

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **DISCUSSIONS ON RESEARCH FINDINGS**

In this chapter I would like to discuss on how the research findings have clearly showed that the social and economic development of Karen communities can be appraised by the work opportunities of Karen young adults and students in NGOs for the time being, and in the future tourism business and regional economic cooperation in the local areas. I would also like to explore how formal tertiary education has given them employment opportunities in such organizations and their skills and knowledge acquired from informal education have enhanced their work opportunities. Finally the research findings would explain to the hypotheses and answer to the research question (research problem) of this study.

The research has used qualitative research methodology, and was conducted from July 2005 to January 2006. Field data and information were mainly acquired from key informants. Documents and reports of government agencies, United Nations agencies and non-government organizations were used to explore issues related to the research question. Related conference papers, books and academic research papers were also used for theoretical findings and literature reviews. Focus group discussions with primary and secondary students, non-participatory observations in the Thai-Karen villagers, and formal and informal interviews with NGOs staffs, village administration staffs, foreign missionaries, farmers, Karen students and young adults were conducted as methods of information and data collection.

#### **6.1 Social and Economic Development**

The research has studied the livelihoods and economic situations of Thai-Karen people who are living in the border districts of Tak province. As regards to the overall situation of social and economic development it has been founded that there are economic disparities among Karen communities in the border districts. The majority of Karen people living in the border districts of Tak province have relied on different types of agricultural farming for their subsistence economic wellbeing. The mountain-dwelling (highlanders) Karens who do not own or cannot find a piece of

farmland practice swidden or rotational farming, whereas the plain-dwellers (lowlanders) who own a piece of farmland do irrigated agricultural farming in their paddy fields. Karen farmers with or without a small piece of land have to do rotational farming, although it is prohibited by the government, for their food security. Being heavily relying on crops produce they have yet to struggle to obtain enough for household consumption. This group is the poorest in the communities. Many young people from poor families and jobless farmers have gone to cities for a job. Being unskilled the Karen laborers with low paid jobs in the cities or urban areas can earn for a living, but their remittance to support their families back home is irregular.

Karen farmers who own enough farmland for their households can basically improve their economic situation by having a higher crop production. Some families who own grocery shop in their village can make a living and improve their economic situation. Karen young adults with a job in non-governmental organization or governmental organization have made secure earnings for their household consumptions and at the same time have improved their economic status. With their earnings he or she will be able to support the schooling of their siblings and will also be able to continue their education to a higher level. These groups can steadily improve their social and economic wellbeing.

A well-off Karen family can generate earnings from their big farmlands or small or medium business enterprises that are based on farming or farm-related activities in the local area. They can also make profits from their business and improve their social and economic status. They can send their children to University or College in Bangkok or other places in Thailand. Very few Karen families can be seen in this group. Sometimes they have descended from well-off families.

## **6.2 Dilemmas to the Economic Development**

The border districts are mostly covered with forests, parks and highland. There has been a shortage of farmlands for the communities who mostly rely on farming. Education levels and job-related knowledge and vocational skills are low. To study higher education at University or College level is expensive for Karen students and

there has been a lack of supports for tertiary education pursuits of Thai-Karen students. The scattered communities live in remote areas, and there is a lack of adequate public services for the local communities. These are the profound burdens to the social and economic development of Thai-Karen communities in the border districts of Tak province.

### **6.3 Hypothetical Reviews**

The research has hypothesized that, first of all, tertiary education of Karen students provides work opportunities in NGOs, and for the provision of tourism business and regional economic cooperation projects in the local districts. Secondly their informal education, such as English language and local dialects proficiencies from apprenticeships and occupational trainings, enhances their work opportunities. And lastly the social and economic development of Karen people can be appraised in terms of opportunities of Karen young adult students towards education and works. These assumptions will be explored and provide evidence as follows.

#### **6.3.1 Formal Education**

Karen young students pursue their primary and secondary education at schools in their village or nearby village or sub-district. They learn Thai language, mathematics, geography and history, etc. For tertiary education they can study at higher education institutions such as Rajabhat University or Vocational Training College in Mae Sot. Some Karen interviewees working in NGOs studied at other Universities in Thailand, such as Ramkhamphaeng University, Saeng Tham College or Kamphaeng Phet University, etc... The research findings have highlighted that with a tertiary education, the Karen young adults have found jobs in non-governmental organizations. As stated in research findings (see Chapter 5) the NGOs such as ZOA Netherlands, Consortium Thailand, Shoklo Malaria Research Unit and Taiwan Overseas Peace Service, have employed 80 % or more Karen staffs in their workforce. It has therefore acknowledged the hypothesis of a formal tertiary education of Karen young adult students provides work opportunities in NGOs, and

the provision of work opportunities in tourism business and regional economic cooperation projects, in the local districts.

### **6.3.2 Informal Education**

Karen young adult students have chances to learn English language skills, and job-related skills and knowledge from trainings and workshops organised by NGOs that are working for refugees, migrant workers and Karen villages in border districts. They can also learn English language speaking from the foreign missionaries. (The informal education means that they learn these skills from trainings or workshops, outside their classrooms of government schools). These skills and knowledge have given them an advantage of getting a job in NGOs. It can be tested by the results of research findings that NGOs such as ZOA Netherlands, Consortium Thailand, Shoklo Malaria Research Unit and Taiwan Overseas Peace Service have around 80 % or more Karen staffs. By having English language skills, job-related skills and knowledge and skills of local dialects have boosted their work opportunities in NGOs. Therefore the suggested hypothesis on informal education, that informal education such as English language and management skills and local dialects from apprenticeship and occupational training enhances their work opportunities, can be recognized by this study.

### **6.3.3 Interrelationship of Education, Work Opportunities and Economic Development**

The research has acknowledged the interrelationship between education, work opportunity and economic development of Thai-Karen communities. It means that their education will provide work opportunities for Karen young adult students and their earnings will finally encourage their social and economic development. Therefore this research have found that the achievements of Karen young adult students for formal tertiary education and informal education such as English language and management skills and local dialects from apprenticeship and occupational trainings, have altogether strengthened their work opportunities in non-government organizations. Since the area has numerous tourist attractions such as

natural parks, wildlife sanctuaries and famous waterfalls, they will also create employments in tourism business. There are regional economic cooperation projects which will also offer work opportunities of Karen young adult students. These entire situations will open up work opportunities for Karen young adult students and encourage social and economic development of their communities.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

The study can therefore be theorized that the attainment of Karen young adult students for formal tertiary education at government education institutions such as Rajabhat University, Vocational Training College or any other University in Thailand, together with informal education, informal in the sense that students learn it from outside school, such as English language skills and local dialects from apprenticeships and occupational trainings provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), enhance their work opportunities in NGOs and for the provision of tourism business and regional economic cooperation projects in local area. These kinds of livelihoods provide better earnings for Karen young adult students, which lead to social and economic development of their communities. Therefore the research findings have proved that formal and informal education of Karen young adult students are tools for their work opportunities, and it is also a path to social and economic development of their communities.

#### **6.5 Suggestions**

The study clearly provides an insight to the problems concerning social and economic disparities in the border districts of Tak province, and also to the hardships and livelihoods of the Thai-Karen people. As stated earlier there are international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and charity organizations (missionaries) which have collaborated with local government agencies and taken initiatives (projects and programs) on social services and education development of Thai-Karen students in the border district of Tak province. These programs shall be improved and extended to more remote villages, and the government shall also put more efforts on improving school facilities to the needs of local students for their primary and secondary

education. Education grants, financial weavers for school fees and scholarships shall be given to the needy Karen young adult students in order to pursue their studies at Rajabhat University or Vocational Training College in Mae Sot district, or any other University in Thailand.

To prevent forest encroachments by Thai-Karen people and for natural resource conservation, employment opportunities should be created to enable additional incomes of Thai-Karen communities, rather than having them heavily relying on farming. Social and health services are the necessary basic needs of remote and scattered communities to combat diseases. Infrastructure shall improve communication and economic activities. Not only policies and programs are introduced for poverty alleviation, but follow up programs for proper implementation is crucial to the success of development programs in the Thai-Karen communities.

Thai-Karen students in the border districts can pursue formal education at government schools or private schools (Catholic secondary schools such as St. Joseph School in Mae Ramat and Pattara Wittaya School in Mae Sot) and Rajabhat University and Vocational Training College in Mae Sot. They shall be given informal education such as English language, management and computer skills from trainings and workshops organized by government organizations (GOs) and non-government organization (NGOs), or with their collaborations. Skills in Burmese, Karen and English languages will be of benefits for employment opportunities for Thai-Karen students in the border districts. Having formal and informal education will open up work opportunity to Thai-Karen students, and at the same time it will be a pathway for their social and economic development.

## **6.6 Limitations**

The study is so far qualitative; therefore the findings can not be specified for every single population in the whole border areas. The area is too wide and populations are scattered. A further study should be conducted, aiming at a more quantitative study with statistical documentations.

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