

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH FINDINGS

During field study for research findings, in-depth interviews with key informants, formal and informal interviews with missionaries and staffs of NGOs and village administration, and focus group discussions with student groups were conducted from July 2005 to January 2006.

I also stayed overnights in Thai-Karen villages and did interviews and observations. During my stays in the villages random interviews were also done with villagers, farmers and youths. They shared their experience and perspectives, and I was able to thoroughly explore issues regarding education for students and young people, and social welfares, livelihoods and income generation activates of Thai-Karen communities. Discussions with two focus groups of young Thai-Karen students, one group was from Pattara Wittaya School (Catholic School) in Mae Sot district and another group was from the boarding hostel (Australian Seventh Day Advantage Mission) of Ban Maela School in Tha Son Yang district, were also conducted. Since most of the discussants were young and from primary school I was asking them questions, rather than group discussion.

Seven key informants were thoroughly interviewed, and information and data on social and economic aspects of Thai-Karen communities were mainly acquired from them. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with Karen staffs from NGOs in Mae sot area, and Karen young adult students who were studying at Rajaphat University and Vocational Training College in Mae Sot district. Their perspectives on education and work opportunities were explored. The research findings have relied on the information and data provided by the interviewees therefore they can be limited in terms of the whole populations of the research site.

5.1 Finding on Economic Aspects

Information on economic aspects of Thai-Karen people was mostly received from Village Headmen, other key informants, farmers and villagers. The villagers explained that the conditions and living standards of Thai-Karen villagers have improved, compared to two decades ago when their remote villages had hardly ever contacts with outside world. Acharn Tip responded that the economic improvement of Thai-Karen people depends on the mainstream economic development of the county. If the overall economy of the country improves Thai-Karen people will also be prosperous, although there will be disparities in earnings. He also explained that in the border districts of Tak province 70% of Thai-Karen households have rotational farming and only 30% of them do irrigation agricultural farming. 95% Thai-Karen villages are in highland and 5% are in the lowland areas. 90% of Thai-Karen villages can be reached by roads in dry seasons, and 30% villages can be reached by roads in rainy seasons. About 80 to 90% families earn less than ten thousand baht per year and the income of some 5 to 10% villagers are worse off. 60% of young Thai-Karen can just speak Thai and they hardly find jobs in town.

Distance to Thai-Karen villages is a major obstacle for economic activities, communication and transportation of goods and services to the widely scattered and small Thai-Karen communities. Most of Thai-Karen villages are situated in the mountainous areas where they rely on agriculture for their living. Some households own a piece of land where they do irrigation farming but many families still rely on rotational agricultural farming. The population is getting bigger and bigger from time to time and the land shortage has caused difficulties for the Karen villagers to get enough food for household consumption from their rotational farming. The Thai government's environmental policy on forest conservation and wildlife sanctuary has created conflicts between the groups that are competing for the forests for different reasons.

A Thai-Karen farmer Mu Gah Nae Dah responded that, she received about 10-15 rai of land plot from her parent and now she can give only 3-4 rai farmland to each of her children. The weather condition and crops in this year is good and they have

got about 130 tins of paddy from their farm. She also mentioned that sometimes they get only 30 to 50 tins of paddy per season when the weather and crops are bad. She also said that farming is not good as before, because the weather conditions are changing, possibly as an affect of environment deterioration, and farmers get less and less water from the stream for irrigational agricultural farming.

One Tambon one million baht scheme of Government program for poverty alleviation has provided villagers with low interest rate borrowing. Khun Saw Gay explained to me that he borrowed 20,000 baht from the scheme. He could not think of any business and finally he bought and raised three cows. He could not make any money back as he did not know very well about animal husbandry and after a few months all cows died. He said that he managed to borrow again and he has now set up a small home shop in his village.

Thai-Karen people living close to or in low lands tend to own bigger farmland areas, compared to Thai-Karen from remote villages in forest and mountainous areas. The fact that having not enough irrigational agriculture land for every household is a push factor for them to depend on rotational farming, though it is not approved by the government and Royal Forestry Department.

The 43 year-old farmer Ah Chai responded that, in the previous times each family owned a piece of farmland that was big enough for a family to produce enough paddy and vegetables. But nowadays the families are growing and the farmland areas do not get bigger and their children have to share the available land of the parents. Back to many years ago they could use slash and burn cultivation, but it is not allowed in these days as it causes deforestation. Thai-Karen villagers live in a nucleus family and family members range an average of four or five to seven or eight. They also said that in the past few years the weather conditions are changing a lot, and many paddy fields dried out and did not produce paddy.

Most Thai-Karen villagers rely solely on farm products. If they get some extra paddy they sell it out and buy other commodities for the household uses. There are few wealthy families in Thai-Karen villages; wealthy in the sense that they own about

20 to 30 rai of farmland, and a truck and/or home-shop in the village. Some families can send their teenage children to school in the nearby towns or villages where they can continue their education. The reason is that their children can study up to only two to three standards at school in their village. Some small and remote villages do not have school at all. Some families lost family labor force and the production of their farm gets less.

There are non-governmental organizations that have given humanitarian assistance to the remote and poor Thai-Karen villages in border districts, where government education faculties and health services can not reach adequately. Some of them are such as COERR (Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees – Thai NGO), TOPS (Taiwan Overseas Peace Service), CT (Consortium Thailand – American NGO), TBBC (Thai Burma Border Consortium – England), ZOA Netherlands, AMI (Aids Medical International - France), ARC (American Refugee Committee – USA), SMRU (Shoklo Malarial Research Unit - France), HI (Handicap International - Norway), MSF (Medicine Sans Frontiers - France), and MHD (Maltese Germany).

When I was doing field interviews and observation on 14th December, 2005, I coincidentally met with staffs of TOPS who were giving training to villagers on solar maintenance in Baan Huay Nok Kok in Tambon Maela. They said the government has provided solar electricity plates to villages that do not have electricity, and the villagers have used it about a year. They do not know how to maintain batteries and the capacity of batteries was depleting. TOPS gave training on how to maintain batteries to some villagers in the areas and they will go back to their villages and teach other villagers too. The COERR (Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees) distributed blankets for cool season to the villages in the areas. Other NGOs have also provided their services, such medicines and medical assistance, school materials, volunteer teachers, water systems, and sanitation to the remote Thai-Karen villages in the border districts. The collaboration of NGOs with local government bodies has enhanced sanitation and health conditions of villagers, education opportunities for children, and the humanitarian assistance of NGOs has also improved social welfare of the Thai-Karen communities in the areas.

5.2 Finding on Employment Aspects

Though the last generations were working in the agricultural sectors in the rural areas the younger generations are finding jobs in the urban areas. Although their parents have lived on subsistence agricultural farming and adhered to a simple life close to nature the youngsters are changing their livelihoods and their way of life in the modern society. Thai-Karen villagers can no longer rely on rotational agricultural farming as the situation has restricted their farming activities because of government policy on reforestation and forest conservation. Many young Thai-Karen villagers have found jobs in restaurants, factories and gasoline stations in urban areas, earning around as less as 2,000 to 3,000 baht per month. Many of them could not send remittance to their families back home and their economic expansion is tentative.

Maniratanavongisri (2004) also acknowledged that since 1980s the Thai government has implemented more laws and regulations to deal with an environmental crisis resulting from high rates of deforestation, and because of that forests surrounding Thai-Karen villages, which were once considered community property that could be used for swidden farming, have become protected areas. Many villagers do not possess farmland for household consumption. Some approach to towns and cities to find jobs, and since being unskilled workers they ended up with low paid jobs.

There are employment opportunities associated with working in NGOs, tourism and trade business, and the provision of regional economic cooperation. These employment aspects will be explored as follows;

5.2.1 Work Opportunities in NGOs

Karen labor force with formal education such as diplomas, undergraduate degrees, or certificates of any tertiary education, and with additional skills in English language, local dialects such as Burmese and Karen, and some knowledge in office management and work operations of NGOs have got work opportunities in NGOs that are working for refugees, migrant workers and Thai-Karen villages in border districts.

As stated above many key informants were employees from non-governmental organizations that are based in Mae Sot. Mae Sot is the border town accessible by road and air. The districts of research site borders with Burma (Myanmar) and there are three refugee camps. According to Karen Refugee Committee's monthly report for June 2005, Maela refugee camp in Tha Song Yang district has 33,039 populations, Um Pheim Mai refugee camp in Phop Phra district has 19,088 populations, and Noh Poe refugee camp in Umphang district has 12,559 populations (Karen Refugee Committee Newsletter 2005).

Sixteen non-governmental organizations and charity organizations providing humanitarian assistance to refugees, migrant workers and Thai-Karen villages in the border districts have located their offices in Mae Sot. This situation has opened up employment opportunities in the area. The organizations are; TBBC (Thai Burma Border Consortium - England), supporting shelter materials, basic food needs and emergency relief for Refugees; MSF (Medicine Sans Frontiers - France), supporting medicine and health facilities and sanitation, AMI (Aids Medical International - France) supporting medical and health facilities and sanitation,, ARC (American Refugee Committee - USA) supporting in medicines and health, MHD (Maltese Germany) supporting in medical and health, ICS International Christian Solidarity - Netherlands) supporting in educational buildings materials, facilities and relief goods, ZOA (The Netherlands) supporting in education materials, facilities and trainings, COERR (Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees – Catholic Church Thailand) supporting rice and educational support, material for vulnerable people, TOPS (Taiwanese Overseas Peace Services - Taiwan) supporting nurseries, widows, orphans, elderly and women group, HI (Handicap International - Norway) supporting training and rehabilitation for Refugee Handicaps, SMRU (Shoklo Malarial Research Unit - France) for malaria research, control and treatment for refugees, PPAT (Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand - Thailand) providing assistance in family planning in camps, Consortium-Thailand (CT - USA) supporting in camps education and teachers, NCA (Norwegian Church Aid) funding for Karen Refugee Committee administration and activities, UNHCR (United High Commissioner for Refugees) involving in registering and protection of refugees, and

SVA (Shanti Volunteer Association - Japan) supporting with libraries and clothing (Karen Refugee Committee Annual Report 2004). Among them COERR (Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees), TOPS (Taiwan Overseas Peace Service), CT (Consortium Thailand), TBBC (Thai Burma Border Consortium), ZOA Netherlands, AMI (Aids Medical International), (American Refugee Committee), SMRU (Shoklo Malarial Research Unit), HI (Handicap International), MSF (Medicine Sans Frontiers), and MHD (Maltese Germany) have implemented education, health and sanitation projects in Thai-Karen villages in the border districts.

The proportion of Thai-Karen employment is quite high in non-governmental organizations. A Thai-Karen staff who is working in COERR (Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees – Mae Sot office) said that there are nineteen staffs in COERR, in which sixteen are Thai-Karen and three are Thais. An interviewee from TOPS (Taiwanese Overseas Peace Service – Mae Sot office) also said that out of total ten staff they have eight Thai-Karen one Thai and one Chinese. A staff from SMRU (Shoklo Malaria Research Unit), which is a French non-governmental organization, counted that there are four Thai staff and 50 Thai-Karen staffs in their organization. A Thai-Karen staff from ZOA replied that there are thirty-five Thai-Karens, seven foreigners and five Thai are working in ZOA Netherlands. A staff of Consortium Thailand (CT) responded that, there are fourteen Thai-Karens, five Thais and four foreigners in their organization. Although only five NGOs were observed among the seventeen NGOs, it clearly shows that Karen young adult students with a tertiary education with some additional skills have better work opportunities in NGOs.

5.2.2 Work Opportunities in Tourism Business

There are nine national parks in the border districts of Tak province, which are the attractions of ecotourism (the names are stated in Chapter 4, page 32). The Namtok Thi Lo Su is considered the sixth biggest waterfall in the world, and it is located in the Umphang Wildlife Sanctuary which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Part of Thaug Yai Naresuan and Huay Kha Kaeng Reserves are in Umphang district. Thi Lo Rae waterfall is also situated in the Umphang Wildlife Sanctuary. Some other

natural waterfalls in the border districts of Tak province are; Pha Charoen waterfall in Mae Sot and Phop Phra districts, Mae U-Su Cave in Tha Song Yang district with a beautiful cave with a stream running through. Ecotourism is best suited for the area, since the area forms largest wildlife haven, virgin forests and its richness of natural resources. In respect to all these tourist attractions and destinations, the tourism business is progressing. Hotel business and tours are run by Thai business people, whereas Karen villagers in the area have got jobs in jungle trekking with their elephants, and selling their local crafts. The development of ecotourism business in the area will create employment opportunities for the local people in the future.

5.2.3 The Provision of Work Opportunities in Regional Economic Cooperation

A number of regional economic cooperations among ASEAN countries have been introduced. Some of them are;

1. The Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) economic cooperation was established in 1992 with Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Burma (Myanmar), Vietnam and Yunan Province of China. It aimed to promote regional economic collaborations for development, such as cross-border trades and investments.
2. The Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) is a regional and sub-regional cooperation initiative and was established in 1997 and later joined by Bhutan and Nepal in 2003. The main areas for cooperation are trade, investment facilitation and transport linkages.
3. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) was established in 2000 with Thailand, Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. Its areas of cooperation are tourism, culture, education, and transport and communication.
4. The Ayeyawady - Chao Phraya - Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) is participated by Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, and aims to generate growth along the borders; to facilitate relocation of agricultural and manufacturing industries to areas with comparative advantages; to create employment opportunities; to reduce income disparity in

the four countries, to enhance peace, stability and shared prosperity in a sustainable manner.

When these regional economic collaborations for development, such as cross-border trades, communications and investments, are actively and fully on operation, there will be employment opportunities to the local people. For example; when economic cooperation between Thailand and Yunan Province of China commenced, there has been a labor demand for business activities on trades, services and industrial sectors in Chiang Seang area and its vicinity. The economic cooperation has created work opportunities for local workforces.

Therefore, the labor force must be prepared for the future needs of the regional economic cooperation. When the four regional economic cooperations commence, the work opportunities in cross border business activities will be created in the border town Mae Sot (which is the research site) and its vicinity, which is on the road linkage of Asia Highway between Thailand and Burma (Myanmar). It will create work opportunities for the local workforces and they shall be trained in advance to absorb in the cross border business activities. Higher education, vocational education and English and Burmese language skills will give them an advantage for their employment. The Thai-Karen workforce in the border districts shall also be prepared to take up work opportunities, and therefore their earnings will be a means to their social and economic development.

5.3 Finding on Education Aspects

A Thai-Karen Kamnan emphasized that, for the overall development of Thai-Karen communities the leader is the main actor to lead and show the right direction. He or she must have good vision with effective leadership skills to open up and initiate opportunities for the communities. Education plays a crucial role for the young Thai-Karen people in obtaining works in government office or non-government organization. Having a livelihood as a clerk or staff in an organization will secure and improve their economic wellbeing. Primary and secondary schools, teachers and education materials shall adequately reach to the Karen villages in remote areas. For higher education or tertiary education at Vocational Training College or Rajabhat University, scholarships and subsidies are essential to enable the Thai-Karen young adult students in pursuing their tertiary education, in view of the fact that expenses on schooling is subject to their pursuit of tertiary education.

Acharn Tip gave an emphasis on education that, it is a significant foundation and the best investment for young people. It is the best way to improve and empower economic wellbeing of Thai-Karen communities. Education awareness and exposure programs should be organized for young people to open up their eyes to the outside world.

Fujioka (2002) recommended in the study on education opportunities for hill tribes in northern Thailand that 'education, along with infrastructure, communication and health care, is an indispensable enabling factor for enhanced rural development. It enables hill tribe people to take full advantage of employment and training opportunities, whether they choose to stay in their communities or decide to earn income in urban areas. Consequently, hill tribe people, based on the skills they acquired, could enhance their capacities, which would help ensure sustainable rural development'

There are formal and informal educations that Karen children and students can pursue. They study formal education at government schools in the area, and informal education outside classroom, such as from trainings and workshops or at their

dormitories. Formal education can be attained by pursuing primary, secondary and tertiary education at Government School, College or University. Informal education, informal in the sense that students receive it outside government schools, such as English language skills, job-related skills and knowledge, can be acquired from trainings and workshops organized by NGOs, and personality development studies are also given at Christian mission schools and dormitories.

5.3.1 Formal Education

With regards to social and economic hardships of the communities in the area pursuing education, especially tertiary education is a privilege for Karen young adult students. There are primary and secondary schools in some villages and sub-districts. Tertiary education can be studied at Rajabhat University or Vocational Training College in Mae Sot district. Many remote villages are quite small and they are mostly formed with family kinships. Sometimes remote villages are formed with as small as five families to twenty or thirty families. For example village such as Baan Tee Bote Kee from Tha Song Yang district has 53 populations and Baan Pa Ploo from Umphang district has 62 populations (see Population in Table. 1 in Appendix A). Primary school and other education assistance hardly reach the children from this kind of small communities.

Some Karen villages have Mae Fah Luang schools with third or fourth standard levels. Khun Chai responded that Baan Huay Nok Kok in Tambon Maela has Mae Fah Luang School with one teacher and about forty students. His wife is also assisting her husband in teaching and caring of students. Living in remote areas and being small communities the Thai-Karen children there become disadvantaged to education and health facilities of government assistance, compared to communities living close to those facilities. Some poor families consider education as an expensive activity and they are not interested in sending their children to pursue high school education. Many children do not continue their education at school in other village after they finish school in their village with second or third standard, and later on they follow their parents to help work in the paddy fields.

Students from Thai-Karen villages that are close to the nearby towns or in their vicinities, where they can go to high school, and Vocational Training College or Rajabhat University in Mae Sot district, have easy access and better opportunity to get education, whereas Thai-Karen students from remote villages have less chances to pursue their studies. One of the reasons is that the living expenses for them to come and stay in town and go to school have put burdens to their families and for their education pursuit. A Thai-Karen student, who is studying at Rajabhat University in Mae Sot district, said that an amount of 6,000 or 7,000 baht tuition fees per semester plus living expenses is unaffordable for many Thai-Karen students. She also responded that there were many students who were not able to continue to tertiary education as their parents could not support them anymore. Many with secondary education have dropped out from high school. There were 24 Thai-Karen students who were currently studying at Rajabhat University which has had, at present, around five hundred students in total. Therefore, even though the government's free secondary education policy for the students, the number of Thai-Karen students at higher education still remains low in the research areas.

The Ministry of Education Mr. Chaturon Chaisang has identified five major strategies for education reform on strengthening moral and ethical values and enhancing the quality of education at all levels, at a press conference on Sunday 6th November, 2005. The five major strategies are;

1. Proactive strategies for enhancing quality of higher education;
2. Strategies for children with all categories of disabilities; disadvantaged children; those without legal status or nationality; and stateless and marginalized children;
3. Strategies for enhancing performance of the offices at the educational service areas and educational institutions;
4. Strategies for development of educational information and communication technologies (ICTs); and
5. Strategies for international affairs.

These strategies will be beneficial to the Thai-Karen students from the border districts, once they are implemented successfully. Strategies for children have

highlighted the identification of children with all types of disabilities; disadvantaged children; those without legal status or nationality; and stateless and marginalized children for clarity, and for seeking effective problem solutions, which meet the real needs of all target groups, by taking steps to:

1. Study the situations, problems and requirements of each target group for identification of the overall strategies and work plans for the respective groups; (At present, less than 15% of disabled and disadvantaged children benefit from educational services; the target is therefore to reach 80% of these children within a period of 3 – 5 years.)
2. Highlight integrated classes as a major strategy for access by disabled children in the communities; the strategy currently adopted in 2000 schools will be expanded to include 8,000 schools so as to cover all Tambons (One Tambon One School with integrated classes); in the connection, provincial special education centers will serve as focal points for preparing parents, communities and schools; and
3. Emphasize the importance of curriculum development; teaching– learning activities; personnel development; and strengthening academic attainment commensurate with the personnel’s competencies and performances.

The education ministry emphasized on the expedition of improvement of teaching and learning of Thai and foreign languages, with particular attention to teaching of English and Chinese. The Taksin Government has introduced Burmese language to be taught at Thai schools along the Thai-Burma border. The education ministry has also confirmed that outcomes of relevant research and evaluation would be utilized for formulating the policy and road map of actions required for education reform, which will also benefit from the views of all concerned. More rapid decision–making is assured for all subsequent undertakings. (Press Conference of the Ministry of Education on 6th November 2006, pp 1-4) (<http://www.moe.go.th/icpmoe/Other/Report/next-step-forward.pdf>)

The government has introduced a free education for public school and every student can get free education until secondary education, which is Nine Standard (M 3

in Thai education level). Under government's educational assistance program, students now have opportunity to borrow money from Krung Thai Bank for their tuition fees. A Thai-Karen staff working in a government organization Border Patrol Police responded that he has a younger sister and a younger brother who have borrowed money for their school fees from Krung Thai Bank under the Government's educational assistance program, which has enabled them pursuing their education at Rajabhat University and Vocational Training College in Mae Sot district.

A Karen staff from TOPS said that Karen young adult students with tertiary education in any field will have work opportunities in NGOs, missionary works or business enterprises in local area. A Karen village head (*Phu Yai Ban*) in Tha Song Yang district has also recognized that having a livelihood as a staff at NGOs will allow a Karen to have earned a living for his or her family. He or she will be able to support his or her siblings to pursue education and attain tertiary education. A Karen Kamnan from Mae La sub-district also responded that his daughter is studying at Kamphaeng Phet University, and there are about ten Karen students from his Sub-district who are in College or University.

To wrap up the responds of key informants on formal education, it can be noted that Karen students and Karen young adults with formal tertiary education can take work opportunities in NGOs, missionary works or business enterprises in local areas. It will leads to their livelihood that can secure and improve their economic status. This is observed by comparison to the situation of Karen young adults who do not have any tertiary education, therefore can only find low paid jobs in urban areas. From the research findings on formal education of Karen students and young adult in the social and economic milieu of the area it clearly shows that a Karen who has at least a tertiary education can earn a stable livelihood as working at NGOs, GOs or other organizations, although level of job or salary may vary from one to another. They also admitted that with this trend of livelihoods the Karen people will be able to improve their social and economic wellbeing. They also mentioned in comparison that on the other hand young Karen people without a higher or tertiary education have found low paid jobs in restaurants, gasoline stations, or other places in Bangkok or other cities in urban areas.

5.3.2 Informal Education

There are dormitories of Christian missionaries that provide accommodation, English language classes and personal development studies to Karen primary and secondary students. They are French Catholic mission dormitory in Ban Tha Song Yang village in Tha Song Yang district, Australian SDA mission dormitory in Ban Maela village in Tambon Maela, Tha Song Yang district, St. Joseph School dormitory in Tambon Mae Ramat, Mae Ramat district, Pattara Wittaya School in Tambon Tha Sai Laud, Mae Sot district, and Fr. Olivier's Catholic mission dormitory in Phop Phra village, Phop Phra district.

Community based organizations and non-governmental organizations have implemented education projects for Karen children and students in border districts of Tak province. They also organize trainings and workshops on community management, health and sanitation, and environment issues, for Karen youth and villagers in the area. More details of NGOs and missionaries will be as follows;

Taiwan Overseas Peace Service (TOPS) has supported an educational project for hill tribe Thai-Karen children from villages in border districts of Tak province. TOPS provides rice for students in the dormitory of Mae Om Ki primary school in Amphoe Tha Song Yang, provides scholarships and dormitory accommodation to the higher education students, and supports Thai community nursery schools in five districts along the border through teacher training and learning/teaching aids distribution.

A Catholic missionary from France has established a mission school in Moo 1 Baan Tha Song Yan village, Tambon Tha Song Yang, Amphoe Tha Song Yang, Tak province. The mission school has provided shelters, foods and educational material and even personal supports to the Thai-Karen students from the remote villages, who come to study at government primary and secondary school in Baan Tha Song Yang village.



The Pattara Wittaya, a Catholic School, in Moo 1, Muban Mae Tao, Tambon Ta Sai Loud, Amphoe Mae Sot, has assisted Thai-Karen students for food, shelter and schooling. The Thai-Karen students are brought up to the school and looked after by the nuns and priests from the Pattara Wittaya School. The school is a middle school and they can study up to ninth standard. They are also given informal education such as religious teaching and personal development by nuns and priests from the school too. When talking to the Thai-Karen student group from Pattara Wittaya School, they said they are given assistance by the priest so that they can study there. The school fee is expensive for them and their parents cannot pay for it. They are around 10 to 16-17 years old and they come from remote villages in Mae Sot and Phop Phra districts.

A Catholic mission from French, which is headed by Fr. Olivier, has established a boarding dormitory in Baan Phop Phra village, Phop Phra district. It has given supports to Thai-Karen children from nearby villages to come and study at Phop Phra primary school. At the moment there are 28 boys and 38 girls, ages from 10 years to 17-18 years, under the mission care.

An Australian SDA (Seventh Day Advantage) missionary has established a Boarding Dormitory in Baan Maela, Tambon Maela, Amphoe Tha Song Yang., and the mission provides dormitory accommodation to Thai-Karen students from nearby villages, who come to study at Bann Maela Primary School in Tambon Maela, Amphoe Tha Song Yang. There are about 80 Thai-Karen students who are taking shelters at the dormitory. When group discussion with conducted with some students at the dormitory, they said that they are happy to be there. When asked if they wanted to continue their study after here, they said they wanted to, but they were afraid if their parents can not send them to middle and high school in other places. The teacher also said that the number of Thai-Karen students is increasing at primary school, but few of them can accomplish high school level.

The TBCA Foundation (Tak Border Child Assistant Foundation – Local Thai-Karen NGO), a Thai-Karen community based organization, has organized and raised funds to give partial scholarships to Thai-Karen students who want to pursue their studies at College or Vocational Training School. The TBCA Foundation, which was

initiated by Acharn Tip who is one of the key informants, has set up a dormitory accommodation and it is now providing shelter for nine Thai-Karen students in Padaeng village, Mae Sot district, Tak province.

There are variations between different communities in pursuing education. Kamnan Wan Nu responded that in his sub-district Christian families or families in Christian communities will support their children to pursue education, more than Buddhist or Animist families do. It can possibly be that Christian families or their neighboring communities are likely to get a kind of encouragement or assistance from Christian missionaries as they have close relations, although there is no such discrimination. He also mentioned that if a student from the community gets higher education with a good job, more parents will then encourage and support their children to pursue education.

Pha Dha Ler, who is working with Fr. Olivier, has expressed that not only the Thai-Karen children and students who have stayed at Christian missions' dormitory accommodations have been given assistance for their livings and schoolings, but also they get opportunities to learn and speak English/French language. Those students who have stayed at Christian dormitory accommodations will have English Bible studies, gospel songs from English hymn books, and Saturday/Sunday Bible School. They also have chances to meet and talk to foreign priests, nuns, religious teachers. Occasionally the missions also organize Christian Fellowship programs, and social gathering activities, in which students can meet and commune with foreign youth. These kinds of informal education also give Thai-Karen students opportunities to acquire English language skills outside classrooms.

A Thai-Karen staff from SMRU has also explained that the TBCA Foundation (Tak Border Child Assistant Foundation) has set up a dormitory accommodation and has raised funds to give scholarships to Thai-Karen students who want to pursue their studies at College or Vocational Training School. These kinds of educational support have become a gateway for Thai-Karen children and students who can pursue their education that is supportive to their work opportunities.

Education is a basic prerequisite and considered necessary for the young people to alleviate poverty, and improve their economic status.

It has clearly shown that the students who have one way or another been given shelter or assistance from missionary boarding dormitory have got opportunity to learn English language skills. There are NGOs that have organized trainings and workshops on community management, language skills and computer skills. These kinds of skills and knowledge have given better opportunity for Karen young adults in getting employed in NGOs or other business sectors. All key informants who are working in NGOs expressed that they are in this kind of situation. They have got better chance in working in NGOs as they have got some English speaking skills and computer skills from trainings and workshops. Moreover having a skill in local dialects has also enhanced their work opportunities.

5.3.3 Positives and Negatives on Education Attainment

Although the economic wellbeing of Karen communities has improved there are positive and negative consequences caused by education attainments of Karen young adults. It was found out that most parents were farmers and they were not able to pursue higher education when they were young. In regards to social and economic hardships, distance to education institutions, and less awareness of their parents on education were the main causes to their education pursuits. Karen young adults with high school education or tertiary education at University or College have now found that their education status is higher than that of their parents and they feel their opinion or knowledge is superior to that of their parents. Their attitude and appreciation towards their parents have declined. Parents' guidance and leadership in the household is denied. The preservation of some traditional values and practices has now been neglected among Karen students and young adults. On the other hand some Karen people argue that culture and some traditions and practices should be promoted or renewed to go with the modern time. Modernization is appreciated by Karen young people, though their parents or the last generations are critic to the modern world.