CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

This Chapter will deal with each aspect of the research findings. I will discuss the research methods, and the findings as these relate to the development of the Thai Government’s urban poverty alleviation policy and also the findings from the interviews with the stakeholders.

6.1 Research methods

Throughout this thesis I have been concerned about being a researcher in two cultural contexts. In discussing the findings I should begin with some reflections on what my research experience has been in this study, given that prior to beginning the research I was aware of the problems of being in the two contexts of both Thai and western academic expectations.

There is a lot of discussion in the western academic literature of the “truth” of the stories that are told to researchers. Plummer (1995:170) goes so far as to conclude that, for him, no stories are true for all time and places, even if they are strongly believed by the informants at the time of telling. They are rather examples of narrative truth rather than historical truth. The implications of this are that I need to account for the interaction between the researcher and the researched and the cultural and social context in which the story was produced. I have commented on the likely effect on responses to quantitative research questionnaires by Thai respondents who are always aware of the need to say and to do the right thing. In writing of my decision to use qualitative methods I quoted Bolton (1995:298-299) who claimed that people always knew what to say in responses to surveys. I found in my research that this was also an issue for qualitative data-gathering. Thai people, especially those who feel they have less power than the interviewer, are very concerned to tell them what they think they need to know or to hear. I now think it possible that large-scale quantitative research projects in Thailand may be able to achieve valid data more easily than qualitative methods, by using survey methods that do not require personal interaction with an interviewer.
Reflecting on my experience with this study I assess that a crucial question for researchers using either qualitative or quantitative methods in Thailand may be the inability of Thais in general to criticise any given situation when they think that the results of that criticism may be to do them some harm. This may range from fears of social criticism and that the author’s qualifications will be dismissed by government, to worries that saying the wrong thing may cause a socially inferior person to be prevented from achieving promotion in a job, or gaining access to resources.

How did this affect my interviewees? There was certainly evidence that all of the stakeholders I interviewed were aware of, or wanted to know, the audience for their responses. As I noted, the policy makers sometimes did not want me to record their adverse comments on politicians. The poor people who had some successful access to resources, that is the included, did not want to criticise the system that had provided them at least with some resources. Corruption was mentioned by some Thai writers in the literature (Phongpaichit and Piriyarangsan, 2001:5). It was never mentioned by the interviewees in their descriptions of the savings groups. This was in contrast to some of the policy makers and the excluded. The latter claimed the existence of corruption as being one reason for not joining savings group schemes.

Social critics, however, do exist in Thailand and some of them are represented by women in my research who have progressed into community leadership. From that position, although, or perhaps because, they may still be living in slum areas, they are strong social critics. For example, Prateep (p136) who talks about the need for governments to understand the causes of poverty and that the poor are victims, rather than the cause of urban problems. I am aware of how much they risk in joining the small group, unpopular with the government, of public social critics. This is why the majority response to interviewers questions is likely to be, ‘What will happen to this information and me?’ rather than them being concerned with telling the truth on all occasions. The social costs of criticism are illustrated well in the case when, in 2004, a journalist involved with women’s rights wrote in a Thai language newspaper of the sexual harassment committed by a high-ranking member of the Royal Thai Police. This man then sued her in both the criminal and civil courts for this accusation. She is continuing to fight these matters in the

As to public criticism by the academic elite, the response of those in power may be to attack their credibility. One well-known professor of economics and social critic, Pasuk Phongpaichit, according to the Bangkok Post (20 November, 2003:1) described the situation in Thailand after the 1997 economic crisis as resulting in the ruling party taking power from local godfathers in their campaigns. The government had been involved in human rights violations, she claimed, as they tried to suppress drugs, crack down on mafia figures and control firearms and stamp out illegal businesses. The government’s response to this criticism came from the ruling party’s Deputy Spokesman who said that such academics as Pasuk ‘opt to criticise the government to show how smart they are’ (Bangkok Post, 21 November, 2003:6). Another academic social critic, Thrirayuth Boonmi, said:

the Prime Minister had used his policies to take control over grassroots and low-income, the political sector, the bureaucracy and capitalists and also to convert the entire country into capital. That made Mr Thaksin the most powerful Prime Minister as he now had the financial power, support of the police, military and civil servants, and support for his ideas. That could put the country at risk of developing in the wrong direction—capitalism rather than self-sufficiency economy,…

Prime Minister Thaksin’s response, on the same day, was that ‘his critic did not understand that democracy without capitalism would never survive, and that poor people could manage investment funds provided to them under various populist projects’. He ‘should talk less and do more or he would never gain true understanding about government policies towards the poor’ (Bangkok Post, 7 October 2003:1).

What did I learn about research methods that I did not know before I began the study? I learnt that qualitative methods used in Thailand may face problems in obtaining valid responses. In quantitative methods it may well be that people answering questionnaires provide answers that they think are required. The qualitative research interview, however, may also have this problem. I am uncertain about the effects of pressures on my
interviewees to give answers that would not cause them to lose face, at least, and at most be afraid of losing jobs or resources.

By completing this study in the context of western expectations I also learnt that a western ethics committee’s requirements may not protect interview subjects from harm through ‘informed consent’. There may be many subtle social pressures on them to participate. Signing consent forms will not necessarily have the protective power that they were designed to achieve. This is either because of people not being literate, or feeling they were in a position with the researcher that brought pressures of obligation to participate as they might receive or lose some benefit.

On the other hand, the need to feedback the results of the research to the participants was a new idea for me as a researcher in my country. This was even though, as I noted, I have always seen myself as a social activist who also did research. This was certainly sometimes for my own financial reward, but I also hoped that the results would be helpful to the people I advocated for in other contexts. I now think that the involvement of all participants in a much more planned way is an essential part of the research process. It is treating participants as being equal in the project. I mean that I shall have to think how to contact prospective participants and also how to keep in contact with them over the period of the research interviewing and the writing up of the results. This is an extension of the participatory, subject–driven approach to community development. If this is the aim in working with the poor I realise it should also be the aim in researching the poor. It might also result in a better response in terms of the motivation to participate.

However, my experience in this research has shown me how difficult this is to achieve. My respondents moved away, from jobs or areas, so that the time and effort involved in re–contacting people who were the urban poor defeated my best intentions. This extended to the policy makers I hoped to re–interview. I telephoned them, informing them of my wish for them to review their comments in the research. No–one wished to be re–interviewed and after I had read them their comments they made only minor changes. Clearly this lack of ongoing participation may have been because I had only paid lip–service to the concept of research participation. Future research of mine, and others,
should have to take this necessary process into consideration in the initial tests of the feasibility of the project. The implications may be that of a more modest project being conceived. The gains should be more accurate data gathering, as it will have been checked by the participants. The subjects will also have been involved in a participatory process. This is important in Thailand, to balance the national tendency to always give away, or to sell your power, to those in a superior position. Resistance can then only be done privately. This is the antithesis of a growing democratic society. Such participation may also be an important part of helping self–reliance through the research subjects being part of an educational process.

Throughout the findings there appears the need for more education of the poor about their rights and the services that are, or could be, available to them. Their participation in research projects would not be simple consciousness–raising, in that my respondents already appear to know where they are in the social structure of Thailand. It would be consciousness–raising through knowing about others who have been in a similar situation and have found different solutions.

Alongside this awareness, that participation should be a central concern of the research, is a consciousness that who I am will affect the research meeting. I now recognise that the issues of class and gender are important considerations of which I have not previously taken account in my research. The majority of the urban poor I interviewed were women. Like many men in Thailand, I act as if the men have the power in the society. In my previous research I have not taken account of the different experiences of men and women who appear to be living in similar circumstances.

In fact, the status of women in Thailand is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, men appear to be the head of the household. The overwhelming support given to poor children is for education by Buddhist monks for boys. On International Women’s Day in Thailand, The Bangkok Post reported that there were 267,818 monks and some 5,000 white–robed nuns. Women are not allowed to be ordained as bhikkhuni in the Thai Theravada Buddhism. The nuns are discriminated against by suffering low status and a lack of state
support. Despite this, nuns have succeeded in setting up the first Nun University in the country. Every political party sees women as a weak group requiring help and development, but no political party has measures to promote women into policy-making positions. Women still cannot use their birth names after marriage. They must use their husband’s family name. Women must change their name from Miss to Mrs (Bangkok Post, 8 March, 2003: Outlook Section:1). However, in her survey of Thai women in slums Thorbek (1994:142-159) argues that, in comparison to Sri Lankan women slum dwellers, Thai women had more power, in terms of their choices of employment, income, support among other women and satisfaction outside a primary relationship with a man. She sees this as a gender struggle that was very active in the situation of Thai women in the slums. I would confirm that my women respondents included women who were very active as community and family leaders.

The position of Thai women in relation to me as researcher was firstly that they were the people in the slums who were mainly responsible for setting up and running the community savings groups. They were often working at two or more jobs, taking care of the family, having community involvement, and working in jobs outside the home which involved them in being away from home for a total of more than ten hours a day. They were certainly people who were trying to help themselves rather than to wait for assistance. This is the reason they were often too busy to meet with me and I adapted to their needs in this. They may have brought to the interview the awareness that it is men who have the power in the world outside of the slums. However, within slum communities they exercised power, from their relationships with other women and through this in relationships with representatives of authority in the form of local government and NGOs. I am uncertain of the impact of my gender here in my role as researcher. I was asking them to tell me of their poverty but also their expertise in coping with poverty. Gender, in my relationships with them, may not have been more important than my class status.

Brown (2004:xi) argues that class analysis has been a neglected dimension by scholars writing about Thailand. He attempts to change this by analysing the importance of the industrial working class in struggles with the state. Further, he claims that in seeing the
politics of capital and the middle–classes being the dominant force in the development of a civil society, the observer ignores the long history of organisations of workers in fighting for their democratic rights (Ibid:132). For my respondents such organisations have largely been excluded from their experience. Mulder (1992:3-8) argues that the concept of power to rule and protect is central in the perception of Thai social processes and this has limited the emergence of a modern industrially inspired class consciousness.

There is reluctance among many Thais to analyse class structure. At the head of the ruling class is the Royal Family whom one is not allowed to openly discuss. The King is both supported by and supports, and sometimes opposes, the government. Thais may also consider different hierarchical relationships that cut across class lines. Given a lack of clear articulation, the awareness of class by Thais is therefore quite subtle. It is not only employment status that determines first impressions of class difference. Dress is important to all Thais, as everyone wants to appear clean and smart. The popularity of uniforms up to university level and in shops and factories helps here. The Thai will then have to take account of other aspects of appearance including ethnicity and skin colour before deciding on the class of the other person. That is before a conversation confirms or denies the person’s class status. Education is certainly one indicator of class and will be carefully assessed in any interaction. Other than class, the assumption in status for the Thai is age. There is an anxious need for people to ascertain the relative age of the other person to determine if they should be afforded respect as a senior. Beyond class considerations, there is also the fact that I was an outsider to the respondents. Mulder (Ibid) concludes that an insider/outsider world view is common for Thai people in locating who is to be trusted, and who is not.

6.2 Appreciating the significance of the interviewer

In summary, I conclude that it is not easy for me to decide what factors most affected my interviews. My gender, class, ethnicity (like many of my respondents I am from rural Thailand), my age being mostly junior to my interviewees, and my outsider status all affected my interviews. I also have to balance these factors to some extent with the skills in community development that I brought to each interview. I assume the importance in
all of these factors in the gathering of data, but not that any of these factors was more important than the rest.

I do now recognise, though, the need to be more aware of the possible importance of gender. In future I would try to get a better representation of men as respondents in order to achieve a more comprehensive view of slum dwellers. This present study is more that of women in slum communities, rather than dwellers in communities as a whole. I would not say this is gender blindness, but my findings indicate that there was some shortsightedness in my research design in assuming I would be researching slum dwellers when the majority of the participants were women. However to focus on these women in the research, as I have done, is valid, as it is women who do drive the communities and families who are living in urban slums.

6.3 The policy framework and my assessment of its impact on the stakeholders

I read through the nine National Economic and Social Development Plans and fifty–four government statements on policy to the National Assembly, covering seventy years in total of Thai governments between 1932, the period of official democracy, to 2001. From 1959 onwards the needs of the urban poor are apparently a concern of governments. The 29th Government (1959-1963) at that time was headed by the authoritarian Prime Minister, Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat. He visited Bangkok areas where there were obviously poor conditions. He ordered the government officials to survey these slum areas. The local authority was asked to improve the areas where slums were reported.

Reviewing National Plans after this time, it appears that urban poverty was a concern of governments. From the time of the First National Economic Development Plan (1961-1966) the emphasis was on slum clearance and the National Housing Authority was an important government organisation that had the responsibility for attending to the needs of slum dwellers by housing measures such as public housing, upgrading of the slums, and relocation of slum dwellers. Rural poverty alleviation became part of the government’s agenda in the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986).
My findings should be read in the context of housing improvements being the major way of achieving poverty alleviation until the time of the Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (1992-1996) when credit loans to strengthen communities were added. However, at the same time, individual welfare provision did exist in Thailand in the form both of social assistance and social security. My practice knowledge is important here too, as are the findings from this research. It is true that social insurance appears to be available but here the concept of inclusion and exclusion is also valid. Some of the people I interviewed were, in theory, entitled to insurance benefits under the scheme managed by the government departments and in businesses employing more than ten workers. The government has extended this to workers in employment with one or more persons. There is also provision for voluntary coverage for the self-employed (ISSA, 2003:149). However none of my respondents had been able to use such provisions because of the lack of a stable employment record. They were therefore still excluded, even though social insurance provisions did exist in theory. The theme of exclusion, despite the apparent existence of some measure of social protection, relates to all of my respondents in other areas where there is apparent coverage.

As I noted, education is freely provided for all in Thailand, under the new Constitution 1997, for not less than twelve years. The many dimensions of poverty that the slum dwellers experienced, however, prevented children from attending school. The reasons were related to the expenses involved in travel, school uniforms, food, education equipment, or just the need for children to work to help the family. Health care is now also apparently universally available, but problems with registration for healthcare cards or accessing the health care meant that the poor were not able to take advantage of what was apparently available from government. The quality of care is also limited. The healthcare card provides access only to certain facilities that are registered under the scheme. Some slum dwellers might only be eligible to use the universal 30 Baht healthcare scheme in their birthplaces in rural areas that are a long distance from Bangkok. Healthcare facilities may also be a distance away from the slum and involve long waiting times that the poor cannot afford to spend away from their jobs.
There is a problem of social insurance coverage throughout Thailand. Most employed persons in rural areas were in the informal sector, while about half of the employed persons in urban areas were in this sector. It is in the coverage of social insurance that the poor are excluded, as the majority of them do not work in formal employment. Most work in the informal sector where they are excluded from social insurance and have not taken up the theoretical possibility of voluntary coverage. A barrier exists to taking advantage of such coverage when you are only able to rely on being employed on a day by day basis.

Outside social insurance, social assistance is certainly available, in theory, to my respondents. Since 1944 there has existed a government welfare department to provide both financial assistance and advice for the poorest in the urban and rural areas. The range of help available appears to be wide. It is not, however, easily accessed because the poor, especially the poorest, lack knowledge of the provisions. In Bangkok, it is more than likely that welfare will not be available. The workers are too few and may be too far away to access. The officials are limited to providing emergency relief. The poor may also feel a lack of confidence to contact the government officials, due to their illegal status as squatters.

All of this enables government to announce/assume there is a social safety−net that in practice is only a minimal facility for the poorest. Perhaps the realisation that the provision of individual welfare is insufficient has led successive governments to emphasise two main ways of providing for the poor. Government programmes for urban poverty alleviation have been driven, since the First National Economic Development Plan (1961-1966) by improvements to housing. This was developed by the establishment of the National Housing Authority in 1970. In the 1990s this policy has been joined by credit programmes. The apparent motivational force here has been the concept of self−reliance, to be achieved by credit schemes that enable the poor to improve their living conditions through housing improvements, access to education, and community economic development. All this is to be achieved by the strengthening of community reciprocal obligations that are expected to give more power to the slum dwellers over decisions
about their lives. From the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001) these ideas come to the front, linked as they were with an intention to develop less centralised government and more people participation. There was a concern to limit the problems of bureaucracy and corruption in government organisations. This encouragement of civil society has been a feature of National Plans since the Seventh Economic and Social Development Plan (1992-1996).

The coincidental drafting of a New Constitution at the time of the 1997 Economic Crisis, when Thailand’s reliance on world markets proved unreliable, has resulted in emphasising the Thai people’s participation in communities and the wider society. It was in 2000 that the Cabinet approved the creation of The Community Organisations Development Institute, designed to promote community organisations and co-ordinate civil society strengthening in both urban communities and rural villages.

These histories clearly point to some awareness that Thai society has a problem as part of the economic development it has enjoyed. This is manifested in both rural and urban areas. The government’s answer has been to focus on housing improvements in the urban areas. During the 40-year time period I reviewed there has been an emphasis on housing as a way of improving the conditions of the urban poor. However, since the time of the Second National Economic Development Plan (1967-1971), rapid economic growth has led to increasing migration to firstly Bangkok, and then to other provinces, and cities in other regions of Thailand. The number of slums has increased despite government efforts to achieve alleviation. The cities have proven to be too attractive, and the rural life too hard for large numbers of the poor. In his criticism of the development industry Dichter (2003:10) claims that a better way to development is that the poor help themselves by moving. In a better financial situation, within a country or internationally, the poor can and do, save to reinvest or send back to relatives.

My respondents were ambivalent about their moving to the city. Those who migrated to Bangkok city had all experienced poverty in rural areas. They hoped that the city would provide opportunities for a better life such as jobs, education and healthcare services. In
reality, they had a difficult time in slum areas. For example, Lampung (p122) was born in a poor family with ten children in the Northeast of Thailand. Her parents had limited land for agriculture. Moreover, the drought in the area and increasing debts pushed her to leave her family to find jobs. Forty years ago she migrated to Bangkok city and expected that her life would be better, some day. She is still living on squatted land in a poor environment with a lack of utilities, and is threatened by eviction. As a street vendor, she earned little income. She often ran away from the city police because it was illegal to sell things on the footpath. Fines also applied to these people’s working activities.

Mana (p119) also had the same dream as Lampung. He was born in a poor peasant family in the Northeast of Thailand. After he got married he migrated to a Bangkok slum with his family ten years ago. He was also aware of discrimination. ‘Urban people usually see us as garbage. They often ask why we don’t return to our rural homes and why we have to encroach on land’. Somsong (p124-125) had left her place in the rural area after the village was affected by the government building a dam. In the slum her life was not easy. She lacked everything, such as utilities, clean water, electricity and sanitation, food, medicines, secure housing and employment. ‘It’s like I escaped a tiger in rural to meet a crocodile in the city. I had a hard time here. I may return to my village in the future’. The poor may still hope to return one day to their rural homes, but in the meantime they were all long-term residents of the urban area. They resided for periods from five to forty years. It was rare for my respondents to send money to their rural homes. They may, however, sometimes donate money to the temple to ensure a better future life.

Urban poverty alleviation was the aim of housing improvements and then, by practical methods, the strengthening of community self-sufficiency. The Thaksin government has been more radical in claiming that its methods will lead to the end of slums and poverty. For this, the method continues to be community development. The Thaksin government has provided loans specifically to achieve community economic development, to enable the poor to enjoy the benefits of capitalism (see his comments on this, above).

Policy for the poor, from the documentary review, has always been at the level of major housing projects, but without the linkage of economic policy to social problems. It is
certainly as Unger (1998:72) states, that economic growth in Thailand has generally been without concern for social policy. The impressive rise in the apparent standards of living had been to the cost of the whole population in the form of pollution, environmental degrading, health costs and a lack of social cohesion.

The poor were caught up in the demands of the economy for sustaining fewer workers on the land. To live in the city they have had to endure poor living conditions throughout the past forty years since the take–off of the economy. Although all urban Thais suffer pollution, traffic congestion, health problems connected with city living, environmental degrading, lack of social cohesion, it is the poor who have little defence. They cannot move from the slum areas that contain their jobs. They do not live, travel and work in air–conditioning. The lack of an extended family may be more important for the poor who cannot afford paid care for children and cannot rely on family care in times of illness or unemployment. Their health is at greater risk because of their environment, their occupations, and their lack of access to health services.

Although Social Development was added to the title of the National Plans in the Fourth Plan (1977-1981) there is little evidence that economic and social planning in practice had been seen as interconnected. This does seem to have changed after the impact of the economic crisis. By the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001) there appears to be awareness of the need to integrate economic with social policy. Following this, there is a much more practical emphasis on the social by strengthening Thai communities as a bridge to all participating in an economy that is more self–sufficient. Here both economic planning and social planning have one overriding theme, that is, of self–reliance.

6.4 Self–reliance: a central finding

The concept of self–reliance has been found to be central to the thesis. According to Dichter (2003:58), the term self–sufficiency began to be used by the west in the 1950s and was applied to nations rather than people. The term self–reliance began to be used by leaders in the Third World and was linked to not being dependent on the west. Recently,
both economic and social policy announced by the Thai government has stressed the importance of both self-sufficiency of the Kingdom and self-reliance of the people. My respondents frequently mention self-reliance. However, it is a word and a concept that may mean different things to different interest groups, even though there may be the assumption that everyone is talking about the same thing. For Thai governments it appears to mean that communities will work together as groups to achieve community self-reliance. Most recently this has been linked with the ability to enjoy the benefits of capitalism. This seems likely to continue whilst Thailand experiences economic success.

Internationally, for over fifty years, the concept of self-reliance has been linked with community development. As I discussed in Chapter Two, in 1960, the United Nations defined community development in a way that emphasised people’s self-help. However, in Thailand the history of the Community Development Department has been one of hierarchy rather than participation. I also reviewed in that Chapter, the concept of self-reliance as it was used by HM The King after the economic crisis. His focus was on both the short-term and long-term alleviation of poverty and was linked with a return to a self-sufficiency economy involving local rather than external reliance, community self-sufficiency by households producing and consuming what they needed rather than wanting to generate increasing income or borrowing. Through the poor being able to work more successfully to gain income then there can be a reduction of government support. The World Bank identified with The King’s views and believed that there were traditional Thai values of self-reliance and self-help which should not be undermined. For the Buddhist, self-reliance means that one can only rely on oneself. For other Buddhist thinkers true freedom has to be gained by not allowing oneself to be dependent, either for material or for mental reasons.

In this environment it is to be expected that those people I interviewed also considered self-reliance of great importance in relation to urban poverty alleviation. Community leaders commented that the government does have a role in helping the poor to achieve self-reliance. They believed that the government will not help the poor unless they band together to achieve power for their own voices. For a government officer, slum dwellers
should learn to solve their own problems and the director of the main government–funded agency to help the poor considered that if the poor waited for help from the outside then they would not be able to help themselves (p144). For the poor like Malee (p117-118) and Lampung (p122) asking for help may have been a negative or too difficult an experience, so they have to be self-reliant. Others such as Chalad (p121-122) never think to ask for help from anyone and believe they must rely on themselves. Because, like Somsong, (p124-125) they lack confidence alongside lacking material goods, then they think it is better to rely on themselves. One slum dweller considered that to be self-reliant meant they needed to work harder and, like the Buddhist thinkers, advocated reducing their demand for money. If in need they would ask help from family rather than expecting help from the government (p131).

Although the concept is in widespread use in Thailand, the working definitions do not appear to agree and may in fact be in conflict. For the government, self-sufficiency means communities working together to solve their own problems. For The King as well this is one part of his solution, but added to this is the need for Thailand to be self-reliant as a country in which communities are self-sufficient in what they produce and consume so that their reliance on government, and indeed any external force, is reduced. For international stakeholders there is, like the King, a belief in traditional Thai values where family self-reliance protects against the downturns in the economy. My respondents seem also to believe that they have only themselves, or sometimes their families, to rely upon. However, this may not be through choice; they may have realised, either because of negative experiences of asking for help, or lack of skills or knowledge, that self-reliance is their only option. From community leaders there is the belief that self-reliance by the poor cannot happen without outside support from GO or NGOs. These stakeholders see self-reliance in a positive way, as giving strength to the poor in making themselves heard by government.

This is a very different use of the concept from seeing it as a way of poor people not looking for outside help. One result of the term self-reliance here would be loud voices from the poor in contrast to other ways of using self-reliance which imply that the poor
should keep quiet. This is using self–reliance as part of a conflict situation where power has to be taken from the governing authorities by the poor. In the literature there is criticism of the very concept of a self–reliant community. It is argued that such a community may never have existed in the past, although in the future maybe we should act as if community existed in order to foster inclusion with the aim of self–reliance. There is recognition that if the Thai family is under stress then it is asking too much to rely on this institution to provide for the needs of the poor.

For the poorest, self–reliance could mean hope for change through community development, or being in the hopeless situation of staying as they are and relying on themselves or their families, or the moneylenders. For some there is a spiritual dimension: controlling your needs, being satisfied with your situation, searching for less, and thereby consuming less. In the words of Malee (p117-118), after going to make merit in the temple she felt ‘peaceful in my mind. I hope that my next life will be better’.

For each stakeholder then, a belief in self–reliance can imply quite different attitudes to, and experiences of poverty, as the following table will clarify.
Table 6.1: Implications of the differing uses of the word and concept of self–reliance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Concept of self–reliance</th>
<th>Implications for the poor</th>
<th>Government’s role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban poor</td>
<td>The only way of being/the way of demanding rights.</td>
<td>Acceptance of the status quo/joining together/working harder.</td>
<td>Little to do/facing the poor’s demands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Community is strengthened. Economy is stimulated by increased ability of poor to consume.</td>
<td>Some of the poor are helped.</td>
<td>Providing revolving fund for loans. Specific help to some groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Assertive of rights.</td>
<td>Increasing their power.</td>
<td>Critical/ provide more resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>Content with your life. Do not want for more.</td>
<td>Feel peaceful in your mind/ hope for a better life next time. Providing some services for the excluded.</td>
<td>Supportive of Buddhist ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics in Social and community work</td>
<td>Help them to help themselves.</td>
<td>Access a social/community worker.</td>
<td>Provide social and community workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International organisations</td>
<td>Reliance and strengthening of Thai cultural and social capital.</td>
<td>Some receive help from funds and technical support through NGOs and GOs.</td>
<td>Receives financial and technical support for policy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Summarised from the data previously mentioned.
This review provides a framework for understanding the origin and development of government policy for urban poverty alleviation. The practice implications of that policy in terms of poverty alleviation, I suggest, require an appreciation of the nuances of an apparent shared meaning that is part of Thai cultural capital; a self-reliant Kingdom that is special with ‘a secret weapon’ against economic shocks in the form of family and community (Porter, 2001:1).

6.5 Self-reliance in practice and its impact on the stakeholders

I will now use my research findings to hear the voices of the stakeholders who were at the receiving end of this practice of self-reliance. One of the main ways of encouraging the inclusion of the poor into participating more effectively in the economy was by means of savings groups. I need to ask how joining such schemes changed the experience of urban poverty of those people I interviewed. As I have already noted, any comparisons can only be impressionistic because of the small number of savings group members I interviewed.

In terms of income, no one in the savings group is earning less than 5,500 Baht per month. In the excluded group 31 per cent are earning less than 5,500 Baht per month. Only one of the families in the savings group was earning under 7,500 Baht per month whereas in the excluded group more than 61 per cent were in this category. For the excluded group only one was earning more than 11,500 Baht, whereas 80 per cent of the savings group members had this income. In the savings group it appears to be that only at the highest levels of income is expenditure greater than income. For the excluded group around 30 per cent of the total are spending more than their income.

When I asked both groups if they considered their income sufficient, 10 of the 15 members of the savings groups said it was not, whilst 49 of the 65 excluded poor claimed this.
### Table 6.2: Savings groups and excluded poor: average monthly income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saving groups</th>
<th>Excluded poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No–one is earning less than 5,500 Baht</td>
<td>31 per cent are earning less than 5,500 Baht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one is earning under 7,500 Baht</td>
<td>61 per cent are earning under 7,500 Baht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 per cent are earning more than 11,500 Baht</td>
<td>Only one is earning more than 11,500 Baht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only at the highest levels of income is expenditure greater than income.</td>
<td>Around 30 per cent of the total are spending more than their income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 of the 15 members of the savings groups considered that their income was insufficient.</td>
<td>49 of the 65 excluded poor claimed that their income was insufficient.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is would not be surprising that proportionally more of those in the savings groups may have considered their income sufficient. However, this does not allow for the number who still thought their incomes were not sufficient. If this is true, we must recognise that apparently not all my respondents had taken on the Buddhist teaching of being content with what they had; especially when what they had was so little.

Of both groups I interviewed, the better off were to be found in a savings group and earning 15,500 Baht per month. With four members in their household this was 3,875 Baht per month for each person. The minimum daily wage is 3,564 Baht (162 x 22) per month. With two working persons in this household then their income should be 7,128 Baht (3,564 x 2) per month. So this is almost double the earnings expected of the working poor. If the poverty rate is used as a measure (886 Baht per month) then this less than a quarter of the minimum wage and therefore my respondents were certainly receiving an income well above the poverty line, which for them would have only been 3,544 Baht (886 x 4) per month. We might say then that some of my respondents in the savings group were not in poverty. However, 162 Baht per day for a household working member does not result in a comfortable lifestyle in Bangkok. The richest in my excluded group earned 14,000 Baht per month. With five members in their household, this was 2,800
Baht per month per person. This was considerably above the minimum wage of 3,564 Baht (886 x 22) per month per working person, that is, 7,128 Baht per month with two working household members. They were also above the poverty line of 4,430 Baht (886 x 5) per month. The poorest in the included group were earning 5,500 Baht per month with five household members. This was only 1,100 Baht per month per person, still just above the poverty line of 4,430 Baht (886 x 5), but well below the expected working poor income of 7,128 Baht per month. When I looked at the income of the poorest of the excluded group they earned 3,500 Baht per month with four in the household, that came to 875 Baht per person per month. They could be assessed as poor, either by the poverty line or the minimum wage.

Table 6.3: Savings groups and excluded poor: income comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Savings groups</th>
<th>Excluded poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The richest of this group earns 15,500 Baht/month with four members in the</td>
<td>The richest of this group earns 14,000 Baht/month with five members in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>household. That was 3,875 Baht/month for each person.</td>
<td>household. That made 2,800 Baht/month for each person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The richest family is earning almost double the earning expected of the</td>
<td>The richest family is above the poverty line of 4,430 Baht (886 x 5)/month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working poor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poorest of this group earns 5,500 Baht/month with five members in the</td>
<td>The poorest of this group earns 3,500 Baht/month with four members in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>household. This meant only 1,100 Baht/month for each person.</td>
<td>household. This meant 875 Baht/month for each person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poorest family is still just above the poverty line of 4,430 Baht (886 x</td>
<td>The poorest family could be assessed as poor either by the poverty line or the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) but well below the expected working poor income of 7,128 Baht/month.</td>
<td>minimum daily wage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The poverty line is 886 Baht per month x the number of persons in the family.

The minimum daily wage in Bangkok is (162 x 22) 3,564 Baht/month. With two working persons in the household then their income should be 7,128 Baht/month

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In summary, both my study groups did contain households that would not be classified as poor in terms of poverty lines and minimum wages. The literature suggests that in the slums of Bangkok not everyone is poor.


Did you know that all slum households in Bangkok have a colour television; that the average number of TVs per household is 1.6; that almost all of the households have a refrigerator; that two-thirds of the households have a washing machine and 1.5 cell phones? (UN-HABITAT, 2003).

I do not know this, either from my practice experience, or from my findings in this study.

If I still consider that I am studying people who really are poor, what were the elements of their lives I would classify as justifying that they did live in poverty? It is not just financial needs. Poverty is multi-dimensional, according to Thai and international definitions. For my respondents poverty is financial, but also related to the condition of their housing, lack of basic utilities, poor environment, the threat of fire and eviction, poor education and health.

We need to listen again to the voices of the poor I provided in Chapter Five. Lampung (p122), squatted on public land to build her own shelter with another hundred families along the railway track. Their housing conditions were very poor and their lives were at risk. She was evicted by threat of fire four times. The poor in my study lack utilities, or are having to pay more than the going rate for these. Jaew used to ask the District Office to provide a water supply for herself and forty other families. They just wanted one truck of water each week, but they were ignored. ‘We are a small community, disorganised, no right for election vote, so we lack power to negotiate with politicians to help us’ according to Jaew (p123).

Other crucial aspects of poverty are health and employment. Education is officially free but there are costs for education in terms of school uniforms, educational materials, and school meals. Although Somsong (p124-125) understood that education was very important for her children, they dropped out from school because she could not continue
to support them. They needed to seek jobs to help their family. My study group had an inability to access health care, or the minimum low standards of care provided were not effective. The nature of Malee’s and her husband’s work on the garbage tip led to a serious injury. Lack of funds prevented proper treatment which then led to permanent disability and therefore loss of earning power in the family (p117-118). Here we see the dangers to health of working on the streets or on rubbish tips. Work in the informal sector is often dangerous and/or unpleasant with long hours. It is also unreliable. Boonchai (p120-121) made a living by selling garlands on the street with the assistance of his wife and children. He earned little and it was an irregular income. Sometimes he cannot sell because of the rainy season, and sometimes the government decides they do not want sellers on the streets. The job is also at risk of road accidents.

The excluded poor are unable to access credit at a reasonable cost to fund improvements in their lives and escape from the poverty cycle, whether that means accessing secure housing, health, education or employment. Chalad (p121-122) knew that he had no credit to access a formal loan. He decided to borrow money from local lenders despite the interest being at what he nicely describes as a shark rate. He had no alternative access to other resources.

Do the findings show that there were real differences between the two groups of the included and excluded in both their experience of these hazards of living and in the way they coped with these problems if and when they occurred? My respondents in the savings group did experience problems with housing. The conditions of their housing are below standard and in poor condition, like the excluded. Some of this group experienced eviction and fires. For instant, Panee (p109-110) was evicted by the landowner. Fire broke out in the community and destroyed her house and others. She lost everything in the fire. Then she moved to another slum nearby where she cannot gain access to water supply and electricity. She used an illegal connection to a neighbour’s house outside the slum at a far higher rate cost per unit than the Electricity Authority of Bangkok Metropolitan. She was now facing eviction with other 90 families in her new slum residence. Employment and education are also problems for the included group. Somjit
was evicted from another slum. She was a street vendor with a low income. Her husband was an unskilled labourer and unemployed. She had three children, who were all studying in schools.

The costs of education are very expensive. Next year, my first son will be finishing high school. He wants to study in higher education. I think I cannot support him. My income is insufficient for expenses in each month.

This group also experienced health problems. As Papai (p111) said, ‘Our income is never enough for food, education and health of my children’. There are also other problems in the community such as environmental problems, drug problems and gambling.

The living situations between the included and excluded are therefore not different. But for the ‘included’ people it is the responses to their situations that are different, because their social capital had developed to an extent which was qualitatively different to those who were not in a savings group. In the west, Vinson (2004:8) has reported on international and Australian studies that detail on how communities with similar high rates of social disadvantage have variables which result in different abilities to respond to such hazards. These are described as the presence of a community attribute called collective efficacy. This is a combination of social cohesion and social control (italics in original).

Just how did those in the savings groups in Thailand use their resources to deal with the hazards of living in the slum? Panee was able to meet with an NGO community worker and learn how people in a similar situation dealt with the issue. A decision was made to set up a savings group. Through the power of the group they can negotiate with their landowner to delay eviction. Then through this power they were able to access funds for housing problems, income generation, healthcare and education for their children. Somjit also benefited in a similar way by help from an NGO community worker. After deciding to use the savings group for income–generation activities, a decision was made, via the social and economic capital the group provided, to extend the savings group objectives to include those similar to Panee’s group. The variable in the experience of these slum dwellers appears to be an NGO community worker. However, Papai’s group developed
by knowing of the experience of the other groups who had been helped by the NGO community worker. Boonserm’s (p111-112) group moved to deal with environmental problems being handled by the savings group arranging for cleaning up their community and having an anti-drugs campaign.

Why were the excluded not able to improve their poor conditions and develop social capital in similar ways? The conditions of savings groups require the members to be able to save regularly in order to repay the debt. This implies having a regular source of income. The excluded seem to agree that they need a regular income for participation. The savings group members also mention problems in members coming from different places and living in the slum and not knowing or trusting each other. Knowing each other well and building trust is very important for a savings group. Getting to know each other and building trust requires time and motivation. The necessary element is time to attend meetings and thereby participate in the savings group. It is a resource the excluded seem to agree they do not have, because of their need to work. As to a possible absence of motivation, then the perception of savings groups by the excluded as maybe involving corruption or patronage is important to note. Given social structural barriers, some measure of access to social and reliable economic capital is obviously necessary to begin the process of change, without it the excluded will remain excluded.

Savings groups themselves do not always continue successfully. Lack of leadership, poor management and a lack of trust in the committee are cited as reasons for this by one savings group member. This points to the need for education/training for slum dwellers to successfully manage the resources that are available for their community. This also hints at something the excluded refer to: a perception that corruption exists in the committees of savings groups. One respondent refers to the way in which the social and economic capital created by savings groups is used to help friends and relatives of the members. This is likely to affect the motivation to join a savings group.

To further understand attitudes to joining and not joining we have to refer to Thai social structure in the form of hierarchy, centralisation of power and the individualistic and
competitive characteristics of Thai people. As I discussed in Chapter Two this leads to problems in achieving co-operation between NGOs communities or government organisations. Further, corruption under a patronage system may, as the literature suggests, be stopping the successful working of some savings groups. Here the negative aspect of social capital is excluding some of the urban poor. They may certainly be unable to join because they do not have the economic capital necessary, or the time to devote to the group. However they may also be unwilling to join because of perceptions about how social capital may involve corruption or patronage.

My findings are partly in line with those of the UCDO survey I reviewed in Chapter Two, which also found that credit and savings groups did work for those who were included, but for the poorest, they were ‘easy to find but hard to access’. Other findings, by the World Bank, have warned that the poorest members of society do not have access to microfinance services and that they do not join because of fears about repaying the loans, thereby increasing their debt burden (van Bastelaer, 1999). This fact was recognised by the government in creating Menu 5 under the Social Investment Fund in 1999. It was an attempt to provide assistance that was community-driven. The savings groups were the chosen vehicles rather than direct provision by a government department or NGOs. This was part of the government’s efforts to deal with corruption and inefficiency in the bureaucracy. However, many of the slum communities do not have a savings group, so they cannot access Menu 5. Even in the slum communities where a savings group operated, some committee savings groups members would have, as a first priority, consideration of helping families or friends of members of the savings group. This is an example of the problems inherent in achieving social capital in communities. Relying on the non-government sector, including community organisations, does not necessarily solve the problems of corruption and/or patronage associated with government organisations. Platteau and Gaspart (2004:1) point out that the recent turning away from top-down aid to community-based development risks the ‘elite capture’ of such provision by existing powerful groups in a target population.
As discussed in Chapter Two, for Menu 5, the politics of exclusion means that the poorest will be three times ineligible for help. Firstly, this is because of their status as being unemployed, handicapped, indigent, homeless children, disadvantaged children, battered women, patients with chronic illnesses. Secondly, a savings group may not be available in their slum. Thirdly, they are ineligible because it is the savings groups committees who decide who are eligible for benefits. As there are usually many people who would fit the criteria of Menu 5, choices have to be made as to who will benefit. The candidates for Menu 5 may not be contacted by the committee members when they survey the slum. If they are, in fact, included in the survey then a choice has to be made as to who is most in need. Moral evaluations may be made here as to the character of the applicants and also their previous relationship to them. As indicated by Boonserm’s comments (p111-112), some people may be involved in ‘antisocial behaviour’ and that makes them unsuitable for help. All discretionary benefits such as Menu 5 have problems in reaching the target group in the urban slums of Thailand.

6.6 A culturally sensitive solution?

Do savings groups act successfully to create social capital to enable the poor to achieve self-reliance? As I discussed in Chapter Two, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements believed that savings groups were one of the ways in which social capital for the poor could be built up. The necessity was to strengthen trust, solidarity and collective identity. My findings show this can occur. For example, Papai (p111) discussed her savings group, formed by 15 people who knew each other well, and how they had to build trust amongst the members. The initial savings group aimed to raise funds for income-generation and then extended to other social needs. However, the building of trust may also be lost in a savings group, according to Panee (p109-110).

There are costs in terms of trusting only one method of poverty alleviation in that the poorest are likely to be excluded. The negative results of social capital formation have also to be taken into account in a society with a social structure that is not fully democratic and remains vulnerable to corruption and patronage.
‘Self-reliance’ in the literature includes Thai family self-reliance. At the time of the crisis, World Bank research I reviewed in Chapter Two found that families did prevent members from falling into poverty. However, during the 1997 crisis 50 per cent of the urban poor had one extra person unemployed. Cousins were just one group among friends and local capitalists from whom the poor borrowed money (see UCDO 1999 in Chapter One:3). There is danger in characterising all slums as places of mutual helping and support. Being self-centred is also a possible attitude (Askew, 2002).

What do my findings show about family self-reliance for the urban poor? For Malee (p117-118), she had five children who had married and left the area. They do not give her any help. She says ‘I want them to help themselves’. My findings did not show whether the poor were supporting family members still living in rural areas. I discussed in Chapter Two that World Bank research showed that, although transfers of income from relatives was the largest form of help the poor could rely on, the 1997 crisis affected those in Bangkok first. Therefore they were restricted in helping their rural families. The respondents in my study were themselves unable to rely on an extended family for transfers of income. As Malee says, ‘My parents have many kids but they do not have any properties’. My respondents were likely to be living in a nuclear family in the slums, sometimes with the addition of elderly parents. Family self-reliance for them meant borrowing money from relatives as a first option and if this was not possible, then borrowing at high rates from other sources. Family members had to give up attending school and to go to work to help these families cope. As for Somsong (p124-125), poverty meant trying harder to find work and reducing expenditure, even though this might be for food This was the reality of self-reliance for these Thai urban poor families.

How effective are savings group schemes as the major way out of the poverty cycle? Do savings groups protect people from the insecurities of slum living or not? Rabibhadana (p139) points out that savings groups cannot protect the poor from lack of job security. My respondents mainly had no choice, because of lack of skills and education, than to work in the informal sector where job security is always unreliable. People in the savings group such as that discussed by Boonserm (p111-112) still experienced being unable to pay back the loans. Lack of job security is one reason for this. The ongoing lack of
security in tenure of the land is something a savings group cannot compensate for, either for the poor in savings groups or for the excluded. Both groups suffer from a lack of housing security. Those in my savings group respondents refer to ongoing problems with eviction. Panee (p109-110) sees the threat still hanging over her.

There are limitations therefore to the ways in which savings groups can alleviate the poverty cycle; they cannot prevent job insecurity and evictions. They can, however, help members to form groups to negotiate with land owners to resist evictions. Assisting by means of loans for education may help the next generation, and also health campaigns do deal with associated problems such as addictions. Income-generating activities may also be started off by such loans.

Are there ways of helping the excluded to be more like the included, or is social capital needed? My findings suggest that the poorest are in a cycle of exclusion and this can only be changed by assistance to achieve social capital in a number of areas, including education, health and employment. As social capital is created by savings groups that may also involve corruption and/or patronage, this may prevent the excluded from joining those who do benefit from this policy. For some such as Malee, now aged 65, the future is bleak without government assistance. The job market will never provide for her and her disabled husband. Her family provides no support. She is excluded from participating in the main form of poverty alleviation, savings group activities. For such people direct financial assistance and help with access to services will need to be given for the rest of their lives.

Social development theory is a western concept that has apparently been taken on by Thai policy makers. At the centre of social development theory is community development as an important way of achieving a country’s social development. For Thailand there has been added the importance of Thai cultural capital as contributing to social development. In practice this has meant relying on the strength of the Thai family and community, alongside an economic policy that will enable all to eventually benefit from capitalism. How appropriate is the theory to my respondents? My findings point to the costs and the contradictions of such a theory from the experience of the poor, and especially the
poorest. They have to deal with the lack of government help for their families and communities except in the form of loans, with a minimum of social assistance. Their experience of capitalism is more in terms of its costs rather than its benefits. They have had to move from the rural areas as jobs disappear and now have to rely on the city’s prosperity to earn a living. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Unger (1998) has pointed out, that the environmental and health and social costs of capitalism is something that Thai governments have been reluctant to deal with. My findings confirm that community development, if it relies only on the assumed strength of Thai cultural capital, will not achieve the self-sufficient communities participating in the benefits of capitalism envisaged by social development theory and emphasised by the present government. The question that arises now is how to help the poor deal with government economic and social policy.

What is taught in social work/community work courses? Does Thai social/community development academic and practice teaching emphasise self-reliance in terms of curriculum and skills? If the concept of self-reliance is central to social policy in Thailand then this is a valid question to ask of such courses. I will attempt to answer this question by examining the undergraduate curricula of the two well-established courses that produce social workers. From the theories that are taught we need to ask what skills are taught to put into practice the ways of helping, involving self-reliance, implied in these theories. We need to know if the Thammasat University Department of Social Administration’s motto ‘To help people to help themselves’ is realised in what they teach at the undergraduate level. Some history of social work education is necessary here.

6.7 Social work education in Thailand
Social work education in Thailand started after the authoritarian Prime Minister Phibunsongkram announced a policy of social welfare and social security in 1938 to strengthen nationalism. This aimed to eradicate what was seen as foreign domination, both from the west, as well as from the Chinese in Thailand. Nationalism aimed mainly to glorify the Thai state as an institution upon which people could depend. The policy was influenced by the English Poor Laws and the Prime Minister introduced the Beggary
Control Act in 1941. He established the Department of Public Welfare in 1944 to provide institutional care, for example, for orphans, the elderly and the disabled, and set up centres for hill-tribe people, and a land settlement scheme for landless people. In 1944, Prime Minister Phibunsongkram’s wife initiated a one–year course in social work that operated under the aegis of the Women’s Cultural Club. This was a group which organised charity for the disadvantaged. The course provided two curricula: a social worker certificate for social science graduates, or the equivalent; and a para–social worker certificate for undergraduates. In 1952 the Club invited United Nations specialists to be committee members in their curricula development. The social work courses were operated under the auspices of the club until 1957. All the trainees were government officers (Phongvivat, 2002:299).

The concern of setting up social work interventions to ensure the stability of the Kingdom was also obvious, as I have already noted (in Chapter Two), in the creation of the Department of Community Development, set up at a time, 1962, when there was concern for internal security in Thailand.

The Faculty of Social Administration at Thammasat University was established in 1954, to produce social workers for government service and promote social work education in order to meet international standards. The first undergraduate curriculum was adapted from a social work course in the United States of America, particularly from Ohio State University, from the United Kingdom and also from the Women’s Cultural Club. Firstly, the Faculty provided a two–year course for third–and–fourth year undergraduate students which later developed into a four–year bachelor’s degree in social work (B.S.W) in 1957. The faculty extended its course provision to offer a master’s degree in 1959 and the PhD in 1998 (Mongkolchaiaranya, 2004:2).

The second social work school was initiated in the year 1990 as the Faculty of Social Work and Social Welfare at Huacheiw Chalermprakiet University, the first non–profit private university in Thailand, established under the Poh Teck Tung Foundation, the Chinese philanthropic foundation which was registered in 1937 with the intention of benefiting the people of Thailand. The first curriculum was prepared by Professor Yupa
Wongchai from the Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University and associates (Phongvivat, 2002:299). The course aimed to produce social worker specialists in medical, industrial, emergency relief and generic social work in a four–year bachelor’s degree of social work (B.S.W). The faculty extended its course provision to offer a master’s degree in 1995.

The overall aims of the curriculum in the Community Development option at Thammasat University does state in Thai, that community development is a social science to work directly with people to promote and develop the capacity of individuals and groups in the community to understand causes and problems and find appropriate ways to respond to the real needs of individuals and groups in the community with equality which will help individuals and groups in the community to become self–reliant. The students who study in this Minor program in Community Development will receive knowledge, attitudes and skills that can apply to work with individuals and groups in the community and help them have a better quality of life. Community development is work which aims to develop individuals and groups in the community to develop their community in other aspects which will improve their environment (Thammasat University, 2002:117).

Huachiew Chalermprakiet University has an Educational Progress Report (Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, 2000:7), in English, that states in its description of the Faculty of Social Work and Social Welfare,

Due to the rapid social changes in Thailand, there is a great demand for professional social workers to work with individuals, families, groups, and communities who face social problems. The Faculty believes in the abilities, dignity, and rights of human beings. With the assistance of well–trained social workers, people can more effectively cope with their own problems. Therefore the social work program is designed to provide students with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and a code of ethics relevant to the social work profession in order to serve the needs of a changing society.
### Table 6.4: Social work curricula in Thailand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty of Social Administration</th>
<th>Faculty of Social Work and Social Welfare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thammasat University</td>
<td>Huachiew Chalermprakiet University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established in 1954</td>
<td>Established 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first curriculum adopted from the United States of America, particularly Ohio State University, the United of Kingdom and also the Women’s Cultural Club which invited United Nations specialists to be committee members in the curricula development.</td>
<td>The first curriculum designed by Professor Yupa Wongchai and associates from the Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W)

**The purposes of curriculum**
Aimed to produce graduate students who have knowledge, attitudes, skills in the social work profession to empower and develop the potential of individuals, communities, society and the environment that leads to developing quality of life, welfare systems and social development, including having abilities to work with academics and other professionals.

**The structure of curriculum**

| 1. General foundation subjects | 30 credits |
| 2. Specific subjects           | 102 credits |
| 2.1 Major social work          | 78 credits |
| 2.2 Minor subjects             | 24 credits |
| 3. Selective subjects          | 3 credits  |
| **Total**                      | **135 credits** |

#### Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W)

**The purposes of curriculum**
Aimed to produce social workers who qualify at standards with which they can work as a professional, and join together with academics, other professionals in social welfare organisations, both GOs and NGOs, with efficiency.

**The structure of curriculum**

| 1. General foundation subjects | 30 credits |
| 2. Specific subjects           | 106 credits |
| 2.1 Basic professional subjects | 21 credits |
| 2.2 Professional subjects      | 70 credits |
| 2.2.1 Theory                   | 48 credits |
| 2.2.2 Practicum                | 22 credits |
| 2.3 Specific interests         | 15 credits |
| 3. Selective subjects          | 9 credits  |
| **Total**                      | **145 credits** |
Table 6.5: Study plan for undergraduate social work students, Thammasat University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Semester 1</th>
<th>Semester 2</th>
<th>Summer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | General foundation subjects  
(Total 15 credits) | General foundation subjects  
(Total 15 credits) |        |
| 2    | SW211 Dynamics of human  
behaviour 3cr, SW212 Human  
brightness in changing society  
3cr, SW213 Social problems and social  
measures 3cr, SW222 Social work methodology I  
3cr, SO201 Basic sociology 3cr,  
LA269 Basic Thai law 3cr.  
(Total 18 credits) | SW201 Field visits and seminars  
3cr, SW214 Thai society and social  
development 3cr, SW221 Theory  
and principle of social development  
3cr, SW223 Social work method II  
3cr, SW224 Social work research I  
3cr.  
(Total 15 credits) | SW202 Field  
work practicum  
with agencies.  
(Total 6 credits) |
| 3    | SW311 Social work method III  
3cr, SW312 Social work  
research II 3cr, EC201  
Economics 3cr, AN201 Basic  
Anthropology, PS321 Political  
science 3cr and 1 selective  
subject 3cr.  
(Total 18 credits) | SW313 Social work methodology IV,  
4 selective subjects and 1 minor  
subject (If, for example, students  
choose Community Development as  
Minor Program, they can study;  
CD311 Theory of community  
development 3cr.)  
(Total 15 credits) | SW301 Field  
work practicum  
in community.  
(Total 6 credits) |
| 4    | SW411, 3 minor subjects (If, for  
example, students choose  
Community Development as Minor  
Program, they can study;  
CD312 Process of community  
development 3cr, CD313 Group  
and interpersonal competence  
3cr, CD314 Community and  
regional planning 3cr) and 1  
selective subject.  
(Total 15 credits) | 4 minor subjects (If, for example,  
students choose Community  
Development as Minor Program,  
they can study; CD401 Community  
development field practicum 3cr,  
CD416 Community Development  
Administration 3cr, CD417  
Educational transferring techniques  
3cr, CD418 Comparative study in  
community development 3cr.  
(Total 12 credits) |        |

Table 6.6: Study plan for undergraduate social work students, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Semester 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SW1033 Foundations of social systems and mechanisms 3cr, GE1003 World view and way of life 3cr, GE1013 Thai society and current world events 3cr, GE1022 Information technology for retrieval 2cr, GE1043 Thai and communication 3cr, GE1053 English for communication I 3cr, GE2103 Introduction to Economics 3cr. <em>(Total 20 credits)</em></td>
<td>SW1012 Introduction to logic 2cr, SW1022 Basic Anthropology 2cr, GE1032 Science and society 2cr, GE1063 English for communication II 3cr, GE1072 Physical education for quality of life development 2cr, GE2093 Thai politics and government 3cr, GE2123 Psychology and life 3cr, ST2023 Statistics for social science 3cr. <em>(Total 20 credits)</em></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>SW2043 Human development and change in society 3cr, SW2052 English applied for professional social work 2cr, SW2063 Professional ethics in social work 3cr, SW2073 Social welfare law 3cr, SW2083 Thai society and social development 3cr, SW2103 Social problems and social measures 3cr, SW2113 Introduction to social work 3 cr. <em>(Total 20 credits)</em></td>
<td>SW2093 Social Change and welfare systems 3cr, SW2123 Concepts of social work and Thai society 3cr, SW2133 Political structure and social welfare systems 3cr, SW2143 Supra system and social practice 3cr, SW2153 Principles and methods of social work practice 3cr, SW2163 Counselling in social work 3cr, SW2241 Field visits and seminars 1cr. <em>(Total 19 credits)</em></td>
<td>SW2256 Field work practicum 1 (placement with social work agencies in case and group work). <em>(Total 6 credits)</em></td>
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<td>SW3173 Principles and methods of community work 3cr, SW3183 Social work research 3cr, SW3223 Social work discussion 1 3cr, and 2 Specific interest subjects (If, for example, students choose group subject of disaster social work, the students can study; SW3532 Introduction to disaster 3cr, SW3543 Community campaign 3 cr.) <em>(Total 15 credits)</em></td>
<td>SW3213 Project writing, analysis and proposal in social work 3cr, 3 specific interest subjects (If for example, students choose group subject of disaster social work, the students can study; SW3533 Crisis intervention in social work 3cr, SW3593 Disaster management 3cr, SW3563 Resource mobilisation 3cr.) and 1 selective subject</td>
<td>SW3266 Field work practice in community work and community development. <em>(Total 6 credits)</em></td>
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<td><strong>SW4193</strong> Social Administration 3cr, <strong>SW4203</strong> Participation of social workers in social welfare policy and planning 3cr, <strong>SW4233</strong> Social work discussion II 3cr, and 2 selective subjects (Students can choose; <strong>SW4873</strong> Groups leaders 3cr, <strong>SW4883</strong> Stabilisation of the family in Thai society 3cr). <strong>(Total 15 credits)</strong></td>
<td><strong>SW4279</strong> Field work practice in area of social work interest <strong>(Total 9 credits)</strong></td>
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The curricula indicate that teaching social/community work seems to be based on a “shopping list approach”. As a case example I have given full details of the available choices that have to be made by students in the third year at Huachiew Chalermprakiet University. The intensive nature of the theoretical teaching means the students have always the examinations in mind which take place twice in each semester. They may feature multiple-choice questions. At Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, for example, when the students are introduced to social work subjects in the second year they spend up to three hours in each of seven subjects each week for fifteen weeks. The topics range from Introduction to Social Work, Human Development and change in society, through English Applied for Professional Social Work to Social Welfare Law. All this teaching comes before the students have any direct experience of social work practice. The demands on social work staff to teach in such a range of courses are heavy. Staff may also wish to introduce alternatives to three–hourly lectures and multiple–choice examinations. In this it is likely they will encounter resistance to change, both from staff and students. The demands on students may be just as great as on the staff, as students are unlikely to have chosen social work study as a priority for their undergraduate degree. Further, they will not, at the beginning of the second year, have had any practical knowledge of the situations faced by social work clients.
In the first two years there is little time for independent study and thereby an opportunity to model the importance of self-reliance may be lost. By the third year students may choose to do a course called Independent Study, and teachers may encourage them to work independently on a topic. A study of some of the actual course descriptions gives little indication that self-reliance, as an organising concept, is central to the teaching content for these undergraduate students. I have provided three examples (written in English) below.

**SW2083 Thai society and social development**
The ideology, concepts, principles, process and strategies of social development groups’ role, social institutions in supporting people’s standard of living and developing social environment including Thai social structure and social mechanisms which determine role, status and behaviour of social members and determine the social norms of behaviour as well as concepts and roots of Thai social development.

**SW3173 Principles and methods of community work**
The principles, approaches, strategies of social practice in community level. Planning, intervention, locating and mobilising resources. How to motivate and maximise community participation in prevention and solving the problem, including social intervention for developing community members.

**SW3266 Practice in community work and community development**
Train students to understand and develop their skills in studying and analysing community needs and problems both in rural and urban areas. Train them to utilise the general knowledge, principles, methods and techniques in collecting data, analysing community problems, difficulties and needs, encouraging and developing community potentiality and locating resources etc., in order to prevent, solve and develop community.
As Huachiew Chalermprakiet University does not have Community Development as a choice for specialised study I have selected some examples from the Thammasat University course descriptions (in Thai) where I assessed that an emphasis on self-reliance, especially related to poverty, might be found. These are in the areas of community development, with associated substantive fields of study such as gender, people’s participation, human rights and Thai society, and social justice. Of course, it may be argued that such concepts should also be central to the teaching in Criminal Justice, Health Social Work, Labour Welfare or Educational Social Work. In other words, all of the Departments represented in the Faculty of Social Administration should include these concepts. This is an investigation I cannot pursue here.

**SW339 People’s participation in social development**
Study of concepts, principles and the importance of people’s participation in individual, group and community levels as a basic human right, process and methods to stimulate consciousness and encourage opportunities for people’s participation and also support people’s participation without violence.

**SW477 Gender perspectives in social development**
Analyse the development of the role of men and women in social institutions, factors that have influenced in creating roles, duties and responsibilities of the gender. Adjusting the roles to the changing society to help men and women participate in the development process with efficiency, and emphasise gender as a key role in development of Thai society.

**SW479 Human rights and advocacy**
Study of concepts, meanings, the origin of rights and human rights, International Declaration of Human Rights, development and movements in different kind of rights. Policy and implementation in advocacy, including roles of social workers in advocacy, promotion and protection of the rights of clients/people, especially disadvantaged groups to help them receive appropriate welfare.
**CD311 Theory of community development**
Study of structures and characteristics of community, meanings, philosophy, concepts, principles and the purposes of community development, problems and processes of social change. Applying social science to community development by considering its relationship to cultures, economic, social and political.

**CD312 Process of community development**
Study of community development in urban and rural communities. Study of structures and community development methods that are used in the present, including study of obstacles in applying the community process to the different types of communities. Creating, using and developing the process of community development and also analysing the process of community development implementation.

**CD401 Community field practicum**
Study of Thai urban and rural communities. Applying the method of community development to understand the basic systems of community such as cultures, economic, social and political. The students need to live in the community for ten weeks and provide a report after finishing the practicum.

**CD418 Comparative study in community development**
Study project to analyse the philosophy of community development projects in Thailand and other countries. Evaluation of the failure and success of these community development projects by looking at the organisation, management, planning, administration and methods of implementation.

Both Universities’ course descriptions then are not explicit in their emphasis on achieving self-reliance, although there are hints at this underlying philosophy in statements such as in Thammasat’s SW339. This section refers to people’s participation in social development, with the reference to participation at individual, group and community levels as being a basic human right. Further, it mentions using the process of consciousness-raising to encourage opportunities for people’s ‘participation without violence’. In the Huachiew Chalermprakiet University course description SW 3173 there
is reference to motivating and maximising community participation. There is no specific reference to the problems of poverty in any of the courses in either University.

6.8 What issues arise from this review of the curricula?

As in all course descriptions, the individual teachers will interpret the curriculum according to their own knowledge, experience, skills and values. A detailed look at these processes, and the curricula as a whole would, for me, make for important further research. This is especially as I am aware that some western university courses, in a variety of subjects including social work, have given up teaching in a discrete subject area in favour of issues–based or problem–based approaches.

At present I am aware that teachers in Thailand may be very skilled in utilising the time and the motivation available to teach in innovative ways, despite the crowded curriculum. Overall the teachers would say that it is attitudes in Thai society to the profession that represent the main difficulty. If we turn to the wisdom of someone who has worked in community development and has taught at both universities at a senior level for many years, some glimpse of the process can be seen.

Both social work curricula at Thammasat University and Huachiew Chalermprakiet University aim to produce well–trained social workers… with those who need counselling for self–dependent living happily in society. …Social attitudes to social work need to be changed. At present, Thai society is still short of social workers. In comparison, the ratio of social workers to the population is 1: 25,000. Thus, the main work done by social workers that is seen by society is helping people in emergency events such as distributing food, clothes or money to victims or disadvantaged people who are in adverse fortune as with disaster, and arranging counselling for solving various problems. In theory, social work is a profession to assist human beings to live in dignity and help disadvantaged people to help themselves sustainably, and in equal opportunity. That usually takes a long time and sometimes requires continuous help. In reality, social workers cannot achieve this goal. This is the challenge the social workers have to try to win. …’ Dr Apornpun Chansawang (for full text of interview see Chapter Five:148-149).
Here we see the aims, and the constraints which prevent these aims from being activated in practice. This implies there may be a point of conflict in translating theory into practice. How do the theoretical inputs meet the demands of practice experience in Thai communities? The Huachiew Chalermprakiet University course description SW3266 refers to using skills to develop communities during a ten-week placement. It is usual that these placements are not in the many urban slums close by the University, but in rural areas. In my experience this is a difficult time for many of them. The students need to adapt themselves to poor communities in both rural and urban areas. They live with poor families in those communities which are selected by community development workers in their areas of responsibility. The majority of the students came from middle-class families who can afford to send their children to study in the university. They are not used to difficult living conditions. In this new environment, the students need to struggle with an uncomfortable life. They may stay in a house that lacks facilities. These factors make them feel depressed or frustrated. Everyone understands that if they fail in the placement it means that they cannot complete their degree, so the students try hard to adapt themselves. Some students may take a few weeks, or the whole ten weeks. Some do not adapt, and return home from the placement. Meanwhile, the students need to conduct a community study, analyse the problems and needs of the people in the communities, plan the project, implement this and evaluate. This is an assignment, applying knowledge they obtain from the classroom to the real communities. The field-work supervisors will monitor the students by field visits and discuss with them as individuals and groups. The students may learn and improve in different skills and areas. In general, these students do learn more about the poor and their problems. Some students cannot experience practice in all community development processes expected in theory, due to the limitations of time, motivation, lack of resources or skills. Their attitudes toward the poor may be changed after they understand their situation. However this does not mean that they will decide to work with the poor after graduation.

Relating the real community’s situation to what they have been taught in the university is not easy, and relies upon the motivations of the student and the skills of the supervisor
and the field visitor. In reality each field visitor may have to take care of twenty-five students placed up to three hundred kilometres from the university. They may all be in one district but in separate villages, each ten to twenty kilometres apart. Each individual student will therefore only see the supervisor for thirty minutes on two occasions during the ten weeks. My university has introduced additional group meetings midway through the placement so the students can present their findings to each other. At these meetings their supervisors will be invited to attend and comment on their findings. These supervisors are unlikely to be qualified in social or community work. They may have graduated in some other subject and received in-service training from the Community Development Department (under the Ministry of Interior). In the ten weeks the students are likely to see their supervisors three or four times.

From these impressions of the curricula of the two universities, supplemented by my experience as a Master’s student at Thammasat University, and now as a teacher, I tentatively conclude that there are many obstacles to producing BSW graduates, that is, those who would wish to work in an urban community where there are apparently such serious problems of poverty as I have reported on in this thesis. The course descriptions appear to place little emphasis on dealing with the structural problems of disadvantages faced by many groups in Thai society. These groups may not just include the poor but also the sick and disabled and those who suffer because of gender discrimination. The academic teachers will be aware that the overarching theme of Thai social policy is that people have to achieve self-reliance to cope with their problems. It is difficult to see how they can model such a concept whilst being expected by the university to teach such a crowded curriculum. This expectation also frequently extends to the students who are at the receiving end of such an educational experience. This is also an education that may be far from their first choice of study. As my interviews show, the teachers are very aware of the need for providing sustainable help for the clients, but there are few resources to achieve this, and instead only emergency assistance is available. In the field the students may experience frustration at having assessed needs but being unable to provide sustainable solutions. The skills needed, to help them live with and challenge the
compromises they have to make, may not be available, either from the supervisor or especially the field teacher.

The question that remains is whether there are ways of organising the teaching that would lead to producing students who can see that working with the urban poor could be one future positive choice for their careers. It is to this question that I turn in the final Chapter as I look at the practical recommendations I can make, derived from the conclusions to my study.