



The people's movement against FTAs has opened important political space in Thailand.

## Fighting FTAs: the experience in Thailand

BIOTHAI (October 2007)

On 11 January 2006, some 15–20,000 people laid siege to the Sheraton Hotel by the Ping River in Chiang Mai province, the venue for the sixth round of negotiations on the USA–Thailand Free Trade Agreement.

Many differences between negotiating positions had been resolved in previous rounds, but not the issues of intellectual property and investment. Most demonstrators were drawn from the ranks of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and farmers' groups. About 50 of them, with black cloth tied around their necks, swam across the torrential river in an attempt to enter the hotel through the back. At the front gate, throngs of people tried to push the iron barricades set up and now pushed back by 1,000 police officers. As demonstrators outnumbered police, the obstacle was eventually removed, and the protesters advanced to the front gate of the hotel building. We besieged the hotel all night and the Thai–US negotiators, including Barbara Weisen, leader of the US negotiation team, had to sneak out in the middle of the night. That became the last round of FTA negotiations thus far.

Attempts by the Thaksin Shinawatra government to suppress press coverage of the anti-FTA campaign failed. State TV reported this event colourfully, shifting media coverage from an inch of space in business sections to newspaper headlines devoted to the anti-FTA movement. The Minister of the Interior, a close ally of the (former Prime Minister [PM]) Shinawatra family, and even the protesters of the "Eleven People's Networks against FTA" led by FTA Watch, were surprised that more people came to join us on the second and third days of the demonstration. Chiang Mai was Thaksin's hometown, and a stronghold for his party, which had just gained a landslide victory in the previous election. Yet along the roads leading to the Hotel, many people cheered us on, even inviting us into their houses for food and refreshments.

Put under heavy pressure, Nittaya Piboonsongkram, the chief Thai negotiator, quit his job one week later.

The anti-FTA movement grew along with anti-government feeling among the middle class and, building on this, FTA Watch joined the campaign to topple the government together with the "People's Alliance for Democracy" (PAD). From early to mid 2006, hundreds of thousands of people rallied daily to demand the ousting of the government at Sanamluang and various Bangkok business neighbourhoods. Even though the protests were ended by the military coup on 11 September 2006, the campaign by the people's sector, particularly the movement against the FTA and other trade deals, opened up important political space and will have significant weight in trade liberalisation policy in the future.

### The start of the FTA campaign

The people's movement against the FTA began when Thaksin and US President Bush declared during the October 2003 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' meeting in Bangkok that their governments would begin negotiations for a bilateral FTA. This followed the conclusion of a US–Singapore FTA.

Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party had just won a landslide victory in the general election, and he became PM for a second term, with more than two-thirds of the MPs in the Lower House. Thaksin became the most powerful PM in Thai democratic history. His government used subtle tactics to contain and undermine



Thai police repressing the people's movement in Chiang Mai, January 2006. (Photo: courtesy BIOTHAI)

dissent. On the one hand, they attempted to gain popularity among the rural poor by setting up village funds to disburse money directly to them and helping the poor gain better access to public health services. On the other hand, they attempted to control, and interfered with, media and independent regulatory organisations such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and even the majority of the senators.

The government announced plans for FTAs with over 10 countries, including China, Australia, New Zealand, Bahrain, Peru, Chile, Japan, the US, and a couple of countries in the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation – comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and Thailand), and EFTA (European Free Trade Association – comprising Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Iceland). They also announced the partial unilateral liberalisation of the agricultural market to countries in Indochina under the ACMECS (Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Partnership Strategy – which includes Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Laos and Vietnam). Thaksin's logic behind these FTAs was to throw open the country's market as Thailand was about to sign a deal with the two most populous countries in the world, namely China and India, with a combined citizenry of more than 2 billion, one third of the world's population. We were about to broker deals with countries that had the highest purchasing power in the world and the planet's biggest and second biggest economies, the USA and Japan. Thaksin touted grand dreams and made many empty promises. People were led to believe that no other national leader could compare with him, and that he would lead the country on a development path to stand side by side with other major developed countries such as South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore.

While the Thai government hosted a grand reception for the APEC meeting and greeted guests with a spectacular royal barge procession, the newly founded FTA Watch issued a statement to protest against the beginning of trade negotiations with the USA. Very few media paid attention to our campaign during APEC. Our rather small

gatherings for the campaign against globalisation and war could not attract many people. An independent poll stated that over 90% of people surveyed did not agree with conducting any campaign during the time the country was hosting APEC.

#### FTA Watch

Amidst Thaksin's growing popularity, the people's sector slowly began to campaign on FTA issues with many difficulties and much caution, hoping to gain mass support. After discussion and analysis during December 2003, FTA Watch was founded, comprising NGOs, Peoples Organisations (POs), academics active on the issues of biological resources, intellectual property, public health and consumer protection, groups opposing the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and globalisation, farmers' networks working on sustainable agriculture, and networks of people living with HIV/AIDS. Our members also came from officers and members of independent regulatory organisations such as the NHRC and the National Economic and Social Advisory Council (NESAC).

FTA Watch aims to help coordinate analysis and advocacy on international trade issues among the people's sector and various alliances with no permanent office. The 30–40 core members came from about 20 organisations. We communicated and reported developments through an email listserve, and reached many decisions via electronic communications. Sensitive issues and important decisions have been sorted out in regular meetings hosted alternately among various member organisations.

FTA Watch developed a website [www.ftawatch.org](http://www.ftawatch.org) to be an official online mouthpiece and to disseminate information. Reports on FTA issues from various Thai newspapers have been compiled, together with related articles, analysis of impacts from liberalisation in various fields and investigative reports concerning debates between representatives from civil society and the government led by the negotiation team. Over 20,000

news items have been featured in the website, mostly in Thai. The website has reached over three million hits. We also ran live internet broadcasts during special events such as academic public discussions – which could draw over 500 participants – and the demonstrations in Chiang Mai, for example.

To disseminate analysis of FTA impacts, the group publishes books written by academics and activists, such as *Sovereignty Not for Sale: An Analysis of Impacts of Thailand–USA FTA* and *Exposing the Hidden Agenda in the Thailand–Japan FTA Agreement*, besides small publications and handouts created for various audiences. We started with small public discussions attended by 30–40 people, and expanded to national seminars with 300–700 participants. Discussion topics include impacts on farmers and patients, an analysis of agreements concerning intellectual property provisions, investment clauses, and an overall analysis of FTA issues such as the lack of transparency in the negotiation process, conflicts of interest and the roles played by transnational companies.

Once the group had become better known, and media and public were increasingly informed about the analysis and impacts, FTA Watch developed into a coordinating centre among activists campaigning on relevant issues. We started with a demonstration against the signing of the Thailand–Australia FTA in 2003 in front of Government House with around 1,000 demonstrators, then a demonstration against the third round of US–Thai FTA negotiations in Pattaya, on 4–8 April 2005, and the massive protest in Chiang Mai. We also joined the PAD to protest against the FTA and the privatisation of state enterprises, and to oust the Thaksin government. This campaign drew hundreds of thousand protesters. (However, several months prior to the coup that toppled Thaksin, FTA Watch gradually retreated from being part of the movement to campaign in the national political arena, and restored its mission to serve the political purpose of the people’s sector.)

FTA Watch members also gave equal importance to lobbying as it did to undertaking analysis of impacts and mass mobilisation. Some of our members sit in various committees under the House of Senate, such as the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Standing Committee on Social Development and Human Security. Other members sit in subcommittees appointed by independent regulatory organisations such as NESAC, NHRC, and so on. We also sent representatives to meet officially with the PM, Deputy PM, and leaders of all opposition political parties, sending our briefings to various committees in the House of Representatives.

After the coup, our members remained active in lobbying for our proposals with members of the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) and pushed for clauses in the new Constitution that guarantee transparency and democracy in the process to develop international trade agreements, making the process more accountable to the people.

### **An analysis of FTA issues**

FTA Watch deems that the push for FTAs has been chiefly driven by vested interests among the major powers in the world, particularly the USA, and the Thai government and its cronies who stand to gain from trade liberalisation.

The government realises that the push for trade and investment liberalisation through WTO has met with more difficulties, particularly after several major developing countries, including China, India and Brazil, united with other, smaller developing countries. Meanwhile, the world sees a growing movement against globalisation. Therefore, the US government has come up with the push for bilateral FTAs with major economies in lieu of WTO negotiations. In South-east Asia, they started with Singapore, then moved on to Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia, in that order.

In Thailand the major drive for the FTA came from Thaksin, the Charoen Pokphand (CP) group, one of the largest agro-industries in the region, headquartered in Thailand, and other interest groups related to members of the cabinet, including the automobile parts industry.

Signing the FTA deal with China spelled disaster for Thai farmers who grow temperate-climate vegetables and fruit in the north of the country. Vegetables and fruit such as garlic, broccoli, kale, apples and peaches flooded into Thailand at half or even a quarter of the price of locally grown produce. A hundred thousand families went bankrupt as a result.

Meanwhile, the Thailand–Australia FTA signed in July 2004 caused serious problems for dairy farmers. Cheaper dairy products, especially milk powder, flooded into Thailand. The 100,000 families of the small-scale Thai dairy sector cannot compete with Australian farms, because the production cost in Australia is only half that in Thailand. One third of Thai dairy farms collapsed within a year of implementation of the agreement.

Various Thai business interests stand to gain from the FTAs, including capitalists within the government, such as the telecommunication business owned by Thaksin’s family, which will benefit from the FTAs with China, Australia and New Zealand. Shrimp and seafood exporters such as the CP Group enjoyed a 50% increase in exports in the first year of the FTA with Australia. Automobile industries, one of them owned by transport minister Suriya Jungrungruengkit, benefited from a 75% increase in exports of auto parts to Australia.

Apart from this conflict of interest, the FTA negotiation process is shrouded in secrecy with no transparency and democracy. The contents and stance are subject to the exclusive manipulation of big business and government officials. Negotiation contents and related documents have been hidden from public access, and see the light only after the deal has been signed. The Thai people were able to see the FTAs with Australia and Japan only after the signing ceremonies. The government refused to table FTA texts for deliberation and approval by the House of Parliament, even though they have a broad impact on the public. Thaksin explained that such an action was unwarranted, as “members of the House of Parliament do not have enough knowledge to deliberate on the issue” (even though two thirds of the MPs came from his TRT party).

An FTA with the USA would have even wider and deeper impact than the China and Australia deals, since the framework of negotiation was quite comprehensive, covering many issues, including intellectual property and investment liberalisation. The Chiang Mai mobilisation against the US FTA had a big public impact and also unnerved government officials. By the time of the



(Photo: courtesy BIOTHAI)

military coup, the attitude of many Thais had turned against Thaksin and his pet projects, including FTAs. Effectively, therefore, the people's movement against the FTA with the US have stopped it – so far.

The Alternative Agriculture Network, a network of academics and NGOs working on the issues of biological resources and intellectual property, concluded that the inclusion of life patenting clauses and liberalisation of genetically modified (GM) products paves the way for the domination of biological resources and monopoly control of the plant varieties used by farmers and their local communities around the country. Similarly, by accepting drug patenting in line with US standards, Thai patients and consumers will have to buy drugs at prices between thirty and several hundred per cent higher. The impacts will be felt most acutely by those who rely on regular medication, such as people living with HIV/AIDS.

Farmers, the poor and the destitute, who make up the majority of the population, will bear the brunt of the impact of FTAs, which will thereby more broadly undermine national sovereignty .

### Mobilisation strategy

During Thaksin's rule, mobilisation among the people's sector faced many difficulties. Apart from tossing money around, mainly to rural folk, the PM also had by his side former social activists, NGO workers, academics, and some community leaders as his advisers. They were quite skilled and subtle in interfering with media and independent regulatory organisations. In the first four years of his first term and during the first year of his second term, therefore, we hardly saw any of the substantial mass mobilisation that there had been in the past.

Formerly, people's movements, such as the demonstrations by the "Assembly of the Poor" in 1997 could draw as many as 30,000 people, and protests could last for three months. Such mobilisations led to many movement objectives and demands, addressing immediate needs

and seeking policy change, being met. But under Thaksin there was hardly any major demonstration. If one happened, it would soon dissolve, as Thaksin used his personal marketing skills and relied on the experience of his close aides. A case in point was the mass demonstration by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) Labour Union to protest against privatisation of major utilities. In the beginning, over 30,000 people joined them. But after the government came up with a proposal to give away free shares in the new EGAT PLC, many EGAT workers changed their position, and the opposition to privatisation crumbled.

Thaksin was not pleased with the people's movements, which he could not control. He strived to make all the grassroots groups succumb to his power. Therefore, any move made by the people's sector led by intellectuals and NGOs became virtually bogged down and those leaders were discredited as "agents who exploit poverty". Reproduction of this discourse in the media has sunk the image of NGO movements to the lowest ever; the discrediting also happened with other social institutions, including the media. As a result, the Thaksin government could easily ink the FTA contract with Australia, even though it was to have a disastrous impact on hundreds of thousands of dairy farmers and over a million beef-cattle farmers. Many farmers were pleased with short-term gains, such as being given free cows to raise under the government's "One Million Cows" project.

The demonstration against the sixth round of FTA negotiations in Chiang Mai was a remobilisation of a people's sector which had dissipated. Prior to the protest, public and media had been informed about the impacts from FTAs to some extent, particularly as effects of the Thailand-China FTA started to be felt deeply among farmers who grew onion, garlic and vegetables in the north of Thailand. Also, impacts on dairy and beef farmers were being felt after the FTA deal with Australia. Despite this leverage, we knew that the demonstration strategies had to be carefully planned, as Chiang Mai was the PM's hometown and his party had won a land-



In Chiang Mai, the Thai and US negotiators were literally under seige in the Sheraton Hotel.

slide election victory. In addition, media, particularly state-owned press and television stations, were under tight government control.

The Chiang Mai demonstrations aimed to attack multinational drug companies and agro-businesses that had been pushing for clauses on intellectual property. This would worsen patient access to necessary medication and undermine farmers' food sovereignty. Investment clauses would affect small-scale investors and entrepreneurs as well as local businesses. Although the process of FTA negotiations obviously lacked transparency and involved conflicts of interest among members of the cabinet, we decided to make this a secondary concern to that of the impacts.

This strategy and the sheer number of protesters in Chiang Mai made media, including those which were state-owned, devote more space to cover our actions. The three days of protest were the first time that FTA Watch and allied academics had a chance to explain the problems and impacts of FTAs to Thailand's 65 million people, and to make clear our opposition stance.

The uprising in Chiang Mai took place at the same time as the middle class in Bangkok and major cities started to feel upset with the government's management. Thaksin's popularity reached the lowest point ever, exacerbated by his decision to sell his family's satellite, mobile phone, television and airline businesses to the Temasak Group from Singapore, untaxed.

According to an independent poll (ABAC) concerning the FTA deals signed with various countries, there were five times as many people opposed to the trade deals as those who were not.

### The Eleven People's Networks against FTA

Normally, FTA Watch functions as a co-ordinating centre for people's movements on activities related to FTA and international trade. But during the mass mobilisation, we needed a stronger and more cohesive organisation, so the "Network of Eleven People's Networks against FTA" was formed a little before the sixth round of FTA negotiations.

In the Network were the Thai network of PLWHA or



People living with HIV/AIDS on the frontline of the FTA struggle in Chiang Mai. (Photo: courtesy BIOTHAI)

TNP+, the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN), the Confederation of Consumer Organisations, the Northern Peasant Federation, Four Region Slum Network, the Council of Networks of People's Organisations in Thailand, the Assembly of the Poor (AOP), the Student Federation of Thailand, Land Reform Action Network for the Poor, the Southern Community Forest Network, the Federation of Labour Unions and Alliances of Labour Movements, and FTA Watch. TNP+ and AAN members constituted the majority of demonstrators at Chiang Mai.

A strong people's organisation, TNP+ draws its members come from over 1,000 organisations – more than 100,000 individuals. The total PLWHA population in Thailand is around 900,000. The network was founded in 1997 and has been very active in advocating access to treatment and drugs as well as other rights of the PLWHAs. They work closely with AIDS NGOs in Thailand. A Thailand-USA FTA would impact most acutely and concretely on PLWHA. Under the deal, it was likely that the monthly medical expenses for each PLWHA would increase from 2,500-5,000 baht to 20,000 baht, the rise being due to the extension of drug patent protection and clauses providing for data exclusivity as well as compulsory licensing. Around 3,000 members from TNP+ joined us during the demonstrations in Chiang Mai.

The AAN was founded in 1989 and has more than 50,000 households countrywide as members. About 2,000 AAN members joined us during the protest in Chiang Mai. The Network has had much experience in advocating policy issues concerning sustainable agriculture and food security. Their previous major accomplishments included the advocacy for the government to change the target of agricultural transformation to reach the 25% goal of sustainable agriculture as the minimum in 1997. They also successfully campaigned with various NGOs working on biodiversity to pressure the government until they had to issue a ban on field trials of GM crops, which has held since 2001. The AAN stands firm on opposing plant variety protection and life patenting laws which would exacerbate access and exchange of biological resources which provide the foundation of food security and sovereignty. Opening up the agriculture commodity market would lead to a rapid increase of imports and dumping of highly subsidised, cheap produce from USA.

Other people's networks, including the Confederation of Consumer Organisations, Northern Peasant Federation, Four Region Slum Network and AOP, had had much experience in advocating at the national level and shared similar political positions. They had also worked together in various uprisings.

Decisions concerning moves on the street were collectively made by representatives from all groups. FTA Watch simply provided information and helped with the overall analysis as well as public relations. AOP members played a big role in the logistics of the demonstration. They were more skilled in situations where we had to confront state authorities.

Taking to the street moved the movement from debate on international trade in the business section of newspapers to public and political debate. It opened media space for people's networks and made it difficult for the government to control media. Success for the campaign would chiefly rely on public reaction, since winning broader support was vital for future mobilisation.

### **Accomplishments of the people's sector for FTA advocacy work in Thailand**

#### *1) Advocating changes in agreements' provisions*

When the FTA deal with China was signed, FTA Watch had not been founded. We were only just starting when the Thailand-Australia FTA was signed in 2003. There was not much we could do to press for changes in the details.

But during the negotiation for the Japan-Thailand FTA (JTEPA), the people's movement had learnt some lessons from previous FTA advocacy. We have made some moves to press for more access to contents of the deal, for example. (The Thai negotiation team allowed our representative to view the contract in a particular place

and during limited time.) It was useful for our analysis of the impacts of the draft contract, especially on two topics including toxic waste and patenting of naturally occurring micro-organisms. FTA Watch disseminated the information we obtained widely through the National Legislative Assembly mechanisms, NESAC, NHRC, etc. We marched to the ITV station to pressure them to broadcast information from the people's sector, and later brought a lawsuit to the Administrative Court concerning flaws in the public hearing of the JTEPA.

The campaigns have made the government issue a side letter, and representatives from Japan had to sign the letter to affirm that clauses on toxic waste and patenting of naturally occurring micro-organisms shall not be interpreted in a manner that would damage Thailand. Although there is a suggestion that this side letter has weak legal status if the main text has not changed, this is the first time that the people have realised that they can possibly change the trade agreement.

#### *2) Reforming legislative process*

After Thaksin Shinawatra was ousted as PM by the middle class and the military, FTA Watch, the progressive academic network and people's organisations launched a campaign for a constitutional amendment concerning the process for concluding international trade deals. Section 190 in the new Constitution states various details pushed forward by the people's sector to provide for transparency in the process as follows:

- 1 Parliament must be informed about the process for development and negotiation on international trade deals*
- 2 Prior to the negotiation, a public hearing must be held*
- 3 In case the trade deals will have impacts on people, there must be remedy and compensation measures in place*



(Photo: courtesy BIOTHAI)

- 4 Contents of the contracts must be disclosed to the public beforehand
- 5 The deals must be approved by Parliament
- 6 A law must be issued to provide for procedure and details of how to proceed with the development of such an international trade deal.

We have succeeded in having these clauses included in the new Constitution by means of various forms of campaign, including policy lobbying, awareness raising, public relations and constant political manoeuvring 3-4 years beforehand.

### 3) Growth of people's organisations

Amidst the tense struggle in the name of free trade by transnational corporations to expand their resource exploitation and markets around the world, national political institutions have failed to perform their tasks. Even though one might not agree entirely with the insult that Thaksin Shinawatra hurled at Parliament when he claimed that MPs were not knowledgeable enough to read trade deals, it certainly reflects some realities. Current political institutions are not capable of handling the trend of neoliberal globalisation.

On the one hand, the emergence of FTA Watch pointed to a weakness of political institutions, the bureaucratic system, educational institutions and various major social institutions. On the other hand, it indicates that, in future, the only force that can contain the power of transnational corporations will stem from coalitions of people's movements and the public, who are so disappointed with the roles of major institutions. These organisations will play a major role in setting the course of democratic development in Thailand.

Looking back at the planning of FTA deals with various countries since 2003, we can see a total failure of the government to protect people's interests. They have been unable to prevent the majority of people from being exploited by the world trade system, and have even become part of the problem. The opposition parties were too weak to withstand criticisms and disagreement, as all political parties have gained from support delivered by large capitalist interests such as CP.



"Fly away, FTA!" A traditional Thai balloon is released at a demonstration (Photo: courtesy BIOTHAI)

Despite government claims to have tackled corruption, it still retains very good relationships with such large business groups.

Academic institutions which used to play prominent roles in shedding light on issues for society have now become merely a mouthpiece to promote the virtues of free trade, with no regard to impacts on quality of life, social inequality, impacts on the environment and the deterioration of natural resources as a result of free trade.

### Lessons learned and suggestions

#### 1) Linking of all groups working on FTA issues

The successes of the Thai anti-FTA movement can be attributed to the linking of people's sector organisations, NGOs, academics from various fields, independent regulatory organisations and some individuals in mainstream political institutions. They have performed their roles, sometimes together and at other times separately, on certain issues. They worked together on information exchange and strategic planning.

Linking affected people in different sectors, such as farmers and PLWHAs, enables mutual learning and makes the movement stronger than if each just focused on one particular interest. In fact, such consolidation of various groups has been achieved before, by the AOP, which is a coalition of more than 100 groups. One difference is that the movement on free trade addresses a wider issue.

One major weakness for movements against free trade in Thailand is that the people's organisations have mostly worked closely with NGOs. NGOs have some constraints in reaching out to other people's organisations, such as labour unions in various fields and farmers' groups, which are directly affected by the FTA deal (such as the dairy cattle and beef cattle cooperatives).

Many labour movements and farmers' groups have experienced interference, from politicians who seek political backing, and from large corporates such as CP and Monsanto, which are working hard in various countries to organise farmers' groups that will support corporate interests. Some interference also came from the AFL-CIO's American Center for International Labor Solidarity, which works closely with the US Embassy in Thailand. They tried to make workers believe that the FTA means cheaper food and improved workers' rights and a quality of life comparable to that of American workers. It is important that people's organisations are free from such political interference.

#### 2) Alternatives to FTAs and Free Trade

The government, large companies and academics in Thailand have become the proponents of FTAs. To fight against FTAs, we have to confront the government and all these interest groups as well as to contend with forces from outside the country. This is not an easy task. Meanwhile, development ideology influenced by free trade and led by the WTO and other mainstream economic and political institutions has become a major discourse dominating other social and political ideas. This makes our task even more difficult, as we have to struggle against free trade doctrines peddled by the WTO as well.



(T-shirt design: Paulo Angelo Veluz)

Since the 1997 economic crisis, His Majesty the King of Thailand has promoted the idea of a “sufficiency economy”, which is interpreted as an economic model that stands against neoliberalism. (“Sufficiency Economy” stresses the middle path as the overriding principle for appropriate conduct by the populace at all levels. This applies to conduct at the levels of the individual, the family, and the community, as well as to the choice of a

balanced development strategy for the nation, so as to modernise in line with the forces of globalisation while shielding against its inevitable shocks and excesses. “Sufficiency” means moderation and due consideration in all modes of conduct, as well as the need for sufficient protection from internal and external shocks (1999 TDR Year-end Conference Distribution Material). But the concept has been subject to various interpretations. Coca Cola – a major symbol of capitalism – uses this “sufficiency economy” concept to promote their soft drinks!

People’s organisations in Thailand have grown from movements that attempted to explore alternative development, such as the alternative agriculture network, community forest network, herbal and alternative medicine, community and health-oriented development, and so on. But at present, the linkage of solutions at community and policy levels has not generated a “new imagination” or “new social ideology” for the majority of people in the country in the short term.

### 3) Linking with international anti-FTA groups

In recent years, people’s sectors around the world have joined hands to oppose trade liberalisation through the WTO. Currently, the movements against bilateral trade negotiation have gained more prominence. But other forms of trade relations, such as FTAs, Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) or other investment agreements, as well as unilateral trade liberalisation schemes such as ACMECS, have gained less attention. We need to push these issues on a par with the campaigning against WTO and make them better known to the public. The Thai people’s sector has to forge relationships for information exchange, analysis and mutual learning to develop strategies for the struggle against FTAs in various contexts, together with similar movements in South-east Asia, North-east Asia and Latin America. The most likely option is to establish an Asian anti-FTA movement.