despair among many persist.

On the other hand, the welfare ideology and practices that are applied to most developed, industrialized societies are Institutionalism or Institutional Model of welfare system. In developed and industrial societies, welfare has long been an essential social institution. Institutionalism puts more emphasis on social and economic equity and social welfare than does Residualism. Being institu-

tionalized, the welfare system in developed societies makes these nations become welfare states where the states are well equipped to fulfill its redistribution function.

Fourthly, inequality leads to social stratification which serves some functions. In a class society, it is often possible for people to move from one class to another, although this movement is more difficult in some places than others. Meritocracy as a system of reward and punishment serves to motivate efficiency and effectiveness in society, work place, and economy. By distributing resources unequally, a society encourages efficiency as well as the development of human resource by motivating each person to do the most significant work possible (Macionis: 1995: 251). In practice, people are motivated to work hard since hard workers receive high rewards.

Various schools of thoughts vary in their perspectives on the welfare ideology. Capitalism, individualism, Social Darwinism, the New Right's idea of the welfare state, and the endowment-based criteria for income and resource distribution seem to favor the concept of social stratification (George & Wilding: 1994: 15; Musgrave & Musgrave: 1989: 76). Natural law philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke postulated a person's innate right to the fruits of his or her labor. The New Right thinking sees

freedom as justice. In economic terms, people should be able to keep what they earn in the free and competitive market. On the other hand, the key to Marx's thinking is the idea of class conflict—the struggle between classes in society over valued resources (Macdonis: 1995: 106). This is the struggle between capitalists and proletariats because of the unfair distribution of resources. Even though small in number, capitalists appropriate a much larger share of resources than do the proletariats.

The mid point in the spectrum of capitalism on one end and Marxism on the other is Democratic Socialism. The welfare ideology of this school of thoughts became the accepted system of welfare in many welfare states in Europe and America. According to this school, the primary justification for a welfare state is the elimination of suffering in the society. Democratic Socialists see some social services as a stimulus to the economy and, hence, an investment in the country's economic prosperity. Education, for instance, is regarded as an investment in human capital, since it improves the quality of labor and, therefore, raises the prospects of productivity and economic growth. Moreover, a welfare state promotes altruism and social integration as people, through a welfare and redistributive system, automatically have to think of others in society (George & Wilding:

1994: 80 - 83).

In welfare states, the efforts to equalize income and wealth occur not only across individuals but also across places. As a result, in many of these countries, there is no conspicuous difference in income and wealth among regions, cities, or provinces. Nor is there apparent disparity between urban and rural areas with respect to the quality of life, infrastructure, and essential public services such as the quality of public education and health facilities.

The United States, for instance, adjusts and balances income and wealth among states and localities through the system of federalism. In this country, although states and localities are somewhat autonomous with respect to local public policy making, program implementation, and revenue raising, the central or federal government is still equipped with the redistribution authority (Danziger: 1996: 201). This is to ensure that certain levels of services, such as physical and mental health care, education, as well as subsidies to certain producers are forthcoming in all jurisdictions. Such services receive much federal government's attention due to their national, overall merit. Some essential and merit services in states and localities are encouraged by federal assistance through federal grants (Musgrave & Musgrave: 1989: 460 - 461).

In the American case, too much

inequality across jurisdictions is considered unfair and inappropriate. This is similar to the unfairness and undesirability of too high a level of unequal income and wealth distribution among individuals. In a mobile society like the U.S., poor localities with mediocre public services will lose the affluent portion of the population to other richer localities with higher quality public services. Those poor localities keep facing more serious financial distress since they continue losing an important tax base--the affluents. A result is run-down cities with low quality of life and high crime rate. Also, social problems spill over from one locality to the next. Localities with inadequate and/or ineffective law enforcement, for instance, serve as breeding places for criminals who move around American towns and cities. And lastly, the inequality across places, like the disparity in income and wealth among individuals, gives the country a bad image. With the federal assistance, the result is a nation with a certain degree of equality, as reflected in somewhat equal development across the nation with respect to infrastructure and essential social services. This eliminates some despair in society.

As redistributive policy and social welfare try to achieve more equal share of resources, two types of equality are involved. Equality of opportunity means a lesser degree of income and resource

distribution than equality of outcome. Equal opportunity is concerned generally with an equal start in life. According to advocates for equal opportunities, inequality resulting from differences in skills and hard work among individuals is justified. But they believe that prior to competition and hard work, people ought to have a certain degree of equal start in life such as education and employment (Heywood: 1994: 230 - 232). On the other hand, equality of outcome is the more radical and controversial face of egalitarianism. In a sporting metaphor, an equality of outcome implies that all runners will finish the race in line together, regardless of their starting point and the speed at which they run.

In welfare states, Democratic Socialists mostly expect to see equal opportunity rather than equal outcome. Therefore, we can still see income and wealth disparity in welfare states. Equal chance at the start is closely related to the idea of basic needs, which, in turn, are closely associated with the concept of human rights, because attempts to identify human rights are often grounded in some notion of basic human needs. In the needs-based theory of justice, to allow people to be hungry, thirsty, homeless, sick, or to live in fear, when resources exist elsewhere to make them otherwise is immoral. Distribution according to needs points toward the public provision of

welfare services, rather than toward the system of private provisions, which generally does not consider people's ability to pay. The elderly as well as people with poor health should receive a greater portion of the nation's resources than should the healthy, because the elderly usually have more needs due to their physical conditions.

In addition, equal opportunity, needs-based redistribution of resources, and human rights are considered formal equality, which is the equality before the law (Heywood: 1994: 227). The attempt to reach equality is reflected in the constitutions of many countries, especially those of welfare states. The American Declaration of Independence states that, "All men are created equal." The French Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen states that, "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights." In the new constitution of Thailand which was promulgated in 1997, many sections are devoted to the issue of human rights along with the effort to reach more equality. Section 52, for instance, states that people are entitled to a standard health care. And the poor have the right to receive health services from public health facilities free of charge. Section 54 states that people over 60 years old without sufficient income are entitled to receive assistance from the government. This should suggest that most countries

believe in a certain level of equity, since it is part of human rights.

Arguments against income and resource distribution

Most arguments against income distribution come from people who believe in capitalism or the New Right's ideas of social welfare. On the first ground, it is argued that social welfare may have a negative effect on production and effectiveness in the work force. This is the opposite view from Democratic Socialism, that sees social welfare as a stimulation of the economy. Capitalists look at welfare as a cause of dependency. Social welfare is believed to decrease work effort of people who rely on welfare as well as on people whose wealth and income are taken away for the purpose of redistribution. This can be considered a cost of welfare. On the part of people whose income and wealth are taken away, or the richer section of the society, it is believed that their work satisfaction will decrease along with their work effort. This is rather logical in a progressive tax system. Particularly for individual and corporate income taxes, if the tax rates keep increasing, it is believed that people will substitute leisure for labor (Musgrave & Musgrave: 1989: 83). Hard work is no longer considered worthwhile, as a large portion of the result of hard work is used for income and wealth transfer. Similarly, for too high a level

of tax on the interests earned from saving, rational people would increase their consumption while decreasing their savings. Another part of inefficiency results from welfare recipients. A popular argument is that some welfare programs such as cash payments and unemployment benefits become a disincentive to work. Some people will choose to remain on welfare instead of trying to become independent (Dye: 1995: 119).

Capitalists and the New Right also attack the welfare state on the ground that it puts too high an emphasis on the pursuit of equity and redistribution, rather than growth and wealth creation stimulated by the efficiency and dynamics of the free market system. What gives the market its dynamics and efficiency is the competition that it engenders through offering rewards for the energetic and successful, while punishing those who fail. With welfare and redistributive policy, the dynamics and efficiency of the market is undermined by the creation of cushion, fail-proof, everlasting arms of the state as a safety net.

Another attack on the welfare system is that state's welfare is a source of growth in the government-the increase in bureaucracy. This is contradictory to the free market ideology which favors freedom of choices than imposing a progressive system of taxation whereby the successful and richer section of the economy faces a

high tax rate. At the same time, welfare state policies tend to be implemented by large, governmental, monopolistic programs. The New Right links size with inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the government's provisions of social services.

Lastly, people attacking the public welfare system believe that governments in welfare states are in the state of confusion. They are led to assume responsibilities for policies that cannot succeed, such as the abolition of poverty, the improvement in the nation's health, or equalizing of educational opportunity (George & Wilding: 1994: 21 - 35).

The reality of welfare and redistributive policy in Thailand

Thai history suggests that the agitation for resource and income distribution was experienced along with the pressure for political reform in the 1970s (Pornprapa: 1998: 10). This was a result of the increasing disadvantage and hardship the Thai peasants and farmers had experienced for some decades.

The effort of economic development through the expansion of infrastructure facilities such as highways, ports, and irrigation dams was accelerated some forty years ago. The export-led, modernized economy, however, worked to benefit only the upper classes, not the disadvantaged peasants. Large numbers

of peasants were supposed to be brought into a commercial economy which is increasingly geared toward exports. But most of the Thai peasants who were unaccustomed to modern marketing techniques became prey of entrepreneurs as well as of the middlemen-merchants. The government also used its economic as well as export-promotions policies to aid mostly investors. As a result, peasant producers gained the least from the growing international trade. In addition, while mechanization made possible cultivation of much larger area of land than would have been possible with animal power, these machines were available only to wealthier peasants. Many of the farmers in the lesser-developed areas such as those in the northeast, not possessing a piece of land, had to rent some from land owners, composed of merchants as well as high-and middle-level bureaucrats and provincial notables with political connections. This accentuates the concentration of agricultural income among classes in the society other than the disadvantaged peasants, thereby intensifying the inequality of income distribution as well as the urban-rural disparity (Prudhisan: 1987: 132).

As a result of the attempt toward modernization and industrialization of the country, the number of blue-collar workers grew rapidly. Most factories were located in urban and suburban

areas in order to take advantage of the more developed infrastructure facilities. With the demand for blue-collar labor in factories, landless and displaced peasants, being exploited and impoverished by the modernization and export-led economy, migrated into urban and suburban areas in large numbers in search of employment. Some became workers in service industries; some found factory jobs; and others became unemployed and had no places to go. For those who could find jobs, hardship still persisted. Employers, who always had an upper hand at that time, constantly refused to negotiate with their employees regarding the latter's demand for wage increases. Often, employers responded to those demands by unfair dismissals or threats of dismissals, as well as cut-backs in working hours of the employees (Prudhisan: 1987: 145). A result was sporadic protests and strikes. Urban and rural differences also increased with the growth and other facilities concentrated only in urban areas. Because of these disparities, hardship and despair increased among the disadvantaged, large numbers of workers and peasants.

Along with the student movement to demand an end to the military, authoritarian government in 1973, social injustice as reflected in hardship among the disadvantaged was also put forward as an issue and justification for the demand for a political reform. Concepts

of equality and justice are closely related to the concept of human rights in the democratic regime. In 1974, some rudimentary links were forged between students, workers, and peasants. The students' role was to provide protest facilities, to help systematize peasants and workers' demand, as well as to act as a mediator between workers and peasants on the one hand and the government on the other. The students were becoming increasingly sympathetic to the workers and peasants.

The modernization effort and the attempt toward economic development through the export-led economy and their result in hardship and despair among the lower class of the Thai society could be depicted as a feature of modernization effect, according to the Modernization Theory. In a global perspective, Modernization Theory explains global inequality in terms of differing levels of technological development among societies. Industrial technology and the innovations of countless entrepreneurs created new wealth on a grand scale. The developed societies were among the first to take advantage of the scientific and technological development. The adoption of new technology and modernization, however, depends on whether the cultural environment in a society emphasizes tradition or innovation and greater productivity. Modernization theorists

believe that traditionalism creates a form of cultural inertia that discourages the adaptation of technological advancement that would improve the standard of living. England and the U.S. have experienced the modernization process since mid nineteenth century (Macdonis: 1995: 306 - 360). On the other hand, most developing countries usually have long, traditional culture, which slows down the desire to pick up and take advantage of new technology. Disparity of income and wealth distribution among nations, therefore, results from the different levels of economic growth and modernization across these nations.

Moving down from the global to the national level, the effect of modernization and economic development, as described by the Modernization Theory, could be depicted in Thailand. While a few urban areas, especially Bangkok and its peripheral provinces, experienced the economic growth, many other remote provinces, in reserving their traditional culture, have mostly remained rural areas with mediocre infrastructure and facilities.

Therefore, modernization is believed to bring inequality. The expectation that the benefit of modernization, in such forms as more income and wealth, will move downward from the richer to the poorer sections of a society is known as the trickling-down effect. This rarely takes place both at the global and national

levels. In Thailand, in particular, the urban and rural areas differ considerably.

Dependency Theory also explains the resource and income disparity among societies both at the national and global level. This theory particularly explains inequality in terms of the historical exploitation of poor societies by rich ones. It is argued that high-income countries have systematically impoverished low-income countries, for instance, by making the poorer nations in Asia and Africa depend on the products of the richer nations. Similarly at the national level, like in the Thai case particularly prior to the start of the economic crisis of 1997, the upper classes in urban areas especially in Bangkok and its periphery benefited the most from the growth of the bubble economy. However, the growth and benefit came about at the expense of resources and inexpensive labor from rural areas. (Maneerat: 1994: 66). Worse than that, when the economic crisis hit Thailand in 1997, the disadvantaged and the lower class seemed to experience the hardest hit mostly in the form of unemployment.

The roles of the student movement and National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) in the 1970s in helping the poor and disadvantaged organize to demand rights could be considered an example of a prototype of social movement and civil society in Thailand. The NSCT would nowadays be called a non-governmental

organization (NGO), as its purposes were altruistic. In this particular case of the NSCT, the networking among the students, peasants, and workers was intended to arrive at a more equitable society.

Since the demand for the Thai political reform in the 1970s, there have been positive changes in the Thai politics in ways that have made the country more democratic. Particularly around the time of the drafting of the constitution in 1997, popular participation in politics increased. The public is increasingly familiar with democratic concepts, such as public hearing, referendum, and accountability in the government. Decentralization movements and efforts have increased with the push for greater local authority and people's participation in local politics and decision making. And Thai citizens had an opportunity to participate in the drafting of the 1997 Constitution by indirect election of the Constitution Drafting Assembly as well as by participating in public hearings in issues concerning the draft. The NGOs, like environmental and human rights groups, as part of the civil society, increased in number along with formal business interest groups.

But with respect to the issue of income and wealth distribution, what has happened in the past few decades? The disadvantaged could no longer tolerate their suffering as a result of poverty and joined the movement for

political reform in the 1970s. As suggested in Table 1, the lowest 20 percent of the Thai population are entitled to 4.5 percent of the country's resources while the highest 20 percent of our population are entitled to 55.4 percent of those resources. This gap in income and wealth has widened slightly as a result of the economic crisis. Table 2 illustrates average annual income per person by regions.

From Table 2, regions with the most conspicuous income disparity are between

the northeastern and the central regions. By comparing the figures of 1962 with those of 1995, the gap is wider in 1995 than in 1962, suggesting a greater incident of income disparity nowadays than in the past. And looking more closely at the disparity between urban areas, especially Bangkok, and other remote, rural areas, one will see differences in many aspects, suggesting hardly any improvement from the 1970s.

Table 2: Average personal income by regions (in Bahts)

Regions	1962	1981	1988	1992	1995
North	1,075	8,447	11,158	17,172	22,305
Northeast	993	5,910	7,804	12,756	16,680
Central	1,174	10,228	12,739	22,248	29,811
South	1,822	8,880	11,228	19,500	26,206

Data from: Naruemon: 1997: 453.

As suggested by Modernization Theory as well as Dependency Theory, the method for achieving modernization and industrialization in Thailand has always been to sacrifice the rural poor through exhausting the country's natural resources (Naruemon: 1997: 423). Dam constructions, such as the case of Kaeng Sua Ten Dam and Pak Mun Dam, for instance, have been hot public policy issue in this country. The arguments for their constructions are for electricity generation and for the prevention of floods during the rainy season while

reserving water for crops in the drought season. However, people who have to bear the direct impact and cost of dam constructions are the local people who have to be relocated away from the specified dam sites, previously their homes. These people are usually the disadvantaged, since areas for dam constructions are mostly remote and rural. Another governmental policy that requires a relocation of local people has been the implementation of reforestation policy by the Royal Forest Department. For example, there have already been

resettlements of hilltribes people from conservation forests to lowland areas. The principal objective of this policy is to fight the loss of forests to agriculture, which is believed to cause environmental problems identified as deforestation, soil erosion, flooding, and water shortage. Recently, a similar relocation took place at Dong Lan Conservation Forest. In all cases of relocation, the government must find a resettlement and/or compensation for affected local people. But since the Thai are not mobile people, they expect to stay for a long time in each settlement. Therefore, mostly, the compensation and government's assistance for relocations are considered by affected people as inadequate, thereby causing dissatisfaction and discontent among local people. Often, there are also complaints that the resettlements are not as fertile for agricultural activities as their original places. It is also argued that these resettlements are responsible for the destruction of local communities by taking away the livelihood of the poor. And in some cases such as Dong Lan Conservation Forest, there were strong reactions from local people, which almost resulted in violence between the people and the public officials in charge of the relocation process.

In another case, Khor Jor Kor Resettlement Project, the change of governmental policies as well as changes of administrations also adversely affected

the poor and disadvantaged. For more than one century, agriculture was the principal support of the Thai economy as well as the source of urban growth and government's revenues. The government promoted agrarian expansion for economic growth and urbanization by permitting peasants to occupy vacant land, mostly in forests, to increase agricultural production. As a result, before the 1970s, forests were wiped out rapidly for the purpose of agricultural expansion and cultivation. But in the 1980s, governmental policy changed toward industrialization through export of goods and services. In order to help promote the export-led economy and industrialization, some land was set aside for commercial reforestation, especially for commercial eucalyptus plantation for pulp industry. In support of conservation and commercial reforestation, the Khor Jor Kor Resettlement Project was initiated to relocate the poor, local people from forest-reserved areas.

One can find endless discussions on the plights of the disadvantaged. In cases related to modernization and industrialization, problems of pollution were often cited. Along with industrialization comes the need for the treatment of industrial waste. Also, more consumption of industrial products results in waste needed to be managed. We have heard about cases of waste mismanagement such as the case of GENCO Company,

which could result in immediate as well as long term effects on people's health due to the toxicity of the improper waste dumping. Other cases of improper waste management and illegal dumping have been frequently cited. Coupled with the pollution problem, safety in work places has become a public issue. Attention must be made to the public and workers' compensation, in cases of accidents such as the Kader Factory fire in 1996 and the Klong Toey Port chemical waste fire in 1993 (Naruemon: 1997: 443 - 448). Lower class workers are usually insufficiently compensated for their loss and the effect on the health.

Aside from Modernization Theory and Dependency Theory as the explanation of inequality, corruption in the government and mismanagement in both the public and private, business sectors might also be responsible for the injustice. Corruption in the Thai government and politics has been a topic that is increasingly discussed. This corruption is very much related to the problem of governance not only in the public but also the private sectors--another popular topic of discussion during the time of constitutional drafting and the onset of the economic crisis in 1997. For a long time both Thai politicians and public officials have gained extraordinarily strong bureaucratic power. In particular, some officials have taken advantage of their positions to

accept bribes from certain interest groups such as business corporations in exchange for favors. This exchange of various forms of favors and bribes is more commonly known in Thailand as corruption in the public and private sectors. The purpose of these exchanges and collusion is mainly for personal gains of both the government and the private sectors (Riggs: 1964: 270; Pasuk & Sungsidh: 1994: 25 - 29). Policy making and implementation in Thailand is, then, in favor of business corporations in such forms as industrialization and modernization, while the price of this favor is usually paid by those disadvantaged in remote, rural areas. Some examples of these prices and plights of the poor were discussed above--relocation without adequate compensation and assistance, pollution, depletion of vital resources needed most by the poor, and, ultimately, unfair income and resource distribution.

Actually, these phenomena are not surprising; and as the previous figures in Table 1 suggest, unequal resource distribution exists also in welfare states. According to Group Theory in public policy making, public policy at any given time is the equilibrium reached within the process of group struggle. This equilibrium is determined by the relative influence of interest groups. And changes in the relative influence of interest groups can be expected to result

in changes in public policy. Policy will move in the direction desired by the groups gaining influence and away from the desires of groups losing influence. The influence or power of a group is usually determined by their numbers, wealth, organizational strength, leadership, access to decision makers, and internal cohesion within each group (Dye: 1995: 24). But in Southeast Asian countries, there is much imbalance in the influence among various groups. In fact, according to Crone (1993), certain characteristics in most Southeast Asian political culture lead to the imbalance and, ultimately, inequity. First, pluralist democracy is rare in the Third World context, despite frequent elections. But most importantly, groups that are disadvantaged are rarely empowered by the political system. Very often, civil society groups are depoliticized so as to be politically irrelevant, reserving political influence to elites. Significant openings of the political space take place only in the interaction of the upper class or socio-economic elites and state elites (Crone: 1993: 58).

There have been positive developments in the Thai politics, however. The case of the Assembly of the Poor, as a social movement which staged its second rally from January to May 1997, represents a way to open up political space for the disadvantaged. Movement strategies of the Assembly in making demands are

noteworthy. Firstly, there were NGOs and a few academics assisting the Assembly. They played advisory roles, focusing particularly on legal, procedural, and documentary matters. But overall, leaders of the Assembly or of the villagers did their own negotiation with ministers and senior public officials. The organizational structure comprises horizontal networks, which are organized in accordance with public policy issues or problem areas, mostly connected to natural resources like soil, forests, and water. The result of such networking and movement is empowerment of the disadvantaged. The size of the Assembly is its important political resource in the fight for the political space.

The outcomes of the Assembly's demand could be considered a partial success. The Assembly was able to achieve some of its objectives in bringing key decision makers to the negotiating table. Long negotiations ended in the agreement of the government to allocate funds for assistance and compensations for those affected by the governmental policy, such as resettlement projects or, ultimately, by the modernization process. The Assembly was also successful in ending three projects—a dam, an industrial estate, and an industrial waste factory—as well as temporarily halting some resettlement projects until the process of establishing rights is concluded. Unfortunately, it was made explicit that

the allotment of funds was exceptions to the rules, applicable to specific cases, and not to be cited as precedence (Prapart: 1998: 207; Prudhisan: 1998: 266 - 269). The assistance and compensations are given by the authorities in the spirit of the good heart to people in trouble.

Even though the plights of the disadvantaged mostly remain, some of the success indicated in the case of Assembly of the Poor as well as its movement strategies should be considered significant in the process of political change in Thailand. Similar phenomena can be witnessed more often at present than before. The increasing formation and movements of NGOs, particularly those with developmental objectives, add more significance and strength to Thai civil society. Along with NGOs, other community-based people's organizations (POs) are formed, in support of the increasing importance and roles of local communities in local self government or decentralization of power and decision making. This growing awareness in the people sector or civil society has been due probably to the distrust in the government as well as in the private sector (Pisanu: 1998: 5-11). The increase in awareness might have also been due to the increasing interest in political participation. More people have become aware that public decision making could directly and indirectly affect their lives as residents in communities.

Political participation and policy advocacy by local people, POs, the disadvantaged and poor, possibly with some assistance from NGOs, have been particularly strong on environmental issues. This is probably because the environmental degradation has increasingly become a serious problem from the 1980s onwards. Environmental issues that have direct, adverse effects mostly on the poor and the disadvantaged have increasingly gained public and media attention.

What is the current state of other social welfare services in Thailand to decrease hardship and suffering? Political will and capacity affect the distribution of social welfare in ways that either increase or decrease its level (Crone: 1993: 56). Thai social welfare system has always been according to the Residual Model of welfare which is usually not comprehensive and leaves individuals to care for themselves. Once there are problems and if people cannot solve their problems, they usually turn to family and friends, as well as possibly to charitable organizations which are mostly voluntary service providers.

Along with despair and suffering, there are many other dimensions of inequity. Many obvious poverty-related problems, such as homelessness and unemployment might be commonly known; but what is more subtle are other poverty-related problems that are piling up on top of trivial problems. These

subtle problems, which are mostly inequity as a result of differences in needs, could be cited endlessly. For instance, the elderly comprise one segment of the population that faces the highest hardship and poverty, because they have more needs than do people of younger generations. Special needs of the elderly are due to health-related expenses.

Women comprise another portion of the population in poverty. The problem of job and wage discrimination against women is widely known and is partially responsible for their poverty. But there are other reasons that explain their poverty, such as the fact that many of the Thai women, especially those in impoverished, rural areas, are abandoned by their husbands and left with nothing to care for their young, dependent children. Naturally, it is easier for men than women to abandon their children. A few case studies will help to illustrate this. Sompit, for example, was married twice and has three children—two with her first husband and one with her second husband. Now she is divorced from both husbands while all three children are with her. Sompit has to leave two of her children with her mother in Lampang Province so that, relieved of the task of caring for them, she could look for jobs. She has been unemployed for some time. Somjai, as another example, having two children and currently pregnant, has been divorced by her husband for several months. She

feels helpless and wonders what her fate and that of her three children would be (Supaluk: 1998, July-August: 47).

Another example of despair and helplessness concerns a married, middle-class couple with two children with mental impairment. One child developed it after being born through a medical procedure in the intensive care unit. A medical malpractice caused a blockage of blood flow to the child's brain. This caused a shortage of oxygen in the brain cells for a few minutes, resulting in permanent brain damage. Another child, a girl, was born with the mental impairment caused by infection with German measles in her mother's womb. The result has been a middle-class family with two helpless children. Currently, the children live happily with their parents who give both of them love and care. But the parents cannot help worrying about the future when the children have to live without their parents. What they are trying to do now is saving some money for the future for their children (Krobkrua...: 1999, March 18: 13).

Sayan and many other children have had to move around the country with their parents from their hometowns in the northeastern part of Thailand in search of jobs mostly in provinces in the central region. Each time when Sayan's parents find a job such as in sugar cane plantation, Sayan would become a child worker and work alongside his parents in order

to raise more money for the family. Similar situations can be witnessed in many other families migrating from the northeastern provinces. Besides the problem of economic hardship that these families face, an even more serious long-term problem would be the lack of education among the children. Since they are in the sugar cane fields working alongside their parents, they cannot be in classes at school. These parents, however, would rather that their children be in school. Desperation alone makes these families accept the fate of their children being in the fields. Not only do these children have to help their parents earn some money for the family, but they also usually find it difficult to attend school, because they move around all the time. The worst result of all is that, like their parents, Sayan and many other children may never escape poverty and despair due mainly to the lack of education and other essential skills required for better jobs (Wirot: 1998, March 15: 6).

Many more incidents like those described above can be cited, especially during the economic crisis. These incidents suggest that most of the time, in subtle ways, poverty correlates with many other types of social problems, bringing the poor and disadvantaged deep down into more despair and hardship. The essential question is: What governmental policies and programs are designed and directed toward each

poverty and poverty-related problem discussed above?

Redistributive policies and programs used to lessen the above problems of despair in most welfare states are quite foreign to Thailand. In the United States, families whose income falls below a certain level, which varies from state to state, will be eligible for being in the Food Stamp Program. Being issued food stamps or coupons, these families, then, may use the coupons to purchase food items. This is considered an in-kind resource redistribution. The Food Stamp Program is not an income transfer, since only food products, not other commodities, can be purchased by food coupons. The Food Stamp Program relieves some of the hunger and hunger-related problems in the U.S.

Many redistributive policies in the U.S. are directed at families with children. In the United States, the divorce rate is quite high, as maintaining a marriage is sometimes not considered worthwhile both for the couple as well as for the children, if there are so many problems in the marriage. Quarrels and fighting between a couple might cause harmful psychological effects on the children. Through each divorce procedure, the court of justice will determine whether the father or the mother will have the custody of the child or children. The Child Support Program through a Child Support Agency would ensure that the

parent—either the mother or the father—in custody and taking care of the children receive monthly allowances from the other parent not in custody of the children. That allowance is geared toward the expense of the children; therefore, both parents who should be responsible in caring for their own children are required by the state to live up to their respective responsibilities. Another program of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) is designed to take some burden off families with many children, especially single-parent families. Naturally, especially lower-class families, single-parent families are headed by females. For education as a social service, children have always been provided with twelve years of formal education free of charge. A child goes to school in a school district closest to his or her home. In state and local governments, there is also the Emergency Foster Care Program, which find temporary foster homes for children in trouble due to poor or possibly dangerous family environment. Problems that children may face are, for example, being battered, abandoned, and sexually or emotionally abused. With reported cases of abused children, the police will take action by bringing these children to the Emergency Foster Care Program. While the investigation regarding the abuse or other poor and dangerous conditions is conducted possibly both by the police and the Program, the Program will find a temporary foster

family for each abused child (Rodger: 1994: 537 - 541; Dye: 1995: 125 - 126; Kulwadee: 1998, March-April: 68).

These are examples of welfare services providing both income and in-kind assistance to families and individuals in need. These programs are designed primarily to respond to basic human needs or human rights, such as the provision of food and shelter as well as skills and basic education to help people become independent. Programs that provide in-kind transfer take people's conditions and situations, such as divorce and other types of needs, into consideration and direct help at these special situations and needs. In most of these programs, federal and state governments share the costs of welfare provision due to possible spilled-over effects of most social problems, particularly poverty-related ones, to other communities. Although local governments are usually responsible for most parts of the welfare costs, federal assistance is sometimes available in the form of grants to local governments in order to ensure at least some basic levels of welfare provisions throughout the country (Rodger: 1994: 540).

It takes money to redistribute income and wealth in order to reduce despair and hardship. Redistributive policy is usually characterized by a high degree of conflict and disagreement, because resource distribution involves

transferring something of value from one group of people to some other groups. Politically, not all transfers are seen as redistributive, however. Only the redistribution from relatively well-off groups to relatively less well-off groups constitutes redistributive policy in the strict political sense. With conflicts and disagreement, not surprisingly, it is difficult for welfare policy and implementation to achieve redistributive results. Also, due to conflicts and disagreement, politicians and bureaucrats involved tend to shift welfare policies away from strict redistribution to the less well-off and to make it a program that serves a larger public. Most welfare policies that are intended to be redistributive policy, in practice, turn out to be less redistributive in nature. Such partial change in intention will offer advantages to many more groups, especially the upper class or elites who are more politically influential. This compromise, as usual, will decrease levels of conflicts and disagreement in the policy process such as this (Ripley & Franklin: 1986: 178).

The less redistributive consequence of Thai social welfare as a result of elite influence, however, does not necessarily mean that the redistributive objective is nonexistent. In fact, similar to other policies such as tax and regulation policies, redistributive and social welfare policy in Thailand has been adapted from the western style of social welfare-Institutional Model.

In Thailand, one may notice many intentions as well as policies to achieve the redistributive objective that are not much different from those of the west. For instance, many types of tax in Thailand, such as corporate and personal income taxes as well as heritage tax are progressive and, therefore, have the redistributive characteristics. Many policies and programs given by various bureaucracies such as Ministry of Public Health, public hospitals, public schools, Department of Public Welfare, Social Security Office, Department of Employment, Department of Skill Development, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of University Affairs are intended for in-kind distribution. Recently, for instance, much attention has been given to Social Security Act as there have been several amendments, in 1993, 1994, and 1999. According to the 1997 Constitution, public education will be free of charge for Thai citizens. Various programs offered by National Housing Authority have been existent for some time to provide inexpensive housing for low income families. Similar to other social insurance programs, the Health Card Program is a voluntary social insurance program whereby the funding comes from both people applying for the card as well as from the state. In principle, Department of Public Welfare is responsible for general social welfare programs, directed at population with most needs such as the

elderly, people with physical and mental impairment, and abandoned children (Department of Public Welfare: 1997: 7-12; Somkiat: 1993: 37) .

Extensive funding and financing, however, are required for social welfare to have intended, redistributive effects. Inadequate funding results in non-comprehensive social welfare system and, in fact, a Residual Model of welfare in Thailand. As Crone (1993) states, the lack of political will and capacity partially explain the inadequate funding and inadequate social welfare, even if the redistribution motive has existed. For instance, the present assistance to eligible elderly is around 300 baht per month, an amount less than ten U.S. dollars at the present foreign exchange rates (Yuthasat...: 1999, June 15: 13). The state's retirement homes for the elderly of the entire country reported to accommodate a total of 2,624 in 1996 and 1997 (Department of Public Welfare: 1997: 57). With inadequate state's social welfare, other sources of assistance, services, as well as funding from families, friends, charitable and voluntary organizations, NGOs, and POs are needed. For instance, the governmental policy toward the elderly that grow in numbers with the present advanced medical technology, stresses the importance of the elderly care by families and relatives. Overall, people have to rely more on themselves in Residual

Model of welfare than in Institutional Model.

In Thailand the role of civil society has increased in order to mitigate the inadequacy of redistributive policy and social welfare. In fact two roles of NGOs and POs, as part of Thai civil society, can be witnessed in the issue of resource distribution. One role is policy advocacy, which represents an attempt by the non-state, non-business, people sector to push for changes in governmental policies in ways that benefit the poor and disadvantaged. This role is reflected in social movements like the case of the Assembly of the Poor. Social movements constitute attempts to transfer the concentration of resources from the government and the private sectors, as a result of the collusion between these two sectors, to the people sector. NGOs and POs, as part of civil society, should receive some credit from making some of the transfer possible.

Another role of NGOs and POs involves public service delivery, particularly welfare services. Some examples of NGOs and other charitable organizations, such as cremation associations like Por Tek Toeng, Emergency Home for Troubled Women and Children, Women's Foundation, Foundation for Child Development, and Foundation for the Better Life of Children have become increasingly familiar in Thai society (Directory of Public Interest NGOs in Thailand: 1990: 107). These non-

state, non-profit organizations deliver social services to the needy such as people with disabilities alongside the government sector. This is considered by Savas (1987) as an alternative arrangement of public goods and service provisions. Similar to government's contracting with private, business firms to deliver certain services such as road construction and repair as well as environmental clean up, charitable organizations, through their voluntary efforts and funding, provide a host of human services to people in need. These situations, as well as many others, constitute privatization, sometimes called coproduction or coprovision of social services. These are situations where there is an involvement of government and non-government sectors including private firms and civil society in social service delivery. In the case of contracts between the government and private firms, the government hires them to deliver social services specified by the government. However, voluntary services pursued by not-for-profit organizations, such as NGOs and POs, are usually financed by donations (Savas: 1987: 80; Whitaker: 1980: 240).

Capitalism and the New Right would favor the voluntary service provision by civil society, since it would decrease the role of the state in the distribution function. The New Right questions whether state's responsibility must necessarily mean state provisions of social services

(George & Wilding: 1994: 43). If civil society, by voluntary organizations such as NGOs and POs, can deliver services, the state might reduce its role from being the service provider to become the service arranger. Even though the provision of social welfare is overseen and sometimes financed by the state, it leaves the actual service provisions to the people sector.

There are some other reasons for the provision of social services by the people sector. Cases of inefficiency in the government are frequently cited. In Thailand, cases of collusion and corruption among the state and private sectors through various contracts such as in road constructions and repair have been widely known as corruption or bribery. It is expected to see less corruption in the people sector due generally to its altruistic motives. Service provisions by civil society, therefore, have become an increasingly attractive alternative in public service delivery in Thailand. In addition, in research regarding services to homeless people in the United States, records of efficiency and effectiveness of service provisions by nonprofit organizations have been noted. Nonprofit organizations not only deliver social services to the homeless, such as the provision of shelters and meals, but are also motivated to mobilize homeless people and leading members of the organizations to increase the salience of homelessness as a public problem. In some communities, nonprofit

organizations use homeless persons to draw media attention to the problem, such as staging sit-downs in commercial areas, and to spur public officials and politicians to take action. Therefore, non-profit organizations often become an important driving force in homeless issues because local governments are often slow to respond to homeless crises (Berman & West: 1995: 237). This sluggish response may be due to the absence of political incentives to act, since homeless persons comprise only a very small section of local population; and the local public often favors law enforcement over rehabilitative strategies for addressing homelessness. Thus, non-profit organizations seem to be effective, relative to the government, not only in delivering welfare services but also in addressing the problem of homelessness as a public problem in need of remedy.

In Thailand, an increased role of civil society in redistributive policy making and implementation helps address some problems regarding social welfare. Primarily, there are more social welfare services rendered by the state and NGOs. Also addressed is the issue of public distrust in the government resulting from corruption in the state and private sectors. NGOs and POs also help better articulate the interests of the disadvantaged in public policies that could adversely affect them such as in the case of dam construction and con-

servation forestation. However, an increased role of civil society in redistributive policy does not ensure an adequate social welfare. Religious organizations in the U.S., in helping the homeless, are known to lack funding as they rely mostly on donations (Berman & West: 1995: 236). Even though the state is relieved of some tasks of social welfare, income distribution still constitutes an important state function. Voluntary social welfare services of NGOs and POs are mostly based on altruism. But without mandate and sufficient action by the state to distribute income and wealth, a certain degree of equality cannot be achieved. Political will and capacity is needed for adequate funding and financing of social welfare, possibly by allocating some financial assistance to NGOs and POs delivering social welfare services. Otherwise, despair of the poor and disadvantaged may never be alleviated adequately.

What is the future of welfare and resource distribution in Thailand? The adequacy of social welfare always depends on political will and capacity to transfer resources from the more well-off to the less well-off. It also depends heavily on civil society to continue articulating interests of the disadvantaged as well as working alongside the government in delivering some welfare services.

The primary indication of the political will to do so seems to be some attention to the social welfare in the 1997

Constitution. For instance, Section 55 pays attention to people with disabilities, who are entitled to extra care and treatment from the state. Section 53 partially directs attention to children, stressing that it is the state's duty to take care of abandoned children. And Section 56 allows both the state and communities to care for and benefit from natural resources. Very importantly, Section 43 entitles all Thai citizens to twelve years of free public education.

If things go as the 1997 Constitution intends, there will be an incredible increase in state's welfare spending and provision. Much more resource, however, will be needed for the fulfillment of free twelve-year public education. Somehow, local governments, communities, and the state or the central government must find more money in order to achieve this policy intention. The government's subsequent decision making as well as policy implementation might not necessarily or fully lead to the results intended by the 1997 Constitution.

In addition, to what extent will these welfare policies and programs support one another? Poverty is inter-related with many other problems. Therefore, for instance, the free twelve-year public education might not suddenly be a panacea to the problems of literacy and lack of job skills. Although education is free, school attendance of some children may still incur some costs to some families that rely on the children's labor as a source of income for the families. Other types of aid, like other income or in-kind transfers, must come from other welfare programs for the education policy to have a stronger impact. Coordinating among these redistributive policies and programs so that these policies and programs support one another is not at all simple.

For a traditionally non-welfare state like Thailand, difficult times, struggles, as well as a lot of compromises and negotiations between the elites and the lower class in the redistribution issue are more to come.

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