

Sustainable Development
Thai Shadow Report of Voluntary National Review
(VNR)
To Division for Sustainable Development of Economic
and Social Affairs, United Nation

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By

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Methodology

People's Empowerment Foundation has conducted a workshop on poverty attended to by representatives from workers, the urban poor, peasants and rural sector on 14 June 2017 at the PEF's office. It was to brainstorm on poverty and its extensive impacts on Thai public. Such inputs from the Thai poor shall be compiled and submitted to the United Nations during the presentation of Thailand delegation at the Voluntary National Review (VNR) in New York on 16 June 2017.

Based on the opinions drawn from representatives of various groups of poor people, we deem that there have been conflicting views regarding the poor among the government, the public and the UN. Such incongruities cover its meaning, definition, and guidelines as well as goals. Despite forums held domestically, but local voices have often been made unheard compared to the government's. It is therefore pertinent that this shadow report is produced to convey such opinions to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on sustainable development division to ensure that concerns about poverty by representatives of Thailand are heard by them.

Goal 1 Poverty

The definition and condition of poverty cannot be determined merely by income. Poverty connotes multifaceted relations, particularly social dimension. An unbalanced of income and expenditure, inflation and uncontrollable costs of living all contribute to the worsening of poverty. And poverty has induced a lack of access to education and other support. It becomes an obstacle to the climbing of social status ladder depriving the poor of their leverage and contributing to contrast inequality between the rich and the poor. The poor are left with unequal purchasing power and lack access to credit. They suffer from high household indebtedness and are left with instabilities in their living having to ensure a lack of good quality

of life, landlessness, homelessness, a lack of property, having no equal access to property, etc. The new generation of the poor get even poorer than the current generation. Youth become aggressive as a result of poverty and their lack of access to many things they deserve. Being forced to relocate as a result of development has worsened their poverty making their costs of living rise. They end up having to borrow money to build their new homes and have to make longer journey to work.

Solutions and indicators The government's management tends to ignore social dimension. With an emphasis placed on national security, much less attention has been paid to secure adequate budgets to support human resource development and social development. The nation is composed of human beings, not weapons. The emphasis on national security should be changed. With an emphasis on militarization, people have been deprived of their rights. Human security should be the main focus of development and the future direction of the country and the world.

The state remains focused on macro-development while ignoring small people. The fallouts of development fail to trickle down to the poor. The state's economic policy has been shaped by business consultants from large companies including C.P. (Charoen Pokphand Group), a monopolizing conglomerate. As a result, the economic policy has been geared toward promoting capitalism and capitalist hegemony and domination of national, regional and global economy. People barely benefit from such development. An important financial institution, the World Bank has to review its lending policy toward countries. It should care for social impacts and human security and refrain from placing the utmost importance on money-making.

The future development should ensure sustainable livelihood of the people and how they can co-exist in balance with nature and the environment. We want the government to change the course of development to avoid working toward the conventional goals of development. Instead, it should focus on a new set of indicators with an emphasis on the quality of life among people at the grassroots level making it its goal for development. Goal 1 regarding poverty are related to other goals under the goals for sustainable development including Goal 2 hunger, Goal 3 health, Goal 4 education, Goals 7-8 clean Water and sanitation, Goals 9- 10- 11 industrial development, urban development, and inequality, Goals 13-14-15 water, air, the environment, forest, and land.

Solutions for the peasants and rural sector

The current agricultural sector suffers from high production costs, low community prices, the use of chemicals and its impacts on the peasants' health, problems concerning marketing and transportation, unfair pricing for rice, expensive seeds and mutation.

1. Growing rice as the main crop should be discouraged and small scale farmers should be promoted to benefit more from growing indigenous varieties of paddy rice. The rice grown based on local wisdom shall enable the farmers to control their own prices and can learn to add more value to their produce and attain reasonable prices. The local rice varieties are grown organically and contain high nutrition with low production costs. A major solution for the farmers is to help them to attain self-reliance and to reduce their production costs. The government must adopt a long-term vision and support small scale famers. They have to ensure that such small people can benefit from development.

2. Mechanisms must be provided to strengthen farmers' organization: At present, there exists local councils of farmers, elected among themselves, at the village, Sub-District, District and provincial levels. But the government has failed to make use of such mechanisms. The councils of farmers are a mechanism most intimate to the farmers and know best about them. The farmers know best about their own problems while the government develop their policies on paper, not on reality. Their policy has thus been developed based on inaccurate data and it has become too rigid and failed benefit people at the grassroots level.

3. The government must throw support to organic farmers. Until now, the farmers have been bombarded with exaggerated advertisements. Meanwhile, state agencies and public officers have reaped benefit from the procurement of chemical fertilizers and other chemical substances. Such chemical use has contributed to permanent damage of the farmers' health. The government must campaign to change this attitude to encourage farmers to reduce and stop using chemicals and support them with rice seeds.

Indicator for 2017-2021

1. Within five years, the government shall help to strengthen the councils of farmers restoring them their leverage to monitor the performance of the state and to increase their bargaining power.

2. Within five years, the government should put in place rice pledging scheme to ensure that farmers can sell their rice at market prices and the councils of farmers should be allowed to have a role in determining rice prices.

3. Within five years, the government shall declare a policy to uplift the quality of life of farmers making it a national agenda. Efforts must be made to promote organic food production making Thailand a safe kitchen of the world.
4. Within five years, the government must ensure that the National Health Federation shall promote health care and consciousness among farmers and to persuade them to reduce the use of chemicals by 30%
5. Within five years, the government must put in place a fund to cover damage as a result of climate change including flood, drought, crop diseases, pests, etc. The councils of farmers must have a role to plan including in making the policy and implementation.
6. The people's sector would monitor and review the goals every five years.

Urban Sector, urban poor and informal workers

Solutions for the urban poor and informal workers: The problems include a lack of housing security, a lack of income security, health problems, education, welfare and care for various vulnerable groups.

Urban poverty can be attributed to a failure in rural development. As a result, there has been a mass exodus to look for jobs for survival in the cities. Human habitat is thus cardinal to human livelihood. Efforts by the state to address the issue have failed to touch the real issue and cannot bring to any effective solution. All proposed solutions must garner concrete cooperation and participation of those affected by the problems.

Opinions and recommendations plus indicators

1. Within five years, the government should establish the Ministry of Settlement to ensure that people have permanent places to live and to provide for various aspects of their quality of life.
2. Within five years, 70% of the urban poor should be provided with permanent habitat suitable to their livelihood. Unused public land should be redistributed to them. The public housing projects such as *Ban Mun Khong* can respond to the need of community, but there are still many people who are excluded from such community and have not benefited from *Ban Mun Khong*.
3. Within five years, the government should ensure that all Thai persons shall be entitled to at least undergraduate education. Compulsory education must be provided free of charge until Grade Twelve. It is now insufficient for students to complete just Grade Twelve, therefore the state should ensure that all students can attain education up to the undergraduate level. The state may

subsidize a half of the expenses for such education and ensure a good quality education that helps student to think critically and practically.

4. The health of the poor, since all persons are subject to illness, a life cycle, it is therefore pertinent that the state shall retain the universal health care scheme (30-baht-for-all-diseases) since it benefits all the poor. All social welfare systems must be integrated including social security, welfare system of public officers and an effort should be made to upgrade the quality of medical treatment up to the national level to ensure that there is no inequality in the treatment.
5. Unemployment insurance can be a sensitive issue and warrants more brainstorming. But it has been proposed that within five years, all people in the working age should be entitled to employment and the level of unemployment should be kept at not more than 2%. Wages must be made fair and should help the workers, the breadwinners of their families, to be able to cover the costs of living for three members in each family (since children and elderly persons are unable to work and have to be provided for by the breadwinners). The state must control prices of commodities. An opposition to automation in production has been expressed fearing it would make more people lose their jobs.
6. A provident fund is a good concept though it may yield inequality since it fails to cover informal workers and other vulnerable groups to whom the government should pay more attention. Progressive taxation should be adopted and the state should provide for various kinds of welfare for the vulnerable groups and people with special needs including older persons, people with disabilities, poor people, and the country should become a welfare state within 2030.

Strategy to cooperation and challenges

Work toward sustainable development warrants cooperation from all parties. There should be public consultations with people from various sectors. The current implementation by the government still rely on a top-down approach, thinking and acting on behalf of the people, and it seems government officials get used to this approach and they tend to suppose ordinary people have no idea and understanding about sustainable development. The government, in collaboration with civil society, should then make more efforts to raise the awareness and support implementation by people's sector in order to establish genuine cooperation. Parallel work is still required in the beginning since the state and people's sector tend to adopt different approaches. But cooperation and tolerance to different opinions is essential for the work to serve public interest of the nation. Thus more consultations are needed based on cordial relationships.

People's participation should be enhanced. All of these should be achieved within 2030 and it should have led to a better change in the future.

People's Empowerment Foundation and Poverty Network,

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