

THAILAND

Monitoring Sustainable Development: The State - Private Sector - People Nexus

Witoon Lianchamroon, Faikham Harnnarong, Pakorn Lertsatienchai, Kingkaew Buaphet, Narumon Arunotai, Ranee Hassarungsee, Pattraporn Chuenglersiri
Social Watch Thailand

In accordance with its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Thailand has issued the Rule of the Office of the Prime Minister on the Committee on Sustainable Development. The rule indicates 1) balanced and integrated policies and strategies on the country's sustainable development which include economic, social and environmental aspects in the long term; 2) the support and promotion of the work of public and private sectors on sustainable development; and 3) the direction of public administration in accordance with policies and strategies to implement sustainable development.

The Committee consists of the Prime Minister, under the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), as head of the Committee; the Federation of Thai Industries, Thai Chamber of Commerce and four research institutes from the private sector; and civil society working groups on 1) the integration of working and prioritizing issues on SDGs; 2) drafting report on monitoring SDGs; and 3) Improvement of economic, social and legal mechanisms to support the SDGs. A representative of Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) commented that despite the three working groups, the public sector and civil society still played minor role and suggested that an alternative Public-Private-People Partnership (PPPP) should be considered in these processes.

As Preeyanut Thampiya, committee member of Thailand Sustainable Development Foundation commented: "Although the Thai government has adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as its national agenda, in reality, sustainable development is hardly

implemented in Thailand. Every sector must realize the importance of sustainable development and it must be ingrained in the inner consciousness, not from enforcing rules."

Thon Thamrongnawasawat, Vice Dean, Faculty of Fisheries, Kasetsart University, went further:

Thailand has sustainable development and destructible development. The main idea of development, rather than being included in the nation's plan or constitution, must be in the heart of all people.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not enough to achieve sustainability. Such development is only for show. Thailand is in the top five countries that are facing the most severe level of marine debris, which is considered the most urgent environmental issue this year. Thailand produces plastic waste only less than China and Indonesia. But if we calculate the ratio of the amount of waste per capita, Thailand is producing the most waste in the world. Therefore, when we talk about sustainable development, there is always destructible development attached.

In the meantime, civil society organizations are playing a crucial role in propelling sustainable development, by elevating and improving their practices in order to establish concrete approach to link with the SDGs, under the circumstances of social economic and political changes in Thailand, as illustrated in the examples below.

Civil-State (Pracha-Rath) policy in the agricultural sector

The Civil-State policy was initiated by the junta that has ruled Thailand since 2014, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). The aim of this policy is to promote the role of the private sector in investment and innovation development, to establish cooperation between the private sector and community enterprises and to develop a new agricultural scheme. The main actors of this policy are: Somkid Jatusripitak, Deputy Prime Minister, and Issara Wongkusolkij, Chairman of Mitr Phol Group and former Chairman of Thai Chamber of Commerce, as representatives from the private sector. The government claims that Civil-State is in accordance with the SDGs. The policy consists of three levels; 1) Policy-making, of which the cabinet is in charge; 2) Implementation, for which six working groups from ministries and committees are responsible, with Deputy Prime Ministers as heads of each group; and 3) Operation, which comprises state, private sector and people or civil society, and consists of 12 working committees. Ministers act as head of each group, together with heads from private sector.¹

The direction of the Civil-State policy is steered by big companies, together with a 'bureaucratic' mechanism. Few representatives from civil society organizations join as most civil society organizations ignore and criticize this policy. They disagree with the weak enforcement of city planning laws and the lack of environmental impact assessments in the special economic development zone.

Agricultural policies for the private sector, the perils of small farmers

The Civil-State policy on the agricultural sector stirs waves of criticism when the memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC) and private companies who profit from chemical fertilizer, pesticide and seed business was issued. On the surface, this MOU seems to help farmers

because it involves price reductions on these materials. However, the real intention is to boost the sales of these chemical agricultural materials. The lower price is actually caused by the low market price of agricultural produce and the current drought. The Civil-State policy on the agricultural sector is irrelevant to sustainable agricultural development because excessive usage of pesticides has always been a major problem for Thai farmers. The attempt to boost the sales of means of production has nothing to do with maximizing output or with sustainable development.

Declines in prices of agricultural products, especially maize, tapioca and rice (including broken-milled rice), is a result of government's support of animal food industries and big agribusiness companies. The government also supports companies that sell chemical agricultural materials such as fertilizers, pesticides and seeds, instead of limiting the use of these materials.

The Ministry of Agriculture signed the MOU with agricultural industries to "promote the use of quality chemical fertilizers, seed and pesticides". Recently there were more than 1 million farmer families who were hard hit by this MOU. Maize price sharply dropped due to the import of maize from neighbouring countries, without limiting the amount and time frame. Moreover, millions of tonnes of wheat are imported for animal food industries, without import tax, although the tax for importing raw material is actually 27 percent. This practice does not only affect the price of maize and tapioca but also the price of broken-milled rice (used for animal food production) and partly causes the drop in the rice price.

After the rice price decline, instead of promoting mixed-method agriculture which farmers can rely on themselves, promoting organic farming, or introducing schemes to reduce means of production, the government signed the MOU with private companies, resulting in encroaching on rice farming areas. They also promote maize and sugar cane crops for animal food products. This is to give benefits to conglomerates who are part of the Civil-State policy. Small farmers are entitled to pay a 7 percent interest rate for their agricultural loans but companies are entitled to pay

¹ Thai Publica, "Deputy Prime Minister address Pracha-Rath as a mean to achieve SDGs and sustainable development," 2016, available at: <http://thaipublica.org/2016/07/mobilizing-collective-action-somkid/>

only 0.01-4 percent. The fall of small farmers is not only caused by low produce prices but also government's policies that favour agricultural conglomerates. Companies who are part of Civil-State make their profits from sugar production, sugar cane monocultural farming, animal food, maize monocultural farming, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, for example. Therefore, it is not surprising that government promotes 'large-scale farming' instead of organic or mixed-method farming. MOAC soon will propose reducing the interest rate for large-scale farming to only 0.01 percent, while organic and other small farmers still have to pay 5-7 percent.

The claim that Civil-State will lead to the development of sustainable agriculture, community enterprises, reduced inequality and strong local community, among other things, is just a sugar coating for a policy that helps a group of agricultural monopolies. The push for GMO crops led to so much opposition from various groups of people, that the project was cancelled. The attempt to amend the law on plant variety protection 1999, aimed to serve seed companies and establish Thailand's legitimacy to join the TransPacific Partnership (TPP), now abandoned by the US and currently being renegotiated by the other participating countries.

The establishment of a so-called enterprise, Pracharat Rak Samaggi Co. Ltd., was led by ThaiBev, CP and Mitr Phol, the country's largest industrial food conglomerates. However, this company does not bring about equality, if the government does not enforce laws and regulations to limit land grabbing by these giant agribusiness, prevent monopolization of agricultural production and centralization of product distribution centres in wholesale and retail businesses.

The signing of MOU between MOAC and the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives (BAAC), along with the Thai and international animal food industry and seed company group (CP, Monsanto, Syngenta, Pacific Seeds) on 21 October 2016 is intended to transform 80,000 acres of rice farming area into maize cropping area.

Seed companies profit tremendously from the sale of maize (6-7 million kg/year), earning around 1 billion

baht. They can transform a rice farming area into a maize cropping area. Biothai, an NGO that monitors agri-industry policy, found that Monsanto and CP will immensely benefit from the MOU because they have the majority of market share of the seed business. CP has an advantage over other companies due to its seed sales through BAAC's mechanism called Thai Agricultural Business Co. Ltd (TABCO), which acts as middle man in buying raw agricultural materials. It also runs the Agricultural Cooperative for Marketing of BAAC clients, in 60 centres nationwide.

Farmers who participate in the rice farming area reduction scheme, although they are entitled to low interest loans to plant maize crops, are tied to certain seeds and means of production. CP gains the most profit under this scheme, since it has a long-time connection with BAAC. Moreover, previous governments have for long appointed CP representatives as BAAC's managerial committee members. It is not surprising why 70 percent of seeds sold through BAAC's mechanism are from CP.

Therefore, agricultural reform must abolish a policy structure that serves to benefit giant agribusiness and agrochemicals, and at the same time, create alternatives for sustainable agriculture for small farmers.

Situation of double oppression against indigenous women²

Since 2016, the government has pursued a policy to allocate land to poor villagers along the Thai-Myanmar border for national security reasons. The government recently reported that 2,589 pieces of land (about 57% of targeted land) were allocated to 1,873 households along the border for dwelling and farming. Some pieces of public land that had been occupied by people

² Briefing on National Civil Society Report on National Commitment to the SDGs, Thailand. Submitted by Foundation for Women, March 2017. Monitoring and Review of the SDGs with the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development (APWLD), available at: http://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/FFW_2.pdf

were also managed for poverty eradication and community development activity. However, the government policy introduced in 2014 to restore national forest from 10 percent to 40 percent has dramatically affected the livelihoods of over 450,000 people living in the national forest areas who are mostly indigenous people.

The Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT) shared that many heads of household have been arrested by the authorities and charges brought against them although they have been living in these forest lands for over 80 years. The whole family is not allowed to live or do any farming in such lands. Some households' crops were destroyed by the authorities despite the order of the National Council for Peace and Order NO.66/2557 not to harm affected poor villagers or those who are landless and have lived there before the NCPO's order. No land means no food, no income and no future. Many become debtors. More and more women have migrated to cities or abroad to look for jobs. Although some of them do not have identity cards and have no means to earn an income, they inevitably migrate to the cities for the future of their families. Indigenous women and young girls are targeted by recruiters to prostitution and forced labour in Malaysia, Singapore and Japan. Moreover, many of those who remain in the agro-industry sector have to rely on contract farming where they have to comply with certain conditions which forced them to use factory seeds, insecticides and chemicals which threaten efforts to preserve the genetic diversity of seeds. Although men are the one who mostly use insecticides, they have some kinds of protection, while women also work in the farm and collect the crops without any kind of protection.

In addition, there are still many cases of domestic violence against women. Although there has been some progress, as the Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development has recently started to develop the National Plan to End Violence against Women which include all forms of violence and there are many protection mechanisms and measures now in place, ethnic Hmong, Lisu and Pakeryor women said that indigenous communities are still excluded from these services and do not get access to legal assistance and

protection. They do not want to report cases of violence to the police because they are afraid of revenge from the perpetrators and also because of lack of knowledge of their rights to claim.

The leader of Tai Yai women reported that affected women in indigenous communities will not go to government shelters due to their limited security. According to the Network of Hmong Women, women in their communities still suffer from domestic violence. In the five months since the opening of their hotline service, there were 10 cases of Hmong women who sought to commit suicide by drinking pesticide, three of whom succeeded. This reflects the fact that there are no forms of support or appropriate services to women affected by gender-based violence. Furthermore, in the past decade there has been higher proportion of women inmates charged with drug use. A member of the Women's Development Network from Chiangrai province reported that almost 90 percent of 919 female inmates were charged with drug use, a quarter of whom are indigenous women. In Terng district, 60 of the 103 female inmates charged with drug use are indigenous women.

It is important to note that although data and information presented are mainly on indigenous women, other women in remote areas throughout Thailand are also facing similar situation and being left out from development agenda.

Recent situations of small-scale fisheries

Thailand has faced a problem of sustainable fisheries since the 1990s, both in the Gulf of Thailand and in the Andaman Sea. Marine resources have deteriorated, and large Thai fishing vessels have increasingly ventured into neighbouring waters. In addition, large commercial fishing vessels require on-board labourers, so Thai and foreign workers have been recruited. In many cases, workers have been abused and have become modern-day slaves in the fisheries. Apart from environmental issues, large-scale fisheries thus often involve human rights violations.

The problem is complex and difficult to resolve, mainly because it involves corruption and influential figures in both political and economic realms.

In April 2015, the European Commission announced the suspension of fishery products imported from Thailand due to “Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU fishing)”. Thailand along with several other countries fell into the “yellow card” status, meaning that an immediate remedy should be issued and implemented or else a total ban may follow. IUU fishing not only degrades marine resources, it also puts lawful fishers at a disadvantage. In addition, it deteriorates ecosystems and weakens coastal communities.³ It is also possible that fisheries problem could affect the export of seafood to the US market, as the US recently enacted the Action Plan for Implementing the Task Force Recommendations.⁴

The Thai government is trying to solve the problem by establishing a Command Center for Combating Illegal Fishing (CCCIF). Vessel Monitoring Centers or Port-in Port-Out Control Centres have been set up at 28 sites along Thai coastal areas to enhance monitoring and inspection. In addition, the new Fisheries Act has been amended to include a new Fisheries Control Act that provides for improved control of in-and-out fishing vessels and ensures further penalties and higher fines for illegal fishers.⁵ This challenge is actually an opportunity for the government to take action and guarantee legal enforcement of fishery control in order to maintain a natural balance. The government will have to stand firm and not be swayed by private sector requests for legal exemptions. There is also a need to revise the policy and plan for real sustainable uses of natural resources.⁶

Private sector and other stakeholders have organized a Task Force or Task Group to support the government’s work on solving the problem; for example, there is a declaration for the termination of contracts and stopping the purchase of raw materials from partners or suppliers who violate the Fisheries Act of 2015 or who are related to human trafficking. These partnerships included proposals from the Shrimp Sustainable Supply Chain Task Force, which offered to reduce the use of fishmeal from fishing vessels by turning to the byproducts from tuna and surimi industries instead.⁷ Apparently, destructive fishing industries are related to the growth and the increasing monopolization by large food corporations. Fishmeal is one of the major animal feeds that comes from small fish/marine animals or from catches from large commercial fishing vessels.

Such IUU problems are critical, and in order to tackle them, over 10 government units have to work together in an integrated manner. Currently, there are discrepancies in the information of each unit, like the number of boats registered, licenses to fish issued, proper fishing equipment, and so on. With stronger enforcement and more strict measure on illegal fishing boats, local fishers receive higher yields. However, some measures have negative impacts on local fishers, like restricting fishing grounds for less than 10 gross tonnage boats to three nautical miles from the shore by Section 34 of Fisheries Act of 2016. Those who violate that will have to pay heavy fines.

Local Fisher Folk Associations in several areas have filed objections to Section 34 through the provincial governor on the issue of fairness in accessing resources and management. It should not be the size and weight of the boat that counts, but the type of fishing equipment. The government has set up a National Fisheries Policy Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, consisting of fishery experts, commercial fishing operators, academics, and representatives from

3 Parima Arkkarayut, "The European Union gives the yellow warning card to Thailand to solve IUU Fishing", 2015, available at: <https://www.scbeic.com/en/detail/product/1436>.

4 Oranuch Sangcharuek, "Illegal, unregulated and uncontrolled fisheries: opportunities for fisheries reform in Thailand (Part 1)", 2016; available at: <http://thaipublica.org/2016/01/luu-reform-opportunities-1/>

5 Parima Arkkarayut, 2015.

6 Nonarit Bisanayabut and Phanatit Lertprasertkul, "TDRI Agenda: 'IUU Yellow Card' Trap, what to do to avoid repeating the steps", Bangkok

Business Newspaper, 19 May 2016, available at: <http://tdri.or.th/tdri-insight/iuu-20160519/>

7 Parima Arkkarayut, 2015.

fisher folk associations. A subcommittee was set up to consider Section 34, but the proportion of fishers' representation is very low and the solution and decision may be misguided and slow.

The National Fisheries Policy Committee concluded that Article 34 cannot be repealed as it may affect the integrative whole of the Fisheries Act 2016, but the Department of Fisheries will work on their official notification to revise fishing gear requisition and to allow local small-scale fishers to fish within the three nautical miles shore limit.⁸

Several social sectors offered solutions to this crisis. Laws and enforcement can be a primary management tool. The State that legislates and amends the laws needs to be more analytical, and data must be collected on a sound academic basis, public participation process is very necessary, and impacts on all sectors need to be addressed and managed. Internationally accepted management principles which rest on fairness and take into account sustainable use of resources are also important.⁹

Another crisis of local small-scale fishing has to do with economic power imbalances and fluctuating pricing of marine animals. This is a deeply rooted and unresolved problem. Most of the fish pricing is set by middlemen or owners of fish piers/fish landings. The Federation of Thai Fisher Folks Associations, Raks Thalay Thai Association, and the Fisherfolk Network have cooperated in setting up a shop called 'Fisher folk'¹⁰, selling seafood at a fair price for consumers as well as for fishers. The shop started in the province of Prachuab Khiri Khan, then expanded to Nakhon Si Thammarat, Satun, and Songkhla Lake areas. This shop works as a small network with business management principles. The shop is an

intermediary between Lemon Farm and small consumers; this corresponds to the concept of participatory development from bottom-up initiative and management.

The way this shop works is for fishers to buy fish at a 5-20 percent higher price than middlemen or fish piers. Fishermen become shareholders and they will receive dividends if the sale is profitable. At the same time, profit from the shop is returned to the community in the form of resource rehabilitation activities. The network also set up a standard under the label of 'Blue Brand'.¹¹ The key is natural resource conservation, chemical free products, and environmentally friendly fishing equipment. At the same time, they continued to befriend middlemen and fish pier owners. This approach not only delivers fresh and quality products to consumers, but it also relays messages and stories of local fishers through these products. It creates a new way of thinking for fishers, that they can be organized and have an outlet that sell fresh seafood at a fair price. After the network is mobilized, then fishers can also work on resource rehabilitation and move to amend unfair rules and regulations. It is evident that local organizations and local fishers are seeking solutions and creating cooperation in and among networks to address existing issues.

The problem of illegal fishing and local small-scale fisheries are not unique to Thailand, and can be considered as an ASEAN problem. Each ASEAN country must cooperate in order to solve the problem and eliminate illegal fishing by stressing the importance of international legal instruments. ASEAN members should highlight the SDGs especially SDG 14, by addressing sustainable utilization of marine resources. Local knowledge and management of small-scale fishers are to be given priority. Furthermore, cooperation is needed from public sector, business community and local communities.

Solutions to large commercial fishing issues and IUU fisheries can be found in successful cases like Korea,

8 Isra News Agency, "Fisheries Policy Committee not repealed Article 34 due to the impact on the whole Fisheries Act, 2016, available at:

https://www.isranews.org/isranews-news/44732-sea_4473201.html

9 Anchalee Pipattanawattanakul, "Retracing the reform of Thai Fisheries Law, why should small boats be allowed to go off shore", 2016, available at:

<http://www.greenpeace.org/seasia/en/news/blog1/blog/55667/>

10 School of Changemakers, "Blue Brand: from local small-scale fishers to safe food standard", 2015, available at:

<https://www.schoolofchangemakers.com/knowledge/9896>

11 Ibid.

the Philippines and Fiji. These countries have restructured their fisheries and fishing industries, enabling them to receive ‘green cards.’ Their problems became an opportunity for a serious reform, and in turn, strengthening local capacity for more sustainable resource management.

From fossil fuel energy to renewable energy: the long and winding road

General Prayut Chan-ocha, Thai Prime Minister, speaking at the opening ceremony of COP21 meeting on 29 November 2016 in Paris, supported the attempt to limit the earth’s temperature increase by 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius, and to uphold principles of justice and mutual responsibility, depending on differentiated level of development and each country’s capacity, according to SDG 13.

However, the Thai leader’s vision seems to be in contradiction with what is happening in the country. NCPO’s seizure of power claims it was based on need to reform the country, including the energy issue. But this government maintains the same stance on energy as the previous government, as for example, the push for coal-fired power plants, according to Thailand Power Development Plan 2015 (PDP 2015). The plan aims to produce at least 5,850 megawatts or almost double the capacity of existing power plants which means additional CO₂ emissions of around 34 million tonnes. Despite opposition, the plan went through, partly owing to the fact that the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) announced that coal energy is economical, environmentally friendly and safe for people’s health. It avoided mention of increased CO₂ emissions, which is contrary to global efforts to lower the use of coal as it produces more CO₂ into the atmosphere than all types of fossil fuels. This is also contrary to Thai leader’s remarks on the urgency of limiting CO₂ emissions.

Investment in fossil fuels such as coal also means lost investment on energy efficiency and clean energy industries. This is a form of ‘infrastructure lock-in’ which will lock the country into a position of relying on fossil fuels for the next few decades.

Included in PDP 2015 is the 800-megawatt coal power plant in Krabi, the 2,000-megawatt coal power plant in Tera, Songkhla province and other two 1,000-megawatt plants, which are yet to announce their locations. There are also plans to build other several independent coal power plants, including one for paper manufacturing factories in Khao Hinson, Chachoengsao province and one for a potash mine in Bumnej Narong, Chaiyapum province.

People’s participation in decision-making processes

Given the pressures on civil society participation, we must thank every community that has the courage to oppose the coal power plant policy, open the arena for public discussion, delay the decision, extend timeframe to push for clean energy transition, and share the work of community groups with others that work on global warming all over the world.

For example, people from various communities and civil society organizations are campaigning to protect food security in the area of Klong Talad - Bang Prakong basin in Thailand’s eastern region, which has been targeted for industrial development for decades. The Khao Hinson 600-megawatt coal power plant project, proposed by the private sector owned National Power Supply Co. Ltd., which is part of Double A Co. Ltd. in 2007, became part of PDP as a base of reserve electric power. The proposed plant claims that will use ‘clean coal technology’ to generate electricity. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) done by a consultant, states that technology used in this plant would emit low level of toxic. However, communities in the area, which is one where high quality organic agriculture is flourishing, are concerned that the plant will monopolize local water supplies and increase the level of toxic emissions which communities already face from surrounding industrial factories. The EIA report is now being reviewed by a committee of specialists.

When the National Energy Policy Committee approved the construction of 800-megawatt power plant in Krabi

province in February 2017, local people demonstrated in front of Government House to oppose it.¹² Although EGAT claimed that the reason for this plant is due to growing demand in the southern region, partly because of the thriving tourism industry, the current capacity of power generation now exceeds demand. However, the unique geography of the southern region makes it difficult to fully integrate its grid system to the overall system, making it necessary for the southern region to build its own energy security capacity on the basis of fuel risk distribution. Thailand's energy system currently relies on 70 percent natural gas, making coal power a viable option, while according to EGAT, renewable energy technologies are not reliable. Standing on the site of an old oil power plant, the proposed coal power plant will be labelled 'clean coal technology' which claims to reduce NOX, SOX emission and small dust particles to below standard level.¹³

Critics point out that this project does not fully consider the impact on the ecosystem of the area which includes an abundant mangrove forest. In addition to the problem of CO2 emissions, large ships carrying coal will also pose threats to the area's marine ecosystem and local fisheries. Local people comment that EGAT's participation processes are not open and not accountable, denying real community participation.¹⁴

Local critics joined academics to do a survey on potential alternative energy in local areas, finding that local communities have potential to generate 1,700 megawatt.¹⁵ Partly, these energies come from solar and wind, which are categorized as unreliable, but they also could include biomass, derived from waste of processing palm products. The policy sector still does not see this as

reliable energy source, claiming it would cause instability to the overall energy system. While the Prime Minister ordered EGAT to review its EIA report in February 2017,¹⁶ this does not mean that the coal power plant project will come to an end.

The deepening conflict with sustainable development

The above examples highlight two obstacles to sustainable development in Thailand:

- Lack of technological choices. The term 'technological choice' does not only refer to technologies in term of material, but also institutional management, and rules and regulations. For Thailand, in many cases, the choices of technology are predetermined, without public participation. Having choices means acknowledging pros and cons, reviewing the impact of each type of technology, how to handle such technology, and the ability to participate in decision-making for future alternatives. It also means good management, prepared for risks and mutual responsibility.
- Unequal power in assessing project impact. The EIA process was conducted by private consultant company hired by the firm that proposed the project. While it is scrutinized in terms of accuracy and independence, this is done by technical advisors who do not understand local areas and local knowledge. Local people who have best knowledge of the area were excluded from the drafting of the EIA since the beginning, and accordingly do not accept it.

¹² BBC, "National Energy Policy Committee approved the construction of 800-megawatt power plant in Krabi", 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-39000921>

¹³ EGAT, "Krabi Power Plant and Khlong Rua Pier: Project Brief", 2017, available at: <http://projects-pdp2010.egat.co.th/projects1/images/Article/001.pdf>

¹⁴ Thai Civil Rights and Investigative Journalism, "EGAT must abandon Krabi Project due to health and tourism impacts", 2017, available at: <http://www.tcijthai.com/news/2014/07/scoop/3955>

¹⁵ ThaiPBS, "EGAT must buy renewable energy from the locals which have high potential for power development", 2016, available at: <http://news.thaipbs.or.th/content/255814>

¹⁶ ThaiPBS, "No more demonstration after rejection of EIA", 2017, available at: <http://news.thaipbs.or.th/content/260312>

Summary

The cases above show some of the problems with partnerships for sustainable development. First, as implemented in Thailand, the SDGs are bounded by mindsets and practices of bureaucracy. Consequently, the goals are reduced to measures or mere numbers without recognition of the principle of development that must put human values and ecological concerns at the centre, so that many minority groups and ordinary people are overlooked (or invisible) and discriminated against. This stems from the second point: the imbalance of power in public-private partnerships. Our examples show that they are not initiated from below but from the centralized power of the corporate-government complex, strengthened by a curtailment of freedom of speech and continued neoliberal policies. This leads to our third point: lack of feedback.

In order for implementation to be meaningful, a participation process should be organized regularly to ensure that diverse voices from below are taken seriously, especially those who are suffered or suppressed. In terms of an institutional framework, there must be effective mechanisms to monitor monopolizing conglomerates and practices that undermine health, environment and diverse local ways of life. Furthermore, local or indigenous forms of knowledge must be channeled into a broader public policy space; co-production of knowledge among various sectors (community, academic, expert, private company, entrepreneurial, etc.) and across many silos of knowledge should be supported in order to rebalance power relations and to enable local initiative and innovation to flourish. Above all, so-called 'glocal' networking is a crucial part in learning to accomplish the SDGs and to construct powerful partnerships.