

TDRI

Quarterly
Review

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Social harmony is a key foundation for peace and prosperity. Although now Thailand is encountered by various problems from the fierce violence in the three southernmost provinces and some potential conflicts stemming from chronic socio-economic disparities, promising ways toward social harmony still exist. See recommended solutions from the 2005 Year-end Conference on “Toward Social Harmony” on page 3.

Summary of the 2005 Year-end Conference on "Toward Social Harmony"*

Kwanjai Lekagul**

The Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) has been organizing its Annual Year-end Conference for more than 20 years. The topic for each year reflects a theme that is considered to be relevant to the country's development at that time. For 2005, the Institute selected the topic of "Toward Social Harmony" for the Conference, which was held on November 26-27, 2005. This was considered to be an appropriate topic at that time for a number of reasons:

(1) Social harmony is a key foundation for peace and prosperity. If any problem leads to major social conflicts within a society, that problem will seriously affect all dimensions of development whether social, political or economic.

(2) The current problems in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand point to the importance of building and preserving social harmony among people with diverse historical, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. If the situation turns into a serious conflict, then it will take a tremendous amount of time and effort to restore sustained peace and harmony.

(3) Apart from social conflicts arising from problems stemming from historical, cultural, ethnic and religious diversities, other issues could also potentially lead to major social conflicts in the future, although they have not done so in the past. These include significant socio-economic disparities, the management and utilization of natural resources, and labor-management disputes. While these potential causes of major social conflicts have not precipitated major problems in the past, they could do so in the future if not properly managed.

Format and Themes of the Conference

The Conference consisted of four parts. In the morning session of Saturday November 26, the Conference started with a panel discussion on the theme "Toward Social Harmony." This was followed by a presentation by representatives of the research team summarizing the various research papers distributed as background papers at the Conference.

In the afternoon session of the same day, the Conference was divided into five group sessions. Finally, at the plenary session on the morning of Sunday November 27, representatives of the groups reported on the main findings and recommendations from each group.

The group sessions were divided as follows.

1. Social Harmony under Cultural and Ethnic Diversities

Under this theme, focus was given to harmonious social integration under conditions of cultural and ethnic diversities. Historical cases of success were examined and lessons drawn that are relevant to the current situation.

2. Social Harmony under Socio-economic Disparities

This group examined another potential source of social conflicts, that related to socio-economic disparities. This was particularly relevant to Thailand given the wide disparities that exist in the country.

* The Conference was co-organized by the Chai Pattana Foundation, the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, the Community Organizations Development Institute, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and the Ministry of Labour on November 26-27, 2005 at the Ambassador City Hotel, Jomtien, Chon Buri, Thailand

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3. Managing Conflicts Arising from Natural Resources Utilization

This group looked at conflicts arising from the management of natural resources. The main focus was on water and land utilization.

4. Managing Labor Conflicts

This group examined the management of potential conflicts arising from labor issues. This included issues arising from domestic labor conflicts as well as issues stemming from foreign migrants.

5. Creating Social Values for Social Harmony

Inculcating an appropriate social value system is very important for achieving social harmony under conditions when there are various potential sources of conflict. This group looked at the role of education and the media in influencing the social value system.

Participants

The Conference was attended by approximately 570 participants from the public sector, the private sector, academia, non-government organizations, representatives from local communities, and the media.

REPORT OF THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The results of the group discussions were presented at the plenary session, which was chaired by Mr. Kosit Panpiemras, Executive Chairman, Bangkok Bank Public Co., Ltd, and a member of the TDRI Council of Trustees and Board of Directors. The group discussions covered five topics as was previously indicated. The results of the group discussions were as follows.

GROUP 1: SOCIAL HARMONY UNDER CULTURAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITIES

The discussions focused on harmonious social assimilation under conditions of cultural and ethnic diversities, covering three issues, namely, historical cases of success and lessons drawn that may be relevant for the current situation, the obstacles in the process toward social harmony, and the key factors in building social harmony.

With regard to the historical cases and lessons, three cases of successful integration of Chinese people, Laotians in Northeastern Thailand, and Malay-Muslims in Satun Province so that they all could become Thai (or actually Siamese prior to 1932) were discussed as follows. The Thai government in the past was successful in assimilating these three groups so that they could become



Thai. The Chinese were already well integrated into Thai society in terms of social, economic and political systems. Also, Chinese capitalists had increasingly been involved with the Thai ruling elites, which finally created the economic system called “bureaucratic capitalism.” Laotians who immigrated to the northeastern part of Thailand were also well assimilated into Thai society. The key factors that facilitated their becoming Thais were their attitudes and the characteristics of being modest, obedient, and peaceful, as well as their fear of the then-Thai superpower. In the case of Satun, the Malay-Muslims there were successfully absorbed into Thai society because of four crucial factors: the Satun Malay-Muslim elites chose to cooperate with the Thai State rather than offer resistance; there was a lack of sense of Malay history in Satun; owing to Satun’s geographical location, they were vulnerable in living along the periphery of multiple power centers, and because of the benign neglect of the Thai government.

In the process toward achieving social harmony, four obstacles were encountered. First, the definition of Thai nationalism is defined not only by Thai ethnicity, but also by economic status, political beliefs, and culture. Hence, a too narrow definition of Thai nationalism is likely to discriminate against other Thai subgroups and might put pressure on minority groups to eschew their own culture and conform to the culture of the majority. Second, there is distrust among different subgroups of Thai people, between each subgroup, and between the people and the government. Third, there is a strong belief in the old paradigm of accepting only successful assimilations, which leads Thais to become too proud to accept the failures in the current situation. Finally, there are inconsistencies in the legal system and these inhibit the reconciliation process.

To overcome all such obstacles, a number of key measures for building social harmony were recommended. First, we should recognize the human rights of minority groups at both the local and the national levels. Second,

we should rebuild mutual trust among different subgroups of Thai people, between each subgroup, and between the people and the government. Third, the aforementioned old paradigm should be changed. Lastly, the lessons drawn from the successful cases of assimilation might provide an alternative solution for the current situation.

Nevertheless, there is one concern over some of the violent measures used in response to the current conflict: that these measures are not the true solution to the problems and, in fact, overshadow the real solution, that is, the political process.

In sum, if Thai people want a harmonious society, it is the responsibility of **all Thais** to work for it together using the political process of reconciliation.

GROUP 2: SOCIAL HARMONY UNDER SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES

This group started with presentations from representatives of the academic sector, the public sector and the non-government sector.

From the academic perspective, Thailand is among the economies of the world with the highest income inequality and this is a potential source of violent social conflict. In fact, although no solid theory predicts that economic inequality necessarily causes violent social conflicts, as there are many non-economic factors contributing to social conflicts, such as social attitudes toward inequality, conflict prevention and conflict resolution, the institutional setting, the ability of the ruler to repress conflicts and so forth, it is hypothesized that, when major and rapid economic changes occur, conflicts tend to emerge, especially when some groups in society cannot cope. Moreover, it was remarked that economic inequality is more likely to cause conflict when that inequality is seen as unjust by society. For instance, when the societal systems, that is, the economic, social, and political systems, lack transparency and are plagued with corruption, cronyism, and privileges, economic inequality may more likely lead to conflict. In this regard, two suggestions were proposed for a way forward toward social harmony. The first was to promote transparency at every corner and at every level of society, such as by encouraging people's participation and public hearings on large-scale development projects with possibly adverse environmental and social impacts. The second was that the government should play a major role in fostering social harmony through sensible redistribution policies, such as its tax policy and social security policy.

From the standpoint of the public sector, it was added that imbalances in economic, social, and natural resources development might also lead to social conflicts. Thus, the way to lessen social disparity is to strengthen communities by accumulating social capital, i.e., trust, mutual understanding, shared values, and behaviors that create harmonious relationships among people in communities. People, communities, and community networks



have to participate as the main actors in developing their own communities. Moreover, as there are rapid changes in socio-economic and natural resources situations, including technological advance, the community needs to know “widely,” “extensively,” and “deeply” in order to be highly resilient. Apart from that, in order to promote people's participation in the community, it was recommended that the community should use the drawing up of “community plans” as a tool to encourage people to work together. Currently, Thailand's Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan has adopted the “people-centered paradigm” and the concept of a “sufficiency economy” as the foundation of the Plan. This five-year plan thus enables all sectors in the society to participate in national development.

The viewpoints of representatives of non-government organizations and the people sector were also expressed in the session. According to a survey conducted by the Community Organizations Development Institute, villagers perceived that social harmony is consisted of five components: (a) active participation of people in the community, (b) mutual understanding developed by working together, (c) helping and taking care of each other, (d) common goals, and (e) the rule of law. The Baan Mankong Project (a national program of building permanent houses for slum dwellers) and the Recovery Project of Tsunami-affected Areas were also presented as successful cases showing that communities could solve problems by themselves in socially harmonious ways. The representatives of local communities also agreed that the concept of Baan Mankong, in which houses belong to the community, has resulted in success because the dwellers recognized that they were joint owners of their community, so they were willing to work together to take care of their community. On the contrary, if people get a house for free, they are more likely not to care much about it, as they did not put any effort into getting it. With regard to the problems in three southernmost provinces, the villagers noted that it would be very difficult for the

Thai Muslims in the three provinces concerned to comprehend the concept of social harmony because they currently still felt a sense of inequality in that area. For example, school textbooks do not recount the history of these three provinces. Moreover, it was found that people from outside the area do not understand Muslim culture and religion very well, so it was recommended that the local people should be invited to participate in the reconciliation process.

Recommendations on conflict resolution were proposed as follows. First, a network among the communities should be established in order to build harmonious relationships in the society as a whole. Second, opportunities for gaining an education, for getting a good occupation and for the right to possess land should be increased. Third, specific measures should be taken to help the underprivileged. However, it was remarked that providing only financial support would not be the right solution; the measures should help them to know how to be ultimately self-reliant. Fourth, the rule of law and law enforcement should be assured in order to prevent conflicts due to the aforementioned unjust societal systems. Fifth, qualitative studies should be initiated, and indicators of the quality of life, such as those relating to social capital, should be determined rather than focusing only on the quantitative ones, such as income.

In conclusion, although the social disparity in Thai society is quite high, the aforementioned successful cases prove that promising ways still exist to lessen these inequalities as well as prevent violent social conflicts; the key factor in the reconciliation process is the participation of all sectors in the society, especially the local communities.

GROUP 3: MANAGING CONFLICTS ARISING FROM NATURAL RESOURCES UTILIZATION

This group focused on the conflicts arising from the management of natural resources, emphasizing water and land utilization from the viewpoint of academics and representatives of local communities.

From the academic standpoint, the discussions covered three issues: a government project on water management, an analysis of public policy in land utilization, and an analysis of policy and law related to forest management by both the government and the people. The group found that government agencies tended to solve problems in natural resources management with large-scale projects in line with government policy. In cases where the policy affected the people, the government agencies were likely to deal with the problem by making decisions in the style of a chief executive officer (CEO), exercising their ultimate legal and administrative authority. However, these government agencies have recognized that harsh measures, such as legal punishments, provide only temporary solutions. Also, the existing legal system on natu-

ral resources management is outdated and needs to be reviewed. Although the people were encouraged to participate in public hearings on natural resources management projects, they had little or no involvement in the planning and decision-making processes. Moreover, it is difficult for people to access some information regarding development projects, such as the areas possibly affected by the construction of a dam.

The group also shared ideas and lessons concerning conflicts in the management of natural resources, five issues were addressed; water resource conflicts between the industrial and other sectors in the eastern region of the country, the case of Rayong Province; the successful bottom-up approach on water management in the northern region and the case of the Mae Ta Chang River Basin; the protest against the Hau Na Weir Project in the northeastern region due to the lack of people's participation and the environmental impact assessment; the conflicts between government agencies and the people in water development and water transfer projects in the upper northern region such as Mae Tang, Mae Ngat, and Mae Kuang dams in Chiang Mai Province; and the problems of coastal resources management, the case of Trang Province with regard to overfishing as well as conflicts between commercial and small-scale fishermen.

The group discussed how all natural resources, such as soil, water, forest, mineral resources, and the air are inextricably linked to each other; thus the management of all natural resources should be done in a holistic way. Likewise, as the conflicts in natural resources management had repercussions on other parts of society, conflict resolution should be based on a holistic approach and focus directly on the problems and the needs of the people. Apart from that, the needs of all sectors in natural resources utilization are increasing tremendously, even though natural resources are limited. Thus, sectors have to compete with each other and this tends to cause conflicts in some cases. When conflicts emerge, government agencies are likely to adopt conflicting standards to problems. For mega-projects concerning the management of



natural resources, many projects have not been based on the correct information and strategy assessments of the social impact are lacking. On the other hand, the successful cases of people's participation in conflict resolution regarding the management of natural resources in the Mae Ta Chang River Basin, and the mangroves in Trang Province proved that the participation of the people concerned is one of the key factors in building a harmonious society. However, these kinds of projects have not been well supported by government agencies.

In making recommendations, the group suggested that we should focus on the needs of the majority, and at the same time, not neglect the voice of the minority, especially the poor. Moreover, we should abolish harsh measures which have been used for resolving conflicts over the management of natural resources and also revise some outdated laws so that they will be in line with the Constitution of B.E. 2540, which highlighted the importance of people's participation. The database on natural resources should be available to the public and kept up to date. Last but not least, the role of the community in resolving conflicts should be emphasized. Community members should try to solve problems by themselves and government agencies should act as facilitators to help them with resources and advice. Government agencies also need to recognize the role of the people as "watchdogs" in monitoring the work of government agencies.

GROUP 4: MANAGING LABOR CONFLICTS

The emphasis of this group was on exploring the management of potential conflicts arising from labor issues, in terms of domestic labor conflicts as well as issues stemming from foreign migrant labor.

It was concluded that Thai society could not be regarded as a truly harmonious society because there were some evidences showing that conflicts arose from inequalities in opportunity and violations of labor rights. Moreover, there was concern that the increasing number of undocumented foreign migrant workers would lead to social problems. During the financial crisis in 1997, conflicts in the labor sector seemed to have declined substantially. However, this did not mean that all conflicts had been resolved. Rather, the situation just cooled down temporarily, as all parts of society needed to compromise in order to survive the difficult time of the crisis.

The group emphasized that the labor relations system is a crucial mechanism for bringing about a harmonious labor situation. Thailand has adopted a tripartite system, which consists of the representatives of three groups: employers, employees, and the government. However, it was remarked that the laws related to the tripartite system give too much authority to government agencies in resolving labor disputes. It was suggested therefore that the settlement of labor conflicts should be done instead through the bipartite system which allows employers and employees to resolve conflicts by themselves. Moreover,

it was noted that the labor relations system in Thailand has failed to bring about social harmony in the labor sphere. This situation reflected a chronic problem, as each group in the labor relations system could not devise a solution due to conflicts in the concept, structure, and management of the labor relations system. In this regard, two crucial factors for the achievement of the labor relations system were proposed: first, the participation of the labor sector, and second, the sharing of benefits between labor and society as a whole.

In making policy recommendations, it was suggested that each group in the labor relations system should set up its own representative organization. With a solid working secretariat, each representative organization would have a stronger voice to negotiate with other organizations in the labor relations system. Moreover, some specific laws related to the labor relations system should be established, such as regulations concerning the registration procedure for representative organizations, and the nomination process to select the representatives for each organization. It was also recommended that some powerful employer organizations, such as the Federation of Thai Industries and the Thai Chamber of Commerce, should play a more active role, and that more employee organizations should be set up.

To sum up, the members of each group in the labor relations system should all work together in strengthening their own representative organizations so that these organizations could effectively negotiate with other organizations in the labor relations system. A well-functioning system would then be able to bring about the resolution of labor conflicts and a harmonious labor society would at last be achieved.

GROUP 5: CREATING SOCIAL VALUES FOR SOCIAL HARMONY

Inculcating an appropriate social value system is very important for achieving social harmony when there are various potential sources of conflict. This group thus looked at the role of education and the media in influencing the social value system.

Social values are those that society recognizes as appropriate ways of thinking and living. They stem from the experiences that people gain from family, school, workplace, peer group, and the media. It was remarked that, in general, social values can change, except for some values that have deep roots in the society; these would be quite difficult to change. It was also noted that Thai people lack competence in analyzing the totality of conflicts in a holistic way, so they are likely to look at problems on a superficial level. For example, when a mother abandons her child, people blame only the mother, and do not look beyond that act into other factors that might force the mother to do so. Moreover, misuse of power seems to be one of the occurrences that Thais have gotten used to. Thus, to achieve social harmony, these two inappropriate social

values, i.e., the lack of a holistic way of thinking and getting used to the misuse of power, should be eliminated.

To create social values for social harmony, five strategies concerning education and the media were recommended. First, the media should establish guidelines for appropriate ways to cover controversial or sensitive issues, such as news about a woman being raped. In school, there should be courses on media literacy to teach children on how to “consume” the media. The children should be taught how to discern between useful media programs so that they can ignore the useless ones. In this regard, it was suggested that a teacher’s manual on media literacy should be drafted and distributed to school teachers. Apart from that, the media should not be monopolized by a few groups controlled by huge broadcasting companies, but others such as small companies or communities should be allowed to join in. This would give the general public more options. Social networking should be encouraged in order to raise the awareness of the general public in monitoring the quality of the media.

The second strategy concerns education. The content of textbooks for school children should be revised with more details provided about the concept of different races, religions and cultures in Thai society. The textbooks should be updated in line with current social and economic situations. As textbooks have only limited space to cover all relevant information that children need to learn, teachers should be encouraged to devise new and interesting teaching strategies to overcome this drawback. Moreover, teachers should be role models for students in terms of reflecting social sensitivity. It was also recommended that a reward system should be initiated for school

children who do a good deed, as this would facilitate the building of social harmony; for example, school children who display kindness to other people could be given rewards.

The third strategy calls for the encouragement of people’s participation in public policymaking, which would introduce alternative solutions to conflicts. Fourth, the justice system needs to be improved. If people do not believe in the justice system and lack confidence in it, they might choose violent measures to resolve conflicts. The justice system should function efficiently and the process should not take a long time. The media should also publicize the whole process of the justice system in order to enlighten the public and create more trust in the efficiency of the system. Fifth, a mechanism should be established that can provide well-rounded information on public issues for the general public. This would create mutual understanding among the people and prevent conflicts that might arise over certain issues.

The group also touched upon the benefits and drawbacks of using polls to assess the attitude of people in society. Polls are useful in that the results can encourage people to hold further discussions or exchange ideas. However, it was remarked that we need to be aware of the limitations of each poll and also the interpretation of the results of a poll. It was further suggested that polls should be conducted continuously so that we can observe the trend of people’s attitudes.

In sum, the group concluded that the media and education reforms alone could not bring about social harmony in Thai society. It is necessary that all Thais work together to create social values for social harmony.



Toward a Harmonious Society*

Mark Tamthai**

Ofentimes when we begin thinking of what steps to undertake to bring about a harmonious Thai society we come up with particular concrete proposals. These ideas are sometimes in conflict with other proposals for bringing about the same thing, and the proponents of the different ideas end up having intense arguments about what line of action should be taken. These conflicts of ideas are difficult to reconcile in some cases because of the uncertainty of the actual consequences of certain actions. However, in not a few cases the problem stems from something deeper, namely, different conceptions as to the nature of a harmonious society. Sorting out this basic question would make the entire endeavor more efficient because it would enable us to focus on the real disagreements and try to sort things out from there. This paper will propose an answer to the basic question of what a harmonious Thai society should be like, and then will offer some reflections on what are some necessary steps, though maybe not sufficient, which Thai society must take if it is to work toward a harmonious society of this kind.

WHAT A HARMONIOUS THAI SOCIETY IS NOT.

It is best to begin by stating what a harmonious Thai society that we are searching for in today's world is not, so that we are clear on the boundaries of the idea we will be proposing.

- A harmonious Thai society in today's world is not a particular Thai society which existed in the past and which we must try to return to or to reclaim. This is an important point to be clear about because we often hear of nostalgic yearnings for Thai society to return to a kinder and gentler past, but such descriptions from the past are almost always from the viewpoint of those

members of society who lived a life free from basic needs, discrimination and abuse from the powerful.

- A harmonious Thai society is not a complete ideal society. We are not trying to build a utopia, but rather something more practical which can reasonably be expected to be possible in a specific time-frame (maybe 10-20 years).
- A harmonious Thai society is not a society where all the members have love and affection for each other. If we were talking about a smaller social unit, such as a village or a medium size company, this might be a reasonable feature to incorporate, but for a society of 60 million this should not be our aim.

WHAT A HARMONIOUS THAI SOCIETY IS.

Having seen what we should not be looking for in a harmonious Thai society, we will now propose what features such a harmonious Thai society ought to have. The features that we propose are the following:

1. *All members of a harmonious Thai society feel that their own particular culture is as much a part of the overall culture as that of other cultures that also exists in the society.* This feeling will come about when all the cultures in society see themselves presented concretely in such public presentations as the visual background of the 8AM and 6PM National Anthem presentations on television, or in Tourist Organization of Thailand brochures which present images of Thailand. There should be no groups in society who look at public presentations of society, such as the two mentioned above, and say (as some groups in Thailand say today) "We do not see ourselves there."

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2. The diversity of cultures that exist in a harmonious Thai society should be able to be expressed freely in public (for example in language, dress, religious ceremonies) with the only exception being in the use of reason in public discussions. In this matter all members of society voluntarily agree to the use of public reason. By voluntarily agreeing to use public reason in public discussions the different cultural groups in society are saying that any values that are specific to their culture, and which might differ from others, will not be used as premises or assumptions in public debate and deliberation. This is a minimum condition for multicultural societies to function as a democratic society.

3. All members of a harmonious Thai society are full citizens and are aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and which they all share equally. This awareness must be the same across all sectors of society. In some forms of societies (such as patronage societies) the rights and responsibilities of different members of society differ from each other. Any remnants of this inequality that still exist in society must be eliminated.

4. All members of a harmonious Thai society must believe that it is possible for them to improve upon their own economic situation as well as that of their families. The economic system, whatever it is, must not lock any member of society into a situation where there is no hope for improvement. Such a situation would cause those members to feel that they had their “backs against the wall” and that their options for the future are extremely limited. This kind of situation would have adverse consequences for the society as a whole since these people would become bitter members of society. As an example consider a person who works in the service industry at a low position. Opportunities might exist for some kind of promotion but it requires a skill that the person does not have. He/she then inquires about ways to acquire this skill but discovers that it costs too much and is not affordable unless he/she gets the promotion. This becomes a “catch 22” situation with no way out. Similar examples exist in the labor and agricultural sectors of being locked into an economic strata with no escape.

HOW CAN THAI SOCIETY BECOME A HARMONIOUS SOCIETY?

So what must we begin doing in order to develop the four features of a harmonious Thai society discussed above? I would like to suggest that the appropriate starting point is to realize that a harmonious Thai society must eventually be the kind of society which provides its members with the two types of needs which all human beings have, namely, the need for individual freedom and the need to be cared for and looked after as part of a community. There is a long standing debate over the merits of individualism vs. communitarianism and the cultural dimensions of these two ways of living, but I think the key is to find the right balance between these two kinds of needs rather than choose one over the other.

We must also make a distinction between what I would like to refer to as “shallow harmony” and “deep harmony.” A (shallow) harmonious society is one in which there are no overt violent conflicts among members but in which there is a widespread sense of unfulfillment and powerlessness among many of its members. Strong patronage societies exhibit this feature, even though they may be well-meaning and seem peaceful on the surface. A (deep) harmonious society is one which has built in mechanisms to deal with conflicts and whose members feel in control of their destiny and so are more willing to work with each other. Democratic societies (though not necessarily of the liberal type) come close to resembling this kind of harmony. It is not an accident that democratic societies are moving close to this deep kind of harmony because in such societies we see the development of public reason (through examples from the legislative, judicial and administrative branches) as a high priority, as well as recognition that cultural pluralism must be dealt with in a comprehensive manner. This is not to say that democratic societies have solved these two tough challenges but that they recognize their importance and so are working on the “right problems.” These are the problems which Thai society must now begin working on in a serious manner if we want to achieve our own kind of harmonious society.

Our past is like a cloud that casts its shadow over society. The first thing that we must do is to find a way to get out from under this cloud in order that sunlight can shine through. Only then will we be able to begin building a harmonious Thai society.

Thailand's Cross-border Trade in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Some Issues Never Solved

Srawooth Paitoonpong*

The growing integration of economies and societies around the world, as manifested by free trade agreements and free trade areas, is a complex process that affects many aspects of our lives. Thus, increasing attention is being paid to the non-trade issues of economic integration. In Southeast Asia, since 1992, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has assisted in a program of subregional economic cooperation based on specific and complementary activities that have extended beyond national borders. The program involves the participation of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Yunnan Province of China — termed collectively as the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). The GMS program initially focused on infrastructure development, but attention is shifting to regional approaches for addressing social, environmental, and trade issues. Most recently, ADB has initiated research to review the impact on poverty of regional economic integration in GMS, in which the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) actively participates. An important part of the research involves reviewing emerging informal issues of cross-border trade in GMS. The country study by TDRI looks into such issues as they relate to Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia. A brief review of the issues is presented here with a view to promoting a broad range of GMS development issues and to serving as a catalyst for further research and discussion on the subject.

Thailand has a border about 1,810 km long with Lao PDR, extending from Chiang Rai Province to Ubon Ratchathani Province. The Thai-Lao border has 36 crossing points, 13 of which are permanent, 2 temporary and 21 informal. The border with Cambodia is about 800 km long extending from Ubon Ratchathani Province to Trat Prov-

ince. The Thai-Cambodian border has one international check-point and four temporary ones. The border economy involves not only economic activities but also social ones, some, or many, of which are informal or even illegal. Indeed, along the GMS borders, considerable off-record or underground movements of goods and services take place as well as the movement of people. Contagious diseases are carried in connection with such movements, particularly the movement of people. Examples of non-trade border issues in GMS include migrant workers or the migration of workers, human trafficking, drug trafficking, HIV/AIDS, smuggling, illegal logging and trafficking, car stealing, border robbery, border ethnic minorities, and the Mekong River ecosystem.

This paper gives an illustration of a limited number of these interrelated issues, namely, migrant workers, human trafficking, and HIV/AIDS in the Mekong region.

MIGRANT WORKERS IN THAILAND

Since the early 1990s Thailand has become an important country of destination for unskilled migrant workers from neighboring low-income countries. Indeed, the rapid economic growth in Thailand over the last two decades has effectively transformed the country from a labor-exporting country (during the period 1970-1980) to a de facto labor-importing country by the early 1990s. Most of the migrant workers are from Myanmar, with relatively smaller numbers from Cambodia, China, Lao PDR and South Asian countries.

It may be said that the lack of effective migration-law enforcement is a major cause of the increasing number

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of undocumented migrant workers in Thailand. Historically, the Thai Government in 1973 required migrants employed in Thailand to get a work permit. It also listed a number of occupations and professions that were prohibited to aliens. In 1979 foreign workers were forbidden to undertake manual work. From 1988 up to the present, there has been an influx of migrant workers, particularly from Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR. In 1992 the first registration of undocumented migrant workers was undertaken. Since 1996 there has been a relaxation of the control on migrant workers, with the re-registration occurring in 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004 and 2005 (IOM 2004). The number of registered migrant workers increased from 90,911 persons in 1998 to 1,269,074 in 2004, of which 905,881 are from Myanmar, 181,579 from Cambodia and 181,614 from Lao PDR (Table 1).

It has been argued that one reason for employers to hire migrant workers is because Thai unskilled workers are “choosy,” preferring not to take “3D” (dangerous, difficult and dirty) jobs. Thus, migrant workers accept jobs

that Thai nationals do not want, especially in fisheries, construction work and farming. Some female migrants are employed in the industrial and service sectors, working in factories, in the entertainment business, and as domestic workers. Yet, it may be noted that the real reason for this may be that most migrant workers get relatively lower wages than Thai workers (UNESCO 2005).

Migrant workers are employed in various jobs such as in agriculture and livestock, domestic work, construction, fishing or fisheries, rice mills and as stevedores. Many of them (30%) are in the “others” category (Table 2), which comprises services followed by domestic work, construction and fishing and fisheries (approximately 15% each).

Migrant workers can be found throughout the entire country, even in the Northeast where they comprise a major source of domestic labor, i.e., 15,891 migrant workers in 2004 (Table 3). The majority of migrant workers are living in the Central and Southern Regions, and Bangkok, 24, 20 and 19 percent respectively.

Table 1 Registered Migrant Workers by Country of Origin and Sex, 1998-2004

		1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Myanmar	Males	53,387	59,968	58,701	257,354	196,520	134,812	497,372
	Females	25,670	29,350	32,023	193,981	152,744	112,979	408,509
	Total	79,057	89,318	90,724	451,335	349,264	247,791	905,881
Cambodia	Males	9,716	8,418	6,898	43,216	28,363	13,976	123,998
	Females	877	1,074	1,023	14,340	10,251	5,699	57,581
	Total	10,593	9,492	7,921	57,556	38,614	19,675	181,579
Lao PDR	Males	1,029	849	749	25,771	17,229	8,611	80,981
	Females	232	315	262	33,587	24,967	12,703	100,633
	Total	1,261	1,164	1,011	59,358	42,196	21,314	181,614
Total	Males	64,132	69,235	66,348	326,341	242,112	157,399	702,351
	Females	26,779	30,739	33,308	568,249	187,962	131,381	566,723
	Total	90,911	99,974	99,656	894,590	430,074	288,780	1,269,074

Source: Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2005. Population of Thailand in 2005.

Table 2 Migrant Workers by Activity (as of May 31, 2005)

Activity	Migrant workers	Percentage
Agriculture and livestock	182,791	21.5
Maid	126,343	14.9
Construction	124,614	14.7
Related fishery	74,500	8.7
Marine and fresh water fishery	60,655	7.1
Rice mills, brick makers, ice mills	16,702	1.9
Stevedore	4,312	0.5
Mining and quarrying	1,568	0.1
Others	256,145	30.2
Total	847,630	100.0

Source: Office of the Administrative Commission on Irregular Migrant Workers, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour.

Table 3 Employers and Migrant Workers' Work Permit Granted under the Cabinet's Resolution on Migrant Workers (as of May 31, 2005)

Region / Province	Employer	Myanmar	Lao PDR	Cambodia	Total	Percentage
Whole Kingdom	204,818	632,454	105,134	110,042	847,630	100
Bangkok	64,332	105,134	40,177	17,709	163,657	19
Central Region ¹	38,555	156,874	24,815	23,840	205,529	24
Eastern Region ²	20,394	34,965	15,272	53,781	104,018	12
Western Region ³	11,107	46,685	3,850	2,105	52,640	6
Northern Region ⁴	30,431	129,904	3,110	944	133,958	16
Northeastern Region ⁵	9,038	2,832	1,063	1,464	15,891	2
Southern Region ⁶	30,961	155,423	–	10,199	171,937	20

- Notes: ¹ Comprises Samut Sakhon, Samut Prakan, Pathum Thani, Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi, Samut Songkhram, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Saraburi, Lop Buri, Chai Nat, Ang Thong, Sing Buri, and Uthai Thani;
- ² Comprises Chon Buri, Trat, Rayong, Sa Kaeo, Chachoengsao, Chanthaburi, Prachin Buri, and Nakhon Nayok;
- ³ Comprises Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Suphan Buri, and Phetchaburi;
- ⁴ Comprises Tak, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Kamphaeng Phet, Nakhon Sawan, Lamphun, Lampang, Phitsanulok, Uttaradit, Phichit, Phetchabun, Phayao, Nan, Sukhothai, and Phrae;
- ⁵ Comprises Ubon Ratchathani, Kalasin, Nong Khai, Loei, Nakhon Phanom, Nakhon Ratchasima, Mukdahan, Udon Thani, Khon Kaen, Surin, Si Sa Ket, Sakon Nakhon, Buri Ram, Amnat Charoen, Chaiyaphum, Roi Et, Yasothon, Maha Sarakham, and Nong Bua Lam Phu;
- ⁶ Comprises Ranong, Surat Thani, Phuket, Phangnga, Chumphon, Songkhla, Pattani, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Trang, Krabi, Satun, Yala, Narathiwat, and Phatthalung.

Source: Office of the Administrative Commission on Irregular Migrant Workers, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour.

Migrant workers in Thailand pose a number of issues in the context of regional economic integration. These include:

- (1) Management of undocumented migrants
- (2) Security and crime
- (3) Contagious diseases
- (4) Human trafficking
- (5) Poor labor standard
- (6) Unemployment and low wage problems of Thai unskilled workers

To mitigate such problems and for mutual benefit, the Thai Government has signed a memorandum of understanding on employment cooperation with Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar in 2002/2003.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking has been defined as “the illicit and clandestine movement of persons across national borders, largely from developing countries and some countries with economies in transition, with the end goal of forcing women and girl children into sexually or economically oppressive situations for profit of recruiters, traffickers and crime syndicates, as well as other illegal activities related to trafficking, such as forced domestic labour, false marriages, clandestine employment and false adoption”

(United Nations General Assembly 1994). The definition is incomplete. It does not include boys and men who are also victims of trafficking, and the listing of situations is not exhaustive. Trafficking arises in a variety of situations beyond the list given, including trafficking for begging and use of people as agents of crime. A key element behind trafficking is coercion. Nevertheless, as will be discussed later, it is possible that there are other situations where there is no coercion at the time of trafficking, but it occurs when the person arrives later in a circumstance tantamount to slavery, such as being forced to work in appalling labor conditions or other illegal activities (MRLC et al. 1999, 33).

By and large, human trafficking is closely related to cross-border irregular migration. The illegality of much of this undocumented migration clearly makes migrants vulnerable to exploitation – to becoming victims of human trafficking. In the GMS it appears that, in the vast majority of cases, the actual movement aspects of the trafficking are generally “voluntary” in the sense that the person himself or herself has made the decision to travel for work, within the limited range of the choice available (Marshall 2001, 3).

Elsewhere, each year up to 350,000 illegal migrants from Mexico enter the United States, and as many as 800,000 migrants from other parts of the world enter the European Union. In 2005, 464 people died while crossing from Mexico into the United States, and each year around

2,000 people drown in the Mediterranean on their way from Africa to Europe (*The Economist*, 8 October, 2005, 18).

In Thailand, there is a dearth of in-depth research on the extent of human trafficking and the problems confronting the victims. There are several issues regarding trafficking and exploitation. Migrants must pay brokers to help them enter the country. They are at risk of being cheated or being arrested on the way. They have no information or any commitment regarding their respective jobs. Some are coerced into forced labor or prostitution, or sexually assaulted. Many of them have a very poor working environment and living quarters (WVFT 2004, 1). Very recently, some migrant workers from Myanmar were forced to traffick drugs by swallowing condoms filled with drugs, after which they cross the border (*Thai Rath*, 31 December, 2005).

Human trafficking may be classified into three types. The first and largest category of trafficking is migrant workers who are brought into the country to take jobs of a low standard. It is a combination of migration and labor exploitation—exploitation in a range of forms including debt bondage, low or no wages, excessive working hours, unsafe conditions, etc. Some migrant workers are charged a high fee for traveling into Thailand as well as the additional costs associated with job seeking. Some of them have been robbed along the way; women have been raped. At the destination, industries hiring a high proportion of irregular migrants include factories and fisheries as well as domestic labor. The second but highest profile form of trafficking is prostitution or sex work. Although in some ways similar to the other forms of labor exploitation mentioned previously, it falls into a slightly different category as it often has an illegal or ambiguous status. The third category of trafficking is those forms of “labor” that address demand, which society generally finds unacceptable. This includes the trafficking of young children for begging, such as from Cambodia to Thailand. It also includes the abduction of young boys in China and the trafficking of Vietnamese and Burmese women into China to become brides for sale.

There is a dearth of data on number of trafficked persons because of the difficulty in assessing and distinguishing between (poor innocent) trafficking victims and economic migrants who are in the business on a voluntary basis. For the first category of trafficking victims, the migrant workers who are given poor jobs in sub-standard working conditions, the number of people at risk can be an indicator. For the third category, migrant child beggars, the number can be observed from those arrested by the Thai authorities, some of whom are deported to Cambodia. The number of children beggars from Cambodia is estimated to be more than 10,000.

For the number involved in cross-border prostitution from neighboring countries, a rough estimate has been made: in 1996, at least 12,607 women out of 77,094 prostitutes in Thailand were migrants (Kritaya and Pornsuk 1997, 24). This number is said to be an extreme underestimation. While it is difficult to differentiate between Thai prosti-

Human traffickers arrested forcing migrant workers to traffic drugs in stomach

In Songkhla, Thailand, on December 29, 2005, the police arrested a Burmese man named Abi Rahman for trafficking drugs to Malaysia. At his house, the police found 10 Burmese men detained. Abi Rahman confessed that the 10 Burmese were smuggled into Thailand through Ranong Province and were in transit to be trafficked to Malaysia at the trafficking fee of 2,000-3,000 baht per head. The workers would be used to traffic drugs into Malaysia at a fee of 20,000 baht per shipment. To traffick the illicit drugs, Rahman forced the workers to starve and made them swallow a few condoms filled with drugs. Then the workers would be sent to Malaysia through the border fence. As soon as the workers arrived at the destination, the drug “bags” would be retrieved and the workers would be sent to work.

Thai Rath, 31 December, 2005.

tutes and migrant prostitutes, it is even more difficult to say who are trafficking victims and who are not.

Although it is difficult to quantify the number of person involved or the extent of human trafficking in Thailand, two major studies provide more information about the activity. One is a study by Kritaya and Pornsuk (1997), entitled “The Route of Women Workers from the Neighboring Countries into the Sex Industry in Thailand.” Another is a study by the World Vision Foundation of Thailand in collaboration with the Asian Research Center for Migration (2004), led by Prof. Supang Chantavanich. The former study describes characteristics of the trafficked victims and their problems as well as the process of trafficking of women into the sex industry in Thailand. The study is based on a survey of 128 female migrant workers (33 employed in the sex industry and 95 in other occupations) and 30 Thai women working in the sex industry. An in-depth interview was also conducted of 62 female migrant workers in the sex industry, 11 Thai female sex workers, 6 operators of brothels, 11 Public Health officials, 7 persons from NGOs, and 2 leaders of minority groups in Myanmar. The study was conducted in 18 provinces of Thailand. The World Vision publication, entitled “Research Report on Migration and Deception of Migrant Workers in Thailand,” is a survey analysis of 1,187 Burmese migrant workers in three areas: 395 from Mae Sai, 399 from Mae Sot, and 393 from Ranong.

An example of the findings is that traffickers can be classified into three groups by scale of operation: large organizations, medium-size organizations, and small ones. Most of the organizations in Thailand are small ones (Kritaya and Pornsuk 1997, 57). Similarly, Marshall (2001,

4) divides traffickers into two categories: organized crime and cottage industry. Within GMS, he maintains that trafficking resembles a cottage industry more than organized crime, with a range of small-scale operators along the way. It has been said that those people who facilitate migration which results in trafficking may often be the same as those who facilitate other forms of less exploitative migration. Such agents and even traffickers or smugglers are often seen as providing a service to the community.

The study by Supang (2000) seems to support the argument of Marshall (2001) that the process of trafficking can happen at the later stage of cross-border migration. For example, most migrant workers (96.5%) said that they were not deceived while they were in their hometowns. Only three respondents (0.8%) claimed that they were forced to walk to Thailand; one of the respondents was deceived and one was threatened. Deception while traveling, deception while seeking jobs and deception at the workplace accounted for 1.9, 1.1 and 4.1 percent of the total respectively (WVFT 2004, 41-42).

The types of exploitation and abuse among women migrant workers found by the World Vision study are shown in Table 4: seven women migrants (1.8%) were forced into prostitution, and nine (2.3%) were assaulted sexually.

Table 4 Types of Misconduct and Violation

	Number	Percentage
None	337	84.5
Being forced into prostitution	7	1.8
Being assaulted sexually	9	2.3
Being forced into labor	16	4.0
Being forced into slavery	3	0.8
Escaped from arrest	3	0.8
No answer	24	6.0
Total	399	100.0

Source: WVFT 2004, Table 3.11.

The World Vision study has more limitation in terms of areas covered, which may have some relationship with the degree of trafficking. It is possible that the deeper that migrants move into inner cities or urban areas, the higher is the risk they face of being exploited. Another reason is that at Mae Sot, Mae Sai and Ranong, there are higher concentrations of migrant workers than in the inner cities. Whether this hypothesis holds true is a subject for more research.

Figure 1 shows the trafficking routes within GMS. Countries in GMS are known as source, transiting and/or receiving countries or areas. While the routes on the map focus on trafficking within GMS, the trafficking is beyond the GMS boundary to other countries in Asia, Europe, North America, Australia, the Middle East and even South Africa.

As shown in Figure 1, women and children from Myanmar, Yunnan Province, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Viet-

nam are trafficked to Thailand and some of them are trafficked further abroad. In the late 1990s more and more women and children from China, Myanmar and Vietnam are trafficked to places such as Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, Macao, Singapore, United States, Canada, Australia, Germany and the Netherlands (Caouette 1998, 13). However, there are no reliable estimates of the number of trafficked victims.

HIV/AIDS IN THE MEKONG REGION

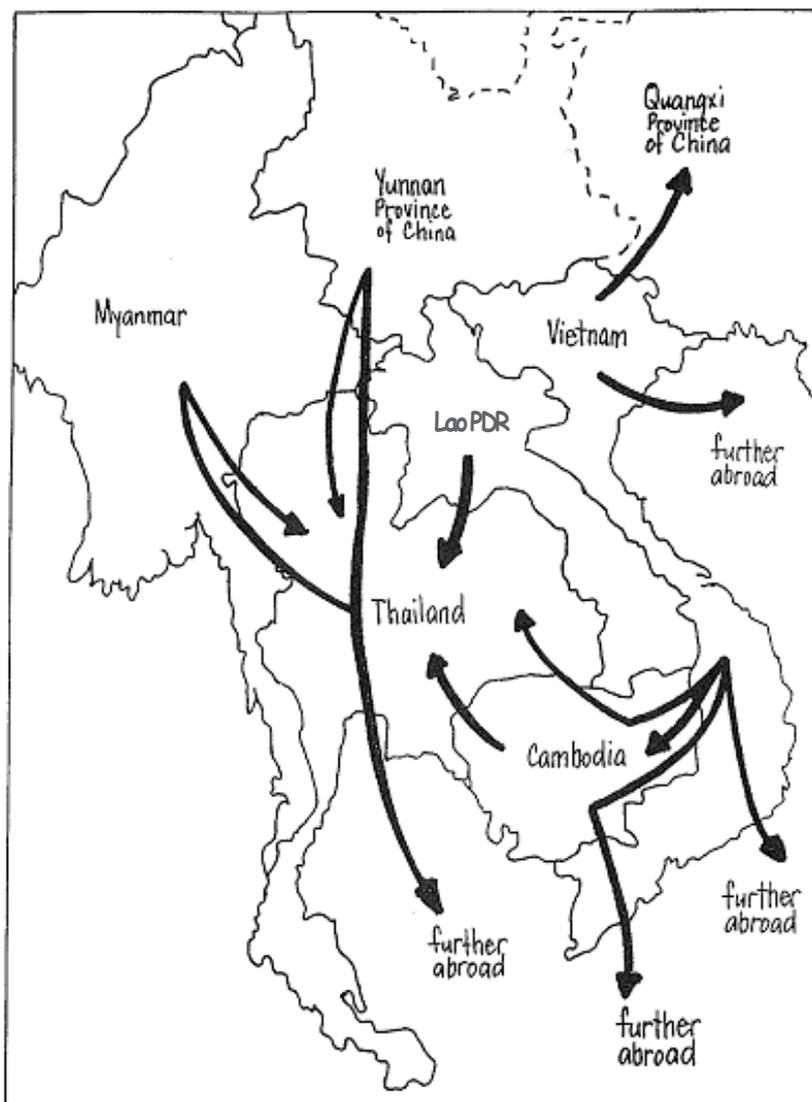
HIV/AIDS is a long-standing issue for countries in the Mekong region. The region is known to be the epicenter of Asia’s HIV/AIDS pandemic. At the end of 2001, approximately 40 million people were living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) worldwide. About 6.6 million were from Asia and the Pacific. Of the 6.6 million PLWHA in Asia and the Pacific, nearly 1 million were from the four countries of the lower Mekong region—Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam (Table 5).

According to a USAID study (2003), the first cases of HIV in the Mekong region were identified in Thailand in 1984: males who had sex with males. Heterosexual transmission of HIV was detected in the country in 1985 and then began to occur on a wider scale by 1989. Early on, Thailand documented high HIV prevalence levels in female sex workers and injecting drug users. Lao PDR and Vietnam reported their first cases of HIV infection in 1990; at that time HIV prevalence was still low in Lao PDR. In Cambodia, the first case of HIV infection was found in 1991 in a man donating blood, although the virus was found in Cambodian refugees in Thailand as early as 1989. Since then, Cambodia has experienced the fastest-growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in Asia.

There are a number of reasons why HIV/AIDS spreads very fast in GMS. First, drug use injection is a significant problem throughout the subregion. The “Golden Triangle,” comprising parts of Myanmar, China, Lao PDR, and Thailand, is a leading supplier of opiates, particularly heroin. Drug trafficking routes crisscross GMS and provide easy access to illicit drugs. Second, the movements of people across national borders are a major factor in HIV/AIDS contacts. The border and urban areas in GMS are sites for the booming sex industry in Southeast Asia. Mobility, increased tourism, the presence of peacekeeping forces, the opening up of formerly centrally-planned economies, human trafficking, a lack of educational and economic opportunities for women and girls, poverty and other factors have contributed to the rapid growth of the sex industry (USAID 2003, 1)

Migrant workers are claimed to be vulnerable to HIV/AIDS contacts and transmission. A study to confirm this hypothesis was undertaken in 1999 by CARE Thailand/Raks Thai Foundation, with the support of the Japanese Foundation for AIDS Prevention. The study does not, however, provide information with regard to evidence about or the extent of HIV/AIDS among migrant workers. Rather, it tried to identify the risk behaviors of migrant

Figure 1 Human Trafficking Routes within the Greater Mekong Subregion



Source: (Caouette 1998, 8).

Table 5 Number of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in the Greater Mekong Subregion, 2001 and 2004

Country	2001		2004	
	Population	PLWHA	Population	PLWHA ^a
Cambodia	13,411,000	170,000	13,363,421	170,000
Lao PDR	5,403,000	1,400	6,068,117	1,700
Thailand	63,584,000	670,000	64,865,523	570,000
Vietnam	79,175,000	130,000	82,689,518	220,000
Total	160,603,000	971,400	166,986,579	961,700

^a/ = Figure at the end of 2003

PLWHA = People living with HIV/AIDS

Source: UNAIDS (2002) quoted in USAID, Bureau for Asia and the Near East, 2003. HIV/AIDS in the Mekong Region, www.avert.org/aidssoutheastasia.htm

workers in three areas, namely, Samut Sakhon and Samut Prakan, Trat, and Chiang Khong.

Cross-border fishing is also a means for HIV/AIDS transmission. Thai fishermen who fish in Cambodian waters had a high chance of contacting HIV. Over-fishing in Thai waters in the Gulf of Thailand has led an increasing number of Thai fishermen entering Cambodian waters. This leads to increased contact among peoples of three nations: Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. The study maintains that fishermen are linked to outbreaks of HIV infection in Bangladesh, Vietnam and Irian Jaya in Indonesia. Prevalence data among fishermen in Ranong show increasingly high levels of HIV infection from 7 percent in 1991 to 14 percent in 1992 and 22 percent in June 1993 (Anthony et al. 1995, 9). Fishermen travel more than people in other occupations. In particular, they have many chances for docking at Cambodian and Vietnamese ports during a single trip that could extend over several months. Fishing boats have to dock occasionally in order to refuel, load ice, sell fish, allow the crew to rest and have recreation, repair equipment, stock up on food, meet friends and colleagues, engage in sex, go to bars and gambling dens, and avoid monsoon and other storms. It is very common among fishermen (captains and boat crews) to have sex with prostitutes in the ports they visit. The study indicates that condom use by Cambodian and Thai men in commercial sex establishments is extremely low. Besides, the men who are the clients in brothels and the sex workers themselves have many misconceptions about HIV/AIDS, such as it is curable; if one is healthy one cannot get AIDS; unattractive commercial sex workers do not have AIDS; clean people do not have AIDS; one cannot get AIDS by having sex with a virgin in a brothel (Anthony et al. 1995).

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is an example of the negative side of economic integration and the free movement of people across borders. Nevertheless, it can also be argued that it is because of income disparity and poverty that the problem is caused, and economic integration should be considered as a means to solve the problem.

CONCLUSIONS

Economic integration along GMS borders needs to be looked at closely with regard to many non-trade issues if it is to achieve the ultimate goal of development. Quite a number of non-trade, informal or illegal issues reflect the fact that a large number of stakeholders are suffering as a result of cross-border activities. Ways to ensure that economic integration can mitigate, if not eliminate, the negative impact need to be identified.

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