AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE POLICY FOR URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN THAILAND THROUGH THE STUDY OF URBAN SLUM COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

It is estimated that there are currently 3.9 million people living in urban poverty in Thailand, without the existence of an effective social assistance safety−net. This thesis presents an analysis of Thai governments’ urban poverty alleviation policy. The central aim of the thesis is to question whether Thai government policy on urban poverty alleviation can be effective for the poor and the poorest in urban slum communities. Qualitative methods are used, supported by documentary research, and the author’s own experience of being a community development worker and researcher in the urban slums of Thailand over a period of 18 years.

I have endeavoured to elicit information from the range of stakeholders engaged with contemporary urban poverty alleviation policy in Bangkok. Thus the research includes the perspectives of policy makers, the poor, and the poorest. I distinguish between these latter two groups by describing those who have access to some government provision for the urban poor and those who are excluded from such provision. I interviewed 18 policy makers, 15 community savings groups committee members, and 65 of the excluded poorest. I investigated the development of policy relating to the urban poor through an analysis of key government reports and documents. I examined all of the government policy documents relating to policies for urban poverty alleviation and the Thai Governments’ five year National Economic and (later) Social Development Plans from 1961 to 2006. I also analysed each of the fifty four Government statements on their policies to the National Assembly covering this period.

This research produced two major new vehicles for understanding and interpreting Thai government urban poverty alleviation policy. First, the policy document research enabled me to construct a critical account of the historical development of policy relating to the urban poor, particularly those in slum communities. Second, the interviews produced a unique view of the often desperate lives lived by some Thai citizens who are part of communities residing in what is estimated as 2,000 slums in Thailand. This view is seen through the eyes of both the urban poor and the policy makers. I found attitudes of
the policy makers towards the urban poor contain a number of diverse stances, both negative and positive. The Government’s preferred way of helping, previously by housing improvements, and recently by promoting credit and loan schemes with a low interest rate to strengthen community–based organisations and emphasise self-reliance, does help some of the poor; it also excludes others.

An important discussion in the thesis is about self-reliance. This is widely referred to by all stakeholders–from HM The King, through leading thinkers including Buddhist scholars, to the poorest in the slum communities. I analyse what such a concept means to each of these groups. I have found there may be little agreement, either on what is being spoken about, or what the implications of self-reliance are for helping Thailand’s poorest citizens.

The thesis is also concerned with how to improve the situations of the poor. There is therefore a review of some curricula relating to the training of social/community workers to assess how well students are prepared for their work. The conclusions make some practical recommendations for change at a policy level, via civil society, and in professional education. The direct education and training of the poor is seen as crucial to any substantial improvements. My own experience, producing the thesis in a western country, is included throughout. This is in order to reflect on my learning and the challenges of researching within and outside the Thai social structure.
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Thanks to friends and staff at Community Organisations Development Institute, Chumchon Thai Foundation, People’s Organisation for Participation, Community Organising for People’s Action and Duang Prateep Foundation for sharing their ideas and helping in data collecting. I must extend a special thanks to the stakeholders, including the poor and poorest, for their essential contribution in this study. Their names and locations have been changed to protect their identities when their comments are not part of the public record.

My love and appreciation go to my family in particular to my wife, Sureephan, my son, Theerathorn and my daughter, Phakkaphan whose love, understanding and ongoing
support made this study possible. Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my father and mother who were my first teachers and showed me the value of education.

This thesis contains material for which I am solely responsible. The research has been conducted with the approval of the University of Sydney’s Human Ethics Committee, Reference No: 02/04/15. It has been edited in accordance with University regulations on the editing of PhD theses.
ABBREVIATIONS

ADB  Asian Development Bank
AMLC  Anti–Money Laundering Commission
AUSAID  Australian Agency for International Development
BMA  Bangkok Metropolitan Administration
BMR  Bangkok Metropolitan Region
CIDA  Canadian International Development Agency
CBO  Community–based Organisation
CDD  Community Development Department
CODI  Community Organisations Development Institute
COPA  Community Organising for People’s Action
ECT  Election Commission of Thailand
EU  European Union
GO  Governmental Organisation
GSB  Government Savings Bank
HCU  Huachiew Chalermprakiet University
HM  His Majesty
INCB  International Narcotics Control Board
LAD  Local Administrative Department
MEA  Metropolitan Electricity Authority
MP  Member of Parliament
NCCC  National Counter Corruption Commission
NESDB  National Economic and Social Development Board
NGO  Non–governmental organisation
NHA  National Housing Authority
NHRC  National Human Rights Commission
NSC  National Security Council
NSO  National Statistical Office
POP  People’s Organisation for Participation
RDF  Rural Development Fund
SIF  Social Investment Fund
TAO  Tambon Administrative Organisation
TDRI  Thailand Development Research Institute
TRF  Thailand Research Fund
TU  Thammasat University
UCDO  Urban Community Development Office
UN  United Nations
UNCHS  United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNDP  United Nations Development Programmes
UPDF  Urban Poor Development Fund
USAID  United States Agency for International Development
PM  Prime Minister

Exchange Rate: Approx. 30 Baht=1 Australian dollar
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