

**Combating Corruption at the Grassroots:
The Thailand Experience**

1999-2000

This report was written by Laura Thornton, Senior Program Officer and Country Representative in Thailand.

For further information, please contact:

Makram Ouais
Senior Program Officer, Asia
National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Fifth Floor
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone: (202) 328-3136
Fax: (202) 332-5576
E-mail: Makram@ndi.org

Laura Thornton
Country Representative
National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
Building One, 14th floor
99 Wireless Road
Pratumwan
Bangkok 10330 Thailand
Phone: (66) 2 256-7116 or 7117
Fax: (66) 2 256-7118
E-mail: laurat@ndi.org

Funds for the publication of this report were provided by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</i>	<i>i</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	1
BACKGROUND	2
Transition to Democracy	2
A New Mandate for Democracy	3
Corruption as an Obstacle to Reform	4
PROGRAM STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES	5
MEASURING IMPACT	8
PROGRAM ACTIVITIES	10
Buriram Province	11
Songkhla Province.....	14
Ubon Ratchathani Province	16
Chiang Mai Province.....	18
Phitsanulok Province	20
ASSESSMENT	22
Context: Threats and Opportunities.....	22
Songkhla Province.....	22
Ubon Ratchathani Province	23
Chiang Mai Province.....	23
Phitsanulok Province	24
Summary.....	25
RECOMMENDATIONS	25
APPENDICES	

Representative institutions are of little value, and may be a mere instrument of tyranny or intrigue, when the generality of electors are not sufficiently interested in their own government to give their vote, or, if they vote at all, do not bestow their suffrages on public grounds, but sell them for money, or vote at the beck of some one who has control over them, or whom, for private reasons, they desire to propitiate.

— John Stuart Mill

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) gratefully acknowledges the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) whose support enabled the Institute to carry out the programs described in this report.

NDI also acknowledge its local partners in Thailand without whom this report would not be possible:

Siriwan Chaiyana, Chiang Mai Province
Niran Kultanan, Buriram Province
Nirun and Surat Phitakwatchara, Ubon Ratchathani Province
Pichai Srisai, Songkhla Province
Prapoth Srited, Phitsanulok Province

In addition, NDI thanks the networks of committed individuals in each province who volunteered their time to carry out these activities.

NDI also acknowledges the work of the Institute's evaluation consultants, Naruemon Thubchumpol and Jaturong Boonyarattanasoonthorn, who contributed to this report.

NDI also thanks several people who served as informal advisers during our research stage of the program: Gotham Arya (Election Commission of Thailand), Pasuk Phongpaichit (Chulalongkorn University), Orapin Sopchokchai (Thailand Development Research Institute Foundation), Juree Vichit-Vadakan (Transparency International, Thailand), Amara Pongsapich (Social Research Institute), Narinchai Patanapongsa (Chiang Mai University), Saiyud Kerdpol (Pollwatch Foundation), and Chaiyan Ratchagool (Chiang Mai University). In addition, NDI thanks the many NGO representatives, researchers, academics, and government officials who provided input into the program through interviews with NDI and their publications on corruption.

Finally, many NDI staff members participated in this program: Jittima Srisuknam (Assistant Program Officer, Thailand), Supannikar Thewtanom (Accounting and Logistics Assistant, Thailand), Keith Jennings (Director, Citizen Participation Programs, Washington, D.C.), Makram Ouais (Senior Program Officer, Washington, D.C.), Sue Grabowski (Director of Publications), Sarah Malm (Former Field Representative, Thailand), and Susan Benda (Director of Democratic Governance Programs). Special acknowledgment is due to Jumana Dalal, (Program Assistant, Washington, D.C.), Shari Knoerzer (Intern, Washington, D.C.) and Raissa Tatad (Intern, Washington, D.C.) for helping edit and format the document.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Political corruption mars the democratic process in Thailand by undermining efficient economic practices, replacing formal rule of law with an opaque patronage system, and diminishing the influence of elected representatives. Many organizations have attempted to design technical solutions to the problem and develop policy prescriptions for the government. Few efforts, however, have addressed the role of civil society in combating corruption even though it is widely believed that only through the application of public pressure can sufficient political will be created to implement reforms and challenge the entrenched system of money politics. There is now hope that with growing citizen involvement, new efforts to curb corruption will have an impact.

In July 1999, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) began working with the People's Network for Elections in Thailand (PNET), a network of public and private organizations committed to election monitoring and democratization, and the Union for Civil Liberties (UCL) to strengthen local efforts to combat corruption in Buriram province. The success of the Buriram program, funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, prompted NDI to develop similar programs in four more provinces: Ubon Ratchathani, Phitsanulok, Chiang Mai and Songkhla.

NDI worked with local civic groups in each province to implement customized programs that addressed political patronage and money politics. Through public forums, citizens voiced their concerns about local issues and advocated change to their elected representatives. NDI's partners also implemented education programs through community radio, music, art, workshops and drama that described the responsibilities of elected representatives, and emphasized the value of policy oriented voting. Moreover, one provincial civic group hosted candidate debates in preparation for several local elections to encourage party accountability to concerns of the community and to

foster policy oriented voting. Finally, where safe, NDI trained its partners to monitor candidates for corrupt practices.

There is now hope that with growing citizen involvement, new efforts to curb fraud will have an impact.

NDI also carried out a rigorous evaluation process. The Institute hired two Thai consultants to help NDI's provincial partners measure the impact of their anti-corruption activities through a series of pre-

and post-activity tests, surveys, focus groups and self-evaluation exercises. The results of this evaluation helped NDI assess the program and shaped future programming decisionmaking.

All of NDI's provincial partners conducted village forums, which attracted a total of more than 11,000 participants. Participants represented diverse interests and a cross-section of Thai society—farmers, government officials, teachers, students, laborers, “fisherfolk” and slum dwellers. According to the pre- and post-forum tests administered by NDI's partners, participants attending the forum gained a better understanding of corruption and the role of elections, particularly Senate polls.

In some provinces, the anti-corruption groups also reported a change in the anticipated behavior of participants. More participants, for example, were willing to volunteer as election monitors after the forum than before. NDI's partners found forums most successful in those areas where people were already organized around a specific problem or issue. The groups differed about whether the forums were more effective in rural or urban areas.

NDI's provincial partners experienced difficulties with measuring their educational efforts. For example, the radio shows were difficult to evaluate, although popularity was determined in each province by measuring the increased number of call-ins and supportive letters to the stations. Other educational initiatives—music, art contests, dance, printed material—varied in popularity. The provincial groups measured these initiatives by recording public requests for the educational

materials and by conducting informal interviews. NDI's partners also organized focus groups to question network members about the most effective educational methods.

The groups did not extensively evaluate their candidate monitoring efforts because they were conducted in a restricted environment due to threats of violence. A complaints bureau established in Buriram, however, effectively informed the election commission of fraudulent activities and provided useful data to the commission. NDI's Songkhla partner stated that the candidate debates yielded a significant impact, measured simply from the extensive media coverage of the debates.

Overall, NDI's civic partners concluded that the anti-corruption program addressed issues relevant to Thais everywhere and strengthened their capacity as civic organizations to initiate activities at the local level. The tactics used during the program, such as village forums and media-based educational activities, also represented a new approach that emphasized the active participation of local citizens. Following the activities, NDI's partners in every province stated that participants understood more about corruption and the political process in Thailand, including the role of elected representatives.

In addition, the groups involved in the program reported a change in behavior among participants, as the number of volunteer monitors and citizen complaints about fraud increased in the areas where activities were conducted. Such conduct represents the kind of grassroots pressure that is needed to eventually curb corruption and reverse an entrenched system of money politics. While the evaluation process was unable to determine whether NDI's modest program motivated public officials to alter past practices, it did lead to a more informed public who were actively engaged in the political process on these issues.

In terms of attitudes toward corruption and politics, however, survey results found that most villagers still believe that politics is separate from their daily lives, a reflection that the patronage network remains deeply ingrained. The provincial

civic groups believe that significant progress on these issues was hindered by the very short time-frame of the program, lack of repetitious activities, and the limited number of activities.

BACKGROUND

Transition to Democracy

Thailand is one of Asia's oldest democracies and a key political and economic leader in the region. The country, however, has experienced uneven democratic development during the past 50 years. Since its transition from absolute monarchy to a democratic constitutional government in 1932, Thailand has alternated between civilian and military rule, experiencing a succession of *coups*, *coup* attempts, as well as unstable and short-lived governments.

On October 14, 1973, frustrated with the repressive authoritarian rule of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, students and faculty at Thammasat University held a protest to "promote democracy" and demand constitutional reform. In response, the police attacked and arrested lecturers and students. When a crowd of 100,000 Thais then held a peaceful rally in front of police headquarters, the police killed more than 70 protestors. Thanom was subsequently forced to resign, and the king called a National Convention of 2,500 delegates who represented a cross-section of Thai society—teachers groups, union members, farmers, businesspeople and religious leaders. This Convention paved the way for elections and constitutional reforms, and is seen by many as Thailand's first sincere step toward democracy.

Following the 1973 Convention, however, Thailand experienced three years of ineffective and powerless leadership. In 1976, Thanom was able to resume power, and his right-wing radical groups summarily executed students, representatives of peasant movements and other spokespersons for democratic reform. General Kriangsak Chomanan took power after a 1977 *coup* and called for elections in 1979, which ushered in a period of increased public participation in politics and a more stable parliamentary system. With the growth of civil

society in the late 1980s and early 1990s, elected politicians began to gain political strength, although military elites continued to play an influential role in the governance of the country.

In 1991, a *coup* led by military leaders General Sunthorn Kongsompong and General Suchinda Kraprayoon forced the resignation of elected Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan. The military charged Chatichai's administration with corruption and "lack of respect" for the military by failing both to appoint army leaders to powerful positions and to consult the military when naming a new defense minister. Under the two generals, the military established the "National Peace Keeping Council" to "restore order" in Thailand. The military leadership was short-lived, however, and civic leader Anand Panyarachun was appointed interim prime minister and scheduled general elections for March 1992.

The four leading pro-military parties gained a narrow majority of the parliamentary seats in March and offered the position of prime minister to General Suchinda who had not run in the elections. Despite a provision in the 1991 constitution that permitted a non-elected individual to serve as prime minister, Suchinda's appointment was met with widespread opposition that led to massive demonstrations and rioting. In a rare display of political involvement, Thailand's king intervened to stem the violence, and constitutional amendments were passed requiring that a prime minister be popularly elected. When Suchinda resigned, Anand took over again as the interim leader, and elections were called for September 1992.

In the September polls, four pro-democracy parties, led by the Democrat Party, emerged with a slim majority of legislative seats, and the party's leader, Chuan Leekpai, became prime minister. Chuan's coalition was weakened in 1994 when parliament rejected reforms intended to broaden Thailand's democratic system, including a bill to reduce the Senate, an appointed body, to one-third the size of the House of Representatives; and legislation to expand political participation by lowering the voting age from 20 to 18. The coalition fell in May 1995 following a land reform scandal. In the July 1995 elections, the conservative Chart

Thai party gained a plurality of seats in the House of Representatives, and its leader, Banharn Silpa-Archa, became prime minister. Banharn led a seven-party coalition known as the "Thai Development Front." This government was also short-lived. After a financial scandal, a hotly contested Bangkok gubernatorial election, and a series of political shifts within the coalition, Prime Minister Banharn resigned, and parliament dissolved in September 1996. The New Aspiration Party, led by Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, won a plurality of seats in the November 1996 elections, and Chavalit became prime minister as the leader of a six-party coalition.

A New Mandate for Democracy

In July 1997, Prime Minister Chavalit's credibility plummeted when his administration failed to stem the country's severe economic downturn caused by the ongoing Asian financial crisis. Faced with fierce public pressure, Chavalit was forced to resign in September 1997, resulting eventually in Chuan Leekpai's return to the position of prime minister.

The period since 1997 has been one of unprecedented transition for Thailand. Amid the Asian economic crisis, Thailand has attempted to implement radical political reform. Coinciding with currency devaluation, high unemployment, IMF austerity measures and student protests, parliament convened in October 1997 to draft the country's 16th constitution in 65 years. However, the 1997 constitution, unlike past constitutions, is a

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revolutionary document that holds the potential to change the face of Thai society. This constitution places political power in the hands

of the people and challenges the system of patronage and bureaucracy that have defined Thai governance for two decades.

The 1997 constitution created an autonomous constitutional court independent from parliament, called for an elected Senate, mandated civic participation in public policymaking through

required public hearings, and established an independent National Counter-Corruption Commission to promote government transparency and accountability. Moreover, the new constitution introduced significant changes in electoral processes and procedures.

The constitution switched the Thai electoral system from a block-vote, majority-plurality system to a semi-proportional system with single-member constituencies and party lists. Of the 500 members in the House of Representatives, 400 are now elected from single-member constituencies and the other 100 are chosen from party lists. The constitution established a unique system for electing the 200-member Senate. Senate candidates must be completely apolitical— not associated with any political parties or government agencies – and cannot campaign. In addition, ballot counting moved from local polling stations to specifically designated places in constituencies. Finally, the new constitution established an independent Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) to administer elections, which were previously administered by the Ministry of the Interior.

Corruption as an Obstacle to Reform

The constitutional reforms exist on paper only; their implementation and sustainability depend on profound changes in Thai culture, particularly the dominance of money and corruption in politics. “You cannot change corrupt practices by passing a law,” according to Pasuk Phongpaichit, professor of economics at Chulalongkorn University. “You need to change the way people think and behave, and that means generating public debate and exerting public pressure.” Corruption riddles governance, business and elections, and corruption scandals define the Thai political process. Yet, civic activism is weak, and many corrupt practices remain unchecked. Some Thai democrats are so angered by the current state of democracy in their country that they publicly express their preference for military rule over the existing “corrupt parliamentary system.”

Thailand’s patronage system, a complex web of patron-client relations, comprises many levels. In

sum, a “patron” provides protection, material goods and/or development to a “client” who, in return, gives the patron support and loyalty. A deeply embedded system of patron-client relations undermines efficient economic practices, replaces formal rules and laws with an opaque system of cronyism, and diminishes the value of elected representation. Elected officials within this system frequently represent money interests and local bosses at the expense of the constituents they are intended to represent. This patronage system continues to flourish in many parts of Thailand because the government often fails to provide sufficient services outside of Bangkok, and citizens turn to unofficial patrons to fill the vacuum.

Vote buying and patronage define the electoral process in Thailand. Vote buying is widespread, and all parties and many voters participate, usually through candidate “canvassers,” a recognized category of Thai citizens who buy votes and often intimidate voters on election day. Such practices have been reported since 1936 and include everything from purchasing medicine, food and other goods for voters to handing out cash before elections. The vote buying system often works in conjunction with the patronage system. Many Thais agree to support the candidate whose canvassers and supporters are respected and/or powerful patrons in the community. If a candidate successfully woos and pays off powerful canvassers, such as village chiefs or business godfathers/mothers (*jao poh*), he or she will likely receive the votes needed on election day. In return for capturing the votes, the elected leader often rewards powerful supporters with offers of lucrative government contracts and business opportunities or by turning a blind eye to the supporter’s illegal endeavors.

Thailand lacks a strong history of real political debate. Once in office, many politicians are accountable to and must safeguard the money interests of local village chiefs and canvassers rather than the concerns of constituents. As a result, political parties do not represent a strong ideology and generally lack meaningful policy based platforms. Distinctions among parties are usually made based on the personalities of various

politicians and the influence of their canvassers. Voters, therefore, rarely find candidates who represent policies in which they believe and opt to sell their votes instead.

Vote buying has grown so embedded in Thai political culture that parties face difficulties breaking this cycle. Citizens are hesitant to relinquish this perk; the money gained from vote selling is often viewed by many Thais as one of the few benefits they receive from their elected representatives. Tax money seemingly disappears in Bangkok, and rarely is funneled toward legitimate public goods or community projects.

Compounding and contributing to corruption and patronage in the Thai political system, are low levels of political awareness among the majority of Thai voters and an underdeveloped civil society. Few Thais understand the function of elected representatives or the role of citizens in a democracy as decisionmakers and advocates for public policies. Thus, they do not expect their representatives to defend policies of public interest.

Despite laws that prohibit vote buying, limit campaign expenditures, and ban corrupt business and political practices, there is little enforcement. In 1996, for example, two canvassers were arrested with millions of *baht* in bank notes stapled to pictures of their candidate; the candidate went unpunished. The new constitution includes provisions intended to increase the accountability of Thai political processes. The ECT is directed to audit parties and publish party expenses biannually. Private-sector institutions may make political contributions but not “in ways that deviate from their industry’s standard path.” Moreover, donations to candidates from government contractors are prohibited.

The constitution also mandates a decentralization process that includes the election of local administrators. This devolution of power, in part, aims to break ties between citizens and local bosses by holding local leaders directly accountable to the electorate. Finally, as noted above, the constitution established the National Counter Corruption Commission to prosecute offenses. As these

constitutional reform provisions are slowly implemented, citizens are witnessing their impact.

High-level government agencies in Thailand are working to combat corruption. While there is clearly a need for developing specific government policies, it is widely believed that only through the application of public pressure can sufficient political will be generated to implement reforms and break the corrupt and debilitating cycle of money politics. As long as candidates continue to win by buying votes and bribing powerful community and business leaders, they will not initiate reforms. When citizens gain a better understanding of the concept of “public office,” the importance of participatory democracy, the value of policy oriented voting over vote selling, and the social, economic and political costs of corruption, they will demand full implementation of the constitutional reforms and vote accordingly.

PROGRAM STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES

Before initiating an anti-corruption program, NDI conducted extensive research. Active in Thailand since 1994, the Institute has developed relationships with a wide range of local and international NGO leaders, academics and officials from whom to gather information and solicit feedback. NDI interviewed many groups and individuals to determine how corruption functions in Thai society and to analyze some of the root causes of the problem. NDI also organized informal focus groups outside Bangkok to broaden the diversity of perspectives. NDI learned that significant work to combat corruption was underway at the national level but grassroots approaches were rare. NDI concluded that a “top-down,” national approach would unlikely yield sustainable programs; in many countries, working through a large NGO based in the capital city often fails to create the strong local commitment needed to sustain programs after the initial project ends. Moreover, given that corruption is embedded in Thai political culture at the local level and that culture varies among provinces, national solutions may not translate, particularly in educational initiatives.

Resource constraints dictated that NDI choose a few provinces in which to work. Given that a civic program to combat corruption was a unique and untested project, working in a limited number of provinces also allowed NDI to better scrutinize the programs and garner best practices. Through its research, NDI developed criteria for province selection, the most important of which was a pre-existing, strong civic network.

Identifying and developing partnerships with provincial-level NGOs proved to be a significant challenge. There is often skepticism in Thailand directed toward western organizations and their mandates, so building trust represented a critical aspect of program development. In addition, since most Thai NGOs are located in major cities, identifying civic groups in provincial capitals was difficult. Finally, it was crucial to NDI that its partners had already developed their own ideas for anti-corruption initiatives independently rather than simply agreeing to implement an “NDI program.”

NDI’s partners varied among provinces. In Buriram province, in the northeast, NDI identified PNET (People’s Network for Elections in Thailand) and UCL (Union of Civil Liberties). In the northeastern province of Ubon Ratchathani, NDI joined with Naturecare, an NGO involved in political education projects and environmental advocacy. In the northern province of Chiang Mai, NDI also developed a partnership with PNET. In the central-north province of Phitsanulok, NDI identified the Local Institute for Democratic Development as its partner organization. In Songkhla province, in the south, NDI worked with Songkhla Forum, a local civic organization.

All of NDI’s partners possessed experience in civic programming and election monitoring. They also held strong interest in and ideas about anti-corruption programming but had not implemented any significant anti-corruption activities. In addition, all of NDI’s partners maintained a network of volunteers dispersed across the country, which proved extremely important to conduct local activities, such as village forums. Finally, all the groups took an oath of political neutrality.



Locals join a village forum in Buriram, September 1999.

Once partners were identified, the research process resumed. NDI and its new partners gathered information about each province’s culture, ethnic groups, political history, economy, electoral history, vote buying, media sources and forms of corruption. NDI’s partners conducted focus groups to understand better the local political environment and help determine appropriate programs. For example, upon learning that most villagers in Buriram dislike reading but enjoy listening to traditional northeastern music (*mo lam*), NDI and its partners concluded that an educational program centered around print materials would likely be less successful than one that focused on music.

To address the problem of money politics, NDI and its partners identified four strategic activities: village forums, educational programs, candidate debates and candidate monitoring. Each province selected to conduct two or three of the four activities.

• **Village Forums**

Civil society in Thailand remains underdeveloped; citizens rarely enjoy opportunities to express their views or advocate reforms, allowing officials and politicians to ignore principles of public accountability and to use public office for personal gain.

Through village forums, akin to town hall meetings, villagers assembled to discuss their local concerns, mostly related to corruption, while trained facilitators helped them develop

advocacy strategies. In addition, facilitators moderated discussions on the roles and responsibilities of elected officials, the inefficiency of corruption, the ramifications of vote buying and the rights of citizens under the new constitution. With the first Senate elections in Thai history then scheduled for March 4, 2000, facilitators used these forums to describe the elections and campaign process, and the roles and duties of Senators.

The village forums increased citizen participation in politics by encouraging people to advocate their concerns and seek reform through official channels. The forums also raised public awareness about the proper role of democratic government.

· *Educational Programs*

The level of political awareness in Thailand is low, and many Thais are unacquainted with the proper duties of their representatives, functions of the political system, or their rights under the constitution. This unfamiliarity allows the system of patronage, vote buying and corrupt political practices to remain unchallenged.

Through radio broadcasts, live and recorded music, posters, puppet shows and student art contests, the educational programs encouraged listeners and audiences to examine such issues as the impact of corruption on village life and the link between local concerns and the responsibilities of elected officials. These educational programs also informed participants of new constitutional provisions, the proper role of elected officials and the long-term benefits of policy oriented voting over the short-term gains of vote selling.

The format for these programs grew out of informal surveys and interviews that found that people absorbed more information from entertainment-oriented educational programs, such as songs and plays, than from written material or “talking head” lectures. The civic partners also tailored the programs to meet distinct cultural preferences among villages.

· *Candidate Debates*

A dearth of policy platforms among elected representatives and minimal accountability to the electorate have allowed corruption and patronage to flourish. Through organized debates, residents of the province listened to candidates discuss their positions and respond to questions posed by the moderator, a rare occurrence in Thailand. In addition, participants were able to question candidates and seek clarification about their policy positions. Debates were also broadcast live on radio and shown on a variety of television stations to reach an even wider audience. The debates encouraged issue-oriented voting and campaigning.



A participant voices her opinion at a village forum in Prakam District, Buriram, October 1999.

· *Candidate Monitoring*

Exposing and publicizing corruption enhances public awareness of the problem and promotes reform activities. A monitoring program allowed NGOs to observe officials and candidates and to report fraudulent behavior.

Monitoring encouraged citizens to challenge local officials and expose corrupt practices, which in turn might persuade those officials to change their behavior as a result of negative exposure.

Monitoring can be a dangerous activity in parts of Thailand, however, and such efforts had to be limited.

NDI conducted rigorous training in each of the provinces. At one- or two-day workshops, participants used a “needs assessment” exercise to define and hone

their programmatic objectives. They then designed activities to fulfill these objectives and developed a workplan. Participants were asked to define each activity in detail and determine the people who would be responsible for the activity, the location of the activity, a timeframe, budget and logistical tasks. The group also discussed expected outcomes. NDI helped the groups create a master calendar detailing all the tasks.¹



Panelists share their expertise during a training seminar for village forum facilitators and educators, Phitsanulok, October 1999.

Finally, NDI sought to create a transparent and inclusive program. Before activities began, where possible, NDI and its partners met with local leaders and officials to inform them of upcoming activities and solicit their support. The Institute also conferred with representatives of political parties in Bangkok and the Election Commission.

To produce broad-based political reform, particularly on a problem deeply ingrained in Thai society, most observers contend that pressure must come from the grassroots. NDI developed a program that used local political participation to challenge political and electoral corruption in specific provinces. Activities were determined

through research at the national and local levels. Each activity identified—village forums, educational programs, monitoring and candidate debates—addressed specific root causes of corruption and had its own unique objectives.

MEASURING IMPACT

The Institute started activities in Buriram province as a pilot project in July 1999 and later expanded to four additional provinces. For the new provinces, NDI designed an evaluation process to measure the impact of anti-corruption activities and identify the most successful tactics. In September 1999, NDI hired two Thai NGO evaluation experts to help NDI's civic partners access their activities. NDI's evaluators relied on the provincial groups to gauge the results of their activities through self-evaluation, pre- and post-activity tests, activity/data records, surveys, and focus groups. The consultants also visited the provinces periodically, and incorporated their own observations and interviews into the final evaluation.

In October, NDI organized a workshop at which provincial representatives joined the consultants to review each province's programs, determine the objectives of the activities, develop indicators of results and discuss possible measurement tools based on these indicators. Ubon Ratchathani, Songkhla and Phitsanulok provinces each sent one representative. Two representatives attended from Chiang Mai, and one representative from Buriram, the pilot project, attended as well.

After the participants described their proposed anti-corruption activities to the group, the consultants asked the participants to complete the following exercise:

¹ See Appendix A for an example of a provincial workplan, in English.

Each province presented the results of the exercise to the group. The consultants then compiled the indicators by activity, and the group discussed possible measurement tools for each indicator.

Village Forum Indicators

- 1) Participants change behavior
- 2) Participants return to subsequent forums
- 3) Participants volunteer for other activities
- 4) Participants ask questions/actively participate
- 5) Villagers parley with candidates on policies
- 6) Participant attendance increases
- 7) Participants represent diverse cross-section of population
- 8) Participants indicate expanded knowledge or accurate understanding of discussion

The consultants divided the indicators into those that represented an immediate reflection of the village forums and more long-term indicators that could be influenced by many factors. The immediate indicators were 4, 7 and 8.

Intermediate indicators, which could be measured after two or three forums, included 2, 3 and 6. Longer-term indicators, which could not be attributed solely to village forums, included 1 and 5. The consultants then discussed possible methods to measure results. For immediate and intermediate indicators, the groups suggested conducting simple pre- and post-tests with participants. For collecting information about increased participation, returning participants and participant diversity, the groups considered using simple forms or checklists to record data. Focus groups in the villages were raised as one possible tool for assessing longer-term indicators.

Educational Program Indicators

- 1) Radio shows, music
 - A) Number of phone-ins
 - B) Number of letters sent to the station
 - C) Number of entrants to on-the-air contests
 - D) Number of villagers who visit the radio station
 - E) Changes in radio station ratings
 - F) Changes in public understanding of content
- 2) Posters, art, drama

- A) Number of people who see materials
- B) Increased public understanding of content

To gauge “increased understanding,” the groups discussed surveying a random sample of people, asking them if they saw or heard the materials or shows and whether they understood and retained the content. However, the group agreed this type of sampling and surveying is very expensive and time-consuming. Another suggestion was simply to conduct a focus group where participants are exposed to all educational materials and they can select “which form they liked best.” Finally, participants agreed that they could use simple checklists to record basic data, such as the number of calls to the radio station.

Candidate Monitoring Indicators

- 1) Number of volunteers recruited
- 2) Number of complaints received
- 3) Number of problems recorded
- 4) Villagers answer questions on corruption

Participants agreed that they could use checklists to record the number of complaints, problems and volunteers. In addition, they could survey both the monitors and villagers in selected areas about their understanding of corrupt practices.



Students participate in an art contest on anti-corruption in Thai society, Phitsanulok, October 1999.

Candidate Debate Indicators

- 1) Change in voter attitudes and selection criteria for elections
- 2) Policy oriented campaigning

To assess candidate debates, participants agreed that tests conducted before and after debates could measure changes in participant attitudes and anticipated voting behavior. The groups could also monitor any changes in the campaigning tactics of candidates following a debate.

After the workshop, NDI's consultants developed a *Manual for Self Evaluation* for each group to use to guide them through the evaluation process. It lists all the common indicators across provinces and provides step-by-step instructions to design surveys and conduct focus groups. The manual also includes checklists and simple forms to record basic data. The provincial representatives used the manual as a guide for reporting to NDI.

NDI consultants helped civic groups in each province develop pre- and post-activity tests for village forums to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices. In addition, the consultants designed evaluation forms for other activities. Some of the forms were designed for network members to complete themselves, and others were meant to survey participants, consumers of the educational materials and the public. The consultants also created forms for the radio programs, cassettes, posters, stickers, brochures and village forums.²

At the conclusion of the program, each of NDI's four provincial partners completed a final evaluation report to assess its activities. Each partner representative met with his or her network to gather information for the report. The provincial representative used the network members as a focus group, particularly when assessing the educational programs. The first section of each partner's report presented the political context of the province and an analysis of the opportunities for and threats to anti-corruption programming, such as a history of political violence, access to media, etc. The second section provided an evaluation of the entire program through a "SWOT" analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). The report then included a section on each activity, providing information about

² See Appendix B for examples of village forum evaluation forms, in English.

the number of events and participants, the results of any tests or surveys, and reasons for the most and least successful events. Finally, each report outlined the lessons learned.

The provincial representatives gathered again on March 18 and 19, 2000 in Bangkok for a final evaluation meeting conducted by NDI consultants, and attended by NDI senior staff members and evaluation experts from Washington, D.C. The meeting allowed the groups to present their findings to one another and learn from the experiences of other provinces. Moreover, the consultants were able to acquire an overall view of the program and draw conclusions across provinces, which they compiled in a final report.³

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Following the workshops on developing a workplan, NDI's partners began recruiting and training volunteers. Every province decided to host village forums, and NDI staff members helped train members of the network to serve as the principal facilitators for the village forums. These facilitators later traveled throughout the province to train other network members. Training focused on determining the location of the forum, forum topics and methods for publicizing the forum. Facilitators also learned tactics and strategies for fostering group participation and dialogue. In addition, NDI produced a Thai-language manual about organizing village forums and distributed it to the networks. In one province, NDI conducted training and distributed guidelines on moderating candidate debates.⁴

In addition, NDI provided ongoing technical assistance to its partners in developing their educational initiatives. The Institute helped the provincial civic groups conduct their initial survey research, plan their strategy and choose an appropriate medium (radio, pamphlets, music, etc.). NDI also assisted its partners in forging better

³See Appendix C for workshop agenda, in English.

⁴See Appendix D for NDI guidelines for organizing a village forum, in English.

relationships with local media sources. Finally, NDI exposed the network in Buriram province to a variety of monitoring approaches, although monitoring initiatives were limited due to the dangerous political environment.



A working group brainstorms during a training seminar for village forum facilitators, Chiang Mai, December 1999.

Buriram Province

Buriram province comprises 1.1 million eligible voters.⁵ Ten Members of Parliament (MPs) represent the province, four from the Solidarity Party, three from the New Aspiration Party, two from the Democrat Party, and one from the National Development Party. When defining corruption in Buriram province, NDI's partners focus on the culture of impunity and violence that allows one MP and his armed supporters to intimidate the public and establish illegal businesses without any legal check. For example, the MP's brother shot and almost killed another Buriram MP. The victim, however, had no legal recourse, as is the case with other victims of political violence in a province where even the police fear challenging the powerful mafia. In addition, the level of political awareness in Buriram is low, and there is little understanding about the concept of democracy or the damaging role of political violence and corruption. However, there have been some significant civic movements in the province. For example, Buriram's forest monks have fought relentlessly to protect the woods from military and business interests. Many of the local NGOs evolved out of environmental

⁵ Voter registration information for all provinces is drawn from material published in 1999 by the Election Commission of Thailand.

causes, such as forest preservation and anti-stone mining efforts.

In July 1999, NDI started a pilot program in Buriram with the People's Network for Elections in Thailand (PNET) and the Union of Civil Liberties (UCL). The Buriram network decided to implement educational programs and village forums. In addition, the Buriram network hosted a provincial-level meeting with elected representatives as part of an advocacy campaign on corruption. The network also carried out extensive candidate monitoring activities.

Educational activities

The network hosted a one-hour radio program Tuesdays through Sundays. Network members moderated the programs, often inviting outside guests to participate. Discussion topics included the patronage system, vote buying, corruption in the political system, the proper role of elected officials, local elections and advocacy tactics. Listeners called in to express their views and ask questions. NDI hosted three such programs to discuss the problem of corruption in Thailand in general and share corruption-fighting initiatives from other countries. In addition to the radio program, several members of the Buriram network were interviewed on *The Pacific News*, a nationwide television and radio program, about corruption in Thailand and their activities in Buriram.⁶

As part of its educational effort, the Buriram network worked with local musicians to create cassettes with different styles of songs including traditional northeastern music (*mo lam*), local folk songs, and contemporary Thai songs. The network produced four master cassettes and 500 copies, which were distributed to radio stations across the province and to other northeastern provinces. Song lyrics describe the rights of citizens, the effects of corruption on daily life and the benefits of policy oriented voting. The public responded positively to the music and called the radio stations for copies of the cassettes.

⁶ See Appendix E for a radio program summary, in English.

Village Forums

The Buriram network hosted eight village forums throughout the province from August through November 1999. Each forum lasted approximately five hours and was led by one or two network facilitators. Attendance averaged approximately 180 people per forum.

Forum participants discussed problems facing the village and the province, the role of money politics and corruption in daily life, election fraud, the function and purpose of political parties, duties of elected representatives, the right of citizens to lodge corruption complaints and advocacy tactics. For most forums, facilitators invited representatives from various local administrative bodies, such as the Tambon (sub-district) Administrative Authority (TAO), to attend the forum so that participants could air their complaints and suggest solutions. All village forums were broadcast live on the radio, and several forums were shown on I-TV, Thailand's independent television station.⁷

Village forums yielded several positive ripple effects. The most significant result was the initiative taken by the villagers themselves to continue meeting on their own. Following a forum in Lamplaimas district, for instance, several community members assembled every other week in what they dubbed the "coffee cabinet," to discuss local concerns and brainstorm solutions. The cabinet grew so popular that it was forced to move to larger accommodations. Moreover, there were follow-up advocacy activities in every village, such as meetings with local officials. In one village, villagers asked PNET and UCL to help them organize a meeting on road safety with Buriram MPs.

A "Provincial Advocacy Forum" represented the culmination of the village forum portion of Buriram's program. At the provincial forum, five representatives from each of the village forums gathered in the provincial capital to discuss corruption problems in their area. Participants divided into working groups to address the corruption tactics of local politicians and

⁷See Appendix F for a village forum summary, in English.



Participants listen at a village forum in Buriram, August 23, 1999.

candidates and to brainstorm ways in which to monitor these activities. There was a consensus that increasing public awareness represented only one step in addressing the issue. Everyone agreed that the problems in Buriram demonstrate a culture of impunity with no respect or adherence to rule of law, and where acts of kidnapping, armed mafia violence, police corruption, bribery and blackmail go unpunished. Without strengthened legal enforcement, the problems will remain. Although discussion about the rampant and often dangerous problem of corruption in Buriram was quite discouraging, participants expressed their commitment to combating the problem. In the afternoon, participants presented the results of the discussion on corruption to a Democrat Party MP, a Thai Rak Thai Party provincial council member, and several *tambon* council members. Each responded to the problems by presenting their proposed solutions.

Candidate and election monitoring

The Buriram network uncovered serious problems when it monitored most constituencies during the December 1999 Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) elections. Four constituencies held no elections because candidates were intimidated into dropping out of the races. One candidate was kidnapped for 48 hours and threatened. Hundreds of voters claimed that party mafia members came to their village and threatened them with guns. Moreover, monitors were blocked from entering 10 villages by armed mafia forces. Monitors also reported instances where polling agents and police served as canvassers for certain parties. Although the Buriram network discussed

their findings on radio and shared information with the press, it was hesitant to publish all its findings for fear of retaliation by candidates.

For the March 4, 2000 Senate elections, NDI spent one week in Buriram helping the network establish a complaints bureau. Based on its monitoring experience during the PAO elections, the Buriram group determined it was necessary to develop a systematic procedure for recording and keeping track of complaints. NDI provided training to the bureau managers on possible options for structuring a complaints bureau, providing models used in other countries. NDI and the managers also discussed the operation of the bureau, criteria for complaints and complainants, investigation techniques, data collection, media relations and reporting. It was determined that the five bureau managers would permanently staff the complaints bureau. In addition, there would be one coordinator and 10 volunteer monitors/investigators for each of 10 constituencies as well as 23 district (*amphur*) representatives. All 10 coordinators used mobile phones or



Buriram network volunteers staff a complaints bureau for the March 2000 Senate elections.

walkie-talkies to facilitate rapid communication with the bureau headquarters. The network also used the community radio station to receive complaints from the public and alert its monitors.

NDI then helped bureau representatives draft a one-page complaints form with coded answers for easy data recording and analysis. A database was also designed to record all the information based on the complaints form. The bureau staff members were then trained on the use of this database and other

functions, such as creating pie charts and graphs to emphasize certain data.⁸

Following the training of the bureau managers, a training workshop was conducted with the 10 coordinators and 23 *amphur* representatives to discuss the structure and operations of the bureau as well as monitoring and investigation tactics. The training stressed the difference between violations observed by bureau volunteers and those reported by the general public. NDI emphasized the need to keep the two types of complaints separate and the value of thorough investigation to differentiate between rumor and evidence. The participants also studied how to actively pursue complaints by interviewing citizens outside the bureau if they have witnessed any problems, which they did not report to the bureau. Throughout the workshop, participants expressed serious concern about their safety, and the bureau managers admitted that they would have to rely on the police to investigate fraud that involved mafia or armed canvassers. Finally, the group critiqued the complaints form and offered suggestions. Each coordinator agreed to take responsibility for gathering the complaints forms in his/her constituency from all the monitors and sending the completed forms to the bureau.

The bureau created more than 10,000 flyers⁹ announcing the complaints bureau, its purpose and contact information. These flyers were provided to volunteers and distributed throughout the province. NDI and the network conducted a press conference a few days before the elections to discuss the bureau, and hosted daily radio programs to report on complaints to date. Finally, NDI and the network met with the chief of police and the director of the provincial election commission to discuss collaboration and communication among the three groups.

Despite the numerous public complaints to the bureau, the investigation process was limited. Network members were too frightened to investigate vote buying complaints in the face of the

⁸ See Appendix G for complaints form, in Thai.

⁹ See Appendix H for flyer, in Thai.



Members of a local association of women farmers take part in a village forum, Buriram, August 1999.

province's powerful canvassers. Moreover, the police themselves refused to investigate reports on certain candidates out of fear. In Buriram, the strength of armed political backers is greater than that of the police or bureaucracy. Despite brave reports of villagers, hard evidence was impossible to gather without some form of armed protection.

Songkhla Province

Songkhla comprises 839,899 registered voters. All of the province's eight MPs represent the Democrat Party. Three main issues define politics in Songkhla. First, several politicians are pushing through an oil pipeline project that will threaten Songkhla's major lake and displace residents. There has been little transparency in the decision-making process, in which contractors are accused of bribing politicians. Second, unrestrained anchovy fishing is exceeding legal limits and killing other types of fish off Songkhla's shores. The anchovy companies have allegedly "bought off" local politicians in order to preserve their businesses. Third, there are concerns about the use of rubber companies for money laundering. Threats to and opportunities for anti-corruption programming in Songkhla included:

Threats

- Corruption is widespread, especially vote buying.
- One party monopolizes provincial politics.
- Widespread smuggling across the Thai-Malaysia border, gambling and the illegal drug industry in Songkhla, pose a threat to local NGOs.

Opportunities

- There is a politically active public; many civic

organizations in Songkhla represent diverse issues and constituents, and citizens have mobilized around local problems.

- The media is committed to exposing corruption; Songkhla is home to the most successful provincial newspaper.

NDI's partner, Songkhla Forum, started its programs in October 1999 and selected three activities: village forums, candidate debates and educational programs.

Village forums

Before implementing village forums, the Songkhla network conducted several workshops throughout October 1999 to train facilitators based on the NDI model. The network determined that the village forums would address local problems, the impact of corruption and advocacy tactics. The forums would also target certain populations adversely affected by political corruption: "fisherfolk," rubber farmers and people living near the pipeline.

Approximately 150 villagers attended each of 23 four-hour forums. Not surprisingly, pipeline construction, illegal rubber plantations and anchovy fishing represented the main problems identified at the forums. Facilitators focused on advocacy solutions, and elected officials attended the end of the forums to listen to the concerns and solutions posed by villagers. Facilitators also used the forums to explain the new electoral process, the role of elected officials and the effects of corruption on daily life. At a few forums, the music band "Democracy Lovers" performed "songs for life," (*plang pua chiwit*), with lyrics about vote buying and corruption in Thai society.

In addition, the network hosted public hearings on specific problems and served as mediators among competing interests. For example, the network sponsored a hearing at which "fisherfolk," anchovy businesses and the governor examined the conflict between anchovy fishing and other types of fishing. Several ongoing advocacy activities have evolved out of the village forums, including The Friday College during which representatives from the village forums and NGO leaders meet in the



Songkhla Forum hosts a puppet show on corruption in politics and its impact on Thai society, November 1999.

provincial capital to discuss tactics for addressing electoral corruption and coordinate advocacy activities. Approximately 40 people attend the two-hour meeting every Friday, with moderating duties rotating among members. Meeting participants have produced educational materials and training guidelines for community initiatives.

Candidate debates

Before local polls in 1999 and 2000, the network conducted eight candidate debates in Songkhla for which it was extremely prepared. Well-trained moderators enforced time limits and ensured that candidates focused their comments on the questions asked. Moderators also asked candidates to provide specifics about their policy solutions. Moreover, the format allowed participants to question candidates and ask for clarification on issues. Once political candidates learned about the strict and challenging conduct of these network's debates, they arrived well prepared with notes and presentations. Each candidate debate produced a "social contract" between the people and the candidates on the proposed policies.

The debates for local elections attracted heightened attention because the decentralization plan in the new constitution empowers several local-level offices with increased authority and budgeting power. Most of the debates were filmed by various television stations and broadcast live on community radio. Local papers also carried extensive coverage of the debates.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Appendix I for a candidate debate description, in English.

Educational programs

The use of media sources in Songkhla Forum's education campaign represented its greatest achievement. Not only did the network attract coverage of its candidate debates, forums and other activities in the local papers and on radio and television, but the network also used several local newspapers to publish its own educational pieces on the role of elected officials and corruption. More than 16 articles were published in *Focus Songkhla*, arguably the most successful provincial newspaper in Thailand.¹¹

The network hosted a two-hour radio show every Saturday, on which network facilitators discussed the role of elected officials, the provincial and Senate elections and techniques for combating electoral fraud. Many of the broadcasts focused on the problems facing rubber farmers and agricultural politics. The network also hosted eight, two-hour "radio forums" during which 15-20 people discussed local concerns and issue advocacy. These forums were also recorded and broadcast on village loudspeakers across the province. Finally, the network helped organize 11, one-hour educational television shows.

The network conducted an opinion poll before and after the municipal election to measure the knowledge and attitudes of Songkhla citizens toward the election process. The network found that although political awareness on local problems was high, the public's understanding of the political process and the link between local concerns and electoral decisionmaking was very low. The results of the polls were published in *Focus Songkhla* and announced on radio. The network used the findings of its surveys to design its educational initiatives.

Songkhla Forum, in coordination with other groups, hosted *norah* performances, a traditional form of southern dance and music. The lyrics of the songs weaved stories about politics and its impact on the community. The network produced 200 copies of a video with *norah* shows and distributed them to

¹¹ See Appendix J for sample newspaper clippings, in Thai.



The Songkhla network conducts a candidate debate, November 1999.

television stations, NGOs and schools. In addition, the network provided 1,000 audiocassettes of the *norah* songs and furnished copies to local radio stations.

The network published educational materials and guides. The group translated and reproduced NDI's guidelines on organizing village forums and candidate debates. In addition, the network produced nine information pamphlets¹² on topics such as the October 14 student uprising, village forums, the upcoming elections and local issue advocacy. The network also created a booklet outlining the problems facing villagers in Songkhla and distributed it to various government bodies and the media. Moreover, Songkhla Forum developed a mobile educational display on the election process that traveled to 30 venues throughout the province.

Ubon Ratchathani Province

Ubon Ratchathani comprises 1.2 million registered voters. Eleven MPs represent the province, two from the Democrat Party, six from the National Aspiration Party, one from Chart Thai, and two from the Chart Pattana Party. In Ubon, corruption pervades daily life—prices of goods and services, roads and school construction, infrastructure development and agriculture are all gravely affected by money politics. According to NDI's local partner in Ubon, elected officials are infamous for skimming

¹² See Appendix K for copies of the covers of two pamphlets, in Thai.

money off the top of transactions and contracts, public or private. Many local businesspeople are unable to function without paying off politicians. In addition, citizens do not understand the proper role of elected representatives and cast their ballots based on the reputation of the canvassers and on the amount of money they receive from selling their votes. The network believes that in order to challenge corruption in this area, one must “change culture” and break down the patronage system that has been in place for years.

Threats to and opportunities for anti-corruption programming in Ubon were:

Threats

- Some areas of the geographically large province are difficult to reach.
- Strong local mafia presence posed a threat to programming.
- The public is suspicious of programs supported by foreign organizations.
- Financial constraints hinder organization of activities.

Opportunities

- The timing was excellent; recent media coverage and the new constitution have heightened awareness of money politics.
- Ubon has several local groups interested in anti-corruption programming.

NDI joined with a local NGO, Naturecare, and a network of former Pollwatch members in Ubon Ratchathani to begin programs in October 1999. NDI's partners decided to host village forums and organize educational initiatives as well as conduct limited monitoring activities.

Village forums

Before implementing the village forums, the network conducted a training session in October 1999 on the organization of village forums. At this session, all network members from across the province gathered for the first time to develop plans for the program. More than 100 participants

attended, including community leaders and members of grassroots organizations from every district in the province. The participants agreed upon organizational tactics and methods for determining the content of the forums. The session also provided an opportunity to discuss some of the unique corruption problems found among different communities in Ubon.

After training network facilitators, the network hosted a remarkable 65 village forums, covering all 11 constituencies and every district in the province. The all-day forums attracted approximately 60-80 participants each. All forums followed the same format, formulated in the training process. Four main questions were posed to participants: What aspects about your community are you most proud? What are the biggest problems in your community? How does money politics and corruption affect your community? How can you solve the problem of money politics and corruption? In addition, facilitators discussed the Senate election process. The facilitators used working groups and various games to encourage participation. Representatives from the TAOs also attended a majority of the forums to hear about the problems in the communities.

The Ubon network stressed the use of advocacy tactics. The network, for example, helped create easy-to-use guidelines for developing a petition. Under the new constitution, Thai citizens can dismiss an elected official by acquiring 50,000 signatures on a petition. Villagers organized many meetings following the forums to map out an advocacy strategy for a specific local problem addressed in the forum.

Educational programs

The Ubon network created three *mo lam* songs about corruption and good governance. Network members identified a popular band in the province and helped its members write appropriate lyrics. The network produced 500 cassettes of the songs and distributed them across the province where they were played on loudspeakers in the villages and during the village forums.



Songkhla Forum co-hosts *norah* dance performances as part of its education campaign on good governance, November 1999.

The Ubon network hosted a half-hour radio show Mondays and Tuesdays that addressed the issue of corruption, the role of elected leaders and local problems. In advance of various local elections—municipal, TAO and PAO—the network’s show focused heavily on the upcoming polls, and candidates were invited to speak on the air. The show also aired the network’s new *mo lam* songs. The program was broadcast across the province as well as in neighboring provinces. Many listeners wrote letters to the station asking questions and expressing their support for the program.

Candidate and election monitoring

Safety concerns limited the network’s monitoring effort. In advance of several local elections, network members monitored candidate campaigns, provided information to the press and announced violations on the radio show. In addition, several network members photographed fraudulent activities, such as illegal posters and campaigning. In one case, a candidate showed up at a village forum and handed out gifts to participants, which presented an easy photo-opportunity. There was no official documentation of the problems witnessed, however, and complaints were passed on to authorities verbally.

Chiang Mai Province

Chiang Mai province comprises close to 1.1 million registered voters. They are represented by 10 MPs who are almost evenly distributed among the Chart

Pattana, Democrat and National Aspiration parties. When describing corruption in Chiang Mai, NDI's partners focused on rampant vote buying and public



A group of participants exchange views during a training session for village forum facilitators, Ubon Ratchathani, October 1999.

apathy toward political issues. Research conducted by NDI's partners revealed that 42 percent of the province's ballots were tainted by vote buying. The network found that the percentage was lower among middle class voters and higher among laborers and farmers. Not surprisingly, the level of education is inversely related to the success of vote buying. In addition to direct vote buying, people gamble on candidates promising voters a share of the money if the selected candidate wins, thus influencing voter behavior.

Threats to and opportunities for anti-corruption programming in Chiang Mai were:

Threats

- NGOs fear any involvement in politics.
- NGOs face serious financial constraints due to decreased foreign funding.
- Neutral members are difficult to recruit; some NGO leaders and former activists have sought power by canvassing for major political parties.
- NGOs and volunteers face time constraints, as most are employed full-time elsewhere.

Opportunities

- NGOs attract many volunteers.
- There is a high voter turnout in Chiang Mai.
- NGOs have a good relationship with the Election Commission of Thailand.

NDI's partner, PNET Chiang Mai, decided to implement an educational program and village forums. Before beginning its activities, PNET conducted extensive survey research throughout October and November 1999.

Research

The Chiang Mai network conducted 450 surveys¹³ throughout the province that measured knowledge, attitudes and practices of citizens about elections, corruption and the role of representatives. The knowledge section asked citizens about the duties of senators and *tambon* council members, election campaign regulations, rights of citizens to file complaints, the legality of vote buying and selling, the new constitution and government transparency provisions, among others. The attitudes section included questions about the criteria for selecting Senators, opinions about corruption, mechanisms to end corruption, and perceptions about the role of canvassers and local village godfathers. The experience/behavior section recorded behavior practices, such as the number of times a person had voted, whether the person has witnessed illegal behavior and whether the person had ever sold her/his vote. Finally, the network included a section on "communication behavior" in order to help determine the most appropriate means to communicate its educational activities. For instance, the survey questioned respondents about their radio listening and reading habits.

The network used survey findings to develop customized educational materials on corruption. Survey results allowed the network to separate the public into different categories of awareness to help target its educational initiatives. The survey also

¹³ See Appendix L for a sample survey, in Thai.

helped the network determine strategic areas to host village forums and topics to address in the forums.

Village forums

With NDI's help, the Chiang Mai network conducted an intensive two-day training seminar in December attended by 50 village forum facilitators. The workshop first addressed the subject matter of the forums by refreshing the facilitators' knowledge of the electoral process and the parliamentary system. Since forums were to focus heavily on the March 4, 2000 Senate elections, the workshops tested facilitators



Participants form working groups during a training seminar for village forum facilitators in Chiang Mai, December 1999.

on their understanding of the Senate election process, such as the role of Senators, campaign regulations and voting procedures. In addition to discussing subject areas, the workshop trainers shared facilitation and training techniques, and provided sample training exercises. Participants later separated into working groups to discuss forms of electoral corruption in their communities, such as corruption in local authorities (TAO and PAO), vote buying and selling, participation by election officials in fraudulent activities, and corruption in the village budget appropriation process. The groups then brainstormed advocacy and monitoring tactics to address these practices. Following the training workshop, facilitators were deployed to villages to begin organizing forums and educational activities.¹⁴

The Chiang Mai network hosted 22, three-hour village forums that attracted an average of 85

¹⁴ See Appendix M for a copy of the knowledge test used in the training, in Thai.

villagers each. The forums sought to challenge attitudes toward the patron-client system in order to combat corruption. The facilitators also discussed the Senate elections and the new responsibilities of Senators. In light of the February PAO elections, several forums focused on the new responsibilities and powers of the PAO. Facilitators remained in the villages for three months after each forum to help villagers develop advocacy strategies for various concerns and organize meetings with local officials.

Educational programs

The network developed educational pamphlets, posters and stickers on corruption and elections based on the results of the survey process.¹⁵ The materials were tailored to each constituency and for various levels of political awareness, a process the network termed "narrow-casting." The materials addressed weaknesses identified by the survey, particularly in the knowledge category. Since, for example, few villagers understood the Senate election process, many of the materials provided information on the Senate polls. Approximately 1,500 stickers and posters and 10,000 pamphlets were distributed to the public. In addition, the network wrote a handbook that described the results of the survey research and outlined 12 civic education activities. The network distributed 500 copies of the entire book and 2,000 copies of an abridged version to election commission, schools, government agencies and NGOs. Teachers used the handbook in their classrooms. The network also created a music cassette with songs about corruption and the role of elected officials in a democracy.

The earlier survey process revealed that radio represented the best medium for reaching a wide audience. As a result, the network started its own half-hour radio show four times a week that provided information on the new constitution, local politics and the election process. Radio hosts also discussed the effects of corruption on Thai society and the role citizens can play in combating corruption. During live shows, listeners could call the station to ask questions or state their opinions.

¹⁵ See Appendix N for a copy of the sticker and the pamphlet, in Thai.

Phitsanulok Province

Phitsanulok province includes 610,476 registered voters. The province is represented by six MPs, two Democrats, one Chart Thai, and three Chart Pattana. The Local Institute for Democratic Development (LIDD), NDI's partner in Phitsanulok, conducted a study on corruption, examining the election cycles. Vote buying and electoral fraud are tremendous problems in the province. Before polls, there is widespread vote buying, gift exchanges, voter roll tampering, gambling, and mafia and canvasser threats. On election day, voters sell their votes, people are threatened, candidates illegally campaign and voters gamble. There have also been incidences of ballot stuffing, multiple voting, fake ballots and counterfeit ID cards. Political corruption continues after elections with favors and money exchanged through the patron-client system.

Threats to and opportunities for anti-corruption programming in Phitsanulok were:

Threats

- A fatalistic attitude among the public hinders participation in politics.
- A strong mafia presence poses a threat to local NGOs.
- NGOs face funding constraints, creating a dependency on volunteers.

Opportunities

- The new Thai constitution introduced several landmark provisions to combat corruption
- A strong NGO network exists in Phitsanulok.

The Phitsanulok network began village forums and educational activities in October 1999. The network also hosted legal forums as part of a combined advocacy and monitoring effort.

Village forums and legal forums

The network recruited more than 11 NGOs plus individual members. Before the first village forum, network members conducted workshops to determine program activities, discuss recruitment, assign tasks, identify facilitators and select forum sites.

The Phitsanulok network decided to divide its forums into two levels. The network conducted nine district or *amphur* forums and 16 sub-district or *tambon* forums. At the *amphur* forums, facilitators were identified for the *tambon* forums. Attendance averaged 150 people, and participants represented diverse sectors of society, including farmers, government officials, teachers, students, laborers, "fisherfolk" and slum dwellers. The network designed the forum agendas based on specific problems evident in the villages, but every forum addressed the issue of corruption at the local level and the proper role of elected officials.

Facilitators also shared advocacy tactics for demanding of elected officials better accountability to local concerns. Every forum utilized working groups to strategize solutions that were subsequently presented to the full forum, and most forums provided some form of educational



Participants gather under the shade during a village forum in Phitsanulok, December 1999.

entertainment, such as local music bands. At the end of the forums, representatives from the TAO, PAO and other governmental bodies joined the group to address specific questions and concerns. The forums were also broadcast live on radio throughout the province, and several forums were shown on television as well.

As part of a combined advocacy and monitoring effort, the network hosted three special forums to inform NGOs and village leaders about legal remedies available to combat corruption. At these forums, a team of lawyers described legal provisions related to corruption, particularly electoral regulations. The forums reviewed the

differences between legal and illegal activities during the campaign and election periods, and facilitators provided hypothetical case studies. In addition, an average of 70 participants at each forum learned how to monitor and report corrupt acts and legal violations. Although participants expressed fear about reporting election fraud, many banded together to file anonymous complaints during local-level elections.

Educational programs

In October 1999, more than 60 network leaders from around the province joined NDI to plan the network's art contests, radio and television programs, and music production. Musicians were invited to the meeting to sing sample songs on corruption and politics, after which the network selected the artists to participate in the program..

The network sponsored an art contest in each of four *amphurs*. Through these art competitions, students expressed their feelings and perceptions about corruption and elections in Thai society. After training by the Phitsanulok network, school art teachers served as facilitators and provided students with basic information about clean governance, and the roles and duties of elected representatives. The involvement of parents represented an important facet of this program. Students were encouraged to work on their art pieces at home and discuss the activity with their family members. Parents became involved in the contests and requested that schools make this activity an annual event. When each contest ended, the art projects were displayed in the community, and the public was invited to view the exhibit. Schools in other areas subsequently requested assistance from the network to conduct this activity, and the Ministry of Education has expressed interest in providing support.

The Phitsanulok network also hosted 46, two-hour, daily radio shows and 41 radio documentaries. The radio hosts and listeners discussed the new constitution and electoral system, the impact of corruption on daily life, the role of the ECT, vote buying, the media's role in anti-corruption efforts, local-level elections, a code of conduct for

candidates, and the Senate election process, among other topics. The radio documentaries were pre-scripted educational pieces covering corruption and upcoming elections. Many listeners requested transcripts of the radio shows.

In addition, on 10 major radio stations and on village loudspeakers, the network sponsored six different two-minute radio spots with information about the difference between legal and illegal election campaigning. Ten TAO bodies requested copies of the spots. On television, the network sponsored one-minute spots on electoral corruption and money politics during the evening news.

The network worked with musicians to write songs in each local traditional music style: *lika*, *lamtad* and *lhea*. More than 300 cassettes were produced and distributed across the province. The lyrics addressed the Senate elections, the responsibilities of Senators, vote buying, corruption in daily life and the rights of voters. The songs were played on the main radio stations as well as over village loudspeakers. The ECT requested permission to use the songs as part of its voter education campaign. Although the radio station received hundreds of inquiries from listeners about purchasing the cassettes, budgetary constraints prevented the network from producing additional copies.



Participants in an art contest on anti-corruption in Thai politics display their work, Phitsanulok, October 1999.

The network also developed separate pamphlets on the constitution, the rights of citizens and the election process. Three thousand copies of these pamphlets were distributed to the public before the Senate elections.¹⁶

¹⁶See Appendix O for a sample pamphlet, in Thai.

ASSESSMENT

The Institute and its evaluation consultants used a variety of methods to measure the impact of the anti-corruption program—the manual for self-evaluation, forms, pre- and post-activity tests and a final evaluation report. These materials included results gathered through self-evaluation, activity and data records, surveys, and focus groups with network members. The consultants also visited the provinces several times and incorporated into the evaluation their own observations and interview findings.

From March 18 to 19, 2000, the provincial representatives gathered in Bangkok for a final evaluation meeting facilitated by NDI's consultants.¹⁷ Two NDI senior staff members and evaluation experts from Washington, D.C. also attended this meeting. The meeting did not assess or evaluate NDI's individual partners in the provinces but rather focused on the impact of the activities and the factors that contributed to their success or failure. The meeting sought to determine which activities were successful in influencing public thinking about corruption and politics and to collect the lessons learned from the program. Overall, both NDI's consultants and partners found the educational activities difficult to measure objectively. The evaluation of educational programs was based mostly on feedback from network members themselves through focus groups. In a few instances, the provincial groups surveyed the public but only informally. Village forums, on the other hand, could be measured more easily through tests administered before and after the events. NDI's partners, however, found this process extremely time consuming and did not conduct tests at every forum. As with any survey method, the accuracy of responses, particularly on attitude and behavioral questions, is unreliable, especially given the limited sample size.

Context: Threats and Opportunities

When evaluating their activities, NDI's provincial partners first examined the pre-existing

¹⁷ See Appendix P for a list of evaluation conference participants, in English.

opportunities for and threats to implementing successful programs. Every province agreed that the new constitution and electoral laws created space in which NGOs could play the roles of watchdog and educator. In addition, the economic crisis provided a strong incentive for people to participate in political life, as the need for good governance was glaringly apparent. Moreover, the media sources in Thailand are committed to exposing corruption and often serve as allies to the NGO community. Finally, cooperation among NGOs in many provinces produces effective programs with a wider impact.

Anti-corruption programming faced several threats as well. Few people possessed the experience or skills to coordinate and train a network of volunteers, which are critical to implementing effective grassroots activities. A strong mafia presence and corrupt political forces also created a dangerous environment in which to implement anti-corruption programs.

Additionally, geographical constraints in most provinces made certain areas difficult to reach. Finally, few villagers had the luxury to leave their work to attend a village forum or other activities, particularly given widespread economic hardships.

Songkhla Province

The Songkhla network conducted tests before and after 10 village forums, interviewing an average of 120 participants each. In some forums, the pre-tests were not administered. In the knowledge section, participants experienced an 8 percent improvement following the forums. Forums strongly affected participant attitudes. For example, before the forums, 68 percent of respondents believed that ordinary people should not be involved in politics. After the forums, 24 percent felt this way. Moreover, 60 percent of participants before the forums thought that a senator must be rich and powerful; following the forums 28 percent of participants held such sentiments. After the forums, 88 percent of participants indicated that the public should participate in election monitoring.

Anticipated behavior was also affected by the forums. Participants, for example, expressed more interest in involving themselves in monitoring and

other election activities after the forums. Following the forums, 68 percent of participants suggested that they would campaign and organize activities for the Senate elections, and 60 percent revealed they would observe and monitor electoral corruption and report their findings to the ECT. The Songkhla network found that radio shows were the most effective educational initiative. The network estimates that more than 300,000 listeners tuned into the program, and feedback from the



Participants at a radio forum in Songkhla, November 1999.

public was positive. The network surveyed the public about several of the educational pamphlets. Seventy-one percent of recipients read through the entire pamphlet, and 64 percent found the pamphlet easy to read. The *norah* performances and music were also very popular; 100 percent of those who viewed the performance indicated that they liked it. The music reached remote parts of the province through broadcasts on village loudspeakers. The mobile educational display met with limited success because several villagers reported that they did not understand the content.

Although disappointed with the low turnout at candidate debates, the network concluded that they had a wider impact than participant numbers indicate, as the debates were aired on television and radio. More-over, each debate ended with the creation of a “social contract” between the candidates and participants, which left participants with something tangible for which they could hold candidates accountable.

Overall, the Songkhla network found that their activities affected citizens in the province. The village forum process improved the relationship between villagers and NGOs, and excellent links

were established among representatives of NGOs, academia and the media. Villagers also grew more involved in politics in the areas where programs were conducted. For example, many villagers united to lobby the ECT to suspend the Senate election results due to local cases of corruption and fraud. The network learned that a program’s success depended on building trust with villagers, exhibiting non-partisanship and relating local issues to politics and corruption.

Ubon Ratchathani Province

The Ubon network used different pre- and post-tests for the village forums than other provinces. The network reported that the forums provided participants with a sense that they had a role to play in politics, indicating a significant attitude shift. Furthermore, participants appreciated the opportunity to present their problems and discuss solutions to corruption. Vote buying, particularly for local elections, decreased in areas where the forums were held. Many forum participants provided evidence to the ECT and volunteered to stand as witnesses.

At times, the Ubon network faced difficulties in persuading villagers to speak, as several participants were uncomfortable discussing vote buying. Network evaluators also observed varied skill levels among forum facilitators, which contributed to inconsistencies in program outcomes.

The radio shows proved to be the most effective educational program. In many letters to the radio station, listeners wrote that the shows helped them understand the Senate electoral process, and the link between corruption and daily life. People also expressed interest in becoming involved with the network.

Chiang Mai Province

The Chiang Mai network conducted tests before and after 20 village forums, interviewing an average of 85 people at each forum. The results demonstrated a significant improvement in participant knowledge of the electoral process, an overall increase of 17 percent. The change in attitudes following the forums was insignificant.

In fact, there was a slight increase after the forum in the number of participants who believed that it was wrong to sell their votes and not vote for the buyer. The willingness of participants after the forum to become election monitors and witnesses represented the most significant change in anticipated behavior. Following the forums, 86 percent of participants indicated they would monitor and 85 percent expressed interest in



A local pedicab sports a complaints bureau flyer in Buriram before Senate elections in March 2000.

serving as witnesses. In addition, 65 percent of participants expressed interest in facilitating a village forum before attending a forum, and 76 percent expressed interest afterward. Eight percent more participants indicated a greater willingness to learn more about Senate candidates after the forums than before. There was a 17 percent increase in the percentage of participants planning to monitor the behavior of their Senators after the elections. The network observed, however, that the facilitation skills among moderators were inconsistent.

Before commencing its activities, the Chiang Mai network conducted survey research, described above. A manual created from the results of this assessment research represented one of the most successful educational materials developed by the network. The manual analyzed the survey results and described 12 activities for educating citizens about corruption and politics. The manual was so popular that the network published 2,000 copies of an abridged version to meet demand. In addition, teachers requested copies to use in their classrooms.

The radio shows were also popular. Network members conducted interviews on the street about the program and held focus groups, both of which yielded positive feedback. Moreover, the network facilitators who hosted the radio shows were asked to appear on other programs at the radio station because of their strong moderating skills.

The Chiang Mai network found that the research it conducted before the program activities positively affected both the forums and the educational programs. The results of the research helped determine the location of the forums and the topics. The forums targeted weak areas revealed in the research, and thus participants showed marked improvement on the knowledge section of the post-forum test. The research was also critical in defining the subject matter for the educational materials.

Phitsanulok Province

The Phitsanulok network administered surveys before and after only a few village forums. The increase in the knowledge section was significant, particularly with respect to the Senate election process. Before the forums, for example, 41 percent of participants believed that a Senate candidate could campaign through relatives, while only 20 percent believed so after the forum. Following the forums, 97 percent of participants acknowledged that they could vote for only one candidate, 85 percent understood that senators could remove MPs from office and 88 percent knew that political parties were forbidden to support candidates. Changes in attitude were slight; before the forums, 44 percent of participants considered vote buying “normal” in Thai society, while 36 percent agreed after the forums.

There was a change in anticipated behavior. Following the forums, participants indicated that they were more willing to report vote buying and involve themselves in voter education activities. Before the forums, 57 percent of participants were willing to apply to be election monitors with the ECT, and after the forums, 64 percent of participants were willing to serve. In fact, many participants actually did volunteer with PNET and

the ECT to monitor the Senate elections. Forum participants also vowed to spread the information learned at the forum to 10 other people. The network

observed that the facilitation skills varied among forum coordinators.

Radio shows in Phitsanulok significantly enhanced the relationship between NGOs and mainstream

The impact of the activities reached beyond the activities themselves, and participants often organized meetings or forums on their own as well as initiated advocacy programs.

radio and television stations, which increased coverage of NGO activities. The radio shows also reached a wide audience, as several were pre-recorded and played on village loud-speakers. The effectiveness of the art contests stemmed from their capacity to affect all levels of society. Teachers, students, parents, other relatives and members of the community were all involved in the art contests. Students worked on their art pieces with their family members, and the final exhibition was held in an area visible to the entire community. The Ministry of Education also expressed interest in the art contest concept. The art contests were, however, extremely time-consuming and required extensive preparation.

Summary

The anti-corruption programs helped establish good relations between villagers and the civic groups. In all provinces, the provincial organizations were able to establish trust with the villagers and to build credibility as neutral, nonpartisan organizations. Participants reported that they appreciated the participatory approach employed by the civic groups and felt like equal players in the activities. The programs also created active citizens; villagers grew to believe that they were central actors in

politics as opposed to passive recipients of political decisionmaking. Participants vowed to involve themselves more in the political process, and many participants expressed a willingness to provide evidence of electoral corruption to the ECT and serve as witnesses. The impact of the activities reached beyond the activities themselves, and participants often organized meetings or forums on their own as well as initiated advocacy programs.

In all four provinces, relations improved between the media and the NGO community. NDI's partners worked with radio stations and developed new ties with the print media. The anti-corruption activities drew increased attention from the mainstream media, and many events, such as village forums and candidate debates, were well covered. The media, particularly radio stations, also cooperated with the NGOs in monitoring the Senate election. In Buriram province, for example, the radio station received complaints from listeners and passed them on to the Buriram complaints bureau.

In all provinces, participants in activities increased their knowledge about the constitution, the election process and corruption. Moreover, some attitudes changed toward money politics and vote buying after activities. For example, participants began to view a candidate's use of vote buying instead of policy platforms as harmful to public interest. Finally, anticipated behavior changed; more people vowed not to sell their votes, and many participants volunteered as monitors.

Such conduct represents the kind of grassroots pressure that is needed to eventually curb corruption and reverse an entrenched system of money politics. While the evaluation process was unable to determine whether NDI's modest program motivated public officials to alter past practices, it did lead to a more informed public who were actively engaged in the political process on these issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the evaluation process, NDI's partners determined that village forums and radio programs were the most

effective anti-corruption activities. The forums were most successful when held at the grassroots level, the facilitation was participatory and diverse groups were represented. The evaluation also revealed that forums must be conducted continuously to produce a meaningful impact. Forums were useful when they addressed specific community problems affected by corruption. Radio programs that were live, broadcast during prime time and conducted in the local dialect proved widely effective. A good relationship between NGOs and local radio stations and broadcasters greatly affected the success of the programs.

The civic groups concluded that printed materials were the least effective educational medium. The networks found that most people in their provinces do not enjoy reading. The evaluation process also revealed that some materials were targeted toward highly educated audiences and thus were too technical for widespread public consumption. Printed materials also represent one-way communication and are difficult to evaluate.

The results of the evaluation suggest that NDI should continue to support anti-corruption programming, especially the village forum process. The forums, however, should be organized continuously, and facilitators trained more extensively and recruited from the host villages, where possible. In addition, NDI should support education programs that are media-based, reach a wide audience and allow for two-way communication. NDI's partners and evaluators also agree that candidate debates would be important initiatives to conduct before the House elections, expected in October or November 2000.

NDI would like to be able to expand this program by applying the tactics and activities tested in the five provinces to a national level program. However, the Institute would be unable to develop a program of this magnitude. Thai civic groups with broad grassroots networks in all 76 provinces, ample resources, many well-trained volunteers and a long-term commitment would be necessary to achieve a significant nationwide impact. To encourage the participation of other civic groups in this process, NDI and its partners plan to pass on

the tactics and materials developed through the program to other organizations. NDI also plans to find ways in which to help link the anti-corruption work at the provincial level to the corruption debate at the national level through improved civic advocacy.