

# Chapter 12

## Civil Society and Health Development

### 1. Definition and Evolution

#### 1.1 Definition

Civil Society can be defined as

“An autonomous sphere of social interactions in which active individuals with common civic consciousness come to work together for public interest. Civil societies are characterized by their partnership, love and compassion under a system of interactive learning through action”.

Civil societies may be informal network/groups, e.g., housewife group, elderly group. They may also be formal structures, e.g., associations or foundations.

#### 1.2 Evolution

Civil Society movement evolves from several factors:-

**1.2.1 Social crisis:** Some situations and problems that state by itself can not solve, e.g., environmental crisis, HIV/AIDS and drug abuse.

**1.2.2 Evolution of urban middle class:** particularly businessmen, professionals, academics and educated people with better socio-economic status.

**1.2.3 Democratic development:** which allow the free expression of idea and movement of the people.

**1.2.4 Communication:** which facilitates interactions, transfer of information, and social movements.

**1.2.5 Inefficiency and non-transparent public sector:** which reduce its ability to solve complicated social problems.

There may be four steps of civil society development, i.e., emergence of consciousness, founding the organization, formulation of common ideology and crystallization and institutionalization of ideology into an accepted way of life. The civic movement in Thailand is evolving from step 3 to step 4.

### 1.3 Component of civil society (Figure 12.1)

Civil Society organizations consist of 3 important components, i.e.,

**1.3.1 Civic consciousness:** This includes the idea and acceptance to gather together freely with love, compassion, common understanding and interactive learning through actions aiming at public benefit.

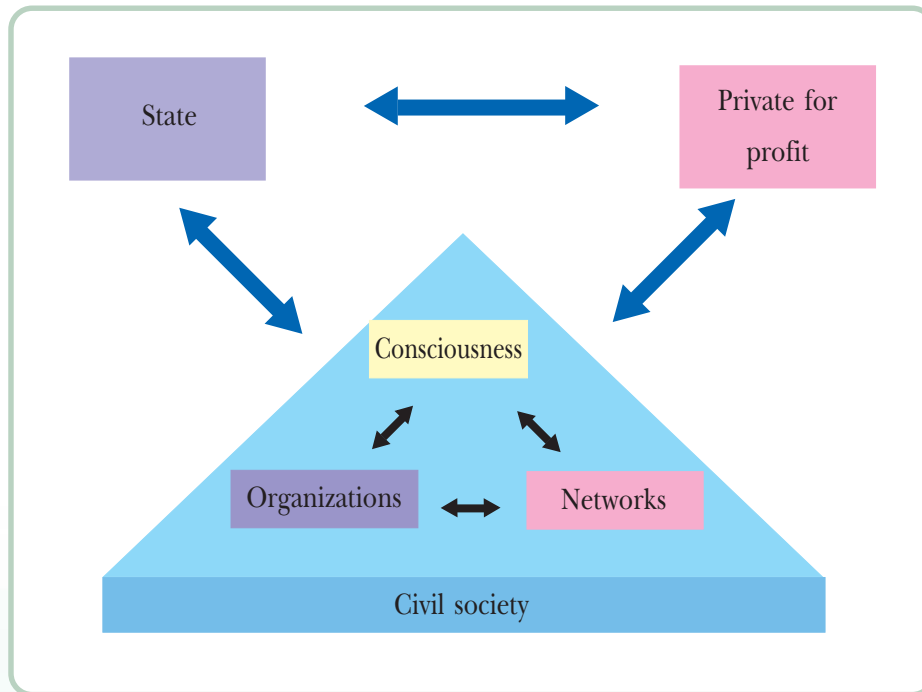
The relationship is horizontal and partnership in nature.

**1.3.2 Civic organization:** Civil societies must have systematic management to support interactive learning through actions towards solutions of social problems. The organizations may be formal or informal. They may be ad hoc or more permanent. They may range from a few to a large number of people. Members may be public employees, businessmen or lay people. However, the movements must possess complete civic consciousness.

Those non-public organizations in the community, which are founded by vertical manipulation without partnership, and civic consciousness, should not be classified as civic organizations.

**1.3.3 Civic network:** This includes structures or processes, which link members within organizations or inter-organization linkages. Effective communication channels and constructive engagement are two major important components for successful networking. Effective networking helps unite the power of consciousness into strong 'social power'.

**Figure 12.1** Component of civil society



#### 1.4 Types of civic organization

Civic organizations may be classified by their main objectives into 3 types, i.e.,

**1.4.1 Support and services:** These groups aim mainly at providing supports and services to members or to those non-possesses. They usually organize in the form of philanthropic bodies, e.g., Children protection foundation, Foundation for the blind, Associations of Oversea Chinese.

**1.4.2 Right and Policy:** These groups aim at social movement on human right and advocacy of policy for public interests. Some are formal groups, e.g., Consumer protection foundation, Health Promotion Institute, Association for human right and freedom. Others are informal groups, e.g., Drug action group, Rural doctor society.

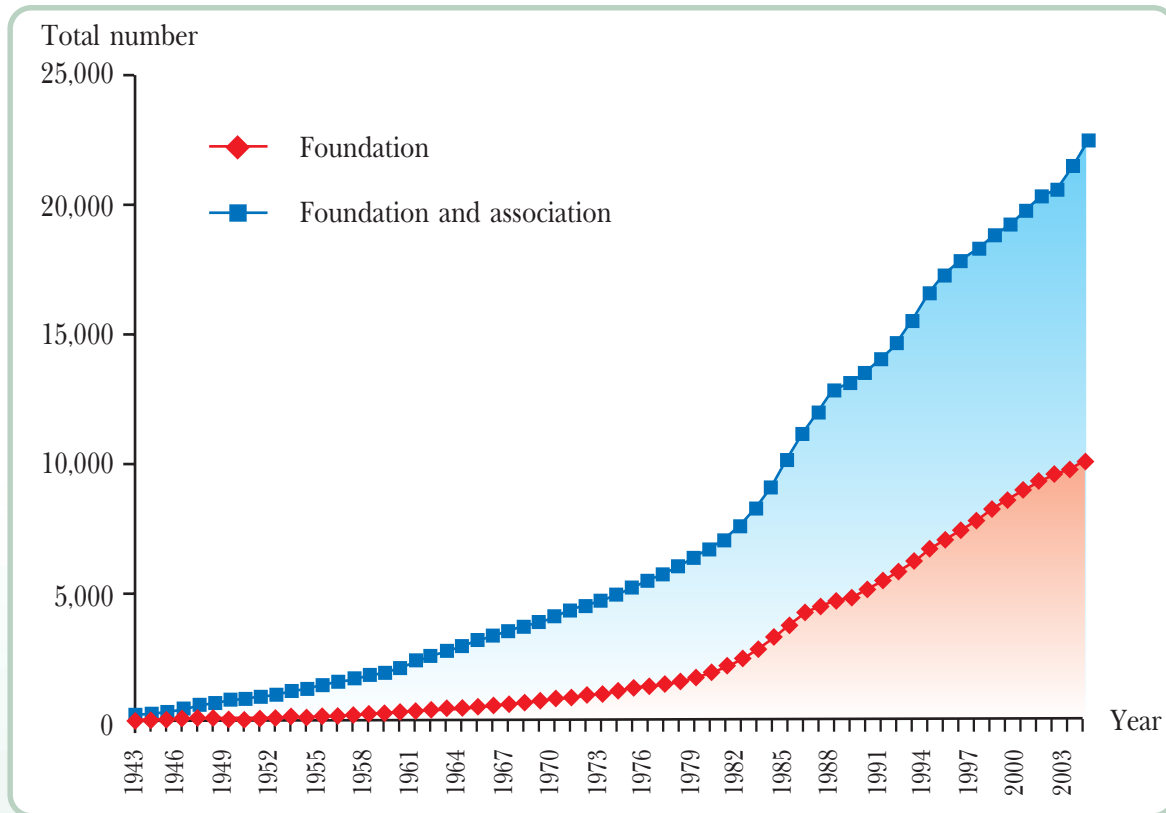
**1.4.3 Knowledge management:** These group aim at management support towards strengthening the power of wisdom of the society. Some of the examples are the National Health Foundation, Thailand Development Research Foundation and Thai Wisdom Foundation.

Nevertheless, one civil society organization may work under more than one main objective, particularly those in categories 1.4.2 and 1.4.3

## 2. Civil Society in Thailand

**2.1 Formal groups:** These may be in the form of foundations, associations and institutes set up under some legal infrastructures. They are usually registered with the Ministry of Interior. The member of this group rose rapidly in the last two decades (Figure 12.2).

Figure 12.2 Member of formal civic organizations in Thailand



Source: Office of National Culture Committee.

**2.2 Informal groups:** There are countless informal civil societies in Thailand. Many of them are at village/community level; others are at provincial, regional or at national level. There are some organizations, which link these civic organizations, e.g., Coordinating organization for NGOs on HIV/AIDS, Coordinating committee on NGOs on PHC.

### 3. Civil Society and Health Development in Thailand.

#### 3.1 State efforts in establishing civil society.

Before the modernization era, health was the responsibility of individual, families and community based on local wisdom. Development in modern medical sciences had taken away the capacity for self-reliance and also delayed the development of local health wisdom. In the two decades of health for all movement, new forms of people participation were developed.

Village health volunteer, traditional birth attendance and village sanitary craftsmen are example of some lay health manpower created in that era. Many community health funds, e.g., Village Drug Fund, Village Nutrition Fund, and Village Sanitary Fund were developed. These are group activities set up through vertical manipulation by the state. They lacked strong civic consciousness and could not be considered as real civic organizations. Their sustainability were quite low. Most of the village health funds have totally disappeared. Nevertheless, they created a certain level of community participation and became part of the mechanisms used by the state to improve the access to essential drugs, sanitation including the communicable disease control.

### **3.2 Real Civil Society in Health Development**

In the last two decades, there are mushrooming of civil society organizations devoted themselves to health development. These are in addition to existing philanthropic organizations. These newly created organizations may have very narrow and specific or wider objectives. Some of the examples are: -

#### **3.2.1 Tobacco Consumption Control**

There are at least two very active civic organizations advocating for tobacco consumption control. They are the Health Promotion Institute under the National Health Foundation and the Action for Smoking and Health Foundation (ASH). Their activities are based on knowledge management, social movements and political movements. Their campaigns received very strong support of young actors and actresses and the public media.

Their successes came out through partnership with other civic organizations one classic example is the nationwide smoking campaign run organized by the Rural Doctor Society in October 1987. This movement had successfully collected signatures of six million people to support non-smoking movement.

Their movements resulted in the promulgation of two acts in 1992, i.e., Tobacco Control Act and the Act to Protect Health of the Non-smokers. Their leaders also participate in the National Tobacco Control Committee, appointed by the Cabinet.

This is a very good example of using the strategy of “Triangle that moves the mountain” to solve difficult and complex social problems. The smoking prevalence in Thailand reduced from 30.1 percent in 1976 to 20.6 percent in 2001.

#### **3.2.2 “Jor Sor 100 Community” and health services in Bangkok**

Severe traffic jam in Bangkok, the capital City of Thailand, prompted the emergence of a live broadcast radio station, Jor Sor 100, since 1990. This station devotes itself to the live interactive report of traffic condition in all corners of the city and nearby provinces. Its countless members (formal and informal) communicate through radio waves with strong civic consciousness to reduce traffic problems, form a good example of “Air civic organization”. Since traffic jam is one of the important obstacle for emergency patient to reach the hospital in time. In addition, most public hospitals usually refuse to accept patient quoting full bed occupancy. When it is on air through Jor Sor 100 that there is an emergency case on their way to a hospital, drivers of vehicles always open their way for that patient and none of the public hospital dares to refuse the patient.

The success of this “air community” prompted the creation of many more “air community” on other specific issue.

### **3.2.3 Civic movement on HIV/AIDS**

The Social crisis from epidemic of HIV/AIDS started in late 1987s. During that period, there were more than 100,000 cases of new infection per year. Although the government is very active and the Prime Minister himself chairs the National AIDS Committee, the crisis is so severe than even the whole government cannot hope with the problems. More than 100 civil society organizations on HIV/AIDS have been created. In 1989, a coordinating committee for AIDS NGO was established at the national level. In addition, the same kind of committee among AIDS NGO in the northern provinces (with highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS) was also created. These NGOs work on different aspects from prevention campaign to community support of AIDS patients. In 1993, an association of business sector against HIV/AIDS was originated. The purposes are to mobilize resources from member companies to collectively tackle AIDS epidemic among their employees. More than 100 companies become its member in 2000.

These AIDS NGOs received strong support from the government. Each year the Ministry of Public Health provides around \$US 2 million to support their activities. These budgets are managed and allocated by the public-private coordinating committee.

The civic network on HIV/AIDS has participated actively in the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) under the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GF). One of the NGO (The Care Thailand) has been accepted as the Principle Recipient of the Global Fund.

## **3.3 Supports for Civil Society on Health Development**

Financial supports to civil society on Health Development usually depend on their target activities. Those that provide services to the under privilege groups are usual supported by donation and public budget. Those that play the role of social movements are sometimes supported by foreign organizations. Since 1990, the Ministry of Public Health started to allocate some budgets (around \$US 1 million) to support civic organization for health development. This budget was increased to around \$US 2 million in 1992. After the economic crisis it was reduced back to less than \$US 1 million (Table 6.44). In 1992, the Ministry of Public Health started another fund to specifically support NGOs on HIV/AIDS. The figure increased from \$US 0.5 million in 1992 to \$US 3.5 million in 1997. After the economic crisis, although the amount in local currency remained the same, the value in \$US reduced to \$US 2.25 million due to change in currency exchange (Table 6.45).

#### 4. The way forward

It is clear that there is a very rapid increase in the number, size and roles of civic organizations for health development. In the recent movement toward total health system reform, the draft of the National Health Bill includes the creation of a National Health Committee. One-third of the members of this committee is from civil societies. A National Health Assembly will also be convened at least once a year. This is mainly the forum for people and civil societies to express their views and demands for health development policies.

Hopefully this bill will be approved by the parliament and promulgated as a people Health Constitution in 2005. It will then be the solid foundation for the sustainable development of civic organizations on health development in Thailand.

