



Thailand Case Study in Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion

UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office

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Acronyms

ARF	Asian Resource Foundation
BRN	Barisan Revolusi Nasional
COPE	Teachers in Peace Education, Pattani
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DSW	Deep South Watch
EAPRO	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
ESA	Education Service Areas
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
ISA	Internal Security Act
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NRC	National Reconciliation Commission
NSC	National Security Council
PBEA	Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy
PULO	Patani United Liberation Organization
RTG	Royal Thai Government
SBPAC	Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center
STEP	Southern Thailand Empowerment and Participation Project
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Action Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNPAF	United Nations Partnership Framework



Yupa Wahup, 5, smiles as she plays with a classmate at Ban Triem Early Childhood Development Centre in the town of Ban Triem, in Kuraburi District, in Phang Nga Province, Southern Thailand.



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Children participate in class at the Bang Nieng Learning Centre for Burmese children in the southern Pang Nga Province of Thailand. Set in a rubber plantation, the Centre accommodates approximately 40 children, aged five to 12 years, whose parents are migrant workers. Subjects include Burmese, Thai, English and mathematics.

Introduction

Purpose of case study

As part of the United Nations Children's Fund's global Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme, the East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) is developing a regional strategy on education for social cohesion and comprehensive school safety. In order to provide context for the strategy, two case studies of conflict-affected countries have been commissioned to explore the relationship between conflict, education and social cohesion; and the role of the education sector in general and UNICEF in particular, in supporting social cohesion. While the countries selected, Thailand and Solomon Islands, have very different conflict contexts, there are similarities, nevertheless, in the role of the education sector in addressing the root causes of conflict and the need to strengthen social cohesion as part of an appropriate response from a policy and programmatic perspective.

This case study uses as an analytical framework the conclusions from UNICEF-commissioned reports on education and peacebuilding, which note that while education has the potential for contributing to social transformation processes in post-conflict environments, the evidence base is weak for the linkage between education interventions and conflict, peacebuilding and social cohesion. Further, neither peacebuilding nor social cohesion theory has had a strong influence on education programming in post-conflict contexts; nor has there been sufficient use of conflict analysis tools to guide education programming (Novelli and Smith, 2011).

The Thailand case study will address: 1) the background of the conflict in the southern provinces of Thailand, including the role of education as a trigger of the conflict; 2) the policy framework for addressing the conflict, both from the government and the United Nations system; 3) the education sector response framework of the government, UNICEF and the non-governmental sectors; and 4) conclusions and recommendations for UNICEF based on current and potential policy and programmatic approaches.

While there is a tendency to label intra-state conflict between different cultural groups as 'ethnic', this study will refer to 'identity-based' conflict, a term preferred by Tawil and Hartley (2004, p. 11) since it more accurately describes the relationship between "cultural identities and social and economic exclusion [that] may overlap and represent an important source of identity-based conflict when associated with forms of political exclusion that imply the denial of security, representation, citizenship, and other basic political and cultural rights."

Methodology

A desk review of academic and programmatic literature and policy documents and reports was conducted, drawing on materials from the Thai Government, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Newspaper articles and websites were also consulted. In addition, a number of stakeholders were interviewed during a site visit to Thailand. These include representatives from the Ministry of Education, Bureau of Education Development for Special Administrative Zone in the South; the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); UNICEF Thailand Country Office; UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office; Mahidol University's Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies; Thaksin University; and Deep South Watch (DSW) Centre of the Prince of Songkla University. In addition, representatives from the following NGOs were interviewed: Human Rights Watch, Justice for Peace Foundation, Asian Resource Foundation and Cross Cultural Foundation. A complete list of people interviewed is provided at the end.

Summary of findings and recommendations

The conflict in the deep south, which erupted into renewed violence in 2004, has complex causes that involve identity, culture, religion, economics and history; however, it is essentially a political struggle about the extent to which the Bangkok administration can exercise legitimate authority in the southern provinces, which are predominantly Malay Muslim. There is consensus that while education policy has played a role in the conflict in the government's efforts to implement the national curriculum, language and historical narratives in the southern region, education reform will continue to be important in addressing long-standing grievances, reducing the tension and mitigating the conflict.

The violence and militarization of the conflict has had an enormous impact on education, resulting in the targeted killing of teachers, the destruction and closure of schools, and the fracturing of the social fabric of inter-community relations and social cohesion, which are very difficult to heal. Two parallel systems of education have emerged – government-run and Islamic private schools – which has resulted in the de facto segregation of most Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim children and youth.

UNICEF Thailand can play an important leadership role in the south in education sector reform, with the goal of building social cohesion as part of its medium and long-term planning process. The following recommendations are suggested for UNICEF to consider, based on the conclusions of the case study, and emerging needs as the contours of the conflict develop and change:

1. Invest in an education sector conflict analysis;
2. Invest in conflict sensitive curriculum reform and education programme design processes that are linked to the findings of the education conflict analysis;
3. Develop mechanisms for coordination and alignment of education and social cohesion programming among stakeholders;
4. Ensure decentralization of education management and devolution of authority to local level;
5. Support programming in the non-formal education sector, which is as important as the formal sector for the implementation of conflict sensitive education programming for social cohesion; and
6. Advocate for school safety and security interventions using risk analysis.

1. Background and context of the conflict

This section provides an overview of the conflict in the four southern provinces and the relationship between the conflict and the education system.

1.1 Overview of the conflict

In the four southern provinces of Thailand that border Malaysia – Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala and Songkhla – a wave of violence in 2004 renewed a long history of resistance from the Malay Muslim population to the authorities in Bangkok. The southern region was only incorporated into the Thai State (then called Siam) in 1909 as part of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty negotiated with the British Empire (McCargo, 2006). The region contains more than 65 per cent of Thailand's Muslim population, where the majority speak the Patani Malay dialect, known in Thai as Yawi. The Malay language has shaped the identity of the people, who since childhood have spoken and received religious instruction through it. The language also serves as a link between the people and their past when the area was part of the Patani¹ sultanate. Patani was one of the major centres of Islamic studies in Southeast Asia, and all Islamic texts are written either in Arabic-scripted Yawi or Arabic (National Reconciliation Commission, 2006).

Policies adopted in the 1940s but later lifted, including banning Islamic schools and attire and outlawing the Patani Malay dialect, have had repercussions in today's insurgent movement. While a significant separatist movement, with more than 60 armed groups among the Malay Muslims, became active in the 1960s, violence had mostly subsided by the late 1980s with an amnesty programme (Melvin, 2007).

In 2004, a renewal of violence involved a series of high profile attacks. An insurgent raid on an arms depot in Narathiwat was followed by arson attacks on 20 schools, and ongoing targeting of teachers and intimidation of education officials. According to Deep South Watch, from January 2004 to September 2012, there were a total of 12,377 violent events, resulting in 14,890 casualties (5,377 deaths and 9,513 injured). Among civilians, at least 157 teachers have been killed (Srisomphob, 2012).

In 2012, a series of attacks again made the conflict more visible, including coordinated car bombings and attacks on principals and teachers (International Crisis Group, 2012). The nature of the insurgency has also changed from earlier years, since it is not a monolithic movement but a network of cells and armed groups with no apparent central authority. There are now several generations of insurgents involved in the current violence, including separatists from groups such as the National Revolutionary Front, Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) and newly formed rebel cells (Liow and Pathan, 2010).

Targeted insurgent attacks on schools are apparently motivated by animosity towards the Thai educational system and the easy access to soft targets. Arson attacks on schools have also been employed to ambush government forces deployed to protect schools. Insurgents have also set off bombs in schools to target security forces, damage schools and create an atmosphere of fear (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Victims of shootings, bombs, and arsons include students, teachers, schools janitors, bus drivers and security guards. Both Buddhist and Muslim teachers have been targeted but the majority of teachers singled out have been Thai Buddhists from government schools. Rogue elements of the Thai army and other groups have been accused of targeting Muslim schools for revenge (O'Malley, 2010). Insurgents have also used Islamic schools to recruit and indoctrinate students (Liow and Pathan, 2010).

¹ Patani was the name of the sultanate while Pattani refers to the name of the region under Thai sovereignty.

Although the Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim communities had resided along ethnic lines, the two cultures largely accommodated each other until the outbreak of violence in 2004 (McCargo, 2006). The renewal of violence has created deep social fissures between the two communities and a previously stable relationship has been shattered by fear, suspicion and anger (Liow and Pathan, 2010).

The government has responded to the insurgency with three special security laws: the 1914 Martial Law Act, the 2005 Executive Decree on Government Administration in States of Emergency (or emergency decree) and the 2008 Internal Security Act (ISA), in force in all or parts of the conflict zone. Local and international human rights groups claim that these measures give the military and local officials excessive powers and foster impunity. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2012), the state of emergency also adds to the sense of injustice felt by the Malay Muslim population, which ICG identifies as one of the underlying causes of the conflict.

Security efforts have resulted in the militarization of the southern border provinces, with more than 8 per cent of the region's population now under arms. There are about 41,000 professional security personnel in the region, including 24,000 troops and 17,000 police. Paramilitary forces include 18,000 volunteer rangers and 7,000 members of a defence corps. Nearly 85,000 civilians organized as volunteer militias augment these forces (ICG, 2012). Five different governments have attempted to quell the unrest. The Government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, who took office in 2011, promised peace, security and autonomy but now faces the reality of the deadly stalemate that has characterized the conflict since 2008.

Government policy makers and analysts hold diverse views about the nature of the current conflict. According to Melvin (2007, p. 3) there are three different interpretations although they are not mutually exclusive: historical grievances, the role of violent Islamism, and the role of contemporary Thai politics on the 'global war on terror'. The most developed explanation for the instability and violence ascribes the source of tensions to the formation of nation states in Southeast Asia from the 19th century onwards, and the grievances and inequalities created in the process.

According to a study by Deep South Watch (2010), the primary cause of the insurgency is the perception of ethnic and religious bias, lack of justice, and use of violence by the state against the Malay Muslim population. People regard state officials from the Thai Buddhist majority in the deep south as "distant and estranged from the people" with no understanding of the culture, language and religion of the Malay Muslims. The population is also angry about the apparent indifference of the national government to development priorities, and the income gap between residents in the south and the rest of the country. According to Human Rights Watch, the Malay Muslim population will never be treated on an equal basis with the Thai population until there is the political will to address injustice through the implementation of policy reforms.²

McCargo (2010) concludes that the chief cause of the renewal of unrest in 2004 was the lack of legitimacy of the Thai State in the deep south, which attempted to rule by co-opting Islamic leaders, teachers and the Malay Muslim political elite. This allowed for the re-emergence of a militant separatist movement led by a network of cells, the *juwae*, who want to change the relationship between the Malay Muslim population and Bangkok. While there is no concrete evidence that the movement is motivated by jihadist ideology or tied to transnational movements, the government has concerns that such connections could emerge if the situation gets worse (Liow and Pathan, 2010). According to Human Rights Watch, which has direct access to information from separatist leaders, some of the militants, who number between 5,000 and 6,000, want complete independence and have no interest in negotiating any other type of

² Interview with Dr. Sunai Phasuk, Human Rights Watch Thailand, on 6 February 2013.



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Children sit on a bench in a camp for migrant Burmese workers on a rubber plantation in the southern Pang Nga Province of Thailand. UNICEF has been working towards establishing partnerships to assist migrant workers and give their children access to schooling and medical care.

governance.³ Sources from the Ministry of Education suggest that the motivation of the separatists is to eliminate Buddhist culture from the region.⁴

Regardless of the interpretations of motivation for the insurgency, the Muslim population in the southern provinces faces a range of challenges, chief among them low educational attainment. The number of students completing secondary education is considerably lower than the national average, and this translates into poorer prospects for employment and a lack of opportunities. This is particularly the case for children who have attended non-government schools or whose primary language is Yawi rather than Thai. Muslims are also poorly represented in the public sector and in higher-level positions (UNICEF, 2006). While the local population is 80 per cent Muslim, Thai Buddhists make up 70 per cent of the local civil service, with Muslims generally limited to lower-level civil service positions (Melvin, 2007). The southernmost provinces also have among the lowest levels of political participation and community organizations (UNDP, 2010).

Youth unemployment is also a critical issue in the south, since many young people lack needed skills for employment and do not feel hopeful about their future. Idle young men are especially vulnerable to manipulation and can easily be used by those with interests in perpetuating violence and hatred (UNDP, 2010).

1.2 Education and conflict

The separatist movement in the southern provinces gained strength when the Thai Government, through the 1921 Compulsory Education Act, tried to dictate the curriculum of *pondoks*, private Islamic schools, by compelling them to use Thai as the medium of instruction (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Malay Muslims fear that the use of Thai in education would initiate the erosion of the Malay language and culture. While Muslim

³ Human Rights Watch interview on 6 February 2013.

⁴ Interview with Bureau of Education Development for Special Administrative Zone in the South, on 7 February, 2013.

parents “prefer sending their children to study both religious and secular knowledge, religious learning takes precedence since seeking this is compulsory to all Muslims such that teachings and practices of Islam will be done accordingly” (Narongraksakhet 2006, pp. 129–130).

Pondoks have been central to the transmission of Malay Muslim culture and identity (Narongraksakhet, 2006). In the 1960s the government attempted to bring the *pondoks* under its control to advance the assimilation process, establishing Thai public schools in Malay Muslim communities; however, many parents did not want to replace the *pondoks* with Thai schools. From the 1970s onwards, the government required that *pondoks* register with the Ministry of Education and offered schools compensation for teaching the Thai curriculum alongside religious teaching. While this strategy reduced the number of *pondoks*, there is still strong opposition to the teaching of Buddhism, Thai official national culture and language in public schools. “Malay Muslims resent the central government’s disregard for their own local history, their language, and their religion and thus view public primary and secondary education as just another method of oppression and forceful assimilation wielded by the central government” (Von Feigenblatt et al., 2010, p. 305).

The Thai Government also tried to make it compulsory for Malay Muslim children to attend Thai government schools. One of the insurgent groups, the Patani Freedom Fighters (loosely affiliated with the BRN) identified the Thai education system as their main target, calling it “a symbol of infidel occupation and suppression of ethnic Malay Muslim identity” (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

The Thai education system has been characterized as a ‘weapon of mass assimilation’ and linked to asymmetric development and decreased levels of human and social capital in the southern region. According to Von Feigenblatt et al. (2010, p. 293), “what is at stake is not only the content of history textbooks but the security of thousands of people belonging to ethnic minorities, their incomes, the natural resources of the country, and the economic opportunities of millions of people in the provinces. Thus, education is linked to political and economic development.”

During the Cold War period, education was used by the government as a tool to extend its control over minorities and their resources. The authors contend that mass assimilation was done through the combination of distorted history lessons, civics, and Buddhism. The history books used in schools provide an idealized view of Thai history from the point of view of the Bangkok elite (Von Feigenblatt et al., 2010).

Meanwhile the use of *pondoks* as a vehicle for the recruitment of insurgents has been asserted by researchers and government officials. According to Liow and Pathan (2010), secret fraternities have been formed and student recruits have taken an oath not to divulge information about their activities or membership in the insurgency. The role of religious schools in indoctrinating and recruiting students is rooted not in Islamic studies, but in local narratives of oppression and colonization. Religious teachers sometimes serve as recruitment agents and it is reported that they select youths who show strong religious belief and can be manipulated. Agents recruit these youths into small groups, initially by befriending and inviting them to join discussion or prayer groups. Potential candidates are sounded out in conversations about Patani history. Those who seem receptive to liberationist ideology are invited to join the movement (ICG, 2012).

The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre’s Deputy Secretary General, Piya Kijthavorn, agrees that education has contributed to the conflict in the teaching of a biased curriculum that is not sensitive to the local cultural, historical and ethno-religious contexts. He asserts that education has been used as a manipulative tool to create distrust among communities and to instigate tensions and violence. The SBPAC is trying to address this issue by using a student-centred approach in building awareness and fostering understanding about the use of education to reinforce existing divisions and exacerbate grievances.⁵

⁵ Interview with Piya Kijthavorn, Deputy Secretary General, Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (written questions and responses by email).

1.3 Impact of the conflict on education

The impact of the current conflict on schools, teachers and students has been profound. Since 2004, violence has frequently been directed against the government education system through the targeting of teachers and schools. The focus on teachers and the particularly brutal nature of the violence used against them, which includes immolation, beheading and beatings, has resulted in strong condemnation from human rights organizations (Melvin, 2007, p. 44).

The insurgents, who view the educational system as a symbol of Thai Buddhist state oppression, have burned and bombed government schools and harassed and killed teachers. The majority of teachers killed have been ethnic Thai Buddhists, and their deaths are often intended as a warning to others. However, insurgents have also targeted Muslim teachers at government schools, and Islamic school administrators who resist insurgents' efforts to use classrooms for indoctrination and recruiting. In some areas, insurgents have also pressured Malay Muslim families not to send their children to government schools (Human Rights Watch, 2010, p. 7).

The violence is affecting the lives of up to one million children in the region. Hundreds of schools have been destroyed and children have witnessed the killing of their own teachers. A UNICEF-supported study found that children live with insecurity and fear on a daily basis and are victims or witnesses of violence, including shootings and bombings. At the same time, children living amid such violence express hope for the future and a strong desire for peace (UNICEF, 2008). The destruction of school buildings disrupts children's access to a quality education, depletes scarce school resources, and creates fear among teachers, children, and their parents. Meanwhile, crowded tents and other prefabricated units in school yards have been set up to house displaced students (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

In attempting to protect teachers and children, government security forces have established long-term military and paramilitary camps in some villages or bases in school buildings and on school grounds. At least 79 schools in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala have a military presence according to the UNICEF Thailand Country Office. The military presence can disrupt school life and attract attacks by insurgents as much as prevent them. The government has conducted raids on Islamic schools and arbitrary arrests of students when it suspects that schools are being used to indoctrinate students in separatist ideology and recruit them. While the military presence might be considered necessary to protect lives, it has also caught schools in the crossfire and interrupted children's education. Some principals and teachers also feel they can be targeted by both sides, regardless of their attempts to remain neutral in the conflict. Some parents have removed their children from occupied schools, fearing for their safety or the harassment of their daughters by security forces. Occupations have also forced students to travel to other schools, resulting in overcrowding of the host schools (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

Moreover, rogue elements of the Thai army and other groups have been accused of targeting Muslim schools for revenge (Human Rights Watch, 2010). In fact, some of the insurgent attacks on schools may likewise be retaliation for the killing of Malay Muslim teachers or human rights violations committed by Thai security forces. Islamic schools are often viewed as security threats due to the allegations of recruitment of children by armed groups. However, no data have been reported on the number of Islamic schools attacked or religious teachers and students killed as a result of Thai security forces and local Thai Buddhist militias.⁶

⁶ Save the Children: Regional Forum on Education under Attack, 'Protecting Education in Difficult Circumstances', power point presentation, UNICEF Asia Pacific Shared Services Centre, Bangkok, 2010.

2. Education system and policy

This section will provide an overview of the current government and religious education institutions in the southern provinces, and address education policy and governance, referencing key government policy documents. Finally, government policies on peacebuilding and social cohesion will be reviewed as well as the extent to which education is situated in these policies.

2.1 Education institutions in the southern provinces

The structure, delivery and content of the education system have long been contested issues in the south. The current system is a product of educational reform motivated in part by the government's need to ensure that traditional Muslim educational institutions provide sufficient awareness of the Thai nationality and secular education. It is also a result of accommodation to the cultural needs of the Malay Muslim population in the far south, therefore making the nature of education very different than in other parts of Thailand (Narongraksakhet, 2006). The conflict that persists in the system and its impacts will be explored in detail in the next section.

The current system of education consists of four types of institutions:

- **Government schools**, which use the same curriculum and standards as other such schools in Thailand. They provide two hours of religious education per week, and children can attend either Buddhist or Islamic studies. Many Muslim parents prefer government schools because of their quality and resources; but some feel that two hours of religious study is insufficient (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Less than 30 per cent of Muslim children attend government secondary schools for a range of reasons, including parental preference, distance and lack of transportation.⁷
- **Traditional Islamic pondok schools**, which have a long history and important role in culture and religious identity in the south. Mainly residential schools for students up to adult age and usually owned by a *tok guru* (school master), they teach only religious courses pertaining to Islamic law and the interpretation of the holy Quran, with the Malay language as the medium of instruction (Narongraksakhet, 2006). Since 2004 the government has attempted to register these schools but does not certify them, and graduates cannot continue on to Thai higher education.

When *pondoks* register they receive government funding based on the number of enrolled students. Some registered *pondoks* offer students the option to take additional classes in the national curriculum, allowing them to obtain national certification (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The Thai Government views *pondoks* with distrust because of concerns they are venues for alleged militant recruitment and do not inculcate Thai nationalism (Narongraksakhet, 2006). Others are critical of *pondoks* for reasons including low quality; nepotism in hiring teachers related to the owners; overcrowding resulting from government subsidies; lack of proper monitoring of student learning and lack of opportunity for students to learn the Thai language. Another criticism is alleged corruption on the part of some owners who pocket a portion of teachers' salaries or over-report enrolment numbers to get more funding from the government.⁸

- **Private Islamic schools**, which are for secondary school-aged children. Formerly *pondoks*, they provide both Islamic religious and government education coursework, with the national curriculum taught in the mornings and religious instruction in the

⁷ Interview with Angkana Neelapaichitr, Justice for Peace Foundation, on 7 February 2013.

⁸ Interviews with Angkana Neelapaichitr, Justice for Peace Foundation, on 7 February 2013 and Sunai Phasuk, Human Rights Watch, on 6 February 2013.

afternoons. Students at Islamic schools, therefore, study for at least 10 hours more per week than their peers in government schools. Because parents give priority to religious education (which is considered compulsory for all Muslims), private Islamic schools are preferred (Narongraksakhet, 2006), although their facilities tend to be of lower quality than at government schools, despite having received state subsidies. Nonetheless, graduating students from the government certified private Islamic schools have a greater chance to continue on to higher education. Yet, according to the Asia Foundation, which funds a project to improve the private Islamic educational system in Thailand, financial constraints often limit the ability of most private Islamic schools to create standardized lesson plans, making it harder for their teachers to use the government curriculum (Human Rights Watch, 2010, p. 37).

- **Tadikas, private elementary schools**, which are usually attached to mosques. These provide early religious education for young pupils in Grades 1 to 6, with the courses overseen by the Ministry of Education. There are an estimated 1,600 *tadikas* in the three southernmost provinces (Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala).

2.2 Education policy and governance

Under King Rama V (1868–1910) the education system was centralized and the Ministry of Education was created in order to build a sense of national identity in all students, regardless of their ethnicity (Von Feigenblatt et al., 2012). In 1921 government policies, beginning with the Compulsory Education Act and followed by the National Education System and National Education Plan of 1932 and 1936 respectively, required all Malay Muslim children to attend state primary schools to learn the Thai language (Melvin, 2007). Since the 1950s the Thai national curriculum has been enforced at secondary level, meaning that private Islamic schools were also compelled to adopt the Thai secular system.⁹ From the 1960s many of the traditional *pondoks* were transformed into private Islamic schools, required to follow the modern secular education system. This was viewed as a threat to religious and cultural identity and was met with resistance by many Malay Muslim religious leaders and heads of traditional Islamic schools (Von Feigenblatt et al., 2012).

Following the upsurge in violence in 2004, the Thai Government began to scrutinize Islamic education with the intention of regulating and managing it. The Thaksin Shinawatra Government began to pressure unregistered *pondoks* to register with the authorities in order to transform them into private Islamic schools offering parallel secular state curricula, in return for government subsidies. Many Islamic school owners benefited from these policies, gaining in wealth and influence with the Thai State even as they became increasingly alienated from their grass roots constituents and teachers (McCargo, 2008).

The current education system was established through reforms included in the National Education Act of 1999 and its 2002 amendments, which formed new decentralized organizational structures and called for innovative learner-centred teaching practices with the goals of:

- Extending compulsory education from six to nine years for all learners;
- Providing free basic education, both formal and non-formal, from nine to 12 years for all Thai citizens;
- Supporting inclusive education through integration of previously marginalized and vulnerable groups;
- Promoting the decentralization of authority to educational service areas, local administrations and institutions; and

⁹ Interview with Srisomphob, Deep South Watch.

- Engaging with all stakeholders to ensure relevance of curriculum content for different learning groups and flexibility in delivery mechanisms.

The primary education curriculum consists of five key competencies: 1) communication capacity, 2) thinking capacity, 3) problem-solving capacity, 4) capacity for applying life skills, and (5) capacity for technological application. The eight desirable characteristics consist of 1) love of nation, religion and king, 2) honesty and integrity, 3) self-discipline, 4) avidity for learning, 5) observance of principles of sufficiency economy philosophy in one's way of life, 6) dedication and commitment to work, 7) cherishing Thai-ness, and 8) public-mindedness (MoE, 2008a).

A new Basic Core Curriculum was prepared in 2008, consisting of eight core subjects: Thai language, mathematics, science, social studies, religion and culture, health and physical education, arts, careers and technology, and foreign languages. The curriculum supports the principle of 'embracing diversity' and promotes efforts "at integrating local wisdom and culture into the national curriculum, underpinned by policies to use mother tongue languages at kindergarten level" (MoE, 2008c). The promotion of thinking skills, self-learning strategies and moral development is at the heart of the Thai National Curriculum.¹⁰ These capacities emphasize communication skills, interpersonal relationships and concern for the environment, which are in line with the educational principles of learning to live together in multicultural societies. However, they lack emphasis on empathy, knowledge of other cultures, understanding of discrimination, teamwork, leadership, trust, political participation, and community involvement.¹¹ Furthermore, while there have been some attempts in the southern provinces to modify the local curriculum to incorporate local narratives and history, these have not been consistently and broadly implemented.¹²

The 1999 National Education Act changed the structure of management and administration with the decentralization of administrative responsibilities to local level and the consolidation of education planning at the central level. The reform process led to the establishment of 175 Education Service Areas (ESA) in 2003, increasing to 185 in 2008 (MoE, 2008a). At the provincial level, education development plans, five-year plans and operational plans are prepared and implemented. Local authorities are responsible for the formulation of local education policies, plans and management.

The Education Service Areas provide a link between the national curriculum and the preparation of local curricula to meet local learning contexts. Educational institutions are allowed to develop and implement curricula and prepare regulations for monitoring and evaluation (UNESCO, 2011/2012).

In 2009, the Ministry of Education outlined its Key Education Policy in the Southern Border Provinces aimed at managing private education and increasing funding for private institutions. The Thai Government funds tuition fees, textbooks, school uniforms and learning materials for private schools in the south, which constitute 70 per cent of all schools in the region. The government increased its financial support for private education (from kindergarten to secondary level) from 60 per cent to 70 per cent of its educational budget for private schools. In fiscal year 2010, it allocated 2.1 billion baht for private schools in southern Thailand. The Ministry of Education also established the practice of Partner Schools – pairing public schools with *pondoks* and *tadika* schools – to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning (MoE, 2009a).

Under the current education system, parents still prefer to send their children to private Islamic schools rather than to government schools; and 80 per cent of secondary school

¹⁰ MoE website, <http://www.bic.moe.go.th/en/images/stories/planpolicy/2009/edpolicy-southern-border-province09.pdf>

¹¹ Interview with Ramya Vivekanandan, UNESCO, Bangkok, on 19 December 2012.

¹² Interview with Human Rights Watch Thailand on 6 February 2013.



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Vinglek walks his sons, (left-right) Sayuti, 10, and Latif, 12, to Baan Klonggum School, Muang District, in Krabi Province, Southern Thailand.

students in the far south attend private institutions. This has resulted in a dual education system, which segregates Malay Muslim and Thai Buddhist communities, preventing the majority of children and youth in the region from experiencing multiculturalism in the classroom.

2.3 Government policy on social cohesion and the role of education

This section reviews government policies and initiatives that address measures to restore peace and social cohesion in the south, and the extent to which education has been incorporated into these measures. Government education sector policy initiatives to advance social cohesion are also discussed.

National Reconciliation Commission

In March 2005, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) under then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra appointed a 48-member National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) to make recommendations on policies and measures “to find a long-term solution to the problem, in order to bring about true reconciliation, peace and justice” and to “work towards a future where people of diverse cultures, both within the southern border provinces and between the people there and Thai society at large, can live happily together” (NRC, 2007, pp. 1–4).

The NRC report undertook a conflict analysis and concluded that the cause of the violence was not religion, but structural and cultural conditions, including inequities in the justice and administrative systems, economic and natural resource issues, and an education system that “fails to empower people to overcome various forms of social challenges,

both secular and religious” (NRC, 2006, p. 37). A number of recommendations were made to address the causal factors of the conflict, including responding to socio-economic grievances, addressing interests introducing elements of *sharia* law in the region, decentralizing authority and responsibility to local communities, affording opportunities for local people to manage natural resources, creating community-level councils of elders (*shuras*), strengthening the justice system and addressing abuses by local authorities and security forces (McCargo, 2010).

In addition, a number of important recommendations were made pertaining to education sector reform. While the NRC suggested that the current system of diverse educational institutions run by the state, the private sector and families was appropriate, it also stressed the importance of preventing “cultural rifts in which Thai Buddhist and Thai Muslim students become increasingly segregated” (NRC, 2006, p. 91) (other analysts in this case study have raised similar concerns about segregated systems of education). The NRC (2006, pp. 93–94) recommended a range of preventive measures, including:

- Improvement in the quality of secular education in private Islamic schools;
- Joint curriculum development by private and public schools of curricula for peace and cultural diversity with joint activity centres;
- Support of local community participation in public and private education governance;
- Promotion of joint sports activities;
- Coordination between public elementary and *tadika* schools in the same communities to organize joint religious or Islamic studies and cultural classes;
- Development of an integrated secular and Islamic curriculum embracing studies at all levels in both public and private Islamic schools;
- Language policy development by the state using mother tongue instruction and effective teaching of spoken and written languages;
- State provision of local education personnel for all subjects.

Additional process recommendations include (NRC, 2006, p. 94):

- Public involvement in curriculum development with adequate funding to allow students currently enrolled in public schools to remain where they are and to counter perceptions of state interference;
- Development of model schools (from existing entities) of educational excellence for integrated management of secular and religious studies through collaboration between the government and the central Islamic committee of each province;
- Ensuring opportunities for both public and private tertiary education in Thailand for Malay Muslim students having difficulty with secular subjects through a qualifications process and increased options for study abroad; and
- Design of sustainable policies by the Ministry of Education with inputs from community education bodies with direct involvement in decision-making.

While these recommendations appeared to be responsive to the root causes of the conflict, the Commission that drew them up did not adequately represent the southern region (McCargo, 2010). Furthermore, there was a disconnection between the recommendations and actual policies being implemented, which were focused on security and not reconciliation. The release of the report was followed by a period of political instability and the 2006 military coup. The recommendations were not enacted.

There was also strong resistance from other sectors to the NRC recommendations. Officials from the Ministry of Education Bureau of Education Development for Special Administrative Zone in the South suggested the Commission was not impartial and its recommendations, based on information from special interests, should not be viewed

as a consensus.¹³ Despite the failure of the NRC report to gain traction at the time of its release, it presents a framework for building social cohesion and locates the education system within that framework. This has been used in current efforts at education reform by the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC), as discussed below.

Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre

The SBPAC, disbanded in 2002 during the Thaksin Shinawatra Government, was revived and restructured under the Abhisit Vejjajiva administration and approved by the National Assembly in November 2010. The objective of the 2010 Southern Border Provinces Administration Act is to “promote special development zones in the south with flexibility and religious and cultural diversity.” The SBPAC covers all districts in the five southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Songkhla, and Satun. It is responsible for implementing development strategies involving political, economic, social, religious, and cultural issues, as well as education, public health, natural resources, technology, foreign affairs, psychological operations, and management (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011a).

In terms of education, the SBPAC is mandated under the Southern Border Provinces Administration Act section 9 (12) to “promote and encourage education arrangement in the southern border provinces” in both secular (mainstream) and religious education in public and private schools. The SBPAC strives for a student-centred approach in order to ensure students receive quality secular and religious education and encourages community involvement, in spite of existing legal limitations. Fostering mutual understanding and changing the biased mindsets of the national government, local authorities as well as the communities towards each other is pivotal, according to Piya Kijthavorn of the SBPAC.¹⁴ The SBPAC is also charged with “reform [of] the entire education system by reforming its structure and management, amending laws in accordance with the Constitution, pooling resources for the improvement of education management from the primary to the tertiary levels” (Council of Ministers, 2008, pp. 9–10).

The SBPAC supports the recommendations of the National Reconciliation Commission to maintain educational diversity, improve quality and give attention to overseas Thai students. Indeed, the recommendation to establish joint learning centres in Pattani and Narathiwat is being implemented through Thailand Knowledge Parks in the two provinces, which are expected to be completed in 2015. Other NRC recommendations supported by the SBPAC include cooperation between government elementary and *tadika* schools and local administrative authorities in the development of secular and religious curricula for both public and private educational establishments. The SBPAC has also given financial support to joint activities for Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim students, including educational activities and cultural exchanges.

The SBPAC has been working with local stakeholders in local education management and has accorded importance to teacher training and adoption of a children-centred approach in curriculum development. It has set up a monitoring system to ensure transparency and accountability in the provision of funds and to guarantee efficiency and effectiveness.¹⁵

National Security Council 2012

The National Security Council (NSC) along with the SBPAC is authorized to design and implement policy in the south. In 2012, it issued a three-year policy offering a progressive conflict resolution vision recognizing the value of cultural diversity. It also recognized for

¹³ Interview with K. Anusak and K. Tawat, Bureau of Education Development for Administrative Zone in the South, OBEC, MoE on 7 February 2013.

¹⁴ Written responses to questions submitted to SBPAC Deputy Director Piya Kijthavorn on 12 February 2013.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the first time “a political dimension of the violence” and the need for peacebuilding, peace dialogue, and decentralization (ICG, 2012, p. i).

This new approach establishes an environment conducive to dialogue and conflict resolution and guarantees that those involved in the conflict can participate in the peace process (Deep South Watch, 2012). However, according to the International Crisis Group ((2012, p. i), implementation of these new policies is likely to be impeded by political and bureaucratic infighting. Srisomphob (2012) states that lack of political will and strategies for implementation have thus far proved to be obstacles to achieving the necessary changes.

Bureau of Education Development for Special Administrative Zone in the South

The current education policies being implemented by the Bureau of Education Development for Special Administrative Zone in the South (Ministry of Education) are significant. According to officials with the Bureau, the Ministry of Education is carrying out policies in government schools that reflect a more pluralistic view of education. Reforms have been implemented in bilingual education, the teaching of history, and for a more inclusive process of curriculum development involving the community.¹⁶

The Development of Education, National Report of Thailand (2008a) summarizes the goals of education reforms implemented a decade after the passage of the National Education Act of 1999. One of the key objectives is to promote “peaceful co-existence” and cultivate an “appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity” as part of quality education. This includes the teaching of morals and values, peace education, human rights education, and education for international understanding (2008a, p. 13). The Ministry of Education has supported pilot projects in mother tongue/bilingual education in both the Omkoi district in northern Thailand as well as the south. In 2005, the MoE selected 12 schools to join a pilot project launched to develop Thai-Malay bilingual education to promote the systematic learning and use of the Thai language among children and youth in three southern provinces. The goals were to preserve the language, identity and culture of Malay speakers while building a “sense of Thai-ness in order to reduce tensions on divisive political issues and foster stability and unity” (Ministry of Education, 2008a, p. 21).

While the government funds informal education and private schools, according to the officials from the Bureau, the insurgents have control of the *pondoks*, *tadikas*, the private Islamic schools and informal education. Bureau officials suggest that the insurgents are resisting reforms and are in a struggle to control education. Their way of resisting is to kill teachers on both sides.

When asked about further decentralization of education administration, Bureau officials assert that it could work if there were no hidden agendas among the parties concerned; but they conclude that this is not the case in the south. They contend that they have responded to the requests for reform in bilingual education, history curriculum, and decentralization. However, their main concern is the right to quality education, which they assert, is being undermined in the current conflict.

Analysis of policies

Several prominent analysts, including Dr. Srisomphob Jitpiromsri of Prince of Songkla University, have expressed concerns about the dual education system, which segregates the Malay Muslim and Thai Buddhist communities. Srisomphob is in favour of reforms that would create an integrated system of education, asserting that parents tend to overlook the fact that the quality of education in private Islamic schools is poorer than in government schools because they prioritize stronger religious and moral education. At

¹⁶ Interview with Anusak Ayuwatana and Tawat Sangsuwan, Bureau of Education Development for Special Administrative Zone in the South, Ministry of Education on 7 February 2013.



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October 2005. Young girls play during a break in classes at Ban Tab Lamu School, Tai Muang District, Phang Nga Province in Southern Thailand. The school was devastated by the 2005 tsunami. UNICEF provided immediate help to rebuild their lives, and has supported the provision of safe drinking water and sanitation, along with scholarships to ensure that orphans stay in education.

the same time, he says, parents do not object to sending their children to government schools provided they can get a quality religious education. Children in private schools, currently overburdened by a double workload, would also benefit from the higher standard of maths and science taught in government schools.¹⁷

Dr. Gothom Arya, Executive Director of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, disagrees with government subsidies of religious schools. A supporter of secular education, Dr. Gothom suggests that rather than separating young people in different institutions, the state should provide non-religious schools that both Buddhists and Muslims could attend. Like Srisomphob, he agrees that there is a need for a mix of students and while it is acceptable to have separate Islamic schools, the state should not support them.¹⁸ Processes for addressing these issues will be discussed in section 4.

Thus far, the MoE has made no official attempt to undertake a comprehensive reform of the teaching of history in the south; rather, standard textbooks are used throughout the country with the content dictated by Bangkok, according to Dr. Gothom. There needs to be more research into history textbook reform and support from the government to undertake it. The Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies has a group of researchers currently involved in trying to clarify historical issues in the south, who will also prepare policy recommendations to education officials. Dr. Gothom suggests that localized history can be introduced at a later time in the region, after open dialogue, agreement, and policy reforms are enacted by the Ministry of Education.

¹⁷ Interview with Dr. Srisomphob Jitpiomsri, Deep South Watch, Prince of Songkla University, on 12 February 2013.

¹⁸ Interview with Dr. Gothom Arya, Executive Director, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, on 11 February 2013.

3. Programming for education and social cohesion

This section reviews policies, programmes and documents initiated by the United Nations system to promote social cohesion, and the extent to which education is part of these. It examines UNICEF's role in programming for social cohesion in the far south and discusses education initiatives in the non-governmental and civil society sectors.

3.1 United Nations system

United Nations Country Team Thailand

In 2008, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) commissioned a conflict analysis literature review in order to identify the historical background, the grievances underlying the conflict, impacts of the violence, and the government response. The analysis also outlined the key issues related to the United Nations mandate for development, human rights and peacebuilding for consideration by the UNCT. The report suggested that United Nations agencies should address the grievances, impacts of violence on livelihoods and vulnerable groups, inter-communal polarization, access to justice and trauma; and recommended they share with the Thai Government best practices from the United Nations' experience in other countries related to response to violence and conflict (UNCT, 2008). The UNCT review identified Thai Government education policies, starting with the Compulsory Education Act of 1921 which challenged the role of the *pondoks* in Malay Muslim education, as a driver of the separatist movement.

The literature review also raised key issues and challenges for United Nations agencies in response to the conflict, in particular the need for them to design programmes that address the grievance mix and the inter-communal polarization identified in the literature, in support of efforts to address violence and conflict in southern Thailand.

The United Nations also conducted a capacity mapping of UN agencies, including UNICEF, to assess to what extent they were addressing issues in the deep south. In order to implement the United Nations Development Action Framework (UNDAF), the UNCT formed a thematic working group on the deep south with key members UNICEF, UNDP, The World Bank and UNFPA. The 2007–2011 United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPAF) for Thailand did not explicitly incorporate the conflict in the south due to the slow process of government review and approval, but revision of the current 2012–2016 UNPAF is under consideration to include conflict prevention.¹⁹ Nevertheless, some of the current UNPAF outcomes are indirectly related to social cohesion and peacebuilding goals, such as improving access to quality social services and strengthening decentralization and provincial and local governance.

The 2007–2011 UNPAF also identified a major equity challenge in education as “the significant disparity in access to quality education based on regional and ethnic differences, as well as between the Thai and non-Thai population.” It stated desired outcomes that include: 1) Education decentralization improved to support the implementation of the Royal Thai Government's Education Reform; 2) Policies and strategies for improvement of quality and equity in education are developed and implemented; and 3) Teacher education improved including better integration of key concepts of sustainability and preventive education; and capacity strengthened for developing and implementing local curriculum (UNCT, 2011).

¹⁹ Interview with Dr. Somchai Yensabai, project officer, United Nations Development Programme, on 11 February 2013.

The education analysis in the Common Country Assessment also concluded that some groups of children are still not benefiting from quality education services. Key challenges which the UNPAF will support are linked to early childhood education (including learning in the child's mother tongue); literacy and lifelong learning opportunities; overall improvement in the quality of education; ensuring gender equality; and enhancing capacity for the management of education services at the local level. Advocacy work through education and training will seek to promote awareness and knowledge of natural hazards, and help develop a culture of prevention. In the key results matrix, the outcome was identified as "increased capacities and programmes in place to address the rights and needs of children caught in violence."

The United Nations Thematic Collaboration on Education prioritizes policies and strategies for improvement of quality and equity in education, decentralization and capacity strengthening for developing and implementing local curriculum (UNCT, 2011, p. 30).

United Nations Development Programme Thailand

The United Nations Development Programme and the Government of Thailand collaborated on the Southern Thailand Empowerment and Participation Project (STEP) in 2010-2012. The overall objective was to enhance community empowerment and public participation in local governance in southern Thailand, to be achieved by activities in two inter-linked areas focusing on capacity development of community-based organizations on the one hand and government on the other.²⁰ This project included as a major output "strengthened institutional capacity of community-based organizations and media in promoting social cohesion" (UNDP, 2010).

In the education sector, the outcomes were identified as: 1) enhanced capacities within national and local government and civil society and communities, and policies for increased access to high-quality, child-friendly basic education (formal and non-formal); 2) increased capacities to support the decentralization and de-concentration of education systems, enhancing local governance and community participation in education; and 3) improved access to life skills education and lifelong learning opportunities, including adult literacy and vocational education and healthy habits and behaviours of young people.

STEP was implemented in coordination with the SBPAC, Prince of Songkla University, community-based organizations and village committees. The partnerships and local human infrastructure developed in this programme and the focus on local empowerment and decentralization provide an excellent opportunity for possible collaboration with UNICEF Thailand in future non-formal education initiatives that promote social cohesion between the Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim communities. This will be addressed further in section 4.²¹

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

It is important to include UNESCO's efforts in promoting social cohesion within the education sector at regional and country level. UNESCO has been advising the Thai Government on education sector reforms, including a review and costing of the country's 15-year free Education for All programme; and a strengthening of policy measures to ensure equitable access, especially in favour of disadvantaged groups. UNESCO has also been advising the government on curricular reforms that include 'learning to live

²⁰ Southern Thailand Empowerment and Participation (STEP) Project, at <http://www.th.undp.org/content/thailand/en/home/operations/projects/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/southerthailand-empowerment-and-participation-step-project/>

²¹ UNDP, Southern Thailand Empowerment and Participation Project, 2010-2012.

together', an approach that has gained wide acceptance in promoting social cohesion and skills for living in a multicultural world. UNESCO has an important role to play in ongoing reform processes, as will be addressed in section 4.²²

3.2 UNICEF Thailand

The UNICEF Thailand Office has provided programmatic and financial support for several initiatives to address challenges in education, conflict and social cohesion in the south. Brief descriptions of these initiatives follow.

Bilingual education. With UNICEF support, Mahidol University in 2007 initiated a multiyear, K-6 pilot programme involving research and action designed to help Patani-Malay speakers retain their Malay language and identity at the local level and achieve a Thai identity at the national level. Patani-Malay is used as the medium of instruction from K-1 so that children gain the necessary skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing in their mother tongue before learning Thai. Patani-Malay Studies, in which the Patani-Malay language is the main component, is also taught throughout primary school (Premsrirat, 2008).

The programme's goals are to improve Malay Muslim students' academic performance while enabling them to retain their cultural identity at the local level (Premsrirat, 2008). No research has been done on the possible impacts of this programme on conflict mitigation or social cohesion but in interviews, parents with children in the programme and community members involved in its implementation have responded positively. It therefore can serve as an important tool in the development of a new language policy for education.

UNICEF will continue to support this programme for several more years to demonstrate the benefits of bilingual education and initiate a larger national discussion on multilingual education. This strategy is planned as a way to address resistance from Bangkok education officials to expanded reforms in multilingual education. A broader national dialogue on language policy in education is needed to improve learning outcomes. The UNICEF Thailand Country Office has encouraged the Ministry of Education to make the programme part of national government policy²³ and is also supporting advocacy for a broader look at language in schools.

Santisuk school programme. In 2010, UNICEF supported the implementation of the Santisuk 'happy' school programme developed by the Faculty of Education, Thaksin University, in response to the growing threat of conflict-associated violence on schools. The programme model was adapted from the 'schools as zones of peace' programme implemented in Nepal by UNICEF and other agencies, in which community members play a significant role in creating protection mechanisms against armed attacks on schools. The goals of Santisuk are to create a safe and secure environment in schools and restore harmony in the community through the zones of peace approach.

The Santisuk programme has been implemented in six government elementary schools with a majority of Malay Muslim students and teachers. School committees drawn from diverse and ethnically mixed community groups were established to plan and implement the programme, which is based on five principles: 1) participation and community based; 2) trust between teachers and students and between teachers and community; 3) use of child-friendly school principles including children's rights, safety and quality education and curriculum that reflects local needs; 4) principles of equity, rights and participation; and 5) community development of programme best practice.²⁴

²² Interview with UNESCO Bangkok programme officer, Ramya Vivekanandan-Rodrigues, on 21 December 2012.

²³ Information provided in interview with UNICEF Thailand Deputy Representative in December 2012.

²⁴ Dr. Wittawat Kattiyamarn and Dr. Amornwan Werathammo, Thaksin University, on 11 February 2013.



(Left-right) Siblings Hundee Klatalay, 8, Yupa Wahup, 5, and Hunda Klatalay, 10, walk to school at Ban Triem Early Childhood Development Centre in the town of Ban Triem, Kuraburi District in the South of Thailand.

The programme initially relied on escorts for teachers and community members rotating in surveillance around schools in the ‘red zone’. However, this practice was terminated due to escalating violence and the shooting of a principal in late 2012. In the wake of the violence, a military presence was established around the perimeter of schools in the red zone, and all Thai Buddhist teachers were transferred to other schools for safety reasons. According to the Thaksin University faculty who designed the programme, the pilot communities have shown greater social cohesion and attacks have been reduced, thus decreasing the need for a military presence.²⁵ However, a final evaluation has yet to be made documenting this finding or other desired results.

There are several reasons to examine this programme approach. First, because of escalating violence, safety is an issue. The Santisuk model does not involve negotiations for schools as safe havens or as military-free zones with potential perpetrators of attacks as the Nepal model did, so there are no assurances that violence will be curtailed. In fact, after attacks on both Thai Buddhist and Muslim teachers in late 2012 and early 2013, schools requested a greater military presence. The safety issue is paramount in the red zone and the programme may be exposing teachers to undue risks. Second, there does not appear to be any mechanism for either scaling up the programme or sustaining it after funding is reduced. Third, since one of its main principles is the child-friendly school approach, it is important to clarify programme goals to distinguish the Santisuk model from the child-friendly school model that has been implemented for a number of years in Thailand with UNICEF support.

Building Peace by Teaching Peace. In 2009, Nonviolence International Southeast Asia was supported by UNICEF to develop a six-month pilot project in peace education in Pattani Province. It involved: 1) producing a training manual and materials on peace education; 2) conducting teacher training for nearly 300 teachers from 15 schools; 3) forming a network of teachers in Peace Education, Pattani (or COPE); and 4) monitoring and supporting teachers in classroom and workshop settings.

²⁵ Ibid.

Some of the challenges of the project included a lack of capacity to monitor implementation and impact, lack of coordination with either government education officials or community leaders to incorporate the content into the ongoing curriculum, and the absence of a strategic approach for scale up and sustainability. Finally, security issues and teachers' concerns for safety interfered with implementation. Because of these problems, UNICEF curtailed funding of the project. Other organizations have also been implementing some form of peace education in the southern provinces. A more systematic and coordinated approach, working with both government and communities and linking the content and methodology of such programmes to a robust conflict analysis of education and conflict, is advised if UNICEF is to provide support for future efforts. Additional recommendations will be provided in Section 4.

Education policy, decentralization and local involvement. In response to calls for local autonomy and the SBPAC's stated objective of supporting this, UNICEF Thailand aims to ensure that when local government initiates actions and policies, there is community involvement and collaborative decision-making. UNICEF is providing support for strengthening decentralization and local control in the southern provinces in planning programmes for children, supporting local organizations and promoting partnerships with local government. UNICEF is also conducting child protection trainings, including for violence and neglect, with Mahidol University and local partners for multisectoral teams from 50 local authorities with the goal of reaching all four southern provinces. Similarly, UNICEF has partnered with local organizations in the south, including the Young Muslim Association and Deep South Watch of Prince of Songkla University.

UNICEF Thailand is preparing a five-year plan for the deep south, which will incorporate education into social cohesion and peacebuilding. Further, it wants to ensure that the introduction of bilingual education on a wider scale will involve collaborative decision-making at national and local levels to achieve significant language policy reform through a consensus-seeking process.²⁶ Recommendations related to this will be addressed in section 4.

3.3 Non-governmental and civil society education programmes

A range of educational programmes to strengthen social cohesion and youth participation, targeting both formal and non-formal education sectors, have been developed for teachers and young people. This section will describe several of them, particularly those initiated by universities in the southern provinces or in partnership with other organizations.

Prince of Songkla University, Deep South Watch Center for the Study of Conflict and Cultural Diversity. Deep South Watch (DSW) was established in 2006 with the intention to raise awareness about the conflict in southern Thailand, frustrated by what it perceived as inaccurate, unreliable and biased information in the general media and government misinformation. DSW provides in-depth reporting from a range of sources, challenging popular misconceptions and prejudices about the Muslim community in the south.

DSW's team of eight staff members from various backgrounds – academia, the media, medicine – brings a range of expertise to its reporting that is not freely available elsewhere. The organization also has a policy advisory service for government and communities consisting of over 20 academics and researchers in both sciences and humanities. DSW has a website and produces an annual report.

Over the past two years, UNDP has collaborated with DSW on a non-formal media education programme for youth, partnering with *pondok* schools. As part of this project,

²⁶ Interview with Andrew Morris, Deputy Representative, UNICEF Thailand Country Office, 6 February 2013.

20 female and male students aged 15–18 were selected to undergo a 10-day intensive training in journalism skills during which they also learned about the conflict and human rights (UNDP, 2012a). By the end of the course the young journalists were able to produce news articles in the Yawi local language, reflecting socio-economic issues in their communities. Their articles were published in local newsletters that were distributed within their communities and on the Deep South Watch website.

Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University. The Institute was founded in 2004 to respond to the growing mistrust between Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim communities in the deep south. It provides research on peace and development issues aimed at deepening understanding of the causes of conflict and promoting peaceful means of conflict resolution as an alternative to violence.

The Institute's Dr. Gothom Arya holds the vision that education should not be solely the preserve of the Ministry of Education and that a new focus on informal education is needed, drawing from many disciplines with involvement of other government agencies and with a pedagogy that addresses the learning process rather than teaching. In his view, one of the biggest obstacles to building peace and social cohesion is the bureaucratic attitudes of ministry officials and discriminatory attitudes of the Thai State.²⁷

Guided by this vision, the Institute is implementing programmes in conflict transformation and peacebuilding aimed at strengthening or reconnecting relationships across ethnic and religious divides, advocating that schools should incorporate transformation of conflict and non-violence in their curriculum. With the past support of the SBPAC, the Institute conducted a training of trainers for teachers and school administrators in non-violence and peacebuilding. The Institute has also worked with the Ministry of Education to develop policy guidance for non-violence in schools, including several conferences and limited trainings. However, there has been no follow up or implementation by the Ministry of Education.²⁸

In addition, the Institute, with funding from the European Union, has worked with Save the Children and the Foundation for Child Development on a three-year project called 'Peaceful Community/Village'. Two components of the programme included child protection at the community level, and development of teaching and learning for non-violence, with an emphasis on non-violence and child rights incorporated into the existing curriculum. The programme trained teachers and organized activities for government secondary school students in four schools per province, where the majority of students were Muslims. Given the challenge of convincing administrators and teachers about the importance of teaching the content and skills, only about a third of the schools were able to fully implement the programme.²⁹

The Institute is also implementing an innovative community-based youth programme taught by local teachers with the explicit goal of social cohesion. The Water Detective Programme is empowering Malay Muslim and Thai Buddhist youth from nearly 40 communities to work on water resource management and environmental issues. They learn skills not only in resource management but also in collaboration and community organization, with a by-product of building positive relationships with their peers from different communities. The Institute also sponsors a youth camp that brings together 30–50 youth to study water quality and other related environmental issues, with the objective of forming a network of youth in conservation and protection of natural resources and the environment.

²⁷ Interview with Dr. Gothom Arya, Executive Director, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, on 11 February 2013.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Interview with Dr. Permsak Makarapirom, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, on 11 February 2013.

Asian Resource Foundation (ARF). A number of education programmes have been initiated by ARF, a regional foundation, to bridge differences between groups and address the causes and impacts of the conflict. These programmes have had variable impacts and sustainability. Starting in 2005, the Pattani office of ARF undertook peacebuilding programmes, including community learning centres for children whose education had been interrupted because of the violence; and a help line to provide counselling for affected children. In 2007, ARF started a peace training programme in 36 schools in the provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat. Students were taught about human rights and the importance of peace to enable them to protect their basic rights, and prepare them to speak out about human rights abuses. ARF staff have been working with people in the local community – village leaders, teachers, and volunteer students from Songkhla Nakarin University – to develop ways of ensuring education continues despite violence.³⁰

In 2005, the SBPAC invited ARF to develop a peacebuilding curriculum, which was eventually taken over by Mahidol University in 2010. The SBPAC requested that the schools it supported make peace education compulsory. This approach proved ineffective because it was top down, and because teachers had neither the time nor adequate preparation to implement the programme. After consultation with students, ARF implemented a series of trainings of trainers with secondary school students and as a result, peace clubs were started in 30 schools.

With funding from Australia, ARF also implemented community-based peace and human rights education, working in 80 communities with the involvement of human rights lawyers. A unique approach was employed to relate human rights to the Quran and communication techniques were developed to monitor violations of human rights.³¹ One of the major achievements of this programme is that volunteers are now engaged in peace work and have formed their own organizations at provincial level without depending on ARF.

ARF established the Community Learning Centre in 2005 to address problems of rural education in Pattani province. Poverty has already made it difficult for children to receive a proper education, but violence prevented other children from going to school. ARF has involved village leaders, teachers, local education authorities and volunteer students from Songkhla Nakarin University to develop ways of ensuring education continues despite the violence. ARF sees the learning centre as a way of building trust in the local community and challenging widespread suspicion of outside groups, enabling the local population to develop ideas which ARF then supports.³²

³⁰ Peace Direct, 'Youth Peace Club and Careers Training, 23 December 2009, at <http://www.insightonconflict.org/conflicts/thailand/stories/youth-peace-clubs-careers-training/>

³¹ Interview with Ekraj Sabur, Asian Resource Foundation, on 7 February 2013.

³² Ibid.

4. Conclusions and recommendations for UNICEF'S role in education and social cohesion

This section ties together the major findings of the study and provides guidance aimed at the education and peacebuilding community in general, with specific recommendations for UNICEF as it develops medium and long-term strategies for addressing education goals in Thailand's southern provinces.

4.1 Conclusions

The following provides a summary of conclusions about the conflict in general and the education sector in particular.

- **Underlying causes of the conflict in the south.** While the conflict is complex, some inaccurately characterize it as part of a global Islamic militancy. According to leading analysts, it is fundamentally a political struggle centred on the extent to which the Bangkok administration can "exercise legitimate authority in the 'Patani' region, that is, the modern Thai provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, plus four adjoining districts of Songkhla" (Srisompob and McCargo, 2010, p. 1).
- **Education and conflict.** Education policy, starting with the Compulsory Education Act of 1921, has been viewed by the Malay Muslim community as an attempt to assimilate the population without regard for local history, language, culture, and desire for a level of autonomy. Some stakeholders view the attitudes of the bureaucracy and the bias of the Thai State as playing a negative role in education and communities. There is a consensus that while education policy has been an element in the conflict, education reform will continue to be crucial in addressing long-standing grievances, reducing tensions and mitigating the conflict.
- **Political solution to the conflict.** Most analysts emphasize that the government must devise and execute a political solution to the conflict, which will likely require support from the military and a demonstration of effort from the Bangkok administration that has not yet been evident (ICG, 2012). Local civil society in the southern provinces must participate in a transformative process to help create opportunities for parties to the conflict to cooperate. The structures and mechanisms for a sustainable peace need to be developed by the various sides and those affected by the conflict in order to achieve a sustainable peace (Deep South Watch, 2012).
- **Inter-community polarization.** The conflict has caused polarization between the Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim communities and deep mistrust between the Muslim population and the government. This has resulted in the fracturing of the social fabric of inter-community relations and social cohesion, which are very difficult to heal. There is a risk of perpetuating a state of tension and volatility far into the future (UNDP, 2008).
- **Fragmentation of programming for peacebuilding and social cohesion.** The implementation of programmes in the formal and non-formal education sectors has been fragmented and not coordinated among stakeholders. Many of these have involved short-term trainings and projects whose longer-term impact and sustainability is not clear. International and national civil society organizations have been active in delivering a range of programmes, whose success in addressing the drivers of conflict is dependent upon sound conceptualization and strategy towards a social cohesion agenda in education. UNICEF has supported various programmes over the past six years and has discontinued funding for some of them because of lack of impact or sustainability. Still, UNICEF will need to thoroughly evaluate the impact of others, such as the Santisuk School project and the bilingual/multilingual education project.

- **Education reform.** The Thai Government has implemented a range of measures to address violence and conflict in southern Thailand, some of which have had more positive impacts than others. However, a concern remains to ensure coherence and consistency in government responses. Simply imposing changes on educational institutions is not adequate. The Ministry of Education indicates it has made significant policy and programme changes to address grievances around issues of language and learning in schools in the deep south and is not inclined to make additional changes. The ministry is concerned about the quality of education in Islamic private schools and their ability to prepare students in the Thai language and 21st century skills. Education should not be solely the preserve of the Ministry of Education, but involve other sectors and disciplines such as economic development and social sciences. Formal and informal education needs to be reformed to advance social cohesion. Reforms in Muslim education institutions also need to be made to promote the peacebuilding and social cohesion processes (Narongraksakhet, 2006).
- **Unintended consequences of education reform.** There are unintended consequences of education policy that are having negative impacts on the education system. These include: 1) Ministry of Education funding to Islamic private schools and *pondoks* increases enrolment in these schools, which has led to overcrowding, lack of sufficiently trained teachers and lower quality education; and 2) the further segregation of Malay Muslim and Thai students into two parallel education systems. These impacts are counter-productive to the strengthening of social cohesion and advancement of quality education. In the formal sector, education has served to reinforce social divisions through an inequitable system that perpetuates a division between private and public schools. Some analysts suggest that modelling education reform along the lines of the Malaysian model, integrating both religious and secular education rather than having parallel systems, would address quality issues as well as begin to heal the inter-community tensions that have developed as a result of the conflict and the distinct private and government systems. Dr. Srisomphob of Prince of Songkla University suggests that the SBPAC would be in a position to begin to integrate the systems, but other policy makers have not suggested this type of reform process.³³
- **Decentralization.** Developing local government capacity in education and at community level has the potential to empower communities, schools and young people, enabling them to assert greater control over their lives and spurring reconciliation and development. Opportunities to implement devolution of education governance to address historical grievances are possible due to the expanded role of the SBPAC in the southern provinces.
- **Lack of coordinated United Nations system response.** In its 2006 literature review of the conflict, the UN Country Team posed some key questions about the role of the United Nations system in addressing the conflict, including how the UN mandates in human rights and peacebuilding should be deployed to limit the impacts of the violence, and how UN projects should be designed to address inter-communal polarization, access to justice, trauma and other negative impacts (UNDP, 2006). While both UNICEF and UNDP have supported a range of programmes to address the conflict, there has been no systematic coordination of their efforts.

³³ Interview with Dr. Srisomphob Jitpiromsri, Deep South Watch, Prince of Songkla University, on 12 February 2013.

4.2 Recommendations for UNICEF Thailand

This section draws on the various issues emerging from this case study, as well as guidance from UNICEF's global initiative on education and peacebuilding, to offer suggestions on conceptualization and strategy for education and social cohesion for the UNICEF Thailand Country Office. These suggestions presume that UNICEF will continue to work collaboratively with the government and other education and civil society actors.

Recommendation 1: Invest in an education sector conflict analysis

While the National Reconciliation Commission report serves as a *de facto* conflict analysis, the United Nations system has not undertaken a broad conflict analysis apart from the UNDP conflict literature review. UNICEF should consider drawing on the conclusions of the NRC and working with stakeholders on a conflict analysis of the education system in the south. This would involve a multi-stakeholder process to ensure it addresses the full range of issues related to education, conflict and social cohesion.

The reforms already undertaken by the Ministry of Education have been designed to respond to some of the drivers of conflict, including the need to incorporate Islamic education in government schools, and the willingness of MoE to support multilingual education. However, it is important that stakeholders, including representatives of affected communities, be involved in a systemic conflict analysis of the education sector. Since UNICEF aims to support a long-term policy and planning process,³⁴ the time and resources involved in a conflict analysis of education policies, programmes, and governance are certainly justified and appropriate. The analysis will provide essential information that will contribute to education programme planning and reform.

The analysis should include: 1) a mapping of the multiple stakeholders in the education sector and other relevant actors and their perspectives and relationships; 2) an analysis of the conflict dynamics within education, addressing the interaction between different causes of conflict, the 'dividers' and 'connectors', which are factors that trigger conflict or promote positive connections; and 3) a prioritization process using consensus-building and stakeholder participation, for education planning and reforms based on the conflict analysis findings and windows of opportunity.

The conflict analysis needs to incorporate a theory of change as "an explanation of why and how a set of activities will bring about the changes the conflict-sensitive program seeks to achieve" (Lederach, 2007). The goal of this process is a set of inter-related initiatives through various entry points, including sector planning, education governance, curriculum reform, and funding for increased access to education. Education programming for social cohesion should be explicitly designed to address causes of conflict and violence, and this must inform related results frameworks.

UNICEF should consider advocating for this process with the Ministry of Education's Southern bureau, the SBPAC, Prince of Songkla and Mahidol universities, civil society and local education leaders from government and private Islamic schools. Experts viewed by stakeholders as impartial and drawn from academic institutions and community organizations should be involved. Conflict analysis tools recently developed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and UNICEF can be adapted if they are deemed useful for this exercise.

³⁴ Interview with Andrew Morris, Deputy Representative, UNICEF Thailand Country Office, on 6 February 2013.

Recommendation 2: Invest in conflict sensitive curriculum reform and education programme design linked to the findings of the education conflict analysis

UNICEF should ensure that long-term curriculum reform processes are informed by the conflict analysis and that a theory of change is integrated into the programming design. The need to address language policy in education and the teaching of history, identity and religion – all contested terrain – will require a significant investment of time and resources. These are deeply political issues and require careful and genuine consultation with all stakeholders, notably affected children and youth, civil society organizations, and authorities. Who decides and how decisions are reached are as important as what is decided.

“Decisions taken about curriculum are widely believed to affect the construction or reconstruction of communal and national identities. They must take into account deep processes of community reflection on the meaning of citizenship, collective memory and shared destiny” (Tawil and Harley, 2004, pp. 17–27).

A consensus-building process with representation among stakeholders should be implemented to ensure that mid and long-term curriculum reforms not only address grievances, but also build social cohesion. Strategies suggested for language policy in education (Lo Bianco, 2013) are an excellent starting point for designing a collaborative process for reforms that will address structural and proximate causes of the current conflict. Existing tools for conflict sensitive curriculum reform developed by UNICEF and INEE to assess current curriculum policies can be adapted for use in Thailand (INEE, 2012).

Specific steps recommended in the INEE conflict sensitive curriculum reform tool include:

- Analysis of existing initiatives and good practice in curriculum and textbooks at local, national, regional and global levels;
- Scoping study with key stakeholders bearing in mind national needs, constraints, good practice and experience;
- Workshop for key stakeholders to review the scoping study and identify a design and policy options for curriculum transformation;
- Formation of a core team and a multi-year memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and key specialist agencies to provide expertise and a time frame for curriculum and textbook renewal and teacher training; and
- Formation of a review committee, including all sides to the conflict and marginalized groups, to review all curricula and textbooks before publication.

Recommendation 3: Develop mechanisms for coordination and alignment of education and social cohesion programming among stakeholders

Amidst a proliferation of programmes to address social cohesion and peacebuilding in schools and community settings in the south, there has apparently been no formal mechanism to coordinate their goals, outcomes or target audiences. While a rich range of programmes is positive, it is important for organizations to coordinate efforts to avoid duplication, ensure sustainability, and link programme outcomes to underlying causes of the conflict. It is critical that UNICEF work with local stakeholders in academia, NGOs and CSOs to coordinate actions and clarify social cohesion goals and outcomes. Addressing coordination and alignment among all organizations that are implementing programmes with other United Nations (namely UNDP) agency frameworks is an essential aspect of conflict sensitive and comprehensive approaches that target the drivers of conflict.



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Two boys stand laughing in the rain outside Baan Bang Muang school in the southern Pang Nga Province of Thailand.

Recommendation 4: Ensure decentralization of education management and devolution of authority to local level

There is a window of opportunity for decentralization of authority that UNICEF should take advantage of through advocacy for the devolution of education governance. With decentralization processes underway in other parts of Thailand, including Chang Mai and Phuket, there is an opportunity to support this process in the south. According to Dr. Sunai Phasuk, decentralizing education could send a positive signal to insurgents that one of their grievances is being addressed, which might demonstrate that changes can be achieved without the use of violence.³⁵ UNICEF should continue to work with the SBPAC, local stakeholders and United Nations actors, including UNDP, to advocate for and support this process.

It is also recommended that UNICEF support the strengthening of education standards and monitoring of student achievement to ensure they are on par with national standards. With decentralization should come enhanced ownership and control on the part of the school community in the school improvement process. Raising the level of participation of children, teachers and the community in school improvement is critical to enhancing other aspects of quality, including teaching, learning, safety and inclusion (Save the Children Alliance, 2011).

Recommendation 5: Support programming in the non-formal education sector, which is as important as the formal sector for the implementation of conflict sensitive education programming for social cohesion

The emergence of two parallel education systems – government and private Islamic – has resulted in significant segregation of Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim students, who have few opportunities for social interaction in school. The unintended consequences of

³⁵ Interview with Dr. Sunai Phasuk, Human Rights Watch, on 6 February 2013.

parallel systems make it critical that non-formal education interventions continue to be designed and implemented to strengthen linkages and social cohesion between the Malay Muslim and Thai Buddhist communities for children, youth and the community at large.

Programmes like the water resources project implemented by Mahidol University's Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies and the UNDP youth journalism initiative are designed to bring youth from the two communities together to work on common community and resource issues. It is recommended that these types of interventions be expanded, with coordination among and harmonization between the many organizations implementing them. As with other conflict sensitive programming, their design, stakeholder involvement, and intended outcomes need to be linked to the underlying causes of the conflict. There is a role for UNICEF to build on some of its child protection work in the south to advocate for coordinating mechanisms for these non-formal education initiatives. Furthermore, with a lack of room in the formal education system, there is a need for programmes to address the emotional stress that children experience living in the provinces affected by the unrest, building on children's natural resiliency (UNICEF, 2008).

Social cohesion objectives may require unique evaluation approaches since transformative processes can take a period of time. However, research and evaluation can enhance institutional learning in Thailand and throughout the region.

Recommendation 6: Advocate for school safety and security interventions using risk analysis

UNICEF should continue to advocate with the government to remove the military presence in schools, with guidelines already defined. Partnering with organizations already doing this work, such as the Justice for Peace Foundation and other civil society organizations, could amplify UNICEF's voice. If security forces are necessary to maintain safety, they should be confined to the school perimeter. Before continuing with the Santisuk school model or implementing any 'schools as zones of peace' programme, it is essential to undertake a risk assessment to ensure that school safety interventions do not endanger teachers or students. Similar programmes in other countries have been based on negotiations with perpetrators and commitment by military forces and insurgents to codes of conduct – which is not part of the Santisuk model. Consequently, while community support for the programme is vital, it may leave schools or targeted educators vulnerable to attack.

UNICEF should also advocate with the government against arming teachers, and seek alternative ways of protecting them. Weapons in schools present risks to the entire school community. If UNICEF and other United Nations and international partners are in a position to advocate for the lifting of martial law, it would advance prospects of a reduction of violence and an end to the spiral of retaliations and grievances that continue to drive the current security situation. UNICEF should continue to promote awareness of children's rights and child protection among civil society and all armed groups and forces, including the military, police and local security teams.

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