

NHDR Write-Up: VDA Practitioner Course on Human Development

NHDR of Thailand in 2007: *Sufficiency economy and Human Development*

By Radhika Behuria

Thailand enjoys the status of a middle-income country and is on track to achieve most of the MDGs. Despite stable economic growth and social progress, stark inequalities remain, outlining much of the existing development challenges. Incomes are skewed leading to large pockets of poverty, and the provision of essential services varies greatly based on geographical location. Growing pressures exist on the environment, and family and community life is strained by tribulations of migration and urbanization. The recent political instability has also resulted in low political participation and growing mistrust in the government systems.

Given these challenges, the Sufficiency Economy (SE) philosophy was formulated by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The SE addresses the human development (HD) challenges in a comprehensive manner, by helping communities, corporations and governments to maximize the benefits and minimize the negative impacts of globalization. The SE is seen as a 'survival strategy' providing empowerment and resilience in a world of economic uncertainty and environmental threats.

The NHDR analyzes development indicators in eight important aspects of HD of: Health, Education, Employment, Income, Housing, Family and Community Life, Transport and Communication, and Participation. It outlines complementarities between the concepts of HD and SE, both being grounded in long-term efforts and concerned with overall quality of life and opportunities for people, with concepts of sustainability and empowerment being central.

The NHDR has been an important tool for influencing policy and creating the space for more in-depth analysis of development. The policy implications of the NHDR for the government relate to developing participatory and transparent government processes. It also outlines the need to integrate principles of HD and SE into the public administration plans in order to spread the provision of services to people in a more equitable manner. The NHDR also focused on the private sector by making it a part of the solution to some challenges that globalization poses on people and the environment. It advises on the adoption of values of resilience, responsibility and respect and seeks to promote responsible corporate citizenship. UNDP plays a major catalytic role in supporting initiatives which emerge from recommendations of the NHDR, in promoting MDG-Plus analysis and monitoring at national and provincial levels; using participatory planning and policy-making methodologies to strengthen local governance and; community-based sustainable resource management.

In my opinion, unstable governance systems, widespread corruption and the lack of a modern educational system lie at the heart of the social, economic and political problems which have risen. To institutionalize the principles of HD and ground them into the national fabric of Thai society, a longer-term perspective needs to be set in motion. Efforts to make the public aware of and interested in good governance and anti-corruption measures need to be scaled up. The governance structure needs to be equipped with more transparent and accountable policies. There is also a need for a larger civil society base which plays an active role as a watchdog – holding the government accountable to its people. It is imperative that the national educational system is redesigned to meet the demands of 21st century Asia and that the youth become more involved in development issues.