

Insights into the Emergence of the Role of Development NGOs in Thailand's Development Process

การก่อกำเนิดบทบาทขององค์กรพัฒนาเอกชน ด้านการพัฒนาในประเทศไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

องค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนเป็นองค์กรที่ตั้งขึ้นเพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งในการแก้ไขปัญหาด้านการพัฒนาเช่น การละเมิดสิทธิมนุษยชน ความไม่เท่าเทียมกันในสังคม ความยากจน และปัญหาด้านสิ่งแวดล้อม องค์กรเหล่านี้มีส่วนสำคัญในการช่วยเหลือกลุ่มชั้นนำที่มักจะถูกละเลย องค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนจึงเป็นหน่วยงานด้านการพัฒนาที่มีบทบาทสำคัญในการพัฒนาอย่างยั่งยืนของประเทศไทย

บทความนึกถ่วงถึงการก่อการเมืองและบทบาทขององค์กรเหล่านี้ แลบปัจจัยต้านสังคมวัฒนธรรมของประเทศไทยที่มีผลต่อบทบาทขององค์กร นอกจากนี้ยังกล่าวถึงการเปลี่ยนแปลงของบทบาทของในช่วงเวลาที่ต่างกัน ผู้เขียนได้วิเคราะห์ลักษณะและบทบาทขององค์กรพัฒนาสังคม โดยใช้แนวคิดของอสเตรอร์ โดยพนวณลักษณะทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรมมีผลต่อลักษณะของบทบาทและค่านิยมขององค์กรและยังพนวณว่าบทบาทขององค์กรเปลี่ยนแปลงไปตามการเรียนรู้และพัฒนาอย่างไร และการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคม

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Abstract

Development NGOs are unique organizations, with interesting missions and ideologies. These organizations address enduring development problems, such as violation of human rights, inequality, poverty and environmental degradation. They also assist marginalized groups. Development NGOs are considered as an important development agent, contributing to Thailand's sustainable and balanced development.

This paper illustrates the emergence of the development of the role of NGOs in Thailand's development process and how socio-cultural factors affect these roles. It also discusses how roles change and evolve and the diverse roles that these organizations play.

The paper provides in-depth information on the role, environment and characteristics of Development NGOs. It further analyses the role of Development NGOs and their status using Oster's Model and clarifies the role of Development NGOs in connection with the socio-cultural and political context. It also explains why Development NGOs perform certain roles and acquire certain positions in society. It is found that socio-cultural and political aspects play important roles in shaping development NGOs' value and role. Looking into the evolution of the role of Development NGOs will shed light on the factors that initiate role change, such as incremental learning, changing social, political and economic realities, influence of donors and funding.

Development NGOs are unique organizations with interesting missions and ideologies. These organizations address enduring development problems, such as the violation of human rights, inequality, poverty and environmental degradation. They also assist marginalized groups. Development NGOs are considered as important development agents that contribute to Thailand's sustainable and balanced development.

Development NGOs have distinctive features, such as the complexity of revenue generation, diverse ideologies and approaches, difficulty in judging organization performance and unique concepts of accountability and legitimacy. This paper will illustrate the emergence of the role of development NGOs in Thailand and how socio-cultural factors affect these roles. It also discusses how roles change and evolve and the diverse roles that these organizations play.

In order to illustrate the importance of the emergence of Development NGOs in the development process, the functions they serve and the types of roles they play, Oster's Model (1995: 21) is applied. According to Oster there are 3 forces; namely, public failure, work sorting and contract failure. Public Failure is the first factor that Oster defines as an important influence on the emergence of the NGO in societies. Public failure occurs when the government cannot provide services to diverse groups in time, which is the case for Thailand as well as other developing countries. Because of public inadequacy, Development NGOs are established to create mechanisms to assist these groups and to fill in the gap of the government's work. The government is still the main development actor, as it has the authority and power to initiate development policies. Development NGOs are development partners that stimulate the government to address different problems, provide suggestions or criticize the government's operation.

Apart from the role of NGOs in serving the unmet needs of different disadvantaged groups, these organizations emerged to serve other social and political functions. For example, many Development NGOs in Thailand serve as a stimulus to bring about a true check and balance system in the country. They monitor the state's provision as well as its transparency, accountability and integrity. Also, Development NGOs open forums for people from different sectors to exchange ideas, problems and approaches, which in turn create active and strong civic actions. These organizations enable Thai people to have a public space and to play a greater role in development.

Oster's second force is *Work Sorting*. Civil society emerged because it serves as a workspace for those that share certain values. These people neither fit in the public nor private sector, but in a third sector. In terms of work sorting, Development NGOs serve as the sector that works toward sustainable and just development in several aspects. This sector attracts people that hold certain shared ideologies and values. It is a sector that attracts people with strong ideology and commitment. Spirit is the key to NGO workers' integrity and commitment. Because NGO workers enter the sector due to strong values and ideologies, and the urge to help others, they have developed certain self-restriction rules to maintain their integrity and good intentions. In addition, shared values and norms lead to tacit rules of unspoken practices among NGO workers.

Oster's last factor is *Contract Failure*, which is when society expects a sector to foster goodness and justice. It is a sector where trust and beliefs are the core principles. When applying contract failure to the Thai context, Development NGOs seem to serve as an ideological asylum

for Thai society. Their work involves fostering goodness through the pursuit of ideological achievements while fighting against injustice. They represent a sector that is devoted to the good deeds of others and expects little personal benefit in return. While the public sector serves political interests, the private sector serves organizational interests, and Development NGOs serve national interests. The outcome of the work of Development NGOs contributes to a better society, higher quality of life and greater equality.

In addition to Oster's three forces, the researcher has identified three more factors that explain the emerging role of Development NGOs in Thailand's development process; Equality and Justice Failure, Analytical Failure and Passivity of Citizens and Status Inequality.

The failure of *Equality and Justice* has occurred throughout Thailand's development history. The national development policies over the past decades have led to great economic development and have improved the standard of living of Thais but at the same time have brought about many social, political, economic and environmental problems. Development NGOs believe in a different development paradigm. They believe that changes must be endured and that major structural change is possible so that in the end the development process shall benefit the poor and the marginalized as well as the rich. Many Development NGOs have built strong alliances with development partners, such as local administrative organizations, people's organizations, business firms and government agencies, based on shared values and feelings towards suffering from inequality and injustice in society.

The Analytical Failure and Passivity of Citizens is another factor that has stimulated the emergence of the role of NGOs. One of the many

factors that shape Thai people's norms and ways of life is the state-centrality paradigm, which has been embedded in the society for centuries. Reliance on administrative power has influenced the societal definition of the roles and status of citizens, making them passive.

It is evident that the power and authority of the state have been accepted by citizens throughout 'the evolution of Thai society. In the early days of absolute monarchy, the king assumed all administrative power, and citizens were taught to assent to such power. Such philosophy came from a mixture of Buddhism and Hindu beliefs, which place the king in a higher status than average people.

When the era of development began, the state was still the key player that dominated the development process. The above are examples of the long-standing nature of loyalty and reliance on leaders, despite the evolution of political structure. Inevitably, this resulted in the decline in citizen initiatives, self-help, mutual reliance and independence. Believing in the state's role in protecting and providing for its citizens, Thais accept the fact that the state has sole authority to remedy all developmental problems (Juree Vichit-Vadakan and others, 2002: 17-20). As a result, the state's top-down policies have overshadowed civil society's initiatives and input into the development process. Also, because of the citizens' dependence on the state, they tend to be less active in participating in shaping the development process. Acceptance of the state's power creates legitimacy for the state's decisions. Instead of people playing a proactive role in development processes, people accept the state's power in shaping their lives with state-centered development activities. With such a notion, people rarely analyze development trends, question the state's decisions or

have doubts about the state's initiated development projects. This is partly because Thais are socialized to think that it is not their role or duty, and partly because they believe that they are in good hands. Because of this state-led context, Thai people tend to be passive in taking part in or in expressing opinions related to social and political issues-they often follow the leader's decisions without raising questions.

Development NGOs have emerged as organizations that stimulate Thai people to think "out of the box" and to pull away from passivity. They analyze the social, economic and political environment and reflect on their own perspectives and approaches. Instead of urging Thais to be dependent on the government, Development NGOs stimulate them to be independent, self-reliant and strong.

Additionally, Development NGOs stimulate Thai people to be proactive in development participation. They are also catalysts for change in the social structure. Their work involves advocacy work that urges social movements to provide input into the development process. They raise awareness about development problems to create collective forces that tackle enduring problems. This is a form of informal education, as these NGOs disseminate information within the organization as well as outside it.

The state is used to having a monopoly on development authority. Quite often the Development NGOs are perceived by the centralized state as having no role or competence in development activities. The Development NGOs that serve a supportive or complementary role to the state are welcomed but negotiating with the state and/or monitoring the state's actions are not. Organizations that are engaged in such activities

would usually be perceived as anti-state groups. Thais often view non-state actors advocating change and development with suspicion, dislike, misgiving and mistrust. In sum, the non-analytical nature and passivity of citizens, influenced by state-led nature, are among the important factors that stimulate Development NGOs to play many development roles, such as watchdog (social monitoring), advocacy and catalyst for change.

Status Inequality is one factor that has triggered the role of Development NGOs in Thailand. Socio-cultural conditions, such as a state-centrality context and a patron-client structure, have certain effects on the emergence of the role of Development NGOs. This is because these socio-cultural contexts lead to status inequality between state officials and non-state actors and draw a line in their roles and duties. According to Juree Vichit-Vadakan (2002b: 6-7), the patron-client structure reflects the unequal relationship between patron and client and is based on the principle of vertical affiliation, where persons of unequal status enter into an either formal or informal relationship. It is a mechanism which links higher status persons to the many lower status persons and where a client must serve the patron and the patron provides protection for the clients in return.

The patron-client relationship and the state-centrality context have a significant influence on state officials. Thai state officials view themselves as providers or leaders that take care of the people. The relationship between state officials and the people is not equal. The state officials assume the role of patron; thus they feel that it is legitimate for them to govern non-state actors. The people assume the role of the clients that are automatically under the care of the patron. Thus, they are expected to follow the guidance or orders of the patron. This unequal relationship

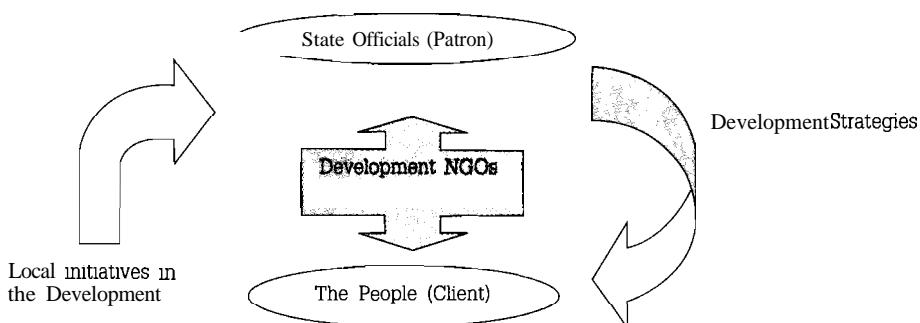
and status inequality between the two parties reduce local people's opportunity to participate in development activities. Also, it increases the level of dependency between the two groups, which limits the client's ability to be strong and independent.

Development NGOs have arisen as a new equation in the patron-client relationship. This is an issue about status. Development NGOs do not view their status in terms of inequality between themselves and the state in the development process. Instead of viewing themselves and local people as clients, they take an active role in being an equal development partner with state officials and urge local people to do the same. In many cases, they are the medium between grassroots people, who have limited channels with which to participate in the development process, and the state. Development NGOs are partnership builders, helping to create a balance between the government's top-down policies and an ideal bottom-up approach.

Development NGOs help local people to increase their capability, self-reliance, self-confidence and interdependency through participation and empowerment activities. Gradually, clients have become more active in expressing their opinions as well as in playing a more distinctive role in the development process. An example of the role of Development NGOs in the new patron-client relationship in Thailand can be seen in the implementation of the 8th National Economic and Social Development plan, where humans have become the center of development. This is the concept that NGOs have supported and enhanced for more than 10 years. Another major incident was that the state allowed participants from the third sector to take part in the drafting of the 1997 Constitution. It was

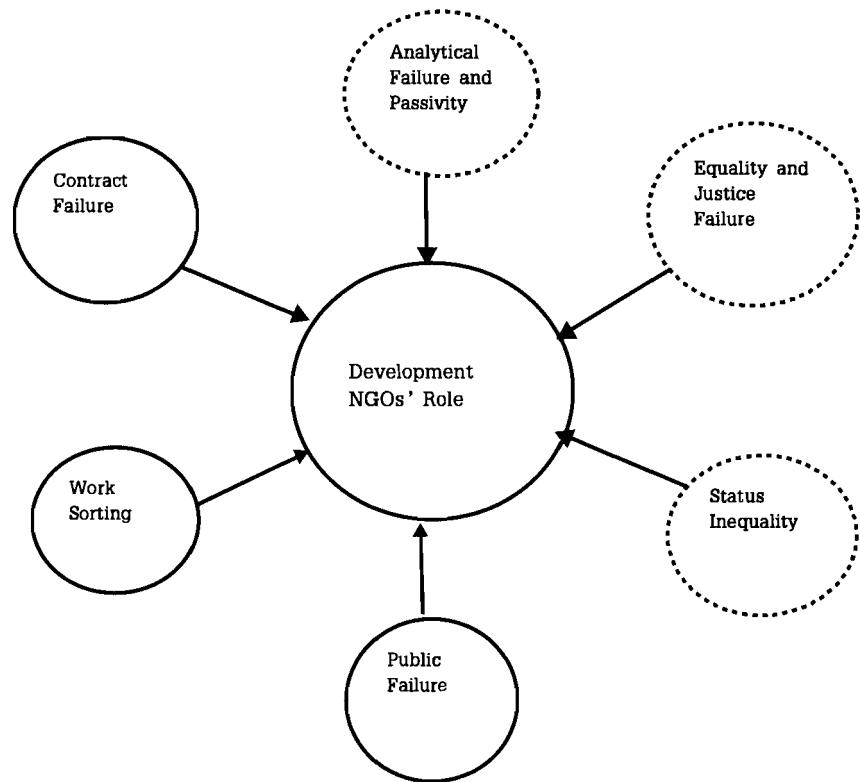
the first time in Thailand that freedom of participation was given to the people in drafting a major law.

The Role of Development NGOs in the Patron-Client Structure



From this last factor, status inequality, it can be assumed that Development NGOs emerged to fill a status gap between the state and the people. When the people are viewed as inferior and powerless, they are often suppressed either by rules and regulations or by social norms. Development NGOs strive to change the equation by empowering the people and helping them to regain their rights and dignity as a member of a democratic society, as well as a competent development agent.

Model of Underlying Factors that Shape the Role of Development NGOs in the Development Process



Oster's Forces



Additional forces developed by the researcher

Insights into the Ways Development NGO's Roles Change and Evolve

When applying the life-cycle theory (Greiner, 1970; Hatch, 1997) to the third sector in Thailand, it is found that only large philanthropic organizations or those that have been established for a long time follow such phases of organizational life, such as the Thai Red Cross Foundation, the Pao-te-shan-tang and some philanthropic organizations under royal patronage established many decades ago. As for Development NGOs, these organizations do not follow all of the phases described by Greiner (entrepreneurial, collective, delegation, formahzation and collaborative). For one reason, these NGOs are relatively newly-established organizations, since the 1960s, and prospered during the 1980s-90s. Therefore they have not been established long enough to have gone through the stages described by Greiner and Hatch.

However, it is interesting to note that these organizations are in the entrepreneurial phase (some are proceeding to the collective phase or the formahzation phase) and they are forming the wide network described in the collaborative phase. This is because development NGOs' work involves social movement and mobilization, which takes a long time to accomplish and requires abundant resources. Thus, it is essential that they form a large and effective network in order to achieve goals. Also, development NGO's alternative development strategies emphasize cross-sectoral networking and collaboration. Mutual learning and collective effort are the keys to these organization's approaches. Development NGOs form a sub-society, where

certain ethics, norms and codes of conduct are expected from members. Within this society, there is a certain form of self-monitoring. Networking is considered as a mechanism to stimulate real implementation of development approaches as well as to create collaboration.

The role and structure of Development NGOs change according to the crises they encounter. It appears that Hatch's statement, that transition only occurs when the organization is confronted with a crisis that threatens its survival, appears to be relevant to the case of Development NGOs in Thailand. For example, Development NGOs used to consider themselves free spirited and they did not want to be restrained by legal rules or regulations. Thus, a majority of the first generation of Development NGOs were unregistered and they used to manage their organizations as they deemed appropriate. Some may have had a concrete system while others may have not. Many organizations were loosely structured in the form of groups, clubs, projects, etc. Even today, there are still many unregistered organizations.

However, this trend is gradually changing due to external pressures influencing Development NGOs to change their structure, value or approach. For example, funding needs force Development NGOs to change. In order to survive, they have to be more formalized, effective, transparent and accountable. Thirty years ago, a great amount of foreign funds came into Thailand, so Development NGOs had abundant funds to do what they wanted. Now the funding has significantly decreased and NGOs have to fight for funding. Donors select effective NGOs, thus, NGOs must prove themselves to be effective and transparent-otherwise, they would not get the funding. As a result, these organizations are forced to rethink their

system and become more formalized. They must also be legal entities because NGOs, both large and small, are competing for financial resources. Consequently, they must readjust in certain ways to show donors that they are effective and transparent; otherwise they may lose financial support to other NGOs that appear to be more transparent and accountable.

How Roles Change and Evolve

Korten's theory is very useful in explaining the way in which NGOs' roles change over time. Korten believes that there are 4 generations of NGOs; namely, 1) relief and welfare, 2) small scale, self-reliant local development, 3) catalyst and 4) coalition nationally and internationally. When applied to the Thai context, it is true that the older philanthropic organizations were primarily concerned with social relief and welfare. However, these organizations did not shift their roles to be catalysts or take on advocacy roles in their later stages. For example, the Women's Cultural Club, which was established in 1943, still provides social services to the poor or destitute in different provinces.

NGOs that conduct activities described in the second, third and fourth generations were mostly Development NGOs which were established later. It is interesting that the steps that Korten has described do reflect steps in the role changes due to the incremental learning of Development NGOs. It appears that roles change because of learning and accumulative experiences. Pioneer Development NGOs play relief and welfare roles in a specific area because they want to ease the suffering of the poor and the marginalized. They work closely with local villagers in different communities. After a while they learn more from the field and gain more experience in

problem solving and conducting development activities. Thus, they later serve as mentor, liaison and partnership builder to local communities in order to make them stronger.

Local organizations, such as people's organizations, are established and NGOs act as their trainers and consultants. Eventually. Development NGOs learn that working in a specific small-scale area is not enough to solve problems at the roots. They then turn to analyzing the social structure and the overall development trends that have strong effects on Thai people's lives. One example is from an interview with a female NGO. She said that Development NGOs can not focus on a small scale as they have done in the past. Earlier they were very involved with individual cases. Now they must be open to the big picture. They must send their people to spearhead changes in society. It is important that they change according to changing needs and expectations.

Unique Features of Development NGOs' Roles

Korten's theory has helped in the analysis of the ways in which Development NGOs' roles change and evolve. However, this does not illustrate the entire picture, as there are some unique features of development NGO that are different from Korten's work. Although the emphasis of the role of development NGOs seems to shift, these organizations do not give up their old roles or take on new ones like generation of NGOs described by Korten. Instead, each NGO plays multiple roles simultaneously, or they may emphasize different issues according to changes in society. Here are some unique features discovered in this research.

Explaining the Life Cycle of Development NGOs: the Life Cycle Theory

The role of Development NGOs in Thailand does not change or evolve in stages or generations but changes according to social and economical trends, immediate issues, financial resources and the legal and political environment. Also, it is obvious that Development NGOs play diverse roles simultaneously and may shift to new roles or play old ones. This depends on the external environment, experience and funding of the organizations.

Engage in Diverse Roles Simultaneously

It is interesting to find that some Development NGOs are engaged in activities at different stages of Korten's theory simultaneously. Many act as service providers that provide relief and welfare, work on a small scale at the local level, and engage in advocacy acts to influence structural reform. Also, they form collaborating relationships with different sectors both domestically and internationally. Their roles did not evolve in a step-by-step manner but rather adapted and existed simultaneously.

Also, different types of Development NGOs coexist to address various issues rather than existing in terms of "generation." Some perform small-scale development work alongside social services; others may be involved in shaping public policies and mobilizing collective movements and still have some projects in small-scale areas.

Add on New Roles as Time Goes By

It appears that each organization's role changes and evolves in

a different manner. One is unable to group them in an absolute way, as Korten has done. Development NGOs do not totally shift roles in the form of "stages" or "generations," as Korten has implied, but tend to change or add on new roles as time goes by depending on the changes in the "social, political or environmental issues/needs" related to their fields of work.

Some organizations add on new roles as they mature. For example, the Population Development Association was primarily concerned with providing services related to birth control. Later they expanded their role to be involved in community development, community business development, health and hygiene and even corruption problems. Nevertheless, they are still providing services related to birth control, such as giving out birth control devices, providing consultation and treatment, etc.

Another example is the Foundation for Slum Childcare under the Patronage of HRH Princess. It used to provide only services to their beneficiaries. Now they have added on other roles besides providing services. The foundation no longer emphasizes social assistance but children's development through training and education; for example, education for pregnant women, training in childcare and nutrition for young children, etc. Also, the organization is more focused on stimulating self-reliance related to childcare at the local level.

Shift Roles According to the External Environment

Different "trends" in society led to role change in Development NGOs. For example, many health organizations that used to emphasize malnutrition or basic health have now turned their attention to HIV-AIDS problems since the epidemic emerged a few years ago. Similarly, Devel-

opment NGOs that used to be primarily concerned with holistic health now have added on activities relate to consumer's rights as well as environmental preservation. After the Tsunami, many children's organizations and environmental organizations adjusted their roles to fit the relief and rehabilitation process in affected areas.

Role Change due to the Influence of Donors

Development NGOs' roles change according to changes in their activities due to the requests of donors. Donors have a major influence in defining the areas of activities of these NGOs. During the economic boom, many NGOs emerged to conduct various development activities and began to take prominent roles in society. This is because of the influx of foreign funding, which allows them to play greater roles. Donations from developed countries to developing countries have increased five times in the past twenty years. The amount increased from 1,000 mdlion USD in 1970 to 5,000 mdlion in 1993 (UNDP, 1993: 88). As for Thailand, foreign funding has a significant impact on the increase of the overall role of NGOs. About 90 percent of NGOs in Thailand are dependent on foreign funding (Narong Pechprasert, 2000: 17).

From 1974 to 1976 the political climate in Thailand became highly volatile. The students, labor unions, and farmer groups were the most active in pressing grievances and making demands, which led them into conflict with government officials, business interests, and land owners (Samudavaija, 2002:94). After this period, development workers that were involved in student movements started to form small Development NGOs. This was the initial seed for growth in the role of Development NGOs in

terms of advocacy, social monitoring and as a catalyst for change during the latter period.

At present, as stated above, there is a dramatic reduction in foreign funding. As a result, Development NGOs are unable to pursue as many roles as they want. Now some organizations have shifted their role to areas where funds are available despite the fact that they may not be related to their original objectives. At present, foreign donors are mostly interested in providing funding for environmental preservation, human rights protection and relief and rehabilitation of Tsunami affected areas. Some NGO leaders look at this change as one way to adapt and survive, as the realization hits them that they have to reduce their ideals and confront economic difficulties. However, others look at it as a shameful act that indicates a deterioration in values and ideologies. One NGO leader who took part in the students' uprising in 1973 said that some NGOs always change their standpoint because of money. They tend to follow the money. To him, this is quite degrading for ideal NGOs.

Role Change from Experience

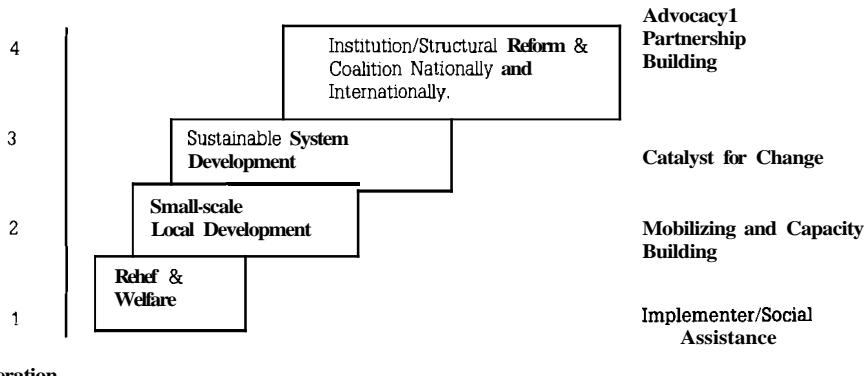
When Development NGOs have been in the business long enough, they realize that they may need to adjust their roles in order to obtain objectives. For example, in the past, the Center for the Protection of Children's Rights Foundation focused only on assisting with individual cases. Now they realize that this has not made the problem of children's rights go away. They need to create changes in a larger context.

Explaining the Development **NGO's** Roles

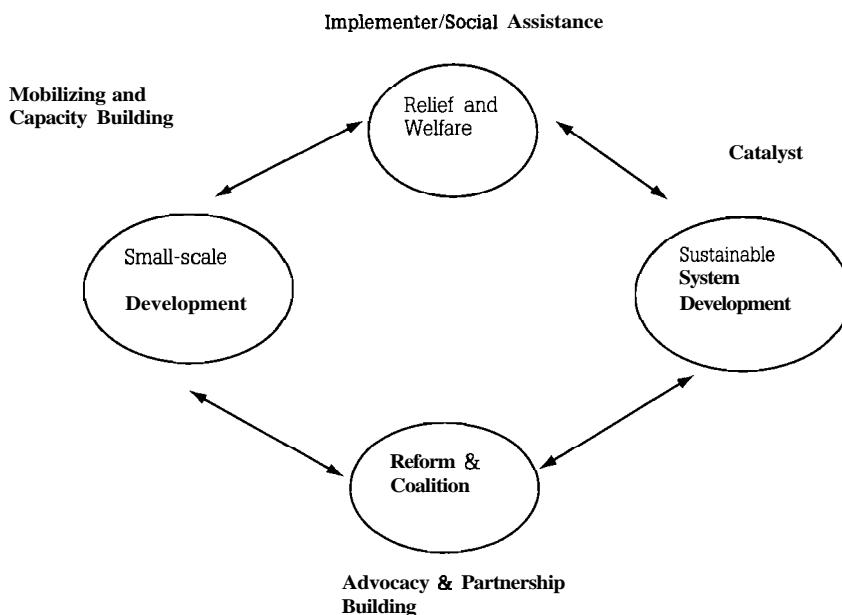
The researcher's interpretation of Korten's theory is compared to a model explaining the researcher's analysis of the way in which the roles of Thai Development NGOs change and evolve. According to Korten's theory, there are 4 generations of NGOs; namely, 1) relief and welfare, 2) small scale, self-reliant local development, 3) catalyst and 4) coalition nationally and internationally. These different roles of NGOs do not take place at the same time. The roles of Development NGOs in the Thai context do not change or evolve in stages or in generations but change according to social and economical trends, immediate issues, financial resources and the legal and political environment. Also, Development NGOs play diverse roles simultaneously and may shift roles depending on the external environment, experience and funding of the organizations.

Comparing Korten's Model and Thailand's Model

Korten's Model of NGO's Roles (1987)



The author's model of the role of Development NGOs in Thailand (2006)



The paper has provided in-depth information on the role, environment and characteristics of Development NGOs. By applying model in the process of analysis and synthesis, we can create certain themes and patterns related to the role and status of Development NGOs. The role and status of Development NGOs in Thailand were ascertained by using Oster's Model, which helps to clarify the role of development NGOs in connection with the socio-cultural and political context. The model also explains why Development NGOs perform certain roles and acquire certain positions in society. It is fascinating to discover that socio-cultural and political aspects play important roles in shaping Development NGOs' values and role play. Looking into the evolution of the role of Development NGOs sheds light on the factors that have initiated role change, such as incremental learning, changing social, political and economic realities, and the influence of donors and funding. The development role of Development NGOs is very flexible. Sometimes they play diverse roles simultaneously. It is quite often that these organizations focus on one main issue and when the trend dies they shift to other pressing issues.

Development NGOs perform many roles, such as advocating social issues, criticizing the social and political structure, and being a catalyst for the movement of the urban poor, innovating new development models, energizing efforts of local people and business entities, synergizing development approaches and business strategies, providing assistance to the poor, and collaborating with different parties in order to support the welfare of the poor.

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