

NGOs, advocacy and popular protest: a case study of Thailand

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Summary

During 1997, many Thai NGOs became involved in anti-government protests at local and national levels as an extension of their advocacy work. The latest and longest protest in Thai history took place from January to May 1997 with more than 30,000 protesters taking part. The main aim of this paper is to examine why public protest has increasingly become part of the advocacy work of these NGOs. It suggests that where social and economic tensions have reached a crisis point, (generated by Thailand's highly uneven economic development of the past decade), there is a phenomenon of 'cultural drift' in which dominant values and norms are challenged and protest action by the poor breaks out. Some Thai NGOs have therefore taken on the role of 'social movement organisations' and in interventions have attempted to shift conflicts from local peripheries into the national arena. Drawing on 'resource mobilisation theory', this paper argues that NGOs have become involved in the protest movement as 'resources' rather than as full 'actors' by providing linkages and networks. The study suggests that the 'social movement' perspective as a conceptual framework for the analysis of the NGOs' advocacy work is useful. It also argues that the NGOs which emphasise advocacy should be considered as 'social movement organisations'. It concludes that more comparative research is needed on NGOs which perform advocacy work, especially in the wider South and South East Asian context.

Introduction

Clark (1991) suggests that dramatic changes in NGO roles towards advocacy occurred during the 1980s when some Northern NGOs that have overseas programmes grew more politically outspoken due to influence from some of their staff and overseas partners, and a number of parallel advocacy groups emerged in the Third World. Action Aid India (1993) adds that the maturity of NGO experiences and the recognition of the role of the NGOs by the government have increased the opportunities for NGOs to become involved in influencing public policies.

There is some evidence that many Thai NGOs have worked to influence Thai government policies since the early 1970s. Advocacy became the new fashion among many of these organisations during the 1980s when they began to mobilise people against the construction of dams and the plantation of eucalyptus trees. Since then, many Thai NGOs have concentrated more and more on advocacy. Between January to May 1997, networks of Thai NGOs and people's organisations (POs) staged a prolonged protest action against the government. This protest took place for 101 days with around 30,000 protesters and was considered by many Thai NGOs as part of their advocacy work.

There has been some work within the NGO literature dealing with the issue of protest, but much of it seems to imply that the NGOs are the ones who organise the protest *on behalf* of the poor (see Covey (1995), Korten (1990a)). This assumption raises many questions; for example, can NGOs organise protests on their own initiative? If so, why do people join the protest? What theory could best explain this phenomenon? This paper intends to examine briefly some possible answers to these questions. However, due to limited space, this paper will focus mainly the reasons why Thai NGOs became involved in these protests. It will also try to explain why protest has become an important feature of Thai NGOs' advocacy work.

In this paper, the word 'protest' is used to describe occasions when poor people took part in public rallies against government projects or policies. The alliance in this case study became known as 'The Assembly of the Poor'. This is the name used by the alliance itself and by some newspapers. However, some quotations have used the name 'Forum of the Poor' while referring to the same alliance, and both terms will be

used interchangeably in this paper according to the sources of the quotation. The acronym 'AOP' will be used to refer to both names.

The Thai context

Thailand has experienced enormous economic changes in the past decade yet there is much evidence suggesting that these changes have not brought about prosperity to all:

Thailand is now tipped to join the ranks of the Newly Industrialising Countries....The rapid and often forced pace of this change has had enormous social and economic consequences, not all of them positive. It is ordinary Thai villagers who have borne the brunt of them. (Wasi,1990:11-12)

The core arguments here are: what are these negative changes? To what extent do these changes affect the majority of the citizens?

Growth

'Economic growth' is the centre of development for the Thai government and the business world. These people dream about the 'New Tiger of Asia'. Some believe that in the year 2020 Thailand will flourish in contrast to many countries in Europe (Phongpaichit and Baker,1996).

There is much evidence in support of this belief. The great influx of foreign capital to Thailand, especially from Japan, has turned Thailand into their new export production base:

Between 1985 and 1990, the flow of foreign investment into Thailand multiplied ten times. In ten years, manufactured exports multiplied twelve times.... In 1980, three-fifths of export originated from agriculture. By 1995, over four-fifths came from manufacturing. (ibid.:4).

The growth of GDP between 1980 and 1990 reached a peak of 7 percent per year, compared with 6.6 percent for Singapore or 4.2 percent for Indonesia (Forsyth,1997:7).

This prosperity can now be seen as an illusion.¹ In 1981, the top ten percent of households earned seventeen times as much as the bottom ten percent while by 1992 the multiple was thirty-eight times (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1996:204). In 1995, at least 20 million Thai people were still living below the poverty line (Poomkacha, 1995).

This growth-centred development has increased the demand for resources for various commercial purposes:

Industrial estates, housing projects, resorts, golf courses take over land which had been under crops. Dams to provide the city with hydroelectricity flood areas of forest, displace villages and disrupt fish stocks. Factories pollute the air, the rivers, and the soil. For villagers, these resources of land, water, and forests are the basis of their livelihood. (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1996:148)

The 'cowboy economics' concept identified by Korten (1990b) can be used to illustrate the problems faced by Thailand at present. These problems are now leading to all kinds of disputes. It is the beginning of an era of polarised 'resource conflicts' pitting the state and corporate sector against the popular sector (Prasartset, 1995).

Power and social control

Many studies have observed that that important roots of Thai society are found in the prevalence of patron-client relationships² (Girling, 1981; Gohlert, 1991; Jacobs, 1971; Phongpaichit and Baker, 1995). This cultural norm, on the one hand, is the positive aspect which reduces the level of confrontation among people. But at the same time, it is a system of social control. As Jacobs (1971:48) points out:

... at best, a private individual who believes he has a political grievance or interest to pursue can only hope to establish some personal, individual (i.e., patrimonial) patron-client relationship with an official to insure that authority will not operate to his disadvantage, especially at a time when he is least prepared to deal with it.

The concept of a highly 'bureaucratic polity'³ (Riggs, 1966) suggests the notion of a Thai political and administrative system which is significantly different from that found in Western countries. Through this system, the bureaucrat plays a key role in controlling decision-making processes and has the real power. All crucial decisions

regarding the development of the country have been the purview of these privileged few, thus preventing a more representative approach to the collective future of the country:

Officials, decision makers, and staff alike, continue to consider themselves above and apart from the public and in no way accountable to it, free to pursue their own interests as they see fit. The decision makers in particular not only are indifferent to popular political participation but often even are indifferent to communicating government policy to the general populace. Officials are notoriously difficult to see and are indifferent to requests and complaints from below. Conversely, officials too often are impatient with public compliance of their requests, and the police frequently are accused of bullying citizens. (Jacobs,1971:47)

Consequently, the patrimonial bureaucracy is a cause of problems when officials seek to respond to popular demands. According to Girling, there are two reasons related to this argument:

First, the bureaucracy had a strategic partnership with moneyed interest: in the towns and cities with banking, business, and real estate, and in the countryside with the rural elite of landowners, money lenders, merchants, and often with *tambon* (subdistrict) and village heads. The second reason was the conservatism of the bureaucracy, which tended to regard workers' strikes and student demonstrations as a threat to national order and prosperity. (1981:185-6).

The attitudes and behaviour of the authorities towards the people, especially in the countryside, are also problematic:

Provincial governors and district officers, imbued with the values of hierarchy and order, cannot fail to regard any independent move by the peasants to defend their interests and seek justice as other than subversive, and therefore to be suppressed. (ibid.:186)

and 'prefer to spread the responsibility among a committee' (Samudavanija,1987:92). This tends to prevent the bureaucracy from attaining maximum effectiveness in responding to the needs of the people and creates more conflict when they have to deal with the problems of the poor.

The growth of popular disillusionment

The problems

The following cases are some examples that illustrate the problems affecting the poor.

The Khor Jor Kor Scheme⁴: broken promises

During the war against the communists in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the military used the strategy 'village surround the forest' (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1995) to fight against the insurgency by welcoming the reduction of forest zones which were the bases for the communist insurgents. They encouraged the loggers to remove the trees. They helped move in peasants to settle in the cleared areas. Especially at *Dongyai* which had been a centre of the insurgency, the settlers had been promised land allocations in return for their help to fight against the insurgents (ibid.). But after this war ended, the government attempted to move the settlers out of the degraded forest areas to make way for reforestation without prior consideration of their promises. In 1990, the military drew up a massive plan to move 9,700 villages with approximately 6 million people out of 1,253 various designated forests throughout the country (ibid.). In April 1991, it began to implement the scheme, known by the acronym *Khor Jor Kor*, in the lower north-east. After that, this region became the battleground for *Khor Jor Kor* (ibid.). One villager expressed her bitterness:

We were encouraged to burn down trees, so that the guerrillas could not make use of the forest.... We were given plots of land to till...We went along with the troops for days because we knew the territory better.... Men were recruited to join the military's own guerrilla unit. We women helped with the food. No one claims that they could have won the battle without our villagers' sweat and blood (quoted in Ekachai, 1991).

The reforestation scheme⁵: invasion of the businessmen

The idea of 'reforestation' suggests planting new trees on 'empty' land which was also claimed by the villagers as their common land. For the authorities, these lands were waste-land and needed to be 'reforested' but it was the most important place for

the villagers to keep their cattle in the rainy season. The government announced the scheme in 1986 and planned to develop green forest by growing eucalyptus trees. This development took place without prior discussion with the villagers. In some places where there were still many big trees, the reforestation project created suspicion and distrust amongst the villagers:

It was ridiculous. Why cut down trees to plant trees? Why destroy an important source of food and medicine?... We could not let our forest disappear before our eyes and do nothing to stop it.... It has always been our forest.... We have our own rules to protect it, to stop the villagers cutting the big trees down, to preserve them for our children.... It seemed as if these outsiders could do anything they pleased with it. We couldn't allow that.... We have no choice but to protect our land and forest (quoted by Ekachai, 1991).

This controversy then led to class conflict:

City people never understand how much the forest matters to us. ...We are poor farmers, and we need the forest to give us food. But city people never seem to understand this. They're not used to hunger and poverty (quoted by Ekachai, 1991).

The protests

The case of the Nam Choan Dam

The protest against the construction of the Nam Choan Dam started when the electricity authority planned the project in the late 1970s in order to satisfy the growing urban demand for electricity. Since 1960, the authority had built several similar dam projects in different regions, each one flooding large areas of forest, and displacing large numbers of people. There had been local protests but they were stifled. One explanation is that, at the time of the communist insurgency, the authorities found it quite easy to cast protesting villagers and anyone who tried to help them as communists (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1996).

In the case of the Nam Choan Dam, the time and the place were different from these earlier dam projects. The insurgency was collapsing and could no longer be summoned as a credible threat. The dam project would flood a large area of the forest along the Thai-Burmese border. This 'western forest' was the largest remaining forest in mainland Southeast Asia. Some parts of it had been designated wildlife

reserves. The protest against this dam began in the locality. Villagers did not want to be moved and did not want the local forests flooded. In 1981 the government shelved the project due to the mass protest but revived it again in 1984 and then abandoned it completely in March 1988.

The case of the Pak Moon Dam

In the early 1990s, the electricity authority launched another project to build a dam across the Moon river in the north-eastern region. The project was a run-of-the-river dam which caused no flooding and displaced few people. Environmental groups and local fishermen campaigned against the dam, pointing out that the dam would still disrupt local fishing and have unpredictable effects on the whole river system of the north-east. They also protested against large-scale blasting of the river bed. However, the authorities ignored these protests and completed the dam in 1994. At present, the controversies about the effects of this dam are still evident. The fishermen living along the river are demanding compensation due to the problems caused by the dam. This demand has been supported as part of the protests organised by the AOP.

The case of the Khor Chor Kor scheme

In 1984, the villagers at Dongyai (see above) were ordered to move out of the reserved forest they had settled in to make room for commercial planting of eucalyptus trees. At the height of the conflict, an angry mob cut down eucalyptus saplings. Petitions were sent to the military in the area and to the provincial governor and offered to replace eucalyptus trees with rubber trees. However, no positive conclusion was reached. Protesters from different Khor Jor Kor zones assembled in the regional capital of the Khon Kaen province and marched to Bangkok. Over 4,500 peasants joined the march. In early July 1992, the government suspended the programme due to this mass-protest (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1995).

The case of the reforestation project

After 1985, there was a regular series of local incidents of protest against eucalyptus planting. The conflicts turned violent when the company, which had won a concession from the Forestry Department to plant eucalyptus trees there, sent in bulldozers to level the forest greenery to make room for their commercial project.

The villagers burnt down the forest concessioners' office, chopped down eucalyptus saplings and guarded their village with security as tight as if it were a war-zone (Ekachai,1991:63). They struggled by petitioning their Member of Parliament, maintaining their show of unity, and backing up their claims with proper academic studies to show that theirs was a healthy forest which had not deteriorated.

In early 1992, rallies and petitions were held in many of the north-eastern provincial capitals. The protests then moved from the periphery towards the centre and became one issue that the AOP demanded the government solve.

The role of NGOs

Between 1976-1978, when Thailand was under the control of the conservative forces, most of the development NGOs had to suppress their activities. Some temporarily closed their offices and shut down their operations. Many of these NGOs were reactivated again after the change in the political climate in the early 1980s. During this period, many new NGOs came up with the ideology that every aspect of their work must be carried out in the villages (Callahan,1995).

Most indigenous NGOs emerged from the university activist students and progressive lecturers during the uprising of the student movement in the mid-1970s (Prasartset,1995; Gohlert,1991). These indigenous NGOs began with a search for a strategy of social change and emphasised the importance of building a 'civil society' (Phongpaichit and Baker,1995).

Thai NGO activists now argue that NGOs have emerged as an essential part of the critical social movement in response to the 'maldevelopment' of the country (Poomkacha,1995). They argue that it is their role to stand firmly in support of social justice. Many of them, in addition to keeping going with their routine work in the rural communities, enthusiastically respond to the problem of what they call 'hot issues'⁶ (Charoensuk,1995). There are also many NGOs working directly on the 'hot issues'. These NGOs joined networks to strengthen themselves and to support people's organisations and networks at local, provincial and regional levels (Suksawat,1995).

Networking is a fundamental strategy for the advocacy work of most Thai NGOs. Some NGO workers even argue that without networks, one would lack allies and become out-of-date and isolated (Suksawat,1995). There are about 10 networks of Thai NGOs which joined together for specific purposes, such as to work on rural development or to pursue issues relating to the environment, health, human rights, etc.

Apart from the network of NGOs, the Thai NGOs also attach great importance to popular networks. For many NGOs it is crucial to strengthen local people's networks in order to be more capable of carrying out larger struggles on their own (Kuankachorn,1995). Therefore, several networks of people's organisations (POs) were formed around cattle-raising groups, community forest campaigns, revolving loan fund groups, alternative agriculture advocates, and households affected by government resettlement schemes, to name but a few. Some of these networks formed themselves into a 'small farmers council' which monitors government policies and lobbies in support of their own views and interests (Prasartset,1995).

Case studies

The Project for Ecological Recovery (PER)

PER is a Thai environmentalist NGO that gives priority to their work by forging an alliance with grassroots organisations and NGOs, student organisations, conservationists, mass media in Thailand, and an international network of environmental organisations and journalists to campaign against socially and environmentally harmful development projects in Thailand. For PER, community organising and networking especially in relation to emancipatory education processes can be considered a real expertise and strength of NGOs. However, the main aim of PER is how to tackle the government policy formulating processes. Kuankachorn (1995), the director of PER, argues that NGOs will need to enhance their advocacy work towards the reform of laws and policies in order to reverse current development trends. The most successful campaign organised by PER was the campaign against the construction of the '*Nam Choan Dam*' (see above).

The Thai NGO Coalition on Aids (TNCA)

The TNCA's major activities have involved campaigning for the rights of people with HIV/AIDS; lobbying for government policy that recognises the capabilities of people

with HIV/AIDS and helping their families and communities to cope with the problem by providing them with accurate information and support; and promoting public awareness and understanding of the HIV/AIDS issue. The representative from the TNCA had a seat on the board of National Aids Prevention and Control Plan.

One example of the initiative of the TNCA was their public campaign during the general election in November 1996. By taking advantage of this event, the TNCA had produced campaign banners urging people to pay attention to the spreading of HIV/AIDS. They organised a march on 7 November 1996 shouting their slogan to get attention from the public. They raised an issue about the insufficient care for Aids patients. They argued that the compulsory blood testing performed by many employers and the subsequent sacking of employees found to be HIV positive should be abandoned.

The Thai Institute for Rural Development (THIRD)

THIRD is an organisation that places itself in the 'third generation' of NGOs and does not undertake 'projects' in the villages. THIRD sees networking as an effective approach for rural development. The networks under the THIRD umbrella include networks of POs, monks, teachers, academics, NGOs, doctors, and mixed groups at sub-district, district, provincial, and regional levels. These networks are playing an important role in the process of learning, exchanging experiences, and achieving mutual support.

The research documents, especially on village funds, small scale industry, and *Kiriwong*⁷ have had an important impact within academic circles and Government Organisations (GOs). THIRD has been approached by some GOs, the Social Science Association of Thailand, the opposition parties and the military after they have read these documents. THIRD's approach to participatory action research and the *Kiriwong* case has drawn the attention of academics to an approach they might follow. Some similar research is now being planned by academics with the support of the National Research Council of Thailand. VIP⁸ has been identifying individuals at village level, the wise people, community leaders, monks, and teachers, as well as coordinating networks. The local authorities at provincial level follow these activities with interest and some offer their assistance and cooperation. Some of this information has been published in RUDOC publications which make known to the public and the government the potential of the people at the grassroots. As a result,

many government officials have visited these people and communities (RUDOC News, 1989:72).

For THIRD, this approach is proving productive and it is contributing to an improvement of mutual understanding and co-operation between NGOs and government.

Assembly of the Poor (AOP)⁹

The AOP was established in December 1995 to focus on the problems that various groups of people had to face as the result of the government's involvement in certain 'mega-development' projects. They had used the occasion of the ASEAN Summit in December 1995 in order to demand that the Thai Government adopted a more appropriate development policy, recognised the community's rights in managing natural resources, decentralised power to local organisations, reformed the political system under the concept of 'People-Centred Development', amended laws to suit sustainable development, and accepted and supported the participation of people's organisations in planning and implementing development projects. A thirty days deadline was given to the Thai Government to come up with appropriate action in response to their demands.

The first rally was staged in front of Government House from March 26 to April 22 1996 after they learned that their demands had not been met. Ten thousand demonstrators joined forces to put pressure on the government. This rally resulted in the government agreeing to appoint a 'Special Task Force' to look into the petitions concerning four main problems: forestry and land; dam construction; state development projects and slum communities; and workplace environment and sickness. Later on, a committee of 23 members composed of the representatives from the government and the AOP was set up on May 14, 1996 to supervise and monitor the implementation of the cabinet resolutions.

The implementation was not as smooth as the negotiation. Later on, they found that the promises made by the government were just a trick to disperse them. Therefore, on 11 October, they organised a second rally with 3,000 protesters in front of Government House to demand the appropriate action previously promised to them. This rally lasted 26 days and 10 problems were acknowledged by the caretaker government.¹⁰

The AOP had also used the occasion of the general election in November 1996 to lobby the political parties to resolve the problems of the poor. After the election, they sent their representatives to meet the new Prime Minister and called for the new government to solve the problems. However, when they found that their demands were not taken seriously, they then staged the third and the longest rally in Thai history. This rally took place between 25 January and May 5, 1997 for 101 days with approximately 30,000 protesters. During this rally, they added more demands to their list as more networks of the poor joined. These demands consisted of 121 points and issues which were divided into six categories: land and forest issues, dam projects, state development projects, slums, occupational health for industrial workers, and alternative agriculture.

All the interviewees said that the protest was the only way the poor could ask for justice as they had no bargaining power and could not rely on the law. Mr. Bamrung, a key advisor to the AOP, said:

People cannot turn to lawyers, the police, or even provincial governors. ... That's why they come to join the assembly and fight for their cause. ... They have come to the realisation that, to survive, they have to fight their own battles (interview in Thai Development Newsletter, no.29,1995).

One of the protesters explained his reason:

I'm here because of the land problem. I have been involved in the protest since 1991, the beginning being the Khor Jor Kor project. When the government cancelled that project, I still had to continue my struggle on the right to plough in my land because it was located in the forest zone announced by the government. I never thought about giving up the protest because if we stopped we would lose our ancestors' land.

Vittaya Youngmeesuk, a village leader gave another reason:

Before, the villagers who got the problems fought their own ways. It's useless. In fact, we don't want to protest. We had done everything such as negotiated with the local government officials but we never received the positive responses. We found that the only way is to bring the problem to the government. But if each of us come by our own, the government will never consider our grievances. NGOs

have come to advise us how to fight. Through this support, we have learned from the experience of other group. We, then, decided to fight hand in hand. The AOP is the result of this commitment.

The main obstacle to solving the problems of the poor has always come from the bureaucracy. As one advisor pointed out:

Before coming to the protest, we used several approaches. We had negotiated at the regional level but our appeals were rejected or held down. Therefore, we needed to come together to put pressure on it. Our country still relies on power. Thus, we have to use 'people power' to tell the government of our grievances.

One advisor gave his view:

Most of the rallies are co-ordinated by villager volunteers. We only help by getting necessary information and negotiating with official channels for them. For our part, we are trying to avoid street protests as much as possible. The work is costly and the government's resultant promises are often empty.

In this chapter we have examined the increased gap between the rich and the poor which is the consequence of rapid economic growth in Thailand, the disputes over resources, and the abuse of power from the authorities that are the main causes of the conflicts between the rich and the poor, as well as the government and the villagers. These conflicts have been leading to the protests from the poor since the mid-1980s. We have also examined the work of Thai NGOs on advocacy. Four NGOs have been used as the case studies.

Conceptual discussion: NGOs as 'social movement organisations'

Why protest?

The core argument in this chapter is why do these conflicts lead to the 'daily' protests, in other words 'the mass movement of the poor'? Why do the poor take the risk of challenging the power of the government, especially when they are governed by the patron-client norm? And to what extent are NGOs involved in the movement?

In order to answer these questions, the 'social movement perspective' and the relevant theories will be used as a framework for the analysis.

According to social movement theory¹¹

... forcible repression is usually the least appropriate course of action. ... Movement of this sort arises when large masses of individuals begin to feel that under the existing social order, in particular under the existing economic and political institutes, they do not have a full stake in their society; they develop the idea that they are only *in* but not really *of* the society (Heberle, 1995:58 original emphasis).

It is obvious that the oppressive situation faced by the poor in Thailand is unbearable. They have learned that as far as growth-centred development has been implemented, they, as victims, become poorer while the rich become richer. They are forced into a corner. They are the losers while the rich are always the winners. They have found no alternative, but to 'fight for their children'. The situations in the mid-1980s when the villagers destroyed the eucalyptus trees (reforestation case), in the early-1990s when they held the historic march to Bangkok (*Khor Jor Khor* case), and since the mid-1990s when they held daily protests in Bangkok (The Assembly of the Poor) are similar. They have learned that they have been treated unjustly and do not have a full stake in Thai society.

Dissatisfaction with social order

Dissatisfaction with the social order, according to the social movement perspective, 'arises when individuals no longer consider the values and norms on which the order is based to be the best or only possible values and norms' (Heberle, 1995:55).

Heberle

argues that society is not a static system, therefore, in order to survive, adjustments in social organisation will be inevitable. But if the dominant minority in a society is unwilling to make the necessary adjustments, then, it must be a social movement that takes action. Blumer (1995) calls this change a 'cultural drift'¹² which is the process through which people come to form new conceptions of themselves that do not conform to the actual positions that they occupy in their lives.

In the case of Thailand, the patron-client norm which has been used as a 'control mechanism' by the authorities for many centuries, also creates new forms of conflict and tension (Hart,1989). Girling (1981:43) points out that the cultural norms such as 'the need to subdue one's own feelings for the sake of conformity, or deference to authority, or obedience to the powerful result in tensions that, though hidden, are never far from the surface. When too long or severely repressed, or when touched off by circumstances, such tension may erupt in violence.' Similarly, the 'bureaucratic polity' which used to be appropriate for the past, has also increased dissent among the people when the bureaucracy could not respond to their grievances (Samudavanija,1987).

This study reveals the facts that the reforestation projects which the authorities had imposed upon the people, the construction of dams for which the government had neglected to pay reasonable compensation to the poor, and the *Khor Jor Kor* scheme under which the authority had forced the people out of the forest area without considering their promises in the past, etc. are leading to the erosion of the patron-client norm and diminishing the power of the authority over the poor. Indeed, it is leading to a 'cultural drift' and the crisis of Thai 'social order'.

Nevertheless, we could not assume that dissatisfaction with the social order and the 'cultural drift', especially in the Third World where the poor have very little power (Gohlert,1991), would lead to a mass movement against the authorities. In Thai history

... the bureaucracy... reacts sharply to any assertion of an independent, and hence 'unauthorized' role, which is regarded as an unacceptable challenge to bureaucratic order (Girling,1981:164).

Intervention of NGOs

In the past, the poor had to conform to the authorities and the local élites because there were no real village-level organisations and associations to defend them. As Girling points out, 'the virtual absence of permanent associations in most Thai villages ... makes it difficult for the poorer peasants to organize effective opposition to the power of the rural elite, backed by the province officials' (ibid.:174). All local organisations such as 'agricultural cooperatives, teachers' associations, labour associations and even commercial associations were created at the instigation of the bureaucracy, and all serve to extend the reach of the bureaucracy'

(Jumbala,1987:117). This circumstance, in the western concept, is the lack of pluralism (Gohlert,1991).

However, Thailand has been changing since the mid 1980s. The emergence of NGOs that emphasise their work in the villages has brought more diversity to Thai society.

As Turton (1989:91) states:

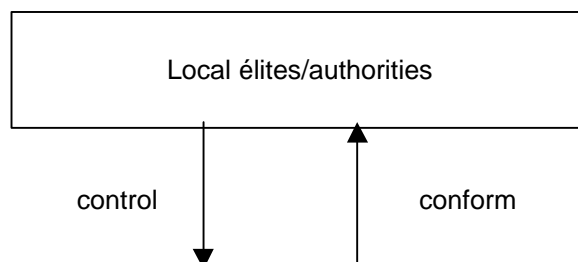
... the presence in the countryside of various categories of nonofficial development workers, agents of nongovernmental organizations, religious groups, and concerned professionals, mainly from educated urban, and middle-class backgrounds, constitutes a new source of potential allies and interlocutors for the rural poor.

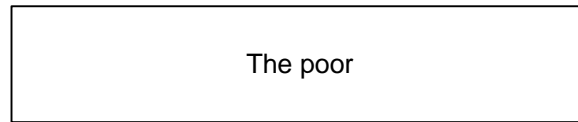
NGOs, therefore, have come to break down the patron-client relation between the authorities, the elites and the poor and reduce the power of the bureaucracy (see figure 1). The rights of local communities have been defended, and the plight of the poor has been brought into public debate. As Prasartset points out,

... within the context of sharpened conflicts, the people and NGOs have devised certain strategy for struggles and campaigns. The struggles have now attained a new dimension, i.e. 'policy advocacy' at national level to effectively solve their problems (1995:109).

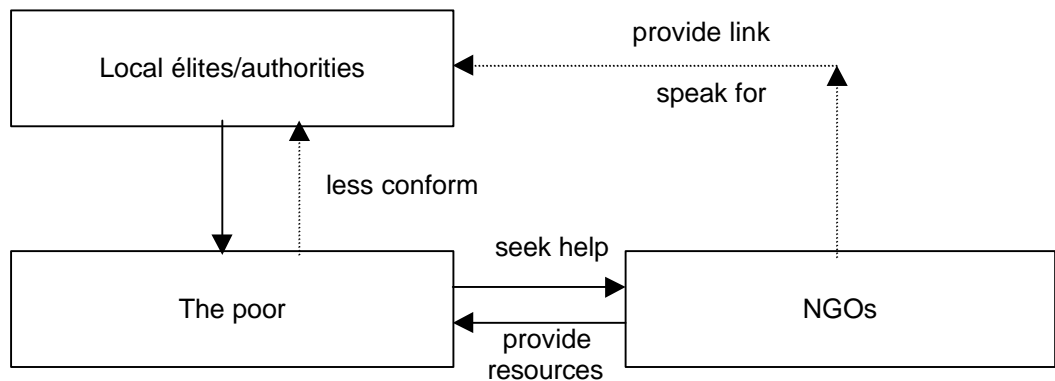
Many Thai NGOs intervene by setting up networks among the POs. However, THIRD, apart from intervention, also sets up a link with the authorities and local élites in order to create mutual understanding among the local people.

Figure 1 The change of the patron-client norm





Pattern I
Patron-client relation



Pattern II
Intervention of NGOs

However, we need more explanation as to why this kind of intervention is leading to the establishment of a mass movement in Thailand.

According to 'resource mobilisation theory', dissatisfaction which leads to protest does not always develop into a social movement because mobilising grievances are 'ubiquitous and constant' (Mayer, 1995) and organisation rarely develops directly from these grievances because "few individuals will 'on their own' bear the costs of working to obtain them" (McCarthy and Zald, 1996). According to this approach, social movements, therefore, 'arise when necessary resources become available, when the political opportunity structure for collective action improves, and when facilities and leaders become available' (Mayer, 1995:173).

This study has shown that grievances existed and protests occurred in Thai villages before the intervention of NGOs. Many dam construction projects carried out during the military regime caused many problems to the villagers, who received little

compensation from government. The poor had staged protests as we found in the case of the reforestation scheme and *Khor Jor Kor*, but those struggles did not last long. The mass movement was only established when NGOs, on the initiative of certain NGO leaders, began to link different groups into the networks and formed a core around which the networks could operate. NGOs themselves became the sufficient resource to enable the poor to continue their struggles.

The protest was not therefore initiated by the NGOs, but the NGOs became 'resources' which fed the mass movement. This argument partly corresponds to Hall's (1992) account of the Itaparica Hydropower Scheme in Brazil: the establishment of 'Polosindical' was the turning point that led the people to 'fight back' after a long period of fragmented and isolated acts of resistance.

NGO and advocacy

Strategy and approach

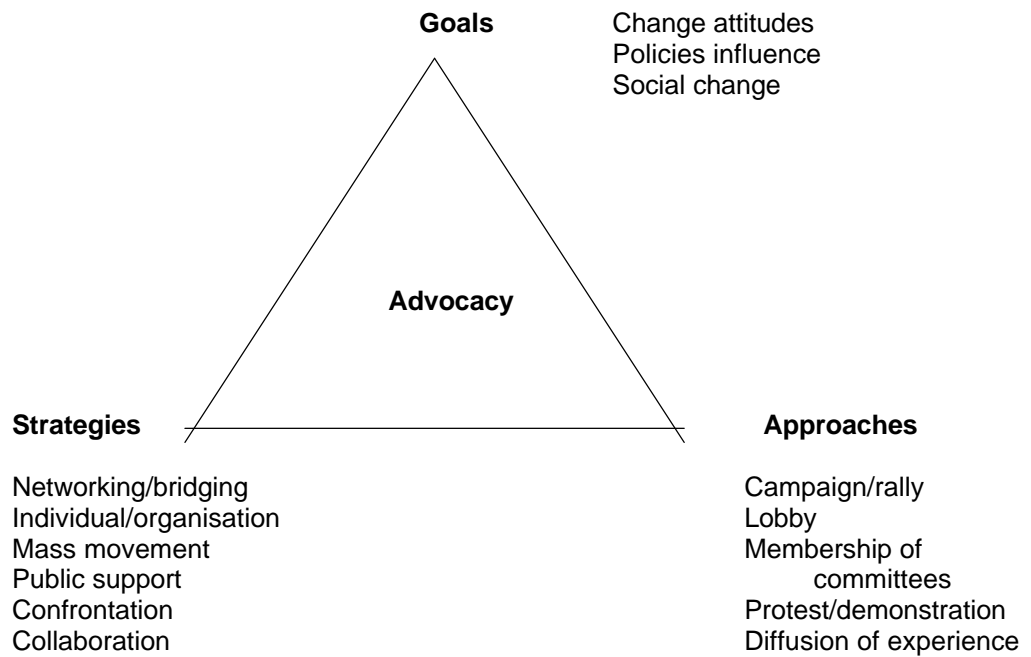
Most of the Thai NGOs involved in advocacy work have used 'networking' as a basic strategy to facilitate their advocacy work. Besides, the differences among the Thai NGOs in relation to advocacy work are mainly at the level of strategies and approach, which range from a radical approach such as protest (AOP, PER) to more conventional approaches such as lobbying and joining committees (TNCA). The work of THIRD is another type of approach which is similar to what Clark (1991) called 'diffusion of experience.' This study, therefore, suggests that it is useful to view advocacy work in three dimensions: goals, strategies and approaches (see figure 2).

Goals

As Jenkins (1987) points out, 'any attempts to influence the decisions of any institution elite on behalf of a collective interest' can be interpreted as advocacy work. We found that basically most of the Thai NGOs expect policy changes in favour of the poor. However, most NGOs also aim at 'social change' which would lead to a situation in which the people may be involved in the decision-making processes in the society (Schulpen, 1994 – biblio?). Another basic objective of some NGOs in their advocacy work is to 'change the attitudes' of their target group members. This goal for some NGOs is explicit (THIRD, TNCA) while for others it remains implicit (AOP, PER). This analysis corresponds to Covey's (1995) argument

that successful NGO advocacy work should also strengthen the capacity of its beneficiaries to advocate for their own interests.

Figure 2 The three-dimensional model of NGO advocacy work, adapted from Pattigrew (1990)



Strategies

This study suggests that 'networking' is more a strategy than an approach. Most Thai NGOs have used 'networking' as their strategy to build up the 'power' for their advocacy work. This finding corresponds to Korten's (1990a) suggestion that the power of NGO action does not come primarily from the size and resources of individual NGOs, but rather from their ability to combine the actions of citizens through widening, constantly evolving networks. If the goal of an organisation is to change the attitudes of their target group (as with PER) then networking may also be considered as an approach.

The 'bridging organisation' concept (Brown, 1990) can also be considered central to the strategies of NGOs such as PER and THIRD. Building a mass movement and increased public support are the strategies that we observed in the work of PER, the TNCA and the AOP, while confrontation (AOP, PER) and collaboration (THIRD, TNCA) are the strategies that NGOs have used in different circumstances.

Approaches

This study suggests that most NGOs involved in advocacy work did not base their performances on specific approaches, but rather used different approaches that were relevant to the political events or circumstances, and were related to the organisational reputation. The approaches being used by the Thai NGOs are campaign/rally, lobby, membership of committees, protest/demonstration and diffusion of experience. The TNCA could use the representative status of the Thai NGOs working on the AIDS issue sitting in the National AIDS Prevention and Control Plan to influence the national policy on AIDS. The AOP tended to emphasise protesting but did not ignore lobbying and campaigning. THIRD preferred to lobby the government officials at a local and national level as well as spreading their experiences and ideas through their publications and the media.

Three patterns of advocacy

This study also suggests that there are three patterns of NGOs' advocacy work. Based on the assumption that networking is the main NGO strategy, we found that

advocacy work could be classified into three patterns: NGOs as the supporter, NGOs as the partner, and NGOs as the main actor (see figure 3).

The AOP and PER mainly play the advisers to the movement of the POs (pattern I). For THIRD and also PER, NGOs and the POs form a partnership (pattern II), while in the case of the TNCA, NGO is the main actor or 'doer' (pattern III). This study also proposes that the different patterns of advocacy work also lead to the different approaches used. Pattern I tends to lead to the use of the 'protest' approach rather than patterns II and III. Pattern II has the special advantage of the 'diffusion of experience' approach while the advantage of pattern III is on a level of professional advocacy work. This finding coincides with what Covey (1995:168) argues that 'campaigns can be carried out in ways which strengthen grassroots organisations and their voice, or they can be implemented by intermediaries for whom the grassroots are 'clients'.'

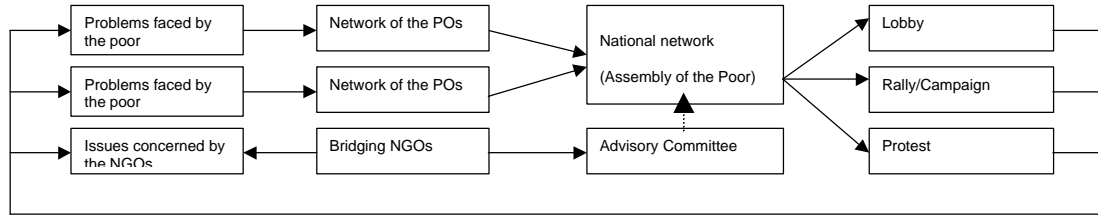
NGOs as 'Social movement organisations'

Another perception of NGO advocacy work which emerged from this study is the concept of NGOs as 'social movement organisations' (SMOs). The resource mobilisation theorists, for example McCarthy and Zald (1987), McCarthy (1995) and Kriesi (1995) point out that some kind of voluntary organisations can be considered as SMOs.¹³ This argument corresponds to Callahan (1995) and Hall (1992) who also point out that NGOs could be considered as part of 'social movements.'

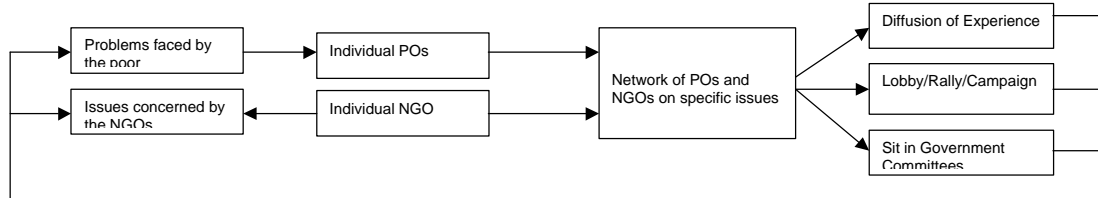
However, Blair (1997: 25) argues that only the NGO that aims at influencing public policy can be defined as a CSO:

... a purely service-oriented NGO...could become a CSO if it added policy advocacy to its agenda, and by the same token a CSO could become an NGO if it dropped its advocacy activities to concentrate solely on service delivery.

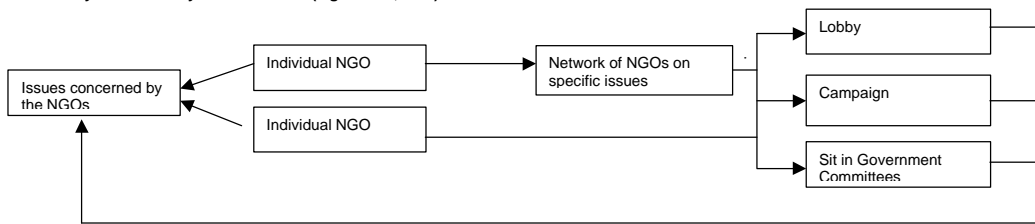
These arguments raise the possibility that, within the whole range of NGO activities, we could classify NGOs into different kinds of organisations. By using the 'three-dimension model' as a framework, we argue that the NGOs could be categorised by their objectives on advocacy work as:



Pattern I: Advocacy work done by the People network (e.g. AOP, PER)



Pattern II: Advocacy work done by POs and NGOs (e.g. THIRD, PER)



Pattern III: Advocacy work done by NGOs (e.g. TNCA)

Figure 3: Three patterns of advocacy work

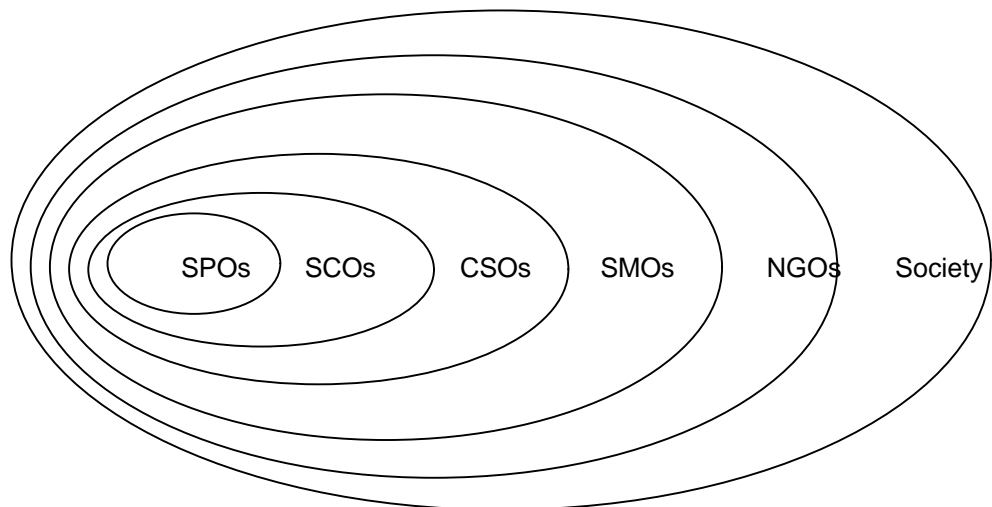
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'social campaign organisations (SCOs)' such as the TNCA

- 'civil society organisations (CSO)' such as PER, THIRD
- 'social movement organisations (SMOs)' such as the AOP .

In addition, the service provider NGOs could also be considered as 'service provider organisations (SPOs).' It is, therefore, interesting to adapt Blair's model of relationship of civil society organisations to NGOs and society to illustrate the relationship between SPOs, SCOs, CSOs, SMOs, NGOs (see figure 4). This argument clearly reinforces the idea that NGO community is highly diverse (Clark,1991).

Figure 4 Relationship between various types of NGOs, adapted from Blair (1997)



Networking: the ultimate use of resources

Working together has always been problematic for NGOs. Many writers on NGOs argue that they are usually jealous and fragmented about differences in ideology (e.g. Clark,1991; Korten,1990b; Gohlert,1991):

NGOs are ideologically diverse, with some firmly committed to advocacy and thus political action, while others have a more project-based alternative development agenda. ... They also vary according to the issues with which they deal, the level at which they operate, their interaction with other NGOs and so on (Hirsch,1997:25).

However, some observers are more optimistic. As Callahan (1995:97) points out:

... oppositional consciousness against state-directed developmentalism is one way to describe how [NGOs] have been able to turn fragmentation into a decentred unity.

The more optimistic views might suggest the idea that advocacy work which brings the NGOs together as a network might generate more co-operation amongst NGOs themselves. This study supports this argument. 'Networking' is central to the advocacy work examined here. Covey (1995) and Forsyth (1997) both suggest that 'networking' is the way to gain expertise and increase the strength of NGOs' advocacy work through alliance with 'expert bodies'. This idea is reminiscent of 'exchange theory', which proposes that very few organisations have enough access to all the elements they need to attain their objectives fully (Levine and White,1961). Therefore, 'networking' is the essential strategy for NGOs to overcome their resource constraint problem.

The importance of context

The country context is an important factor in NGO advocacy work. The importance of social and political contexts are clearly pointed out by many NGO observers (e.g. Clark,1991; Tandon,1987; Pongsapich,1995; Hirsch,1997; and Gohlert,1991). However, this study suggests that economic and cultural contexts are also worth considering, especially when the poor are those who carry out the advocacy work (see figure 3). It is obvious that the gap between the rich and the poor and the changing social order in Thailand have created the environment that has aroused resentment amongst the poor. This argument corresponds to what de Graaf (1987) points out, that it is changes in the external environment of NGOs – social, economic, political or cultural - which provides opportunities for the NGOs to exercise influence.

Conclusion

This study has focused on the relationship between NGO advocacy work and protest. Four Thai NGOs were selected as case studies in order to examine the scope of their advocacy work. The study has used the concept of the social movement to explain why the poor in Thailand are involved in protests against the government, focusing on 'resource mobilisation theory' in particular in order to explain *why* NGOs became involved. This paper argues that it was the poor, not the NGOs, who actually staged the protest. When social and economic problems reached a crisis point as they did in Thailand, the social system became characterised by a 'cultural drift' which contradicted dominant values and norms, and led to popular protest. Eventually, the NGOs, as 'social movement organisations,' intervened and moved these conflicts from the periphery to national politics. NGOs have therefore become involved in the protest mainly as the 'resources' not as the actors.

Secondly, the paper discusses the ways in which Thai NGOs have been using several different strategies and approaches for their advocacy work. This paper is suggesting a look at advocacy work in a three-dimensional model. Indeed, this model supports Edwards' and Hulme's (1992) argument that advocacy should be considered as a 'process.' According to this model, it is a process of the development of goals, strategies and approaches which would eventually expand the roles of NGOs towards democracy and civil society. The paper proposes the idea of looking at the scope of advocacy work in terms of three patterns, based on the experiences of these Thai NGOs. Each of these has distinctive advantages. This suggestion, therefore, provides more scope for the NGOs that do not work directly with the grassroots group to be authorised to organise the advocacy work 'on behalf of the poor.' Besides, this three-pattern model explains why some initiatives on advocacy work tend to be 'radical' while others emphasise a collaborative style.

This paper also argues for more attention to be given to the concept of NGOs as 'social movement organisations', which is useful in interpreting the advocacy work of NGOs towards democracy and civil society. This idea, corresponding with Blair's concept of 'civil society organisations (CSOs)', proposes a wider diagram of relationships between society, NGOs, SMOs, CSOs, SCOs and SPOs. The paper argues for the importance of 'networking' as a fundamental strategy of advocacy

work. Finally, it argues for the significance of the social, economic, political and cultural environment for the advocacy work.

Considering these NGOs as 'social movement organisations' seems to support fully Korten's concept of 'fourth generation NGOs' (1990b). It is a great challenge for NGOs and POs to develop and link together into a mass movement, from local level to global level. It would be a movement converting jealous behaviour among NGOs into 'esprit de corps'¹⁴ 'and changing the diversity into solidarity'. This study highlights the essential role of the NGOs as a 'catalyst of change' directed against what Korten calls the 'cowboy development' phenomenon. It also supports the concept that advocacy work is one of the strengths of NGOs. All the issues suggested in this paper need further research and further comparative study is particularly needed on the various NGO approaches to advocacy work outside Thailand.

Appendix: Chronology of events leading towards the 'Assembly of the Poor'

May 1991

7 networks of POs in North-eastern Thailand took the position of opposing the Agriculture Council Bill which gave more power to the Agro-Business Companies. The bill, then, was dropped.

August 1991

Protested by burning the 'Agriculture Council Bill' in front of Government House in Bangkok.

June-July 1992

Isarn Farmers' Assembly (IFA) asked the government to cancel the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC)'s plan on Land Allocation Scheme for the landless people (*Khor Jor Kor*) in the reserved forest. An eighty kilometres long march from the *Nakorn Rachasima (Korat)* province directed towards Bangkok was organised and joined by more than 10,000 villagers.

February-March 1993

Villagers from *Pak Moon Dam, Ubon Rachathanee* Province who opposed the construction of the dam, occupied the construction site. The confrontation between the villagers and the authority started.

March 1, 1993

Tapioca Plantation Farmers' Groups in *Buriram* province and the support groups for ISA network launched the appeal rally to urge the government to solve the tapioca price drop. Three thousand villagers rallied in front of the district office.

March 10, 1993

Isarn Pig Raisers Cooperatives and the Support Groups for ISA network urged the government to solve the problem of the live pig's price. Four thousand villagers rallied and obstructed the highway.

June 20-24, 1993

Isarn Small Scale Farmers' Assembly (ISFA) staged a rally in front of the provincial hall of Roi-Et province. Three thousand, five hundred villagers attended.

October 14-29, 1993

Moon River Basin Villager Committee staged a rally demanding fair compensation.

October 19-28, 1993

Three thousand villagers rallied at Kuchinarai District of Kalasin Province for 10 days and demanded 9 cases be solved.

December 3, 1993

The rally of villagers at Sirindhorn Dam was broken up violently by the authorities.

January 30 - February 16, 1994

Fifteen thousand villagers gathered together at the Irrigation Station in Nakorn Rachasima Province and launched a 17-day long march towards Bangkok.

April 27 - May 4, 1994

Two thousand villagers gathered at Grand Hall at Chiangmai University Northern Thailand and launched the 7-day long march from Chiangmai along the Paholyothin Super Highway to Lampoon Province, demanding that the government review the plan to evict the villagers from the forestry area.

January 24- February 4, 1995

ISFA gathered 12,000 villagers and launched a 12 day long march.

March 1-27, 1995

ISFA demanded the closure of 3 quarry factories in Loey Province. Three thousand villagers gathered for 27 days.

April 16-21, 1995

One thousand five hundred villagers rallied in front of Government House for five days demanding the closure 3 quarry factories in Loey province.

May 15-19, 1995

One thousand villagers gathered in front of Government House for 5 days. The rally ended because the Government dissolved Parliament.

July 13-15, 1995

Twelve thousand villagers gathered in order to urge the government to take action on the killing of ISFA's leader.

October 4-11, 1995

Three thousand villagers launched an eight-day long march from Klong Phai to Pak Chong, Nakorn Ratchasima Province, urging the government to solve the problems that were already agreed.

Notes

1. By 1997, Thailand faced a major economic crisis. In August 1997, the IMF was asked for help by the Thai government. Mr Anan Panyarachun, the former Prime Minister of Thailand, said that Thailand was facing bankruptcy (Bangkokpost (Internet version), August 5, 1997).
2. Girling (1981) points out that the concept of patron-client relations underlines the importance of *personal* relations in a *stratified* society. The patron is the “big man” and the client is the “small man”, considered in terms of status, power or wealth. The patron, displaying generosity and providing protection, assures himself of a loyal following, which he uses to enhance his influence and power. The client is at the beck and call of his patron, and in return for these “services” benefits from the advancement of his patron’s interest. Patron-client relations thus reflect two deep-seated, and complementary, values in Thai society: personal freedom (voluntary decision to join, or leave, a patron’s clientele); and social order (the ranking of every individual according to wealth, power, birth, and status).
3. Riggs’ (1966) classic study of bureaucracy in Thailand is much quoted. He argues that in most ‘advanced’ countries there are institutes of local self-government which help to shape public policy. These are able to improve some controls on field officers of the national bureaucracy, but not in the case of Thailand.
4. *Khor Jor Kor* was a relocation scheme for the poor living in degraded forest lands. It ostensibly protected reserved degraded state forests from intensified encroachment, but, in fact, actively promoted the establishment of monoculture commercial tree-farming. It was inspired by the government’s economic policies and the world-wide demand for wood chips and paper pulp (Taylor, 1997).
5. The *Khor Jor Kor* and the reforestation schemes are interrelated. However, our argument here is to emphasise the *Khor Jor Kor* Scheme as the attempt to move the villagers out of the forest while the reforestation scheme is there to emphasise the dispute of the village common land.

6. These include the issues of conflict such as farmers' land rights and workers' wages.

7. *Kiriwong* is a village in the South of Thailand where THIRD made a study of the causes of various problems in the villages linked to the policies and development plans of the government. Arguably, the participatory action research work provided villagers with an opportunity to become more aware of their own history, their values, their past and present, their decision-making ability and plans for their future.

8. Village Institution Promotion (VIP) is a THIRD project.

9. Mr. Bamrung Kayotha had set up the Isarn Small Scale Farmers' Assembly (ISFA) in 1993. However, after the change of ISFA's leader, Mr. Banrung and his colleagues set up the Assembly of the Poor.

10. At that time the government dissolved the parliament and a caretaker government was appointed.

11. 'Social movement' theory is not homogeneous. There are two theories, the European 'structural' theory and American 'resource mobilisation' theory (Mayer, 1995). This paper focuses on 'resource mobilisation theory' as it is considered particularly relevant to these issues.

12. 'Cultural drifts' stand for a general shift in the ideas of people, particularly along the line of the conceptions people have of themselves, and of their rights and privileges. Over a period of time many people may develop a new view of what they believe they are entitled to – a view largely made up of desires and hopes. It signifies the emergence of a new set of values, which influence people in the way in which they look upon their own lives' (Blumer, 1995: 60-61).

13. According to McCarthy and Zald (1987), a 'social movement organisation' is a complex, or formal, organisation that identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals.

14. There are five mechanisms which are essential for the growth of the social movement: agitation; development of 'esprit de corps'; development of morale; the formation of an ideology; and the development of the operating tactics (Blumer, 1995).

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