PEACE SURVEY – A TOOL FOR PEACEBUILDING IN THE DEEP SOUTH OF THAILAND

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Abstract— The violence called the 'Southern Fire' in the southernmost provinces of Thailand is one of the most prolonged ethno-religious conflicts in Southeast Asian region. Almost every day innocent people have been killed since the upsurge in the insurgency in 2004. It has been over a decade but the violent situation seems to be continuing and an end to the conflict is not being reached. Ones of the key recommendations that can help to support peace building process are trust and understanding the needs of the locals. Fortunately, the peace survey project has been initiated in the deep south of Thailand early in 2015. The area of peace survey covers the three southernmost provinces, including Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat plus four districts of Songkhla province. This project is very significant as this is a significant step of Thailand in creating a peace survey as an extra tool to resolve the ethno-religious conflict in the south. The purpose of this paperis to introduce the peace survey project as a tool to get people participation in peace process. A quantitative method by questionnaire is used in this research. This paper presents the results about relationship between people from the two cultures and roles of key players in the peace process.

Keywords— Peace Survey, Southern Thailand, People Participation, Peacebuilding.

I. INTRODUCTION

Building peace is a long, complex process involving many actors, steps and a variety of tools. The important recommendations that can help to enhance peace process are trust among conflicting parties and understanding the needs of the local people. As a civilian living in Southern Thailand, I realised that getting opinions from the local people who could make some positive changes in this area. One way to involve the citizenry is through surveys. Research projects about conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the southernmost provinces are popular for state authorities, NGOs, academics and researchers. However, this 'Peace Survey' project is special. This is because the project received good cooperation from the leading organisations; the team tried to get people participation in every step of the research; and the survey process was non-bias methodology method.

In early 2015, King Prajadhipok's Institute has started the 'Peace Survey' project in order to get people participation on peace process in the deep south. The Institute has cooperated with fifteen groups[1] from various sectors and networks, including academics, NGOs and civil society. As I am a local lecturer based in Songkhla province, I have been invited to join the 'Peace Survey' project as one of the academic team. I found this project very interesting and sparked my ideas in creating a paper about people participation on peace process. As being part of the team, I have been through the process of this project from the beginning.

The purposes of the paper are to promote peace survey as an extra tool which can help to resolve the ethno-religious conflict and boost the peace process more effective. Furthermore, it would be most grateful if this work could encourage public participation into the peace process or even be used by policy maker or relevant authorities to build lasting peace elsewhere.

II. METHODOLOGY

This peace survey is unique because of the methodology. It tried to avoid partials in every step to make sure that every sample has the same probability of selection. The sampling method was planned by the experts and experienced researchers. The samples were randomly selected by systematic sampling in sub-district, district and household levels. Sampling random process was done in front of the well-known civil society groups. The samples of this survey

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included 1,559 peoplefrom195 villages in the three southernmost provinces plus four districts of Songkhla province.

The fieldtrip teamsplay a main role in collecting data from villagers. The surveying teams have experiences in collecting data by using questionnaires with similar topics in this region. There are four teams separating into their familiar areas. This project used almost a hundred interviewers. We have managers to control the data collecting process to make sure that the samples were correct and all questionnaires have been completed.

Ethic issue is also important for conducting researches in these sensitive areas. Safety of respondents and data collectors has to be considered. Before visiting any villages, it has to be cooperated with the locals that the situation is safe. At the same time, we have to keep data of the respondents safe and cannot be traced.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This survey includes a pile of interesting questions with more than 400 variables. The majority of the samples is Muslim as Islam is the main religion in this region. For this paper, I would like to raise some issues about the relationship of people in different cultures and roles of key players in the peace process. The details are as follows:-

Relationship betweenBuddhist and Muslim Communities

The survey shows that local people feel uncomfortable to communicate with other people and must be careful when they contact the others. It means trust is still a sensitive issue in this conflicting area. The questions about relationship betweenBuddhist and Muslim communities were also asked in the survey. Although most people see that culture and religion are not important for them to choose where to live or where they would send their children to study, in reality people with the same culture seem to live in the same village. It does not mean that they do not like each other but it is because their ways of life. In Muslim community, it should have Mosque where is the centre of Muslim community. So, it is more convenient for the locals with same culture to live in the same area. Moreover, the highest percent of respondents see that the government policy which Thai Buddhists get the better opportunity than Muslims is the security policy when comparing with policies in economic, justice, language, education, religion, and administration.

A big proportion of respondents chose not to answer in some questions. Why is that? It was found that those questions are relevant to independence, insurgency groups, intervening of international actors.They are all quite the sensitive issues that the locals still do not want to express their opinions. Therefore, choosing not to answer or do not know, it actually means something.

Roles of Key Players in the Peace Process

Role of State

Some people in this area still believe that the ongoing violence in this provinces would be because the state authorities do not want to end the conflict. As we knew, the government have been spending the big amounts of budget on the insurgent encounters in the south every year. Ironically, the survey shows that people do not satisfy with the present government's performance that much. However, government got the highest scores as a key player in peace process following by religious leaders, and politicians. Furthermore, most samples agreed that it is necessary to discuss about special administrative region. However, when the survey asked about the styles or bodies of the new administration, a significant number of respondents said they do not know or refused to answer these questions.

Role of civil society

In fact, it was agreed by the worldwide academics' network that civil society can play an important role in reducing violence and building peace in some conflict cases. As the gap between the government and local people in the southernmost provinces is very large, civil society groups can act as a bridge which will bring them closer to each other. Another task of the bridge-builder is to create a common space for all relevant parties to exchange their experiences and share knowledge that might be useful for finding a solution. Interestingly, in this survey, civil society sector is not in the top-five of sectors that are important for peacebuilding. This result might provoke civil society sector to work harder in order to make some changes and to play more important role in the peace process.

Role of local people

There is an interesting part asking about the roles of female and malein political leader, economic and peacebuilding. It was undoubtedly found that male has a higher per cent than female in all roles, especially in role in political leader. It is because male is dominated in Muslim society. When we compare roles that both female and male would do well, it was interestingly found that the role in peace building got the highest scores. It shows that both female and male should get involved in the peace process.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown some of results from the first phase of peace survey conducting in southernmost region. It has to say that this is only the opinion of a

group of samples whom researchers agreed that they would be the best representatives of the whole population. The ultimate research outcome is to promote the important of public participation and peace survey as a non-violent tool in resolving ethnic conflict and building peace in southern Thailand. The lessons found from this project will be very helpful for peacebuilding process and might be applied to the conflict resolution in other cases. Also, the result of the peace survey will be very beneficial for policy makers, authorities and sectors that are involved peace process in the southernmost region.

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