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EVALUATION REPORT



UDF-THA-07-185 Cultivating democratic leaders from marginalized groups

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF nor of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

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I. Executive Summary

(i) *The project*

The Asia Foundation's project entitled "*Cultivating democratic leaders from marginalized groups*," which ran from 1 September 2008 to 31 December 2010, was designed to engage young people (15 to 25 year-olds) from the marginalized populations in four regions of Thailand, to empower them "to voice their needs, access their rights, participate in political processes, and improve their lives and communities". The Asia Foundation set out, in fact, to create new leaders among young people to lead actions in the disenfranchised communities, particularly because increasingly young people are leaving these communities and becoming disengaged with the problems threatening the families they leave behind.

The project began with four implementing partners: the Inter-Mountain People's and Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT) working in the north, the Student Federation of Thailand (in the southern provinces); T-LAC Youth Club (south Andaman coast) and Seeds of Right Net (in the north-east). After the project began, 13 more organizations joined the project.

This project had three principal objectives:

- Enhanced understanding of the political, civil and social needs of marginalized youth,
- Improved advocacy, programming, and positive action by and for marginalized youth,
- Increased understanding and capacity among marginalized youth of human rights, gender equality and democratic and peace building processes.

It aimed to achieve these through four principal clusters of activity:

- Training of Trainer (ToT) workshops to prepare 40 young people (10 from each of the four regions) to work in their communities leading civic education sessions to improve the skills of other young people, help them to understand how to access democratic avenues for discussion and redress, and mobilize communities around priority issues;
- Perception surveys of young people, with 35 of the youth leaders receiving research training in order to conduct these, with a view to identifying issues of concern to young people in the four regions, and providing data to underpin discussions with the authorities;
- A national youth conference at which the youth participants in the project would come together to discuss and explore difference and commonality, and engage with local and national political decision makers; and
- Implementation of a number of grassroots community projects, allowing the youth leaders and other youth participants to position themselves as activists and leaders in their communities.

(ii) *Assessment of the project*

▪ *Relevance*

The development space in the marginalized regions of Thailand is very crowded and a large number of NGOs are engaged in project work, primarily focused on the pressing development and social issues facing these regions, including reducing the vulnerability of minorities in the north to human trafficking, raising awareness and programming to combat HIV/AIDS, protecting communities from the take-over of land by developers, and reducing poverty. Although these projects may not focus directly on democratic process and dialogue, they are built on raising awareness of human rights (variously embodied in land rights, socio-

economic rights etc.) and, to this extent, do raise awareness and develop the capacity of the young people engaged in project activities to claim their rights and lead their communities in doing so.

There is cause to question, therefore, whether this project was relevant. While it fulfilled a need to support the national NGO implementing partners financially and to a lesser extent with expertise, it did not demonstrate significant added-value in the area of democratic development. The trainees were by and large already engaged in development work in their communities (indeed that was one of the criteria for their selection) and, once the project ended, the partners and the young people continued as before. The project designers would have been more aware of this, and potentially had a chance to rethink the relevance of the design, if they had reviewed existing and earlier practice in this area, and had considered in more depth the way NGOs in the regions work and from where they get their funding.

The one potentially new element of the project – the commissioned research – does not seem to have been used to underpin the activities of the project participants; the issues addressed were the same issues that have been the focus of actions in this region for some time and which are, additionally, the major focus of other projects operating in the regions.

▪ ***Effectiveness***

The project achieved its planned outputs but not its overall goal. The Training of Trainers (ToT) went ahead as planned for 47 young people. They were brought together with other young people in a national youth conference. At this conference, the results of perception surveys in each of the regions, facilitated by the young people, were released. Small grants were disbursed to 17 grassroots organizations across the four regions to fund 21 youth-led community projects. However, these outputs contributed only marginally to developing youth leadership. Most of the young people were already engaged, through grassroots organizations, in community development. As such, the goals achieved are over-stated in the grantee's assessment of outcomes. Some participants did say that they had gained understanding, confidence and motivation from the training and workshops undertaken, however most of those interviewed said that they had already been active before they joined the project, and that their main motivation for participating in the activities was because the project provided funding to the NGOs to which they belonged (either as implementing partners or through the small-grant projects).

▪ ***Efficiency***

The project was implemented as anticipated, with minor delays that resulted in a four-month extension. However, there was a considerable shortfall in the projected budget (made up by The Asia Foundation and other donors) that resulted in what might be considered a flaw in the way the project was set up. The project had grassroots partners in each region and, in each area, one of the implementing partners to help with selection of participants and some logistics. However control essentially remained in the grantee's office in Bangkok and was not delegated to the regions. As a result, quality control could not be guaranteed without additional personnel being allocated to the project, with resulting additional costs. Because of the structural weakness in the way the project partnerships were organized, there was a corresponding imbalance between money spent at central level (staff and facilities at The Asia Foundation) and at the grassroots level (support to capacity building of local organizations and small project funding).

▪ ***Impact***

The project reached a large number of young people: more than 2,000. However the focus of training was the 47 young people who were already engaged in grassroots activity in their areas, and the project relied on them and the implementing partners to identify and bring together the other young people for follow-up community-based training. It is impossible to say how many of these young people actually gained something new by participating, and

how many of the 'new' participants (as opposed to those already working on the issues) remained motivated once the project ended.

The project was a useful 'maintenance' project that provided much-needed funds to small organizations already engaged in community activism and who depend on this type of funding to keep going. The project did provide capacity building in the area of democratic process (at a grassroots level) and human rights. One unanticipated outcome of the project was the impact on young people of being brought together from the four different regions. The opportunity to move outside their own area of concern and experience differences and similarities among other young people was mentioned by several participants as the most memorable aspect of the project.

- **Sustainability**

The project is unlikely to have sustained impact. Although some of the young people will have benefited from the capacity building, in general the most active participants will have to start again looking to participate in projects that bring them the funds they need to be able to survive to fight another day. The local NGOs noted that, after the project ended, it became difficult for them to continue monitoring the progress and supporting the actions of the young people because they did not have the resources or personnel. Additionally, young people invariably move on, with many of the project participants leaving to continue their education or find work. This is especially true of young people who were not already active in their community or who did not develop another support base during the project. The project design/risk strategy did not address this (for example by specifically selecting youth participants in different age ranges and promoting a 'buddy' or mentoring system that might enlarge the pool of young people over time). An additional factor impacting on sustainability is the challenge of overcoming bureaucratic hurdles in getting support from local government organizations and building faith among adults in the communities. Both of these depend on signs from national authorities that the issues of concern to the communities are on the political agenda. Short-term projects do not address this and their impact is therefore inevitably short-term also.

- **UNDEF value-added**

There is a need for training and projects in the area of democratic process, democratic dialogue, governance and leadership in Thailand, not only but especially in the marginalized regions in the north and south. UNDEF therefore has a role to play in this area. However UNDEF's aims are unlikely to be achieved in a project like this one, where the substance of the training was less important than the funding attached to it and where for the participants the focus of their work was not democracy, governance or leadership but development and poverty alleviation.

(iii) Conclusions

- ***This project*** was implemented in accordance with the Project Document, and ***achieved anticipated outputs. It is questionable, however, whether the project achieved desired outcomes***, in particular ***in relation to impact and sustainability***. While the project set out to create a 'new generation' of youth leaders in the four regions where it ran, the majority of young people who participated were in fact already active in their communities and interviewees expressed the concern that many of the participants (identified through local organizations to which they belonged as staff or volunteers) ***became involved in the project primarily for the short-term funding it brought***. In the four regions of activity, crowded with local NGOs vying for scarce resources, there is concern that project funders/implementers ***simply 'go away' once the project is completed***, leaving young people unsupported and without funds to continue their work and ***contributing to 'aid dependency'***.

- Additionally, ***the project needed an advocacy component*** to it to begin addressing the overriding problem that ***local issues in the four marginalized regions*** where the project was implemented are ***not on the national political agenda, and are ignored by the public at large***. This might have been a good use for the perception survey undertaken as part of the project, however there was a mismatch between the findings of the survey and the grassroots actions initiated, and the survey was consequently not widely used.

- The budget over-run resulted from what might be seen as a flawed project implementation structure. ***It would have been advisable to set up a more robust project structure at the outset, with The Asia Foundation taking primary responsibility for the project but delegating coordination*** and a negotiated degree of decision-making to an identified implementing partner in each of the four regions. Apart from some initial help in identifying candidates for the ToT, the four nominated partners do not seem to have had pivotal roles in the coordination of the project, in following up the youth trainees nor in monitoring the small-grants projects.

- ***Overall, the project was a useful ‘maintenance’ project that provided much-needed funds to small organizations already engaged*** in community activism and who depend on this type of funding to keep going, but did not achieve its aim of creating a band of new democratic leaders. ***The project provided dedicated capacity building*** in the area of democratic process (at a grassroots level) and human rights but for the grassroots organizations involved this seems to have been secondary to the injection of funds they received for their ongoing work.

- ***Those young people who remain active will have to start again looking to participate in projects that bring them the funds they need***. These may or may not arrive in a project or programme focusing on democratic dialogue/process; they may just as easily arrive linked to health, human trafficking, conflict prevention or some other thematic of the project-implementing agency. To be able to access such funds, in any case, ***they need skills*** that the project should have provided: ***programme design and evaluation, fundraising above all, as well as project management, basic financial accounting and reporting***.

- Training and projects in the specific area of democratic process, democratic dialogue, governance and leadership are needed in Thailand, not only in the marginalized regions in the north and south but nationally in light of ongoing political unrest. UNDEF therefore has a role to play in this area. However, the relationship between the ‘democracy’ content of projects and the development activities—which are effectively demonstration actions on what democracy means in practice—is complex. Understanding this relationship and managing it to ensure value-added in relation to UNDEF’s aims of promoting democracy is not easy. It is moreover easily compromised in a context like the one in Thailand, where a crowded NGO community battles for funds and may join a project primarily to secure funding.

(iv) Recommendations

For the Asia Foundation :

- When designing short-term projects, consider what will happen once the project ends (not just an ‘exit strategy’ but a longer-term analysis of what will happen to the partners and participants). Will local partner organizations be able to continue the work

begun? In particular, will mobilized young people be left without follow-up guidance, oversight (if necessary) and, above all, resources? **Building fundraising techniques and exploring local resources** are an important part of any project and should be built into project design. Such forward planning might also include, for example, the **development of local networks** not only of project participants but also including the local agencies that can support them: local authorities, media and potential donors (private and public sector).

- When project beneficiaries are marginalized not only by geography and ethnic origin but by mainstream politics and public attitudes, then **advocacy and attitude-change actions at national level are vital** to embedding the outcomes of project activity. This opens up a political space in which the aspirations and expectations of young people and their communities are more likely to be met.

- **The nature of partnerships needs to be more fully explored at project design stage.** What will be the role and responsibilities of the implementing partners at each stage of the project (and after)? Do they have the capacity to achieve these? If necessary, build capacity building/training of partners into the preliminary stages of project activity. This might include budgeting/financial management, report writing, fundraising, working with the media, monitoring and evaluation, or other technical skills necessary for efficient project management. Training young people in these skills, as well as the implementing partners, will also contribute to sustainability of project outcomes.

- **Ensure, before a project is even designed, that there has been a comprehensive mapping of the issues to be addressed and of previous (and ongoing) projects or programmes with the same or similar focus.** It is vital, at the same time, to carry out a stakeholder analysis of potential partners not only in relation to their capacity (see above) but also their financial viability. Does an organization have a secure funding base (relevant to its size) or does it stumble from project to project seeking funds to stay afloat? If there are resourcing problems in a given area, or any group of NGOs, do not add to these by bringing in short-term funds without addressing the longer-term problem.

- **Consider whether there is still value to be gained from promoting the results of the Youth Perception Survey more broadly.** Consider, additionally, whether The Asia Foundation may capitalise on some of the social issues identified in the survey, or advocate these so that they be taken up at national level.

- Depending on the issues being addressed (and the country of activity), **consider including a media component in projects where public attitudes are important.** If local media -- for political or other reasons -- are reluctant to pick up on issues, consider whether international correspondents based in the country might be interested (local media will often follow up a story that has appeared first in an overseas publication or on-line). To do this effectively, and to ensure that local stakeholders are not put at risk of political or personal reprisals, take on an experience media liaison officer or commission the services of a media agency for advice. (Note: media activity as a component of project activity is not the same as involving media in order to publicize the project or organizations involved.)

- **Working with young people is rewarding but difficult.** Over the years many lessons have been learned about youth participation and mobilization, but it remains a challenging area, perhaps best left to organizations who work with young people on an ongoing basis. Raising the expectation of young people and then leaving them unmet because there is no follow-up is a major concern. **Building sustainability** into actions that depend **on a group that is by nature evolving** and likely to move on is also difficult. Consulting young people and **involving them in project design, monitoring and evaluation** as well as **staggering the age groups** may also help.

For UNDEF:

- ***There is a space for governance and leadership projects in Thailand,*** and UNDEF is well placed to deliver these, ***however doing this through projects which have an overwhelming social development/poverty reduction focus is risky,*** since the grassroots partners that must be involved are driven by this imperative and concentrate efforts on securing funding and resources for their ongoing work rather than promoting learning.

- ***The rights violations of marginalized populations in the north and south of Thailand are not on the national political agenda*** and do not figure in public debate. Projects that aim to address this at a national level might be of particular interest in future rounds.

- To address the imperative for grantees to survey existing and past work already done in the area on which they propose to work, ***UNDEF might consider introducing a question (or questions) into the required submission documentation for new projects asking for information on preparatory research/surveys undertaken,*** and on potential or intended stakeholders' capacities and roles. At the very least, this will signal to organizations intending to submit funding proposals that they should do this crucial preparatory work.

II. Introduction and development context

(i) The project and evaluation objective

This report contains an evaluation of the project entitled “*Cultivating democratic leaders from marginalized groups.*” The project ran from 1 September 2008 to 31 December 2010, including a four-month extension, with an UNDEF grant of US\$400,000 (a project budget of 375,000, plus monitoring and evaluation component of US\$25,000). The project was designed and implemented by The Asia Foundation, with the aim of engaging young people (15 to 25 year-olds) from marginalized populations in four regions of Thailand, to empower them “to voice their needs, access their rights, participate in political processes, and improve their lives and communities”. The project began with four implementing partners: the Inter-Mountain People’s and Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT) working in the north, the Student Federation of Thailand (in the southern provinces); T-LAC Youth Club (south Andaman coast) and Seeds of Right Net (in the north-east). After the project began, 13 more organizations joined the project to implement activities with small grants provided as part of the project.

UNDEF and Transtec have agreed on a framework governing the evaluation process, set out in an Operational Manual. According to the manual, the objective of the evaluation is to “undertake in-depth analysis of UNDEF-funded projects to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project, which will in turn help UNDEF devise future project strategies. Evaluations also assist stakeholders to determine whether projects have been implemented in accordance with the project document and whether anticipated project outputs have been achieved. “

(ii) Evaluation methodology

An international expert working with a national expert from Thailand carried out the evaluation under the framework agreement between UNDEF and Transtec. Planning of the evaluation was detailed in a *Launch Note* approved by UNDEF in June 2011. In preparing the *Launch Note*, the international expert reviewed the set of project documents provided by UNDEF (see list in Annex 2) and exchanged email messages with the implementing agency and the national expert. A decision was taken early in the planning that the national expert would travel to the Chiang Mai region of Thailand to interview some of the participants and partner organizations, since these interviews had to be conducted in Thai. The international expert took the opportunity to hold additional meetings in Bangkok with UN programme staff working in youth mobilization and related areas, as well as a prominent youth-led non-governmental organization (NGO) active in two of the regions covered by the project.

(iii) Development context

Thailand is the world’s 50th largest country, and the 21st most populous (approximately 65 million people). Three quarters of the population is ethnically Thai; 14% is of Chinese origin; 3% of the population is ethnically Malay. Minority groups including Mons and Khmers and various hill tribes make up the rest of the population. Thailand is classified as a newly industrialized country, with a thriving tourist sector and a range of exports contributing to the economy. Thailand is a unitary parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy; the king is Head of State, Head of the Armed Forces, Upholder of the Buddhist Religion and Defender of All Faiths. King Bhumibol is the world’s longest-serving current head of state, having acceded to the throne in 1946. Thailand has long had a lively and constantly changing political scene, with nine coups d’état during the king’s reign and, in recent years, violent civil unrest as Thai voters have polarized into those supporting ousted politician

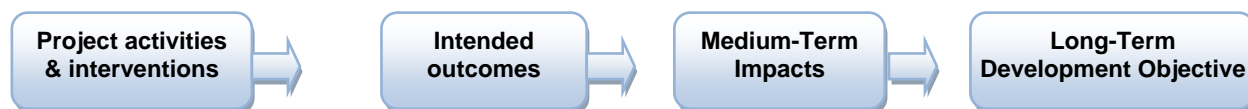
Thaksin Shinawatra whose *Puea Thai* ('For Thais') party continues to contest elections in his absence (and in July 2011 won power), and the Democrat Party which depends on covert military support and coalition partners for survival. Above the vagaries of Thai politics, the king reigns with the universal devotion and loyalty of his subjects and has at times intervened to broker peaceful working relations among political opponents.

While most Thai voters and indeed the rest of the world follow the twists and turns of national politics in Thailand, a number of grave social issues continue unaddressed in political debate and mostly forgotten in public debate, because they affect the most marginalized and disenfranchised sections of Thai society:

- The minority hill tribes in the north of the country remain stateless and, as non-citizens, cannot own the land on which they live and from which they make their living;
- In the deep south, the predominantly Muslim Thai/Malay population's battle with entrepreneurs whose developments threaten their villages is forgotten in the much more frequent coverage of conflict in that region;
- Along the tsunami-devastated Andaman coast, land rights are denied as greedy developers move in and grab the devastated land on which the local people aspire to rebuild their homes;
- In the north-east of the country, the vulnerability of people at high risk of human trafficking is overlooked as poverty and crime persist.

III. Project objectives, strategy and implementation

(i) Logical framework



TO T TRAINING AND REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One 7-day training of 40 young people from four identified regions in human rights, civics and democratic processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40 youth leaders equipped with knowledge to return to their communities and mobilize more young people and community members around priority issues 	<p>Increased understanding and capacity among marginalized youth of human rights, gender equality, and democratic and peace-building processes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six 3-day workshops on civil education for approximately 1,000 participants, led by the 40 trained young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,000 young people equipped to mobilize in order to support their communities in accessing their rights 	<p>Communities engaged in democratic processes, led by young people, around issues of priority concern to the communities</p>

YOUTH PERCEPTION SURVEY

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One 3-day training for young people selected from the 40 ToT participants in how to conduct a 'youth perception' survey to identify priority issues for community action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selected young people trained in survey techniques 	<p>Capacity of young people to gather data to support their activism enhanced</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting of survey among young people with approximately 800 samples, 200 from each target group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed youth perception survey identifying areas for priority action in each of the four regions 	<p>Enhanced understanding of political, civil and social needs of marginalized youth.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Press conference/briefing to release results of survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media support for advocacy efforts; engagement of local and national authorities 	<p>Priority issues put on the political agenda locally and nationally</p>

Political attention is paid to priority issues identified, through informed, democratic processes led by young people from the four marginalized groups.

Local and national authorities accept young people as informed interlocutors.

NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization of one 2-day seminar/conference bringing together participants from all four regions to form a network of youth leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National conference uniting youth leaders and youth participants and providing opportunities for engagement with national policy and decision makers. 	<p>Reinforcement of capacity building of youth leaders through interaction with other participants.</p>
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COMMUNITY-BASED SMALL-GRANT PROJECTS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seed funding of 21 community projects led by youth participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21 small-grant community projects implemented in designated regions. 	<p>Improved advocacy, programming, and positive action by and for marginalized youth.</p>
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(ii) Project approach

The project strategy was developed with lessons learned from a previous participatory training model entitled *Civic participation in local governance*. The main aim of this model was to promote change in citizens' "attitudes, knowledge and skills[...]transforming them from passive subjects to active, informed citizens". This was to be achieved by training approximately 40 young people identified by partner organizations working in those regions as already active or interested. The trained young people would then lead regional workshops to mobilize more young people. Based on the lessons learned, it was also decided to train some youth participants in basic research techniques so that they could conduct a 'perception survey' designed to identify priority concerns among young people in the target regions. The intention was for this to serve as a tool for advocacy and to promote ownership and discussion among the participants. A national conference bringing the young people together, and at which the results of the perception survey were released to local and national decision makers and the media, was organized. To further position the young people within their communities, and to provide them with concrete activities around which to practise their skills in negotiation, mobilization and action, 21 small-grant projects were funded (run by 17 different organizations).

(iii) Strategic aspects

The project had four principal clusters of activity:

- ToT workshops to prepare young people (an anticipated 10 from each of the four regions; in practice 47 in total) to work in their communities leading civic education sessions to improve the skills of other young people, help them to understand how to access democratic avenues for discussion and redress, and mobilize communities around priority issues. The curriculum for this was designed by The Asia Foundation in consultation with a number of national advisors. It covered:

- Life and politics
- Human dignity and equality
- Rights and freedoms according to the Thai Constitution
- Decentralization and local governance
- Rights protection (measures and mechanisms)
- Citizen participation in political processes
- Youth participation in democracy (activity design)
- Project administration and logistics
- Project development and proposal writing;

- Perception surveys of young people, with 26 out of 47 of the youth leaders receiving research training in order to conduct these, with a view to identifying issues of concern to young people in the four regions, and providing data to underpin discussions with the authorities;

- A national youth conference at which the youth participants in the project would come together to discuss and explore difference and commonality, and engage with local and national political decision makers; and

- Implementation of 21¹ youth-initiated community projects, allowing the youth leaders and other youth participants to position themselves as activists and leaders in their communities. Funds for these small-grant projects were disbursed to 17 grassroots organizations across the four regions.

¹ The original Results Framework indicated '50 projects initiated'. During implementation, however, it became clear that this was unworkable if quality assurance of the projects was to be assured. The number of projects initiated was therefore reduced to 21.

IV. Evaluation Findings

(i) **Relevance**

The design of this project followed on from earlier work by The Asia Foundation in the area of civic participation, and capacity building of local government agencies and communities. However, it is clear that the relevance of the project would have benefited from a broader review of activities that had already been implemented in the specific area of youth mobilization/participation and training. Youth participation/mobilization has a long history in Thailand, and specifically in some of the marginalized areas targeted by this project. A 2004 project by UNICEF and the Asian Muslim Action Network, for example, shared many elements of The Asia Foundation's project: youth survey (problem and needs analysis), training of youth leaders, community penetration through seed grants for small projects. Key to identifying any value-added in The Asia Foundation's project is therefore (i) assessing whether the content of the training, survey, workshop, conference and small-grant projects focused clearly on democratic processes and responded to the needs of the target beneficiaries; and (ii) ascertaining whether the project succeeded in mobilizing young people who would not otherwise have been mobilized, this depending to a large degree on the positioning and influence of the young people trained in the ToT sessions.

In relation to (i), the thematic of democratic process was clear to some participants interviewed but not all. A number of grassroots participants said that they had learned how to approach local authorities with more confidence. Others, however, said that they were already working along these lines. In a self-administered pre-activity survey, more than 50 per cent of the young people indicated that they had previous experience in human rights and democracy. For the regional workshops, young people were selected, *inter alia*, according to whether they already were "working or having experience on rights defending". In relation to (ii), the selection of young people for the ToT was delegated to grassroots organizations with which The Asia Foundation already had links, and was not necessarily carefully thought out. One of the organizations interviewed, for example, advised that, of the four young people it had sent to the ToT, two had moved on to study in a different province a few months after the training. The criterion this organization had used to select the four young people was their perceived leadership ability, not their potential influence in their community nor the likely longevity of their participation in community activities.

Another organization interviewed said that it did not normally work with young people and so had sent one of its staff members to the ToT. This person was perceived as 'senior' to most of the other participants from his region and became the lead facilitator of the regional training workshop. When interviewed, he said he found the training "rigorous[...]there was a lot to learn and I went to bed so late every day[...]I used the facilitation skills and knowledge about rights and democracy learned at the ToT for our regional training".

An important factor in assessing both relevance and sustainability is the serious problem, identified both by participants interviewed and external commentators, of dependency on project funding in the marginalized areas where the project worked. The imperative for grassroots organizations to secure funds for their ongoing work results in their joining projects such as this one whether or not the aims of the project coincide with their own aims and focus.

Despite undertaking a survey to identify youth priorities in the four regions, the project focused in fact on the political and development issues on which the participating organizations were already working. Although these are crucial issues to the communities concerned, they are not the issues highlighted in the youth perception surveys and there was a consequent lack of synergy between the activism and research components of the project. Based on 800 questionnaires and 32 focus group participants (15 – 30 year-olds), the research resulted in the following priorities being identified:

- Commodity prices
- Poverty
- Debt
- Pre-marital sex among young people
- School drop-out rates
- Access to natural resources
- Drugs
- Youth unemployment.



Youth Perception Survey Report

The youth survey undertaken by UNICEF cited earlier had also suggested that the major issues of concern to young people in the deep south and north-west were violence, drugs, trafficking and smuggling across the Malaysian and Singaporean borders, access to mainstream education and appropriate/respectful integration of *madrassa* curricula, and land ownership. Neither the UNICEF project nor the project under consideration addressed these priorities. Perhaps they were considered too difficult, but more likely, grantees chose to work in the areas already prioritized by the partner organizations, such as land rights and citizenship. As a result, the perception survey itself was not a particularly relevant (or effective) activity, although the research training for some 26 young people was seen to be useful. Two interviewees who had participated in the research training, for example, although they believed that the survey was intended to gather information about community problems and assess the knowledge of the young people, said they did not believe the survey was used in relation to other project activities, “We didn’t share the information collected with other people...I just collected all the questionnaires and sent them to the research coordinator.” The 21 small-grant projects funded by the project were similarly not developed on the basis of the perception survey but on the orientations of the grassroots organizations funded (the 17 partners named in the final report). As a result, they focus on capacity building/training, public advocacy campaigns, and media training. Two projects had non-institution-building aims, both related to relief assistance in flood-affected areas.

(ii) Effectiveness

The Training of Trainers (ToT) went ahead as planned for 47 young people. In turn, these young people facilitated six regional meetings with youth volunteers in their communities. The trained youth leaders were brought together for a national youth conference. At this conference, the results of perception surveys in each of the regions, facilitated by the young people, were released. Small grants were disbursed to 17 grassroots organizations across the four regions to fund 21 youth-led projects. Most of the young people were already engaged, through grassroots organizations, in community development. Some participants did say that they had gained understanding, confidence and motivation from the training and workshops undertaken, however most of those interviewed said that they had already been active before they joined the project, and that their main motivation for participating in the

Case study 1: A youth participant from the north

One impact of the project was to increase the confidence and ability of youth participants to represent community needs to potential funders.

Suniran Rattanawilalak, a 21 year-old Karen man, told the evaluators that he had received an educational scholarship from IMPECT over many years, and had been involved in activities of the organization. He had participated in training on the rights of indigenous people, and had helped IMPECT to organize youth camps for young people in his community during school breaks.



Suniran Rattanawilalak, youth participant

IMPECT encouraged Suniran and his friends to find additional funds for the camps through local administrative offices.

Suniran said he joined The Asia Foundation project specifically to learn how to do this: “Before this project, I was afraid to approach local authorities or community leaders, as I always thought they were important people, not like us. With encouragement from IMPECT staff, I went to meet the head of our local administrative office to tell him about our project. When I first saw him, my face went all red and I could not say a word. But since then I have been going back to that office more often. I am now volunteering to help the community leaders to prepare a proposal to get funding for our annual community event next year”.

activities was because the project provided funding to the NGOs to which they belonged (either as implementing partners or through the small-grant projects).

As noted above, the perception survey was carried out but was not used to underpin project development or to guide the selection of the 21 community-based projects. In addition to the weak link between the survey outcomes and the actions at grassroots level already outlined, there was a lost opportunity to use the survey as a tool for advocacy at national level (probably limiting project impact, as well). The press conference intended to launch the results of the perception survey did not occur as planned; instead the survey results were released at the national conference that took place, and was targeted predominantly at local and national officials (although some media were present to cover their attendance).

The final report states that, “it was evident that after participating in this two-year programme, youth were not only inspired to take positive action in their communities, but now had alternative ways of advocating for and protecting their rights”. In fact, the project did not form a body of new youth leaders; mostly it provided support to young people already mobilized to take positive action in their communities. While for some young people this did include new skills in accessing democratic processes to claim their rights, for most it really meant providing project funds that allowed them to continue the work in which they were already engaged.

(iii) Efficiency

The project was implemented as anticipated, with minor delays that resulted in a four-month extension. It consequently ran from 1 September 2008 to 31 December 2010. Earlier lessons learned by The Asia Foundation included the importance of allowing partner organizations to act independently as far as possible; however it is important to balance independence and oversight. The Asia Foundation learned this halfway through the project,

when they became concerned about quality control of the small-grant projects and were obliged to allocate extra staff time to monitoring this. Preliminary decisions taken on the nature of the partnerships in the project meant that The Asia Foundation was obliged to devote considerably more of its permanent staff time to the project than anticipated, and this had budgetary implications, with The Asia Foundation supplementing project funds by co-funding of \$10,000 from a private donor and own funds of \$55,000. Because of the structural weakness in the project management, there was a corresponding imbalance between money spent at central level (staff and facilities at The Asia Foundation) and at the grassroots level (support to capacity building of local organizations and small project funding). The Asia Foundation recognized this both structurally (in the need to allocate more staff to the work) and financially (by providing additional funds). A more robust project implementation structure that empowered designated local implementing partners would have necessarily involved a rebalance in the project budget. With this caveat, however, the project was efficient: the training and workshops were appropriately resourced; the national conference was of sufficient quality to attract government participation; the small grants were disbursed appropriately to the local organizations.

(iv) Impact

The numbers of young people reached by the project are impressive: more than 2,000 young people participated in the ToT, regional workshops, national conference and small-grant projects. However, the major “new” impact of the project – as opposed to ongoing support – seems to have been on a much smaller number of individual participants, who were in general already active but who benefited from the training, support for their community-based activities and in most cases small-grant funding.

One important outcome of the project, perhaps not anticipated in project design, was the impact on young people of being brought together in the regional workshops and national conference. A number of interviewees said that, although they were already active in their communities and aware of the issues dealt with, they found the cross-learning with young people from other ethnic groups an “eye-opening experience.” A number of staff interviewees also underlined how surprised they were at the reactions of the young people when they came together. They were amazed to learn that young people in other regions were also active in meeting the challenges faced by their communities, and were surprised at the things they had in common.

The assessment of impact should also be done in the context of aid dependency mentioned above. It was particularly disconcerting to learn, in interviews with

Case study 2: Struggle for control in Chiang Rai province

Before participating in The Asia Foundation project, Joey (26), Yod (24) and Daojai (20), three young Karen people from Huay Hin Lad community in Chiang Rai province in the north of Thailand, had already been engaged, along with their families, in the struggle of their community to have control over their own natural resources.



ToT workshop, Bangkok 25 April – 1 May 2009

A member of a local grassroots organization took part in the ToT training and returned to the community with the idea of bringing together young people from different ethnic groups to learn about each other and the problems facing their communities. He proposed they take up the question of land rights and to advocate for “community land title.” Joey, Yod and Daojai joined the organization to learn more about this issue to support the actions in which they were already engaged.

youth-led organizations that participated in the project, that some had resigned from formal employment in order to work on issues of concern to their communities but with only intermittent short-term project funding. The assessment of impact should also be tempered by the fact that most of the youth participants benefiting from training were already active in community development before the project.

(v) Sustainability

Interviewees said that, if there is no ongoing support and mobilization of the young people, they “move on”, with many continuing to further education or leaving the community to find work. The Asia Foundation staff themselves noted that working with youth groups has a built-in challenge for sustainability, since many of the young people trained move on and more young people replace them. They tried to take this into consideration by including some younger people and using some older youths as mentors; even so some of the intended participants had moved on even in the interval between the project being accepted and the contract being signed.

The evaluators questioned The Asia Foundation about their future plans in relation to the project. There are no plans for continuation of the activities or for support of the young participants in the project. The Foundation continues its relationship with the four nominated implementing partners on an *ad hoc* basis, however the relationship does not at time of writing include work in the areas of democracy or youth leadership. The project did not leave behind structures, activities or processes that will continue.

Some of the young people who participated did say that they felt the project had enhanced their capacity as leaders, although there was a general concern that the lack of follow-up meant that most of the young people would retain little benefit from the project unless they were taken on as staff by the four partner organizations.

(vi) UNDEF value-added

The evaluators attempted to identify other projects or programmes in the four regions of Thailand in question in the area of democratic dialogue, or youth leadership in democratic processes. This search did not produce results. However, there are numerous projects and programmes in the area of youth mobilization, including a number of significant long-term processes focused on the COMMIT process to combat human trafficking, UNICEF-led youth participation programmes, and ILO-IPEC-led projects on youth employment, child labour and trafficking. A number of international NGOs, in particular Save the Children, Plan International and World Vision, are also engaged in youth participation activities as a long-term strategic priority in Thailand.

V. Conclusions

(i) The project would have benefited at design stage if it had better taken into account the local participation component and incorporated some important lessons learned from similar projects. In particular, based largely on Finding (i) above, :

- The sustainability of the project would have been enhanced if more account had been taken, at design stage, of concerns expressed by youth participants in a number of projects and programmes (and indeed at the Youth Summit held in conjunction with the Millennium UNGASS) that project funders/implementers disappear once the project is completed, leaving young people unsupported and without funds to continue their work. One way of addressing this issue would have been to explore more carefully, when designing the project, potential local sources of funds, promoting local funding relationships between local networks; young people, communities and local decision makers and opinion formers
- No explicit account seems to have been taken of the aid dependency which is prevalent in particular in the southern provinces, and the consequent danger that implementing partners would participate in projects that did not necessarily fit with their comparative advantage.
- The need to create ‘political space’ for youth-led advocacy and activism, particularly in the light of local corruption and pressure from developers and entrepreneurs whose agendas may be in conflict with the development aspirations of communities, and widespread perceptions in broader Thai society that the minority communities, especially the Thai/Malay community in the deep south, are a threat to national security.

However, the project succeeded in recognizing the need to train youth leaders (as well as the grassroots organizations hosting them or that they create) in the technical skills they need to implement elements of the project and to remain active and raise funds once the project has ended, such as project management, action research, needs assessment, report writing and, vitally, fundraising.

(ii) The perception survey could have been better used. The evaluators found that the perception survey did not really contribute to relevance of the project to beneficiary needs and that it was not used to its full potential in national-level awareness raising and the advancement of youth interests in democratic governance (Findings (i) on relevance and (ii) on effectiveness.) Survey results might have been of interest to the media generally (including international media) and media coverage might have contributed to putting some serious social issues on the political agenda. So-called ‘lifestyle challenges’ among young people (drugs, pre-marital sex, violence) are consistently neglected in public debate in Thailand. This may have even represented an opportunity missed for UN added value, since one of the characteristics of the UN is its ability to engage with governments and the public in controversial areas, such as drugs and youth sexuality, which other donor organizations and governments may be reluctant to broach. The survey could still, of course, be used for such purposes.

(iii) Better planning and a more appropriate project structure could have avoided resource shortfalls midway through the project. The budget overrun described above under Finding (iii) on efficiency resulted from what might be seen as a flawed project implementation structure. It would have been advisable to set up a more

robust project structure at the outset, with The Asia Foundation taking primary responsibility for the project but delegating coordination and a negotiated (and contracted) degree of decision-making to an identified implementing partner in each of the four regions. In fact, the original Project Document could be read to suggest that this was going to happen, since The Asia Foundation did nominate four “implementing partners”. However, by the Final Project Report, these four had been subsumed into a list of 17 “partners” which were, in fact, beneficiaries of the small-grants project funding. Apart from some initial help in identifying candidates for the ToT, the four nominated partners do not seem to have had pivotal roles in the coordination of the project, in following up the youth trainees or in monitoring the small-grants projects.

(iv) Taken as a whole, but based mostly on Findings (iv) on impact and (v) on sustainability above, **prospects for long-lasting impact or sustainability are weak. The project was a useful “maintenance”** project that provided much-needed funds to small organizations already engaged in community activism and who depend on this type of funding to keep going, but did not achieve its aim of creating a band of new democratic leaders. Some youth participants gained useful skills in areas such as fund mobilization. The project provided dedicated capacity building in the area of democratic process (at a grassroots level) and human rights but for the grassroots organizations involved this seems to have been secondary to the injection of funds they received for their ongoing work.

(v) **In general, the most active participants/beneficiaries will have to start again looking to participate in projects that bring them the funds they need.** This is part of the aid dependency syndrome alluded to above. If the funds happen to arrive in the form of a project or program focusing on democratic dialogue, this project will have contributed lasting value added, but they may just as well arrive in the form of a project on health, human trafficking, or some other thematic area. **The project did introduce ‘report writing and preparation’ capacity building in anticipation of the national conference, but young people need more than this:** programme design and evaluation, profile promotion and fundraising above all, as well as project management, basic financial accounting and reporting.

VI. Recommendations

▪ For The Asia Foundation:

(i) Based on Conclusions (i) and (iv), when designing short-term projects, **consider what will happen once the project ends** (not just an “exit strategy,” but a longer-term analysis of what will happen to the partners and participants). Will local partner organizations be able to continue the work begun? In particular, will mobilized young people be left without follow-up guidance, oversight (if necessary) and, above all, resources? Building fundraising techniques and exploring local resources are an important part of any project and should be built into project design (see (i) above). Such forward planning might also include, for example, the development of local networks not only of project participants but also including the local agencies that can support them: local authorities, media and potential donors (private and public sector).

(ii) Based on Conclusion (ii) above, **project outputs should be effectively used for national advocacy and awareness raising.** This is particularly true where, as here, project beneficiaries are marginalized not only by geography and ethnic origin but by mainstream politics and public attitudes. This opens up a political space in which the aspirations and expectations of young people and their communities are more likely to be met.

(iii) **Examine partnerships needs and strategy closely at the project design stage (see Conclusion (iii) above).** What will be the role and responsibilities of the implementing partners at each stage of the project (and after)? Do they have the capacity to achieve these? If necessary, **include capacity building/training of partners into the preliminary stages of project activity.** This might include budgeting/financial management, report writing, fundraising, working with the media, monitoring and evaluation, or other technical skills necessary for efficient project management. Training young people in these skills, as well as the implementing partners, will also contribute to sustainability of project outcomes.

(iv) Based on Conclusion (i), **ensure, before a project is even designed, that there has been a comprehensive mapping of the issues to be addressed and of previous (and ongoing) projects or programmes with the same or similar focus.** It is vital, at the same time, to **carry out a stakeholder analysis** of potential partners not only in relation to their capacity (see Conclusion (iii) above) but also their financial viability. Does an organization have a secure funding base (relevant to its size) or does it rely entirely on short-term project funds to stay afloat? If there are resourcing problems in a given area, or any group of NGOs, do not add to these by bringing in short-term funds without addressing the longer-term problem.

(v) Specifically, based on Conclusion (ii), **consider whether there is still value to be gained from promoting the results of the Youth Perception Survey more broadly.** Consider, additionally, whether The Asia Foundation may capitalize on some of the social issues identified in the survey, or advocate these so that they be taken up at national level.

(vi) In view of the fact that the perception survey was never really used to generate media coverage, and depending on the issues being addressed (and the country of activity), **consider including a media component in projects where public attitudes are important.** If local media—for political or other reasons—are reluctant to pick up on issues, consider whether international correspondents based in the country might be interested (local media will often follow up a story that has appeared first in an overseas publication or on-line). To do this effectively, and to ensure that local stakeholders are not put at risk of political or personal reprisals, take on an experience media liaison officer or commission the services of a media agency for advice. (Note: media activity as a component of project activity is not the same as involving media in order to publicize the project or organizations involved.)

Based on Conclusion (i) **strengthen the participation of young people in project design.** Working with young people is rewarding but difficult. Over the years many lessons have been learned about youth participation and mobilization, but it remains a challenging area, perhaps best left to organizations who work with young people on an ongoing basis. Raising

the expectation of young people and then leaving them unmet because there is no follow-up is a major concern. Building sustainability into actions that depend on a group that is by nature evolving and likely to move on is also difficult. **Consulting young people and involving them in project design, monitoring and evaluation may help.** Setting up 'buddy' systems where more **senior/experienced/older youth agreed to mentor younger people** not yet of an age to participate in the project formally is also advisable.

- **For UNDEF:**

(i) **There is a space for governance and leadership projects in Thailand, and UNDEF is well placed to deliver these**, however doing this through projects which have an overwhelming social development/poverty reduction focus is risky, since the grassroots partners that must be involved are driven by this imperative and concentrate efforts on securing funding and resources for their ongoing work rather than promoting learning.

(ii) The rights violations of marginalized populations in the north and south of Thailand are not on the national political agenda and do not figure in public debate. **Projects that aim to address this at a national level might be of particular interest in future rounds.** If projects are not at national level, then they at least should have a well-developed advocacy and awareness-raising strategy at the national level. This also applies to projects addressing particularly sensitive thematic areas, such as youth, where UNDEF may have a wider room for maneuver than other donors.

(iii) To address the imperative for grantees to survey existing and past work already done in the area on which they propose to work, **UNDEF might consider introducing a question (or questions) into the required submission documentation for new projects asking for information on preparatory research/surveys undertaken**, and on potential or intended stakeholders' capacities and roles. At the very least, this will signal to organizations intending to submit funding proposals that they should do this crucial preparatory work.

VII. Overall assessment and closing thoughts

This was an adequately run project that did not, however, take sufficient account of the lessons learned from earlier projects in the four target regions, and that fell into the trap of becoming essentially a short-term provider of funds.

Despite individual examples of positive outcomes from the ToT and workshops, the majority of participants in the project were organizations and individual young people who are already mobilized and who benefited from the project to maintain their activities rather than develop new ones. There is a real concern that this might add to a recognized problem of aid dependency in these regions.

UNDEF HQ has expressed the view that it would have been difficult for another body than the grantee to pull together a project in the four marginalized areas where this project was

implemented, and that this is “part of the novelty and value-added of the project”. In fact, a number of agencies work in these marginalized areas. Both UNICEF and ILO-IPEC have implemented various protection and prevention programmes in these areas over a number of years, both of which have included youth participation/mobilization components and, in the case of ILO in particular, community demonstration projects. Save the Children and World Vision are also active in these areas.

All of these agencies have struggled with the challenges of youth participation and mobilization, in particular in relation to unmet expectations of young people, the fact that young people leave for education, move for work or just become adults and are no longer included in youth activities. There are no easy solutions to these inevitabilities, however they must be acknowledged in project design and some attempt be made to mitigate them, for example by setting up mentoring hierarchies among the young people (which would allow for some younger people to be involved and so ‘grow into’ the actions).

It is difficult not to conclude that, in the areas of youth participation, partnership development, synergy among the various project components and sustainability of outcomes, the project was weak. For these reasons, the project did not achieve its overall aim of empowering young people “to voice their needs, access their rights, participate in political processes, and improve their lives and communities.”

VIII. Annexes

Annex 1: Evaluation questions

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?
Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

Annex 2: Documents reviewed

Project document (UDF-THA-07-185), signed 28 July 2008

Additional note (by email) from Ishaani Sen, 4 May 2011

Milestone verification mission report, 21 July 2009

Mid-term progress report, 1 October 2009

Final project narrative report (copy supplied undated)

Thailand Fact Sheet, The Asia Foundation (undated)

In Asia: Weekly insight and features from Asia, The Asia Foundation, 27 October 2010

Thailand: Cultivating youth leaders, The Asia Foundation (undated)

Report: *Lessons learned and evaluation workshop on the ToT and regional civic education training*, July/August 2009

Evaluation report of US State Department-supported project *Empowering Thai communities and minorities to participate in democratic processes*, December 2009

Media clippings and analysis, The Asia Foundation, Oct – Dec 2010

Newsletter: *Amana*, Vol.5:1, April 2011, The Asian Muslim Action Network

Annex 3: People interviewed

Project personnel	
Ms Pauline Tweedie	Deputy Country Representative, The Asia Foundation (overall supervisory responsibility)
Ms Yupa Phusahas	Senior Programme Officer, The Asia Foundation (overall programme coordination)
Mr Santi Nindang	Programme Officer, The Asia Foundation
Ms Sunee Chiyarose	Promotion of Youth and Women in Democracy Development Group; former Human Rights commissioner (Advisor and trainer, youth perception survey)
Grassroots organizations	
Mr Yuttana	Former project officer, IMPECT
Mr Worawut Tami	Staff member, HPT
Mr Songwut Lae-soe	Staff member, IMPECT Coordinated AKA youth group in the HPT-implemented small-grants project
Mr Chaitawat Jomti	Staff member, FND Coordinated Karen youth group in the HPT-implemented project
Ms Jeeran Mungsukchareonwong	Facilitator, YT Workshop facilitator in the HPT-implemented project
Em	Member, FAN Facilitator at national conference
Bom	Member, FAN Facilitator at national conference
Kawson	Member, FAN Facilitator at national conference
Youth beneficiaries	
Mr Suniran Rattanawilailuck	Young Karen person Participated in IMPECT-implemented project
Mr Kasi Chiyo	Young Karen person Participated in HPT-implemented project
Ms Daojai Siri	Young Karen person Participated in HPT-implemented project
Mr Boonyos Wechakij	Young Karen person Participated in IMT-implemented project
External commentators	
Mr Ekraj Sabur	Asian Muslim Action Network (Active youth-led NGO working in southern regions)
Ms Thetis Mangahas-Abrera	Deputy Regional Director, ILO Regional Office (<i>Inter alia</i> , advisor in youth employment and mobilization)
Mr Max Tunon	Programme Officer, ILO-IPEC (Youth mobilization, Asia youth forum)

Annex 4: Acronyms

FAN	Friend of Activist Network
FND	Foundation for Northern Development
HPT	Highland People Taskforce
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO-IPEC	ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
IMPECT	Inter-Mountain Peoples' Education and Culture in Thailand Association
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ToT	Training of Trainers
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
YT	Youth Training (organization)