CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION DURING VIOLENT CONFLICT IN THE SOUTHERNMOST PROVINCES OF THAILAND

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Abstract

The struggles between Malay-Muslims and Thai authorities in the southernmost provinces of Thailand, namely Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and four districts of Songkhla, have been ongoing for more than a century and there seems to be no end in sight. Interestingly, the Thai security policy regarding the violence in Deep South from 2004, which was the year that the violence re-emerged and expanded, to the present, has gradually changed to promote further participation and collaboration between state- and non-state actors. This article aims to examine cross-sector collaboration in the conflict area of the southernmost part of Thailand by focusing on both state- and non-state actors. Moreover, the article will investigate the role of the state and its agencies, as well as the governmental response to the political activities of people in the conflict area, through the lens of cross-sector collaboration. Based on interviews with governmental officials, civil society activists, and local people, as well as field work in the Deep South of Thailand, this article found that the ongoing conflict and violence did not only lead to more violence and negative impacts, but also influenced an increased awareness and led to changes in the collaborative activities between the Thai state and the Malay-Muslim people. However, even though the Thai government has recently worked to provide more channels of cross-sector collaboration to the Malay-Muslims, collaboration in the conflict area is still restricted by the State's close watch and tight control under the application of martial law. Therefore, although the state's policy has gradually changed to be more open to participation and collaboration, due to the continued feelings of suspicion and distrust, and the concern of national security, the state still maintains centralized power and exercises control over the participation of Malay-Muslims in cross-sector collaboration.

Keywords: Cross-sector collaboration, peace and conflict, Deep South Thailand

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1. INTRODUCTION

The struggles between Malay-Muslim separatists and Thai authorities in the southernmost provinces of Thailand, namely Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and the four districts of Songkhla, have been ongoing for more than a century. As recorded by the Deep South Watch Organization, since 2004 more than 6,900 people[1], both Buddhists and Muslims, have died in the continuing crisis and several thousand have been injured. Although more than 302,926 million baht[2] (*Isranews*, June 10, 2018) of government funds have been allocated to address this problem since 2004, the answer to the question of why the longstanding conflict and violence in southernmost Thailand continues has not yet been discovered. Without a concrete solution, there seems to be no end in sight. However, even in the midst of conflict and violence, despite the problems of trust and suspicion, people in the Deep South, including Malay-Muslims, Thai-Buddhists, state-, and non-state actors, recognize the importance of cross-sector collaboration. Even though there are some difficulties in initiating and maintaining cross-sector collaboration in conflict-affected areas, both public and private sectors still find a way to decrease the severity of conflict and violence through this method.

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[1] *According to the Deep South Incident Database (DSID), the number of deaths in the three southern border provinces and four districts of Songkhla since the re-emergence of violence in 2004 is 6,956 and the number of injured is 13,549, most recently updated in February 2019. For the latest statistics of the Deep South unrest, visit www.deepsouthwatch.org.*

[2] *The government-allocated budget for the Deep South as of 2018.*

This article aims to examine cross-sector collaboration in the conflict area of the southernmost part of Thailand by focusing on both state and non-state actors. Moreover, the article will investigate the role of the state and its agencies, as well as the governmental response to the political activities of people in the conflict area through cross-sector collaboration. The involvement and role of civil society, including youth, women, economic, and religious sectors, are also investigated in order to explore how these actors work to enhance cross-sector collaboration and whether cross-sector collaboration can lead to a reduction in the ongoing violence.

The article will proceed as follows: the first section provides a historical background of the conflict and violence in the Deep South of Thailand in order to provide readers a basic understanding. The next section describes the research objectives, scope, and methodology to allow readers to understand how the data and information used in this article was collected and analyzed. The article then briefly examines cross-sector collaboration during violent conflict, divided into two parts: 1) review of cross-sector collaboration in the Deep South of Thailand before the re-occurrence of violence in 2004, and 2) cross-sector collaboration after violent conflict had re-emerged in 2004. This is done in effort to assess the development and challenges of cross-sector collaboration in the Deep South of Thailand over time. The final section of this article provides some recommendations for future policy in an attempt to create a study that will be useful not only for academic research, but also for policy formation and implementation,

further increasing awareness of cross-sector collaboration and improving the conflict in southern Thailand.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ISSUE

In the past decade, the violence in Thailand's three southernmost provinces, plus four districts of Songkhla, has become a significant concern of the Thai government and has drawn international attention. The Southern people have faced on-going political violence between the rebels and Thai authorities on and off for many years. It is not only the local Malay-Muslims, but Thai-Buddhists residing in the area who suffer from the pain of the loss of their loved ones. Regardless of which religion or ethnicity they are, they have to live in danger and in fear of being targets and victims of the ongoing violence. While the Thai-Buddhists are fearful of being targets of the Malay-Muslim militants, the Malay-Muslims are fearful of being suspects of the Thai military.

The crisis has also destroyed the economic and social systems in the conflict area. The government has to spend much more of its budget for domestic security, while local income has been decreasing due to diminishing numbers of tourists and reduced revenue from rubber plantations, which are the main sources of income for the South. Additionally, the education system has been disrupted as children cannot go to school safely and many schools have been attacked by unidentified groups. Even today the violence in these three southern provinces is largely unpredictable and considered as "the single most aggressive challenge that southern Thai Malay - Muslims have

issued to the sovereign Thai nation-state" (Dorairajoo, 2009, p.70).

Although there have been many attempts from various experts to study the causes and patterns of violence, as well as to determine the best solution, potential methods of conflict resolution have been difficult to decide upon. This research is therefore conducted with the aim of offering an alternative way to consider the problem by emphasizing state - and non-state actors and how they can support each other in solving the conflict through cross-sector collaboration.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE IN THE DEEP SOUTH OF THAILAND

The three southernmost provinces of Thailand, namely Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat, and the four districts of neighboring Songkhla, were historically part of the Kingdom of Patani[3] before being incorporated into the kingdom of Thailand in 1902. The majority ethnic population in these provinces is Malay and their religion is Islam, whereas Thailand (then called Siam[4]) is a Buddhist-dominant nation. When the Thai government promoted the concept of Thai-ness during the premiership of Field Marshal Plaek Phibulsongkram in the 1940s and 1950s, the Malay-Muslims' feeling of exclusion

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[3] *"Patani"* refers to the Malay Sultanate of Patani, being known as Greater Patani or Patani Raya, before its annexation by Siam. Patani also included the present provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun, and part of Songkhla.
"Pattani" (with two "t"s) refers to the present day Thai province of Pattani.

[4] *Siam changed its name to Thailand in 1939.*

was intensified. Thai-ness is not just being born in Thailand and speaking Thai as a first language, but also includes the willingness to merge one's ethnicity, language, and religious identity with the dominant Thai culture (McCargo, 2011, p.845).

However, the Malay-Muslims in the southern border provinces of Thailand chose not to act according to the government's integration policy and have a long history of fighting to preserve their ethnic identity. The government has ignored that Thailand is comprised of different ethnic groups and instead asserts that everyone must be socialized in a certain way to be a "real" Thai citizen. The resistance of the Malay-Muslims in an attempt to preserve their identity has been perceived by the Thai government not only as a denial of Thai-ness, but also as a perpetual threat to national security (Darairajoo, 2009, p.61).

Violence intensified in 2004 during the premiership of Thaksin Shinawatra, starting with attacks on military and police installations, seizure of arms, and burning of schools by an unidentified group operating throughout Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat on January 4, 2004. Although there had been attacks on the military in the past, this particular incident was seen as a major strike against Thai military prestige because the militants effectively harassed and outsmarted Thai military forces by successfully escaping with hundreds of military weapons. Moreover, this attack signalled that the state was facing more complex and effective groups of insurgents than previous ones, with Prime Minister Thaksin even admitting that these attacks were a well-planned and well-coordinated operation.

This violence signified a new era of the "age-old ethno-political conflict" in the Thai south and stressed the hostile relationship between the Malay-Muslims and the Thai state (Aphornsuvan, 2004, p.8). In response to the increasing violence, Thaksin decided to respond to the rebels with harsh policies and tightened control over the areas of conflict by declaring martial law in 2004. After a series of bombings in Yala in July 2005, the state was given full authority through an Emergency Decree to address the conflict, increasing state intervention at the local level in an effort to suppress the violence. The state became stronger as power was centralized at the national level and it began expanding control over its citizens in all dimensions.

In March 2005 the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) was established as an independent agency, appointed by Thaksin, to understand the crisis and assess political grievances to further determine the most effective and peaceful resolution (Storey, 2007, p.6). The NRC was led by the highly-respected former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun and became a platform for cross-sector collaboration among government authorities, leading civil - society activists, and intellectuals from Bangkok to the South. Even though its members were mainly non-Muslims and non-southern, the NRC is considered as the government's first progressive attempt to address the political grievances of people in the conflict area, with particular efforts to cooperate with various actors, rather than focusing only on security.

According to the NRC's report, the keys to reducing violence in the lower South were peaceful reconciliation through non-violent methods and that assimilation based on Thai-ness should not be promoted (Ockey, 2008, p.136). The suggested long-term solutions were to support education and economic development, and to promote forgiveness and acceptance of differences through increased mutual understanding and coordination among the Malay-Muslims, government officials, and Thais in order to reduce anger and resentment and encourage grassroots participation. The short-term solutions included withdrawal of the military and establishment of unarmed peace teams.

Despite the escalating violence and increased state control, the existing conflict rose to a new era in 2004, sparking the desire of local people to collaborate with state- and non-state actors to decrease the conflict and violence. According to Marc Askew (2010, 147-148), the local Malay-Muslims with whom he spoke have expressed less interest in the conflict now compared to the past and the concept of Malay-Muslim identity is not the strong motivational point that it was before. However, this does not mean that the Malay-Muslims do not care about the conflict in their hometowns, rather, it may mean that they are seeking peaceful solutions through collaboration with various actors in the Thai state. If the desire to collaborate is blocked, more conflict will likely ensue.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This article aims to analyze cross-sector collaboration during conflict and violence in the Deep South of Thailand in order to respond to these following objectives;

1) To explain cross-sector collaboration during conflict and violence in the Deep South of Thailand.
2) To analyze the challenges of cross-sector collaboration during conflict and violence in the Deep South of Thailand.
3) To suggest alternative strategies for the Thai government to address the conflict, encouraging cross-sector collaboration and decreasing tension in the conflict area of the southernmost provinces of Thailand

5. RESEARCH SCOPE

There has been considerable speculation as to how people living in the midst of longstanding conflict and violence in the deep south of Thailand can peacefully collaborate across sectors to decrease violence as opposed to ignoring it or joining the rebels. To find the answer, this article will focus on cross-sector collaboration between groups of people who are directly affected by the violence in the south. The article focuses on the period following 2004, which was the year that the violence in the Deep South re-emerged. Moreover, the article gives attention to the non-electoral modes of local participation during that period and assesses whether or not the seemingly

endless crisis in southern Thailand has impacted cross-sector collaboration in the conflict areas. Therefore, the article seeks to examine whether people in the conflict areas of the Deep South collaborate with people of different backgrounds, both state- and non-state actors, to decrease violence, and how cross-sector collaboration impacts violent conflict in the southernmost part of Thailand.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology utilized in this study included the conduction of qualitative field research by way of semi-structured interviews with both state- and non-state actors. The researcher chose to interview people from various backgrounds, including representatives of local people, and professionals from various sectors in order to receive a variety of data from a wide range of viewpoints. The participants for semi-structured interviews were divided into seven categories as follows: 1) local government sector, 2) economic sector, 3) political sector, 4) education sector, 5) religious sector, 6) civil society sector, and 7) local people.

7. RESEARCH FINDINGS

7.1 Cross-sector Collaboration during Violent Conflict in the Deep South of Thailand before the Re-emergence of Violence in 2004

The conflict and violence in the Deep South that originated from the annexation of the Patani kingdom by the Kingdom of Siam, and the history of the Malay-Muslim's resistance to protect their rights and independence, was fuelled by a range of grievances as explained in the former section. Amongst all the grievances,

the state assimilation policy was one of the most sensitive for Malay-Muslims and facilitated intense dissatisfaction, further reducing the participatory atmosphere among these communities in the lower South.

In addition to state policy, the mistreatment of the Malay-Muslims by Thai state officials also contributed to the failure of promoting cross-sector collaboration through state agencies. The behaviors of the Thai authorities, who came from different races and religions, made the Malay-Muslims hesitant to collaborate with state agents. The maltreatment caused by the authorities' negligence of Malay-Muslim culture perpetuated the conflict by further adding to the feelings of detestation and opposition against the state. Olli-Pekka Ruohomaki (1999, p.99) described southerners as having "a feeling of dislike for the central government and its representatives and pride in the local dialect, culture, and history." This perception of Thai bureaucrats, who were sent by the central government, as hostile outsiders by the local Malay-Muslims sustained the limited relationship between the two sides (Enloe, 1980, p.88).

One of the major problems that limited cross-sector collaboration in the period before 2001 was the culture-language barrier. Although the Malay-Muslims made up the majority in the southern border provinces, the number of Malay-Muslims who worked in local government administration was very low. In 1975, 85 percent of village chiefs in Yala, Pattani, and Naratiwat were Malay-Muslims who could not read or write Thai (Girling, 1981, 265), whereas the majority

of the administrative bureaucrats in those three provinces were Thai Buddhists who could not understand Malay (McCargo, 2005, p.5). This imbalance in the culture-language ability of local officials not only decreased the possibility of cross-sector collaboration, but also reduced effectiveness of policy implementation. The duties of village heads to deliver state policies, serve as representatives of the villages, and encourage cross-sector collaboration between the locals and the Thai state were more difficult due to ineffective communication caused by language illiteracy on both sides.

Moreover, many officials were reassigned to work in the southern border provinces as punishment for bad behavior in other regions (Ockey, 2008, p.148). Between 1978 and 1995, there were more than one hundred civil servants, over eighty percent of which were police, transferred to the Deep South as a punishment for charges such as corruption and maltreatment (Ornanong, 2001, pp.187-188). Many of them were disappointed to have to work in a remote area far from Bangkok, creating tension and maltreatment in providing services to the local people. Due to complaints of harassment, mistreatment, and corruption by the Thai state officials, the relationship between state officials and local people worsened. As a result, many local people preferred to avoid contact with Thai bureaucrats and officials, including the police and the military, wherever and whenever possible (McCargo, 2004, p.7).

During the premiership of General Prem in 1980, government policies became more flexible, the atmosphere of participation increased, and local grievances, including the problems of abuse and maltreatment by security officers, received more attention. The 1980s administrations also established counter-insurgency institutions to more peacefully address conflict and violence in the South. These included the Combined 43rd Civilian-Police-Military Command (CPM 43), which is the security agency that works against insurgencies and extrajudicial killings in the Malay-Muslim provinces; and the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), which is a military-run center to deal with local grievances.

After the promulgation of the People's Constitution in 1997, the security sector of the Thai state issued a national security policy for the southern border provinces in 1999, aligned with the Constitution's focus on popular participation. This policy demonstrated the state security agency's realization of the importance of political participation and desire to promote cross-sector collaboration between various parties in order to prevent conflict and bring peace to the region[5]. However, the goal of this policy has not yet been accomplished.

Cross-sector collaboration requires cooperation from both the state and the people. However, for people in the Deep South, the accumulated grievances that people experienced over time destroyed the relationship between the state and local people, further impacting the possibility of

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[5] *For details of the policy, see Office of the National Security Council of Thailand, "National Security Policy for the Southern Border Provinces, 1999-2003 (in Thai)", Office of the National Secuity Council of Thailand. <http://www.nsc go.th/Download1/PolicySouth42to46.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2019.*

cross-sector collaboration. Even though the Thai government made attempts to encourage more collaboration and build trust among the Malay-Muslims, particularly during the Prem government when the tension was eased, the feeling of being a deprived minority and the continued suspicions of some Malay-Muslims deterred many from collaborating with the state.

7.2 Cross-sector Collaboration during Violent Conflict in the Deep South of Thailand after the Re-emergence of Violence in 2004

The conflict and violence that re-emerged in 2004 has made cross-sector collaboration in the southern border provinces of Thailand more complicated than in other regions. The relationship between the state and Malay-Muslims in the Deep South is generally negative. Many Malay-Muslims consider the Thai state as "an instrument of terror" (Albritton, 2005, p.169). Many state bureaucrats who were sent from other regions with different backgrounds, and some sent unwillingly as punishment, have brought more harm than peace to the area. The negative perception of- and experience with Thai state authorities affected the way Malay-Muslims in the southern border provinces coordinated with the state.

After years of violence, the Thai government and military learned that hard power tactics and military strategy alone might not be enough to reduce the conflict. One of the state's more recent strategies is to improve relationships between the state and local people via cross-sector collaboration. An example of this strategy is the military's development of relationships with local people through the support of

university students. According to interviews with university students in Pattani, there are many student groups and projects that are supported by the military's budget and the SBPAC (university students in Pattani, interview, January and February, 2013). One student activist explained that his student group asked the military and SBPAC for financial support and "They gave us funds to organize activities. I think they wanted to prevent us from turning against the state and wanted us to promote the roles of the military in the conflict areas" (*Ibid*).

Both soft power and hard power tactics were deemed necessary in addressing the conflict in the Deep South. The "hawk", or hard power, strategy was considered vital in countering insurgents who used violence against innocent people. However, applying only hard power tactics could temporarily stop one attack at a time, but could not win the trust of the locals. In addition, the "hawk" strategy may actually reinforce negative perceptions of the state, resulting in stronger resistance to cooperation. The "dove", or soft power, strategy was therefore considered essential in promoting cross-sector collaboration and establishing good relationships between the military and the Malay-Muslims in an effort to influence people to support the Thai state instead of joining the insurgency.

To some extent, promoting cross-sector collaboration helped to build trust as some local people grew less afraid of contacting the military when they needed help. The military sometimes received complaints from local people in the conflict areas about issues cause by the unequal distribution of the local budget

allocation. Regardless of the military's attempts to improve their image and participate more in community projects, distrust of the Thai military still remained. One small group of military officials directly met with and participated in the community, which succeeded in building a positive relationship with local Malay-Muslims. This indicates that in areas of conflict, trust and collaboration depends on individual interactions with state officials. There is no trust in the state as an institution, nor in any of its branches. Consequently, whenever a state official is transferred, the trust that that particular person worked to build simply disappears. Unless the state as an institution is trusted by local people, there will be no channel for cross-sector collaboration as trust in individual officials does not provide a sustainable approach to conflict resolution.

The problem of trust is not one-sided, in fact the Thai government and military officials also expressed distrust in the Malay-Muslims. Despite the Royal Thai Army's provision of a three-month training about Malay-Muslim culture, religion, and local topography for soldiers assigned to the Deep South, the differences in the backgrounds of the soldiers and the local people still made it difficult for the military to develop good relationships and engage in collaboration with local people. Furthermore, the insurgent militant operations that targeted security officers and anyone who cooperated with them severely impeded on local people's comfort in being near security officers due to the fear of stray bullets or bombs. Therefore, if even getting close to security officers was dangerous for local people, cooperation and participation with security

officers would incite a more direct threat to their safety. Moreover, when military bases were hit, some locals lost trust in Thai security forces, beginning to perceive them as incompetent, explaining "they cannot even defend themselves, let alone defend the public" (Rung, 2007, p.160). Therefore, the militant attacks were able to weaken the military force and successfully discourage local people from collaborating with Thai state agencies.

Besides the security officers, many Thai-Buddhist government officials had little direct contact with the Malay-Muslims due to the difference in language, culture, and religion (McCargo, 2008, p.57). Additionally, the sporadic unrest before 2004 had intensified people's negative attitudes toward each other. The communication between the local Malay-Muslims and state officials therefore occurred only for necessary matters and through middle men who could speak Thai (Pitsuwan, 1982, p.23). The low level of communication and interpersonal relationships led to low levels of cross-sector collaboration prior to 2004.

Also, the political leadership of provincial governors has been an important factor in determining the rise and fall of cross-sector collaboration. Krissada Boonrach, a former governor of Songkhla (2011-2014), and later a Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, initiated policies that encouraged cross-sector collaboration within local communities of the four conflict districts of Songkhla. He allowed each village to set up its own rules and regulations in, for example taking care of village security, preventing young villagers from drug addiction, and managing village orderliness. The village

regulations were defined through consultation among the four main community leaders (*Phu nam see sao lak*) in each village, including the Phuyaiban, Imam, SAO president, and respected elders of the village (Krissada Boonrach, interview, February 21, 2013).. His policy led to increased cooperation and participation among local government officers, religious leaders, local politicians, and villagers in communities. Opening the doors to civil power and political rights encouraged a significant rise in political participation. Within the first four months after promoting cross-sector collaboration within local communities, Krissada explained that there were more than 15 subdistricts, from a total of 32 in the four violent conflict districts of Songkhla, that participated. Moreover, he noticed that a higher number of local people in these four districts participated in state activities, such as community development projects (*Ibid*).

Krissada had previously applied this strategy of encouraging cross-sector collaboration among the four main community leaders in Yala when he was Governor in 2010, but his strategy failed. One reason, Krissada mentioned, was that there was a high level of suspicion and conflict among the community leaders in Yala (*INN News*, October 6, 2010). Therefore, the same strategy that was unsuccessful in highly violent conflict areas may be a success in a less violent conflict area where the degree of collaboration is more open and feelings of suspicion and untrustworthiness are lower.

The distance between the locals, especially between the grassroots and upper level bureaucrats, obstructed some Malay - Muslims from cross - sector collaboration. Since *Kamnan* and *Phuyaiban* are locals, who typically have language abilities in both Thai and Malay and are familiar with Thai government officials, they are often requested by their villagers to contact the local Thai bureaucrats for them. In addition, due to the negative relationship with the national civil servants, some villagers did not go directly to the district office and instead sought to contact the *Kamnan* and *Phuyaiban*. Therefore, local officials came to be considered as both local and state representatives who act as intermediaries and link the two sides. However, the elected, local officials can be seen as creating the same dilemma in which they cannot gain full trust from either the state or the local people. Considering the locally elected officials are Malay-Muslims, the Thai government is suspicious that they may cooperate with the militants in opposition to the Thai government, while the local Malay-Muslims suspect that the *Kamnan* and *Phuyaiban* are acting as spies for the Thai state.

However, the re-emergence of violence did not completely destroy local people's confidence in cross-sector collaboration. Although people in the conflict areas avoided discussing the ongoing conflict, they still participated in other matters such as community development and volunteering as civil society activists. According to the conducted interviews, the ongoing conflict was not their only concern; many villagers were also worried about their livelihoods, income, agricultural products, and the problem of drug addiction (field notes in Songkhla and Pattani, November, 2012

and February – March, 2013). It is undeniable that conflict and violence has brought hardship to the people in the conflict areas, but it has also acted as a potential motivation for cross-sector collaboration. Local people have increasingly realized the importance of communal participation in reinforcing their community.

By studying both state- and non-state actors, we will see more clearly that cross-sector collaboration through civil society activities in conflict areas is developing and expanding; not only in terms of specific activities, but also in terms of the involvement of wider groups of actors. The ongoing conflict and violence brought many academics, professional civil society actors, and funding organizations to the Deep South. The increasing capacity-building activities of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the conflict areas gradually helped to develop the political skills of local people. The CSOs educated the local citizens about their rights and duties as a citizen, encouraged them to participate in public activities, taught them to work with other people, and trained them to be more confident in expressing their views to others. Thus, the establishment of these organizations contributed to an overall increase in cross-sector collaboration through civil society activities, both as activists and participants.

In the following section, we will look more closely at three different groups of civil society actors, youth, women, and religious leaders, in order to explore their roles in cross-sector collaboration during conflict and to observe how the ongoing conflict impacts their activities.

The youth organizations in the Deep South seem to be polarized between those funded by the Thai state and those not funded by state institutions. The two distinct groups had different political opinions and were difficult to merge together. The divergent standpoints among youth groups might further discourage cross-sector collaboration for those who do not wish to take sides, or at least do not want to publicly show their stance. In conflict areas, participating in particular youth groups may imply support or opposition of the state. In an environment where interaction could be dangerous, some might be afraid that cross-sector collaboration might bring them more harm than good. They then choose to instead participate in collective participation (university students in Pattani, interview, September and November, 2012).

The ongoing conflict and violence have increasingly obstructed cross-sector collaboration from bringing together people of different religions. A villager from Thepha district said, "Although I have Muslim friends, we do not talk about violent issues. I have to be more careful when talking to my Muslim friends. So, we mostly do not participate in the same activities and are not members of the same civil society group" (a Malay-Muslim university student in Songkhla, interview, February, 2013)

Students' participation in civil society has had influence not only within their groups but also in the wider community. According to interviews, most local people preferred to collaborate with student activists rather than with other activists or the state authorities (university students in Songkhla and Pattani,

interview, February-March, 2013). University students are respected and admired by local people as they believe local student activists can be trusted and view them as their children who are working to develop their community. Some locals trust that students will not betray them so they feel free to openly discuss and express their opinions with these students (a student activist in Pattani, interview, March, 2013). Although collaboration between local people and student activists seemed to be positive, cooperation and participation between student groups with different ideologies is still rare.

Women's participation in the Deep South's civil society has increased tremendously after the re-emergence of conflict and violence in 2004 (Pleumjai & Sungkharat, 2016). In the past, Malay-Muslim women in southern Thailand generally did not participate in political affairs, mostly remaining at home to take care of housework (a Malay-Muslim woman and civil society activist in Pattani, interview, March, 2013). Since 2004, the conflict and violence has unexpectedly changed the roles of Malay-Muslim women to become more active in public activities.

Moreover, since women are typically not the direct targets of militants and not suspected by the Thai security forces, they face lower risks when participating in political activities than Malay-Muslim men. The low risk combined with the high incentive to fight for better lives for their families and community led to an increase in women's roles in cross-sector collaboration in the Deep South. Gender, then, is a crucial factor in cross-sector collaboration,

particularly in Malay-Muslim society. Although accepting Muslim females in leadership roles may be uncomfortable for some Muslim males, encouraging greater participation of women in conflict areas is very important and beneficial to all parties involved in conflict. This is because women are neither direct targets of the insurgents nor are main suspects of the military and therefore the risks of their public involvement were considered lower than for Malay-Muslim males, while women's grievances from conflict and violence are comparatively high. Secondly, women have the capability to be seen as both strong and submissive, effective and harmless. Their non-violent involvement can easily foster support and trust from both the state and local people. So, female involvement in public activities has the potential to draw further involvement from other actors in the conflict areas.

In addition, the factor of religion is very important since it is the strongest element emphasizing the Malay-Muslim identity. It is also a key element in the isolation of Malay-Muslims from the majority of Thailand's population (Pitsuwan, 1982, p.24). Religion is considered by some scholars as one of the major causes of the conflict (Liow, 2007; Sugunnasil, 2007; Askew, 2010). Yet, religion is also a direct victim of the violence. Religious leaders, both Islamic and Buddhist, became symbolic targets of the conflict between the Thai-Buddhist state and the Malay-Muslim separatists. Since 2004, there have been at least 33 Islamic religious leaders and 27 monks and novices killed and injured (Deep South Watch, December 27, 2014).

A survey in 2015 by the Center for Conflict Studies and Cultural Diversity (CSCD) also revealed that Islamic leaders are the ones that local Malay-Muslims trust to develop peace and security in the Deep South[6]. Due to their influence, many people, including the Thai state, have expected religious leaders to take the lead as powerful actors in encouraging cross-sector collaboration.

Some Malay-Muslims believe that political participation should be structured in an Islamic way by including the concept of *al-shura* (mutual consultation) in participatory exercises (a civil society activist in Songkhla, interview, May, 2013). The principle of *al-shura* encourages Muslims to have consultations regarding public affairs with the Muslim community in order to find a mutual resolution that does not violate religious disciplines. The mutual resolution from *al-shura* is sacred and obligatory. Consultation under the principle of *al-shura* can encourage cross-sector collaboration.

The principle of *al-shura* has already been implemented by some civil society groups in the Deep South. For example, community health development projects in the southern border provinces of Thailand applied the concept of *al-shura* by appointing *shura* councils, including religious leaders, women and youth representatives, and local authorities, to carry out several activities based on the *shura* process. When the policies of a project are initiated by cooperation amongst the group members, they tend to be more agreeable to the community and do not violate Islamic concepts (*Ibid*).

Since religious leaders are highly respected by most Malay-Muslims, the Thai state wanted religious leaders to act as intermediaries between the state and local Malay-Muslims, especially at the grassroots level, in order to encourage further participation and collaboration. Some Imams felt that they were caught in between (a scholar in Pattani, interview, May, 2013). On the one hand, it was risky to collaborate closely with state authorities because they could become a target of the militants. On the other hand, if they did not collaborate with the state, they might be labelled as non-cooperative, making it more difficult to serve their community's needs (a civil society activist in Pattani, interview, May, 2013).

Throughout the conflict and violence, religious organizations continue to play an important role in encouraging collaboration with state actors and other religious organizations, such as the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand, to reduce conflict and tension. A representative of the Islamic Council explained, "I do not deny that Islamic religious leaders are involved in politics, but our involvement and participation is not for personal interest. We participate in politics for the benefits of our society and to bring peace through nonviolent means" (a representative of the provincial Islamic Council in the Deep South, interview, May, 2013).There are regular meetings between state representatives and religious leaders, including Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Hindu, and Sikhs, to discuss the current

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[6] *For more details about the survey, see http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/sites/default/files/cscd_survey2015_exsum.pdf, accessed 10 June 2016.*

situation of conflict and violence in the Deep South (*Ibid*).

In general, even though the relationship between civil society and local people is considered better than the relationship between local people and the state, fear from violent incidents and local people's suspicions might deter them from participating in civil society activities. Simultaneously, the same feelings of fear and distrust were also able to motivate some people to participate more in civil society so that they gain more confidence. However, the state perceived that civil society activities cause trouble rather than collaboration. Although civil society is, in theory, "an arena beyond state control and influence" (MacGaffy, 1994, p.169), in conflict areas the state is unwilling to allow civil societies their full freedom. The state considers it necessary to implement government control in order to ensure power over its citizens, especially those who tend to act against state power.

8. DISCUSSION

Cross-sector collaboration during violent conflict can act as a pacifier to lessen the severity of conflict and violence in the Deep South. The Thai state knows that to win this war they need to establish more alliances, which can be done through the promotion of collaboration among various actors. The government learned from its past mistakes that limiting people's participation could lead to more resistance. To decrease the risk of resistance from both militants and local people, the Thai state selectively promoted collaboration as a tool to gain people's support. In this way, cross-sector collaboration can serve as a pacifier to

encourage Malay-Muslims to cooperate with the Thai state.

In this article, the author argues that conflict and participation can be linked in a positive way. When people of different background collaborate, it leads to less violence. However, cross-sector collaboration, which is supposed to influence bottom-up policies, is still practiced in a top-down manner, proving ineffective. This can be misleading and may create false expectations as people will not get the results they were originally anticipating. Once people realize that their collaboration is actually tainted by control of the state, they may resort to violence.

The state's security policy towards the Deep South has gradually changed to be more open to cross-sector collaboration. The state security agency has started to realize the importance of cross-sector collaboration and wanted to promote coordination between all parties in order to gain more supports from the people. The government of General Prayuth Chan-ocha issued a policy that promotes cross-sector collaboration between public and private sectors, also referred to as civil state strategy. This policy illustrated the intention of the government to encourage cross-sector collaboration among three groups of actors: state sector, including the police, the military, the government officials; people sector, including local people, religious leaders, civil society activists; and opposition groups to further promote civic power in development. However, this policy has not yet been successful. Even though the Thai government has recently provided many channels of participation and collaboration for Malay-Muslims, cross-sector collaboration

in a conflict area is still restricted by the state's close watch and tight control under the application of martial law. Therefore, although the state's policy has gradually changed to be more open to participation and collaboration, due to the continued feelings of suspicion and distrust, and the concern of national security, the state still maintains centralized power and exercises control over the participation of Malay-Muslims in cross-sector collaboration.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Ultimately, the research found that trust, or the lack of trust, is the most important underlying issue of the conflict in the Deep South. This lack of trust, which remains strong in the conflict areas, is one of the fundamental obstacles for the Thai state in implementing successful policies in the Deep South. Due to feelings of distrust and fear, many Malay-Muslims feel insecure to contact state officers and rather choose to avoid political commitments. Unless the problem of trust is resolved, cross-sector collaboration in violent conflict areas will be difficult to develop.

In addition, it is important to recognize the outstanding and very active CSOs working in the Deep South. Civil society activists commit themselves to establishing peace in the Deep South. However, their work is full of obstacles that affect their performance. In general, CSOs in the Deep South have been allowed to engage in the policy-making process more effectively through the expansion of CSO networks. Since there is already collaboration among CSOs, they could potentially initiate the participation of a wider group of individuals in civil

society activities, including the state authorities. However, despite the increasing number of civil society networks and CSOs in the Deep South, many civil society activists work for several CSOs simultaneously. The cause for concern, then, is if civil society in the Deep South is led by only a specific group of people, mostly middle class, it limits access to grassroots participation, and policies promoted by civil society were likely to be opposed by local people. Moreover, the government typically regards CSOs as competitors rather than as collaborators in problem solving or as partners that could support state functions. Therefore, the author recommends CSOs in the Deep South to work a lot harder to gain access to the government in order to influence decision making.

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