

## CHAPTER 2

### FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In seeking to explain the ways in which governments act, why they make the decisions they do, and how various civil society actors influence the outcome of such actions, theorists and political scientists have found it necessary to develop some form of framework or model as the basis for observation. Over time, this inquiry developed into the discipline of policy analysis. The recent accumulation of literature on policy analysis and the various accompanying models is vast and varied<sup>13</sup>. Of these models, there have been moves afoot to break out of more traditional models mentioned above, which seem to view the policy process in a linear, stage-oriented fashion. The most oft-cited and broadly accepted model for explaining the policy process is the ‘stages heuristic’ model, which breaks the policy process into distinct, temporal subprocesses. Chutima Sumon based her thesis on the roles of democracy-oriented groups in the political reform movement on the ‘stages heuristic’ model as articulated by Thomas Dye. This model identifies five key stages in the public policy process<sup>14</sup>:

1. Identifying problems
2. Formulating policy proposals
3. Legitimizing policies
4. Implementing policies
5. Evaluating policies

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<sup>13</sup> For a detailed description of the differences between the Advocacy Coalition Framework and other theoretical models such as Lowi’s Arenas of Power, Kingdon’s Multiple Streams, Hofferbert’s Funnel of Causality, Statist Theory, Institutional Rational Choice and Traditional Pluralist Theory, please see Sabatier, P. and Jenkins-Smith, H. (1993) pp. 36-37

<sup>14</sup> ชุตติมา สุมนน. 2541, p. 13

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, in outlining their *Advocacy Coalition Framework* theory have pointed out several key reasons for which the stages-oriented theories are limited in their effectiveness. First, the stages heuristic model is not really a causal model, and lacks, they argue, the ability to identify the impetus or causal forces for change within or between stages. Second, because it lacks the above mechanisms, it is deficient in its empirical testability. That is, it cannot be scientifically tested and reproduced using a standard set of measures. Third, the 'stages' model suffers from 'descriptive inaccuracy.' That is, the model does not accurately reflect the full range of possibilities available within the full spectrum of policy process activities. Fourth, the 'stages' model is bound to a legalistic, top-down focus. They argue that this model gives importance to legislators and often a particular piece of legislation thereby ignoring other valuable potential players. Fifth, it is argued that emphasising the policy cycle as the temporal unit of analysis is flawed as it does not account for multiple, overlapping cycles among a variety of actors and stages of government. Finally, the 'stages' model is considered to be lacking in that it does not allow for the causal impact of policy-oriented learning on the process.<sup>15</sup> This will be discussed further later. In sum, the goal here is to develop more realistic models of policy analysis which focus on the *process* of policy formation and the interrelationship between the various actors, causal factors and levels of government, rather than to focus on the institutional components such as the legislature, the individual document, or the bureaucracy.

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<sup>15</sup> Sabatier, P. and Jenkins-Smith, H. (eds.), 1993, pp. 3-4

Therefore, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (hereafter ACF), which has been progressively articulated and developed over a series of articles since the late 1980s is offered here as an attempt to develop and expand the theoretical resources available to the researcher of public policy.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.1 *The Advocacy Coalition Framework*

Essentially, the ACF is based upon four key premises:

1. *Policy change should be viewed from a time perspective of ten years or more.*

The rationale for analysing the problem over a long period of time is based precisely on another fundamental defining characteristic of the ACF, that of *policy-oriented learning*. Policy-oriented learning posits that there is a cumulative effect from various studies, academic research and scientific examination upon belief systems, and thus on policy change. Participants of an advocacy coalition will seek to acquire new knowledge and information in order to buttress their position, seek to influence the opposition and to further their policy objectives. Among members of a policy advocacy coalition, it is assumed that beliefs can be classified as core beliefs – beliefs which are absolutely fundamental and highly resistant to change, and secondary beliefs – or beliefs which, while important, are subject to negotiation and change.

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<sup>16</sup> Sabatier, Paul. "An Advocacy Coalition Framework of Policy Change and the Role of Policy-Oriented Learning Therein." *Policy Sciences* 21, pp. 129-168 and Sabatier, Paul and Jenkins-Smith, Hank (eds.), 1993

The ACF theory argues that core beliefs are extremely resistant to change, and usually only change as a result of ‘external perturbations.’<sup>17</sup>

2. *The focus of analysis should be placed upon the ‘policy subsystem’ or interaction of actors who seek to influence public policy decisions.*

As previously noted, the ‘iron triangle’ focus upon policy-making institutions is discarded within the ACF, which emphasis instead being placed upon what is called a *policy subsystem*.<sup>18</sup> The policy subsystem is composed of a variety of actors who deal with a particular policy issue. These actors may be activists, business people, journalists, academics, politicians, or may even include latent constituencies. When these differing groups of people come together on a given policy issue because of their shared beliefs, they can be said to form *advocacy coalitions*, which are defined as a set of actors with shared beliefs, values, causal assumptions that show some important degree of coordinated activity over a period of time.<sup>19</sup> Not all participants within a policy subsystem will share all the same ideas or beliefs or expend the same amount of energy as some in the pursuit of the policy goals. Some subsystems will incorporate several advocacy coalitions.

Within the policy subsystem, there are a variety of variables which form the basis for measuring the activity that takes place within and between subsystems, and that

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 35

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 25

change which is caused by shocks external to the subsystem. These can be broken down into *relatively stable parameters* and *dynamic system events*.<sup>20</sup>

#### Relatively Stable Parameters<sup>21</sup>

- a) Basic Attributes of Problem Area (good)
- b) Basic Distribution of Natural Resources
- c) Fundamental Cultural Values and Social Structure
- d) Basic Legal Structure

#### Dynamic System Events<sup>22</sup>

- a) Socio-economic Conditions and Technology
- b) Systemic Governing Coalitions
- c) Policy Decisions and Impacts from other Subsystems

3. *'Policy subsystems' should be viewed from an intergovernmental perspective (all levels of government – national, provincial, local, etc.)*

According to the ACF theory, we must view policy change from all levels of government. Therefore, a policy regarding a water dam project in Amphoe Song of Phrae province, will involve government at the local, provincial, and most definitely the national level due to various jurisdictions and relevant legislation. However, our discussion here is predominantly centred at the national level, given its national significance and its incorporation in national law at the level of the constitution.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 20

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. pp. 20-22

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. pp. 22-23

4. *Public policies and programmes can be conceptualised like belief systems, or sets of value priorities and causal assumptions.*<sup>23</sup>

This is the crux of the framework, arguing that policies and programmes are extensions of the way in which people believe, think, behave and conceptualise. This is indeed the playing field on which we measure the activities of advocacy coalitions and the impetus for change. Where advocacy coalitions within a subsystem disagree or conflict on given secondary and core beliefs, that conflict serves as the catalyst for change. However, on core beliefs, it is argued that change will be only effected by forces external to the subsystem (external perturbations) and/or the successful exploitation of those external forces by one or more participating advocacy coalitions.<sup>24</sup> Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith provide an illustrative chart that is useful in understanding this hierarchical division, which is reproduced here:

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 16

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 217

Figure 1 -- Structure of Belief Systems of Policy Elites<sup>25</sup>

|                                 | Deep (normative)<br>Core  | Near (policy)<br>Core   | Secondary<br>Aspects   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Defining Characteristics</b> | Fundamental normative and ontological axioms.   | Fundamental policy positions concerning the basic strategies for achieving core values within the subsystem.  | Instrumental decisions and information searches necessary to implement policy core.  |
| <b>Scope</b>                    | Across all policy subsystems.   | Specific to a subsystem.  | Specific to a subsystem.   |
| <b>Susceptibility to Change</b> | Very difficult; akin to a religious conversion.   | Difficult, but can occur if experience reveals serious anomalies  | Moderately easy; this is the topic of most administrative and even legislative policymaking.   |
| <b>Illustrative Components</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The nature of man: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Inherently evil vs. socially redeemable.</li> <li>b) Part of nature vs. dominion over nature.</li> <li>c) Narrow egoists vs. contractarians.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2) Relative priority of various ultimate values: freedom, security, power, knowledge, health, love, beauty, etc.</li> <li>3) Basic criteria of distributive justice: Whose welfare counts? Relative weights of self, primary groups, all people, future generations, non-human beings, etc.</li> </ol> | <p>Fundamental Normative Precepts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Orientation on basic value priorities.</li> <li>2) Identification of groups or other entities whose welfare is of greatest concern.</li> </ol> <p>Precepts with a Substantial Empirical Component:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3) Overall seriousness of the problem.</li> <li>4) Proper distribution of authority between government and market.</li> <li>5) Proper distribution of authority among various units of government.</li> <li>6) Priority accorded various policy instruments (e.g. regulation, insurance, education, direct payments, tax credits.)</li> <li>7) Ability of society to solve the problem (e.g. Zero-sum competition vs. potential for mutual accommodation; Technological optimism vs. pessimism.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Most decisions concerning administrative rules, budgetary allocations, disposition of cases, statutory revision.</li> <li>2) Information concerning programme performance, the seriousness of the problem, etc.</li> </ol> |

In summary, the ACF attempts to aggregate policy actors into groupings called *advocacy coalitions*, composed of people who share similar normative and causal

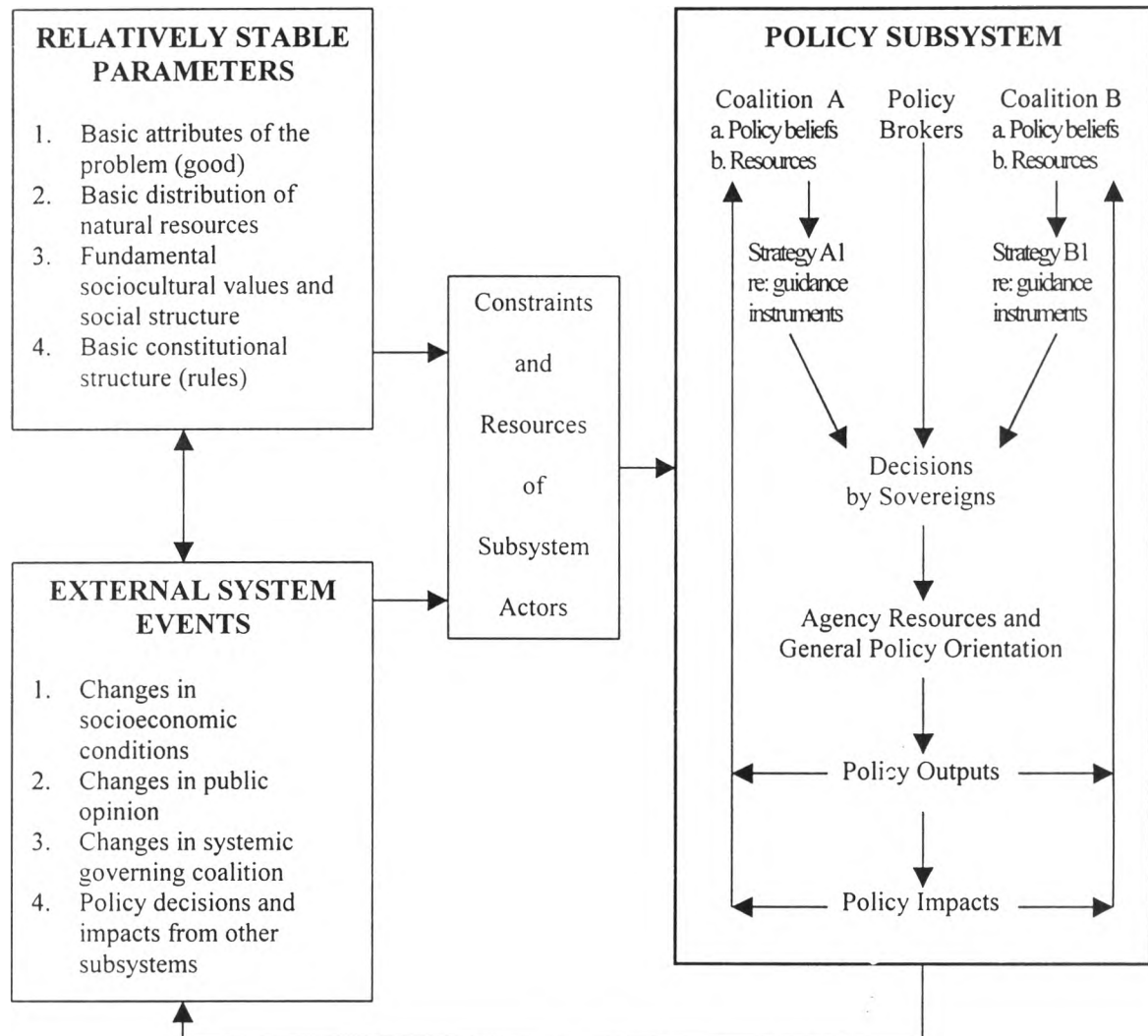
<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 221

beliefs and who demonstrate some level of coordination over time. Their beliefs can be categorised into a hierarchical structure comprised of fundamental norms and values (*core beliefs*), fundamental ideas about strategies involved in realising the core beliefs (*policy core*) and instrumental beliefs about causal patterns in the real world (*secondary beliefs*). The members of an advocacy coalition, who may represent various actors, levels of government, or a third grouping called *policy brokers* who seek to keep the level of conflict within ‘acceptable’ limits. Advocacy coalitions compete to have their beliefs realised in public policy within *policy subsystems*, or the set of actors who work on a particular policy issue such as traffic control or smoking.

Policy change takes place as a result of either conflict between the belief systems (manifest in advocacy strategies) or as a result of external perturbations (exogenous shocks.) The key to policy change lies in policy-oriented learning, whereby advocacy coalitions seek to cognitively enhance their understanding of the issue with the aim of further strengthening their position which simultaneously altering the position of their opponents. Where two coalitions disagree on core beliefs, it is said that they engage in a ‘dialogue of the deaf’ and end up talking past one another, until external factors necessitate or force a radical change of belief. Therefore, a moderate level of conflict is more conducive to policy-oriented learning. For example a Christian and an atheist have competing core beliefs – one believes in the existence of God and the other does not. In such an atmosphere, dialogue is near impossible. However, a Catholic and a Protestant share the core belief in the existence of God, but may differ on the best way to save souls or gather tithes, etc.



For a clearer view of the workings of the model, the advocacy coalition framework can be visually represented as follows.



**Figure 2 -- Diagram of the Advocacy Coalition Framework**

The Advocacy Coalition Framework is not without its detractors, however, with some charging that it does not adequately address such serious questions as when policy change takes place, or how advocacy coalitions develop and form.<sup>26</sup> Sato cites

<sup>26</sup> Sato, Hajime. "The Advocacy Coalition Framework and the Policy Process Analysis: The Case of Smoking Control in Japan." in *Policy Studies Journal* 27:1 (1999), p. 29

Schlager as charging that the ACF also doesn't adequately explain how newly acquired beliefs are translated into policy.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Mintrom and Vergari fault the ACF for rejecting the possibility that 'coalitions of convenience' acting on 'short-term interests' can have any enduring effect on policy outcomes.<sup>28</sup> Further criticisms include not explaining the processes that will determine when policy change takes place, the composition of advocacy coalitions and how collective action problems are addressed by coalition members.<sup>29</sup>

In attempting to address the apparent failings in the ACF, the researchers offer complimentary, not substitute, theories of policy change including the Policy Process Analysis and Policy Entrepreneur models respectively. The PPA of Sato breaks the policy process into distinct processes in order to examine the role of various levels of government actors. However, it would be unwise to apply this model to the discussion at hand as even Sato claims the PPA model, 'has also been found to fail to capture the roles played by nongovernmental stakeholders at each stage of the policy process.'<sup>30</sup> However, the Policy Entrepreneur model of Mintrom and Vergari is far more interesting to us in that it examines the role of policy entrepreneurs, or actors within a policy subsystem who seek to sell ideas to effect dynamic policy change. These entrepreneurs are somewhat similar to the 'policy brokers' of the ACF, yet, while the ACF focuses on their role over a long period of time, the PE model focuses on dynamic policy change and on examining the activities of policy entrepreneurs

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 30

<sup>28</sup> Mintrom, Michael and Vergari, Sandra. "Advocacy Coalitions, Policy Entrepreneurs and Policy Change. in *Policy Studies Journal* 24:3 (1996), p. 421

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 422

<sup>30</sup> Sato, H., 1999, p. 31

during a brief period of time.<sup>31</sup> This would seem to be an appropriate model given the rapid events and short period of time involved in the Thai national human rights commission case.

I, too, see some weaknesses in the ACF. Given the apparent bent of the authors of the theory, (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith) towards quantitative analysis of policy change in subsystems dealing with the natural sciences such as energy and environmental policy, the ACF has a seemingly built-in bias towards natural science policy issues and quantitative measurement. This is apparent when the authors claim that the framework is more applicable to those issues in which analytical tractability is possible within policy-oriented learning. The central role given to policy-oriented learning also lends itself to more empirical measurement. Therefore, it is better suited to deal with issues of air pollution than it is to deal with issues which are very difficult to measure such as mental health or human rights. Nevertheless, we shall attempt to apply the ACF to this thesis, with the caveat that it may require some modification or addition of complementary theories such as the Policy Entrepreneur model.

As the title of this thesis suggests, we are concerned here with an examination of the apparent growth of civil society actors and their advocacy role in the establishment of the nation human rights commission. In order to effectively apply the Advocacy Coalition Framework to the issue at hand, and in order to assist in our attempt to answer the central questions posed in Chapter 1, it is important to locate these concepts within some manner of theoretical framework. Within the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the main goal of advocacy coalitions is to attempt to translate

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<sup>31</sup> Mintrom and Vergari. 1993, pp. 423-424

shared beliefs on a particular issue into a government policy or programme. In many ways this resembles the function of civil society. As Dr. Vitit Muntabhorn argues, one of the main roles of civil society is to ‘advocate for change and reform.’<sup>32</sup> The Advocacy Coalition Framework and theories of civil society are in fact complementary. It is unlikely that advocacy coalitions would be effective in societies where civil society was heavily constrained or virtually non-existent.

In order to better understand the much-cited concept of civil society, we will first turn to a brief discussion of what it means according to the views of prominent theorists, political scientists, activists and academics. Following this, we will focus our attention on the ways in which advocacy coalitions or civil society actors strategically plan and act to realise their policy objectives.

## 2.2 *Civil Society*

The term *civil society* has re-emerged recently as perhaps the most prominent catchword in the lexicon of pro-democracy advocates. Its proponents directly link the expansion and growth of civil society to an improved and strengthened democracy. Yet, the term is imprecise at best, and subject to a variety of interpretations. In some quarters, civil society has even superseded the concept of democracy in terms of its political currency. In addition to debates surrounding the definition of the term civil society, so too are there disagreements about exactly what factors are requisite for its realisation, growth and sustainability.

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<sup>32</sup> Address given by Dr. Vitit Muntabhorn on issue of ‘Human Rights in Asia and Thailand,’ observed by the author speaking at a conference entitled, “Engaging National Human Rights Commissions: The Role of Civil Society” Nakorn Nayok, Thailand, December 17-19, 1999.

The wealth of literature on the subject is overwhelming, and increasing day by day as the concept of civil society becomes further imbedded in the language of political scientists, legislators, funding organisations, NGOs and even the United Nations. In fact, debates and theoretical musings about civil society and its importance have been traced back as far as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the writings of political theory giants such as Cicero, Hume, Paine, Hegel, Gramsci, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, but to name a few.<sup>33</sup> However important such debates may be to the development of the concept in Western circles, this author chooses to deviate from an examination of Thai civil society using concepts articulated by Western theorists. Instead, the discourses of civil society in Thai society and among Thai academics<sup>34</sup> and theoreticians will be given prominence here.<sup>35</sup> However, a brief summary of contemporary definitions of civil society is warranted.

### 2.2.1 Civil Society in Contemporary Western Thought

The International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (Rights & Democracy) defines civil society as ‘the sum of all non-family social institutions, and associations in a country which are autonomous, independent of the State and capable of significantly influencing public policy.’<sup>36</sup> Thede claims that civil society even

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<sup>33</sup> Van Rooy, Alison. “Good News! You May be Out of a Job: Reflections on the Past and Future 50 years from Northern NGOs.” In Eade, Deborah and Ligteringen, Ernst (eds.) *Debating Development: NGOs and the Future*. London: Oxfam GB, 2001, p. 27

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed examination of the subject, see Anuchat Puongsomlee and Weeraboon Wisartsakul. *Civil Society, Semantics, Thoughts and Meaning*. Bangkok: Local Development Institute, 1997

<sup>35</sup> In contrast to recent publications on civil society in Thailand using primarily Western sources. See Naruemon Thabchumpon. *The Role of Grassroots NGOs in Political Reform in Thailand: Democracy behind Civil Society*. Unpublished Thesis

<sup>36</sup> Thede, Nancy., *op. cit.*, 1996

predates democracy in the evolution of the modern state. For the ICHRDD, democratic civil societies have three defining characteristics:

1. civil associations are politically independent of the State
2. there exists a culture of tolerance and dialogue
3. all adult men and women have equal political rights and the right to choose and reject their governors.<sup>37</sup>

Cohen and Arato, however, choose to define civil society as ‘new, generally non-class based forms of collective action oriented and linked to the legal, associational and public institutions of society which is differentiated from state and capitalist market economy.’<sup>38</sup>

According to Naruemon, there is common consensus among scholars that, at the very least, civil society is located in society’s ‘public sphere’ and is composed of associations which are detached from the State, but that still relate to it in some fashion. Interestingly, she also quotes Diamond as saying that civil society does not include the market or political parties as it does not aim to ‘win formal office power from the state.’<sup>39</sup> As we will see later in the Thai example, this assertion may be premature.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. (unpaginated Internet version)

<sup>38</sup> Cohen, Jean and Arato, A. *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, p. 2

<sup>39</sup> Naruemon Thabchumpon, op.cit. p. 5

### 2.2.2 Civil Society in Contemporary Thai Thought

The most concise definition of civil society may be found in Prudhisan's statement that civil society is a recent 'pluralist aggregation of non-state pressure groups.'<sup>40</sup>

Yet, there exist many more complex and comprehensive interpretations of the concept as outlined below.

Pasuk Pongpaichit outlines two key schools of thought regarding the development of civil society, which also says something about its character. The first school argues that to develop a true civil society, we must further modernisation, reform, social and economic modernisation along Western lines, (modernise the peasant society out of existence.)<sup>41</sup> To put it another way, she quotes Anek Laothamatas as saying that we must free the 'little people' from traditional patronage relationships with 'big people' so they can become truly free 'individuals' who can then participate in civil society.<sup>42</sup> This seems an urban-centred, elite, top-down approach to the issue, which seeks to destroy the rural-urban split in Thai society and politics by phasing out one sector of the society. Not only paternalistic in tone, it assumes the supremacy and desirability of a 'modern', urban lifestyle.

The second school, being one more attuned to the traditional and local sensitivities, posits that we must battle *within* civil society to extend local rights, enlarge political space beyond traditional demonstrations, strikes, etc. This focus places importance on the coexistence between rural and urban societies (in contrast to above), and

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<sup>40</sup> Prudhisan Jumbala. *Towards a Theory of Group Formation in Thai Society and Pressure Groups in Thailand after the October 1973 Uprising*. (mimeograph), 1974

<sup>41</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit. *Civilising the State: State, Civil Society and Politics in Thailand*. The Wertheim Lecture 1999. Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam, 1999 p. 15

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16

emphasises the overthrow of patronage systems from below. The difference between the two is a matter of class.

In a groundbreaking academic contribution to the discourse of civil society in Thailand, various intellectual heavyweights are brought together in one collection to discuss the term in both essay and interview formats. The resulting volume speaks directly to the plethora of opinions, viewpoints and convictions that are at play in Thai intellectual circles today.<sup>43</sup> Chuchai Suphawong alternates between the English and Thai terms for ‘civil society’, and traces the history and scholarship on the term in Thailand. Veteran scholars and social activists such as Anek Laothamatas, Prawes Wasi and Chai-Anan Samutawongnit seem to prefer the English term. Thirayuth Boonmee promotes an alternative concept based upon the term *sangkhom khem khaeng* (strong society). Elsewhere, Thirayuth has also been forceful in promoting the concept of good governance, which he defines as *thammarat* where, ‘national good governance lies in the power of the movement of local organisations, peoples and communities to understand problems, be self-reliant, help themselves, reform themselves; and at the same times be forceful in monitoring whatever is bad and ugly in society.’<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, as Pasuk points out, there is no reference made to formal government institutions in his definition. It is highly curious and also highly unlikely that any concept of good governance can be said to be complete or sustainable if it rejects the participation of formal state institutions.

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<sup>43</sup> ชูชัย สุภวงษ์ และ ชวดี ศาสดการณีไกล (บก.) *ประชาสังคม: ทรรศนะนักคิดในสังคมไทย*. สำนักพิมพ์มติชน: กรุงเทพฯ 2541

<sup>44</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit, *op. cit.*, p. 11



Nidhi Eaosriwong, on the other hand prefers to almost completely avoid the term and speak instead about civil society in a fashion reminiscent of Ben Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. He calls civil society a, 'collection of individuals who identify as being members of the same group or of the same people who must identify as a collective even without knowing each other, base our association on rights and the respect for each other's rights.'<sup>45</sup> Yet, I argue, this collectivity, or 'imagined community' must be secured in a clear and precise manner, respectful of diversity and free from the homogenising forces of the state. For example, in the Thai case, when speaking of human rights and equality, many political elites have naively and erroneously maintained that to be *identical* is to be equal. Hence, the state-sponsored programmes to promote standardisation and homogeneity in terms of language, educational curricula and religion.<sup>46</sup>

For Anek Laothamatas, society is composed of three parts, state, civil society and the individual. He defines civil society as 'networks, groups, clubs, associations, foundations, institutions and communities that carry out activities or activism between the state and individuals' with the following emphasis:

1. refuses any control or domineering role for the state, although it may accept some structures or forms or cooperation with the state.
2. Stresses communal cooperation and rejects extreme individualism leading to greed and quest for individual gain<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> ชูชัย ศุภวงศ์ และ ยวดี คาคการณ์ไกล (บก.). p. 56

<sup>46</sup> อนุชาติ พวงสำลี และ กฤตยา อาชวนิจกุล (บรรณาธิการ) *ขบวนการประชาสังคมไทย: ความเคลื่อนไหวภาคพลเมือง*. โครงการวิจัยและพัฒนาระชาสังคม กรุงเทพฯ 2542, p. xxxi

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 35

Anek argues that interest groups, social movements, class movements and other forms of political group formation are based in conflictual, confrontational modes of operation, with the only concern being the wresting of power from the state. He maintains that civil society should be a cooperative and harmonious movement for the benefit of all. Anek's thesis, in my opinion, draws heavily upon Buddhist notions of governance and is derived from the teachings of many Buddhist scholars who will be mentioned later. The focus on non-violence, harmonious relationships as opposed to traditional aggressive political tactics of interest groups is seen as being counter productive and detrimental to civil and social equilibrium. While his definition perhaps represents the most ideologically compatible representation of civil society, it is also highly at odds with contemporary Thai society. Extreme individualism and rampant greed are increasingly conspicuous aspects of Thailand's rapidly expanding middle class and their unquestioning adoption of material capitalist accumulation.

In sum, the term civil society will have as many dimensions as those who compose its membership. We should guard ourselves against assuming, however, that civil society is a monolithic actor. We must remain vigilant as to who we consider a part of civil society, who they purport to speak for and who they claim to represent. Later, it will become clear that in Thailand, civil society is not always entirely representative, instead being composed primarily of legal elites who profess to 'speak' for the people. It is apparent, however, that the term encompasses that type of social organisation that is mobilised by non-state forces in an attempt to negotiate, mediate and even challenge the state. But, what kind of social organisation may be said to represent civil society? While no one type of group may lay claim to being *the*

voice of civil society, two groups, non-governmental organisations and the media, play a majority role in formulating and directing public opinion. The media will be dealt with in the proceeding chapter. Let us turn our attention to non-governmental organisations.

### **2.2.3 Civil Society, NGOs, the Middle Class and Democracy**

In modern Thai society, non-governmental organisations, or NGOs play a significant role in the maintenance and stability of civil society. Naruemon Thabchumpon ascribes to them a central position, especially those working at the grassroots level and claims that they are the ‘driving force behind Thai civil society for democratisation.’<sup>48</sup> Many have argued that the new, emerging middle class is behind the growth of civil society and, by extension, behind the strength of non-governmental organisations. I maintain this to be largely a illusory proposition. There is evidence to suggest that NGOs in Thai society, as products of Thai society, mirror many of the undemocratic characteristics that can be found in that society. Furthermore, the myth of the middle class’ unwavering support for NGOs and civil society is also important to consider. Let us first examine the emergence of NGOs in Thai society, followed by the relationship between the middle class and NGOs.

The birth of the modern Thai NGO has been traced back to the establishment of the Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement by Puey Ungpakorn in 1969.<sup>49</sup> This

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<sup>48</sup> Naruemon Thabchumpon., op. cit., p. 24

<sup>49</sup> Suthy Prasartset. In Jaturong Boonyarattanasoontorn and Gawin Chutima (eds.) Thai NGOs: The Continuing Struggle for Democracy. Bangkok: Thai NGO Support Project, 1995, p. 99

resulted in the establishment of pattern of strategic alliances whereby the NGOs obtained technical support from academics, supplemented by resources and support from the urban middle class. Following this, various NGOs continued to emerge in response to what many viewed as unequal Bangkok-centric development and also in challenge to various authoritarian regimes during the 70s and 80s. This is in line with arguments by scholars such as Diamond who maintain that economic expansion leads to growth and modernisation, which in turn expands civil society, which challenges authoritarianism through various means such as voting and political parties.<sup>50</sup> Naruemon argues that the 1973 student uprising against the dictatorial regime was the first time that civil society played a central role in Thai politics. However, this has been challenged by Kevin Hewison, who instead argues that there has been opposition, in various form, to military and civil bureaucracies dating from the 1920s.<sup>51</sup>

The characterisation of the middle class as a monolithic grouping of people, simultaneously seeking to accumulate material wealth, while benevolently supporting NGOs, political reform and pro-democracy organisations is not entirely accurate. While the middle class has participated to some extent, there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that the middle class is somehow *predisposed* to democracy. Capitalists need not necessarily be democrats, and in fact, have shown to be fickle bedmates of pro-democracy groups in recent years. Political reformists following the 1973, 1976 and 1992 uprisings and massacres could be said to represent a loose

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<sup>50</sup> Hewison, Kevin. "Political Oppositions and Regime Change in Thailand." in Rodan, G. (ed.) *Political Oppositions in Industrialising Asia*. Routledge, 1996. pp. 70-74

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76

coalition of business leaders, politicians, bureaucrats and intellectuals.<sup>52</sup> It would be a mistake to assume that this coalition was held together by some altruistic shared commitment to democracy and civil society. Chai-Anan agrees when he states that, 'socio-economic change enabled the middle class to participate more in bureaucratic politics rather than to fundamentally change its nature.'<sup>53</sup> Thus, the expansion of political space, and the ability to use that space for personal or group interest is key to understanding the role of the middle class. We need to ask: why is the alliance so fragile?

Fundamentally, the middle class and NGO groups do not share the same priorities. For example, following the massive demonstrations in May 1992 against the continuing role of the military in Thai politics, the middle class 'failed to show its strength and cohesion' and 'ability to help consolidate democracy.'<sup>54</sup> There were few, if any, attempts to set up organisations or groups to follow up on the gains made during the events. The middle class showed an almost total lack of enthusiasm and interest in key NGO policies such as the decentralisation of power and constitutional reform. There are three key reasons for this. First, the middle class, like civil society, is not a monolithic entity. Many of its members, primarily descendants of various elite groups in society, are remarkably conservative and have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Second, most NGO groups (particularly at the grassroots) are engaged in issues of social and economic equality, rural issues, slum issues, etc.

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<sup>52</sup> Connors, Michael Kelly. "Political Reform and the State in Thailand." in *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 29:2 (1999).

<sup>53</sup> quoted in Hewison, Kevin., op. cit., p. 87

<sup>54</sup> Suchit Bunbongkarn. *State of the Nation: Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1996, p. 98

Even the term for NGO in Thai, *ongkorn patana ekachon* translates roughly as private development organisation. Even the term itself belies the historical orientation towards developmental issues. Such issues are not within the political interest of the middle classes by and large. Third, concerns the nature of NGOs in Thailand, given the political and historical background.

NGOs in Thailand have been criticised by many as being overly aggressive, confrontational, anti-bureaucratic and antagonistic.<sup>55</sup> The traditional paradigm in NGO circles is that government is bad, NGOs are good, NGOs are ‘the people’, government is not ‘the people.’ Many claim that they do not adapt, apply unyielding criticism and are led primarily by veteran political activists whose experience was accumulated in a different era. Image problems often plague NGOs in Thailand, with them being viewed as puppets of international donor organisations or governments, or as promoting the ideas of NGO or intellectual elites. From this authors observation, many of these criticisms have to them some modicum of truth.<sup>56</sup>

NGOs in Thailand, in contrast to, for example, South America, have serious problems recruiting and encouraging the participation of members. While many have ‘token’ members, a careful examination will reveal an incestuous pattern of overlap, multiple allegiances and unclear organisational relationships. Organisations which are entirely

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<sup>55</sup> see Amara Pongsapich. “Non-Governmental Organisations in Thailand.” in Yamamoto, Tadashi (ed.) *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community*. JCIE, 1995, p. 247; Suchit Bungbongkarn., op. cit., p. 101 and Democracy Forum for East Asia. *Conference Report, ‘The Role of Civil Society in Promoting Democracy in East Asia.’* Bangkok, October 2000 (Internet version), Session III

<sup>56</sup> My comments in this section come from personal involvement in human rights NGOs in Thailand and organisational/programme evaluation research for an organisation which shall remain anonymous.

membership based, such as Amnesty International, struggle to recruit committed members. It is not uncommon to find the director of one organisation sitting on the board of a so-called sister organisation or for two organisations to simultaneously hold memberships in each other's organisations. Not only is membership (and accompanying democratic structures such as boards, annual general meetings, etc.) paid token lip-service, there exists what I term an 'NGO Mafia' at work in Thailand. Senior positions and non-transparent hiring practices mean that a select core of professional activists (with the requisite qualifications of having been a '73, '76 student activist) dominate the NGO scene, leaving very little room for new blood. Opportunities are rare for young people to secure policy-setting positions within Thai NGOs.<sup>57</sup> In sum, as mentioned earlier, many NGOs in Thai society merely mirror the social inequalities, elite structures and patterns of patronage that exist in the larger environment.

Moreover, many Thai NGOs today suffer from a lack of professional strategic planning, preferring to engage in what Somchai Homlaor calls 'rally politics'.<sup>58</sup> Activism is often reactive, or precipitated by external events, rather than originating internally within the organisation based on a comprehensive needs assessment and plan. Not only does this lead to poor organisational management, but also to less than effective lobbying and advocacy efforts. As we will see later, this had an impact on the advocacy outcomes surrounding the national human rights commission. Jaime Joseph summarises it concisely by stating that, 'often the programmes and projects

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<sup>57</sup> Pravit Rojanaphruk. "Wrong Way to Ask a Right Question." in *The Nation*. April 1, 1993, p. c1

<sup>58</sup> McCargo, Duncan. *Chamlong Srimuang and the New Thai Politics*. London: Hurst and Co., 1997, p. 263

that are explicitly designed to strengthen democracy are not based on a critical analysis of the democratic political system itself.<sup>59</sup> All these factors lead directly to a very shaky foundation on which to build a sustainable relationship between the NGO community and the middle class. It thus begs the question, in whose interest(s) are NGOs acting? As many are undemocratically elected officials, by what right do they claim to speak for 'the people'? It is more than mildly ironic that many of the major proponents of democratic ideals do not espouse those very principles within their own organisations.

### 2.3 *Advocacy*

In pressing for public policy change, organisations may engage in many different types of action, ranging from the Ghandian movement for non-violent change, to demonstrations and popular insurrections. The strategies available to civil society actors in pushing for policy initiatives are similarly numerous. The term most often applied to the actions of civil society groups in their negotiation with state actors is *advocacy*. The Advocacy Learning Institute defines the term as,

'[the] pursuit of influencing outcomes - including public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions - that directly affect people's lives.

Advocacy consists of organised efforts and actions based on the reality of "what is." These organised actions seek to highlight critical issues that have been ignored and submerged, to influence public attitudes, and to enact and implement laws and public policies so that vision of "what should be" in a just, decent society become a reality. Human rights - political, economic, and social - is an overreaching framework for these

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph, Jaime. "NGOs: Fragmented Dreams." In Eade, Deborah and Ligteringen, Ernst (eds.) *Debating Development: NGOs and the Future*. London: Oxfam GB, 2001, p. 153



visions. Advocacy organisations draw their strength from and are accountable to people - their members, constituents, and/or members of affected groups.

Advocacy has purposeful results: to enable social justice advocates to gain access and voice in the decision making of relevant institutions; to change the power relationships between these institutions and the people affected by their decisions, thereby changing the institutions themselves; and to bring a clear improvement in people's lives.<sup>60</sup>

Taken at face value, this definition seems to be accurate and workable, if not perhaps a little verbose. However, there are several points of interest which deserve mentioning. First, concerns the definition of 'what is' and 'what should be.' Who decides 'what is' or 'what should be'? By what process do they do so?

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, in addressing the issue of advocacy, prefer the term 'guidance instruments.' Examples include: persuading agency officials through testimony, publicising agency performance gaps in the media, providing research reports, offering inducements, changing the professional background of agency staff by hiring of staff, changing personnel decisions, pursue litigation, pursue changes in legislation, influencing public opinion, etc.<sup>61</sup>

In this chapter we have considered the primary concepts relevant to this discussion, including the Advocacy Coalition Framework, civil society and advocacy. In order to situate the preceding theoretical concepts within a real world environment, we now

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<sup>60</sup> Cohen, David. *Reflections on Advocacy: Volume I*. Advocacy Learning Institute, Forthcoming

<sup>61</sup> Sabatier, Paul and Jenkins-Smith, Hank., op.cit., p. 227

turn our attention to a discussion of the social and political human rights environment in Thailand .