

Peace-building Partnership Fund: Findings and Applied Learning

Background

The secessionist movement in Thailand's southernmost provinces is one of the oldest and deadliest sub-national conflicts in Southeast Asia. After more than a decade of dormancy, violence escalated in the early 2000s. The ethnic separatist insurgency has since claimed over 6,000 lives, injured almost 11,000 people, and continues to negatively impact the socio-economic and mental health of all residents in the area. Trust and confidence among people and institutions at all levels of society have been eroded.

An estimated 80 percent of southern Thailand's¹ population of two million is ethnic Malay and Muslim. The region, although not Thailand's poorest, ranks below the national average on several key development indicators, particularly education, and is poorer than the immediately neighboring, predominantly Buddhist provinces of Thailand. This long-standing conflict derives primarily from limited political voice, perceived economic discrimination, and the struggle of some Malay Muslims to maintain a distinct ethnic-religious identity and local autonomy.

The Thai government has invested substantial resources, both civilian and military, in the conflict-affected southern provinces. Initial development investments consisted primarily of injecting capital through large infrastructure projects to improve logistics and integrate the region's local economy into the nation. Since 2005, the Government has focused its efforts towards winning the "hearts and minds" of the local population through village development and community-level livelihood activities, as well as victims' compensation payments, education assistance, and skills/-capacity development programs. These additional investments have stressed the capacities of local level institutions.

¹The conflict-affected region comprises the three southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat and four districts of neighboring Songkla province.

The civil society sector in southern Thailand is relatively weak compared with other areas of the country, but since the resurgence of violence it has emerged as an important contributor to peace-building efforts. Fractured communities, mistrust between local citizens and state officials, and a lack of 'space' to advocate peacefully for reforms to government policies offer opportunities for engagement with civil society.

A still small but increasing number of civil society organizations in the south are active in delivering services, particularly to underserved and vulnerable groups; strengthening community resilience through improving local leadership mechanisms; and networking and high-level advocacy.

Continued weaknesses, including limited capacity, lack of funding, poor coordination, incomplete strategies, combined with public ignorance of the sector, however, impede its potential.

In response to a request by the Government, the World Bank mobilized grant financing through the State and Peace-Building Fund to first study and then pilot ways to deliver local assistance in Thailand's southernmost provinces. The Piloting Community Approaches in Conflict Situations (CACS) Project, implemented from 2009 to 2013 by the Local Development Institute (LDI), sought to develop culturally appropriate approaches to local development that created opportunities for increased interaction within and among conflict-affected communities and between communities and the state apparatus through collective action to strengthen the foundation for peace. To achieve this goal, the project financed grants through two facilities or 'windows'. Block grants to villages funded local development activities identified through a participatory, community-driven development process. This area-based approach was complemented by issue-focused Peace-building Partnership (PPF) grants to civil society organizations and their networks for innovative approaches and partnerships that promoted trust, peace and development.



This note is one in a series of brief, operationally relevant pieces meant to inform a broad range of stakeholders – including government, civil society and international institutions - about the design, implementation and results of the project as partnering organizations strive to adapt and adopt the approaches piloted and inform the government's local development efforts. Based on evidence from several sources, including project progress reports, supervision missions, the project's database, and a qualitative evaluation conducted in late 2012, this note presents an overview of emerging findings and lessons learned from the first phase of the project's Peace-Building Partnership Fund grant component, and their influence on the follow-on Expanding Community Approaches in Conflict Situations (ECACS) project currently being implemented.²

CACS Project – Peace-building Partnership Fund

The conflict analysis that informed the design of the Peace-building Partnership Fund (and other project components) recognized the important potential contribution of civil society to long-term peace in the southern provinces, but also the limited strength of the sector. The study revealed that the capacity of local civil society organizations and their networks restricts their support for local development activities, engagement in policy dialogue, and the promotion of peace in southern Thailand. To help achieve the overall project goal of building 'space' for increased interaction, the PPF sought to strengthen the capacity and extend the reach of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the conflict-affected areas.

The PPF assumes that a strengthened civil society is likely to contribute to peace-building through two channels: (i) instilling a sense of community by working together to improve well-being through support to local-level initiatives such as livelihoods activities, the formation of savings groups, and the management of public goods; and (ii) stimulating participation in discussions around key and sensitive policy issues, such as decentralization. The Peace-building Partnership Fund used a multi-step process to award grants (see Figure 1).

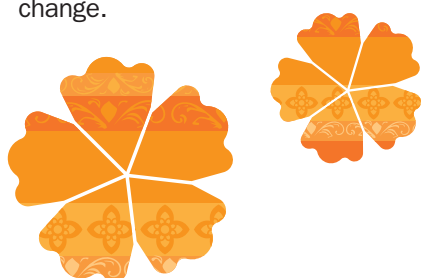
²The findings of the project's Community Development Grant component are covered in a separate, complementary knowledge management note.

Figure 1: PPF Grant-making Process

To help reach targeted organizations³, the project created a database of eligible and active organizations in the southern provinces to which it then directed its outreach efforts using a variety of media. Interested CSOs and their networks (CSNs) prepared and submitted proposals to the local project office. Proposals were then screened by the project's provincial coordinators for alignment with the Fund's objectives and adherence to its principles of simplicity, broad-based participation and group decision-making and transparency. Project Reviewing Committees, comprised of LDI management staff and a network of experts and advisors in the southern provinces, appraised proposals for the participation of beneficiaries, inclusivity, feasibility, community contribution, transparency and sustainability, and voted to approve select proposals.

In addition to grants, LDI through the PPF also provided training and implementation support to civil society organizations, primarily in operations and project management, as well as intensive consultation to improve the efficiency of working processes and address obstacles. Extensive knowledge management activities promoted learning and the exchange of experiences and lessons.

Implementation over the three-year period adjusted to fit the context and early experience. During the first 15 months, the PPF focused on the distribution of grants to a diverse set of recipients spread across the target areas as described below. At mid-term, recognizing the limitations of such an approach to reaching project objectives, the strategy shifted from supporting many small civil society groups to financing a more select set and focused efforts and budget on aiding networks of civil society organizations with greater potential for affecting change.



Emerging Findings

Overall, the first phase of the PPF through its support to civil society organizations and networks made a significant initial contribution to the process of strengthening the capacity of local CSOs to plan and implement a range of peace-building activities, including the delivery of conflict-related social services (e.g., trauma counseling, legal aid). The project succeeded in enhancing public awareness in the south of the importance of civil society and of the nature and costs of the conflict in other areas of the country. Civil society networks demonstrated promising potential to become effective mechanisms for expressing local views and grievances in a non-violent manner, and to serve as platforms for exploring governance issues and options for eventually resolving the conflict (e.g., decentralization, education and language, rights, women and peace, and injustice).

³Organizations eligible for PPF grants could be either registered or unregistered, but had to have at least ten persons, a proven record of good management, and at least one year of experience implementing development activities in the target area.

Table 1: Diversity of grant activities

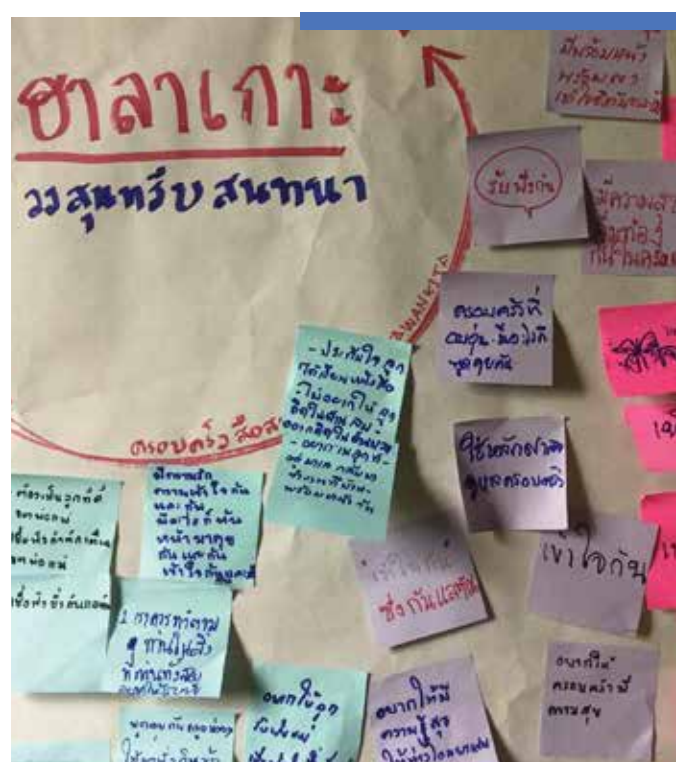
FOCUS AREA	TARGET GROUP				TOTAL
	Children/ Youth	Women/ Widows	CSO/CBO	Community members	
Health, drug rehabilitation	2	0	0	0	2
Education	4	0	0	0	4
Livelihoods	1	3	0	0	4
Savings groups	0	0	0	1	1
Natural resource mgmt	2	0	1	1	4
Networking	1	1	2	0	4
Leadership development	0	0	1	0	1
Media	1	1	0	0	2
Local research	1	0	0	0	1
Community strengthening, faith and tradition	2	0	0	0	2
TOTAL	14 (56%)	5 (20%)	4 (16%)	2 (8%)	25

PPF Activities

Between 2009 and 2013, the PPF provided a total of about US\$275,000 to 25 civil society projects aimed at strengthening local grantees and promoting interaction and trust, particularly between citizens and the state. These grants were widely disbursed across a diverse set of organizations benefiting differing target groups (see Table 1). Issues ranged from initiating networks to increasing public communication and information, promotion of local culture and education to natural resource management. Grant activities involved 114 groups covering 98 communities across 92 sub-districts in the targeted areas. All were aimed at helping lay a foundation upon which peace could be built.

In addition to these grants, the project also developed and strengthened the capabilities of 3,535 key local leaders (55% of whom were women) through training and learning forums to enhance their roles in the future development of the region.

Civil society organization grants. Grants to small and disparate civil society organizations, many of whom had not previously received external support, provided them opportunities to expand their beneficiaries and develop their capacities. The number and variety of grants complicates aggregating or summarizing the outcomes of the diverse set of activities implemented. Box 1 describes several examples of projects seeking to advance peace by bringing people together through different activities.





Box 1: CSO grants brought people together

ACADEMIC CENTER FOR CHILDREN AFFECTED BY THE UNREST (TADIKA SCHOOL)

Tadika schools, run by and located in mosques, are found throughout the three southern provinces. Volunteers (often women), teach Islamic religion and Malay to primary school-age children. The goal of the PPF-financed project, implemented by an NGO (Bunga Raya) comprised of 20 young with diverse educational backgrounds was to integrate the teaching of Islam with general knowledge subjects using improved teaching methods and learning activities to expand students' perceptions and world views - important for and peace-building. The Bunga Raya team gained the cooperation and support of parents, local leaders, and sub-district officials. The successes of the first round of activities inspired expansion to other communities.

BALUKA ISLAMIC SAVINGS GROUP PROMOTION FOR HIRE PURCHASE

The Savings Group of Ban Baluka, founded in 2002 with 8 members, grew to almost 200 members in 2012. As savings accumulated, the group used the joint capital to purchase consumer goods to rent them to members. In line with Islamic principles, profits were realized by marking up the prices of goods loaned (not interest charges), and distributed as dividends to members and vulnerable people in the community. The PPF grant was used to further develop the group's plans to evolve into a Community Credit Union, share widely their experiences with interest groups throughout the sub-district, and learn from exposure trips to and exchanges with similar groups in other areas.

DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF YOUTH NETWORK ON FOREST CONSERVATION

With an area of about 5,120 hectares, the Budoh Sungei National Park stretches across the three southernmost provinces. To protect the rich eco-system that serves as a source of livelihood for neighboring communities, the Raks Pa Budoh Youth Network, comprised of four youth conservation clubs, spans Muslim and Buddhist communities. Two PPF grants focused on developing and strengthening the network, and opening public space for Muslim children and non-Muslim youth to meet, work and learn together about the common purpose of natural resource conservation. The exposure and activities expanded their interactions. Buddhist monks and Islamic imams both supported the youth activities. Partnering organizations provided valued advice and inputs.

An important benefit of the grant process to project implementation and the achievement of results was that it allowed LDI to learn about relevant issues in the conflict areas, identify and engage with local leaders, and assess the

capacity of local level civil society organizations, many of which were newly formed. This learning was critically important to formulating a broader strategy for engaging with the sector.

Civil society network grants

Recognizing that it was more effective to advance the work of CSOs by building their institutional strength and relevance through support to networks of civil society organizations, the PPF guided and financed the establishment, strategies, workplans and activities of select civil society networks – the Civil Society Council of Southernmost Thailand (CSCST), the Women's Network of the Three Southern Provinces, the Youth Network and the Natural Resource Management Network - through intensive and continued engagement. As a result of the project, CSNs both provided support to their member organizations and communities, and also empowered local voices that increased the scope for collective advocacy for policy changes. The Civil Society Council offers a particularly compelling example of the important role such organizations can play in the peaceful development of the south (see Box 2).



Box 2: Strengthening civil society through networking

Founded in 2011 with 20 members - each recognized leaders of groups working on different issues (e.g. cultural identity, media, education, youth, women, legal recovery assistance, and natural resource management), the Civil Society Council of Southernmost Thailand has four main aims: (i) to enhance the capacity of People's Organizations; (ii) to set a common direction for problem solving in and the sustainable development of the conflict-affected area; (iii) to exchange knowledge and experience with and coordinate and support all membership organizations and networks; and (iv) create public space for people and organizations across the public and private sectors. Their strategies advocate policy change and the reduction of violence.

The PPF provided two grants to the CSC. Activities focused on the sharing of experiences and lessons learned and capacity-building to enhance common strategies and public deliberation. Outputs included the production of a 'social road map' identifying council member organizations and their networks and partners, enhanced decision-making processes and more openly democratic discussions.

The Civil Society Council seeks to increase the voices and power of people in the peace process. The opening up of public space has allowed local people to raise to the council their concerns and issues, particularly relating to the injustices incurred, and thus reducing distrust and the potential for violence. The council has articulated a clear vision and strategy for fostering cooperation, peace-building, learning and empowerment among civil society organizations in the region. The network is widely viewed as being open and neutral, and its activities have received recognition by the government, the security agency, SBPAC, NGOs and the media. Select CSC members have been appointed as representatives to committees investigating cases of human rights violations and injustice. Support to its membership has increased their capacity and skills to improve the prospects for moving forward in a collective, coordinated approach. Policy proposals on decentralization and peace-building developed through a series of consultative forums have been widely communicated and disseminated to the public.



Outcomes

Initial results of the pilot phase of PPF support are beginning to emerge in three main areas: increased interaction, improved information and understanding, and enhanced voice. All are considered important pillars of the foundation for peace.

1. Increased interaction

Through its financing of civil society organizations and their networks, the PPF created space for increased interactions among multiple groups in the conflict-affected areas. The project supported creative and innovative ideas that brought together diverse groups, such as Muslim and Buddhist community members and students.

Although such inter-communal tensions are ongoing and merit attention in specific areas, the main fracture behind the conflict and nature of the violence is state-society relations. The PPF worked to improve relations between local government and communities with some evident success. The project provided opportunities for local government officials with limited access to volatile areas to provide support to non-governmental organizations and communities in these areas, particularly for livelihood-related activities. All activities were implemented with the involvement of local government entities, including the Southern Border Province Administrative Center. Officials from the sub-district, district and provincial offices of line agencies (e.g., Health, Agriculture, Industry and Interior (Community Development), along with experts from academic and vocational education facilities in the south, provided valued advice and inputs.

At the village level, the project helped foster partnerships between formal and religious leaders and their organizations benefiting community members.



2. Promoted understanding

The project's attention to sharing experiences and learning through informal working groups, information dissemination, training activities, field visits and larger forums enhanced knowledge and understanding among a wide range of government agencies and civil society organizations active in the southern provinces. These 'spaces' or opportunities to learn through experience enhanced understanding among people, communities, civil society, government and other development partners.

Through the capacity-building program, participating organizations gained knowledge and skills in proposal writing and administering projects themselves. Participants report enhanced management and implementation capacities. Some organizations, as a result, were able to provide cross-support to others.

3. Enhanced voice and dialogue

PPF support to the establishment and operations of networks of civil society organizations with common interests working in the south has effectively increased the voice and bargaining power of local CSOs and improved the quality of the dialogue on issues related to building peace. The newly created public space for the discussion of sensitive and critical issues and sharing of differences may well reduce the potential for conflict. This approach responds to demands of community leaders in the conflict areas to broaden political discussion, increase local engagement in the understanding of the scope for reform, and presents a viable channel for achieving changes through non-violent and constitutional means.



Extending gains – Expanded Community Approaches in Conflict Situations Project

Building on the experiences, accomplishments and lessons of the pilot phase, the Expanded Community Approaches in Conflict Situations Project currently being implemented continues to seek to strengthen civil society organizations and networks for building trust and peace. The new project deepens its support for the four networks benefiting from the pilot phase by focusing strategically and sustainably on building their capacities; and (ii) about 10 civil society organizations, half of which demonstrated potential during the pilot phase. All of these organizations are working on issues related to peace-building, addressing grievances of the local population, and demand for good governance.

For each of the four civil society networks, financing of up to US\$ 40,000 per year is provided on the basis of the strategic plan developed during the CACS pilot phase. The new project also provides funding for the four networks to undertake “peace dialogue” events on key issues such as decentralization, education, role of women and peace, youth and peace, access to justice, transitional justice and reintegration of conflict-affected populations to enhance further the voice of civil society and social accountability in the region and to raise awareness about these issues for an eventual transition process. In addition to the reviewing committee from the CACS pilot which comprises representatives from government, academia and civil society organizations, the project also continues to draw upon technical specialists from various fields to provide guidance and coaching support to these organizations from the initial stage of proposal review. The committee reviews grant proposals on the basis of project relevance with increased emphasis on peace and trust building, feasibility and institutional capacity.

Conclusion

The CACS experience demonstrated the appetite, capacity and space for meaningful and constructive engagement on peace-building issues by civil society and civilian government agencies. By strengthening the role and status of civil society organizations and networks in the south to plan and implement a range of peace-building activities and creating a neutral space for discussion of issues critical to the peace dialogue, the PPF made considerable progress in laying a foundation upon which the follow-on ECACS project is building. This sustained engagement with the civil society sector is one critical input to the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

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