



In the past 50 years, Thailand and its children have progressed further than many would have thought possible. Indicators tell of dramatic drops in infant mortality rates and other diseases commonly afflicting children; literacy rates have soared and far fewer children are malnourished. The achievements cannot be attributed to one body. They are the result of years of dedication by Thai society as a whole.

UNICEF has accompanied Thailand's children on their journey and has itself changed along the way. Fifty years ago, UNICEF was a needs-based organization. Today, UNICEF is adapting its role to ensure it is able to provide the most appropriate benefit to Thailand's youth.

*UNICEF in Thailand: A Journey of Fifty Years* tells a compelling narrative through the anecdotes and memorabilia of UNICEF's pioneers in Thailand.

"I consider it is a fitting tribute to His Majesty the King that this book was published as we celebrated his Sixth Cycle or 72nd birthday, and dedicated to the Children of Thailand with His Majesty's blessings."

H. E. Anand Panyarachun, UNICEF's Ambassador to Thailand



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& UNICEF EAPRO

19 Phra Atit Road  
Bangkok 10200  
Thailand

Baht360  
US\$9.95

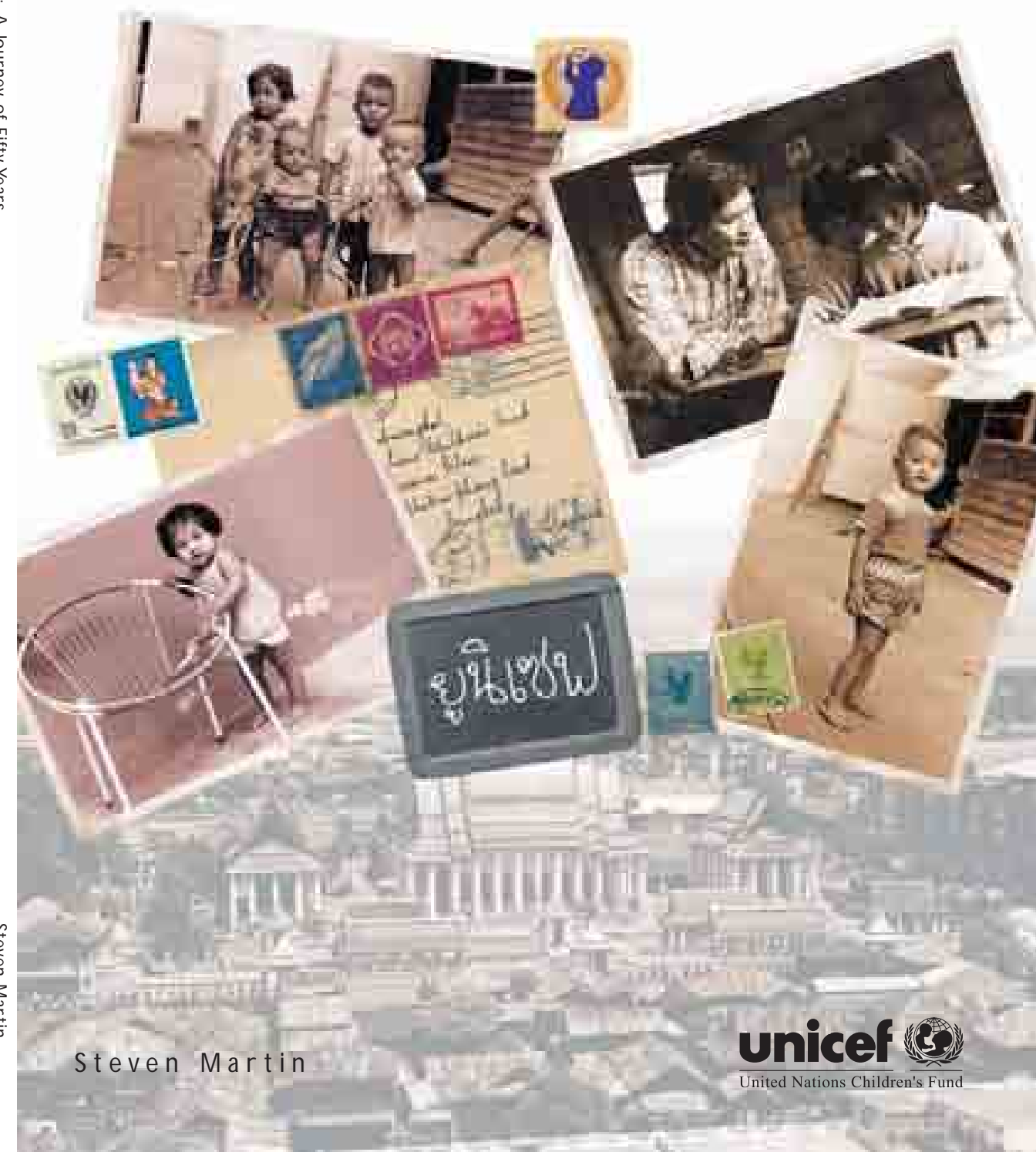


UNICEF in Thailand: A Journey of Fifty Years

Steven Martin

# UNICEF IN THAILAND

## A Journey of Fifty Years



Steven Martin





## UNICEF IN THAILAND

A Journey of Fifty Years



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ISBN: 974-8237-78-8

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Design and production: Keen Publishing (Thailand) Co. Ltd

Printed in Thailand



His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej encourages a handicapped boy to walk during a visit to a self-help community in the southern province of Narathiwat in 1985.

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TO THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND  
WITH THE BLESSING OF HIS MAJESTY THE KING

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## Acknowledgements

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UNICEF in Thailand would like to thank the following people for their considerable contributions in the research and writing of this book. We name below only some of the many individuals who actively participated in the compilation of this UNICEF history. *UNICEF in Thailand: A Journey of Fifty Years* could not have been written without the co-operation and tireless work of the countless staff and volunteers who have committed their energy for the benefit of the children of Thailand.

Special thanks to the Royal Patronage through the Grand Chamberlain of the Royal Household Bureau and to the Secretary General of the Office of the Royal Development Projects Board for contributing photographs of His Majesty the King, and to UNICEF Thailand's Ambassador and Former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun for his encouragement.

The idea for this book was conceived by Kul C. Gautam, Regional Director, UNICEF EAPRO. The editorial and project management team included Gamini Abeysekera, Representative, UNICEF Thailand; Ofelia C. Valdecanas, Regional Communication Officer; Urai Singhpaiboonporn, Senior Communication Assistant; Supachai na Pombejr, Former Information Officer (retired); Mallica Vajrathorn-Childers, Former Information Officer (retired); Suchada Sangsingkeo, Former Programme Officer (retired); David Keen, Managing Editor, Keen Publishing; and Steven C. Martin, Author. The book was designed by Nippon Penplugsakul, Keen Publishing.

Retired UNICEF staff who contributed their valuable memories as well as memorabilia and old photographs include Dera Sumitra, Laeka Piya-ajariya, Prathak Smithinant, Sudchit Bhinyoying, Prasert Boonyathisthan, Shyam B. Pandey, Chitpiya Chudharop, Phuriphan Phirakijkusol, Suebsakdi and Wandee Phiphobmongkol, Malinee (widow of Pricha) Chulavachana, Vichai Noumskont, Sasithorn Assavavi-sithchai, H.A.L. French, Boontham Dhanespramoj, Supote Saranthanachai and Malee Charoensuk.

From their homes abroad, retired UNICEF staff who contributed their tales, time and critical input include Wah Wong, Roberto Esquerro Barry, Francis F. Smithwick, David S. Burgess and Stephen H. Umemoto.

Current UNICEF staff who recounted their long years of service with UNICEF and provided information on country programmes include Pajjarindr Phirakijkusol, Onanong Panyajaray, Kitiya Phornsadja, Srisamorn Silawatanawongse, Sununtha Puenpipat, Wannipa Jongwutiwes, Chintana Limsiriponthong, Somsak Boonyawiroj and Usaneewan Legbumrung.

Thai counterparts who gave their time for interviewing and recounting their experiences working with UNICEF, as well as providing information materials and photographs, include Apilas Osathananda, Former Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office; Saisuree Chutikul, Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister's Office and Senator; Kittipan Kanjanapipatkul, Director General, Department of Technical and Economic Co-operation; Dr Sem Pringpoungaew, Former Deputy Minister, Ministry of Public Health; Dr Damrong Boonyuen, Director General, Department of Health; Dr Aree Valyasevi, Former Director, National Food and Nutrition Research Institute; Savitri Suwansathit, Chief, Office of the General Inspector, Ministry of Education; Elawat Chandraprasert, Director General, Public Welfare Department; Duenpen Sankhariksha, Director, Research and Development, Community Development Department; Vichit Vuthi-umpol, Director General, Public Relations Department; Uraiwan Pichitkul, Secretary-General, National Youth Bureau; Vitit Muntarbhorn, Professor of Law, Chulalongkorn University and Child Rights Advocate; Kesorn Khoratana, Health Technician, Department of Health, for her midwife kit; and the staff of the Audio Visual Unit, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Bangkok, for the old photographs of Thai villages.

The UNICEF New York Headquarters staff who helped look for 1950-1960 archival documents and photographs includes Adithara Keefe, Chief, Archive Unit; Achara Stone, Librarian; Michael Corbett, Deputy Director, Human Resource Development; Ellen Tolmie, Chief, Design and Photography Unit; and Elias Oyomba, Human Resource Development.

UNICEF's appreciation also goes to the Executive Committee of the Bangkok Staff Association who were involved in meetings and the book title competition.

The editorial and project management team would like to extend its profound thanks to all the individuals not mentioned above who provided invaluable information in the research and compilation of this book.

## Message from UNICEF's Ambassador to Thailand

### H. E. Anand Panyarachun

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Having observed and associated with the work of the United Nations Children's Fund, popularly known as UNICEF, I am intrigued by the close similarity of the vision and mission of this organization to the values, traditions and philosophy inherent in Thai Society. This somewhat invisible, but nonetheless significant, spiritual relationship may have contributed immensely to fostering the programme of co-operation between UNICEF Thailand and the Government and the people of Thailand through Royal Patronage.

Interestingly, the 50 years of UNICEF's journey in Thailand has coincided almost exactly with the reign of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who has guided and inspired the political, economic and social development spheres of Thailand for the past 54 years. Hence, I consider it is a fitting tribute to His Majesty the King that this book was published as we celebrated his Sixth Cycle or 72nd Birthday and dedicated to the Children of Thailand with His Majesty's blessings.

UNICEF, both globally and locally, has promoted the well-being of millions of children through a gradual and systematic process, which evolved from an emergency relief and rehabilitation approach to a more holistic approach for the development of children. This historical path of the organization, since its inception as a response to the post World War II situation of children, is also reflected in the journey of UNICEF in Thailand in the past 50 years. Today, UNICEF has quite impressively combined programmes addressing the basic needs of children with the fundamental rights of children to enable and ensure their survival, protection, development and participation. In doing so, UNICEF contributes to changing the lives of hundreds of thousands of children in Thailand year after year.

One reason for UNICEF's successful accomplishments in Thailand, which has even produced examples and replicable models of good practices for other countries, is the Royal Patronage for policies and projects aimed at human development. Among the

more than 3,000 projects scattered over the Kingdom, and currently under the Royal Patronage, a range of interventions and activities benefiting children both directly and indirectly can be seen. These are evident primarily in the areas of health, nutrition, security, water and sanitation, environment, education and skill development, social welfare, special studies and research. Some specific UNICEF-supported projects, such as distribution of milk for alleviating child malnutrition, iodization of salt for eliminating iodine deficiency disorders, provision of safe water and sanitation and assistance to educating school dropouts from poor families have been actively promoted by members of the Royal Family.

His Majesty's deep philosophical insight into life, influenced by both Buddhism and modern sciences, highlights that 'development' must be a process of 'providing comfort and progress to people who do not have the opportunity to help themselves'. This view is very much in line with the conceptual framework developed by UNICEF in addressing the issues of the most disadvantaged children and families. The special efforts by the Royal Family, led by His Majesty the King, focus on less privileged and vulnerable segments of this country, such as orphans, the poor and the hill tribe people.

The conceptual and practical guidelines that UNICEF has developed – including 'the best interest of the child', in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified in 1989, and, 'putting children first, in good times as well as bad', following the World Summit for Children Declaration of 1980 – seem to echo the same values enunciated by His Majesty, as well as the values that have been traditionally adopted and practised by Thai families and communities. Similarly, they are consistent with the emerging concerns, policies and plans relating to good governance where, the 'people-centred development', respect for human rights, decentralized management and community empowerment are emphasized. These factors have provided a breeding ground and a harmonious environment conducive to the planning and implementation of UNICEF-assisted projects in Thailand.

I commend UNICEF for this endeavour to compile the wealth of institutional and personal memories of the past 50 years of UNICEF operations in Thailand and to document them in a relatively complete and concise manner for the benefit of readers within the country and abroad.

In conclusion, I wish to recommend this book for those who are seeking an interesting, informative and inspiring account of a mutually satisfying and rewarding partnership between UNICEF and Thailand that is working for the well-being of yesterday's, today's and tomorrow's children.





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## Foreword

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The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been in operation in Thailand for 50 years. This book carries readers through the journey and examines UNICEF's future in continuing to ensure the survival, development, protection and participation of Thai children and children throughout the region. Any institution and individual should not only derive great pleasure from looking back on the challenges and achievements of the past but also should benefit from the lessons learned and the experiences shared to help shape their future. It is in this context that we embarked on the project to narrate the story of *UNICEF in Thailand: A Journey of Fifty Years*.



Thailand, with Bangkok as the base, has provided shelter to many members of the United Nations family, and UNICEF was among the first when it was established in December 1948. By virtue of its geographical location, easy access, infrastructure and other facilities, as well as the patronage of the Royal Family and the courtesy of the Thai government, Bangkok is UNICEF's regional hub. Therefore, the story of UNICEF in Thailand covers how the organization addresses children's issues in Thailand and in other countries throughout the East Asia and Pacific region.

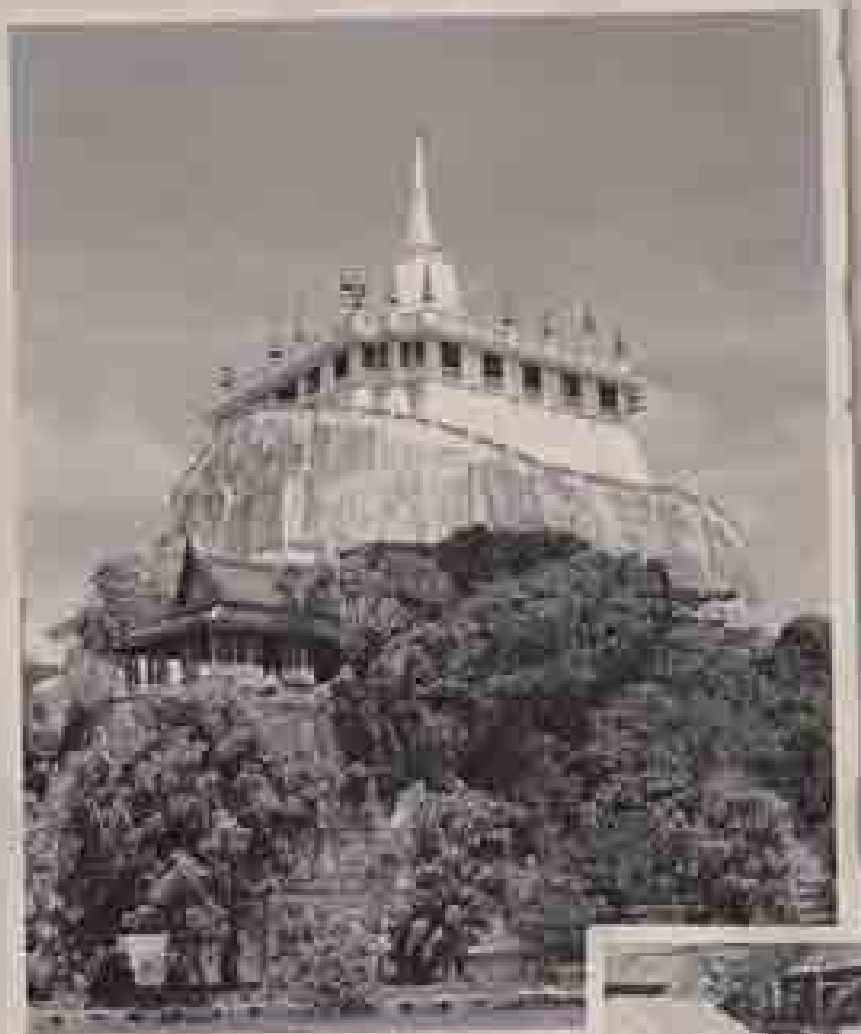
Many advisers, supporters, navigators and crew members have joined us in the course of our voyage on the UNICEF ship in the ocean of children. It is not possible to draw on the memories and capture insights from all of them – some are unfortunately no longer with us.

Nevertheless, with what we were able to gather from a variety of sources such as personal notes, official documents, press clippings, formal interviews and oral anecdotes, coupled with a large collection of photographs and memorabilia, we feel that a sufficiently complete story has emerged. The purpose of this book was not to write a comprehensive history of UNICEF in Thailand, but to document some interesting and inspiring landmarks and lessons. We sincerely hope that as you join us on this journey through the past with a view to the future, that you will be inspired to dedicate yourself to serving the children of Thailand, as well as the rest of the children throughout the world.

During the past five decades, Thailand's experience has greatly influenced UNICEF's regional and global policies and programming strategies. Looking ahead, we expect UNICEF to pioneer a new role for Thailand and other countries in the East Asia and Pacific region as they make the transition into the 21st century. We hope the next 50 years will be equally or more interesting, challenging and rewarding, and we encourage the next generation of staff to tell that story to the world.

Gamini Abeysekera  
Representative, UNICEF Thailand Office





## CHAPTER 1

## SETTING THE SCENE

More than half a century has passed since the end of World War II. To the vast majority of the world's population, those who were born after 1945, the conflict that engulfed the globe seems like distant history. No amount of black and white photographs or grainy newsreel footage can adequately portray the horror and misery that humankind inflicted upon itself during that period. And because the physical and psychological scars of the war have faded with time, it is difficult to appreciate the miracle of hope and optimism that the carnage of World War II inspired in its aftermath.



*Kampuchea Emergency Operation, June 1980*

UNICEF's initial relief efforts, the urgent distribution of food, medicine and clothing to the children of Europe, and later China, contributed greatly to alleviating the dire situation of children in these war-ravaged regions. Yet, these were not the only areas that had been devastated by the global war. Throughout much of Asia, the war had caused economies to collapse and poverty to surge. Particularly

in Europe's shattered Asian colonies, political and social upheaval brought on widespread malnutrition and disease. By 1948, UNICEF was looking toward expanding its emergency aid to these parts of Asia, and the government of the Philippines invited the organization to make Manila its headquarters in the Far East. The field of operations was to cover a vast area from the Philippine archipelago, south to Indonesia and stretching as far west as India, embracing a total population of more than 600 million people.



UNICEF was a product of postwar idealism. It began as an urgent appeal to ease the suffering of the millions of children affected by the war, regardless of what their governments' wartime role had been. From the very beginning it was agreed that the needs of the world's children should be kept above politics, and this is the foundation on which all of UNICEF's policies continue to rest to this day.



*Danny Kaye, comedian from the United States, visited Thai children at their village house, 1954*

In 1948, UNICEF arrived in Manila and, due to a severe shortage of undamaged buildings, set up temporary headquarters in a suite at the Manila Hotel. While the city was almost completely destroyed by the war, its medical infrastructure was still largely intact compared to other countries in the region. Soon, it became apparent that Manila's location on the continent's fringe made it not the best location for the attainment of UNICEF's pan-Asian goals. Thailand, however, was located more or less centrally in the region. Of equal importance, Thailand's capital city had not been devastated by the war, nor was its population divided by guerrilla conflict.

To understand why Thailand was able to weather World War II comparatively unscathed, it should be remembered that Thailand never suffered the ignominy of being a European colony and therefore could deal with the Japanese threat in a unique manner. After a brief but fierce resistance to the invading forces, Thailand surrendered and concluded a military pact with Japan, thereby avoiding an inevitable and destructive conquest. In 1944, it became apparent that Japan would lose the war. By then, Thailand's anti-Japanese 'Free Thai' movement had infiltrated the government and readied itself for a shift in power. Allied Forces' bombs were dropped on targets in Bangkok and other major cities but, fortunately, there was no battle for the control of Thailand.



*First office of the Thai Area Mission was at the Ministry of Public Health situated by the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok*

While the number of Thai wartime casualties was relatively low, once the tide turned against Japan, the war did have a grave effect on the Thai people. Thailand's flow of imports and exports was reduced to a trickle as Japan lost control of Asian shipping lanes. This brought on shortages of food and medicine, particularly for those living in rural areas. An outbreak of disease was caused in part by malnutrition and in

part by the prohibitively high cost or outright lack of medicine. Not surprisingly, it was Thailand's children who were most vulnerable to the conditions created by the war. Tuberculosis, malaria and yaws were the three most common causes of death and disability when UNICEF established its home in Bangkok with the transfer of its Far East headquarters from Manila in March of 1949.



Twenty years ago, when I was a member of the UNICEF executive board,  
I never imagined the kinds of problems we would be facing today.

**Dr Damrong Boonyoen,**  
**Director General, Department of Health**

I think the advantage UNICEF has over other UN agencies is that  
it is one of very few UN agencies that remain nonpoliticized.

**H.E. Anand Panyarachun**  
**UNICEF Ambassador in Thailand**



Despite the difficulties posed by the postwar situation, UNICEF soon learned that one of the great advantages of working in Thailand was the tolerant atmosphere of the society that fostered an openness conducive to solving problems. Similarly, Bangkok provided an ideal base for all regional operations because of its central

location. This was to prove especially important during and immediately following the Second Indochina War when social and political upheaval enveloped Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and Thailand became an important link in the lifeline to multitudes of desperate children in these war-stricken countries.



Thailand's progressive thinking and actions have also led to its becoming a role model, not just for the region but for developing countries all over the world. In the 1950s, many of Europe's former colonies were becoming independent. One of the legacies of colonialism was the health service infrastructure. A system that revolved around a large central hospital located in the capital city and a handful of provincial hospitals. In many countries these hospitals were generously staffed and well equipped, using up the vast majority of the health service budget. In the euphoria of independence, grand and unrealistic plans were often made, and the large central or provincial hospitals became showcases for expensive equipment that benefited only a small portion of the population. Qualified doctors and nurses were reluctant to leave the city and set up practices in rural areas where their expertise was needed most. Small satellite hospitals located in

provincial or district capitals were understaffed, poorly equipped, and their resources were stretched far beyond their capacity.

Thailand had a similar system in place, but was quick to admit that the top-heavy infrastructure was badly flawed and that a new system, known as primary health care, needed to be tried.

Based on the concept of 'barefoot doctors' in China, the radical new idea turned the old system on its head. Instead of pouring money into large central and provincial hospitals in hopes that the benefits would trickle down, the primary health care system started at the grass-roots level. Lay persons were trained in giving advice and basic medical assistance for illnesses, such as diarrhoea, that were widespread and easily treated. Known as 'village health volunteers', these lay persons focused on measures of prevention, teaching basic hygiene in villages where the concept was unknown.

By 1978, the idea of primary health care was officially adopted by UNICEF and the World Health Organization at a conference in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan. Thailand had been employing the concept for some time and therefore became a model for other countries wishing to initiate



A public health nurse demonstrates the way to mix oral rehydration salts to a village mother

similar programmes. Following the adoption of the policy by UNICEF, Thailand magnified its efforts to include the whole country. A primary health care project in Lampang province was a pioneering effort, and in the 1980s, Thailand was frequently visited by officials from other developing countries wishing to observe the fruits of this shift in health care philosophy. A key achievement was universal child immunization, which protected Thai children from six dangerous diseases: tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus, polio and measles.

Likewise, nutrition was an area in which Thailand was an innovator. The standard approach to nutrition had always been to view it in relation to food and

agriculture. It is now known that the availability of food alone does not guarantee that the population of a country will be well nourished. Paradoxically, there were, and continue to be, countries in which people suffer from malnutrition while their governments export significant amounts of food. This is because proper nutrition is more than just having enough food to eat; it is knowing to eat the right food at the right time. Proper methods of hygiene are also important if disease is to be avoided, especially among children. Good nutrition, hygiene and health care are intertwined, and Thailand has promoted policies that give equal attention to all three aspects. This approach allowed Thailand to make great strides in advancing the health of its people in the 1970s and 1980s, strides that other developing countries have followed.



Proper nutrition is more than just having enough food to eat

A society that exploits its women and children is doomed.

Savitri Suwansathit  
General Inspector, Ministry of Education



Thai school children participate in a campaign against drugs and irresponsible social behaviour leading to HIV/AIDS

More recently, the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS is yet another area where Thailand has been in the forefront. When the first cases of the disease began to appear in Thailand, the initial reaction was one of denial. Especially disturbing to many was the fact that the incurable disease was spread mainly via sexual contact, a taboo subject in polite Thai society. But Thailand was quick to realize that ignoring HIV/AIDS would not make it go away. Men contracted the disease through contact with sex-workers and then brought the disease home to their wives. Women infected with HIV began giving birth to HIV-positive babies. By confronting the problem head on with UNICEF-assisted programmes that

stressed prevention through education, Thailand is now unique among developing countries in that the number of new HIV/AIDS infections is beginning to decline and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS is being well tackled. Once again, Thailand has generously offered to share what was learned through its own experiences so that other countries in the same predicament might benefit.

As it looks to the future, Thailand seems once again poised to make history. The concept of child participation – of actually giving children some say in their own affairs – is relatively new and not yet universally accepted. While some nations



are content to pay lip service to the idea of child participation, Thailand has already acted upon it. In 1998, two children, acting as official delegates, accompanied the Thai delegation to submit a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, Switzerland. The children were there to share their experiences and to give their opinions on programmes that would directly affect them and millions of other children. The event was widely hailed as a breakthrough in advancing the practice of child participation and, thanks to Thailand, the concept of child participation is one step closer to being accepted around the world.

Apart from the evolution in the nature of providing assistance, UNICEF's funding strategy also has evolved over the years. Quite early on it became obvious that if UNICEF was to continue to be effective it could not shoulder the burden of providing funding on its own. Recipient countries would have to contribute to the cause as much as their means allowed. This concept, known as 'matching', worked to increase the number of recipients of UNICEF aid. More importantly perhaps, it also helped to ensure that host countries would see UNICEF not as some charitable cow to be milked but as a dedicated partner in improving the lives of local



children. Because all contributions are voluntary, UNICEF-supported projects must do well in the field to guarantee government satisfaction and to ensure that the funding will be sustained or increased, a strategy that sets UNICEF apart from other aid organizations. Likewise, continued good performance and accountability are essential if UNICEF is to be able to rely on individuals and the private sector for their support.

Over the years, the relationship between UNICEF and Thailand has changed from being donor/recipient oriented to being

a mutually advantageous partnership. UNICEF benefits greatly from the knowledge gleaned from Thailand's experience in programmes designed to uplift the health, education and welfare of its people. Thailand's wise choice to invest in bettering the quality of life of its citizens has contributed greatly to the growth, stability and prosperity of the Kingdom. Surely, the day is not far off when Thailand's role will progress to the next level: that of a donor country contributing funds to UNICEF for the betterment not only of children in Thailand but also children in less prosperous countries in the region and beyond. 🌐



If I were an adult, I would never underestimate a child.

*Children's Voices,*  
UNICEF, 1998



*On his visit to Thailand in 1992, Mr James Grant, former UNICEF Executive Director, was granted an audience with His Majesty the King*

Thailand is extremely fortunate to be blessed with the King and Royal Family who take a genuine interest in the well-being of the Kingdom's people. Meticulously planned and lovingly executed, Thailand's royally sponsored projects often mirror and complement work that UNICEF is involved in, such as programmes to promote milk production and the consumption of iodized salt.

UNICEF Thailand's Ambassador and former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun explains His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's unique role in promoting the welfare of the Kingdom's children, "Of course in Thailand UNICEF has done a very good job partly because of the King's personal interest in children. The King himself has undertaken a number of projects that directly concern the public health of Thai children, dealing with such problems as leprosy and malnutrition. In this Kingdom, whatever the King says, whatever the King does, people follow voluntarily. So I think here you have, sort of, a built-in advantage over UNICEF operations in other countries."



At the presentation of the first Thai proof coins in a series commemorating the International Year of the Child, a Thai boy from the UN International School in New York reads a welcoming address to H.M. Queen Sirikit in 1981

## BANGKOK BEGINNINGS

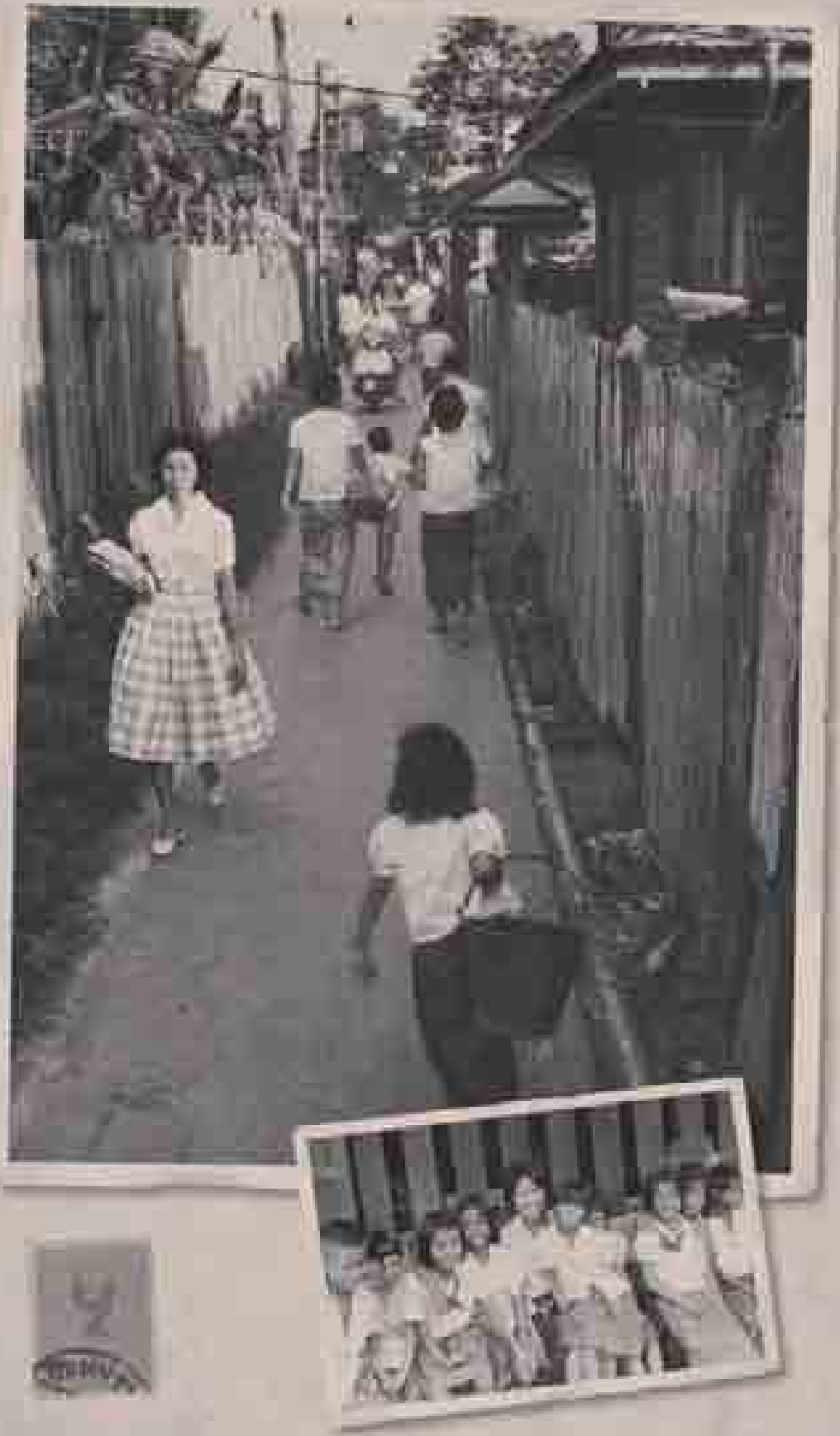
The list of people who have been a part of UNICEF during its first 50 years in Thailand is a long one, and rightfully topping any such list would be the name Spurgeon 'Sam' Keeny. Indeed, it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that, for the first decade of its existence, Sam Keeny was UNICEF to the people of Thailand and much of Asia.



*Sam Keeny visits with Thai children*

Arriving in Thailand as Regional Director in 1950 at the age of 57, the Pennsylvania native set about to do something that had never been done before: to provide aid for millions of Asia's children – 'half the world's children', by Sam Keeny's own estimation. Only amid the can-do spirit that prevailed after World War II could such an optimistic mandate have been initiated, and then only with the efforts of a man that embodied that spirit. During the Second World War, Sam Keeny delivered ten million tons of supplies to war-torn Italy for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Later came a posting in France with the newly formed UNICEF, where Mr Keeny learned the science of procurement and distribution.

While the setting in Thailand was vastly different from that of Europe, the goals were essentially the same. Children were suffering from diseases that could be easily treated and living in conditions that could be improved. All that was needed was money and people who cared. Serving as the eyes, ears and conscience of UNICEF in Asia, Mr Keeny was intolerant of any kind of bureaucracy that might stand in the way of UNICEF's mission, but pragmatic enough to know his limitations as a cog in the United Nations machine and as an invited guest of Thailand and the other countries in the region. Still, he found it hard to control his sense of urgency at promoting the needs of deprived children. In December 1951 he wrote:





*A UNICEF mobile health service unit is in action providing health check-ups for Thai schoolchildren in the early 1960s*



lars. This is a lot of money, although it means only five cents, U.S., per child for our 250 million kiddies. We note, however, that...the member States of the United Nations are spending 2,000 million dollars a week on arms. In other words, they are spending every hour, day and night, on armaments what UNICEF is spending in four years for nearly one-third of the world's poorest children."

Mr Keeny, who passed away in 1988, is recalled by former colleagues as a man of action and compassion. Wah Wong, UNICEF Programme Officer from 1955 until 1963, gives his recollections, "In a very short time, Sam Keeny came to personify UNICEF in Asia. Remember there was no Convention on the Rights of the Child back then to provide a programming framework; no five-year plans in which to forecast a neat progression of targets and objectives...Sam had to fly by the seat of his pants, persuading ministries to put up scarce resources to implement programmes that did not have sufficient personnel but plenty of heart, which Sam



*Simon Polak, the first UNICEF Representative to Thailand, in audience with Their Majesties the King and Queen, 1965*

particularly the Ministry of Public Health, for the benefit of children.

Of a staff of 17 at the UNICEF TAM office, Mr Polak was the only foreigner. All the Thai staff who worked with Mr Polak knew him as an honest, hard-working and fair boss. Ms. Suchada Saengsingkeo, former Programme Officer, recalls,

himself helped to provide. He would not excuse programme staff who sat in the office more than two weeks at a time, for how could we know whether we were providing the right things to make programmes work if we didn't see things with our own eyes?" In summary, Mr Wong adds, "Sam was the right person at the right time for Asia, when it was emerging from the horrors of war; when everything was chaotic; and when what was needed was someone who could stimulate the region's governments to do great things for needy children with more or less no money and few trained personnel."

"We were like one big family and we called him Papa." It was Mr Polak who signed the Plans of Operations for the countries he represented and who attended all official functions. When Mr Polak retired in 1965, he was honoured with a Royal decoration that showed Thailand's appreciation for his service.

Almost concurrent with Sam Keeny's term, Simon Polak, a Dutch national, served as the head of the Thai Area Mission (TAM) and as the first UNICEF Representative for Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Brunei from 1949 to 1965. Mr Polak had previously worked with the Thai government,

The city of Bangkok into which Sam Keeny and Simon Polak arrived is not the same city in which we live today. Bangkok has changed so tremendously within the past 50 years that even those who have witnessed the metamorphosis firsthand are usually at a loss for words when it comes to describing the old city. Typical recollections such as, 'There was less traffic', or, 'There were no tall buildings,' miserably fail to satisfy the imagination. Fortunately, tidbits gleaned from the writings of UNICEF pioneers Sam Keeny and Margaret Gaan, former Programme Officer, provide us with rare glimpses of a sleepy but exotic Bangkok in the mid-20th century.



The 'Venice of the East' sobriquet was still appropriate back then and the city was criss-crossed with a grid of canals and streams. It was a low city with a magical skyline: brilliantly tiled temple roofs and the spires of stupas thrust skyward through the canopy of palm and ficus trees. The Grand Palace, surrounded by medieval-looking crenellated walls, was the undisputed heart of the city. Nearby was Sanam Luang, the royal cremation ground, an expanse of grass partially shaded by a ring of tamarind trees.

\* The Weekend Market remains a Bangkok institution. In later years it was moved to Suan Chatuchak, where it grew to its current size and is claimed to be the world's largest outdoor market.



The Dusit district circa 1960

### Sam Keeny's Reports

Sam Keeny produced seven volumes of monthly reports during his posting in Thailand as Regional Director of UNICEF, spanning the period from June 1950 to May 1963. Far from being the collection of dry observations and statistics that one might expect, the reports are replete with anecdotes and local colour that shed light into the character of the man who penned them. Mr Keeny never seemed to tire of his job and was quick to marvel at the customs and cultures that he encountered with a child-like wonder that goes far in explaining why he was just the right person for his position. Also evident is his thrift and ingenuity. One of Mr Keeny's typewriters had a lame number 8 key. He solved this problem with typical artifice, substituting the letter S and then going over the finished report with a pen to turn each S into an 8.

After breakfast we rode to work slowly past the bird market (on boats), from which we drew philosophic sustenance for the day's work. There were always of course, the busy toddlers in the garb of Eden before the Fall; who rise with the dawn, slide down off the boats and clamber onto the bank, where they busy themselves gravely with the mysterious occupations of childhood. At first they all look alike; but soon one comes to tell them apart - the girls by the variety of silver mesh fig leaves; the boys by the chains about their tummies hung with hearts and other symbols of good luck and fertility, but still more by their haircuts, which suggests the work of an imaginative barber specializing in tonsures. These youngsters are the daily reminders of the 250 million children in the countries we serve.

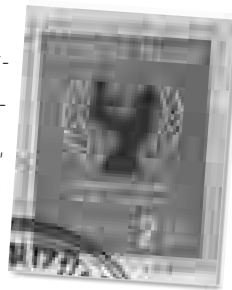
S.M. Keeny  
July, 1953



Henry R. Labouisse, second UNICEF Executive Director, and his wife, accompanied by Simon Polak, greet a Thai boy in Bangkok

Just up river from Sanam Luang was Banglamphu, a commercial district lined with quaint shop houses and cooled by the *ton lamphu*, a tree of generous shade after which the district was named.\* Banglamphu was then known city-wide for its market, which specialized in tropical fruits and Thai sweets. After nearly ten years, during which the UNICEF Thailand office was located in the Ministry of Public Health, a larger space was found to house UNICEF. Sitting grandly on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, the

available structure was a former palace and one-time residence of Pridi Phanomyong, whose tenure as Prime Minister lasted just long enough for him to change Thailand's name back to Siam, before being forced into exile by a coup d'etat in 1947. This bit of history gave the new UNICEF office some colour. As Margaret Gaan related in her memoirs, "It has a secret door in what had been Pridi's library and was our



\* The public park behind the crenellated walls of Phra Sumen Fort, a short walk up river from the UNICEF office, is home to Banglamphu's last two remaining *lamphu* trees.



UNICEF's first Regional Office for Far East Asia and Pakistan at 19 Phra Atit Road

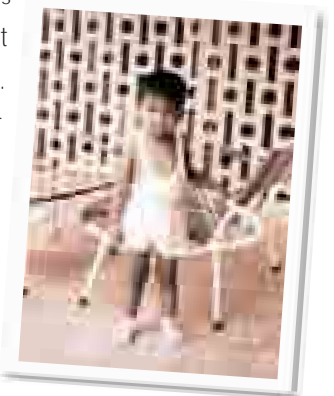
Supply Division, through which Pridi is said to have fled when his rivals came to arrest him. It always seemed to us that he could have got out more quickly through any of the ordinary doors – that secret door was very hard to open and creaked loudly – but it gave our office a certain cachet and our janitor loved to show it off to visitors."

The compound had other curious features. It contained an ornate brick and stucco mansion that was reputedly haunted (see the Middle Building, page 42) and there was even a souvenir from World War II – an air-raid shelter – once located under what is now the guard's station next to the gate. During the war, the buildings at 19 Phra Atit Road were spared damage by Allied Forces' bombs, but nearby Wat Chanasongkhram was not so fortunate. A bomb intended for the Bangkok Noi Railway Station across the river in Thonburi

is said to have landed on the monastery, resulting in great loss of life.

As a new office, Pridi's former residence was a step above the original office attached to the Ministry of Public Health. Still, there were some bugs to be ironed out. Electricity was fickle and power outages were common. During one blackout that threatened to delay a UNICEF report due the following day, the hand-cranked mimeograph

machine had to be moved to the open-air ground floor so that the headlights from an automobile could be used to illuminate nocturnal efforts to meet the deadline. The office's location on the banks of the river was aesthetically pleasing, but, as Ms Gaan wrote, there were problems. "All around the building there were verandas and windows, on every floor and at every angle, to catch the slightest breeze – fine for a home in Bangkok, especially one on the river, but a major disadvantage for an office, for our mountains of papers tended to fly about like dandelion puffs. We were forever making grabs at papers, holding them down with hands and forearms and elbows, then peeling





This is the month when servants are said to give notice without warning, when lovers quarrel without cause, and in general when reason departs. Presumably to forestall consequences so dire, the Thai Government has ordained that, until the rains come, Government offices shall work only in the mornings. UNICEF continues to work throughout the day, but we trust that any unusual asperities in correspondence this month will be charitably attributed to the heat.

S.M. Keeny  
April, 1951

them off where they had stuck to our everlastingly perspiration-damp skin."

It would be years before the Bangkok electric company could generate adequate electricity to support an air-conditioner, but once it became a possibility, Ms Gaan set out to convince Sam Keeny, who was decidedly against the idea, of the advantages of conditioned air. "...One day we dragged him out to the veranda to show him a big sheaf

of pink, yellow and blue papers, undoubtedly copies from our file banks, floating away on the river, looking like pretty lotus flowers, lost forever. But it was the pigs that finally decided him. His room, which was the only one big enough for meetings, overlooked a small dock. Until we had air-conditioning, every meeting took place to the accompaniment of the squealing of pigs being unloaded from river boats at the dock below, on their way to slaughter."



Early UNICEF people were much like missionaries, totally devoted and prepared to risk their lives to get things done.

Ms Mallica Vajrathom-Childers  
Former Information Officer



Elephants hauled penicillin, syringes, health teams and vans with loudspeakers to remote parts of Thailand to help eradicate yaws



For the vast territory that the UNICEF office in Thailand was responsible for, the size of the staff was astonishingly small. Mr Wong lists the people working for Mr Keeny in the old days, "The Regional Office for Asia in those early years was not large, considering that, until the early 1960s, it was responsible for India as well. The International staff consisted of Mr Keeny's deputy, Brian Jones; his two programme officers, Margaret Gaan and myself; Victor Hitch as medical specifications officer; Tony Meager as supply officer, Norman Winter as accountant, Anil Roy as Norman's assistant, and later Tran Phu as personnel officer, plus one or two secretaries. The local Thai staff was headed by Mr Saward Apaiwongse." In her memoirs, Ms Gaan wrote, "I remember a year when only Sam and Wah and I were in Bangkok to do all the work of preparing for an Executive Board meeting. It was never done faster nor more efficiently because we had to consult no one but ourselves, and our consultation consisted, not of long meetings, but of a word or two, a raised eyebrow, a nod or shake of the head." Waxing nostalgic in a report, Mr Keeny referred to the times as "the Halcyon

days of UNICEF, before we developed policies and precedents."

As UNICEF grew, so did its staff and their needs for space. Eventually a third building was constructed on the property with the cost funded by the Thai government through the Ministry of Public Health. Built in 1973, it is an example of the boxy architecture that characterized the building boom of the 1960s and features a decorative sun-screen on the facade and UNICEF spelled out in a no-nonsense, 60s-era font. The old office, originally leased by UNICEF from the Crown Property Bureau, now has a fence separating it from the other two buildings.

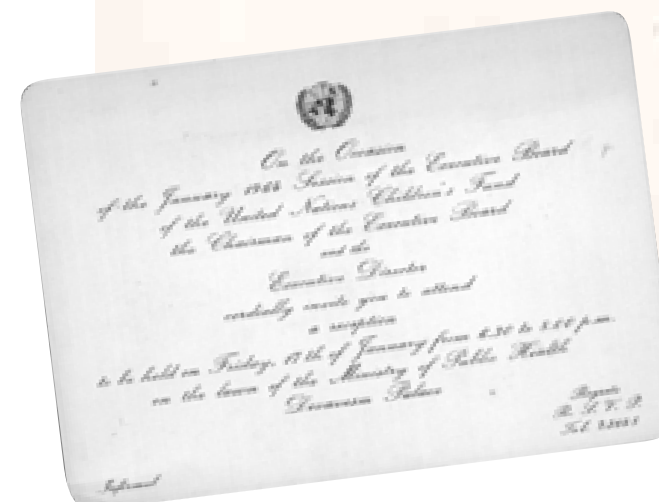
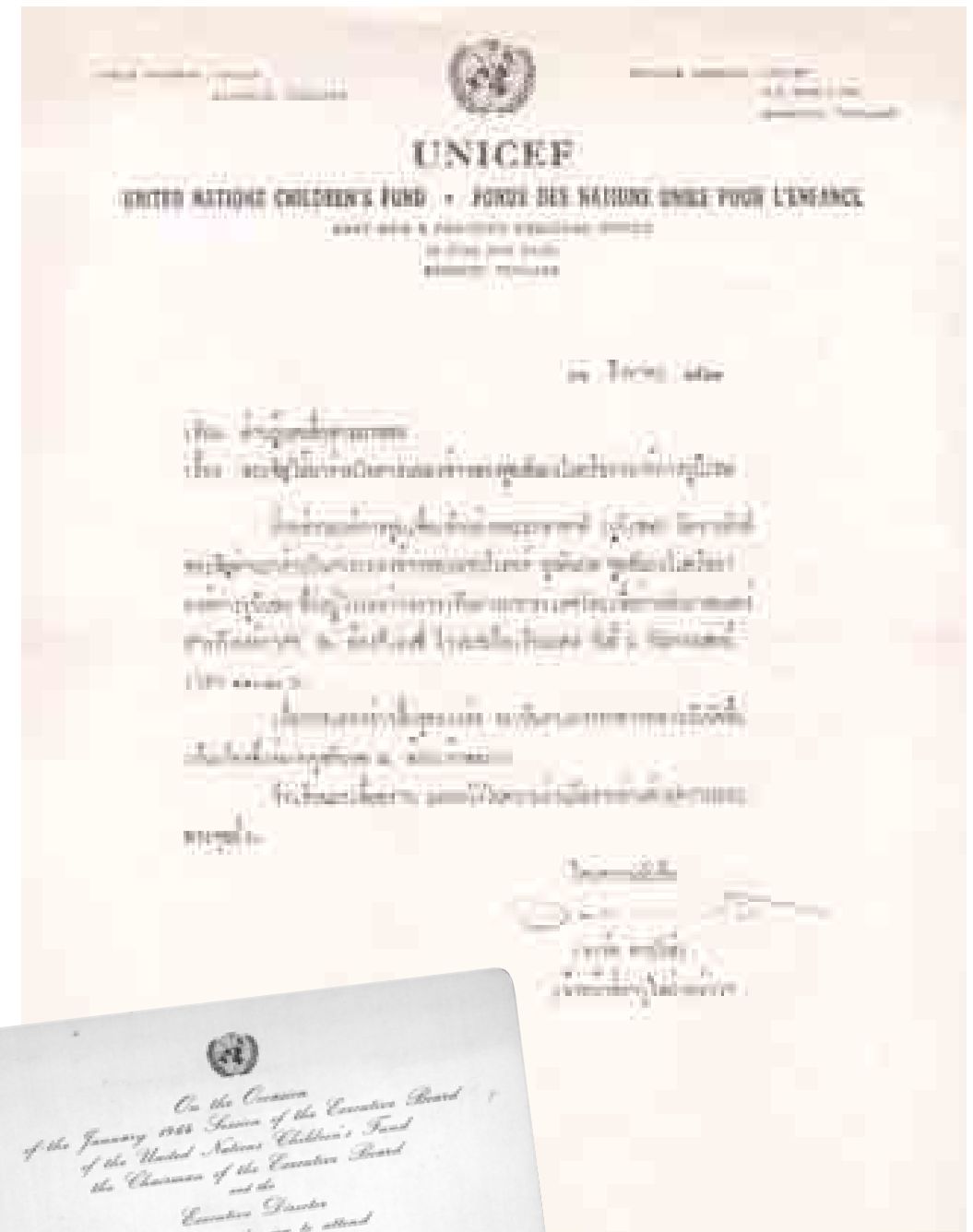
By the 1970s, Banglamphu had undergone many changes. The electric trams that once glided up and down Phra Atit Road had been retired and Bangkok's fleet of trishaws was no longer tolerated on city streets. If the UNICEF compound, the surrounding neighbourhood and Bangkok itself have been transformed beyond recognition in the past 50 years, one thing has stayed essentially the same: the Chao Phraya River, or at least the vessels that ply it. Margaret Gaan describes her view of the great waterway from the office, "All sorts of traffic bustles by on that busy river: small ships, tug boats, motor boats with rudder-shafts as long as tails, launches, ferry boats, junks, sail boats, tiny paddle boats, rafts as big as football fields made of teak logs roped together..."





## The Middle Building

Of the three buildings that occupy the compound at 19 Phra Atit Road, one stands out as an example of an early 20th-century mansion known in Thai as *wang gao*, or 'old palace' because it was once the residence of nobility. At first glance the structure appears to be a mere duplicate of a European model, but closer inspection reveals Thai touches, most of which were designed to make the building better suited for the tropics. Shuttered windows, a European feature, are coupled with half moon-shaped transoms of filigreed wood above doors and windows. This would have allowed air to circulate even when the doors and windows were bolted shut. Along the side of the building facing the river, a wide veranda was once open to admit cooling breezes. Today the building serves as the UNICEF Office for Thailand. It has been sealed with glass to keep heat and noise out and air-conditioning in, but despite the modern innovations, the old mansion still has a charmingly decrepit air, which seems to add credence to stories of the restless spirits that have come to inhabit it.





## CHAPTER 2

## A PROGRAMME SAMPLER

During a trip into the field, Sam Keeny once heard the remark of a Thai villager who had already been exposed to development projects organized and implemented by outsiders. "Some of them scratch where we don't itch," the villager said, and Mr Keeny took note. Since its arrival in Thailand, UNICEF has striven to keep a sharp focus on its goals: providing assistance to children in need. But as times and circumstances change, UNICEF has changed along with them. By the 1960s it was no longer possible or even desirable to have a single person shouldering the responsibility for overseeing all of UNICEF's projects in Asia. Likewise, the very nature of the UNICEF programmes and policies began to evolve to keep up with developments in the philosophy of child assistance.

As UNICEF was born of emergency conditions created by World War II, it is not surprising that UNICEF's initial projects in Thailand were offshoots of the emergency assistance that was given to Europe and China in the wake of the war. Thailand's school milk programme and the anti-yaws campaign had their roots in the emergency milk distribution and anti-syphilis campaigns of postwar Europe. As the 1950s wore on however, it became evident that such projects as distributing food or immunizing children against diseases were not enough. These 'single-purpose' projects, involving nutrition, health or sanitation, each filled a basic need, yet there had been no attempt to combine or integrate the different projects. By the mid-1970s, a new approach, known as Basic Services, worked to do just that. The result was that programmes began to interface with each other and produce a multiplier effect, benefiting far more children than before.



Another shift in philosophy that began in the 1960s was the move to embrace long-term planning that focused on development. Instead of shipping tons of powdered milk to a needy country, UNICEF would encourage and assist the country to develop its own dairy industry. Community awareness and involvement were promoted, not only to inform people of how their children would benefit from the projects, but also to ensure that the projects would foster lasting traditions. This came from the realization that a sense of ownership by the people in the community is a key for the sustainability and success of projects.

While its goals have remained essentially the same, UNICEF's methods for achieving those goals have gone through some significant changes over the years. And while not every programme in which UNICEF involved itself was a complete

success, no project ever failed through lack of effort or dedication. The following is a sampler of just a handful of the many programmes that UNICEF helped to implement during its 50 years of work in Thailand.



**UNICEF is willing to do daring things that other international organizations wouldn't even consider.**

**Dr Saisuree Chutikul**  
**Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister's Office, Senator and**  
**Former Director of the National Youth Bureau**



## ERADICATING SCOURGES: YAWS AND LEPROSY

Yaws is as loathsome a disease as the name suggests, a plague of open sores that cover the entire body of the victim – face, hands, legs, nothing is spared. The excruciating pain caused by yaws means that the victim is disabled, reduced to lying around while trying to keep pestering flies at bay. When sores erupt on the soles of the feet it becomes very difficult to walk, and if yaws infects the palms of the hands, it is very painful to grip tools. Thus a village afflicted by a severe outbreak of yaws is in danger of malnutrition as people are often in too much pain to farm or hunt. Yaws is caused by the spirochete, akin to syphilis, and the characteristic sores resemble the chancre ulcers of that disease. But yaws is not spread through sexual contact. It is highly contagious and can be spread by casual contact, by flies and other insects, or is even picked up by walking barefoot through an infected patch of dirt. Just a few decades ago, yaws was endemic throughout the tropics, and rural villages in southern, central and northeastern Thailand were commonly infected. The disease did not thrive in the north, where relatively cool temperatures kept it at bay.



*Administering the anti-yaws vaccination*



*Before vaccination*

UNICEF targeted yaws early on for a number of reasons. It was quickly and cheaply cured with a single injection of penicillin, and the injections could be administered by almost anybody with a minimum of training. The cure was often dramatic: within days of the injection the victim's ulcers dried up and healed with little trace. A highlight of Danny Kaye's 1955 documentary about UNICEF was the seemingly miraculous recovery of a seven-year-old Thai boy suffering from a severe case of yaws that had covered his entire body. That such a cure could be had for so little expense perfectly illustrated to donors in the United States and Europe the difference that UNICEF could make. Still, if the disease was easily cured, getting into isolated villages to examine and vaccinate was not a simple matter. Besides the hardship involved in actually reaching remote villages, language and cultural barriers had to be overcome. It is easy to forget that a few decades ago, there were parts of Thailand where central Thai was neither spoken nor understood. Dr Sem Pringpoungkaew, Director of Chiang Rai

Provincial Hospital in the 1950s and later Deputy Minister of Public Health, recalls what it was like making first contact with an infected village in the hinterlands. "We had to gain their trust. But we couldn't do this by just talking to them; they couldn't understand us. We had to use our eyes and expressions to show that we didn't look down on them, that we meant no harm. Some of these villages were too far to be visited in a day. Sometimes we would have to sleep in the village and eat communally with villagers who were infected with yaws and covered with sores. We couldn't show that we were put off by this or it would offend them." Teams like the one which Dr Sem accompanied scoured the countryside until every villager had been examined and treated. By the early 1960s yaws had been almost completely eradicated. The effectiveness of the UNICEF anti-yaws campaign can be seen in its modern obscurity. What was once a plague of biblical proportions, feared throughout Southeast Asia, is now largely forgotten.



*After vaccination*



Leprosy is another hideous disease that has inspired dread since the dawn of history. Caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae*, leprosy is a contagious disease that, if not arrested with drugs, causes gross disfigurement as it attacks the skin, flesh and nerves. So horrible was the stigma of leprosy that in cultures all over the globe, sufferers of the disease were banished from their homes and villages and forced to live in isolated colonies. Thailand was no exception. A few generations ago, it was not uncommon for victims of leprosy to be chased from their homes by their neighbours and family members and exiled to the fringes of society and a life of begging. Many victims were hidden away in some dark corner of the family dwelling until, after years of suffering and neglect, they finally succumbed to the disease. Until the sulfone drugs were introduced, hydnocarpus oil was the most widely used treatment. Unfortunately, it caused acute pain due to the difficulty of injecting the heavy oil through a needle and into



affected skin and muscle. While a vast improvement over the oil treatment, the new sulfone drug treatment was not as easily administered as a shot of penicillin was to cure yaws. Supervision was needed to ensure that the patients did not suffer too adversely from the drug's side effects and to guarantee that the proper dosage was taken at the right time.

In January 1956, UNICEF's Sam Keeny and Simon Polak boarded a train in Bangkok for the 12-hour, 450-kilometre trip to Khon Kaen. Their destination was a new pilot project, a government leprosy hospital with some 300 patients. The idea was to replace leprosy 'colonies' with a clinic that would treat curable leprosy victims as outpatients. While the sulfone drug treatment was a boon to sufferers of leprosy, social attitudes toward the disease and its victims were slow to change. Sam Keeny described the situation. "In 1955 not a single patient had been formally discharged. The law prescribing segregation for leprosy patients was enacted before it was surely known that some cases are not infectious, so that there is no orderly way to release even patients who are cured. More than that, the fear of the disease is so great in Thailand that it would take more than a scrap of paper from a doctor to make an ex-patient welcome back in his village. Knowing this, the patients make no plans for the future. Besides, they may not have any special skills and may have become too crippled to work with their hands. Also, after one has

sat in the sun – or the shade – for a few years with no worry about his rice, that can become a way of life." Besides the 300 patients residing at the hospital, there were nearly 100 'outpatients' squatting within a short distance of the hospital, effectively creating a situation much like a 'colony'. Mr Keeny concluded, "The problem is less how to cure them than what to do with them when they are cured."

It is a problem that has yet to be solved, as the stigma attached to leprosy was never overcome. Since Mr Keeny's observation was made, the spread of leprosy has been largely checked, but the old colonies, though smaller and fewer in number, still exist and will continue to do so until the last generation of sufferers, those who were horribly mutilated by the disease, passes away.

If I were an adult, I would help the handicapped children and try to make life easier for them.

*Children's Voices,*  
UNICEF, 1998



*Students receiving a medical examination at school*

At Rajburi we reviewed the woes of the field teams, behind in their pay and wet from their field work. In New York or Geneva or Bangkok it is easy to talk of expecting fifty or a hundred thousand people a month to be examined. It is another matter for the teams that go out in steady rain by jeep or boat, and for the last four or five miles on foot across paddy fields that wet one to the knees. They get up at dawn to cook their own rice and work in wet clothing all day long, coming back at night to their village lodging. Their evenings are spent without benefit of light, but they are not alone. All round them mosquitoes sing their nightly song against a background of howling dogs, without which no Thai village is complete. When the saga of the battle against yaws is written, it will not be told in statistical tables, but in the experience of the sanitary inspectors, little more than boys, who really do the job. And the job will be done. In five years Thailand should be free from yaws.

S.M. Keeny  
June, 1951



A temporary setback



Yaws of course is less deadly, especially to children, than malaria but it is almost unique in making friends. After a village has had its dreadful sores healed within a month, it is ready to cooperate against malaria, leprosy, and even the much less spectacular job of mother-and-child centres. In the countries where it exists, yaws is the best key to start rural health services.

S.M. Keeny  
May, 1959

## ASSISTING THE VILLAGE MIDWIFE

Thailand has an ancient and deeply rooted tradition of midwifery. Known in Thai as the *maw tam yae*, the village midwife learned her skills through hands-on experience. Indigenous techniques used in Thai midwifery include the administration of massage to the woman in labour. From the jungle, the midwife gathers herbs and roots, which are then

pulverized, steamed and applied as a hot compress to the pregnant woman's stomach, back and legs, and delicately massaged into the pores. After the birth, the midwife prepares a sauna in which the new mother recuperates. Still, midwives in rural areas were poorly equipped, and some of their techniques were primitive and lacking in basic hygiene. Early on UNICEF decided that it should play a role in assist-

ing the village midwife. Dr Sem Pringpoungaew recalls UNICEF's initial involvement with Thai midwives, "Traditionally a midwife would use a piece of split bamboo to sever the baby's umbilical cord. Of course the bamboo was not sterile and there was a very high incidence of neo-natal tetanus among newly born babies. UNICEF would meet with us and ask, 'What problems do you have?' We would discuss the problems and our ideas would become



crystallized into action. It was just a matter of discussing the problem together. It was a joint effort. This is how the idea of a Midwife Kit came about. Among other things, the kits contained a pair of scissors that could be boiled or sterilized with alcohol, perfect for cutting an umbilical cord." Besides surgical scissors, the Midwife Kits



contained such indispensable items as soap, towels, forceps and sterile gauze bandages. In all, UNICEF was instrumental in distributing thousands of Midwife Kits throughout Thailand.

Seeing that midwives were properly equipped was only half the battle. Even the best equipment is of little value in unskilled hands. UNICEF co-operated with the Thai government to improve the care midwives could offer their patients and to train midwives in villages where there were none. Besides the lowland-dwelling ethnic Thai, the northern region of Thailand is inhabited by hill tribes, groups that have migrated south into Thailand from China,

Myanmar and Laos. Providing assistance to these people was a special challenge, as customs and culture sometimes differed widely with that of the ethnic Thai. Elawat Chandraprasert, Director General of the Public Welfare Department under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, tells

of the difficulties encountered when selecting women for training as midwives in a hill tribe village, "At first we chose young women to learn the duties of a midwife. We chose them because they understood Thai and could easily be trained. Later when

we followed up on the

programme we saw that the young women weren't serving as midwives because the villagers wouldn't accept these young women as midwives. It turned out that an elder was needed. We had to start over. We had to get older women who were already midwives and teach them about the importance of cleanliness and such."



But such misunderstandings were not confined to hill tribe villages. Among some ethnic Thai, government doctors encountered what at first seemed to be a senseless superstition concerning pregnant mothers. Nutritious foods were shunned to ensure that the foetus remained small, the



theory being that large babies were difficult to deliver. Dr Aree Valyasevi, Former Director of the National Food and Nutrition Research Institute, describes his first encounter with this practice, "At a certain time during their pregnancy the mothers would begin to restrict their intake of protein. The reason they gave for this was that they wanted their babies to be small. Smaller babies make for easier births and so fewer women die during childbirth. At the time, I was a medical student and I remember thinking, 'Oh, these people are not too smart,' but later I just happened to be in a rural village and witnessed a difficult birth in which the mother-to-be started haemorrhaging badly. Normally in such situations, a caesarean section could not be performed. What would have happened if there were no doctor there?"

The answer was the establishment of rural health centres, another Thai government project that found support in UNICEF. As it was impossible to station a certified doctor in every rural village, girls from the village who had completed ten years of education were sent for three years of training at regional midwifery schools. After graduation they would return to the village to provide basic health services. Nowadays, in most lowland villages, pregnant women seek prenatal care and advice at rural health centres or provincial hospitals. The result has been a shift away from using the services of the traditional midwife.

Ms Sudchit Bhinyoying, UNICEF Information Officer from 1978 to 1984, explains, "More and more mothers began having their babies delivered at government health centres, not at home. Formerly, you had to train traditional birth attendants (midwives) to take care of the mothers. Now, the accessibility of the health centres is better. The government has even established health centres in small villages."



High-ranking Thai officials discuss children's health problems at a village health centre in Khon Kaen

We reviewed all the UNICEF-assisted projects in Thailand - and a good showing it was over the past ten years. Yaws is on the way out...TB is being attacked vigorously in a pilot project that will hopefully show how the disease can be cleaned out of Bangkok. The campaign against leprosy is growing rapidly, with a thousand cases found every month. More than 700 public health centres have been given equipment and another 725 midwives set to work in the villages, with all these units getting milk and drug-and-diet supplements. In addition some 6,500 village midwives have received brief instruction courses.

S.M. Keeny  
August, 1960





### THE SILENT EMERGENCY

The 1980s saw a reshuffling of priorities at UNICEF. In order to counter the tragic statistics of an estimated 15 million children worldwide who were annually dying of afflictions that were easily treated or prevented, UNICEF declared a 'silent emergency'. Dubbed thus because the high death rate had gone largely unnoticed – principally due to it not being caused by war or natural calamity – the silent emergency could be combatted by four simple and economical techniques known by the acronym GOBI. The techniques could be taught to mothers of young children who, by ensuring that the measures were carried out, would greatly increase their child's chance of surviving its early years.

The 'G' of GOBI stood for 'growth monitoring', regulating a baby's growth in an effort to detect malnutrition. The 'O' was for 'oral re-hydration', a treatment for dehydration, which can cause death among young children with severe diarrhoea. The 'B' stood for 'breastfeeding', which had fallen out of favour in the 1960s but was vindicated in the 1980s. The 'I' was for 'immunization', namely against the most common childhood killers: tuberculosis, measles, polio, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus. Combined, the techniques became known as the Child Survival and Development Revolution, and in Thailand their effects were almost immediately felt. For instance, the number of deaths caused by acute diarrhoea dropped from 664 in 1978 to 275 in 1983.



His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej gives a polio drop to a hill tribe child during his visit to villages in Chiang Mai Province, December 1970



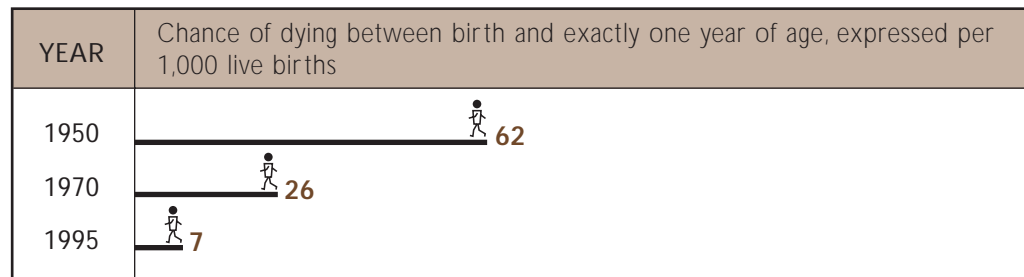
Health Training at Chulalongkorn Hospital, Bangkok



Thailand's Immunization Programme

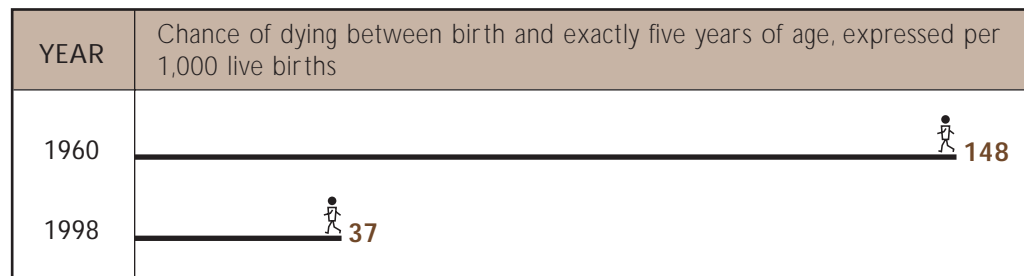
## SELECTED INDICATORS

### Infant Mortality Rate



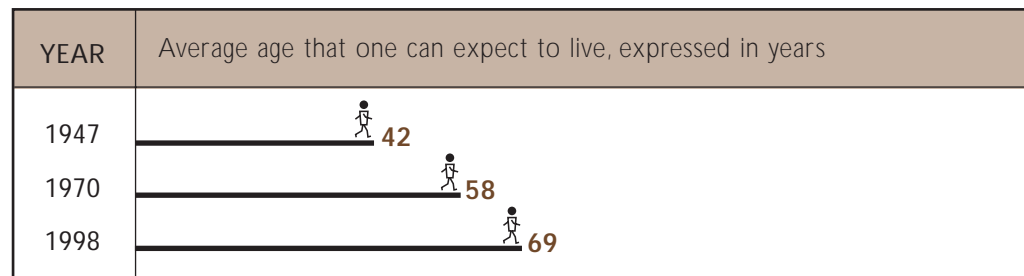
**Source:** 1950 and 1970, *Important Statistics of Thailand 2530* (1987), The National Statistics Office, Office of the Prime Minister  
1995, Thailand Health Statistics Division, Office of the Permanent Secretary for Public Health, Ministry of Public Health

### Under-5 Mortality Rate



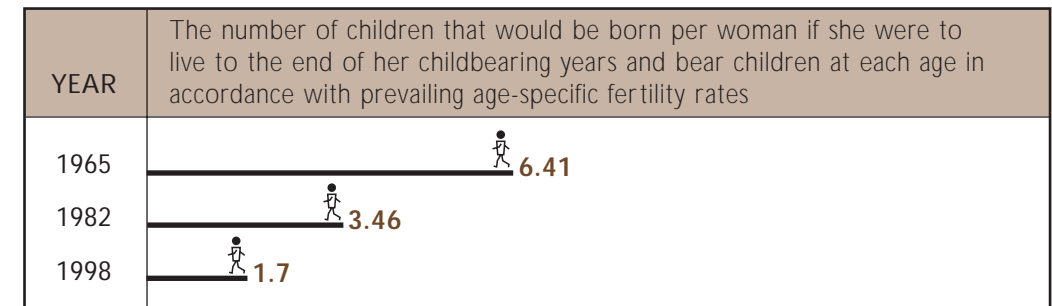
**Source:** 1960 and 1998, UNICEF, United Nations Population Division and United Nations Statistics Division  
(from UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2000*)

### Life Expectancy at Birth



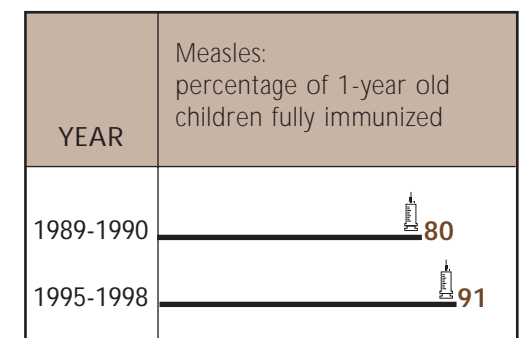
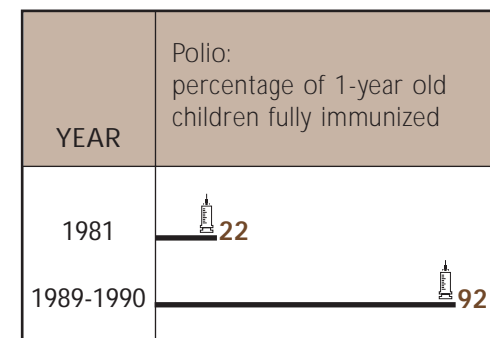
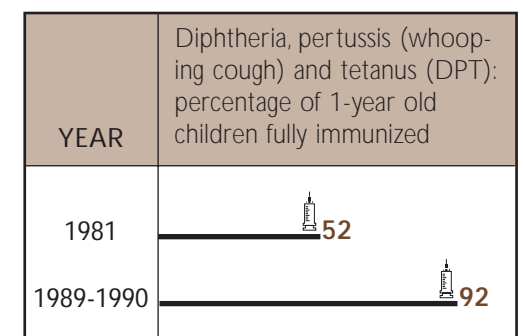
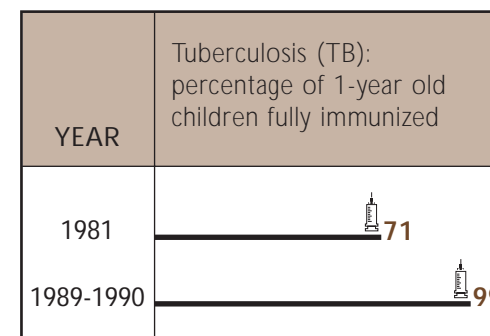
**Source:** 1947, *Important Statistics of Thailand 2530* (1987), The National Statistics Office, Office of the Prime Minister  
1970 and 1998, United Nations Population Division (from UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2000*)

### Total Fertility Rate



**Source:** 1947, *Important Statistics of Thailand 2530* (1987), The National Statistics Office, Office of the Prime Minister  
1970 and 1998, United Nations Population Division (from UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2000*)

### Immunization



**Source:** 1981 and 1989-1990, UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 1992*  
1995-1998, UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2000*



## HEALTH, NUTRITION AND EDUCATION

In the aftermath of World War II UNICEF became known worldwide for its efforts to supply milk to the children of war-torn Europe. More than 400 million pounds of powdered milk were shipped by UNICEF during the period between 1947 and 1951. When UNICEF arrived in Thailand, a continuation of the emergency milk programme seemed the logical step to take, and shipments of skim milk powder were soon arriving in Bangkok. But the programme ran into an unforeseen snag: most Thai children, unaccustomed to drinking milk beyond infancy, lacked an enzyme that would allow their bodies to digest it. Dr Sem Pringpoungaew explains, "Thai children weren't able to digest milk on the first few occasions that they drank it. It gave most all of them diarrhoea. Some people thought that we weren't mixing the powdered milk correctly, but we knew that we were following the procedures correctly. Soon we were having the same problem all over the country but we didn't know why. Children were sick everywhere that we introduced milk. They were actually losing weight and their parents were complaining, 'What are you doing to our kids?' We were then forced to discontinue the programme."

Years later, in 1960, milk was once again introduced to schools, but this time with positive results, as corn-soy milk and wheat-soy-blend milk was used instead of skim milk. In 1962 Sam Keeny reported, "In spite of all our talk about nutrition, more children are being helped by milk powder than by all our other schemes put together."



*Students examine a milk-powder mixing machine*

Thailand's children, and the people of Thailand subsequently acquired a taste for milk. "Now people know the benefits of drinking milk", says former UNICEF Administrative Assistant Mr Suebsakdi Phiphobmongkol, "Parents do not have to be convinced to feed their children milk. Parents of today were the recipients of UNICEF's milk programme 40 years ago." Today, the success of UNICEF-assisted nutrition programmes can be easily observed: compare the differences in size and stature between the generations of almost any Thai family.

Salt iodization was another programme that UNICEF

The long-term solution of course must depend on more local protein. Until more becomes available let's grab all the milk we can distribute." Dr Saisuree Chutikul recalls how her childhood was affected by UNICEF milk, "I remember in high school, during morning recess, we would take turns going to the school kitchen to help carry the containers of milk back to the classroom. We would do this every morning. So you can say that I am a product of the UNICEF milk programme. And look at me now!" The milk programme did indeed help to alleviate protein deficiency among

helped to establish. Iodine is one of the so-called micronutrients that have an impact on overall health. The effects of iodine deficiency are most visible in the form of goitre, a painful swelling of the neck caused by an enlarged thyroid gland. This condition marks iodine deficiency in its advanced stages, and those suffering from goitre are usually adults. In children the effects of iodine deficiency are less visible but no less harmful. As early as the first two months of life, iodine deficiency affects a child's cognitive performance, resulting in irreversible damage to the child's learning ability.



*A UNICEF team in northern Thailand*

Dr Sem describes the situation he found in Chiang Rai before World War II, "I went into the morning market, and I was surprised to see that many of the people there had swollen necks – at least 50 or 60 of them. When I walked into the market with my 'thin' neck people were looking at me as if I was something strange. After that day, I started exploring the villages in the area and discovered that villages on the mountain called Doi Tung, on the route between Chiang Rai and Mae Sai, had a very high incidence of goitre. In some villages, the number of people with goitre was as high as 80 per cent. So I began to distribute a solution of iodine mixed with water to control the growth of the goitre. It was only of limited success because the smell and taste of the iodine solution made it almost unpalatable. Then I remembered from my studies in the US that there was



once a high incidence of goitre in the so-called 'goitre belt', an area between Chicago and Cleveland. Iodized salt was used to treat the disease."

Salt is the best conduit for iodine for a number of reasons: it is cheap, easily transported and can readily be used during food preparation. In September of 1961, Sam Keeny reported that "a small pilot project for a small, highly goitrous area in North Thailand" had been given the green

light. Six months later it was decided that the campaign should include the whole of the north of Thailand, affecting a population of ten million people and involving some 15,000-20,000 tons of salt a year. Once certain technical questions were worked out, such as whether wet or dry salt was more economically iodized, factories were supplied with free iodine and iodization equipment with the hope that adding iodine to salt would eventually become standard practice. Not everyone was immediately

convinced of the salt iodization programme's benefits. Owners of salt factories were concerned that iodization would cut into their profits. Ms Sudchit Bhinyoying explains, "I went around to the salt factories in Samut Sakhon and Phetburi and the owners of the factory were complaining, 'You know salt is only one or two baht a packet and then you keep asking us to buy this 600 baht bottle of iodine to spray into the salt. It's too expensive. How many packets of salt do we have to sell to recoup our losses?' Fortunately I was accompanied by officials from the Ministry of Public Health who were able to impress upon the factory owners the importance of iodized salt."

Today, iodization of salt is not a high-cost intervention. What is needed is an increased awareness of the benefits of purchasing and using iodized salt.



*An Akha woman and her granddaughters*

## THE KING'S SALT

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's interest in eliminating disorders caused by iodine deficiency within the Kingdom led to a royal endorsement of the Ministry of Public Health's strategy of salt iodization in 1991. His Majesty paid a visit to Samoeng District in Chiang Mai province, one of the areas worst affected by iodine deficiency disorders in Thailand, and voiced his concern about the importance of giving high priority to ending preventable brain damage caused by iodine deficiency. His Majesty also encouraged the development of low-cost technology that would make salt iodization cost effective for small-scale salt producers. The challenge was taken up by Chiang Mai Technical College which invented a salt iodization machine based on the design of small cement mixers. These salt iodization machines are now being used throughout the Kingdom and in Laos.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of his accession to the throne in 1996, His Majesty the King donated iodized salt to the Ministry of Public Health and gave permission for the packets of salt to be adorned with the logo of the Golden Jubilee. Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn then presided over a ceremony on behalf of His Majesty to initiate distribution of 'the King's salt.'

In 1999, UNICEF was recognized for the promotion of iodized salt toward the elimination of iodine deficiency disorders and was presented with a plaque from H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.



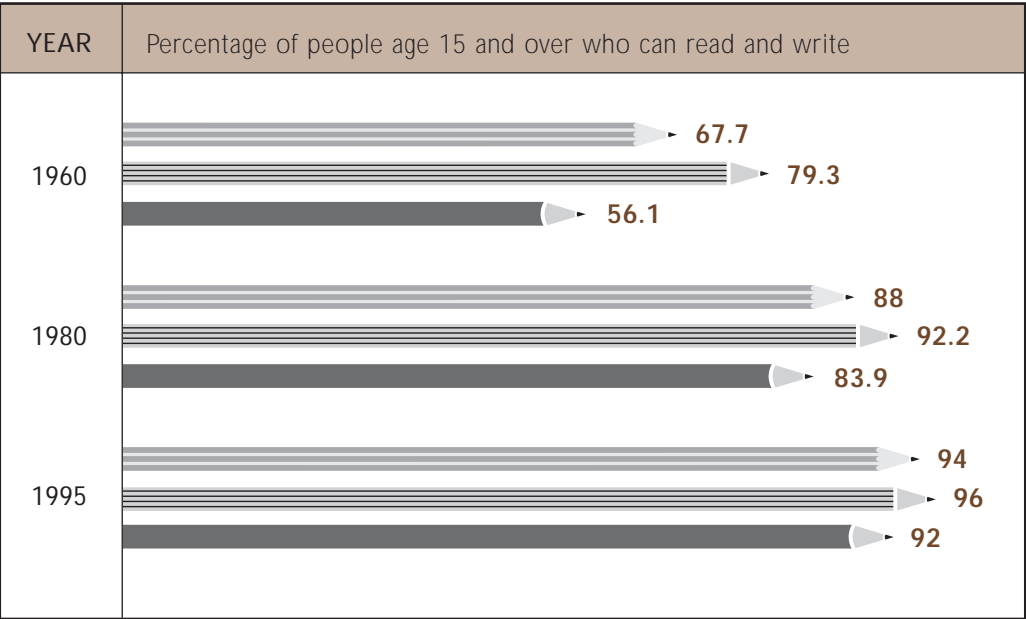


EDUCATION FOR ALL

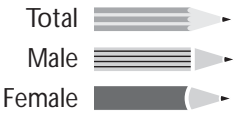
In March of 1990, Thailand was the host of the International Conference on Education for All, a forum sponsored by UNESCO, UNDP, the World Bank and UNICEF. Held at Jomtien in Chonburi Province and officially opened by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, the conference was attended by representatives from 155 countries. The theme of the conference was that a basic education should be available to all children. Members of the forum also gave emphasis to the importance of promoting female education.

In an assessment of the Education for All Regional Programme held in 2000 – ten years after the conference in Jomtien – Thailand was noted for its success in the areas relating to increasing primary and secondary school enrolment, reducing the dropout rate and improving the quality of education. Thailand has also embarked on a ‘child-friendly’ school initiative, incorporating active learning; community-based school management; child rights promotion; and life skills development.

Total Adult Literacy Rate



Source: 1960 and 1980, *Important Statistics of Thailand 2530 (1987)*, The National Statistics Office, Office of the Prime Minister  
1995 UNESCO (from UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2000*)



## A School That Is More Than a School

Province: Srisaket  
District: Rasisalai  
Population: 1,471  
Decade: 1980s



The school in Baan Ko village was beautiful, with a large green yard, children's playground, football pitch and vegetable garden. Schoolchildren, girls in their white and blue, and boys in their khaki uniforms, were busy watering their vegetable garden and plants – which they grew themselves.

The pride and enthusiasm of the children came from the fact that vegetables they grew would be used in making their nutritious lunch, and by gardening, they are learning skills that they can use to make their living in the future.

School vegetable gardening was a rather new initiative. A few years ago this piece of land was a wasteland overgrown with grass. But now it is covered with fresh green vegetables. This small change is a significant step forward for Baan Ko, once a village of pottery makers.

Thom Nantasin, the village leader, was the driving force behind the changes. He looks back to a year ago, "Initially we were suffering. We moved here from another place, about 300 kilometres away. Over there the land was so barren that we could not grow anything. We dug up soil to make pottery. But no sooner had we done that, than people were making pottery everywhere. We decided to move to Baan Ko where the soil is fertile. We grew onion and garlic and earned quite a handsome income. But currently the crop prices are lower. We are suffering again."

Thom didn't give up. Instead, he was motivated by improvement he saw in other villages when the government implemented the National Development Plan in 1983.

Thom and his fellow villagers attended a training workshop that included healthcare and disease prevention, food production, and childcare and education. This three-phase workshop was conducted for the whole district and was part of the Development Plan. Thom was selected to be the co-ordinator for this workshop.

Explains Thom "We sent two of our village women to train as a village health volunteer and a communicator. They weighed all babies and young children in the village. All of our 50 households now know what a growth-monitoring chart, provided by UNICEF, is. For the whole year we did not have any cases of child death. Sixteen small children who were reported as malnourished are now strong and healthy. Our schoolchildren made a big change too. We once had a report of 100 out of 354 school children malnourished. Now it is reduced to 70. We also have a day care centre in the school."



Seven years ago there were only ten families (out of 229) practising family planning. Currently the number has risen to 150. A number of husbands have had vasectomies.

After the workshop Thom put his learning into practice. He started making supplementary food from beans and rice, and sells his products to the villagers at a low price. Moreover, he also provides basic medicine to the poorest families.

Sai Thongdee, 29, has five children. Her husband left her when her youngest child was one month old. She has to toil making pottery from very early every morning to earn a living. If she can make 20 pots a day she takes in 85 baht to feed her five children. She has no land of her own. Her neighbours have helped out by providing additional food and firewood for her pottery making.

Big changes happened in her life when two of her children brought back packages of vegetable seeds from school. Now Sai Thongdee, like other families, has a small garden at the end of the village where she and her children grow vegetables and have more nutritious food for the whole family. "Last year," she explains, "two of my children were malnourished. But today they are fine and healthy."



## Baan Sao Lao: On the Road to Development

Province: Ubon Rachathani  
 District: Dej-udom  
 Population: 150  
 Decade: 1980s

Baan Sao Lao is no different from thousands of other villages in the northeast of Thailand, where there are few access roads, and no water supply, sanitation system or health services. These are precisely what make it different from Bangkok.



At a closer look, however, we can see a road leading to gradual development of this village. Sukon Thongthai, 56 years of age, talked about the changes, "I married when I was only 17 and had seven children, but two of them died when they were very young. The five who lived are all now over 30 and each of them has only two children. None of them married before reaching 20 years old."

Sukon Thongthai is a woman who is full of energy. She helped promote the family planning project in the village by selling birth control pills and condoms at a low price. She encouraged married couples to have vasectomies. She herself was also the chairperson of the village Women's Cultural Committee of 30 members. Each committee member attended an eight-day training course on nutrition, vegetable gardening, cooking and childcare. Sukon had become a symbol of change to the village some years earlier, particularly since the beginning of the Fifth Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan. Villagers were encouraged to grow new crops in their 20-rai land area that formerly cultivated paddy rice once a year. The change has increased the community income.



UNICEF provided the new vegetable seeds for crops, such as cabbage, beans, maize, lettuce, onion, pumpkin and others.

"You see," says Sukon, "at the beginning when I started promoting a cooking group to introduce nutritious food for children and mothers I had to buy ingredients from other places because we didn't grow them here. Some people didn't eat chicken or meat because they believed that they were infested with parasites. But it has changed now."

Six fowl were provided by UNICEF to families with children suffering from malnutrition, and the villagers bred them into a small poultry farm. Now each family has more than ten chickens and five ducks. Moreover, there are now 100 fish ponds in the village. Undoubtedly, the first fish pond was dug by Sukon.

In addition, Kesorn Inthana, a village health volunteer, has regularly weighed children in the village every month and kept the record on a growth-monitoring chart. She sells nutritious children's food, which is made by the villagers, at a very low price per month. For the first time, every child in the village has been immunized against diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, and tuberculosis.

Another interesting change was that 70 per cent of houses in Baan Sao Lao now have latrines, which were partly built with support from UNICEF at 80 baht per family. The next step was building big water vessels to catch rainwater and keep it for use by the whole village. UNICEF supported the building of the first two big water vessels and displayed them in front of Sukon's house. "Villagers started to understand what is meant by development," says Sukon.

Villagers all joined the effort of building roads in the village. It's not at all a surprising scene to see women villagers happily working in the farm. Who could blame the old woman wearing a big weed-woven hat and chewing betel nut for looking very proud?



## THE INDOCHINA CRISIS

From its beginnings UNICEF strove to set itself apart as an organization that was politically neutral. The objective was simple: only a strictly non-political agency would be able to help children regardless of the national, political or ideological boundaries that encircled them. And, indeed, UNICEF's first Executive Director, Maurice Pate, insisted that there would be no 'enemy children' and UNICEF should be allowed to work in any country where children were in need. The Indochina War, with its sides drawn by the conflicting ideologies of the Cold War, tested UNICEF's willingness to stand by its charter. The conflict's aftermath also tested the Thailand office's ability to handle a regional crisis of epic proportions.



While the United Nations was founded on the hope that wars could be averted, the situation in Indochina was beyond the UN's capacity to intervene or assist. Not until a peace agreement was signed by the United States, North Vietnam and South Vietnam in Paris in 1973 did UNICEF finally see an opportunity to secure a foothold in Indochina through which to aid its destitute children. Henry Labouisse, then the Executive Director of UNICEF, launched a major appeal for UNICEF to be allowed to provide relief for all of Indochina – Laos and Cambodia as well as North and South Vietnam. While other UN agencies were cautious and chose to bide their time to see if the peace would hold, UNICEF acted immediately, setting up the Indochina Peninsular Liaison Group (IPLG).



Indochina in 1968 (courtesy of the National Geographic Society)



*A social centre run by the South Vietnamese government in the 1970s*

At the time, UNICEF had small offices in Saigon and Vientiane, but none in Phnom Penh or Hanoi. It was decided that to be most effective, UNICEF would have to open offices in the capitals of all four countries, and the North Vietnamese government was approached about opening a UNICEF office in Hanoi. UNICEF was most welcome to set up operations in Hanoi, the government of North Vietnam said, on the condition that the Saigon office be closed and all UNICEF dealings in South Vietnam be co-ordinated through the Provisional Revolutionary Government, popularly known as the 'Viet Cong'. Harking back to its proclamation that there were no 'enemy children', UNICEF replied that the agency would be happy to work in the North and

in the areas of the South under the control of the Viet Cong, but that UNICEF must also be allowed to keep its office in Saigon and help children in areas of South Vietnam still controlled by the government in Saigon. The response of the North was adamant and unyielding: assistance would be accepted, but there could be no office for UNICEF in Hanoi. Even though negotiations broke down, UNICEF was confident that, in time, the government of North Vietnam could be swayed. However, it was



not until 1975, after the government of South Vietnam fell to the North that an office was finally established in Hanoi.

In Cambodia a much more desperate situation was developing. The American military employed air strikes to disrupt the southern half of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and decimate the Khmer Rouge, but this action was conducted without US congressional authorization. Once the bombing was exposed, a very angry Congress cut off the funding for all US military operations within Cambodia. However, the cut-off was not effective immediately, and as a result the US military quickened the

pace of bombing before the deadline came into effect. The intensified bombing campaign caused a final surge of refugees to seek shelter in Phnom Penh, adding to the already desperate conditions that threatened the health of both refugees and residents. The population of Phnom Penh had ballooned. In 1970 the capital was a sleepy town of less than half a million people. By 1974 it had grown to 2.5 million people. UNICEF opened an office in Phnom Penh in

1973 and while UNICEF's time in pre-revolutionary Cambodia was limited, the agency managed to aid its displaced children.

Following a Cambodian government request to help in educating the thousands of idle kids living in squatter camps surrounding Phnom Penh, UNICEF launched an ambitious programme to build and staff temporary schools. Mr Kul Gautam, Regional Director of the UNICEF

EAPRO office in 1999, relates some of the hurdles that had to be cleared, "UNICEF was very concerned not just about education but also about sanitation. The Cambodian government had not really thought about the latrines. They said, 'We need the schools,

never mind the latrines...' We knew that our headquarters would never agree." The problem was solved by a shipment of prefabricated school buildings from Singapore, complete with their own latrines, and, as usual, the Thailand office took charge of procurement. But with the arrival of the first shipment of prefabricated structures, another problem surfaced: lack of water. "In areas where you could find water, part of our assistance was to pipe the water to the





schools so the toilets could be functional. But then there were areas where there was no public water system, so we had to arrange for trucks to deliver water to the schools," explains Mr Gautam.

As the Lon Nol government steadily lost territory to the Khmer Rouge, UNICEF's field of operations became smaller and smaller. UNICEF officials tried to establish contact with the Khmer Rouge through channels in China and Vietnam, but this proved to be very difficult. In April of 1975, the Khmer Rouge strode victoriously into Phnom Penh and immediately ordered the expulsion of all foreigners from Cambodia. Taking refuge in the French embassy, the two remaining UNICEF staff members had no choice but to quit operations in Cambodia and return to Bangkok. Mr Gautam had been on the staff of

UNICEF's Cambodia office until just weeks prior to the fall of Phnom Penh. As he explains, "The Khmer Rouge turned out to be much more extremist than any of us had imagined." Within days of its 'liberation' in April 1975, Phnom Penh was forcibly evacuated by the Khmer Rouge, the first calamitous step in a plan to transform Cambodia into one huge agrarian commune. The fanaticism of the Khmer Rouge triggered a mass exodus of Cambodians that would, over the next few years, send hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing across the border into Thailand (see the Cambodian Emergency, page 81).

In 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, driving the Khmer Rouge back into the jungles and installing a new government. While many were happy to see the murderous Khmer Rouge fall from power,



*A UNICEF-assisted day care centre in Phnom Penh*



*Awaiting distribution of rice at a Cambodian refugee camp on the Thai border*

the United Nations saw the new Vietnamese-backed government as illegitimate and continued to recognize Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge as the rightful government of Cambodia. Again UNICEF placed itself above politics. Recognizing a great need for relief in the aftermath of Khmer Rouge rule, UNICEF requested and received permission to re-establish its operations in Cambodia and worked alongside the International Committee of the Red Cross, the only other relief agency to operate within Vietnamese-occupied Cambodia. UNICEF's work in Cambodia between 1979 and 1982 went on to become the largest operation in the organization's history since the relief campaigns in Europe and China immediately following World War II.

In Vientiane, UNICEF upgraded its small office to a full-fledged operation following the Paris Peace Agreement of 1973. While Laos was still divided, UNICEF worked to earn the trust and confidence of

both sides in order to be consistent with the principles of helping children regardless of politics. Mr Gautam, who was transferred to the Vientiane office in 1979, describes the situation, "The Lao by nature are much more gentle... The [royalist] Lao were more tolerant of our working with the [communist] Pathet Lao. So we had established quite good

contacts with them both through the Thailand and the Vientiane offices." After the communists gained control in 1975, UNICEF found that many of the hard-line communist leaders, men of limited education who had spent much of their lives fighting in the jungles, tended to view the UN and its agencies with suspicion. As most UN officials were Westerners or had been educated in schools in Western countries, the Lao hard-liners assumed that the UN should be included with 'unfriendly' non-socialist countries. As with diplomats from Western countries, UN officials had severe restrictions placed on their movement within Laos. Mr Gautam himself set out to rectify the situation. "I deliberately made a policy of socializing a bit more with ambassadors of socialist countries. Whenever I invited some Lao government officials to my home for a reception or a dinner, I would make sure that I would invite maybe the Russian ambassador or the Cuban ambassador or the East German ambassador so [the Lao] saw that we were

friendly with them too, not just the Americans and the Brits and the Australians and whatnot". Mr Gautam vacated the living quarters that had been occupied by his predecessor in favour of a more humble dwelling. Likewise, the official UNICEF automobile, a Mercedes-Benz, was traded in for a Toyota. The Lao government took notice, and travel restrictions on UNICEF were gradually relaxed, allowing unprecedented access to sensitive areas near the Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian borders. This allowed UNICEF to conduct the most effective and extensive aid programme of all the relief agencies working in Laos at that time.

While the operations in Indochina during difficult times are a testament to the persistence and flexibility of the staff of the UNICEF offices in the Indochinese capitals, praise must be shared with the regional office in Bangkok. In procuring supplies, giving logistical help and providing administrative support for UNICEF staff, the services of UNICEF in Thailand were indispensable for the success of the UNICEF operations in Indochina. Throughout the period, the UNICEF regional office in Thailand served as a lifeline between the long-suffering children of Indochina and the outside world. 🌐



*Cambodian refugees near the Thai border in 1980*

We should keep the world at peace – and eliminate war.

*Children's Voices,  
UNICEF, 1998*



## CAMBODIAN EMERGENCY

For the people of western Cambodia trying to escape the hell of Khmer Rouge rule, the Thai border was a natural destination. Many travelled on foot for days with few possessions. Once across the Thai border and out of reach of the



Khmer Rouge, the exhausted refugees would squat and try to make sense of their situation. Water and food had to be found, and shelter had to be built. Sudchit Bhinyoying describes a visit to the refugee camp in Sa Kaew Province's Khao-I-Dang district at the outbreak of the crisis, "You could smell the stench about two or three kilometres before you arrived...nearly 100,000 people had come with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. The trees

were so barren. They had been stripped of leaves by the refugees who were trying to build shelters...The refugees were becoming desperate and began to rob and steal from the Thai villagers in the area."

With the arrival of Thai government and UN officials to the camps, order was eventually imposed but there was still much to do if further tragedy was to be averted. A refugee camp has all the problems of any human settlement but with none of the convenient solutions that permanency provides. Basic amenities that more permanent settlers take for granted – such as a reliable water source – are frequently lacking. Levels of hygiene and sanitation are appallingly low and disease is rampant. As time passes, some of the refugees, deprived of an income and realizing the hopelessness of their situation, become idle and complacent. Children are most vulnerable to the deplorable conditions but they are also easiest to persuade to make the best of the situation. Ms Sudchit tells of a plan by one NGO to give the refugees incentive to improve sanitation in the camp, "They had nothing to do, and there were flies everywhere so it was decided that the refugees could trade a cup full of dead flies for a cup full of vegetable seeds. Later, when we visited the camp again, we noticed all the vegetables growing. It was a very good strategy."



## CHAPTER 3

# EVOLVING OBJECTIVES

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In the early days of UNICEF's involvement in Thailand, programmes were more health and survival focused to fit the needs of the time. Formerly, programmes dealt with one aspect of a child's health or welfare. Over the years, experience has brought about changes in the philosophy of how best to assist Thailand's children. Programmes have become more integrated to reflect new challenges and advanced theories on child development. If a vaccination or two and a cup of milk a day did wonders for kids, how much more would they benefit from an integrated approach that sought to influence all aspects of their lives? The realization that health, nutrition and education were interconnected brought about a new generation of programmes with an integrated approach.





One example is the integrated nutrition programme. In the past, Thailand was structurally like many other countries; the nutrition programme was implemented as part of the overall health programme under the Ministry of Public Health. This proved to fall short of the desired results. Thailand took the initiative in setting up a National Food and Nutrition Committee to take charge of an inter-ministerial nutrition promotion programme where all major ministries took part in ensuring sufficient food production and nutrition. "For example," Dr. Aree Valyasevi, former Director, National Food and Nutrition

Research Institute, explains, "the Public Health Ministry promoted nutrition-related health care, the Education Ministry put it in school curriculum while the Interior Ministry, through the Community Development Department, promoted supplementary food production at a low price for villagers, and the Agriculture Ministry provided technical assistance to villagers on how to increase food production. This offensive approach has had great success in improving the nutritional status of the Thai people. It has become the model for nutrition programme implementation for other countries."

As it has consistently been doing for the past 50 years, Thailand continues in many ways to lead the world in social development efforts. Thai society's flexibility and ability to adapt to adverse situations has helped it gain the upper hand in the battle against the AIDS virus. Likewise, the willingness to try new ideas has given Thailand a head start in realizing actual examples of child participation. Above all,

it is the Thai tendency toward tolerance that has contributed immeasurably to the effectiveness of the Thailand/UNICEF partnership.

The following sections present some examples of how UNICEF and its Thai counterparts continue to seek innovative and practical ways to improve the quality of life of Thailand's children.



**UNICEF has become very mature. The programmes and policies are much more sophisticated than in the old days.**

**Ms Suchada Sangsingkeo  
Programme Officer for UNICEF TAM, 1963-1973,  
and UNICEF EAPRO, 1974-1994**

## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE BENEFIT OF CHILDREN

While almost any Thai asked could name UNICEF as a branch of the United Nations whose goal is to better the lives of children, relatively few would know of the crucial role played by Thai counterparts in all UNICEF programmes concerning Thailand. One of UNICEF's key policies from its inception has been to involve local governments and organizations in the creation and implementation of its programmes. In post World War II Europe, that sometimes meant waiting until a government could be formed to replace the anarchy that prevailed in the wake of the war. While Thailand was much less devastated by the war than some of its neighbours, the situation was far from encouraging. Barely a year after UNICEF arrived in Bangkok, a particularly violent coup d'état left 1,200 people dead. Despite political instability, UNICEF and the Thai government joined hands to eradicate diseases, improve nutrition and better education.



It should come as no surprise that UNICEF's ability to remain sensitive and responsive to local needs, in a world where international agencies are often perceived as being faceless and bureaucratic, has gone a long way in gaining the trust and respect of the Thai government. Gamini Abeysekera, Representative of the UNICEF Thailand Office, explains, "One thing I have learned working with UNICEF, both in Thailand and abroad, is that trust must be established with the host government. The important thing is to impress upon the politicians that UNICEF's efforts are truly

well meaning and will have a positive impact on the people. This is to the politician's advantage. Some may be a bit slow or cautious in accepting our ideas, so our first step is to spell out our plans for development in a way that politicians will understand as a genuine effort to help children."

It may surprise some, however, that UNICEF works not only with the Thai government, but also strives to support any NGO, group or individual that shares its goals. This is for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most important is that, in the quest to improve the lives of children, no potential ally can be overlooked. Mr Abeysekera explains further, "When it comes to understanding the political nature of a country, we have to find good allies, both inside and outside the



government. We need to consult locals who understand the issues better than the UNICEF staff does. Besides government officials, these may be intellectuals or academics who understand the situation and can analyse the issues. Often we find groups that are much more broadminded and enlightened than the average bureaucrat whose perspectives may have been conditioned by politics."



The better pupils should  
help the weak ones.  
Older children should  
help the younger ones.

*Children's Voices,  
UNICEF, 1998*



Likewise, UNICEF's success in Thailand has been in part due to its flexibility when working with its Thai counterparts. UNICEF's enthusiasm for building uncon-

ventional alliances is much appreciated in Thailand. Dr Saisuree describes her dealings with UNICEF, "Thankfully, the time has long passed when UN agencies would only work with the government. I think this is a very welcome change. I belong to an informal group that is interested in changing Thai law to be more child-friendly. Don't ask us to explain what kind of group we are; we're just a group of concerned people. We used to get together and plan our efforts after working hours. UNICEF was willing to support us and within a few years our informal group was able to amend the

penal code's procedure for processing children in court cases – having psychologists and social workers sitting down with the child and using video tape so that the child doesn't have to appear in court. I don't think any other organization would have been willing to support a group like us. Only UNICEF was willing to take a chance on us."

This courage to work innovatively opens up new frontiers. Besides the obvious players in a child's life, such as parents and teachers, there are many people that have an impact on the lives of children. UNICEF's strategies are designed to seek the co-operation of all people whose actions, directly or indirectly, affect children. Dr Saisuree explains, "There are other people out there who also affect the lives of children, people we usually never consider: attorneys, immigration officers,

parliamentarians. I think UNICEF's willingness to take risks in working with them makes the organization unique. At one time international organizations were reluctant to work with the Thai police...[They] would get spooked as soon as you mentioned the police. I brought this up at a meeting. I asked if UNICEF would care to work together with the police department, and Mr Kul Gautam [then the Director of the Programme Division at UNICEF headquarters] answered, 'Why not? Let's work with the police.' He just stood up and gave the green light. It's this kind of thing that puts UNICEF above all others."

the situation and start a dialogue with the government, to get them to understand and sympathize with the predicament of the children and to give special protection to them. The important thing to impress on any government is that, no matter which nationality, religion or culture they belong to, children are always innocent victims... UNICEF's non-political nature and its proven track record, both within and outside Thailand, enables UNICEF, in a small but consistent manner, to influence the thinking of the political leadership."

By all accounts, the co-operation between UNICEF and the Thai government during UNICEF's first 50 years in Thailand has been a shining example for other country programmes to admire and emulate. For UNICEF staff, there is real satisfaction in beholding the progress that Thailand has made over the last five decades. There is also gratitude for the commitment of the Thai counterparts who have in



UNICEF's achievements in Thailand are also in part due to its mandate as an organization that has absolutely no political leanings. Governments know that they will not be judged or critiqued by UNICEF staff over political issues. Of course, when a political issue is affecting children in an adverse way, it is UNICEF's job to bring it to the attention of local officials so that the problem may be alleviated. Mr Abeysekera explains, "We first look at

their own way done much for the benefit of UNICEF. Says Mr Kul Gautam, UNICEF Regional Director for East Asia and the Pacific region, "UNICEF's relationship with Thailand is not a donor/recipient relationship where we give and Thailand receives. It is a relationship of mutual assistance. We provide assistance to Thailand, but Thailand provides much more assistance to us in terms of ideas and experience. In this way Thailand fills a very special role."

The children of Thailand, as well as UNICEF, have also benefited enormously from the unyielding support of His Majesty the King and the Royal Family. Royal-sponsored projects have helped alleviate the burdens of the poor throughout the country, thereby improving the lives of Thailand's neediest children. For example, His Majesty takes a team of doctors with him wherever he travels in the Kingdom to care for under-nourished and sick people. The team has prompted the health authorities to set up mobile medical units to help people who can't make it to hospital and trains volunteers in each village to carry out basic medical duties.

Since the initiation of the mobile medical units, thousands of children have

received treatment for a multitude of diseases as well as preventive vaccinations.

His Majesty the King's work with the hill tribes in northern Thailand has realized the dreams of many children with the building of schools and the purchasing of educational supplies, including text books.

Other Royal-sponsored projects such as those concerning water resources have also directly benefited Thailand's children through a dramatic improvement in agricultural cultivation. His Majesty's projects have turned flooded areas into productive land and brought water to places that previously could not be farmed. Similarly, His Majesty's support for the welfare of farmers has also indirectly provided support to the Kingdom's children.



H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn with Roberto Esquerre Barry, Regional Director, 1975-1979



## IN THE PUBLIC EYE: UNICEF AMBASSADORS

Early on UNICEF learned that capturing the public's attention was vital to fulfilling its goals. In the decade following World War II, UNICEF sought to channel the wealth of America into its crusade to help children all over the world by convincing the American public that this was the right thing to do. To accomplish this task, UNICEF enlisted the charisma of a special celebrity.

During a chance meeting on a trans-Atlantic flight in the early 1950s, Maurice Pate, founding director of UNICEF, met entertainer Danny Kaye and they discussed each other's occupations. Months later Mr Pate contacted Mr Kaye and asked if he would be interested in helping UNICEF 'keep from drowning in a sea of United Nations acronyms.' The result of Mr Kaye's effort was *Assignment: Children*, an award-winning documentary, shot partially in Thailand. In a memoir written for UNICEF's 40th anniversary, Mr Kaye described the project's beginnings, "I didn't know what I was going to do. I hadn't any idea of how I would shoot the film. We had no script, no props. The exciting thing was that



Danny Kaye entertains Thai youngsters, 1954

we ended up shooting exactly what we saw – children in Burma, India, Indonesia, Korea, Thailand and Japan. Today, people might call what we did something fancy like *cinema vérité*. But that expression hadn't been invented yet so we just went ahead and made the film...

"Everywhere, the children were the real stars of our film. And that goes double for seven-year-old Sam, whom we met in a Thai village. Sam's real name was Boonting Choeykholai. I simply couldn't pronounce it, so I decided to call him Sam. We came to his village to film a small miracle happening at the local health centre. Just like a million other Thai youngsters, little Sam had yaws. His body was covered with big, open red sores – the kind that make you feel a little bit ill when you first look at them. Six of his brothers and sisters also had the contagious, crippling disease.

"I watched Sam being given a shot of penicillin provided by UNICEF, and he took it without a quiver. Fourteen days later – even before we finished shooting our film – his sores had completely dried up...

"When our film *Assignment: Children* was released a year later in 1955, people all over the world got to know about Sam as well as the other children UNICEF was helping. The film was translated into 19 languages and viewed by I don't know how many millions of people. It is possible that more people saw that film than any other film I made...

"I met Sam again years later at a reunion held by UNICEF in Tokyo for children representing every Asian country UNICEF has worked in. By then Sam had become a tall, strong, healthy and handsome 17-year-old. He worked on his father's rice paddy. Once he recognized me, Sam never left my side. Because we didn't speak each other's language, it was rather difficult to communicate; so in trying to thank me and UNICEF, he merely put his hand on my shoulder. It was the most eloquent expression of love I have ever encountered."





*Peter Ustinov, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and Eva Nisus, Former Senior Programme Officer, greet former Bangkok Governor, Krisda Arunvongse na Ayudhaya*

Realizing the effectiveness of utilizing Goodwill Ambassadors to generate awareness, gain publicity and seek funding, UNICEF set out to enlist the help of other celebrities. British actor Peter Ustinov has also been a visitor to Thailand on several occasions. Likewise Audrey Hepburn, Liv Ullmann and many others have done much to elevate the profile of UNICEF around the globe. In Thailand, former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun has worked tirelessly to promote UNICEF as its national Ambassador since 1996. It was his signature that made Thailand an official signatory of the World Declaration on Survival, Protection and Development of Children in 1992. Mr Anand explains his views on his involvement in helping the Kingdom's children, "The subject of children is a very attractive one. Any human being, whatever flaws – whatever shortcomings he or she may have – would find him or herself attracted to the idea of helping children...I think in Thailand one of the fundamental, traditional features in our lives is giving. But even we as Buddhists have sometimes retreated from that position because of creeping consumerism and materialism...It's important to maintain and to nurture this concept of giving. Giving without expecting anything in return. Giving without expecting any reward. Giving in good conscience."

## GREETING CARD OPERATION

UNICEF's Greeting Card Operation began in 1949 when Jitka Samkova, a seven-year-old Czechoslovakian girl, gave a painting to UNICEF in thanks for the help it had given her war-ravaged village following World War II. The theme was 'happiness in a country at peace'. Because her design was so popular, it was the first produced as a UNICEF greeting card.

The Greeting Card Operation in Thailand has operated since 1985. To date, more than 3.5 million UNICEF cards have been sold, and approximately Baht 70 million in gross sales has been raised to help benefit needy Thai children in UNICEF-funded projects. UNICEF greeting card customers are business corporations, government organizations and private individuals. In addition to the holiday cards and calendars, there is also an extensive year-round product line, which includes educational games for children, stationery ensembles, apparel and gift items.

All designs for UNICEF cards are contributed by artists or museums from around the world. There are more than ten Thai artists who have contributed their artwork to UNICEF and whose work has been selected by the International Art Committee for reproduction as UNICEF greeting cards. The well-known Thai artists who have been selected include Chakrabhand Posayakrit, Attasart Tularak and Vallapbis Sodprasert. Today, the Greeting Card Operation continues to expand its work with a strong commitment to maximizing the net income to benefit needy children in Thailand and the world over.



The first UNICEF greeting card, Jitka Samkova, 1949



Greeting card by Apirak Achawapichettum of Thailand



Greeting card by Chakrabhand Posayakrit of Thailand



*Fun fund raising - the Sport Aid Race in Bangkok, May 1986, was part of a campaign launched by UNICEF and Band Aid Trust to help in the race against time for starving children in Africa and the Third World, including Thailand*

## PRIVATE SECTOR FUND RAISING

UNICEF Thailand started raising funds from the local population, including private sector establishments and households, in late 1995 to supplement the decrease in external funds contributed by international donors and to encourage local ownership of the programmes for children.

The income generated in Thailand in 1996 was Baht 18.7 million (US\$ 0.77 million) and by 1999 it had grown to an astounding Baht 55 million (US\$ 1.45 million). Despite the economic crisis, contributions steadily poured in and exceeded the target in 1998. The growth rate between 1997 and 1998 was 27 per cent, and the projected target in 1999 was also surpassed.

It is interesting to note that more than 90 per cent of all contributions come from ordinary working people making their small donations, deposited weekly by UNICEF. In addition, corporate donors and special events provide substantial amounts of funding.

The donations not only reflect the traditional values and generosity of the Thai community in caring for the well-being of children but also reflect the potential in the future for a self-reliant UNICEF in Thailand. It is noteworthy that not many developing countries raise funds from their local private sectors and households for UNICEF. Thailand is a rare and exemplary case.



## THE HOLISTIC APPROACH: BENEFITING THE WHOLE CHILD

One of the most significant changes in the philosophy of UNICEF over the years has been its effort to stand back and look at the big picture. The 'emergency relief' programmes of UNICEF's early days in Thailand, such as yaws eradication and milk distribution, were a practical but limited reaction to the urgent needs of the times. These programmes were also an important means of establishing the initial trust between UNICEF and the governments of the region. As perspectives shifted and new philosophies emerged, UNICEF's policies have evolved to keep abreast of the changes. Not surprisingly, the trend now is toward long-term gains via a holistic approach – that is, an approach that deals with 'wholes', as opposed to focusing on disparate parts. Instead of concentrating on one aspect of a child's welfare, the holistic approach is designed to benefit the whole child. It attempts to integrate the four points spelled out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child: survival, development, protection and participation. And because the lives of children are greatly influenced by their immediate families, the holistic approach includes programmes that aid parents, especially mothers. Since children are also vulnerable to the actions of many different sectors of society, the holistic approach attempts to co-ordinate these sectors to better serve the needs of the child.



First and foremost, holistic means all children. In Thailand this includes every child that dwells within Thai borders, regardless of their sex, race, religion or nationality. This last point is significant because Thailand has an estimated 100,000 children, mostly in the border regions, who do not hold Thai citizenship. Ignoring their welfare would leave them open to dangers and abuse that, in the end, would affect all of Thai society. Many of these children receive no education. They are susceptible to sexual and labour exploitation and some end up as prostitutes or couriers of illegal drugs.

Over the years the very definition of what constitutes a child has been expanded. It is now universally recognized that children remain children until they reach 18 years of age. This is notable because early UNICEF programmes were more concerned with children under ten. Ms Kitiya Pornsadj, Assistant Project Officer (Child Protection), elaborates, "In the past we tended to focus on the first decade of a child's life but didn't pay too much attention to adolescents. Nowadays, when we talk about 'childhood', it means from zero to 18. This is in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child."

The age of a child is important in dictating what kinds of programmes will be most beneficial. For children in the first decade of life, survival is the most important issue. Common diseases, such as diarrhoea, can be a major cause of death among young children and therefore programmes





stressing the importance of good hygiene and oral rehydration would be appropriate for children under ten. For older children there is a greater need for protection. Particularly in times of rapid economic growth, older children may feel the need to leave their homes and families in rural areas in order to find work in the cities. But their lack of maturity and guidance leaves them at risk. During the economic boom, teenagers migrated from the villages looking for jobs in the industrial and service sectors. Dr Damrong Boonyoen, Director General of the Department of Health, describes the situation in the 1990s, "When they migrated, these teenagers left their parents and their grandparents and came to the cities to live by themselves. These

youth are in danger of contracting HIV because they don't have anyone to restrict their behaviour. They are far from their parents. They live with their peers and entertain themselves. They may even use the services of commercial sex workers and they experiment with drugs, such as methamphetamine."

The holistic approach to such a situation would not just be a matter of teaching these teenagers a worthy skill or a vocation, it would also be necessary to teach values and attitudes, so that they can make the right decisions and grow up in a balanced way, becoming confident and self-reliant.



Another example of applying the holistic approach to a specific problem can be seen in UNICEF's programme for the elimination of child prostitution. When the programme was first implemented, it was most concerned with the rescuing of children from brothels. Later it was found that this was not a complete strategy. A holistic, integrated strategy would have to include not only prevention and protection but

also the rehabilitation and recovery of the victims. The reintegration of the former child prostitutes into society would have to be organized, and the private sector would need to be mobilized in order to help combat this type of exploitation. Above all, there would need to be properly enforced laws to protect the children in the first place.

Explains Ms Kitiya, "All these aspects put together – those of survival, development, protection and the participation of all children – make up the holistic approach...This kind of thought is nothing new. It goes all the way back to the teachings of the Lord Buddha. He taught that one must pay attention to all aspects of life and to be able to think critically. In Thai we say *khit pen*, to be able to think for oneself. So this is not a new idea in Thailand. It's just a matter of reviving a traditional way of thought."



Drugs is the biggest problem.

*Children's Voices,*  
UNICEF, 1998



## EMPOWERING THE POWERLESS: CHILD RIGHTS

The violation of human rights is an issue that stirs emotions. When accusations fly that a government is violating the rights of its citizens, the news tends to attract attention worldwide. Yet the concept of child rights – a set of rights specifically established to serve the special needs of children – is not nearly as well recognized or understood. This is ironic when one considers that in many countries children make up half the population.



While the idea of child rights may be relatively unfamiliar, it is certainly not new. As far back as the 1920s, people were debating seriously about the concept of child rights. In



the 1950s the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was drafted. The Declaration was a groundbreaking document that outlined what every child should be able to expect from the government, community and family, such as the right to a nationality and the right not to be the victim of discrimination due to race, religion or gender. As basic as these rights sound, the idea of spelling them out on paper was considered as radical as the idea of child

participation seems to many people today. Despite the innovative nature of the document, the Declaration had its shortcomings. The most glaring of these was that it was not legally binding and therefore not likely to be taken seriously. In the 1980s another attempt was made, and this time UNICEF became actively involved in promoting the new document. In November 1989 the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and within the first year it had already been ratified by 20 countries, making the Convention a part of international law. Today, having been signed by almost all countries, it is the most universally ratified UN Convention.

of every adult and because spelling out these rights makes it easier for people to understand and act on their obligations. The old attitude used to be that assistance was given to children because generous, 'good' adults wanted to assist. The concept has changed. Adults have to give, have to provide and have to serve, because it is the right of children to receive this assistance. The second reason is because it makes sense economically. Children who are physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy will grow up to be happy, productive adults who will in turn foster similar traits in their own children. It is obvious that such a cycle would be a great asset for a country's future.

In Thailand, almost 28 per cent of the population are under the age of 18. While their numbers are large, as a group children are unorganized and under-represented. Why do children need to have their rights spelled out? The answer is two-fold. First, because it is the moral obligation



I would like to ask the  
government about its policy  
on street children.

*Children's Voices,*  
UNICEF, 1998





Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Law explains part of the impact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child has had on Thailand's decision-makers, "The subject of child rights has become much more open. In the early 1990s, Thailand was reticent when it came to talking publicly about child labour, child prostitution and the need for the protection of women and children. Government authorities were very reluctant to discuss these things openly and there was a sort of denial syndrome. What we've witnessed since Thailand signed [the

Certain segments of the public sector are also sorely lacking in education on child rights. Children who get into trouble with the law are in need of special protection. Ms Kitiya Phornsadja elaborates, "We started working with the juvenile and family courts to improve the services in the detention centres so that the authorities are more aware of the rights of these children. When children commit a crime, there must be specific procedures to deal with them. In many countries, children accused of a crime are treated the same as adults.

We have received a lot of reports about the maltreatment of children by the attendants working in the detention centres. Formerly the law required that such attendants have only a fourth-grade education. Just imagine what the quality of the services were. We are also working with the police on the same principles, recognizing the rights of children."



Convention] is a much more open process, more of a willingness to discuss and to look at the question of child rights and what changes need to be made."

Having the Convention on the Rights of the Child makes it easier for officials to recognize and target elements in society that are harmful to children. Yet, it is not only unscrupulous elements in the private sector that present such hazards.



Another way in which UNICEF is involved in ensuring that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is heeded in Thailand is by co-ordinating different aspects of the public sector to affirm that they assist and complement each other's efforts to aid children. For example, UNICEF is promoting a Multi-disciplinary Child Protection Team, which will co-ordinate the work of all the different offices that are responsible for children because no one unit can work effectively without the other. The police cannot work without the attorney general, without welfare officers, without the staff of the local hospital. It is hoped

that there will be a Multi-disciplinary Child Protection Team in each province.

A valid concern of people who are unfamiliar with the Convention on the Rights of the Child is that the rights contained within would somehow conflict with Thai customs and traditions. Interestingly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a product of a diversity of traditions because the people who drafted it came from varied backgrounds and were sensitive to the fact that even more diverse cultures would need to interpret and implement it. But in instances where local



Former Prime Minister and UNICEF Ambassador, Anand Panyarachun, representing Thailand in the signing of the World Declaration on Survival, Protection and Development of Children, 1992. Standing to the left of H.E. Anand Panyarachun are (from left to right) Stephen Umemoto, Representative to Thailand, Daniel J. Brooks, Regional Director and James P. Grant, Executive Director

### The Rights of Every Child

To be born, to have a name and nationality.

To have a family who will love and care for me.

To live in a peaceful community and a wholesome environment.

To have adequate food and a healthy and active body.

To obtain a good education and develop my potential.

To be given opportunities for play and leisure.

To be protected against abuse, exploitation, neglect, violence and danger.

To be defended and given assistance by the government.

To be able to express my own views.



culture advocates practices that are detrimental to the child, the Convention stands firm. The Convention on the Rights of the Child actually respects the tradition of parental rights. However, the Convention opposes situations where parental rights are taken to the extreme, such as severe forms of corporal punishment or the selling of one's own children into bonded labour or prostitution. Professor Vitit explains, "There are some bad traditions worldwide that we need to counter, traditions that promote child abuse and exploitation, such as forced child marriages, and the answer is not only to have a law against such practices. We also need to have a broader education process and community mobilization to counter negative traditions."

Of course the Convention is not of much use if people don't know about it. This presents a special challenge in countries, such as Thailand, where a sizeable portion of the population speaks Thai as a second language. In an effort to get the word out, the Convention has been translated into Yawi, a language spoken in southern Thailand, and in the future, the Convention will need to be translated into Hmong and other non-Thai languages spoken within the Kingdom. As Professor Vitit explains, the job of educating the public about what is contained in the Articles of the Convention presents some obstacles. "While we've tried to be inventive and creative in increasing Thai awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,

we've still got a long way to go. It's important that the message of child rights is multi-modal, utilizing different ways of diffusing information, be they traditional shadow plays or puppet theatre or via the Internet."

The ultimate goal is to persuade people that respecting child rights is not just the correct moral decision, it also makes good sense for Thailand's future. UNICEF and its advocacy of the Articles stipulated under the Convention on the Rights of the Child are working to alert Thailand to the needs and rights of the Kingdom's children. Today's rights-based programmes are a noble bid to empower what has historically been society's most powerless element – its children.



If I were an adult, I would never lie to a child. I know how it feels.

*Children's Voices,*  
UNICEF, 1998



## A SAY IN THEIR OWN FUTURE: CHILD PARTICIPATION

Just as the idea of child rights was for a time treated with condescension and suspicion, the concept of child participation is still seen in some quarters as fanciful. This is not surprising, as the idea of child participation is relatively new, and it often takes time for new ideas to gain favour. Child participation means giving children some say in the issues that affect them. The concept sounds simple enough, but there are cultural obstacles to be surmounted.



All adults willingly agree to child participation when it comes to sports and recreation, but most are much less comfortable with the idea of children questioning certain aspects of society. Similarly, many adults feel that children are too young to understand the complex issues that affect them. These adults might argue that, even if the issues were understood, children would not be mature enough to know what is good for them. Advocates of child participation contend that not only are children capable of understanding issues that affect them, they may have a better grasp of the feasibility of solutions simply by virtue of their being children.



I think it is good to allow children to express their opinions so adults can learn how they think and what's on their minds.

*Children's Voices,*  
UNICEF, 1998



Thai delegation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child 19th Session, Geneva, October 1998; seated in the front row (left to right) are youth delegates Priengpvai Pakjai and Ananya Lohakijja

In Thailand, the concept has thus far been met with mixed reviews. Some individuals perceive child participation as another Western concept that is being forced onto Thai society. Indeed, some sectors of Thai society, teachers for instance, may view child participation as being a potential threat to their traditional authority. This is partly due to the customary instructor/pupil relationship in Thai classrooms, where the instructor is never questioned, something teachers fear that child participation will lead to. If such opposition exists to mere child participation in the classroom, one wonders if child participation in the development of curriculum in Thai schools is not a pipe dream.

On the other hand, Thailand has already made impressive strides toward getting world-wide attention for child participation. In 1998, a Thai delegation travelled to Geneva, Switzerland, to submit a report to the Commission on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Among the official Thai delegates were two children. Hailed as a breakthrough in advancing the practice of child participation, Thailand was the first country to allow children to take part in such a way. Professor Vitit describes the scene, "The children were selected relatively democratically through a decentralized process, and I was very proud to be their interpreter. One of my major concerns was that the children

The biggest problem for children is the conflict within ourselves, between what we learn at home and at school and what is actually going on in society.

*Children's Voices,*  
UNICEF, 1998



would not be able to speak their minds to the international community. I certainly didn't want adults to control what the children would say once they got to Geneva. And they were not controlled. The children came with an agenda. They talked about being beaten. The boy described how he had been abandoned by his family. They talked about being exposed to illegal drugs, and they talked about it frankly but in a constructive way. And having the children talk candidly created a certain atmosphere of frankness and transparency." It is hoped that children will continue to be a part of

the official Thai delegation when submitting its report to the Commission in Geneva every five years.

As one of the key elements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the concept of child participation has become an important ingredient of UNICEF child protection programmes. An example of UNICEF involvement is a project on child rights training activities, which is concentrating on eight northern provinces and ten northeastern provinces. The training concerns child rights and rights violations, and



currently 22 out of 60 child rights volunteers are under the age of 18. In an interesting development that illustrates how such programmes generate genuine action on the part of children, two of the 22 have recently established their own organization. Called the Centre for Girls, the Chiang Rai-based organization has already attracted an additional 26 youth volunteers. Receiving funding from UNICEF, the Centre for Girls provides peer-to-peer education for adolescent girls. The youth volunteers submitted a plan of action to UNICEF that included the teaching of HIV/AIDS prevention and vocational skills, the idea being to reach girls who might otherwise be lured or sold into prostitution.

As society comes more and more to terms with the concept of child rights and child participation, everyone, including the Thai government, UNICEF and other organizations, will have to meet the challenges of enabling children to be consulted directly on the issues that affect them. With an eye on keeping Thailand at the forefront of such issues, Professor Vitit expects UNICEF to lead the way, "I think an important challenge for UNICEF in the 21st century will be not just a UNICEF run by adults, but a UNICEF run in part by children. One of the advantages that UNICEF enjoys over other international organizations is that it is able to go to people directly and establish partnerships. And I think the key component of a UNICEF partnership should be the child." 



I want all children to go to school and to live in the loving care of their families and society.

*Children's Voices,*  
UNICEF, 1998





## CHAPTER 4

## THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS

Over the past 50 years the policies of UNICEF and Thailand have evolved along parallel lines. What began as an effort to alleviate the suffering of Thai children in the wake of World War II has matured into a dedicated partnership to uplift all children within the Kingdom regardless of sex, religion or nationality. The effectiveness of this partnership can be discerned by simply comparing Thailand to some of its neighbours. When UNICEF came to Thailand, the state of Thai children was little different from that of children in neighbouring countries. The killing diseases, malnutrition, lack of safe water and sanitation and sub-standard education were just as acute as in the rest of Southeast Asia. Today the magnitude of Thailand's progress is immediately apparent upon crossing the border between Thailand and one of its less developed neighbours.

UNICEF's programmes have changed to fit the times and to serve corresponding needs. Progressing from a welfare-oriented and needs-based organization in the 1980s, the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been used as the solid foundation upon which to build programmes of long-lasting benefit. Over the past decade the trend in Thailand has been toward democratization and decentralization. Thailand's current national strategy includes serious efforts to involve local communities, down to the provincial and district levels, in the planning of development programmes. This participatory

approach is in agreement with the ideals of the Convention and the results should be promising. Naturally, people understand programmes better when they are included in the decision-making process. At the same time, when people are actually involved in planning the very programmes that are designed to aid their development, their personal interests help to insure that the programmes will be sustainable. Provided that the twin trends of democratization and decentralization continue, the future will undoubtedly see a Thailand where child rights will be understood and discussed openly and then integrated into all aspects of Thai society.

While the current economic crisis is mostly seen as a negative force that has worked against the development of Thailand, there have been some positive effects as well. The economic crisis has helped people to re-examine the path that was being taken toward development. During the boom times many were content to simply pay lip service to the idea of



democratization and decentralization. Now these concepts are beginning to be applied in a more serious way. This encouraging development, combined with reforms being taken to improve governance through minimizing corruption and improving management skills, will likely see Thailand emerge as a role model for the region, where social development is not forced to take a back seat to economic development. Indeed, in research undertaken by UNICEF and the World Bank in 1999, it was shown that spending decreased on alcohol and tobacco consumption during the economic crisis but remained constant for education and health. Families, often with the help of the local community or through intra-family sharing, prioritized the education and health of their children at the expense of more frivolous spending practises.

Concurrently, UNICEF is utilizing a two-pronged approach to take advantage of Thai government efforts at decentralization. UNICEF now has an office in Chiang Mai and will very soon open another one in Khon Kaen. In these offices, the capacity-building and analyses performed at the national level now will be translated into community-based activities that will actually be monitored by the host community. For example, UNICEF's 'child-friendly school initiative' utilizes a genuinely participatory approach, where the community, the school and the children come together to make the school a more friendly place for learning and understanding the local



When they [children] experience bad things, they just copy. Adults should do good things for children to copy.

*Children's Voices,*  
UNICEF, 1998



**Continued strong support of the social sector – especially programmes for children – is the best investment that a country can make in its future, whatever the crisis of the moment.**

**Carol Bellamy,  
Executive Director of UNICEF**



environment, both physical and cultural. By working from the national level down and from the community level up, UNICEF aims to help bridge the gap, working together with a strong, stable government while at the same time assisting at the community level to ensure the people, NGOs and civil society are consulted. UNICEF sees this as the ideal arrangement for launching its Convention on the Rights of the Child strategies and projects in developing countries, and Thailand will be one of the first countries to benefit.

And what will the state of Thai children be 50 years from now? In an

attempt to get an idea of what the future will hold, UNICEF is initiating a consultative process at three levels. The first level, which has already been established, brings together a visionary group of eminent Thai personalities from various fields such as economics, law and education, under the able leadership of UNICEF Thailand's Ambassador and former Prime Minister

Anand Panyarachun. This visionary group is being tasked with looking into the future of Thai children. With their intimate understanding of society and how it may evolve, the group will attempt to forecast the challenges, as well as formulate the strategies that will affect and, hopefully, improve the lives of the Kingdom's next generation of children.

In the same spirit of consultation and participation, UNICEF is currently organizing discussions with Thai adolescents to get them involved in understanding their rights and examining their own issues. In the primary schools as well, children are



*Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, in audience with His Majesty the King, 1998*

being encouraged to look into topics that affect their lives as a part of their daily discussions and assignments. Rather than UNICEF sitting down and trying to identify potential obstacles, it seems a much better idea to have the Thai people themselves – the experts, the adolescents and the children – study the issues and relate what they consider the opportunities and the risks of the future will be.

Besides programming and policies, there is another way in which the relationship between UNICEF, Thailand and Thai society has matured. Many countries today are in a stage of dependency on the United Nations and other foreign assistance. While it is understandable in cases when the

dependent countries have low levels of development or have to cope with political or social unrest, it is hoped that this dependency will eventually result in self-reliance. The commitment of the government and society of a dependent country should be in working toward eventually weaning themselves from the support of external sources. Thailand is gradually approaching that stage. Since the mid-1990s, when Thailand began its private sector fund raising strategy, the local community, both from the corporate and household sector, has contributed more than a million dollars to UNICEF, and this despite the woes of an economic crisis. This shows that there is a genuine commitment by Thai society to the well-being of children. Currently,

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**We in Thailand believe that investment in human resources, starting with children, is our country's best defence and the best hope for its future.**

**H.E. Chuan Leekpai,  
Prime Minister of Thailand**

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UNICEF's role in Thailand is that of a custodian for Thai children. The Thai public channels funds through UNICEF so that it may be used as seed money that will promote sustainable programmes for the development of the Kingdom's children. Having reached this stage, the day is certainly not far off when Thailand will say, "UNICEF, thanks for all the money you've contributed in the past. Now we only need your technical support, your advice and your monitoring. We no longer need your money because enough is now available through our own budget and from contributions from our own community."

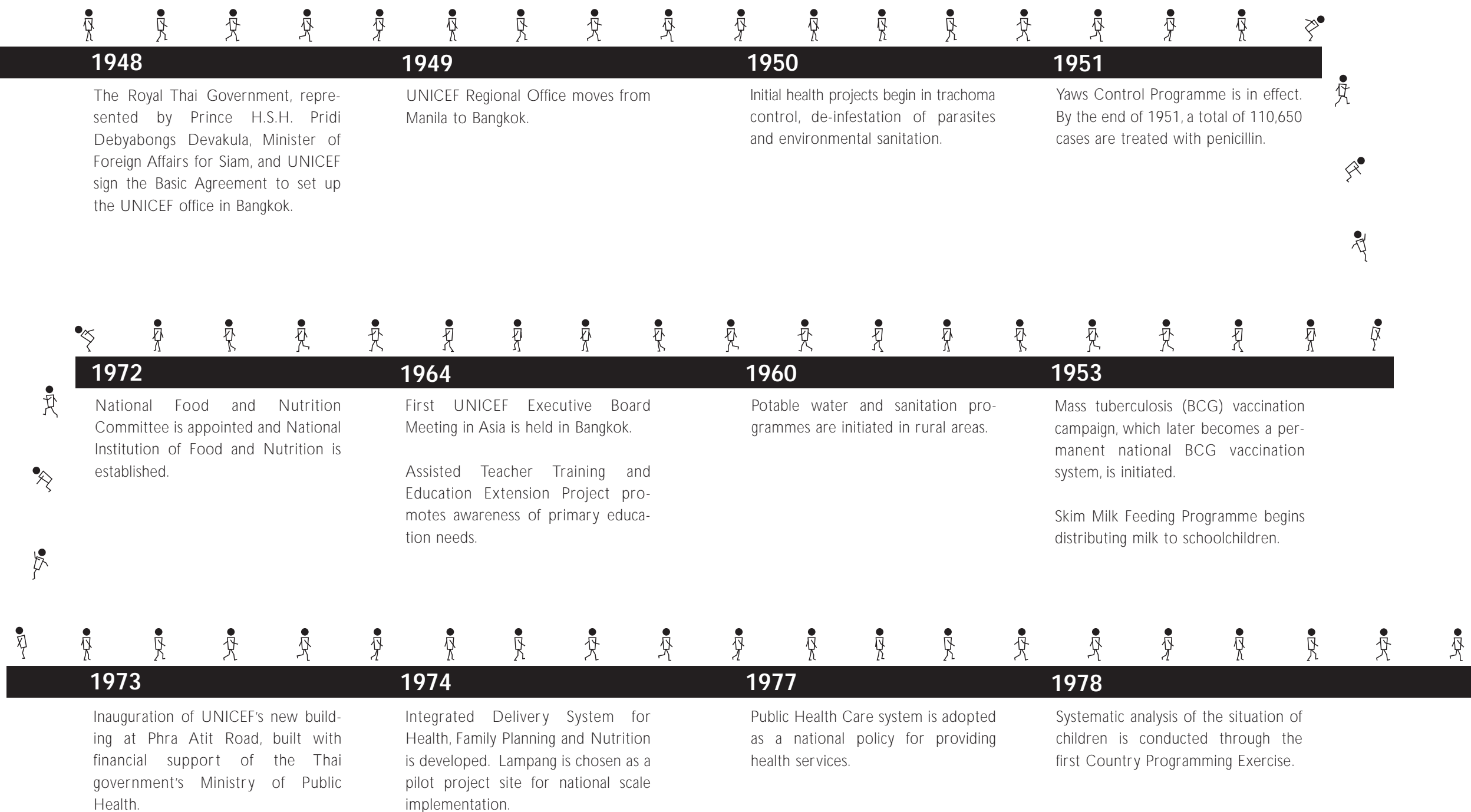
In Thailand this can come only when the private sector becomes more socially responsible. Until now it has primarily been the government that invests in the education and health of the private sector's workforce. Since the private sector is the beneficiary of the productivity of its workforce, it makes sense that the private sector should invest part of its profits in developing these human resources. Such actions on the part of a socially responsible private sector, together with good

governance, will eventually enable UNICEF in Thailand to set up a new, different type of organization. In the more developed countries of the world, national committees have been established. In such cases, UNICEF's role is financially independent and the national committee often acts as a mobilizer for other, more needy, countries in the region. Other governments are already exploring the role that UNICEF can play and, depending on prevailing national conditions, planning the most appropriate organizational structure. As Thailand is already engaged in an effort to assist East Timor through the generosity of Thai contributions, it should not be a long time before Thai benevolence, with UNICEF support, will be extended to children who suffer beyond Thai borders. In the same way that Thailand now receives UNICEF national committee funds from abroad, Thailand may soon have the international prestige and moral satisfaction of becoming a provider of both financial and technical assistance to the rest of the world. Thus, Thailand will once again become a pioneer of an innovative approach to define the role of UNICEF. 🌐

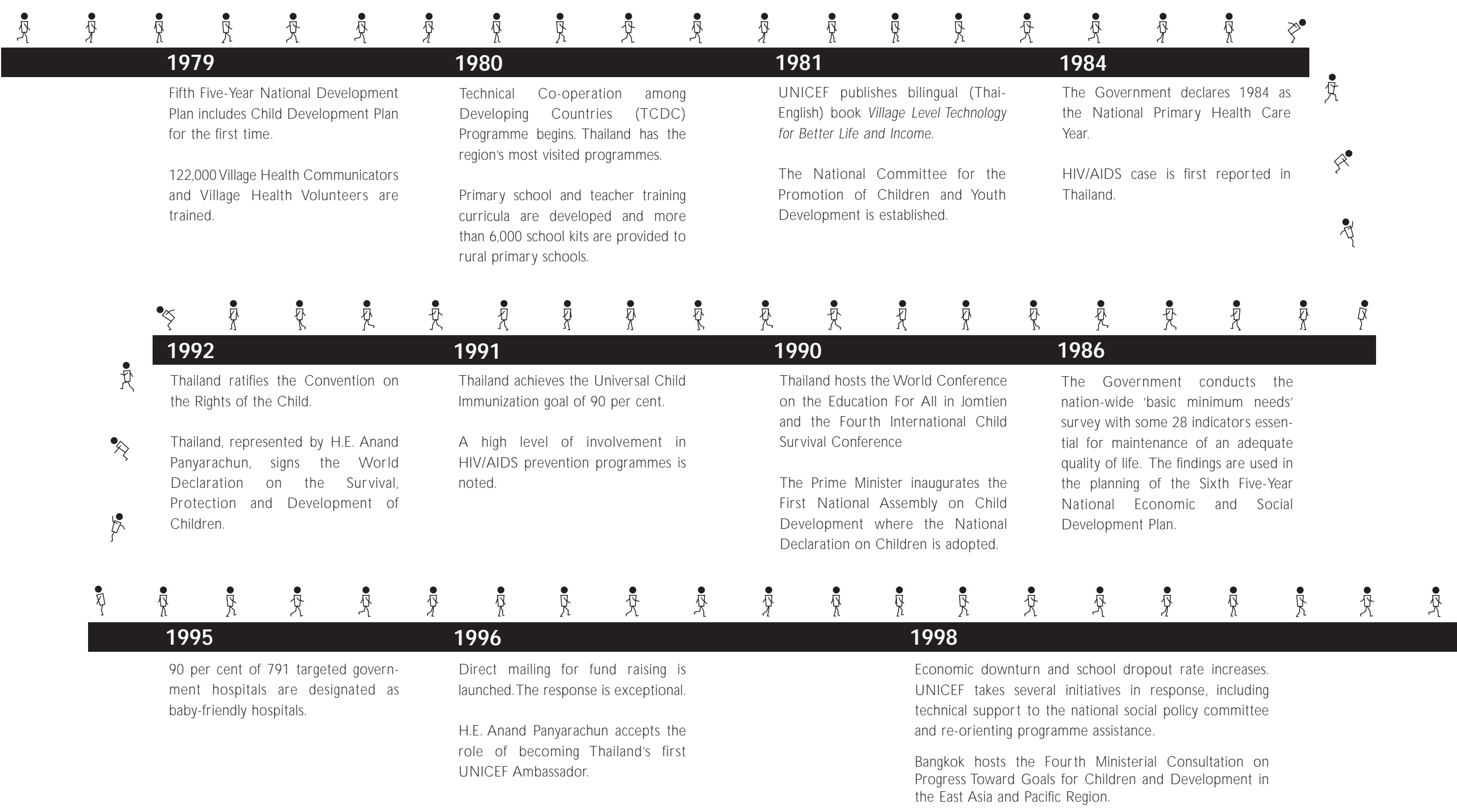




# Time Line



Time Line





## EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS AT NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

Mr Maurice Pate	1946-1965
Mr Henry R. Labouisse	1965-1979
Mr James P. Grant	1980-1995
Ms Carol Bellamy	1996-present



Mr Maurice Pate  
1946-1965



Mr Henry R. Labouisse  
1965-1979



Mr James P. Grant  
1980-1995



Ms Carol Bellamy  
1996-present



## REGIONAL DIRECTORS

Dr Michael Watt	1948-1949
Mr Spurgeon (Sam) Keeny	1950-1963
Mr Brian Jones	1964-1969
Mr Yehia Darwish	1970-1974
Mr Roberto Esguerra Barry	1975-1979
Mrs Titi Memet Tanumidjaja	1980-1984
Mr Ahmed Mostefaoui	1985-1988
Mr Daniel J. Brooks	1989-1994
Mrs Pratima Kale	1995-1997
Mr Kul C. Gautam	1998-present



Mr Roberto Esguerra Barry  
1975-1979



Mrs Titi Memet Tanumidjaja  
1980-1984



Mr Spurgeon (Sam) Keeny  
1950-1963



Mr Ahmed Mostefaoui  
1985-1988



Mr Daniel J. Brooks  
1989-1994



Mr Brian Jones  
1964-1969



Mr Yehia Darwish  
1970-1974



Mrs Pratima Kale  
1995-1997



Mr Kul C. Gautam  
1998-present





## REPRESENTATIVES TO THAILAND

Mr Simon Polak 1949-1965

Mr David Burgess 1966-1968

Mr Jose Diaz 1969-1973

The Thailand Office and the Regional Office  
were merged from 1974-1991

Mr Stephen Umemoto 1992-1994

Mrs Sarojini Vitachi 1995-1996

Mr Anthony Hewett 1997-1998

Mr Gamini Abeysekera 1999-present



Mr Simon Polak  
1949-1965



Mr David Burgess  
1966-1968



Mr Jose Diaz  
1969-1973



Mr Stephen Umemoto  
1992-1994



Mr Anthony Hewett  
1997-1998



Mrs Sarojini Vitachi  
1995-1996



Mr Gamini Abeysekera  
1999-present



## UNICEF TEAMS IN THAILAND



Early 1960s



1968



1971



1979



1981



1988



1994

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Steven Martin, a native of Southern California, has lived and worked in Thailand for the last ten years.

Martin learned to speak Thai fluently while teaching English to village children in a small hamlet close to Chiang Mai. He was editor of *Manager* magazine in 1997 and co-author of the *Rough Guide to Laos* in 1998.

Steven Martin lives in Bangkok and is currently working on an update of Lonely Planet's guidebook to Thailand.