DISCUSSION PAPERS REGARDING ISSUES FOR

YOUNG PEOPLE,

PEOPLE FROM ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS,

AND WOMEN,

FROM BURMA

Produced by the Nationalities' Youth Development Program

INTRODUCTION

The Nationalities Youth Development Program has been organized by a group of Shan and Karenni young people. Nine ethnic minority groups from Burma have been represented in the first three workshops and field work projects that were facilitated between March and October 1999. The program is attempting to enhance the participants analytical skills in political, economic and cultural affairs. We hope this will enable participants to support their own community organizations more effectively.

The discussion papers that are presented in this document were developed during the third workshop in Mae Hong Son province, Thailand during October 1999. Three papers are presented for further discussion. The first focuses on issues for young people from Burma, the second discusses issues relevant to people from ethnic minority groups in Burma, and the third paper reports on our discussion about issues for women from Burma. Each paper presents a summary of the main problems, and then makes suggestions about how to solve each problem.

These papers are not policy statements. These are not orders. The problems identified, and the suggestions recommended, may not be relevant to all the communities. However, we hope these discussion papers will help local communities in various ethnic minority groups to analyze your own situation more comprehensively. We hope that you will be inspired to analyze your community's major problems and develop some practical suggestions of your own.

DISCUSSION PAPER REGARDING ISSUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM BURMA

PROBLEMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM BURMA

- The closure of many schools and restrictions on students when schools are open are limiting educational opportunities for young people to broaden our knowledge and increase our skills.

- The lack of clear economic and political policies have created the economic recession which is especially hurting young people through the social problems we are experiencing.

- The supply of illicit drugs to young people, and our vulnerability due to a lack of education programs, is creating drug abuse and social problems.

- SPDC and the ethnic minority political parties use young people and children for forced labour and forced conscription into military service, which restricts our opportunities to develop.

- The lack of understanding between generations and difficulties for young people to gain experience restricts our opportunities to participate in leadership and decision making.

SUGGESTIONS TO REDUCE PROBLEMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM BURMA

PROBLEM :

The closure of many schools and restrictions on students when schools are open are limiting educational opportunities for young people to broaden our knowledge and increase our skills.

SUGGESTIONS :

- SPDC should reopen schools and open access to all the students.
- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should provide scholarships to poor students.
- Ethnic minority political parties should increase coordination of education programs in refugee camps.
- Ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should network with NGOs to organize small-scale education programs in the communities outside the refugee camps.

PROBLEM :

The lack of clear economic and political policies have created the economic recession which is especially hurting young people through the social problems we are experiencing.

SUGGESTIONS :

- SPDC, NLD and ethnic minority political parties should open dialogue to solve the country's political problems so that economic development can be sustainable.
- SPDC should promote an open market economy but include government protection against social and environmental exploitation.
- Ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should organize income generation projects to increase the self-reliance of local communities.
- Ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should organize trainings about economic policy.

PROBLEM :

The supply of illicit drugs to young people, and our vulnerability due to a lack of education programs, is creating drug abuse and social problems.

SUGGESTIONS :

- SPDC, ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should organize drug education programs based on harm-minimization principles.
- SPDC should redistribute land back to farmers to increase local economic opportunities.
- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should redistribute resources to primary health care and away from the military.
- United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) should increase participation of local farmers in their crops substitution programs.

PROBLEM :

SPDC and the ethnic minority political parties use young people and children for forced labour and forced conscription into military service which restricts our opportunities to develop.

SUGGESTIONS :

- SPDC should have legal reform to prohibit forced conscription for the people under age 18.
- Some of the Ethnic minority political parties should publicly agree to the Convention on Rights of the Child and stop conscripting people under 18 into their armies.
- International Labor Organization (ILO) should expel SPDC to pressure it to stop forced labour

PROBLEM :

The lack of understanding between generations and difficulties for young people to gain experience restricts our opportunities to participate in leadership and decision making.

SUGGESTIONS :

- Ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should organize regular meetings and discussion to exchange views, and for frank and mutual criticism.
- Ethnic minority youth organizations should lobby to ethnic minority political parties to increase youth participation in leadership and decision-making.
- Ethnic minority youth organizations should organize their own skills development program so that ethnic minority political parties will respect them more.

DISCUSSION PAPER REGARDING ISSUES FOR PEOPLE FROM ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS FROM BURMA.

PROBLEMS FACING PEOPLE FROM ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS :

- People from ethnic minority groups lack opportunities to maintain express and develop our cultural traditions and heritage.

- People from ethnic minority groups have been dispossessed of our land and so lack economic autonomy.

- Due to economic mismanagement and exploitation by the military junta leading to unemployment and inflation, people from ethnic minority groups are suffering from social and identity problems.

- People from ethnic minority groups lack access to health care and education and lack opportunities to organize these services, especially in remote areas.

- Due to oppression from SPDC and the ethnic minority political parties, people from ethnic minority groups suffer human rights violations such as forced labour and forced conscription and lack social and religious freedoms.

SUGGESTIONS TO REDUCE PROBLEMS FOR PEOPLE FROM ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS

PROBLEM

People from ethnic minority groups lack opportunities to maintain express and develop our cultural traditions and heritage.

SUGGESTIONS

- SPDC should introduce ethnic minority languages as a subject in government schools.
- SPDC, ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should organize cultural events and publish literature relevant to our cultural heritage.

PROBLEM

People from ethnic minority groups have been dispossessed of our land and so lack economic autonomy.

SUGGESTIONS

- SPDC should enact agrarian law reform to redistribute land back to local farmers.
- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should reduce agricultural and land taxes for poor farmers.
- Ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should support the development of farmer's trade unions.
- SPDC should protect and against foreign land ownership and foreign investment, that exploits local farmers and resources.

PROBLEM

Due to economic mismanagement leading to unemployment and inflation (as well as economic exploitation) by the military junta, people from ethnic minority groups are suffering from social and identity problems.

SUGGESTIONS

- SPDC, NLD and the ethnic minority political parties should open dialogue to solve the country's political problems, so that economic development can be sustainable.
- SPDC should promote an open market economy but include government protection against social and environmental exploitation.
- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should implement tax reform and protect against corruption
- Ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should seek and organize trainings about economic policy.
- Ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should organise income generation projects to increase the self reliance of local communities.

PROBLEM

People from ethnic minority groups lack access to health care and education and lack opportunities to organize services, especially in remote areas.

SUGGESTIONS

- Ethnic minority political parties and SPDC should redistribute resources to primary health care in remote areas and away from the military.
- Ethnic minority political parties and youth organizations should seek funding to develop primary health care programs in remote areas
- SPDC should reopen all schools and allow all students access to education.

- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should provide scholarships to economically poor students.
- Ethnic minority political parties should increase the coordination of education programs, in refugee camps.
- Ethnic minority youth networks should network with NGOs to organize small-scale education programs in the communities in foreign countries outside the refugees camps.

PROBLEM

Due to oppression from SPDC and the ethnic minority political parties, people from ethnic minority groups suffer human rights violations such as forced labour and forced conscription and lack social and religious freedoms.

SUGGESTIONS

SPDC should recognize the result of the 1990 election.

- SPDC should have legal reform to prohibit forced conscription for people aged under 18.
- Ethnic minority political parties should publicly agree to the Convention on Rights of the Child and stop conscripting people under 18 into their armies.
- The International Labor Organization (ILO) should expel SPDC to pressure them to stop using forced labor and porters.
- International organizations should support the tripartite dialogue between ethnic minorities, democratic parties and SPDC
- International organizations should recognize Committee Representing the People's Parliament.
- ASEAN should reconsider its Constructive Engagement towards Burma.

DISCUSSION PAPER REGARDING ISSUES FOR WOMEN FROM BURMA

PROBLEMS FACING WOMEN FROM BURMA :

- Women lack legal protection against rape as a weapon of war and against rape within the general community.

- The lack of health care services specific for women leads to problems with miscarriages, family planning and nutritional deficiencies.

- Women lack opportunities to participate in leadership of political, economic and cultural organizations, which leads to a lack of decision-making power.

- Women have a higher burden of work to support their family, which limits their opportunities for personal development and community participation.

- Women face discrimination in education after primary school.

- Women suffer a greater burden of forced labour, forced portering and forced participation in political propaganda because men hide when SPDC and revolutionary Armies come.

- Women are sold into the sex-trade industry due to economic problem and male chauvinism.

SUGGESTIONS TO REDUCE PROBLEMS FOR WOMEN FROM BURMA :

PROBLEM :

Women lack legal protection against rape as a weapon of war and against within the general community.

SUGGESTIONS :

- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should reform their laws to give more protection against rape.
- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should order their armies to stop using rape as a weapon of war and punish soldiers who disobey.
- Ethnic minority women's organizations and youth organizations should organize assertiveness training programs for women.
- Ethnic minority women's organizations and youth organizations should organize support groups for survivors of rape.

PROBLEM;

The lack of health care services specific for women leads to problems with miscarriages, family planning and nutritional deficiencies.

SUGGESTIONS;

- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should redistribute funds away from their military budget and into women’s health care programs.

- SPDC, ethnic minority political parties, women's organizations and youth organizations should organize primary health care programs for women and children at the village level.
- Foreign funding organizations should priorities primary health care programs for women and children.

PROBLEM;

Women lack opportunities to participate in leadership of political, economic and cultural organizations, which leads to a lack of decision-making power.

SUGGESTIONS;

- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should establish laws to guarantee equal opportunity for men and women.
- Ethnic minority women's organizations and youth organizations should organize skill development trainings for women to increase women's participation in leadership positions.
- Foreign funding organizations should not support organizations where less than 30% of the leaders are women.
- Ethnic minority women's organizations should lobby The Beijing Plus 5 Conference in 2000 to develop a program to increase opportunities for women in Burma.
- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should allow independent women's organizations.

PROBLEM;

Women have a higher burden of work to support their family, which limits their opportunities for personal development and community participation.

SUGGESTIONS;

- SPDC should develop policies to reduce the unemployment of women.
- Ethnic minority political parties, women's organizations and youth organizations should organize skills development training programs for women.
- Ethnic minority political parties, women's organizations and youth organizations should organize small-scale income generation programs for women to increase self-reliance.
- Ethnic minority political parties, women's organizations and youth organizations should organize gender awareness trainings for men, to increase support for women with family work.

PROBLEM;

Women face discrimination in education after primary school.

SUGGESTIONS;

- ethnic minority political parties and women's organizations should organize education programs for parents to decrease limits to women's participation.
- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should ensure that their education departments encourage equal opportunities for women and men.
- Ethnic minority women's organizations should lobby SPDC and ethnic minority political parties to make laws so that all women must attend high school.

PROBLEM;

Women suffer a greater burden of forced labour, forced portering and forced participation in political propaganda because men hide when SPDC and revolutionary Armies come.

SUGGESTIONS;

- ILO should expel SPDC to pressure it to stop forced labor and portering.
- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should stop using forced labor and porters.
- Ethnic minority political parties, women's organizations and youth organizations should organize programs to support women who are used as forced labor and porters.

PROBLEM;

Women are sold into the sex-trade industry due to economic problems and male chauvinism.

SUGGESTIONS;

- SPDC and ethnic minority political parties should make laws to punish brokers who traffic women into prostitution.
- Ethnic minority women's organizations and youth organizations should organize income generation projects for women at the village level to reduce economic pressures.
- Ethnic minority political parties, women's organizations and youth organizations should organize gender awareness workshops for men to reduce the demand for sex workers.
- Ethnic minority women's organizations should support women during and after they are involved with the sex trade.