

Role Sharing and Collaboration between Governments and NGOs for National Development in Thailand

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The first non-governmental organization (NGO) was established in Thailand for more than 100 years. Apart from the original Thai Red Cross Society, there were many registered charitable foundations and associations. Concerning the national development, NGO started their roles about four decades (since 1960s) and at present they play very important roles and try to collaborate with the government sector.

This paper will present the activities of the Thai NGOs, especially their roles and collaboration with the government sector concerning the national development policy and practice. The paper is categorized into 5 parts:

1. Background of the Thai NGOs
2. Characteristics of the Thai NGOs
3. The First Thai Development-Oriented NGO
4. Role Sharing and Collaboration with Government
5. A Case study and a Profile of Successful NGO

Background of the Thai NGOs

NGOs in Thailand have constantly developed their roles and operational directions, especially during the previous decades. Valuable experiences derived from their work and learning process with participation from the local people – the majority of whom are rural and urban disadvantaged groups – have enriched their situational analysis ability, enabling them to utilize systematic, holistic and more comprehensive approaches to the process. This skill is extremely essential in current social situation, which has become more and more complex.

Thai NGOs advocate the sufferings of the people- the causes as well as the prevention and the solution of problem through local potentiality and wisdom. This enhances extensive public awareness and people participation. In many cases, the efforts have significant impact on national policies as stated in the national economic and social development plans (Phuavongphatya, 1995).

Although the government in recent years has recognized and accepted the role of NGOs and has requested more NGO participation in development process. There still existing conflicts in development concepts and working strategies. Time and efforts are required in order to reach mutual understanding, which will result in effective cooperation in the future.

Thai people have known and received some services from the work of NGOs. Some NGOs are highly appreciated and very popular throughout the country, they are accepted as charitable organization. Most of them initially organized as relief agencies, providing immediate assistance to any needed circumstances such as disastrous aids. Out of these, very few Thais know what NGOs are.

During the 1980s, there were a lot of questions concerned with social justice within the national development policy, the situation forced the government made major changes to concentrate on the poorest areas development especially at the rural areas. And the government gave more attention to the role of NGO in social development. At the same time numbers of international NGOs came to Thailand to work with the Indo-China refugee, these events brought a more involvement of Thai NGOs to play either charity or development oriented programs.

In short national development policy over the past four decades have pushed the country to increase dependence on world market while economic growth is its' prime priority. At present, not less than 20 million people from the whole (60) are still under poverty line. National resources have been used unwisely, which made pollution and environment to a very dangerous situation.

However, they have much more efforts in straightening people organization for people's sustainable development. These NGOs are seen as progressive social action groups.

- ◆ Most of them are run by committed people from various backgrounds who express social development form the humanitarian or social justice concept.
- ◆ They are democratic broad minded, searching new alternatives out of bureaucratic administration for a proper development approach.
- ◆ Their main target groups are deprived sectors of the society. These NGOs put their efforts raising the awareness and develop strength in solving their problems.

These NGOs mainly practice development approach with the target group, in many cases they cannot leave out of relief services. General speaking their works can be seen in four roles.

1. Encouraging the strength of community institutions. The main idea is to facilitate target groups to analyze and solve their own problems with proper methodology. To do this role NGOs emphasize on pulling the target groups ability to use within their obstacles. In the future the NGOS hope to have strong people's organization to work by themselves.

2. Educating the public about social problems This work is form facts, data, information collected from their task. NGOs often distribute these realities through various mass media including meetings or seminars. These presentations in many cases wake society up to a more participation or stimulate the government setting up a working mechanism on the raised issues.
3. Providing direct assistance. Thailand is the same as any society where numbers of underprivileged or handicapped groups are existing. NGOs often have to work to alleviate directly the hardships of the concerned ones by giving needed helps. Such activities themselves are only services. They are valuable source. They may be a good area of future self help. They can also play educational roles to the public on social problems.
4. Coordination of networking development role. This is another important role trying to strengthen the NGO movement itself for a better coordination and improving the quality of its work (Poomkacha, 1995).

Characteristics of the Thai NGOs

The Thai NGOs may be seen into two groups as follows:

1. A well established group

These NGOs have at least three factors through their program implementation. Firstly, they have worked long enough in Thailand with the last 15-20 years. Secondly, they are secured from the sources of financial support to continue their responsibilities. Thirdly, their leaders are either from popular social image or strong professional background. Many international NGOs working in Thailand are counted in the group.

2. An indigenous grassroots NGO

Most of them have grown up in the last decade. Yes they are beginning to make some impact on public awareness and public opinion concerning social and development issues. And they are emerging as a small force for social justice and social change in Thailand. They have many limitations when compare to the first group including the capability and skills of the staff. The areas of the strength are flexibility and the works are pretty much close to the badly needed

groups in the society. They are more concerned with people's empowerment rather than material development.

The Thai NGOs anyway may be grouped according to their field of interest as follows.

- ◆ Rural Development
- ◆ Children and Youth Development
- ◆ Education Development
- ◆ Human Right
- ◆ Coordination and Services to other NGOs
- ◆ Environment
- ◆ Urban (Slum) Development/Basic Health Development
- ◆ Consumer Protection
- ◆ Appropriate Technology

From the study of the Public Welfare Department, more than 80% of Thai NGOs were found after 1957. At present they are roughly 2,547 NGOs, not more than 375 (15%) are development oriented, the rest are either funding or charitable services NGOs.

Types of NGOs Allowed under Thai Government Regulations

There are five types of NGOs that are operated and registered in Thailand as follows:

Type	Registrar	Law
1) Foundation	◆ Ministry of the Interior ◆ National Cultural Commission	◆ Civil and Commercial Code ◆ National Cultural Act
2) Association	◆ National Police Bureau ◆ National Cultural Commission	◆ Civil and Commercial Code ◆ National Cultural Act
3) Trade/Industrial Council	◆ Ministry of Commerce ◆ Ministry of Industry	◆ Civil and Commercial Code ◆ National Cultural Act
4) Cremation Association	◆ Department of Public Welfare	◆ Cremation Welfare Act
5) Labor Union	◆ Ministry of Labor	◆ Labor Relations Act

The First Thai Development-Oriented NGOs (Suksawat, 1995)

An event in early 1967 was very important for the social development movement in Thailand. As some of the national leaders at that time, including M.R. Chakthong Thongyai, the Minister of Agriculture and Co-operatives, Mr. Sanoh Nilakamhaeng, some leading businessmen and Dr. Puay Ungphakorn, Governor of the Bank of Thailand, were granted a permission to bring Dr. Y.C. James Yen to receive an audience by, and present their thoughts on rural development to His Majesty the King. The original schedule for the audience was thirty minutes. However, as the issues of discussion benefited rural areas, which the King was so concerned, His Majesty discussed with them for nearly ninety minutes.

After the audience with His Majesty the King, this group of national leaders, who were either member of the royal family, civil servant or businessman decided to set up a foundation to

be the first development-oriented NGO in Thailand called “Foundation for Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM)”.

In October 1969, His Majesty the King accepted the foundation to be under His Patronage and asked how could he support the foundation, The foundation committee then asked a fortune money of one baht.

For example, in the Mae Klong river basin development project, Dr. Puay tried to coordinate with Thammasat and Mahidol Universities, so that academics and students from the two universities would be able to apply their academic knowledge to real practices in rural development and they could be more “down to earth”. Development activities in this project began in the vicinity of Yokkrabat temple, Yokkrabat sub-district, Ban Praew district of Samut Sakhon province. If successful, rural development work in this project would be expanded to Ratchaburi, Nakorn Prathom, and Karnchanaburi provinces to meet with the expansion from Chao Phraya river basin in Suphanburi. This model would then be applied in other regions of Thailand.

This set of thoughts was based on clear studies of geographical and social settings to make it simple for implementation, reduce risks and when it was successful, more difficult tasks could be tackled.

Thammasat University’s Graduate Volunteer Services (GVS) was another brainchild of Dr. Puay and his close colleagues to provide an opportunity for graduates from any university to be a volunteer doing social work for a year, so that they would know more about the society and rural areas. It was also hoped that when these graduates became full-time wage earners in the government, state enterprises or private businesses, at least they would understand “ordinary people” more and work to serve their society with good quality and virtue. The Office of Graduate Volunteer Service has maintained this function continuously until the present day.

Dr. Puay and TRRM Steering Committee’s development concepts based on the principle of human development were that of genius which went beyond time, particularly networking of field work, universities and intellectuals. This point made the extreme right-wing groups looked at any do-gooders, including Dr. Puay and the TRRM group, at that time as leftists, even though he was accepted in Europe and the US as an economic guru and frequently invited to give special lectures by various universities until he was pass away.

Role Sharing and Collaboration with Government (Suksawat, 1995)

In late 1984, the government of General Prem Tinsulanonda wanted rural development NGOs to join together at regional and national levels. Regional seminars were organized in mid 1985, followed by a national one in December of the same year. Each region elected their committee, which sent representatives to a national committee, called “NGO Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-Cord).” Regional committee was as follows:

1. NGO-CORD, Upper Northern Region
2. NGO-CORD, Lower Northern and Central Region
3. NGO-CORD, Upper Northeastern Region
4. NGO-CORD, Lower Northeastern Region
5. NGO-CORD, Southern Region
6. NGO-CORD, Bangkok Region

The government’s goal was that they would be able to see the shape of NGOs more clearly and know where to make contacts. However, over the past eight years until 1993, the government have not come up clearly the ways to help NGOs, while these NGOs worked with virtually all groups of people in all geographical areas of the country from fisherfolk communities to hill tribes, and from underneath the sea, river basins to uplands and mountainous areas more than 1,000 metres above sea level.

Some NGOs worked very hard day in, day out, deep down to family institution, looking for popular wisdom and people’s scholar to create new alternatives for social development.

Another example of role sharing and collaboration was a speech of the Former Prime Minister Anand Punyarachun, at the Siam Society Gala Dinner on 14 August 199(Farrington and Lewis, 1993). The speech highlighted several difficulties currently faced by NGOs, including registration and screening procedures that are lengthy and treat NGOs as politically suspect; the difficulties of attracting and retaining skilled personnel, and the threat of reduced external funding as Thailand moves to 'middle-income' status.

The Prime Minister highlighted several NGO roles worthy of government support:

1. as *communicators* they have raised public awareness about e.g. the distribution of forests, and have secured a widespread ban on logging

2. *as facilitators*, NGOs mediate between government and people, and assist communities to help themselves.
3. *as providers of services* NGOs can reach some areas with certain types of services more cost-effectively than government.
4. NGOs innovate in the provision of services and the tackling of specific problems, and government should support and learn from this process
5. NGOs should be brought more into official development planning processes, to ensure that grassroots views are heard.

The Prime Minister explained that he had already emphasized in a policy statement to the National Assembly the need to support NGOs, and outlined the measures he intended to take:

1. streamlining of registration procedures, in particular the removal of security checks on personnel
2. raising of the current limits on tax deductibility for corporate contributions to charity
3. government requirements that provincial authorities co-operate with NGOs in e.g. the 6 million baht allocation for drinking water, environmental conservation and occupational training
4. government funds in certain cases to match the contributions raised by NGOs from society at large.

More widely, it was the government's intention to promote a spirit of voluntary work among commercial companies, encouraging them to sponsor particular villages or NGOs, and to provide specialist skills where these are beyond the reach of NGOs.

Other possibilities under consideration include the substitution of community service for currently compulsory military service, and the repayment of scholarships through voluntary work with NGOs during vacations.

A Case Study and a Profile of Successful NGO

Case Study: Land of Virtue and Prosperity (Land of Dharma; Land of Gold)

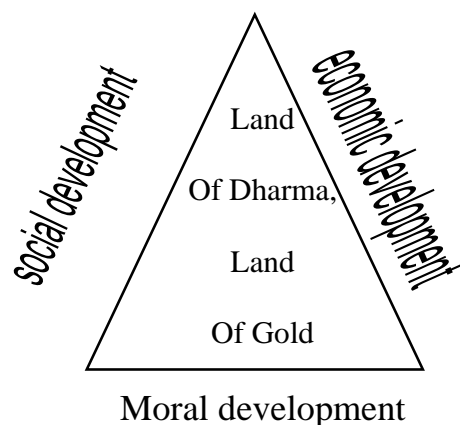
(Chintakanond, 1991)

Inspired by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Royal Address on his Coronation Day, May 5, 1950, "We shall reign with righteousness (Dharma) for the happiness and welfare of the Thai people", the National Council on Social Welfare of Thailand initiated the concept of the "Land of Dharma, Land of Gold" or "Land of Virtue and Prosperity" which espouses that development should be carried out in balanced harmony, namely, moral development, social development and economic development. Moral development, however, should be given special priority, since development should first take place in the mind of man.

The NCSWT presented this idea to the Government which in 1984 appointed a Subcommittee on National Ideology consisting of scholars, civil servants and knowledgeable persons to draft the "Thai National Ideology" to serve as a guideline in the nation's economic, social and political development. In 1985 the Government deemed it suitable and opportune to implement the concept of "Land of Dharma, Land of Gold" to mark His Majesty the King's 40 Years of reign in 1986 and His Majesty's 60th birthday in 1987.

The teaching in all religions is relevant to moral development, the principle of democracy in social development, mutual assistance and self-help are the basis in economic development. Chart I demonstrates the concept of the "Land of Dharma, Land of Gold".

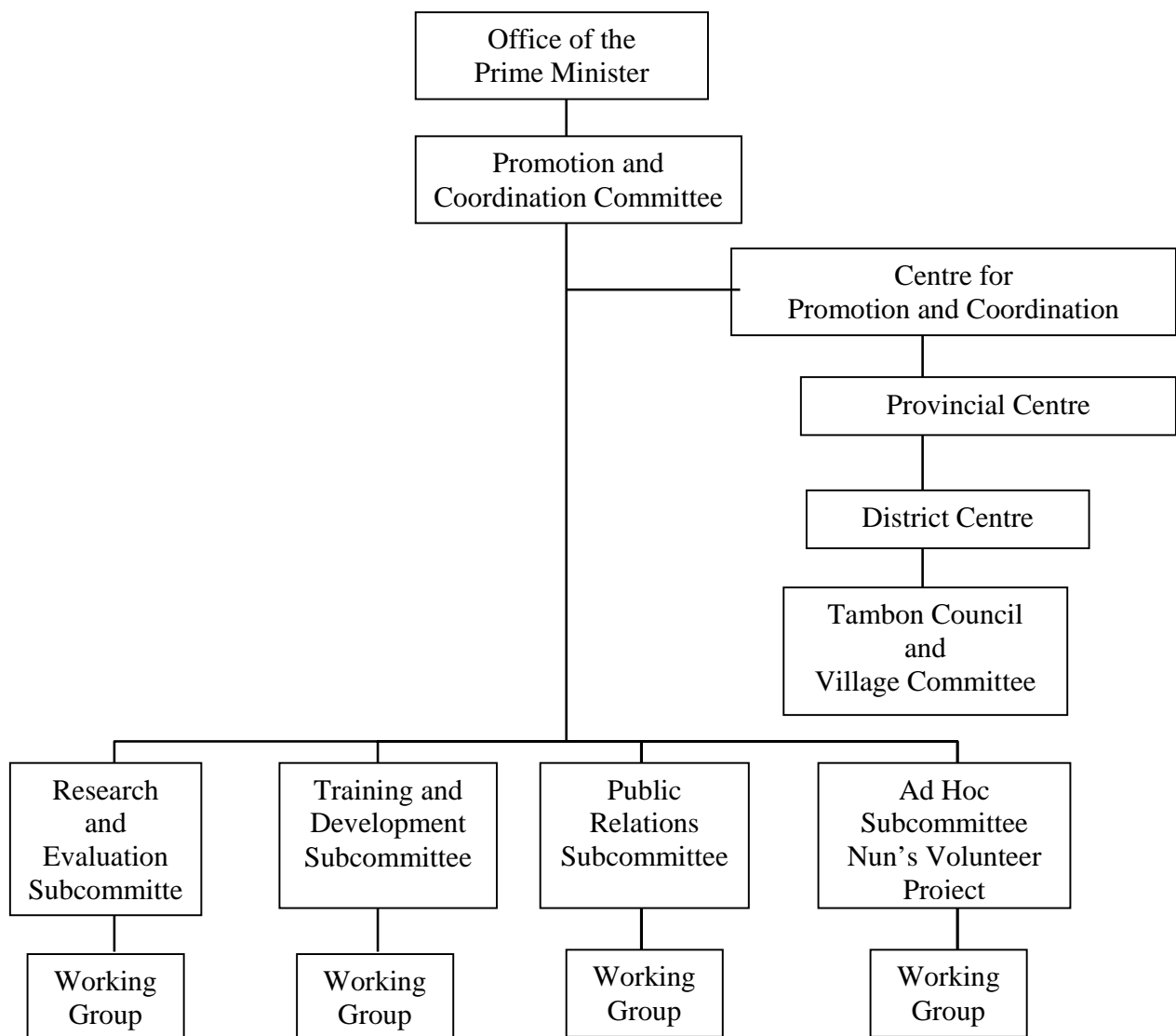
Chart I



The Promotion and Coordination Committee for the "Land of Dharma, Land of Gold" is responsible for overseeing that programs and activities conform with policy, are consistent with

the objectives and meet established targets. It presents progress reports to the Prime Minister and Cabinet and coordinated activities with Gos and NGOs, the Centre for the Promotion and Coordination of the Land of Dharma, Land of Gold being the operating agency at the national level. Similar centres have been established at the provincial and district levels to facilitate implementation and coordination between Gos and NGOs (inclusive of the military). The Tambon Council and the Village Committee are the operating agencies at these two levels. Chart II explains the structure of operations.

Chart II. Land of Dharma, Land of Gold



Na Nok Kao Village, Sakon Nakorn province, for example, was interned into the "Land of Dharma, Land of Gold" programme in 1989. Six Ministries are involved in the project, namely, the Interior, Agriculture and Cooperatives, Education, Public Health, Industries and Commerce. On the private sector side, full cooperation was received from foundations, associations, and businessmen as well as priests.

Moral development aspects included:

- ◆ Promoting harmony and unity, patriotism and a sense of responsibility
- ◆ to one's community and nation,
- ◆ Expounding the principle of democracy and respect of law,
- ◆ Abstinence from self-indulgence including gambling, consumption of alcoholic beverages, etc.,
- ◆ Observing religious teaching occasions,
- ◆ Preserving local tradition and culture.

Economic development aspects involved supporting the self-help needs of the community to improve its economic well-being. With the cooperation of GO's and NGO's various programs to improve production and marketing abilities were undertaken. Projects aimed at increasing family and community economic stability and security such as Rice Banks, Saving Cooperatives etc. were also implemented.

Social development aspects involved:

- ◆ Encouraging villagers to express their ideas as a means of determining their needs and as means of educating them about democracy. Gos assisted by guiding the villagers to systematize their thoughts so as to render them applicable,
- ◆ Setting up a committee to oversee village security and order as well as pooling of equipment for use against fire and other unfortunate occurrences,
- ◆ Establishing health and sanitation facilities, e.g. medicine fund, health fund.

Under the "Land of Dharma, Land of Gold" Project, the village of Na Nok Kao has upgraded itself not only in terms of economic well being but also in terms of a higher quality of life which includes better social conditions and moral development.

A Profile of Successful NGO: The Population and Community Development

The Population and Community Development Association (PDA) was founded in 1974. It is one of Thailand's most well established and diverse non-government organizations. Operating from Bangkok, 16 regional development centres and branch offices in rural Thailand, PDA's programs are based on the belief that local people are best suited to shape and sustain their own development. PDA has pioneered grassroots growth marked by extensive villager involvement not only as beneficiaries but also as planners, managers and leaders.

With over 25 years experience PDA looks forward with renewed commitment to respond to current social and economic dilemmas with the innovation and ingenuity that have marked its achievements through the years.

PDA was first active in promoting family planning in urban and rural areas of Thailand, where knowledge of and access to such services were scarce. PDA recruited and trained respected members of local urban and rural neighborhood to distribute and provide information on affordable contraceptives directly to their communities. Other campaigns were tailored to the health of specific target groups such as factory workers, hill tribe villagers and adolescents. In total 12,000 volunteers plus several mobile health units distributed contraceptives to over 10,000 villages. Today PDA programs cover over one third of the country, helping to lower the national population growth rate from 3.2% to 1%.

PDA programs now encompass integrated rural development, water resource development, local institution building, medical and health services, population control and AIDS care activities, income generation and occupational training, and forestry and environmental conservation.

The development of a nation can be achieved only when the quality of life for all Thai people is improved to a satisfactory standard. PDA is not the sole contributor but believes that the community as a whole-in all sectors of society; private, public and non-profit can join together in a new civil society movement. Today the Population and Community Development Association is proud to have contributed to improving the standard and quality of life in Thailand; however, they endeavor to continue their struggle in the rural areas, where the government's efforts require their support in the betterment of the country, both at the local and national levels.

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