

Intersections between Civil Society, Insurgency, and Development: Case of the Subnational Conflict in the South of Thailand

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Abstract

This article discusses the nature of and challenges faced by civil society in subnational conflict areas when participating in development programs. Drawing from the case of the current insurgency movement by Malay nationalists along the Thai-Malaysian border, it analyses how civil society members at the village level interact with development programs by the state. Based on 100 interviews in 10 communities the data found that civil society behaviors are restricted and shaped by relations with insurgents and the state combined. Key findings are 1) civil society groups are caught between the state and the insurgents; 2) civil society members have aspirations and ideologies supporting nationalism; and 3) there are links between empowerment and the insurgency movement. The study finds civil society groups are fearful of both military (and the state) and insurgents. They have to continuously negotiate with both insurgents and the state to protect their lives and livelihoods. The article provides these policy recommendations 1) shift discourse from separatists to nationalists; 2) shift discourse from villagers to citizens; 3) have sound communication plans; 4) have sound participatory approaches; and 5) conduct political dynamic mapping for every project on the ground. In addition, it argues that it is important to accept the political nature of development programs in subnational conflict areas.

Keywords

insurgency, empowerment, Southern Thailand, civil society, development, subnational conflict

INTRODUCTION

Most do not realize that since 1992 there have been at least 26 subnational conflicts in Asia (Parks et al. 2013). It is estimated that the number of people affected by these conflicts is over 131 million (Parks et al. 2013). These conflicts are mostly ethnic-based conflicts along international borders and are usually part of unfinished nation-state building processes since independence. Examples of such are seen in Myanmar, Aceh in Indonesia, Assam and Kashmir in India, Baluchistan in Pakistan, southern Thailand, and the Mindanao in the Philippines. These conflicts last on average 45 years (Parks et al. 2013).

Subnational conflicts have their own distinct characteristics. These conflicts are often considered as domestic issues where foreign governments are not welcomed to interfere. Subnational conflicts are dissimilar to traditional development issues such as basic utility like water and electricity, education, and infrastructure, where development assistance (a form of interference) is highly welcomed.

Furthermore, conventional protocols and international treaties related to peace building and maintenance between nation-states do not apply either. The parties in conflict do not have equal status in the international arena. These conflicts are often between a smaller (natural) nation situated in or dominated by a more powerful (natural or constructed) nation-state. The more powerful nation is usually the people of certain ethnicity that controls the central government and state military forces. These conflicts often erupt in borderland regions of the nation-state (Wucherpennig et al. 2001).

These distinct characteristics suggest that civil society in these areas face certain challenges that civil societies in general do not face. For instance, an all-Burmese youth group promoting traditional music in Yangon would not face the same challenges as a Karen youth group promoting traditional Karen art and music in Myanmar's Karen State. In the midst of an armed conflict, they face limitations on how openly they can express themselves for fear of being labeled as siding with the insurgency movement.

Therefore, it is imperative for scholars and practitioners to make such distinctions and to closely examine civil society in these subnational conflicts to see how they can be better understood. There is also the need to understand relationships between civil society and insurgency movements. A better understanding will help governments and international donors work more effectively with civil society to solve or manage these protracted conflicts.

By using the case of southern Thailand, this study analyzes the challenges that civil society actors face in a subnational conflict with respect to development programs. The article aims to provide general policy recommendations to support

and foster civil societies in subnational conflicts.

This article is organized as follows. Definition of terminologies is explained in the first section, which includes references to existing literature. This is followed by a description of the southern Thailand case and the methods section. Key findings and specific analyses are then provided, which can be summarized as 1) civil society groups are caught between the state and insurgents; 2) civil society members have aspirations and ideologies supporting nationalism; and 3) there are links between empowerment and the insurgency movement. In the last section, before the conclusion, a discussion on policy implications is provided. Key recommendations include the need to 1) shift discourse from separatists to nationalists; 2) shift discourse from villagers to citizens; 3) have sound communication plans; 4) have sound participatory approaches; and 5) conduct political dynamic mapping for every project on the ground.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUBNATIONAL CONFLICTS

The term subnational conflict can be defined as “armed conflict over control of a subnational territory within a sovereign state, where an opposition movement uses violence to contest for local political authority, and ostensibly, greater self-rule for the local population. Armed violence may take many forms, as competition between local elites and inter-communal violence may be closely linked to the vertical state-minority conflict” (Parks et al. 2013, 12).

Parks et al. further state that “In most cases, the defining characteristic of the conflict is the presence of an armed political movement with ethno-nationalist motivations that is seeking greater self-rule through increase political autonomy from the central government, greater control of local resources and economic activity, and outright separation” (Parks et al. 2013, 11).

Ethno-political conflict is characterized by the struggle of a group of people based on their ethnicity, which is primordial, non-voluntary, and exclusive in nature (Marchetti & Tocci 2009). It can be said that the notion of ethnicity is a multiple concept that refers to a myth of collective ancestry (Horowitz 1985). Ethnic conflicts, defined broadly, are based on ascriptive group identities—race, language, religion, tribe, or caste (Varshney 2001).

In sum, the nature of subnational conflicts can include the presence of hard politics (governance, power, and autonomy); ethnic and identity-based narratives; interpretation of history; injustice and suppression; economic deprivation; social ills and problems. Table 1 below illustrates the subnational conflicts found in Asia

Table 1. Subnational Conflicts in South and Southeast Asia (1992-2012)

Country	Conflict Area	Ethnic Group	Active 2012	Duration (years)
Bangladesh	Chittagong Hill Tracts	Chittagong Hill Tribes	N	17
	Kachin State	Kachins	Y	51
	Karen State	Karens	Y	64
	Karenni State	Karenni	Y	64
	Mon State	Mon	Y	64
	Rakhine State	Arakan	Y	64
	Shan State	Shans	Y	60
	Chin State	Zomis (Chins)	Y	24
India	Assam	Assamese	Y	33
	Assam	Bodos	Y	18
	Kashmir	Kashmiris	Y	65
	Manipur	Manipur	N	48
	Mizoram	Mizos (Hmar)	Y	26
	Nagaland	Nagas	N	65
	Punjab	Sikhs	N	65
	Tripura	Tripuras	N	34
Indonesia	Aceh	Acehnese	N	52
	East Timor	Timorese	N	24
	Papua	Papuans	Y	51
Nepal	Limbuwan and Khambuwan	Kiratis/Kosi, Mechi, Sgaramatha	Y	20
	Terai	Madeshi	Y	8
	Pakistan	Baluchistan	Baluchis	Y
Papua New Guinea	Bougainville	Bougainvilleans	N	7
Philippines	Mindanao, Sulu Archipelago	Moros	Y	43
	Sri Lanka	North/East Sri Lanka	Tamil	N
Thailand	Southern Thailand	Malay-Muslims	Y	110

Source: Parks, Colletta & Oppenheim (2013).

since 1992.¹

Conventional theories and studies of civil society today emerged out of Western Europe's context of state formation (Hobbes, Locke Ferguson), capitalism, class struggle (Hegel & Marx), and democratization (Gramsci & Habermas) (Marchetti & Tocci 2009, 202). Civil society groups have a variety of roles with respect

1 The author acknowledges that the current nature of conflict in the Middle East has differing qualities from other subnational conflicts. The analysis presented here does not claim to be universally applicable to such complex civil wars.

to its relations with government. In normal, non-conflict situations, civil society groups compliment and collaborate with government. In some situations, civil society groups advocate for change, protest and compete against the government (Boris 2006; Young 2006).

However, in subnational conflicts, where groups of people are contesting the legitimacy of the government or the people who are governing, the relationship between civil society groups and the government does not neatly fit into the above typology.

Studies of civil society in relation to conflict have been confined to the role of international non-government organizations (NGOs) in conflicts, and civil society as agents of change in places of post-conflict or in peace building mode. NGOs can be crudely divided into those that provide humanitarian assistance and those that do development work.

Among studies of international NGOs and their operations in conflict areas, many of them are on violence against aid workers. There is an underlying assumption or expectation that humanitarian work should be exempted from questions of allegiances and political motivation and that NGOs should not be harmed. However, this is not the case. Fast's (2007) study of NGOs that worked in Angola, Ecuador, and Sierra Leone found that NGOs that were inflicted with violence were those that 1) carried out multiple types of activities and provided material aid; 2) they implemented programs on the ground; 3) they worked with both sides of the conflict; 4) they integrated into the local community.

In reality, once an NGO steps into a conflict area, the notion of being neutral is highly difficult to defend. It has been argued that humanitarian neutrality in war and political emergencies is absurd (African Rights, 1994). Some also reject the notion of neutrality because it imposes silence upon violations of human rights (Plattner 1996). Thus, there is incompatibility between neutrality and justice of programs in conflict areas. The only international NGO that is recognized as being neutral is the International Committee of the Red Cross (Plattner 1996).

In studies of nationalism, civil society is labeled to be a negative agent in fundamentalist or nationalistic struggles (Marchetti & Tocci 2009, 205). Subnational conflicts are often overly simplified to be about a group of people wanting independence or self-determination, which entails separating away from the central national government. In addition, people who support such change are labeled as anti-state or pro-rebel or pro-insurgency. Irrespective of which sector civil society and NGO are working in—health, education, social, or environment—their choice of policy and programs can be used to judge their loyalty towards the state or the separatist movement.

In their study to link civil society and conflict, Marchetti and Tocci (2009)

argue that civil society does exist in failed states, authoritarian rule, and ethnic nationalistic conflict. They further assert that civil society is both an independent agent for change and a dependent product of existing structures. Civil society actors can be 'civil' and 'uncivil' actors carrying a variety of actions on the ground (Marchetti & Tocci 2009, 202). For instance, in a study of looting behaviors of war actors including NGOs in Somalia, Bakonyi (2010) categorized five types of looting: strategic looting; protest looting; leveling looting; poverty looting; organized looting; and rackets.

In this study, civil society is defined as an informal network of relationships in communities that is independent from the state (or government) and the business sector. The study takes a broad view to include formal associations and informal groupings of citizens with certain interests and goals. It also takes into account the fact that civil society groups that have genuinely emerged during times of conflict usually have a strong nationalistic undertone i.e. a dependent product of the conflict. Normally, they are not apolitical entities. These actors include village leaders, elected representatives at the local level, youth groups, women groups, elderly, and health volunteers.

The study of civil society, in this broad definition, and conflict is scarce. Exceptions include a study of civil society in the Hindu-Muslim riots in India by Varshney (2001). The study suggests that interethnic networks and intraethnic networks produce differing impacts on ethnic conflicts. These engagements are part of civic life and civil society groups for both formal and informal associations.

Marchetti and Tocci (2009) conclude that civil society in conflict can have three macro-impacts: fuelling conflict, holding conflict, and peacemaking. These impacts are also true in the southern Thailand case. Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge that civil society in subnational conflict areas are shaped by the context they operate in. These include political structure, historical narratives, cultural and traditional values, and experiences of violence. In this context, it is a fallacy to narrowly define civil society in the conventional sense of being agents of positive change. However having stated this, it is equally important to acknowledge civil society's role and power to bring about positive change because they can simultaneously shape the context that they are in.

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN SUB-NATIONAL CONFLICT

In the field of development aid, there is valid and growing concern about how development programs on the ground affect the course of subnational conflict. Some studies have focused on the role of international aid and unintended consequenc-

es related to ethnic conflicts. For instance, in their study of development projects with respect to ethnic conflict, Herring and Esman (2001) articulated concisely that aid projects have distributive consequences and that turning a blind eye to the effects on the power equilibrium of different ethnicities can have tremendous negative consequences.

They assert that “however administratively rational the plans of agencies, aid is allocated and administered in a political context; considerations of ethnic territoriality, power relations, and patronage influence the effectiveness of development assistance even when evaluated on narrowly technical grounds” (Herring & Esman 2001, 3). They further state that in conflict areas “even in an expanding-sum game, relative gains may be more important than absolute gains” (Herring & Esman 2001, 7). More critical studies have argued how development aid can be very destructive in conflict areas where it propagates dependency, corruption, and violence. Examples of prominent studies include Maren’s (1997) work on aid in Somalia and Uvin’s (1998) work on Rwanda.

Furthermore, combatants and civilians are intrinsically mixed in subnational conflict areas (Slim 1997). Levine (1995) notes that combatants are not a distinct group, separated from the civilian population, but are fathers, brothers, and sons frequently returning to their homes. In such circumstances, women and children who have received aid are not going to refuse to feed their own family members. Thus, in reality, it is nearly impossible to safeguard resources for only the ‘good’ civil society members in subnational conflict areas.

Most existing studies use conventional discourse on *development assistance* that rests upon the nation-state as a unit of analysis (Herring & Esman 2001). However, in subnational conflicts, the legitimacy of the state is questioned by segments of the population, which is usually ethnic-based. Consequently, treating the government (or state) as a ‘partner’ in programs and policies, based on the new partnership approach for aid effectiveness (i.e. the Paris Declaration), will not answer the problem of ethnic-based grievances. This is especially true when the politically dominant ethnic community is a demographic majority, where the government can privilege its constituents by formal majoritarian democratic processes (Herring & Esman 2001, 5).

Whilst there are many common problems between development programs administered by government and by NGOs, regardless of where the funding comes from (national or international funds), there is no short list of recommendations from scholars and practitioners to improve development assistance with respect to ethnic conflicts. Common principles include 1) avoiding conflict and ensuring peaceful coexistence; 2) achieving equity or rough distributional justice; or 3) simply to do no harm to any ethnic community (Herring & Esman 2001,

244). More specific recommendations are such as following the principles of 1) the search for common interest; 2) divisibility of projects, as opposed to one large project; and 3) producing interdependence between ethnic communities (Herring & Esman 2001, 248).

Particularly widely accepted is Mary Anderson's (1999) book *Do no harm: How aid can support peace—or war*, which provides accounts of how aid can aim to build capacities for peace. It puts forward the “Analytical Framework for Assessing Sources of Tensions, Dividers, War Capacities, and Connectors and Capacities for Peace in Conflict Situations,” a planning tool for practitioners to assess the impact of their work and programs on peace and war capacities. Her study has since influenced fundamental principles of development aid in general conflict zones, which is perhaps not specific to subnational conflict areas.

In response to the criticisms, in the last decade we have witnessed development programs moving away from direct redistribution of resources to empowering individuals and capacity building for organizations and communities (See such as Eade 1997; Nussbaum 2000). This capacity approach includes training programs and opportunities provided to segments of the population to learn skill sets such as leadership, project management, financial management, computer, negotiation, communication, consensus building and decision-making skills. This approach aims to improve people's capacity to govern, which in turn should help localities to develop. Supporters of this approach assert that it should help to remedy competition for resources among ethnic groups in conflict. This approach is a hybrid of humanitarian assistance and development working together with the rights-based approach. It is often found in protracted low-intensity subnational conflict areas.

It can be argued that these capacity-building programs do influence power dynamics in a community, not limited to conflict areas. Doubts are now cast on how effective these development approaches are for subnational conflict areas. Questions that have been raised include how empowerment programs affect ethnic power dynamics in local areas and in turn how that influences the direction of the subnational conflict itself.

THE CASE OF SOUTHERN THAILAND

To describe any subnational conflict in a few sentences risks the potential to overly simplify a highly complex problem. Many studies already exist covering the nature, characteristics, and causes on the subnational conflict in the south of Thailand (i.e. Askew 2007; McCargo 2008; Satha-Anand 2009; Liow & Pathan 2010).

Therefore, this article will not discuss the details and nuances of the conflict but will describe the key features.

This conflict is an on-going struggle of the Malay-Muslim population in the far southern part of Thailand (along the Thai-Malaysian border) to gain greater autonomy from the Thai state. It has persisted for the last 100 years since Thailand began to form its modern nation-state. The region comprises of three provinces, Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and a segment of Songkhla province. More than 75 percent of the 1.8 million people in this afflicted region identify themselves as Malay-Muslims.²

The current wave of the insurgency movement started in 2004 when multiple acts of violence were staged, by both civilians and security personnel. Since then violent acts have erupted periodically which include drive-by shootings, car and motorcycle bombs, beheading, arson attacks, and counter attacks by security personnel. So far, over 6,000 lives have been lost in this conflict.³

The Malay people's struggle for self-determination and governance clashes with the mainstream narrative of nation building for Thais that the central government in Bangkok is determined to create and sustain. Assimilation policies, inequalities, discriminatory judicial practices, and the highly centralized nature of the Thai government, fuelled the feelings of being oppressed and the lack of space for expression of grievances (Burke et al. 2013). This subnational conflict is typical of many ethnic conflicts where the ethnic region is far from the capital. The state's cultural penetration generally declines in remote areas, which contribute to the alienation of peripheral groups to be involved in the nation-building process (Wucherpennig et al. 2001).

The conflict has never truly made top political agenda for national politicians and government leaders. Partly due to its mysterious nature (i.e. insurgents not publicly taking claim for the violence, not making public demands, and not making their identities known), but mainly due to the larger national-level political crisis that Thailand is going through. Since 2006, Thailand has had two military coups and more than five prime ministers. Hence, not only is the region peripheral with respect to geographical location, the issue of the Malays is also considered peripheral on the political agenda. Across the border is Malaysia, which has the potential to play an important role in facilitating peace. Interestingly Kuala Lumpur also sees its northern part of the country, where stricter interpretation of Islam is practiced, as peripheral to the national government's agenda.

2 Thailand has a population of 67 million. Over 90 percent of which are Buddhists.

3 For more information on violence levels see Deep South Watch at <http://www.deepsouthwatch.org>. This organization also has the list of formal civil society organizations working in the conflict area and its analyses.

According to Burke et al. (2013, 2) this case is representative of subnational conflicts in Asia for the following reasons. It is a protracted historically low-intensity conflict, contestation over the state that is limited to the region (rarely do insurgents operate outside of the conflict zones), fragmented insurgent groups, very limited international involvement, and extreme difficulties in providing assistance from outside due to government sensitivities.

DATA & METHODS

This study draws data from a large-scale research project spearheaded by the Asia Foundation in 2012-13. The project aimed at understanding the effectiveness of international and national development programs in the subnational conflict areas of southern Thailand, Aceh of Indonesia, and Mindanao in the Philippines. The author was one of the lead researchers for Thailand.

From the larger dataset, for this study, 100 in-depth interviews conducted in 10 sub-districts in the three provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani were used. The interviewees were village heads, women group leaders, elected members of sub-district councils, youth group leaders, religious leaders, natural leaders, school principals, and respected elderlies. These actors are key drivers of civil society at the most primary unit of administration in the country, villages, and sub-districts. Formal and informal interviews were also conducted with registered civil society groups, on the ground and national level NGOs that worked in the local area. Each interview was transcribed into 3-6 pages of text.

Due to the nature of the subnational conflict, it was important to take into consideration a set of sensitivities during the data collection process. These were the interviewers' ethnicity, safety, and well-being. Some local researchers were unwilling to interview military, police, and certain government officials due mainly to fear and distrust. Some villages were in very remote areas that required an overnight stay. The author is a Thai from Bangkok. Thus, it was important for her to be accompanied by Malay researchers from the region to gain trust from the interviewees. Almost all of the interviews were conducted in Thai language, with a few exceptions that were conducted in Yawi, a Malay language dialect used in the region.

The focus of the interviews was on a set of government-led or military-led programs that had a variety of goals. Table 2 below shows the list of programs investigated. These programs were chosen based on its wide scale effort—covering every district in the afflicted area. They were on-going programs that people could relate to and had opinions on.

Table 2. Development Programs Studied

Program	Description
Panop	Aims to help households make a living by giving \$150 dollars (US) worth of goods per household
Panom	Aims for village development by letting village committees decide on how to use \$6,700 dollars (US) funding
Masjid Sanjai	Aims to combat drug abuse by empowering religious leaders to educate and talk to vulnerable families
Jalannabaru	Aims to bring awareness on drugs and rehabilitate former drug addicts

Funded partly by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the first two development programs were led by the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC)⁴ and were implemented by officials from the provincial, district, and village levels. The goal of Panop was to raise the income and standard of living for about 110,000 households. The English name is Development of Peaceful Communities Using Self-Sufficiency Philosophy. The Panom funding was aimed for villagers to decide together on how to use common funding given by the government. Many used the funding to build infrastructure such as mosque walls, water tanks, and community meeting halls. Internal Security Operations Command 4, Narcotics Control Board, and Tanyarak Institute-Ministry of Health initiated the Jalannabaru project. This project aimed to curb drug addiction by sending youths at risk to training camps for seven days. The training camps are run by military and are located near to military bases in the three provinces. Lastly, the Internal Security Operations Command 4 together with imams in each village organized the Masjid Sanjai project. The aim of this project is to combat drug abuse among village members by empowering imams and mosque committees to monitor households that have drug users. The idea is to use mosques as the main infrastructure to gather youths. During Friday prayers, imams are to preach on the danger of drugs. As of 2013, there were 650 mosques that have participated out of the total 2,035 in the region.

⁴ The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) is a special agency setup specifically to coordinate and take lead on all policies regarding the three southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. It also coordinates closely with religious groups, community leaders, the military and local governments in the region.

KEY FINDINGS

The following are key findings related to civil society and community members' reaction towards the programs.

1. These programs have strict templates for implementation, which leads to the lack of flexibility to customize projects to fit community and household levels' needs. For example in the Panop project, certain households were provided with livestock such as chickens, catfish and goats regardless of the fact that they did not have land nor knowledge on how to raise livestock. Many of these households ended up selling the animals the very next day.
2. Most projects lacked transparency. Civil society and community members did not know how decisions were made and did not understand why some were asked and some were not asked to participate in these programs. Some people were skeptical about how funding has been used for the programs. For example in the Panop program, in certain locations, the officials mandated that the money had to be used to buy goods and farming equipment only from certain shops.
3. Some of these programs have the underlying assumption that a certain level of participation from community members will help curb corruption. However, there were incidences where community members were accused of cheating and unfairly distributing resources. Interviews reveal that village heads and local government officials are not accustomed to setting agenda, managing deliberations and discussions. They often complain that community members' needs are very diverse. They are often not successful at drawing consensus and creating positive space for deliberations. In addition, fake signatures are often used to support projects at the village-level. This is due mainly because of conditions set by the programs, such as the mandate to have at least 70 people in the public hearings or the mandate to have the signatures of the four main pillars (local government, village head, religious leader, natural leader) of the sub-district. Public hearings end up being either charades or space for only the like-minded. Thus, it is not surprising that there is a perception of elite capture in some communities.
4. Some local communities perceive these programs as an effort by the government to gain more legitimacy. However when the program fails and corruption or dishonesty is detected the state's legitimacy further deteriorates.

The above findings are not unique to southern Thailand. These problems are often found in development programs in many developing countries around the world. However, what makes all the above very alarming is the fact that these civil society actors and community members are constantly deciding whom they trust and whom they are loyal to. This is a crucial aspect in ethnic-based subnational conflict where the state wishes to minimize insurgency supporters and sympathizers. Thus, there is a need to further analyze how civil society groups in such a setting feel and think.

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

These points below highlight how the treatment and understanding of civil society in subnational conflict areas should be different from conventional methods.

1. Civil society groups are caught in between the state and the insurgents

In subnational conflicts, civil society groups and community members have to negotiate with both the government and armed groups. They are reluctant to say no to government initiatives for fear that they will be labeled anti-state and be understood as part of the separatist movement. At the same time they are afraid the insurgents might think they side with government. Thus, civil society and community groups are put in a very difficult position.

This is exactly what happened in Thailand when the military gave color codes to villages labeling them as red or green. Red villages were uncooperative with the state and possibly siding with the insurgents. The basis for such labeling was unclear but interviews alluded to the possibility that cooperation with government programs was used as one of the criterions.

Among the programs studied, Masjid Sanjai was one of the more troubling programs for civil society actors. The program asks community members to identify people in the community who are associated with drugs, including those who produce, sell, smuggle, and consume. The idea was to empower imams and mosque committees to monitor households that have drug users and to use mosques as the main infrastructure to gather youths. During Friday prayers, imams are to preach on the danger of drugs. Households that are 'clean' receive white flags, provided by the military, to put up front, showing that they are drug-free.

The imams who were asked to take the lead on this project were hesitant to participate. One imam said he knew who sold the drugs in the village but of course, cannot turn his own friend in to the military. Understandably, the imam

fears for his own safety. He needs to calculate how he wishes to maintain his relationships in the long run. He would rather not interfere with armed groups or powerful individuals. The imams take caution not to upset the power-balance of the insurgents, drug dealers, and other strong groups. Striking the wrong cord can easily cause them their life. At the same time, they do not want to be labeled as not cooperating with the military either. Some imams expressed this frustration that they are caught in between. In some villages everyone simply voted for every household to be clean without actual investigation. In other places community members simply exchange votes i.e. 'you vote my family is clean and I will vote that your family is clean too.'

Other problems were also found with this program. They include the slowness in transfer of funds to the mosque committees from the military and the rigidity of the process on how to work with community members. For example, each household had to contribute money to a drug-combating fund and public referendums were held to publicly identify households that had drug users. This program has profound impact on how community members, imams, and insurgents view the Thai state. It feeds into some of the skepticism that the state is not genuine about its intention to solve problems.

Similar to the above project, Jalannabaru project also aimed to combat drug abuse. Male youths at risk were selected to attend a training camp for seven days. The youths were selected either through volunteering or they were nominated by leaders of the village. The camps are run by the military near military-bases in the three provinces. Those interviewed expressed mixed feelings towards the effectiveness of this program. Some youths were able to stop using drugs, while some continued. Unfortunately, many youths who went through the camp had stigma of a drug addict, forbidding them to find good work despite the fact that some of them voluntarily went because they wanted to learn more about the harm of drug abuse.

After the training, youths are asked to start Jalannabaru clubs in their communities. Some youths expressed fear in working with the military. Some community members were unhappy that their youths were too close to the military. This happened in one sub-district, where the youth leader felt pressured from the military to select other youths to join the camp training, while the youths (his friends) were not willing to go. He was caught in the middle until finally he resigned from the club.

Some community members thought this in-camp training method was the wrong approach. Some said funding should be used for scholarships, some said the imam should play a bigger role, and some disagreed in using religion to solve drug problems. One interviewee said he thought the program was security related

i.e. preventing youths to join the insurgency by using the drug program as a tactic. Because this program is run by the military, there is probably an implicit goal to unlock the link between drug abuse and recruitment of insurgents. Such a tactic makes it very dangerous for youths involved in the project.

Another example is the Panop project where households distributed animals, farming equipment, seeds, and fertilizer worth \$150 dollars (US). The village head and his team held the responsibility of identifying who got what. While many community members took part in receiving this free handout, many criticized the program for wasting budget and held views that the program does not help to solve long-term economic problems.

Interview data reveals that some community leaders are coerced to distribute the goods and animals to members of the insurgent group first or else their safety is not guaranteed. Despite rules to have public participation processes to decide on who gets what and how, some communities that had a strong insurgency influence held private closed-door meetings to negotiate and decide before the actual public meeting. Some village heads were fearful; thus, they reluctantly gave-in to the insurgents. Many leaders did not want to take part in the decision-making process but they were also afraid to be suspected of siding with insurgents. Thus, they reluctantly cooperated with the state. This puts community leaders in the middle and it was no surprise that some leaders were not supportive of the project at all.

In addition, as briefly mentioned in the key findings, the project quickly failed for some communities where there was no tradition of raising farm animals. Some interviewees expressed that since most community members worked in rubber tree plantations, raising catfish or goats is not aligned with their existing skills. Some suspected corruption within the project, saying that officials buy animals and equipment at a higher price than the market. Also, some animals such as cows were not suitable for the humid hot climate of the South and died soon after being delivered to the community members. These negative views towards the project fuel further deterioration of state-society relations.

2. Civil society actors have ideologies and aspirations

In areas of subnational conflict where communities are close-knit, people tend to know each other on a personal basis. This is especially true in more rural and agricultural-based societies. This study found that many people in the region of the far south do feel the sense of suppression and wish to freely express their Malay identity more freely. Some do support the idea of having an autonomous province for the Malay-Muslim population. However, most would not support the use of

violence to achieve such a goal.⁵

Founded on the situation that civil society groups are often caught in between combined with the natural feelings of nationalism, civil society members sometimes end up helping insurgency group members in one way or the other. Some interviewees shared these experiences with the research team. For example a well-known woman activist, who commands respect from the government and military due to her ability to convene people, once allowed for a fugitive to hide in her house. She decided to do so based on her ideologies and aspirations for the local people. We also heard from a village head that openly shared how he asked for insurgents to leave his village area because he did not want trouble with the military. He did not report them, of course, but allowed them to move on freely.

Based on observations and interviews with more candid individuals, many seem to know someone personally who is in the insurgency movement. Thus, in the first point above, insurgents command provision of goods and services from development projects by threatening village leaders in some cases; however, in this second point, some village leaders willingly ration for insurgents and insurgent supporters first. This is not meant to judge the choice of action among civil society actors. But it is meant to emphasize the need to accept that in subnational conflict, it is rational to expect that civil society actors do have ideologies and aspirations. It is inevitable for these actors to take a stand and take sides.

The last example of how civil society actors can also hold aspirations of independence or self-governance is of a man who the author encountered. He once took up arms and trained with other fighters. After a while, he left the group to pursue higher education. He is now a scholar and has started an NGO that aims to provide alternative discourse on the autonomous movement. This individual's case illustrates the reality that people's beliefs and behavior is complex and dynamic. Events and people's behavior cannot be fully understood in snapshots. The fact is people in general do have aspirations and ideologies, and their wishes need to be acknowledged.

3. Links between political empowerment and the insurgency movement

Anderson (1999) points to the reality that in many conflict settings there is no right side to support. She argues that NGOs should empower the local population and organize the local community. Many development programs have objectives to empower certain segments of community members, such as women, youths,

5 For more discussion and statistics on support or non-support of violence, see Asia Foundation's 2013 report *The Contested Corners of Asia: Subnational Conflict and International Development Assistance—The Case of Southern Thailand*. Available at <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/1219>. Accessed on April 13, 2015.

and minority groups. In subnational areas, these empowerment programs are useful for they allow new groups of people to rise and take part in the political sphere of the community. It helps to break old monopolies and hegemonies at the village, district, and provincial levels. In this study, it was found that some youths and women who have been empowered do take up leading roles in their communities.

In one of the villages that were studied, it was found that the newly elected village head was relatively young, in his mid-twenties. This is uncommon as most village heads are forty to fifty years old. This particular young man was a youth leader in his teenage years. He has been of service to the community, we were told. However, we were also told that he enjoyed support from the separatist group, which in essence, endorsed his leadership. Without such support, it would be difficult for a very young man to win an election over more mature and experienced community leaders. Interviews with him revealed how he grew stronger as a leader through the various empowerment programs offered.

In another case, a women's group that grew more powerful because of various skills-based development programs they went through became the community's swing vote during village head and local government elections. These development programs included baking and cooking skills, sewing skills, and marketing skills. It would not be inconceivable that members of the insurgency movement would try to win hearts and minds of these empowered women groups.

It was also found that there is a systematic bias that hinders the advancement of civil society groups among Malay-Muslims. Communities with retired teachers or bureaucrats often have an advantage in setting up women's groups, community funds, and elderly groups. In gaining access for funding to support these groups' activities, people need to be able to speak and write Thai bureaucratic language, aside from knowing how the bureaucracy works. Often these retired bureaucrats are Thai-Buddhists. The lack of this capacity in other places stems from the fact that not many Malay-Muslims enter the public sector. This is not surprising given that in similar cases, members of certain ethnic groups who were initially privileged by education and employment opportunities benefit more from market-based competition or programs that do not consciously allocate resources based on ethnicity (Herring & Esman 2001). Examples include the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Jews in Russia, and the Chinese in Indonesia (Herring & Esman 2001).

In sum, development programs of any type—distribution of resources or empowerment/capacity training programs—do highly influence the direction of the conflict. Its effects on ethnic-based political dynamics are associated with trust towards the state, social capital among community members, and livelihoods of the families and civil society involved in the policy or program. Many development and security projects in the South are accompanied by opportunities for greater

access to resources and power for families, government officials, military personnel, insurgents, religious leaders, local government officials, and volunteers. While it can positively influence development in localities, these opportunities for resources and power also contribute to friction and conflict among the actors involved in the design and implementation of the projects. Serious cases of mistrust and conflict stemming from these projects lead to further deterioration of state-society relations, and state legitimacy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

Based on the above findings, this study suggests a few key implications for practice for development programs in subnational conflict areas.

First, the discourse should shift from separatists to nationalists. It is crucial to move away from judging civil society as not being representative of the popular constituency. Often civil society actors and active citizens are portrayed to be propagators of narrow self-centered political interests or they are shamed and punished for being separatist movement sympathizers. While there is the need to promote peaceful means, it is also important to respect citizens' aspirations and the pride of their identities (perceived, created, or real). There is very little use in cornering civil society actors to choose sides and to categorize them as 'for' or 'against' us. This black and white categorization of people does more harm than good in subnational conflict areas.

This point is echoed in Duncan McCargo's (2008) criticisms of schemes by military forces. He states "the security forces proved terminally incompetent in their day-to-day operations, and persistently failed to grasp that most Malay Muslims were neither "good" nor "bad," but simply trying to survive in a murky environment where they feared antagonizing either the state authorities or the burgeoning militant movement" (McCargo 2008, 185).

Second, the discourse should shift from villagers to citizens. Once there is no 'us' and 'them' mentality, it would be easier to see people as citizens. Citizens have aspirations for their homeland and society. They follow sets of ideologies, formed through education and associations in religious, cultural, and societal settings. Most development programs funded internationally or by the state, treat people as recipients and beneficiaries of aid rather than active citizens, who have rights and obligations. People are called 'villagers' (in Thai-Chao Ban) and 'subjects' (in Thai-Rasadorn). These words should no longer be used due to their inferior connotations. Citizens' views and aspirations should not be taken lightly.

Third, there should be an acceptance of the fact that civil society behavior is

restricted due to safety reasons. Most projects do not have formal and continuous mechanisms for monitoring and providing direct feedback from citizens. Citizens feel fearful of speaking out directly about how they feel about the projects. Thus, aside from setting feedback mechanisms that people trust, a thorough communication strategy and effective implementation of the communication plan is another vital aspect of development programs. Often when citizens do not receive or have full access to information regarding the project, they will misinterpret the intention of the project, which in turn can fuel feelings of hostility towards the government. We experienced the difficulty of accessing information on these development projects first hand through this research project.

Fourth, it is not enough to merely require civil society actors to participate in the decision-making process of the programs. It is crucial to determine the type of participation, level of participation, timing of participation, duration of participation, objective of participation, follow-up on impact of participation, monitoring of participation, checks and balances of participation, which are all important components to help think issues through carefully. A proper accountability system must be in place at the local level to ensure that decision-making and participatory processes are sound.

Last, and most importantly, political dynamic mapping and forecast ethnic dynamic impact assessment must be undertaken prior to starting any project. It is also important to do continual assessment of the dynamic during the implementation and evaluation stages of the program. This recommendation is not new, Herring and Esman (2001, 13) concluded from their study of seven cases of conflict ranging from Kenya, Sri Lanka, and India to Russia, that development analysts need to pay more attention to grounded qualitative assessments of ethnic conflicts. Other scholars have also raised this concern. However, its practice has been relatively limited.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed how civil society actors face certain challenges unique to a subnational conflict. The study was guided by a basic proposition that civil society and community members on the ground can be victims of violence, and at the same time can also be indirect supporters of insurgents and violent acts. The findings of this study suggest the fallacy that development and humanitarian spheres can be separated from political spheres that is at the heart of all subnational conflicts.

As long as civil society is strictly defined as people who are ‘civil’ or ‘for

peace,' the true picture of the complexity of people's aspirations and challenges in subnational conflict areas can never be fully captured. Insurgency movements are made up of thinkers, political advisors, family members, and neighbors, in addition to fighters who use violence. The bottom-line is the civil society should be engaged and nationalism and strong nationalistic ideals that many civil societies are built upon should be accepted. If people are respected and treated as citizens, there is a higher chance for people to develop constructive civic mindsets and 'act civil.' Thus, policies should treat people in the region as equals, as citizens, as opposed to trying to segregate civilians and insurgents, especially in development programs.

Civil society is part of the political sphere of any community, regardless of the community's democratic nature. It is erroneous to expect and assume civil society groups to be apolitical in subnational conflict regions. Any type of intervention, such as empowerment programs, will have an impact on the political dynamics of the community. Thus, we have to accept the fact that any kind of intervention in a community is a political action, which will always have some level of political consequence. It is, thus, misleading for governments, international NGOs, and donors, to insist that their development programs and policies are neutral and non-political in nature. Once you step into a subnational conflict area, everything you do will be related to the conflict, in one way or the other.

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