NGO Involvement in Poverty Reduction in Thailand:  
Population and Community Development Association (PDA)\(^1\)

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Introduction
Rural development is very important for improving the quality of life of grassroots groups in Thailand. As Krongkaew et. Al., (1992) have presented, the aim of rural developments is to improve the economic and social livelihood of special target groups, in particular the poor in rural areas. In the past, the traditional thinking has been that only government must attend to the welfare of villagers. However, at present, the role of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in Thailand has dramatically increased and become significantly established (Narkwiboonwong and Tips, 1989, Krongkaew et al., 1992).

Presently, rural development in Thailand is facing a difficult task due two main reasons: 1) its image as a prosperous country has led donor agencies to categorise Thailand as a non-recipient country (Sukpanich, 1998; PDA, 1994; UN-ESCAP, 1997), and 2) Thailand’s economic turmoil since mid – 1997(Terdudomtham, 1998) has meant the governmental budget for various developing programmes has declined. The main problem that Thai NGOs currently face is rapidly diminishing support from international donor agencies.

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Normally, NGOs and others seeking donation often find raising a very difficult task, since asking for assistance from other is not part of Thai culture. In addition, Thai NGOs lack the skills and appropriate models necessary to target the right donor and make the case for rural development effectively. Significantly, despite recent improvements in the Thai economy, there is still a need for private companies to participate in rural development.

One of the large Thai NGOs working in rural development is the Population and Community Development Association (PDA). It consists of 600 staff and 16 community development centres nationwide implanting 20 development programmes both in urban and rural areas (PDA, 1997). Currently, the PDA plays a special role in promoting private company involvement in rural development programmes in Thailand. In general, the overall objective of promoting private company involvement in rural development is to upgrade the standard of living of villagers in terms of income, basic needs, education and skills, health, the village environment, and the ability to cooperatively manages small enterprises and development, focusing on: 1) income generation, 2) educational opportunity, 3) improving the environment, 4) strengthening village institutions, and 5) social development.

1. Significance of NGO in Rural Development Programmes

As mentioned earlier, not only have government organizations implemented social development programmes, NGOs have also done it. Over the last three decades many NGOs have sprung up to complement the work of government. Particularly in Asia, a number of NGOs continue to work for the basic needs of poor villagers in urban and rural areas (United Nations, 1992; Charoensap, 1984). In addition, an NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC, 1984) provides one of the more creative dimensions in development which is due to the relative small – scale size casing them to be especially more efficient and effective in dealing with their beneficiaries.

In general, NGOs tend to work with and have better access to grassroots groups and villager organisations who lack opportunity in terms of standard of living in society (ANGOC, 1984, Tillekeratne, 1984)). NGOs usually transfer their appropriate skills to their target groups. They can also contribute the needed innovation, flexibility and dedication, which are necessary to the rural development activities. By doing this, NGOs are well placed to bring the marginalized and the poor within the mainstream of development. NGOs fundamentally still use the villager participatory approach in their development process.
NGOs tended to have various approaches to rural development programmes. The development agencies attempt to design an approach that will create an appropriate model depending on the circumstances. Actually, the models can help NGOs to decide where they can make the greatest contribution in rural communities. Ritchies et al., (1995) have supported this by suggesting four main approaches adopted by NGOs: 1) relief and welfare, 2) community development, 3) sustainable development, and 4) villager movements.

2. Effectiveness of Development Programmes in Thailand

Development programmes have both advantages and disadvantages to the country. Undoubtedly, the remarkable economic growth from development programmes has resulted in various social changes. The economic and social development programmes are having a substantial impact on many issues related to demography and health, education, urbanization, natural resources, and the response to change (Hewison, 1993; Siriprachai, 1996; Wasi, 1998; Viravaidya and Sacks, 1997).

In 1970 the annual population growth rate of about 3.2 per cent, was one of the highest in the world (Lohitkul, and Bosher, 1994). However, after the family planning programme was widely implemented by both the government and NGOs, the population growth rate has decreased significantly to 1.2 per cent in 1991 (Hewison, 1993), and 1.1 per cent currently (Plengmaneepun, 1998). The United nations Development Programmes (UNDP) reported that the life expectancy at birth in 1996 in Thailand was 69.5 years (The Nation, 1998). Primary health care problems had also reduced by 50 per cent by 1987 (Hewison, 1993). The reason behind the success of the health situation has been a significant expansion of medical services, which has also seen the disease profile change.

Approximately 14-15 per cent of the country’s population live the greater Bangkok metropolitan area, which seven per cent reside in other urban areas. However, Hewison (1993) indicates a population movement towards urban areas in every region of Thailand. Bangkok remains the predominant city, but it has not grown proportionately. Furthermore, the provincial centres are growing rapidly since the infrastructure is improving.

The pace of economic and social changes has indeed been rapid. These changes, however, have resulted in major social problems. Economic development and consumerism have created
pressure upon families to earn cash income. Since agriculture is in decline, many children are seeking work away from the farm in order to support the family. A wide range of social problems have been attributed to this rapid economic income change, including cultural disintegration, the breakdown of the family (PDA, 1995; Viravaidy and Sacks, 1997), the growth in numbers of street urchins, an increase in the suicide rate, and the disintegration of religious values (Hewison, 1993). However, these problems are not only caused by the economic and development programmes, but are also brought about by poor political decision-making, regarding social and educational policies. The following sums up the kind of changes which have occurred (Wasi, 1998):

“The path of economic development we have followed has unfortunately, brought about environmental degradation. Forty years ago, forest accounted from 60 percent of total land in the Kingdom. Now it is less than 24 percent. Greed and ignorance, aided by technology, has ravaged the wealth of he land. The biodiversity and fundamentals of the rural sector are now at high risk. With both natural resources and community integrity out of balance, a large number of rural folk have migrated in search of work in the cities or abroad. Families have become disintegrated, children and the elderly are abandoned. Slums sprout up here and there, prostitutes abound. Crime and violence rampant throughout the land”

However, positive outcomes from the economic and social development programmes means Thailand has succeeded in various sectors. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported recently that Thailand ranks 12th among developing countries by United Nation’s standard with a small percentage of the population living in poverty, and it fares well in human development, being in the 59th place among the 174-country list (The nation, 1998). Furthermore, in its annual Human Development Report, UNDP said Thailand and Singapore are the only two Southeast Asian countries that fare well among other developing counties in terms of life expectancy, literacy, and living standards that formed the basis for the Human Poverty Indicator (The Nation, 1998).

3. The Population and Community Development Association (PDA)
The Population and Community Development Association was originally founded in 1974. The organisation’s initial mission was to implement the efforts the Royal Thai Government to promote family planning in urban and rural areas of Thailand. The PDA used a community – based strategy to recruit and train respected villagers in those areas to provide information and
distribute affordable contraceptives directly in their communities. The Success of the PDA’s community – based approach to family planning encouraged them to apply the strategy to other development programmes in Thailand. Since 1979, the PDA has implemented a variety of integrated community development programmes throughout the country. To attain the aims of the association, various development programmes have operated widely.

The Population and Community Development Association (PDA) is a non–government organization with the initial aim to complement the efforts of Royal Thai Government in promoting family planning in Thailand, especially in areas where knowledge and access to services were scarce. Utilizing a participatory, community – bases approach, PDA recruited and trained residents of villages and urban neighborhoods to provide information on family planning, including the supervised, non- medical distribution of oral contraceptives. This distribution network covered more than one - third of the country, thus contributing significantly the decrease in the annual population growth rate from 3.3 % in the mid-1970s to 0.85 in 2002. During the same period, the number of children per family fell from 7 to 1.6.

After addressing the immediate family planning needs, PDA expanded its activities to include primary health care, HIV / AIDS education and prevention, water resource development and sanitation, income – generation, environment conservation, promotion of small – scale rural enterprise programs, gender equality, youth development, democracy promotion. The most recent activity has been the post – Tsunami social, economic, and environmental rehabilitation of the villages affected by the Tsunami.

Today, PDA is the leading and most diversified NGO in Thailand, employing over 800 staff members and working with over 12,000 volunteers. PDA has 18 regional development centers and branch offices located in 15 provinces in rural Thailand.

PDA has pioneered sustainable grassroots endeavors, marked by extensive village not only as beneficiaries, but also as partners, planners, managers and leaders. PDA’s programmes are based on the belief that local people are best suited to be an equal partner in shaping sustaining their own development. Thirty – three years of PDA’s involvement has created significant change in the following eleven areas:
- Health, AIDS & family Planning
- Income Generation & Poverty Reduction
- Rural Microcredit
- Water & Environment
- Youth as Agents of Change Today and Leaders of Tomorrow
- Education & Nutrition
- Cooperates Social Responsibility
- Emergency Relief Services (CBERS)
- Asian Center for Population and Community Development (ACPD)
- NGO Sustainability

4. The CBIRD – Ban Phai Center: One of Active PDA’s Development Center

One of the PDA’s development centers, The Community – Based Integrated Rural Development – Ban Phai Center (CBIRD – Ban Phai Center) proved to be most effective in creating a positive impact on its target population. It is located in Ban Phai district Khon Kaen province, Northeast Thailand.

The CBIRD – Ban Phai Center was established 1984 by receiving the financial support from German Agro Action (Germany) as the Water Resource Development and Sanitation Development Project, but also other projects have been locally implemented such as Woman and Youth Development, Community Forestry management, student Environment Development, Thai Business Initiation Rural Development Family Planning and AIDS Prevention etc. Actually the Ban Phai CBIRD Center aims to obtain self – reliance and improved living conditions for villages target in period of each project. This show that the project can sustain in the villages and managed by the village committees. Various projects are designed to assist in increasing family incomes, village skill levels primary health care, environment, education, gender, democratic system, and villages organization, including promoting private company involvement in various rural development programmes in Khon Kaen province.

The CBIRD – Ban Phai Center has implemented into two main aspect 1) NGO sustainability and 2) Rural Development. According to NGO sustainability, the center itself has officially founded the company that can implement the business as such normal business company. It earns
the profit then pays tax for government as usually, while the profit is allocated to the development programmes and CBIRD Ban Phai Center areas. Thus, factories, minimart and Cabbages and Condoms Restaurant located in the center ground. In terms of rural development programmes, these have been done as normal. However, many NGOs in Thailand including PDA have actually faced the financial assistant from donor agencies, these causes small NGOs collapsed and stopped working. According to rural factories, there are 1,000 labors in three companies producing shoes and garment work on the PDA ground. Their result directly to increase local people incomes.

In contrast, there are the revolving loan fund for PDA to still implement the activities and the administration costs are supported from the company under the CBIRD – Ban Phai Center.

5. Promoting Private Company Involvement in Rural Development

The concept of promoting private company involvement in rural development has been created and developed by the PDA since 1986. Demonstrate that the basic idea is to mobilize the relatively untapped private companies to participate actively in rural development, especially to help develop the business skills of villages, create new jobs, and provide market opportunities. The core objectives of programs are two fold!

1) Apply the material resources, business skills and market knowledge development by the local private company to effect sustainable economic growth and social improvements in rural development communities, and

2) Create lasting local funding sources to underwrite the cost of rural development as foreign aid decreased.

As show earlier, NGOs are effective in promoting social development, but in general, they lack business knowledge, skill, and experience to transfer this to the villagers. Neither NGOs nor Government Organizations (GOs) have well developed business skills in organization, production, financial management, and marketing to provide for target groups. However, villages do need these skills to earn cash incomes. Furthermore, NGOs have small staff numbers hence they can only cover a small percentage of the population. In contrast, government agencies have large number of officers but they still lack the experience to provide the business skills for the rural villager.

Therefore, there is a need for NGOs and GOs to find a partner capable for providing and transferring business skills to the poor in villages. Particularly, NGOs can play an important role by persuading the private companies sponsoring the villages, and harnessing of their
business experiences to villages needs. This is an innovative approach to a rural development programmers’ in the country.

5.1 Steps to Promoting Companies

The idea of this new dimension of rural development was developed by following “the five steps to adopting village” with the PDA and private company. A brief explanation of step follows:

1) **Concept Presentation:** Basically, this is an in–depth explanation of the private company helping villages developed a concept that is presented to the executives of a private company.

2) **Study Tour:** After agreeing in principle to join the rural development programmers’, the PDA suggests the private company from a task force team to plan and develop ideas of how the company can help the villages. This team then should attend a study tour of the area and work out the plan. The PDA can assist the team in identifying potential programmers’ villages.

3) **Target Area Villages:** The task force visits potential project villages to meet community leader and the village headman. Together they can assess villages needs and potential, discuss possibilities and jointly plan activities. In some cases of development programs a project coordinator may be hired to implement the project in the village.

4) **Project Planning:** When the target village is selected, the task force work with villagers to develop a simple work plan. Various issues, such as, timeline, budget, and coordination with many other development agencies will scheduled.

5) **Sponsor Approval:** The work plan and corresponding resource commitments are approved by the senior management of the company or board of the organization before the project is formally launched. Funds for rural development activities spent by the private company are tax – deductible through the PDA.
5.2 Examples of the development project

Two important development projects for poor have been illustrated as follows:

5.2.1 The Basic Model of Irrigation system (Sky Irrigation System)
Sky Irrigation, in Thai Baden Loi Fa (literally, irrigation from the sky), is a village-based irrigation system for the purpose of year-round, intensive production of high-value crops, in particular vegetables. It consists both of a physical infrastructure to utilize existing water resources for irrigation as well as related organizational structure to manage the irrigation system. The basic Sky Irrigation module has a size of 12.5 rai (2 hectares) and 25 members, with each member holding a plot of 0.5 rai or 800 m² (one hectare = 0.16 rai).

In terms of infrastructure, Sky Irrigation has three main components: i) A pump and control system to extract water from either surface or underground source, ii) Holding tanks to store the water, and iii) A network of pipes with taps and small tank reservoirs at each member outlet. In terms of organizational structure, the Sky Irrigation systems are managed by Village Water Management Committees (VWMC) specifically set up for this purpose. The 11–person committee is elected by the assembly of members and has the specific task of collecting water fees from members, executing system maintenance works as well as assisting members on agricultural and marketing matters. Woman must be represented to at least 50% on the members of committees. This provides the opportunity for women in rural areas to manage their resources and take place to manage the groups.
Membership in the project is voluntary and principle open to all village residents. The project targets particularly the poorest villages and encourages their participation. Each member has to make both financial and in-kind contributions to the project. With regard to the financial contribution, they commit themselves to repay the construction cost of the Sky Irrigation system on a monthly basis, based on a flat rate plus by how much water is used. Members also contribute with their own labour to help in the system construction. These local contributions ensure that the project addresses member needs and is economically viable.

5.2.2 Ban That Poverty Alleviation Fund, Ban Phai Khon Kaen
Ban That is a village in Ban Phai district, located about 4 kilometers from CBIRD – Ban Phai Center. It also placed near the La Wa Lake that water available year a round. Ban That consists of 140 households 701 population (340 male and 301 female at March 2004) The main occupation of villages is rice farmer, while other sources of incomes are animal husbandry, fish catching, cocoon raising, labour and government officers. The CBIRD-Ban Phai Center implements the Poverty Alleviation Fund in Ban That since 2006 by receiving fund from the rich man in USA : Mr Bakeley approximately 1,000,000 baht. The project started with participatory approach planning by using AIC technique. They, the fund committees are selected : 10 persons from village committees, 10 persons elderly groups 8 persons from youth group. Most 1250 household applied to be the group member with share the money : 10 baht per share. This consists of 2,103 shares and 21,030 baht, then, this share has added with 1 million baht from the project.

Fig. 3 and 4 Ban That fund provided the budget for cricket raising and environment reservation
The fund is basically allocated for borrowing by same activity members that worked together as sub – development group. The list of them and activities are following:

Table 1 The list of sub-development groups at Ban That

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Development Groups</th>
<th>No. of Member</th>
<th>Loan (Baht)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Silk wearing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cocoon raising</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Agriculture (sky irrigation)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fishery</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eco-tourism</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cricket raising</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Elderly mat wearing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thai sweet making</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Emergency</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reserved fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Accounting record of the Ban That Poverty Alleviation Fund, 2007

The Poverty Alleviation Fund Committees manage the fund with approving the loan, money collection, considering suitable interest rate and providing the profit to community services. Therefore, the villages have good opportunity to learn and practice the group management and financial system. They also learn the business skill from NGO and business people. Actually, they have practiced and experiment their activities. The accounting and result records have been operated. Then, learning process have been actually done and disseminated when they got successfully.

**Conclusion**

Thailand is a country currently undergoing rapid changer. As a primarily agriculture nation Thailand is expected to be propelled into the ranks of the newly industrialized countries (NICs). One important impact from this development is the big gap of income between rich
and poor. Thus, the various development programs are very important to the country to improve the economic and social livelihood of special target group. Due to development agency, not only the government organization (GO) but also the non government organization (NGO) have efficiently played the roles on poverty reduction. Itself has set up the development centers nationwide to operate various development programs involvement improving the quality of life of people and conservation the environment. One newly dimension of development program is to promote the private sector getting involve in community development. Two example, sky irrigation and Ban that Poverty Alleviation Fund, which implemented in Khon Kaen province, have been illustrated.

References


Resource Persons

