CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

‘If you don’t have a strong community, anything you do will be set to fail. No matter how much the government or authorities might try to help, nothing will be accomplished. But with a strong community, coupled with government support, you can foster development which can stand on its own’ (Phra Subin Panito, the spiritual leader of Baan Pret, Bangkok Post, 11 January, 1999:1).

2.1 Urban poverty: theory and research

Both in western and in developing countries the focus of social and economic policy discussion is no longer on just subsistence levels of existence but on the relative poverty which remains part of all societies. As a developing country, Thailand has seen a reduction in the rate of absolute poverty over the past twenty years. The poor were so defined if they did not have sufficient income to satisfy their basic needs. ‘The poverty line defines the minimum basic needs of the people. This is the threshold income below which one is considered to be poor’ (NESDB and NSO, 1999:1). The national average of the official poverty line was Baht 473 per person per month in 1988, which increased to Baht 878 per month in 1998 (Ibid:3), and Baht 886 per month in 1999 (World Bank, 2001a:iii). ‘This means that the poverty line (converted to a daily basis) was significantly lower than the minimum wage, constituting less than one-fourth of the minimum wage in 1999. In current dollar terms, the official Thai poverty line in 1999 was equal to approximately US$0.75 per day’ (Ibid:iii). According to the World Bank’s June 2000 Thailand Economic Monitor, in the ten years prior to 1997 Thailand had successfully halved the incidence of poverty–from 32 per cent to about 11 per cent–mainly from economic growth. However the World Bank noted that Thailand’s growth hides the poverty still present in Thai society and the lack of a government social safety-net (World Bank 1999b:6).

Any progress in improving the rate of poverty was halted due to the economic crisis in 1997. In common with other countries in Asia, Thailand experienced a collapse of economic growth accounted for by weaknesses in financial management and vulnerability to world economic trends that saw capital exiting from Asian markets and
leaving countries facing bad debts and lack of secure financing. Many investment and banking companies went bankrupt, factories closed. The shocks of the downturn were felt by all sections of society. According to the World Bank, poverty increased to 16 per cent of the population (World Bank, 2001a:xviii).

The social consequences of the economic crisis include unemployment, high prices for basic commodities, growing urban poverty, increased crime and domestic violence, psychological alienation and environment degradation in Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia (World Bank, 1999a:16).

The effects of the downturn occurred across Thai society and throughout the country. The urban areas directly experienced the results of a failing financial system but the laid-off workers had to return to their origins in the rural areas. No longer were they able to send home financial support. They were dependent themselves now. The importance of migration for the poor who move to urban from rural areas must be emphasised. On the subject of international migration, Dichter (2003:10) claims the money earned by migrants is saved to reinvest, or send back to relatives and may equal or exceed all official development assistance. Home and/or rural communities may be very dependent on such funding.

Everyone was therefore affected, but the richer people were able, through savings of their own, or those of well-off family members, to survive the crisis. It was my experience at that time that other middle-class friends were providing considerable sums in coming to the financial rescue of relatives whose businesses had collapsed. The poor were less likely to have these emergency resources. This shows the impact of inequalities in both economic and social capital. So although everyone was affected by the economic crisis, the results were more of a crisis for the poorest.

Hardiman and Midgley (1989:32) state: ‘Although many social scientists concerned with development issues recognise both the centrality and urgency of the problem of mass poverty, attention has focused in recent years on the phenomenon of inequality’. Along with economic development, the increasing wealth of the country has not been evenly distributed and relative poverty is still a feature of the society. ‘The impact of modernization is most evident in the rural people and urban poor’ (Gohlert, 1991:150).
The government, before the economic crisis, saw the main way of reducing urban poverty as being a well-managed and booming economy. However, it admitted that a core group of urban poor had remained almost the same relative size since the early 1980s (Government of Thailand, 1995:21). The crisis emphasised that the poor are very likely to suffer most when this economy stops growing. The richest fifth of the population had 58.3 per cent of income in 1999 and the poorest fifth of the population 3.9 per cent (World Bank, 2001a:13-27). Regional inequalities are also a feature of Thailand. Areas of poverty exist in the South and the North, with the Northeast being the poorest region, according to the World Bank. It is from the Northeast that the largest numbers of migrants to Bangkok are drawn. The influence of the Northeast is everywhere; from food to music, service and industry workers, migrants, sex workers and the recent fashion for eating fried insects, a Northeastern delicacy, in Bangkok’s shopping malls.

The visible evidence of the gap between rich and poor in Thailand has long been recognised. When Thammasat University conducted research at the end of the 1960s on the urban poor it was found that Klong Toey was the largest slum:

> The distance from the central railway station in Bangkok to the Port of Thailand is four miles along the broad boulevard of Rama IV. Half way stands the Dusit Thani Hotel, said by some to be among the ten most distinguished hotels in the world and a source of pride to many Bangkok citizens. Just two miles further down the road stands Klong Toey, site of Bangkok’s largest and most distinguished slum (Bangkok Magazine, 28 March, 1971).

Slums will continue to exist because they provide shelter at costs people can afford and new slums will come into being to meet the needs of the numerically dominant low income group as it rapidly expands (Bangkok Magazine, 11 April, 1971).

In the large metropolitan areas like Bangkok both absolute and relative poverty are a well known part of urban life. Sometimes the government hides this, for example, when it built a wall between a slum and The Queen Sirikit National Conference Centre, used by The World Bank delegates in 1991. This cosmetic procedure was repeated for the APEC Summit in October 2003 when according to The Sydney Morning Herald (October, 2003:6) ‘a 5000–metre wide, four–story building high banner hides a slum from APEC
dignitaries’. The government also tried to hide the homeless, street children and street vendors. After briefly disappearing, they have returned to the streets again. ‘Smell of jasmine to return to city streets after city hall banned garland sellers from streets, along with dogs, beggars and vagrants. Because it was feared that their presence would be embarrassing and offensive to delegates’ (Bangkok Post, 22 October, 2003:3). So sometimes these things are hidden from view and sometimes they are seen, but not attended to, by the prosperous Thais and foreigners who live side by side with urban slums.

2.2 Urbanisation
Since the experience of economic development over the past 20 years Thailand has moved from an agrarian economy to one in which industrialisation has increased the GDP and changed the economic basis of the country’s wealth. Thailand is still predominantly agricultural, but national output had decreasingly relied on this sector, moving instead to the manufacturing and services sectors. The result has been a rise in urbanisation and industrialisation and large-scale migration from a rural to an urban pattern (Yoddumnern-attig, 1992:13). Agriculture still accounts for some 50 per cent of employment, while its share of GDP is only around 10 per cent (World Bank, 2000d:49). A real shift has occurred, with the whole population now drawn to the metropolitan like a magnet, although the majority of people may still live in rural areas. Most of the migrants live in slums and squatter settlements, with approximately 20 per cent of the extended Bangkok region’s population living in slums (World Bank, 2000d:51).

2.3 Urban poverty
The causes of urban poverty relate to what is happening in the rural areas. The focus on cash crops, with the neglect of small farmers, are global trends that encourage elites to focus on industrialisation and international trade, resulting in increasing rural poverty. Added to this is climate change, and the attractions of the city (Einsiedel, 1999:2). People may be willing to take low-paid jobs. There is expensive land, long commuting, vulnerability to economic and environmental changes, and the loss of family supports (Asian Development Bank, 1999:9). There are also corruption, inappropriate policies,
bureaucracy and lack of access to social and health services (Baharoglu and Kessides, 2001:8).

2.3.1 The definition of urban poverty
Urban poverty is multi-dimensional and each aspect interacts with the other (Baharoglu and Kessides, 2001:6). Urban poverty is often harsher and more extreme than rural poverty and has economic, health, education, human rights and psychological aspects, all resulting in a poor quality of life (Asian Development Bank, 1999:9). Urban poverty involves squalid living conditions; risks to life and wealth from poor sanitation, air pollution, crime and violence, traffic accidents, and natural disaster and the breakdown of traditional family and community safety-nets. Moreover, income inequality is worsening in many urban areas, implying further social exclusion for low-income groups (World Bank, 2000e:3).

2.3.2 What are the characteristics of urban poverty in Thailand?
The National Plan for Solving and Preventing Slum Communities Problems and Sustaining Development of Quality of Life of the Urban Poor (1996) indicated that the problems of the urban poor are tenure insecurity, economic problems, low income, lack of funding resources, lack of skills in their occupations, and social problems. There is a lack of access to government services, inequality to other groups in education, health and infrastructure, lack of co-ordination and unity among agencies concerned with their problems (UCDO, 1997:73).

2.4 Urban slums
Hardiman and Midgley (1989:142) noted that there is no standard definition of a slum. In the urban areas the poor may live in cheap rental housing, under bridges, or on the streets, or they may live in what may be usually called ‘slums’. Many experts now feel that the term ‘slum’ has negative associations and does not reflect the diversity of living situations of poorer people. The term ‘spontaneous settlements’ is frequently used and in Thailand the government prefers ‘crowded community’. I will continue to use the descriptor ‘slum’ as I think it better conveys the living conditions of the people I have
worked with. Spontaneous settlements or crowded community may imply choices about residence that the poor usually do not have.

To explain the existence of such large numbers of slums in Thailand, as in many developed countries, requires looking beyond individual explanations to the process of urbanisation and the way that this affects people’s abilities to lead independent lives within families and communities.

The development of urbanisation in Thailand was first centred on just one city—Bangkok and it was here that was first seen the development of urban slums. After the Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (1991-1995) efforts were made to decentralise such development to the regions. The results include the spreading of slums to other metropolitan areas. They can now be found from Songkha in the South to Chiang Mai in the North, with other cities in the Central area and the Northeast. Hence most urban growth is taking place on the fringes of the main urban areas. The absolute number of slums and poor people has declined in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area since the early 1990s, but new slums are spreading in newly developed industrial belts (World Bank, 2000d:51).

The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003, a report by the United Nations estimated that, ‘The total number of slum dwellers in the world stood at about 924 million people in 2001. This represents about 32 per cent of the world’s total urban population’ (UN-HABITAT, 2003). This report analyses both the good and bad aspects of slums. The bad include urban housing conditions with insecurity of tenure, lack of basic services, especially water and sanitation, poor building structures, and overcrowding. In addition, there are social and economic deprivation and exclusion. Slum dwellers have limited access to credit and formal job markets. Slums often suffer the worst of environmental pollution. People in slum areas suffer high levels of health problems. Women and children are the greatest victims. Crime may flourish if there are inadequate social controls. On the positive side for new migrants, slums are a first and affordable entry to the city. The majority of slum dwellers work hard to earn their living from nearby informal sector activities.
2.4.1 How many urban slums are there in Thailand?

The first Bangkok Slum Survey in 1968 indicated that there were only 50 slums. In 1984, the figure had swollen to 480 slums with 852,000 dwellers. In 1985, Pornchokchhai found that there were 1,020 slums in Thailand, 943 were to be found in Bangkok and others were found in outer metropolitan areas of Nonthaburi and Sumutprakarn. In 1987, Pornchokchhai surveyed 3,594 slum people. He found that 60 per cent were born in Bangkok and 60 per cent of the heads of family were born in provincial areas. He also found that not all slum dwellers are poor. He estimated that 44 per cent of slum dwellers may be considered as ‘real’ poor, 30 per cent ‘non–real’ poor or relatively poor, and 26 per cent relatively ‘well–to–do’ (Pornchokchhai, 1992:5). Based on the poverty line in 1990, those who earned less than the poverty line he considered as constituting the most critical group. In early 1990, the National Housing Authority (NHA) announced that 1,500 slums were found in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR–including the five neighbouring provinces of Bangkok. These are Samutprakarn, Samutsakhon, Nonthaburi, Patumthani and Nakhonpathom). In mid–1990s, The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) verified the NHA data and concentrated on the slums actually located in its own administration area. 981 slums were found in Bangkok (BMA, 1992:11). In 1994, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) reported that 1,024 slums, 246,530 families, and 1,038,906 people were found in Bangkok. It also found that 710 families, 2,526 people, lived under 78 bridges (UCDO, 1997:64-65). These people are among the poorest and do not access public services.

In 1996, The Plan for Solving and Preventing Slum Communities Problems and Sustain Development of Quality of Life of the Urban Poor was established by the National Economic and Social Development Board. It indicated that there were 1,841 slums comprising 310,202 families, 1.3 million people, in the whole country. In Bangkok and the five neighbouring provinces of Bangkok there were 1,521 slums, 254,492 families, a total of 1.1 million people. In large regional cities there were 320 slums, 55,710 families, and more than 200,000 people (UCDO, 1997:65).
In 2001, The Policy and Principle for Establishing Village and Urban Community National Fund indicated that there were 8,889 urban communities in the Kingdom. 1,596 communities were in Bangkok, 7,283 were in municipalities in other cities (Office of The Prime Minister, 2001:4).

2.4.2 How different is a slum from other types of urban residences?

According to the National Housing Authority (NHA):

slums were in a very critical state due to high density (i.e., only 100 square meters per house) and overcrowding. Three severe conditions were noted: (i) the lack of privacy, since houses were built very close to each other without any planned pattern, resulting in unwanted interactions among dwellers; (ii) substandard housing conditions, i.e., materials were dilapidated, deteriorating, or makeshift; and (iii) the haphazard physical layouts of the communities and the lack of infrastructure and public services (Ratanakomut, et al., 1994:219).

Johnson (1978:446) saw slums ‘as ecological areas: part of an urban system where distinct functional zones emerge with spatial, physical and social attributes’. He found a wide range of income groups within the slum population and also between particular slums. This limited generalisations when living in slums could be seen as the same thing as being in poverty or part of the urban ‘underclass’. He stated that the poor of the slums were not particularly distinct from the poor who lived in other housing arrangements in Bangkok.

A number of writers (Hardiman and Midgley, 1989:142-143) have attempted to differentiate between types of slums and slum dwellers. Korff (1986) found there was diversity and complexity in the slums. People living in slums in Bangkok have different status and occupations. They do not always have harmonious relationships or always help each other. The slum dwellers are in situations no different from the urban masses. The slum dwellers, however, experience a number of insecurities living in the urban system.

In my experience some government officers regard slum dwellers as privileged among urban residents, as they may qualify for special benefits. On the other hand, I am also aware of the stigma that is attached to such people in their eyes. My view is that what defines someone’s experience of being a slum dweller is the insecurity they have in
respect of basic service provision—water supply, electricity, land tenure, education, health and employment. They may not have the necessary documents to prove residence in the city, which is necessary as a key to accessing services. Even recent government attempts to provide such documentation for slum dwellers is still not widely available, or even accepted by landowners. When they cannot expect to have services they may have to do without or buy them at a higher rate than other people. As my research will show, this does not mean that there are no ‘elite’ groups within communities who are better off than other slum dwellers. In fact, in some slum communities, leaders have appeared who are able to access all available services. However, they have to struggle to do this, basic services are not provided as a right. To see all slums as the same is an error. There are many differences in terms of facilities, age groups, locations, stability—how long they have lived there, their problems, relationships among themselves, and maybe also their level of poverty. Also important is the length of time they will stay in this condition.

In my view it is also important to recognise that such groups of slum dwellers are not all just passive victims of economic development. They may be part of the slum people’s movement which seeks to improve both the perceptions and the material conditions of the dwellers. For example, the families of urban poor in each slum may join together to improve their local environment and the urban slum community networks who settled along canals in Bangkok, Chiang Mai (Northern) and Songkha (Southern) cleaned up the canals in which households, markets, hospitals and industries dumped wastes, causing odours and poor water quality. The community networks have improved those canals. Living close by these pro–active communities are people in very desperate circumstances, apparently unable to help themselves.

An Australian nun, Sister Joan Evans, a former teacher and school principal from Western Australia, sponsored education for more than 200 children with donations from supporters in Australia and Bangkok. She describes very well the kinds of slum problems that are part of the daily lives of many Thai urban dwellers, ‘methamphetamines—cheaply bought speed—are the curse of slums. So are AIDS, poverty and disease. Many children were abandoned by parents, brought up by an elderly grandmother because their parents
are in prison, caught supplying drugs or trafficking’. She sees education as a way of helping Thai children to help themselves but explained that, ‘without a uniform these children can’t go to school, it’s as simple as that. There is no guarantee the kids will attend but, in my book, one day at school is better than none at all’. She says “no” to no one. She helps every child she can in the slums’ *(Sydney Morning Herald, Weekend Edition, 2-3 November, 2002:17)*.

### 2.5 Theories of poverty and poverty alleviation and social development

When we overview Thai attitudes to this quite longstanding poverty we should begin with the construction of the modern Kingdom of Siam. When Rama VI, King Vajiravudh, came to the throne in 1895 there was a trend towards the construction of a Thai identity rooted more in the symbolism of the nation–state than in Buddhism is suggested by the motto coined by the king, ‘nation, religion (Buddhism), king’, represented by the tricolour national flag created during his reign (Swearer, 1999:208).

In the Thai tri colour, red signifies nation, white signifies religion and blue signifies King. According to Kelly Connors (2003:35-36), King Vajiravudh encouraged the idea of the triad as the foundation of the ‘civic religion’, part of an ongoing project to construct the Thai identity.

What is the attitude of key people, represented by these three colours, to poverty in the midst of relative prosperity? Since the crisis of 1997 the major players in opinion and policy making had to respond, and they did; with an interestingly similar solution to the economic troubles. The following will examine how these major representatives of religion, national leaders and monarchy have responded.

#### 2.5.1 Attitudes to poverty

As I have mentioned, some of the urban slums are hidden from view behind shopping malls and cosmetic devices erected to hide what may seem shameful—but shame is not the only attitude that exists. There are also judgements made about slum dwellers. Attitudes reflect 19th Century English positions with regard to the poor and their living areas. The first western person to survey the poor, Charles Booth, whilst acknowledging the
majority of poor people were in this state through no fault of their own, also allowed for poor moral character and criminality (Stitt, 1994:20). In Thailand similar views can be found in the 20th Century: ‘The prevailing official reaction to the slum is one of callousness: It is full of thieves, pimps, prostitutes and drug addicts—the shame of the city’ (Bangkok Magazine, 28 March, 1971). Here there are apparently similar views, existing over time, about the dangerous nature of the poor in both the west and the east.

The King’s views, because of his status in Thailand, can never be ignored in any discussion of the attitudes of Thai people. He has pronounced on poverty: that ‘…Poor people do not have enough energy to give anything back; even if they work they are not productive because they are poor. But if we are able to improve their standard of living a bit, they will be able to earn more money, we will be able to lower the amount of welfare provided’ (Office of The Prime Minister, 1997a:289).

Since 1997 the economic crisis has changed attitudes to being in need, to some extent, as the crisis affected all people. Even if the middle class had more reserves to fall back on, they too lost their jobs in the commerce houses and banks. The effect of the King’s birthday speech, NGO reports, academic activists and respected leaders meant the government had to make policy ‘with one eye on the issue of the poor’ (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000:74). To begin with the King’s solution, ‘If we can move back to a self−sufficient economy, not completely, even not as much as half, perhaps just a quarter, we can survive...’ (Bangkok Post, 4 December, 1997).

There are parallel responses from the government. The Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001) focused on:

- the poor and under−privileged, and with initiative designed to empower local communities through decentralization of government, public participation in the Government decision−making process, increased transparency and improved governance, and building of local capacities and self−reliance (World Bank, 1999b:7).

Mr Pitsuwan was the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the government of Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and described:
In this difficult time as we focus on the immediate task of economic recovery, the need for an adequate social safety net—to protect the unemployed, the poor and the marginalised—assumes even greater urgency. But it would be a terrible disservice and demeaning to our people if we think of the social safety net solely in terms of handouts. For real human security—the real social safety net—is human development, holistic human development. Intelligence (sic) and equal access to opportunities are the best insurance against future calamities. Helping them to help themselves constitutes the most important investment that we can make for our own future and shall help enable us to emerge from the present crisis on to the path of stronger, more disciplined and sustained growth (Pitsuwan, 1998).

According to the World Bank, leading Thai thinkers and politicians were united in identifying with the views of HM The King in being determined to restore ‘traditional Thai values of self–reliance and self–help and an equally strong desire not to undermine such values in society’ (World Bank, 1999b:18).

Missing from the discussion so far is mention of the third party represented in the national flag, religion. A Buddhist proverb expresses (in Bali-church language of Theravada Buddhism) well the view: ‘Atthahi Atthano Natho’, meaning one has only oneself to rely on. This individual self–reliance is extended to community self–reliance. Mulder (1992) argues that for the Thai there is the safety of home with its obligations to parents and other caregivers and that outside the home the world is an unsafe place. The result is the need, for your whole life, to establish an attitude of self–reliance when not in the safe world of the home. During the economic crisis the world outside did prove to be a very unsafe place. Traditional values were referred to in a general appeal to self–reliance centred on the known world of the family, and beyond to ‘community’. The slogan “Thai helps Thai” could be heard everywhere, for a while; from the flight attendants on Thai International pushing their duty free trolley, to the collection of gold and other unwanted goods by the relatively rich to provide charity to the victims of the economic crisis.

Kelly Connors (2003:82-83) argues that in Thailand the dominant ideological enterprise has been the construction of the Thai citizen. The idea of community has been created to be one aspect of this construction. For Kelly Connors, Thai developmental democracy
has reflected not capitalist individualisation but a wish to construct citizens as the eyes and ears of the security state. At a national level this has involved a succession of Thai royalty in well publicised visits to all parts of the Kingdom, visits that are still celebrated with old photographs of the royal family shown before every cinema session to accompany the King’s Song. Thai monks in the 1960s were used to help achieve loyalty to The King and Nation in the face of communist threats (Ibid:59). At the level of community development, the Community Development Department was established in 1962 as aiding local development focused on village leaders, leading to villages developing self–reliance and self governance (Ibid:65). By the time of the 1997 crisis the words self–reliance and self–sufficiency were adopted by many influential groups in Thailand. These included the largest Ministry in government, the Ministry of Interior, which contains the Community Development Department. Also coming to use these expressions were the Royal Thai Army, politicians and NGOs. In this discourse the concept of community became ‘central both as a source of value and as a political construct. The discourse made culture… the area of contestation between the community and outside forces (state, capitalism) (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2000:195).

When self–reliance concepts are applied to attitudes to welfare in Thailand we can clearly see the possibility that receiving social service from outside the family is likely to carry a great deal of stigma. This is because the family is seen as self–sufficient and is conceptualised as having a duty to care for all of its members. If people fall outside this system then they will be only provided with minimal services in order to ensure the family or community remains strong. Such services will therefore be stigmatised, as they are not reciprocal but unilateral. Pinker (1971) wrote of the need in industrial societies to maintain and legitimate their institutional order by socialising their children to value work and self–help. We can see how this is operationalised in Thailand, both in the lack of state welfare, and in the attitudes to the poor.

In the response to the crisis we can see a wish to return to ‘traditional Thai values’ based on a strong family and community. ‘The pursuit of self–reliance was thus important at a personal level, community level, and national level’ (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2000:199).
Here the community is seen as the site not just of potential economic and social capital but also cultural capital. These types of capital can be activated in providing social services in the context of the family. As such it can be seen as an alternative to the economic values that are to the fore in the western dominated global economy.

...to draw on Thai culture and local community cultures to rescue the society from disaster. The strategy is to look inward, have less faith in globalization, and leverage benefits from the society’s inheritance rather than relying on borrowed money and technology (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2000:210).

Kelly Connors (2003:242) cautions that community may be a transitional stage to the more individualistic orientation of a full capitalist economy. Community has been created by state ideology, and supported by NGOs, to provide some protection to the disadvantaged before the benefits of capitalism flow through to everyone. Here both individuals and communities are encouraged to be self-reliant. ‘Citizen Community acts like Citizen Subject: responsible and productive’.

There are other traditional attitudes to poverty that influence poverty alleviation policies. The Buddhist attitude of believing that you can get credit in heaven for good works like charity and that those who have a hard life are destined to suffer, works to support the concept of individual charity rather than structural change such as income redistribution.

Status positions in Thai society popularly are explained in terms of merit. The more meritorious a previous life, the higher the position in this life. Social inequality and mobility are explained in religious terms (Mulder, 1973:6).

Thailand may not have been a colony but it is still influenced by western theories about the meaning, extent and causes of poverty. For the World Bank poverty is multi-dimensional, involving not being able to cover basic needs, along with lack of control, of resources, education and skills. People also suffer from poor health, malnutrition, lack of housing, clean water and sanitation. They are vulnerable to violence and crime with a lack of political freedom and a voice (World Bank, 2001b:3).

For ESCAP poverty means three closely interrelated things: ‘poverty of money’, ‘poverty of access’ and ‘poverty of power’. The result is limited choices and security, and without
these they remain within the cycle of poverty and are socially excluded (ESCAP, 2000:1).

It has been suggested that ‘Poverty in Thailand is not so much the problem of lack of ‘resources’ as lack of ‘access’ especially lack of access to information and decision–making opportunity’ (UNDP, 2002:1).

2.5.2 Theories of poverty

Stitt (1994) summarises theories on the causation of poverty into individualist, culture/subculture, and labour market and structuralist theories. In this categorisation the individualist theory sees the cause located in the habits of the poor, as do the culture/subculture views. Labour market and structuralist theories see the poor as unable to change their situations because of their low occupational status. Marxist explanations see the poor as necessary to the capitalist mode of production, helpless in the face of the requirements of the market.

When these western theories are applied to the situation in Thailand we can observe that structural theories as explanations seem not to be popular as ‘Marxism’, or rather ‘Communism’ has always been feared. Rather, a neo–liberal view about the trickle down benefits of industrialisation has been relied on during the economic lift–off of the past twenty years. So it is believed that at some time things will get better. Professor Nidhi Eoseewong, a prominent social critic and former Chiang Mai University lecturer, stated that:

As for solving the poverty problem, I don’t believe this government really understands poverty or the poor. It only injects money and hopes to spur spending and generate GDP growth. But this benefits high and middle–income earners more than the poor. The government has yet to act on the structure of poverty (Bangkok Post, 11 August, 2002:6).

He also stated that Thai society is still lacking knowledge and understanding about poverty and the poor. Research about poverty and the poor is very rare, almost none is existent, and such research is not an interest of funding agencies. Universities are not
interested in this problem either. They create knowledge about how to become well off and hope that when they become richer, poverty will be eradicated.

Alongside this expectation of trickle down was a belief in the culture of the poor (Lewis, 1968) which prevented them from changing their habits to enable them to benefit from the economic advantages enjoyed by the rest of the population. However, it is possible to read the new emphasis on self-sufficiency as taking structuralist theory and placing this in the Thai context, the consequence being that western models of industrialisation are rejected, or at least modified. The strengths available in the culture of the Thai community are substituted for, or value-added on to, global market forces, in order that dependency on such market forces is reduced. In such an analysis, providing a safety-net is less important than achieving structural change in the form of appealing to Thai culture to avoid the need for the safety-net. The focus is on structural change, both economic and cultural, within the society in terms of achieving (more) self-sufficiency. This may lead to less reliance on global markets.

2.5.3 Theories of social development
Since the end of the Second World War the rich countries of the west, the developed world, have taken it upon themselves to classify others as underdeveloped or developing. Alongside this has emerged what Dichter (2003) has called the ‘development industry’ which aimed to help these nations be more like themselves. The belief was that economic lift-off would provide the conditions under which poverty would be reduced or eradicated. Alongside the developed world’s development assistance was the responsibility of the individual state, in this case Thailand, to attempt to change the conditions of those in relative and absolute poverty. In Thailand, as in other developing countries, there has been a lot of reliance on the assumption that a modernisation of traditional social structures would aid economic growth and thereby achieve the prosperity of individuals. This has been a major part of the World Bank’s influence on the management of the Thai economy. According to Hewison (2003:122-123) this began at the end of the 1950s and was based on the Bank’s orthodox growth strategy, that solid economic growth would result in a trickle-down effect to the poor in the population. The
Thai economy did expand rapidly and steadily from the late 1950s in a context of unusual price and social stability (Unger, 1998:72). This has allowed the people to enjoy the results of the rapid economic development. At the same time, the benefits of this development have not been distributed equally and income inequality has grown, slightly altering during the slowing of growth in the mid–1990s, but making the later economic crisis one that had the most impact on the poor (Sarntisart, 2004:405). Unger (1998:72) points out that there had been a reluctance to use interventionist or welfarist strategies to cope with the costs of economic development in relation to the environment, health and social problems. However, after the crisis there was, according to Hewison (2003:122-123) a change in the Thai government and the World Bank’s ‘developmentalist social contract’. Since the 1997 economic crisis, key persons in the Kingdom advocated policies partly based on a theoretical belief similar to that made by proponents of international structuralism or dependency theory (Hardiman and Midgley, 1989:52). This points to the causes of poverty as being the results of the exploitation of poor countries by the rich and thereby the continuance of the problems of poverty for their peoples. The new Thaksin Government contained people from previously left–wing positions who would be sympathetic to such an economic analysis but they were now in a government which also contained right–wing members and has been called the first government of tycoons. Alongside this mixture was the World Bank’s apparent wish to believe in the power of social capital in preventing hardship and even social unrest (Hewison, 2003:127). Later has emerged literature advocating a class–based analysis of the faults of capitalism (Ungpakorn, 2003:1-5). Even though there have been references to the need to make Thailand less dependent on western economic fluctuations, neither the Thaksin Government, nor other Thai leaders or international sponsors have advocated radical changes. Instead there is the joint aim of making capitalism work for Thailand. Here, Thai social, economic, cultural and gender (see Bell, 2003) capital is called upon to facilitate self-sufficiency within a capitalist world order. Mr Thaksin argued against his critics (Bangkok Post, 7 October 2003:1), claiming that democracy without capitalism would never survive and poor people could manage the investment funds that the government would be providing.
The Thaksin Government was elected in 2001 on a platform of concern for Thai business and the poor in both urban and rural areas (The 54th Government of Thailand, 2001). In the case of Thailand, the finger is pointed at too much vulnerability to the unexpected changes in the global economy. The Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006) advocates, in terms of development, something called a ‘sufficiency economy’, ‘the middle path’. This refers both to the ‘moral fibre’ of the population and a balanced development strategy (Office of The Prime Minister, 2002:1). The plan is written in a language that defers to HM The King as the author of such ideas, and relies apparently as much on what can be seen as the essential cultural capital of Thai people as it does on the essentials of social development such as improved education, reform of the financial sector, management, protection of the environment and alleviation of urban and rural poverty. Somehow social development will flow on from more reliance on Thai cultural capital. This focuses the discussion on the building blocks for social development, the creation of communities.

2.5.4 Self–reliance and community development

In 1960 the United Nations defined community development in a way that emphasised the efforts of the people themselves to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities (United Nations 1960: 1). It was the rural village of the Third World that provided the first setting for community development workers, but since then community workers in the west such as Lappin (1985:82-83), Twelvetrees (1991:1) and Lane (1992:68) have emphasised the resulting community work as distinguished by being driven by the people who live in the area. More recently, western theorists have developed the implications of community–driven development, emphasising relying on the strengths already existing in communities. Here the role of outside agencies is that of avoiding dependency and being instead facilitators and encouraging community leadership. Inclusive participation is the aim in a rights–based approach (Mathie and Cunningham (2003:483-484). Pawar and Cox (2002: 5-6) point to four sectors involved in social development: the state, private enterprise, civil society and community. They acknowledge that in the west it is the formal welfare sector that dominates and in developing societies it is the informal. These authors suggest that a balance between these
sectors has to be achieved whilst acknowledging that a significant number of people across the modern world do not have access to either.

The idea of local self-reliance, originally meaning a small community relying on its own forces is, according to Galtung (1980:19), as old as humanity itself. The idea of linking such self-reliance with community development has, since the Second World War, been a strategy for dealing with the social problems of the poor. It has influenced the thinking of many international NGOs and some governments. Self-reliance has developed to be associated with being an alternative to western methods of central international and national power and the marginalisation of non-western countries and the poor within these. The alternative is seen as being a striving for a world in which ‘each part is a centre’ (Ibid:20).

The concept has also gained popularity in the west. The belief there is that economic independence is all-important, so individuals should be free of constraints imposed by the state that restrict their freedom to make choices that will result in their improving their economic independence. This would include provision of welfare services by the state that encourage dependency. People have to be free of such controls in order to choose for themselves the right education, health care, employment, place to live. There is a belief that, free of state controls, people will act in ways that are economically rational.

Self-reliance has implications for many political systems. The central question, for my purposes, is the role of the state in a (more) self-reliant society. If self-reliance means not being dependent on the state for welfare, then the individuals will have to rely on themselves, or failing that, to rely on family and community to provide for their needs. In Asian societies this emphasis on individual self-reliance may have spiritual dimensions in the person not wanting more than they have, and only turning to family and community when they ask for help for what they do not have. In the 1980s, the leading Buddhist scholar P.A. Payutto (Phra Thammapidok) wrote of a Buddhist approach to economics which he saw as a philosophy that should have its aim as ‘well-being’ which would lead to contentment. Buddhist texts emphasise the importance of avoiding greed.
and excess in contrast to the acquisitiveness built into the discipline of economics. He argued, ‘in contrast to the classical economic equation of maximum consumption leading to maximum satisfaction, we have moderate or wise consumption, leading to well−being’ (UNDP, 2003:32).

Here is a Buddhist approach to the importance of the concepts of sufficiency and self−reliance. Sufficiency (pho yo pho kin) is the Buddhist concept of moderation as a cure to acquisitiveness. Rather than expanding production, well−being can be achieved by limiting desires. Self−reliance (phung ton eng) implies that freedom can be gained by the lack of any dependencies, either material or mental. By the 1990s, several Thai thinkers (including Payutto and Prawase Wasit) had integrated these concepts into conceptualising the role of community as being able to actualise this philosophy. An economics professor, Apichai Puntasen, then began teaching a course on Buddhist economics which included models of business enterprise designed for social gain rather than private profit (Ibid:32).

In Thailand the implication of self−reliance in terms of people−driven projects has not always been translated into programmes that could be described in the west as community development. The Community Development Department (CDD) has traditionally relied on hierarchical methods dealing with village leaders and seeing community workers as change agents rather than achieving participation (Kelly Connors, 2003:65-66). This points to the necessity of changes that Mathie and Cunningham (2003:484) prescribe as the need for an enabling environment for community−driven development to occur. Such development approaches reject the marginalisation of the poor in development work and aim to relocate power to communities through participation in all decision−making. In an analysis of power Rees (1991:38-40) uses practice examples to draw out the necessity of seeing Lukes’ terms of the three dimensions of power in a social work context. He suggests that the worker needs to see practice power as requiring awareness that power is not just about the presence or absence of conflict; it also needs analysis of what is not obvious on the surface in any conflict situation. To add the third dimension means looking beyond the conflict to
imagine what a different set of questions and answers might be to a particular conflict situation. The skill for the community worker would be in communicating these ways of viewing power so as to be useful to the poor, and acceptable to the policy makers.

Such community work is part of the development of civil society and a rights approach to participation by the poor. This has not yet been achieved in Thailand. Self-reliance implies a consideration of the concept of power as it relates to the giving and/or taking of power by, and to, the poor. Gohlert (1991:53-54) suggests that the sharing of power is not easy in Thailand because of a social structure based on traditional culture that is founded on hierarchy and results in dependencies. He views the answer as a win–win situation where the poor are given power to make decisions about their futures and the government agencies gain power through recognition that this is the most effective way of providing services. In 1997 after the economic crisis, HM The King emphasised the philosophy of a sufficiency economy aiming in the short term to combat the impact of the crisis, and to alleviate poverty in the long term. This was by 1) Self–reliance: in the community demonstrated by the replacement of external production materials with local ones and the use of local experts instead of external ones. The use of local wisdom to create income-generating activities, reliance on local sources of funds instead of borrowing. There should be community self–management rather than reliance on external support, including government assistance. The building of social capital should happen alongside economic capital. 2) Sufficiency: communities should regard self–sufficiency as the key poverty reduction strategy. They should produce commodities that are readily marketable. They should focus on reducing expenses rather than increasing income. Communities should also ensure that there is adequate production for household consumption (UNDP, 2003:56).

The new Constitution of 1997 emphasises community–based development and political decentralisation. The Community Development Department has expanded the scope of community participation into the Tambon Administrative Organisation (TAO) which is under the Local Administrative Department (LAD), in the Ministry of Interior. The LAD aimed to promote local democracy and to support the TAO to develop their capacity and
ability to distribute services for the better life of people in the area. These included the social and economic infrastructure, new social services, agricultural support, credit, education and access to information. A Tambon is composed of ten to twenty villages where the people in each village elect the head of the village. Then the head of the village will join the Tambon Council. The World Bank considers that the Tambon Administration Organisation is underdeveloped and will probably take a few years to be able to implement community–based rural development effectively (World Bank, 2000d:50). As each community development worker may be responsible for up to 20 villages in one Tambon, then they will work through the village leaders. This is, therefore, still not the people–driven development envisaged by ‘expert’ international authors.

By the 1990s the concept of self–reliance and community development, if not the practice, had apparently increased its popularity by being also incorporated into the publications of the World Bank. In Thailand, the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986) recognised that poverty was an issue in rural areas that had not benefited from economic development. A new strategy was to be used which concluded that, ‘development can ultimately only result from actions by the residents of the poor communities themselves’ (Government of Thailand, 1995:23). By the time of the Seventh National Plan (1992-1996) it was recognised that although poverty was a rural phenomenon, urban poverty had also to be dealt with. Included in the plan was the aim of strengthening people’s organisations in slum communities. Both government and non–governmental organisation try to foster the concept of self–reliance and working with the people to show that they can attempt to be self–sufficient by working together and helping each other. ‘Group organisations as a means towards community self–reliance is one concrete form of such activities’ (Ibid:33). The Eighth Plan (1997-2001) further emphasised the importance of community–based organisations in achieving self–reliance and self–sufficiency.

As I have noted, the overwhelming attitude to the urban slum problem has been versions of the improvement of self–relance. The King, the Government, the World Bank and
religious leaders have all emphasised the need for family and community development. Underlying such views, we can see, have been theories, if not practices, of community development. There have long been some agreed features of what constitutes such an approach:

1. community as a unit of action; 2. community initiative and leadership as resources; 3. use of both internal and external resources; 4. inclusive participation; 5. an organized, comprehensive approach that attempts to involve the entire community; and 6. democratic, rational task accomplishment (Cary, 1970:2).

The other reason for Thailand emphasising national and self-reliance is that international welfare providers such as AUSAID, USAID, CIDA, and the EU no longer see Thailand as a priority area for aid. Thailand is seen as being able to help itself. There is a more radical question about the use of foreign aid to developing countries which is simply that it does not work. Dichter (2003) argues that what he calls the ‘international poverty alleviation industry’ has failed to improve the conditions of the poor in any sustainable way. There is therefore a need to take theories of social development seriously and not rely on outside aid, whether it comes from central government or international donors or NGOs. In this regard, international writers and domestic commentators are apparently agreed that solutions cannot be imposed from the outside. Development has to grow, somehow, from within Thai culture.

2.5.5 Social capital

Woolcock and Narayan (2000:243) conclude that a consensus is emerging about the importance of social relations in development. They point out that one of the most important examples of social capital at work is when poor people use social connections to protect themselves against economic forces. Lin (2001:3) states that social capital has emerged in the past two decades as one of the most salient concepts in the social sciences. The definition provided is ‘as resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions’ (Ibid:12). Winter (2000:18-19) traces back the use of the concept to 1916. He states that social capital is being written about in a range of disciplines and in a number of policy settings. The concept has also been taken on by social and community work. When reported on by social work writers
Healy and Hampshire (2000:2) we are told it refers to the norms of trust, reciprocity and
citizen participation. However, other writers such as Woolcock and Narayan (2000:243)
refer to how the evidence shows that social capital can be used to promote or undermine
the public good. For example, reciprocity exists in all communities, of whatever status,
and can be used to ensure the continuance of privilege of many kinds that may not be to
the public good. The ‘old boy’ or sometimes ‘old girl’ networks exist in Thailand and are
not necessarily conducive to a more open society.

The existence of social capital amongst the poor is, however, seen as crucial to
approaches to community development. As the state seems not to be likely to provide a
welfare safety net, Thai–style community development means ‘the family and its
togetherness are at the heart of social capital considerations’ (World Bank, 2000b:1). In
the recent economic crisis the report found that, at the household level, Thai families
continued to protect their essential expenditures on necessities and cut back on luxury
expenditures.

Most admirable, Thai families have continued to help each other with cash gifts
and remittances during the crisis,... Communities have been drawn together and
have created new institutions and capacities to help themselves, particularly
saving groups. There has been a conspicuous absence of civil conflict in Thailand
during the crisis,... (World Bank, 2000b:2).

However it was noted that social capital and government programmes could not deal with
the adverse effects of the crisis on some Thai people. Unger (1998:174-175) has argued
that at a national level Thailand has had low levels of social capital because of an
individualistic orientation. This has led to an emphasis on economic development which,
since the 1950s, has seen remarkable growth. However, this has been without the
balances of state regulation to protect the country against the adverse effects of economic
development, such as incompetent financial management, poor infrastructure, and
environmental damage and public health issues.

2.5.6 Safety—net and social policy

What is the government’s safety—net? The United Nations Development Program
declared that Thailand lacked effective social protection. ‘The Thai government has not
always provided much social support to vulnerable groups. In 1998 social services accounted for only 12 per cent of the government budget, and only a small part went for direct assistance to the poor’ (UNDP, 2001:1). Therefore, funding of the urban poor has come mostly from non–direct social assistance. According to the World Bank, the Government invested strongly in community–based informal safety–net services despite substantial gaps remaining in formal social protection (World Bank, 2000d:8). Their remedy was, however, for any public social safety–net supplementing, rather than overriding the extensive informal social safety–net that was believed to soften the impact of the crisis on families and individuals (World Bank, 2000d:9). Ptanawanit’s research (2002:132-133) on Thailand’s social security concluded that, even after the economic crisis, the trend of government support to social assistance and social services is increasing very slowly and this implied that government policy towards a safety–net had not changed. Less than five per cent of taxation was returned to the people in the form of social assistance and social services. He concluded that further coverage will not be extensive. In January 2004, after the economic crisis and its effect on many groups in Thailand, the Thaksin Government introduced unemployment insurance. This, however, only covered those 23.2 per cent of workers who were employed in the formal sector (National Statistical Office, 2004). Workers in the informal sector have the opportunity for voluntary participation.

It seems correct to conclude that the welfare state funding as such will not increase, but it is the present government’s policy to invest in people’s welfare through credit schemes financed by government savings banks. The national economy is treated like a business, and thereby the aim is to find ways of increasing any unused assets in the country to raise the profits of the national business. In this the poor are also seen as underused assets who have to be stimulated to join the successful economic experience of the rest of the society.

Thailand does have, in theory, a safety–net comprising social security in the form of social insurance, and social assistance providing for individual welfare. The law envisages that the whole Thai labour force is covered under a social insurance scheme
Social security in Thailand remains in reality at an early stage of development. Ptanawanit (2002:iii) compared social security provision in Australia and Thailand and found that:

Comparative evidence shows many problems in social security provisions in Thailand. Relatively narrow coverage, low quality and quantity of benefits and services, higher financial burdens borne by people, and marginal welfare rights are important indications of the severity of the problems.

Although there are several programmes such as the National Social Insurance Programme, the Workmen’s Compensation Fund, private or public voluntary insurance, and various government assistance programmes, the programmes can provide only limited security and can cover only a minority proportion of the population at risk. The provisions cover mainly people working in the formal sector. Thereby the largest group of employees in Thailand who work in the informal sector miss out. The urban poor, who are my present concern, mostly work in this sector. The self-employed also miss out on health insurance because of its voluntary nature. Since 1993 there has been a Health Insurance Card Scheme but the coverage has not been large and has proved most popular in rural areas. By the end of the 1990s this voluntary scheme covered 13 per cent of the population (Ministry of Public Health, 1999:5). There is also Health Assistance, which is aimed at people with low incomes and their families, the elderly and children and the disabled. All these provisions involve a means test. The procedure for this is that community or village leaders form a committee to decide who is eligible for these benefits. Access is to a primary health care centre and then only to a community hospital by referral.

The Department of Public Welfare (under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare) is also charged with providing social welfare services for the poor in both rural and urban areas who are older persons, destitute persons, disadvantaged women, socially handicapped families, low-income families, distressed people, disaster victims in cases of fires or other disasters. The Department also performs functions authorised by the laws on child welfare and child protection, child adoption, the prevention and suppression of prostitution, funeral assistance, land allocation for livelihood in self-help land settlements, hostels, control of beggars, rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and
other pertinent laws (Department of Public Welfare, 2002:5). The provision of the services is based on a means test. In 2001, the Department provided a budget for the target groups of 4,496.86 million Baht (approximately 150 million Australian Dollars). This was 8.59 per cent of the budget for social welfare and social work administration. 72.93 per cent was for social welfare and social work programmes, 10 per cent for land settlement development and occupational promotion, 5.75 per cent for hill-tribe development, 0.04 per cent for prevention and control of drugs, 1.28 per cent for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and 1.20 per cent for rural development (Ibid:7).

Again the provision cannot cope with the potential demand. In Bangkok, there are eight offices of the Department which is responsible for the urban poor in 50 districts in an area of 1,568.737 square kilometres. Each office may have two to four social workers. For example, The Office of Public Welfare, Area 3, Klong Teoy, Bangkok is responsible for eight districts which comprise 174 slums and 54 poor communities, with 66,560 families or 301,163 persons. There are 10 staff working in the office. Only three persons are social workers (Kanchanasri and Ampavapalin, 1999:5). In my experience many slum communities never receive a visit from a social worker and many slum dwellers never know about the available benefits. In 2002, the name of the Department was changed to the Department of Social Development and Welfare in a new Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. My experiences as a community worker have shown me how limited have been the schemes by the Department to assist the poor. Selective provisions are available to the aged and the disabled. Although there is a standard guideline for the means test prepared by the Department, it is not administered by its staff but rather by community leaders. The belief is that this makes the provision more responsive to needs. However, it gives a lot of power to leaders and their committees. This is a reliance on the discretion of community leaders who, in theory, will be close to the needs of people and therefore will make flexible decisions on the use of scarce resources that will target those most in need.

In Thailand the concept of universal rights to welfare does not exist. This is a Thai variant of the western discussion on the provision for needs by discretion or universal provision (Lister, 2003:260-261). The difference of course is that in the west it is
professionals who are making such judgements. In Thailand there has been a movement aware from government officers being the front-line workers, and instead the community leaders will initially screen who is in need and present a recommendation to the government office.

2.5.7 Recent developments that are apparently universal

In 2001 Prime Minister Thaksin introduced a universal health care scheme which was one of the populist policies of his government. This scheme was intended for everyone not in any health scheme and whose names were in the house registrations in all provinces. These people would receive a universal health card. Both government health services and certain private sector health services are registered with this scheme. Accessing a health service is by referral from the primary health centre or the nearby hospital, which are registered under the project. For emergencies and accidents, the insured could access any government health services. The insured must contribute a co-payment of 30 Baht per visit. Under this 30 Baht Universal Coverage Policy, the insured would receive the same quality health services as offered by other health schemes. At present the cover excludes cosmetic care, obstetric delivery beyond two pregnancies, drug addiction treatment, hemodialysis, organ transplantation, infertility treatment, and other high-cost interventions. However, with more resources and disease priorities, inclusion can be expanded (UNESCAP, 2004).

A few years after this scheme was introduced, many reports indicate that hospitals under the scheme were running short of money. The Rural Doctor Society stated that ‘the government health care scheme was causing more state hospitals to suffer financial difficulties’ (Bangkok Post, 14 November 2003:5). This lack of adequate government financial support for the scheme has led to other problems such as the quality of services. For example, Chang Peuk Hospital in Chiang Mai has been accused of leaving a 10-month old baby admitted with high fever under the 30 Baht medical welfare scheme to die, by rendering him no emergency medical help. The father of the baby said his son cried all night but hospital staff refused to give him any medicine. He tried to find a doctor but there was no physician on duty or a respirator to help his son. The hospital had been plunged into financial trouble after joining the 30 Baht scheme (Bangkok Post, 21
October 2003:10). This apparently universal provision, even at a low standard, is not universal in reality. People who are not currently living in the area where they are registered are not able to claim health care in the place in which they currently reside. Equally important is the exclusion of people, usually the better off, who are already in health care schemes. A critical element in terms of provision and standards is thereby excluded from this system.

The New Constitution 1997 says ‘a person shall enjoy an equal right to receive the fundamental education for the duration of not less than 12 years which shall be provided by the state thoroughly, of high quality, and without charge’. However, the poorest families cannot support their children to attend school. There are other daily expenses that the poor cannot afford, such as expenses for food and transportation, education materials and school uniform. After the economic crisis in 1997, the children who lived in slums were increasingly dropping out from school. This has been recognised by the present government in granting some scholarships to the most needy students throughout the country (Bangkok Post, 9 November 2003:2).

2.5.8 Housing and welfare policy for the urban poor

Although, as I have noted, some provision has existed since the development of the Department of Public Welfare in 1944, the government has not been able to rely on forms of individual welfare to cope with the growing needs of the urban poor. Only 0.5 per cent of GDP is allocated by the Thai Government for social security, which includes social assistance and social services (Ptanawanit, 2002:132). In this situation of limited coverage of those in need by individual welfare measures, it has been to housing welfare that the government has turned to assist the urban poor. In the early years, the government saw slums as a ‘cancer’ in society. In the absence of other safety−nets, slum clearance and public housing were introduced as ways to solve the problem of poverty. The National Housing Authority was established in 1970, to provide low-income housing with infrastructures and services for low−income earners. High−rise flats were also built, but this does not respond to the needs of the urban poor. The slum−upgrading and relocation approaches were initiated in the 1980s, but the approach failed to solve urban poverty. In the 1990s there was a change of emphasis towards the provision of credit and
loans, chosen as the key tool in community development which would apparently lead to the self-sufficiency of communities and thereby solve the problem of urban poverty. The Urban Community Development Office (UCDO) was established in 1992 to assist in this aim. After the economic collapse of 1997, the ideas of self-reliance and a sufficiency economy were emphasised to society by HM The King. The Government played the key role in supporting this concept. In 2000, the Urban Community Development Office merged with the Rural Development Fund to become the Community Organisations Development Institute (CODI). This organisation aimed to promote and strengthen community-based organisations and increase the self-reliance of households and communities in both rural and urban areas (CODI, 2001:19). The Village and Urban Development Fund was also created by the Thaksin Government in 2001 to support the concept of economic sufficiency and self-reliance.

Here I should provide more details about the development of the major funding that is now available for the urban poor as part of the ‘civil society organisations in the community’ (World Bank, 2001a:70), as these are central to the ways of managing and delivering social assistance in Thailand.

The first policy dealing directly with urban poor people was developed and implemented by the National Housing Authority, established in 1970. Migration from rural to urban areas resulted in the authority’s provision of low income housing with infrastructure and services. Programmes were also available for slum-upgrading. New Towns were built, such as Bang Plee in the suburbs of Bangkok next to my University, for low-income earners in the developing factory areas on the Eastern side of Bangkok. This authority was, however, charged with having to make a profit through house-building and rents. According to Boonyabancha (2001:10) government programmes have sought to deliver subsidised welfare-based housing to the urban poor. However, the system of delivery faced many problems, such as having too many steps, taking too long, costing too much money, leading to corruption and lack of insight into the lives of the poor. Such a system ended up missing the target group and, instead, delivering housing to groups that were
not as poor. Even if they were targeted correctly, many of the poorest could not afford to stay in welfare–based housing projects. The lack of success resulted in the creation of another government office. The Urban Community Development Office (UCDO) was established in 1992, aiming to improve the living conditions and increase the organisational capacity of urban poor communities with an initial grant of 1.25 billion Baht, as a special revolving fund to support urban community development activities and provide low–interest loans to community organisations for emergencies, housing and income generation. Though technically under the umbrella of the National Housing Authority of Thailand, in the Ministry of Interior, this organisation had its own development process and a separate board of directors to allow the fullest flexibility.

The fund was to be accessible to all urban poor groups nation–wide who organized themselves to apply for loans for their development projects. Over half of 2,000 communities are now UDCO members, linked together into 103 networks through a broad range of community development activities including; income generation, environmental improvement, community enterprise and welfare (UCDO, 2000:1).

The idea of small groups of people who are well known to each other solving their financial problems by ‘Len Share’ is well established in Thailand. It is the Thai form of rotating savings and credit associations. It is operated exclusively by members who are well known to each other as close friends, workmates, or family. The size of the group is around five to fifteen members. The leader of the group takes responsibility for organising the share and is liable for late or non–payment of individual share members. The members regularly pay into the group fund, usually during group meetings, according to group agreement. These payments may take place daily, every week, fortnightly or monthly. The number of group meetings in each cycle depends on the numbers of members. During the group meeting each member pays into the fund, which will then be allocated to one group member. Based on prior group decision, the cycle of fund allocation is determined by bidding (most commonly), by lottery, or according to the decision of the leader. This Thai way of mutual help was developed firstly by NGOs into formal savings groups. When, for example, I worked with Foster Parents Plan in the 1980s we used this already established informal method of helping the poor, to encourage the development of social capital. I discovered that a group of street vendors operated
Len Share. I introduced the idea of a savings group and provided a budget for them. Members set the regulations about the use of this budget. The loans were used to help them in income–generation activities to produce their products more effectively whilst making some savings for the group fund. From these savings and the (low) interest, the budget expanded and could be used to provide loans for education, health problems and housing repairs.

This model was taken up by government organisations, firstly under the UCDO. Encouraging the development of savings groups, it was believed, would strengthen communities by means of members’ participation in groups that would extend mutual helping beyond financial saving activities. The government organisations provided low–interest loans to the community savings groups (not to individuals). Savings groups provide different kinds of loans to the poor who were members of the groups, such as housing improvement, income–generation activities, education, health and emergencies. The savings groups are managed by committee members, selected from and by members of the groups. The committee members form regulations and make decisions about loans to individual members and about repayment. The idea behind this system is to promote and strengthen community–driven savings and credit groups as a primary unit of people–driven development. To achieve the goal of community savings, people have to come together to solve common problems and in this way reciprocal relationships are formed that enable savings to occur. In addition, a network is formed of people who develop and share their skills in negotiation with authorities and each other. This is hoped to be the beginning of the development of social capital. ‘Savings groups provide a good example of social capital. Comprised mainly of poor women, such groups save and lend small amounts of money on a daily basis, thereby strengthening trust, solidarity and collective identity’ (UNCHS, 2001b:48).

There has been dissatisfaction with government–centralised ways of dealing with the poor and the 1990s have seen a number of projects that are not dominated by government bureaucrats but are managed by representatives of the poor as well as academics, NGOs and bureaucrats. This development was encouraged by the New Constitution of 1997
which aimed to bring decentralisation and public participation in government to achieve a more democratic practice, which had begun in theory in Thailand in 1932. The Social Investment Fund (SIF) was launched in September 1998 after the economic crisis in late 1997. The Royal Thai Government implemented the Social Investment Fund Project which was one measure for recovery. The general objective was to transform the crisis into an opportunity by supporting highly desirable reforms toward better governance, community empowerment and the formation of broad development partnerships among key elements of civil society. During the early implementation of SIF, recognising that certain groups had ‘slipped through the cracks’ the Social Development Fund Office developed a new window of support in the early months of 1999 to finance social assistance to the needy. The new window, or ‘Menu 5’, was designed to respond to the urgent needs of the poor who were making increasing demands on organisations struggling to assist them, particularly those groups on the margins who cannot access regular services (that is hill tribe communities, urban slum communities, unregistered families, communities in remote areas). The Menu 5 finances social assistance transfer to the most vulnerable through community organisation networks. This not only allowed the Social Investment Fund to reach the vulnerable more quickly, but it has also supported the strengthening of community networks and thus the core objective of SIF of building up the stock of social capital. The Menu 5 beneficiaries include (1) unemployed homeward migrants; (2) the indigent; (3) poor farmers; (4) homeless children, disadvantaged children, neglected children and school drop-outs; (5) battered women and women impacted upon by the social crisis; (6) neglected HIV/AIDS patients; (7) neglected senior citizens; (8) the handicapped who need care providers; (9) patients with chronic illnesses. More than 300 community organisation networks have participated in Menu 5 activities, with approximately 538,414 individuals benefiting from Menu 5 support. The SIF is widely recognised in Thailand as a major element of the Government’s crisis alleviation strategy and a pathway toward government collaboration with civil society organisations (World Bank, 2001a:70). This is a recognition that certain people are vulnerable to slipping through the gaps in service provision. It is still, however, possible to be excluded from this programme because the coverage is not
comprehensive and may also be hampered by such factors as corruption, or the lack of social capital necessary to access the provision.

The Community Organisations Development Institute (CODI) is an organisation which promotes the development of community organisations and co–ordinates civil society efforts throughout rural and urban areas. This organisation was established in July, 2000 through the merger of two organisations with similar objectives to make revolving funds and capital available to community organisations. These two organisations were the Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF) which was managed by the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO), and the Rural Development Fund (RDF) which was managed by the Government Savings Bank (GSB). This organisation is designated as a public organisation under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance. The structure and approach emphasise the participation of people, particularly those people who are living in poor communities. The main objective is to help strengthen community–based organisations through financial and technical support. The main strategies are community development organisations, recognising and endorsing the status of community organisations, credit and loan facilities and the development of civil society and partnership collaborations. Through its efforts, this organisation hopes to promote the existing community organisations as the core of community development throughout the country. A revolving fund with a total budget of 3,274.35 million Baht (approximately 109 million Australian Dollars) was provided (CODI, 2001:1-4). In 2002, the CODI was moved to be under the supervision of a new Ministry of Social Development and Human Security.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra declared his policy on the Village and Urban Community Fund, to the National Assembly on 26 February 2001. This was to establish a revolving fund for rural villages and urban communities as one of the emergency policies of his government for recovery in the economic crisis. The Village and Urban Community Fund, launched in late 2001, is managed by the Village and Urban Community Fund Office, part of the Office of The Prime Minister. The fund aims to be a resource to develop living conditions and income–generation, and stimulate small
business at the household level for poor people in 70,865 rural villages and 8,889 urban communities. Each rural village/urban community would receive one million Baht from a revolving fund (Office of The Prime Minister, 2001:4). I estimate the budget to be approximately 79,754 million Baht (approximately 2,659 million Australian Dollars). Originally a community had to have the backing of 75 per cent of residents before the money could be approved, but now it is suggested this be reduced to 50 per cent. There are problems with the administration of these funds. The community firstly has to be united enough to agree to set up an organisation to manage the fund. There are also accusations of corruption at the community level.

2.6 Previous research on urban slums

Research projects have turned attention to urban slums. Valaisatien and Ondam (1997) evaluated The Urban Poor Development Project which was conducted by the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO). The objectives of the evaluation were to investigate how appropriate the strategy and processes were to implement the project, to explore the result of the implementation of the project, and to identify the factors that affected the project. To achieve this, face to face interviews about the UCDO processes and the impact of the project on their families were conducted with 253 people who were members of community savings groups and benefited from the project. They were from 14 slum communities in four regions: Bangkok and vicinity 11 slums (218 persons), Northern one slum (15 persons), and Northeast one slum (12 persons) and Southern one slum (8 persons). This represented 15 per cent of the total beneficiaries (1,881 persons). The research also included in-depth interviews that were conducted with the groups’ leaders from 14 slums, and focus groups with leaders’ representatives at the peak level. The main findings were: the government credit program for the urban poor through savings and credit schemes results in empowering of the urban poor to manage their needs and problems. The people participate and learn from the project. The credit programme could not respond to everyone’s needs, especially the poorest in the slums. It was found that when the project was successful it did provide important benefits to the recipients. The funds provided low-interest loans and income generation for the urban poor.
What of those people in the urban slums who are at the receiving end of these theories, practices and beliefs? My experience as an action researcher in Thailand looking at urban poverty has already made me aware of some problems of relying on family and self-reliance and community organisations as the solution to urban poverty. Since 1999, I have been a member of the team researching into Slums Community Development and People’s Organisations. This research was implemented by The Urban Community Research and Development Institute, under the Bureau of Crown Property, funded by the Thailand Research Fund and led by Dr Akin Rabibhadana. Ten different slum communities were selected, covering four regions of Thailand (Northern–three slums, Southern–two slums, Northeast–three slums and Bangkok Metropolitan and vicinities region–three slums). The main purposes of this project were as follows: firstly, to identify the needs and problems of individuals and communities of the urban poor in different regions; secondly, to organise and empower the urban poor to enable them to increase their income for poverty alleviation; finally, to strengthen the community-based organisations in these areas for improving the environment and quality of life. Our initial findings indicate that many of the poorest families do not have access to the available limited government funds or services which are provided through community organisations. Some people’s organisations had a lack of leadership, management skills and decision-making. There was corruption among the leader groups. Networking between some communities was underdeveloped. There were many conflicts between community leaders and people in their communities. Why, despite the efforts to decentralise programmes and provide these at the community level, are there (so) many remaining excluded? I hope to learn the answers from my study.

2.6.1 The reliance on family and community

The question emerged as to why the projects do not reach a significant number of the urban poor. The reasons appear to be, from my knowledge so far: lack of knowledge and skills in community development for the community workers, recipients were too busy with work to participate, corruption, and an ‘exclusion process’ whereby people who are successful in obtaining one type of grant can then go on to apply again to another project.
It appears that those who are outside remain so. This often applies at a family level, for example, where one family member will be successful in obtaining grants from different sources for all family members. Such conclusions about the experience and process of exclusion point to the reasons for my study.

Social services often fail, in western and non-western countries to help those in the greatest need. Thailand is developing its own way of helping, based on reinforcing or developing existing networks. What are the implications for the poor if these family and community networks also exclude?

The form that poverty alleviation has taken in Thailand has both influenced and been influenced by the (under) development of social protection. The limited coverage of social security has both demanded other ways of dealing with poverty, and justified the use of such strategies. As the World Bank has argued, there is resistance to the idea of a welfare state safety-net. This is in common with other countries where the traditional safety-net has been provided by the family. However, as has been noted, urbanisation may weaken such informal ways of protecting people from the hazards of living. It is being assumed that there is something special about the Thai character and it is used here to justify self-help and reliance. This is the language of cultural capital. According to the World Bank in the Thailand Social Monitor: Poverty and Public Policy, November 2001, the report analyses what it describes as the admirable self-reliance of Thai families in providing safety-nets to their neighbours and relatives. Gifts provided to poor Thai households prevented another 6 per cent of the population from falling into poverty in 1999. The rise in community activism and self-help activities during the crisis has also played a role in cushioning the effects of crisis. Porter, a World Bank Country Director for Thailand stated that ‘This key attribute of Thai society, family self-reliance and community-based support, is indeed the country’s secret weapon against economic shocks; it is frequently underestimated’ (Porter, 2001:1). This weapon may not be so secret, as other Asian societies have also been described as providing economic security by means of the family. However, it remains uncertain how relevant this method of caring will continue to be in the face of social and economic change. In Hong Kong, for
example, Chung (2003:1183) stated that ‘Chinese people tend to seek family support when faced with a crisis’. Families also play a key role in caring for the elderly. Chi (2004) reported that:

In Hong Kong, studies have found that the major source of informal support for the elderly is provided by their families. However, it has also been well documented that the family system in Hong Kong underwent tremendous changes in the last two decades. These changes included the decreasing size of households and an increasing trend for married children to live away from their parents. Though Chinese culture favours the extended family, nuclear families have become the dominant family type in Hong Kong since the 1970’s.

There are critics in Thailand of the possibilities of self–reliance. Phongpaichit and Baker (2000:200) note that the idea of strengthening local communities as a counterweight to globalisation by an inward–turning to community resources and culture may be idealising a community that may never have existed. The expectations on community here are great. It is seen as an alternative to Thailand being dependent on western–oriented, export oriented growth that left Thailand dependent on the world’s great economic powers. Phongpaichit and Baker (Ibid) develop the ideas of Saneh Chamarik, the prominent Thai scholar concerned with the poor. They argue that community was much more a moral than a physical idea. Even if a community did not exist we should act as if it did, in a new economy developed from the bottom up, with the central idea of the inclusion of everyone, based on self–reliance. Askew (2002:145) reviews the sociology of the slum in Thailand and refers to the idea of mutual helping in social networks. These are largely driven by women in domestic work and in income–generating activities such as loan schemes and jobs outside the home. He warns of the dangers of oversimplifying these patterns and that these mutual relationships may be fragile.

In Thailand, social insurance is not available for the unemployed in the informal sector, and social and health service effectiveness is limited. Research has already found that public assistance schemes do not reach the ultra–poorest in rural areas (Research by Krongkaew reported in World Bank, 2001a:39). There is a potential problem when reliance is put on the Thai family in urban areas if that network is under stress or is no longer functioning.
ESCAP recognises that traditional support systems and safety-nets, which have been important as coping mechanisms for the poor and vulnerable in crisis times, are now weakened over time because of economic and social changes, including urbanisation and the loss of extended families. Public systems have not appeared to compensate for these losses (ESCAP, 2001a:11).

The World Bank (2000b) acknowledges there is scope for improving the effectiveness of existing safety-net programmes. Weaknesses were identified in three areas: 1) targeting, social programs not helping the poor but general social expenditures focusing rather on the middle and high-income groups. 2) cost-effectiveness of programmes. Some of these are often designed without proper knowledge of the cultural and socio-economic characteristics of the population they target. 3) co-ordination. The implementation of safety-net programmes has induced the proliferation of social funds which often target the same markets or population groups.

### 2.6.2 The influence of the Thai social structure

To find the reasons for the exclusion of some poor people we have to look at not just the assumption of family self-reliance made by national and international authorities, but rather at the Thai social structure. In reviewing the results of the urban community environmental activities project, Boonyabancha makes central points about the way in which the Thai social structure may prevent the ideals of community development envisaged by Thai and international thinkers. She concludes that though the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan and the New Constitution of 1997 aimed to:

express the government’s widely supported wish to create capable and self-reliant citizens...There are many obstacles to achieving these aims. Thai society remains rigidly hierarchical and centralized, and the move towards decentralization will face resistance. Furthermore, Thai people are individualistic and competitive. To generate cooperation among equals, be they government or other agencies, NGOs or communities will be difficult (Boonyabancha, 1999:115).

Although the Eighth National Plan represents a milestone in development thinking and planning in the country, it is also viewed with scepticism whether the ‘people-centred
development' approach can be implemented, as it would mean big shifts in attitude and behaviour, extensive capacity building in managing the change process (UNDP, 2002:1).

To understand the presence of individualistic, competitive behaviour we have to look back into the history of the Thai social structure. Before the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932, people’s needs were taken care of, or ignored by, their rulers, in what Ptanawanit (2002:83-84) refers to as the Feudal system in Thailand. People’s welfare was therefore reliant on their individual success in hierarchical relationships. Slavery and other forms of bondage and serfdom were abolished at the beginning of the 20th Century by King Rama V (Wyatt, 1984:192), but forms of interdependent relationships have continued until modern times. Patronage exists at every level of Thai society from politicians, bureaucrats, university teachers, business employees and community leaders. People look for powerful superiors with whom they can enter into an interdependent relationship where responsibility for their welfare as a junior will be taken on, whilst they in turn are under obligation to provide services to such persons. In business, political, and academic life everyone is looking for a patron who will secure their future. In such a competitive environment, gaining and giving favours at every level of society, corruption is often the means by which progress is made in the world outside the family.

This has been recognised in the past few years as governments have moved to strengthen civil society as a defence against corrupt behaviours. There is now the National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC) and the Anti–Money Laundering Commission (AMLC), sited alongside the National Human Rights Commission in Bangkok. The World Bank notes that the 1997 Constitution introduced new measures to empower civil society and safeguard individual liberties. The Constitution emphasised gender equality, environmental preservation, local resource management, community empowerment, and basic rights in education and health (World Bank, 1999b:7).

All of this assumes a thriving democracy. Vote–buying at elections, however, is still common, even in Metropolitan Bangkok. The elections to the Senate in 1999 and to the House of Representatives (the lower house) in 2000 were careful to try and change this situation and revealed many corruptions. I was a member of the Task Force of the
Senator’s Election in Zone 8, Bangkok Metropolitan Administrative. This was under the responsibility of the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT), which was to ensure fair elections. I oversaw the election in Bangkholaem district (Zone 8) and found that some politicians tried to win the election by sending their members to slums to buy votes from the urban poor. They also took the poor from their slums by car to election centres, thus putting a lot of pressure on them to vote for the candidate who had provided them with the money and transportation. I learnt this from the poor who received the money from the politicians, but they did not want to be identified.

The problem of corruption still affects every aspect of relationships in Thailand and is likely to persist in the near future. This is simply because it works so well. An alternative system has yet to impress many Thais, including those who have a lot of power. Phongpaichit and Piriyarangsan recognise corruption in all levels of the bureaucracy and political system. Further, for many of those so involved, these practices are legitimate under the patronage system, even if illegal under modern laws (Phongpaichit and Piriyarangsan, 2001:5).

Corruption is part of the social capital in Thailand and this operates at every level of society, from the urban and rural community to the national level. It will also therefore be likely to affect the provision of poverty alleviation programmes. Adler and Kwon (2002) conclude it is ‘common knowledge’ that social capital and network position influence the success of individuals and that self-interest may work hard to keep it that way.

Alongside the results of the patronage system, gender inequalities, as part of the Thai social structure, remain fundamental to understanding the issue of social exclusions. The 1997 Constitution granted women equal rights but the reality was that in 1998, in the labour force, women earned 37 per cent of income despite being 46.34 per cent of the working force (World Bank, 2000d:16). Women hold eight per cent of government positions and 1.5 per cent of those at local level. Few women have seats in the Parliament that consists of 367 (93.9 per cent) male and 24 (6.1 per cent) female MPs (World Bank, 2001a:46). The World Bank stated that ‘more needs to be done to increase the voice of women and reduce their sense of vulnerability and insecurity…More attention needs to
be paid to achieving gender equity in order to advance the goal of poverty reduction’ (Ibid:46).

2.7 Conclusion

The questions emerging from this literature review are about the reasons for, and the extent of, the excluded and the included in urban poverty alleviation programmes. This should be studied from a variety of perspectives, ranging from the views of the poor who are themselves both included and excluded from available poverty alleviation programmes to the attitudes of Thai leaders and policy makers to their situations. Also important is an understanding of the elements in the Thai social structure that influence attitudes to dependency.

From this data I will need to go on to understand the efficacy of the model of poverty alleviation for all of the poor, which underpins the practice, as this is demonstrated in the programmes currently provided. Is this a radical social policy, turning away from comparisons with western safety--net provisions to a culturally sensitive solution for Thailand? My study attempts to find this out from representatives of all of the stakeholders: including the poorest. The next Chapter discusses the methods I will use to attempt to answer these questions.