

## **Rethinking Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among Karen “Longneck” Women Hill Tribe in Northern Thailand**

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### **Abstract:**

*The Karen tribe, originating from a branch within the Burmese Kayan ethnic group, now comprises the most considerable portion of Thailand’s ethnic highland population. The tribe has been migrating throughout Thai-Myanmar mountainous border, as the impact of armed conflict between Karen nationalist and Burmese government since the 1950s and as democracy faltered in Myanmar. In the last two decades, the number of Karen people who migrated to Chiang Rai has been increasing due to the new industry of tribal tourism in the province. However, for Thai people, the hill tribe people are still considered alien or the other, but their presence must be integrated into Thai society. Therefore, the Thai government issued a special identity card for the hill tribes identifying them as people belonging to ethnic minorities, yet, non-Thai citizens. There are currently three categories to recognize hill tribe people in Thailand based on the Cabinet resolutions and laws passed to reflect the level of the state’s acceptance of the citizenship status. However, this policy brings contradictive sense, especially in terms of citizenship rights and fulfilling SDGs for the hill tribes. This research focuses on Karen “longneck” women that live in tambon Nanglae, Amphoe Mueang Chiang Rai, named Kayan Lahwi, or the Padaung, the sub-group of the Red Karen. This research’s primary purpose is to specifically perceive the impact of Thai citizenship laws on the current social-economic sustainability of the Padaung Karen women living in tambon Nanglae, Amphoe Mueang, Chiang Rai. This research applied qualitative methods by using literature data, interviews, and participant observation to gather information. Close inspection will reveal challenging issues for Padaung Karen women in Chiang Rai to achieve sustainability in income (SDG 1), food security (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), and education (SDG 4) for their community.*

**Keywords:** Karen “Longneck,” citizenship, SDGs, tribal tourism, northern thailand

### **Abstrak:**

*Suku Karen, yang berasal dari cabang kelompok etnis Kayan Burma, kini menjadi bagian terbesar dari populasi etnis dataran tinggi Thailand. Suku tersebut telah bermigrasi ke seluruh perbatasan pegunungan Thailand-Myanmar, sebagai dampak dari konflik bersenjata antara nasionalis Karen dan pemerintah Burma sejak 1950-an dan ketika proses demokrasi tersendat di Myanmar. Dalam dua dekade terakhir, jumlah orang Karen yang bermigrasi ke Chiang Rai telah meningkat karena industri baru pariwisata suku di provinsi tersebut. Namun bagi masyarakat Thailand, masyarakat suku pegunungan masih dianggap makhluk asing, namun mau tak mau, keberadaan mereka harus diintegrasikan ke dalam masyarakat Thailand. Oleh karena itu, pemerintah Thailand mengeluarkan kartu identitas khusus untuk suku pegunungan yang mengidentifikasi mereka sebagai orang dari etnis minoritas, namun bukan warga negara Thailand. Saat ini ada tiga kategori untuk mengakui orang suku pegunungan di Thailand berdasarkan resolusi Kabinet dan undang-undang yang disahkan untuk mencerminkan tingkat penerimaan negara atas status kewarganegaraan. Namun, kebijakan ini membawa makna yang kontradiktif, terutama dalam hal hak kewarganegaraan dan pemenuhan SDGs bagi suku pegunungan. Penelitian ini berfokus pada perempuan Karen “leher panjang” yang tinggal di tambon Nanglae, Amphoe Mueang Chiang Rai, bernama Kayan Lahwi, atau Padaung, sub-kelompok dari Karen Merah. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah untuk secara khusus melihat dampak undang-undang kewarganegaraan Thailand terhadap keberlanjutan sosial-ekonomi perempuan Padaung Karen yang tinggal di tambon Nanglae, Amphoe Mueang, Chiang Rai, saat ini. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan menggunakan data literatur, wawancara, dan observasi partisipan untuk mengumpulkan informasi. Hasil penelitian mengungkap masalah yang masih menjadi tantangan bagi perempuan suku Padaung Karen di Chiang Rai untuk mencapai*

target pembangunan keberlanjutan (SDG) dalam pendapatan (SDG 1), ketahanan pangan (SDG 2), kesehatan (SDG 3), dan pendidikan (SDG 4) bagi komunitas mereka.

**Kata Kunci:** Karen "Leher Panjang", Kewarganegaraan, SDG, Pariwisata Tribal, Thailand Utara

## 1. Introduction

Chiang Rai, the northernmost province of Thailand, is also known as the region where the borders of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar congregate. Along the area, the Mekong River forms the state border and separates three ASEAN countries. After being occupied by Burmese until 1786 and part of Lana's kingdom for centuries, the city became a province of Thailand in 1910 during the reign of King Rama VII. There are 18 districts (*Amphoe*) administered in the province, and subdivided into 124 sub-districts (*tambon*) and 1510 villages (*muban*). Geographically, Chiang Rai consists of flat river plains area in its eastern part, and mountainous terrain in the western part. The mountainous terrain, or the hills part, is the most critical zone in the province, as it becomes a shared space between the native Thai and the ethnic minority groups. In the past, this area was the focal point where the opium trading and poppy cultivating activity dominated its society.

In Thailand, most indigenous people or ethnic minorities live in the northern and northeastern parts of the country, with few of them inhabit the southern part. There are different names to mention the ethnic minority groups. Especially in northern Thailand, several ethnic groups residing in the lowlands are collectively called *khon muang* (town people), whereas those who live in the highlands are identified as *chao khao* - "ชาวเขา (hill tribes). In 2015, it was estimated that the population of ethnic minority groups in Thailand was 6.1 million people, comprised of 4.9 million people of lowland ethnic groups and 1.2 million people of the hill tribes (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2015). This number is quite significant, covering almost 10 percent of Thailand's total population. Following the Royal Thai General System, ten hill tribes are residing in North Thailand under the global banner of definition the indigenous people, they are: Akha, Dara'ang, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Kachin, Karen, Lahu, Lisu, Lua (Lawa), and Shan (Tai-Yai). These ten groups are known to promote sub-national social movement actively, and this number has been expanding to other 30 ethnic groups from lowland and beyond the North (Morton, 2016).

This research will be focused on Karen "longneck" hill-tribe that live in tambon Nanglae, Amphoe Mueang Chiang Rai. In Thailand, the Karen hill tribe is identified into four sub-groups: the Pwo/Plong/Pa-O Karen, Sgaw Karen, Pga-gan Yaw or the Black Karen, and the Bwe/Kayah or the Red Karen. In tambon Nanglae, Amphoe Mueang Chiang Rai, living the Kayan Lahwi or the Padaung, the Red Karen's sub-group. In this area, the Padaung Karen live in a village side by side with other hill tribes of Akha, Lu Mien, Lahu, and Kayaw. Most of Padaung Karen came to Thailand as the impact of armed conflict between Karen nationalists and the Burmese government. At first, they came as the refugee living on the Thailand-Burma border camps. In the last two decades, the number of Karen people who migrated to Chiang Rai has been increasing as a result of the new industry of tribal tourism in the province. Ethnic villages have been a popular tourist destination in Chiang Rai, attracting investors to open more and more model villages where Karen "longneck" can live closer to the urban centers. Thus, this research will not be extended to the historical conflict concern of Karen people in Burma. The primary purpose of this research is to specifically perceive the current social-economic situation of the Padaung Karen "longneck" women in tambon Nanglae, Amphoe Mueang Chiang Rai, based on SDGs perspective (SDG 1-4) since most of the inhabitants in the tribal tourism villages are women. The research is mainly focused on answering the question about to what extent Sustainable Development Goals have been achieved for the Karen women hill tribes in Chiang Rai, Thailand. Close inspection will reveal challenging issues for Karen people living in the tourism villages in Chiang Rai to speed up their accomplishment to SDG targets as well as to follow-up development and sustainable goals for their community, essentially due to the existence of state's limitation and restriction to their cultural and political identity.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1. Research Methods

This research applied qualitative methods by using literature data, interviews, and participant observation to contextualize the literature review and provide supplementary information. A qualitative study is an approach using empirical enquiries that enable an investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2012). In the research process of a qualitative study, the literature review represents the most critical step of the research process (Boote, 2005). Analyzing the literature review means to break down a whole into its component or constituent part, through the assembly of the parts to understand the integrity of the whole data collection (Schwandt, 2007).

The interviews to provide supplementary information included a fixed series of pre-formulated questions, although follow the characteristics of an informal conversation and encourage the person questioned to do most of the talks. There were seven Padaung Karen "longneck" females and two males, aged between 16 to 50 years old, living in *tambon* Nanglae, *amphoe* Mueang Chiang Rai, interviewed in their home village to ascertain opinions and match the questions led by the most basic understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals target points (poverty, foods, health, and education). The participant observation was used to acknowledge infrastructure built inside the village, the villagers' mobility access, and their income flow to support their daily life based on their participation in the tribal tourism industry. However, along with the field research process, there was a problem with the language barrier due to insufficient proficiency in local Burmese and Thai language. Two native interpreters were needed to establish communication and translate the language verbally to the exact English translation. There would be a chance of dropping information. However, the lacking of language proficiency was inescapable.

### 2.2. Understanding SDGs for the Hill Tribes Based on Thai State-Led Development Model

According to the UNDP (2015), the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs is the global goals adopted by the United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action (in seventeen integrated points) to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The seventeen targets of SDGs are explained in the table below (UNDP, 2015).

**Table 2.2.1.** SDGs' Seventeen Points

SDG 1	No Poverty
SDG 2	Zero Hunger
SDG 3	Good Wealth and Well-Being
SDG 4	Quality Education
SDG 5	Gender Equality
SDG 6	Clean Water and Sanitation
SDG 7	Affordable and Clean Energy
SDG 8	Decent Work and Economic Growth
SDG 9	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
SDG 10	Reduced Inequalities
SDG 11	Sustainable Cities and Communities
SDG 12	Responsible Consumption and Production
SDG 13	Climate Action
SDG 14	Life Below Water
SDG 15	Life on Land
SDG 16	Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
SDG 17	Partnership for the Goals

In Thailand, SDGs are translated into Thai localization of the SDGs, in which the Sufficiency Economic Philosophy (SEP) has been a critical guiding principle of Thailand's sustainable development efforts, reflected in Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Plan since 2002 (Open Development Initiative, 2018). At the present day, in conjunction with the Constitutional Amendments in 2017 Constitution, Thailand announced the country's National Development Plan that introduced the ethnic questions in its 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017 – 2021) and has officially recognized 62 ethnicities in its entire regions: the sea people (chao lay) and hill tribes (chao khao). The first focus is on the Community Forest Bill to protect ethnic minorities' rights, way of life, culture, and local wisdom, especially those who live in conservation areas and the upstream areas of watersheds (Subsection 3, Clause 3.7, Par. 3.71). This first focus strongly affects indigenous people who live in the northern part of Thailand. The second focus concerns about Thailand's Deep South for Thai Malays ethnicity to reinforce national security. The third focus concentrates on ethnic tourism in the northern part of Thailand to enhance Lanna's uniqueness (the old kingdom of Northern Thailand) culture as development strategies (Prachathai, 2018).

The hill tribes are not Thai, given the different ethnic traits and nation origin (Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 2006). Materialized in their languages and clothes, people from the hill tribes apply different customs and traditions. For Thai people, the hill ethnic minorities are still considered alien or the other. However, their presence must be integrated into Thai society. Attention from the Thai government to hill tribes' presence was started after World War II, amidst the fear of Communism in Southeast Asia and the pressure applied by international organizations on narcotics elimination. Since then, many development projects have been carried out by the Thai government to integrate the hill tribes, who posed a possible national threat, to the national agenda. Therefore, state interference in the name of development and social welfare for the hill tribes has essential purposes: securing Thai borders, ending opium cultivation, and improving the highland ethnic minority people (Sakboon, Controlling Bad Drugs, Creating Good Citizens: Citizenship and Social Immobility for Thailand's Hill Ethnic Minorities, 2013).

One example is the Doi Tung Development Project, which started in 1988 in Chiang Rai in the Northern Thailand. The project was seen as a successful effort for the country to eradicate opium cultivation by the highland ethnic minorities. Under the late Princess Mother's stewardship, the project reforested the once-barren mountain and offered alternative living by cultivating popular products like coffee and tea plants. The project also offers design and marketing assistance for the hill tribes' handicrafts and other local products to prove the self-reliance agenda for the hill tribes to run the project by themselves shortly. The Doi Tung model proves poverty eradication and tackles a lack of economic opportunities based on the sustainable development model as an alternative development. Another project initiated by Their Majesties, the King and Queen for the hill tribes, is the forest's food bank project. This project schemes to make people benefit from the forests, and mutually, they will become the forest's guardian. This project has secured food security to the hill tribes, and on the other side, it also secures the local environment. The hill tribes are allowed to plant and collect edible plants for their consumption, but they must use it moderately and sustainably (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand, 2015).

On the national scale, in 1956, the Thai government has already established the Committee to Provide Welfare to People in Remote Areas, renamed into Hill Tribe Welfare Committee, and now is known as Hill Tribe Committee. This committee has a primary function to assist hill tribes' problems, including tackling poppy cultivating and other considerable threat to Thai national security. During this period, the concept of nikhom (temporary settlement area) was also introduced as a policy to assist the hill tribes for the express of purpose to help them to become capable and self-reliance, while in the same time, making it easy for Thai officials to conduct the development and welfare projects to mainly solve the problem of opium cultivation (Buadaeng, 2006). Further, the Thai state's integration policies to the hill tribes were resolved in the Cabinet 1976 to implement national integration and instill national loyalty among the highland people. Since that time, the Thai government has also initiated the Thai Development Program for the hill tribes, including state survey and registration,

building schools in highland areas by the Border patrol Police, and sending Buddhist missionaries to the highlands. The projects, especially related to education, are also supported by foreign donors and international and local NGOs (Sakboon, Spatial Arrangements, Borders and Negotiation, 2011).

### 2.3. *Karen Hill Tribe in Northern Thailand*

The indigenous people of Thailand are often referred to as the hill tribes and sometimes ethnic minorities. These terms are interrelated and interchangeable in use. Karen tribe originated from a branch within the Burmese Kayan ethnic group, now comprise the most considerable portion of the highland population in Thailand. Concentrated on the northern border side, more than two thousand villages are located along the Thai-Myanmar border, from Chiang Rai to Prachuab Khiri Khan. There is no clear evidence to tell the exact time when the tribes settled in Thailand, but it is believed that their ancestors had been present within Thailand's boundaries for no less than 200 years (Kesmanee, 1995).

The presence of Karen people in Thailand was noticed discernably since 1962 by the cause of civil war in Burma as the Ministry of Interior defined the Karen Tribe as the displaced persons from armed conflict (Trichot, 2005). It was described that Karen people had fled an armed conflict described as the slow genocides of ethnic people. Their villages were burned to the ground, and the villagers live in constant fear of the Burmese military coming to their village to torture, rape, and kill anyone suspected to have a connection to the ethnic armed opposition (La Guardia, 2005). In the mid-1980s, about 60,000 Mons and Karen people fled to Thailand to escape Burmese military offensive. During the 1990s until the 2000s, the number increased to about 120,000, with most refugees being Karen people (UNHCR, 2011). Although Thailand has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and is not a party to the Convention or its 1967 Protocol, Thailand is the primary host for more than 100,000 refugees, whom the majority of them are ethnic minorities from Myanmar living in temporary shelters along with Thailand and Myanmar state border (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

It has been more than 30 years that Karen people live with refugee status in Thailand since the first refugee arrived in 1984. They have been living in an isolated camp in the mountains that are mostly far away from the town to access essential health and communication signals. The Kayan or the Padaung Karen hill tribe in Thailand inhabits a resettlement area called *nikhom*. The primary purpose of *nikhom*, in the first place, was to create temporary settlement camps for the various ethnic minorities under the Thai Council of Ministers, coordinated under the Central Hill Tribe Committee as the first organization established in 1959 to be responsible to hill tribe policy on a national level. This method reflects the policies of Thailand, which emphasized on temporary living (Trichot, 2005). Thai government allows only temporary asylum centralized on the state's border side for humanitarian reasons. Therefore, besides functioned as a temporary settlement, *nikhom* aimed to assist integration between the ethnic minority groups and the Thai government, making them more effortlessly controllable (Trupp, 2014). Inside *nikhom*, many houses were built for temporary usage by using bamboo as the material for construction. Decades after, the Padaung Karen are still living in *nikhom*, as their status is still refugees waiting to repatriate after the war. However, the *nikhom* concept also generated personal space and privacy concerns. For example, camps in Mae La, Tham Hin, and Ban Don Yang are reported to be overcrowded and limit space for the people. A family cannot store their households, and the young married couples share sleeping space with parents. The bamboo material also generates awareness of the future danger of fire traps. The difficulties and limitations have mostly become the main reason for the Karen hill tribe to move and join the industry of tribal tourism, selling their authentic culture of "longneck."

### 2.4. *The Industry of Padaung Karen "Longneck" Tribal Tourism in Chiang Rai*

In tambon Nanglae, Amphoe Mueang, Chiang Rai, there is a famous Karen village for tribal tourism, called the Union Tribe Villages, founded by Friends of the Hill Tribes Foundation. This village is not an authentic village built by the Karen people themselves, but the village was built for tourism in the hills of Chiang Rai, displaying the daily activities of, mostly, Karen "longneck" women

wearing their traditional necklace. This village is following the trace of other villages that have been gaining success to attract tourists internationally. At least four similar Karen tourism villages in other *tambon* apply eco-tourism, combining elephant trekking, hiking, mountain biking, handicraft learning, and local food tasting. All villages, located far away from each other, aim to develop Chiang Rai province tourism with the target market, especially for the middle-class groups from Western countries like the EU, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. The villagers mentioned that the vision and mission behind the villages' establishment are especially to redistribute the income generated from the tourists for the local communities and support the hill tribes living. At the same time, it will also connect and help people around the world to interact with the hill tribes or so-called authentic hill tribes' experience in their authentic culture. Karen people become the most attractive magnets for the tourism industry because of Karen "longneck" women's uniqueness. The Karen women have become well-known for wearing rings or coils around their neck, making the neck stretched and their head floating above a pedestal of gold.

For the Karen village in *tambon* Nanglae, *amphoe* Mueang, Chiang Rai, the village does not offer exotic nature photography and elephant trekking jungle; however, the location is only around 20 minutes driving from Chiang Rai international airport, making it accessible for many international tourists. The village was established nearly 20 years ago, combining five hill tribes' villages altogether: Akha, Lu Mien, Lahu, Hmong, and Karen. However, it gains popularity just in previous years as more people acknowledge Karen longneck women advertised in most tourism posters and billboards.



**Picture 1.** The outside gazes of Karen Village (personal photos)

There are an entrance gate and Thai officers that collect entrance fees from the tourists from the gate of the village. Thai local people must pay THB 200 (USD 6), and non-Thai must pay around THB 300 (USD 9). There is a little shop near the gate, selling drinks and snacks. After paying the entrance fee, tourists must walk around 10 minutes to reach the village. Along the way, there is still unpaved road with Bamboo Bridge connecting the small river. Poultrys are wandering around freely. A giant billboard map is installed to give directions for the tourists to walk around the area.



*Picture 2.* Dirt road to the village (personal photos)

The *nikhom* concept is seen to be applied in this tribal tourism village. Most of infrastructures found in this village are built from bamboo, including the houses and the only kindergarten school for the Karen children. Every day, the Padaung Karen "longneck" women do their daily activities, like making textiles and selling souvenirs using their traditional clothes and neck rings. Inside the house, the "longneck" women can cook their foods. Most of the villagers live in Karen village are women and children. Some men are seen to walk around and move from one place to another place.



*Picture 3.* Houses, Souvenirs Markets, and Schools (personal photos)

## 2.5. Finding SDGs in Karen "Longneck" Tourism Industry

In the Karen village in *tambon* Nanglae, *amphoe* Mueang, Chiang Rai, 40 populations of Padaung Karen live in around 30 houses. Each house is mostly taken care of by a woman to sit and wait for the tourists to buy their souvenirs like textile, knitted bags, and rings with affordable prices for around THB 100 – 300 (USD 3 – 9) each item. In order to communicate, they use the Thai language and sometimes change into their local language. An old Karen lady mentioned that she has been living in this village since 2004. She came directly to this village from Burma with her children after she received information about this village. When she was asked why she was interested in moving to this village, she replied:

*"They offer me a free place to stay. Yes, it is free. We can stay with no payment to rent or anything. We just come, do our tradition and open shops. Moreover, they provide us with a bonus of rice and a sum of money (from the entrance fees). If the tourists come and buy our souvenirs, we can have all the money. I like to be here, and I can earn money."*

Other Karen women, when they were asked why they came to this village, they said that:

*"It is free, and I do not need to pay for anything. I move to here from Mae Hong Son (refugee camp). I have a son and two daughters who help my shop and raise poultries. We can cook our food and eat every day. My son is now working in Burma. He has (the pink) card to move around. Sometimes he visits me and gives me some money to buy clothes and foods."*

*"The village is near the town. Sometimes I visit the town and see many things. I follow my family to move here. I can live in our own house"*.

In the village, there is no health clinic, or hospital found. Karen people must go to the hospital near the town to access health by showing their pink card. Because they are not Thai citizens, they cannot get the thirty-baht-per-visit-scheme, so they need to spend more money on health. However, there is usually a community service program by doctors, nurses, and other health practitioners who come to this village. A local man from Karen village mentioned that:

*"The men (must) go outside the village (to find a job). We work on the farm nearby or build constructions (for cash). We need the money to support (health) for our family. (For example) If my wife needs to deliver the baby, we need to go to the hospital. Whatever the emergency, we must go to the hospital in the town."*

Inside the village, there is only one school for the level of kindergarten. Inside the school, there are books written in Thai to teach the children the Thai language. All children and villagers must speak in Thai, although sometimes they talk with their local language. The teachers who teach in the school are Thai, coming from the village near the Karen village. At school, all children must study the Thai alphabet, English, and Math. If the Karen children want to continue their education, they must go outside the village to enter the primary schools and other Thai children. Karen parents can register their children to the government schools until the high school level.

*"I only (go to school) until Junior High school outside this village. Nevertheless, I fell in love and got married. Now, I am helping my family to raise our children."*

The Karen village in *tambon* Nanglae, *amphoe* Mueang, Chiang Rai, attracts local Karen people because it offers them a free space to stay with a mutual benefit of tribal tourism. The village provides the villagers with staple foods (rice) and allows them to plant vegetables and raises poultries for their daily consumption. The tourism industry has also opened an opportunity for Karen people to earn some money by selling their cultural products. It helps the people to elevate their life from the extreme poverty too. For example, it was mentioned that the entrance fees that the tourists paid would be returning to the hill tribes through monthly salary for each family, foods (rice, meat, vegetables), medicines, clothing, blanket, school uniforms, bamboo for construction materials, instructional media at school (tables, chairs, boards, books, stationaries), and payment for teachers to teach at school for the children. Some villagers prefer staying in the tourism village to staying in the refugee camps or in the conflict area back to their original state where they could not find peace of mind and always felt fear of persecution every day in their life. With the opportunity offered in this tribal tourism industry, the concept of Karen "longneck" tourism is now gaining attention for many Karen people who are still living in the refugee camps or even in their state. A Karen man told that:

*"The (tribal tourism) business is now open in Phuket (South Thailand) and even in Malaysia! People love to see us. We will go (there) if we have a chance. But it is difficult to get (document permissions)."*

Despite the village's economic and social opportunities, the villagers have been living in a similar place and model for many years. The Karen village in *tambon* Nanglae, *amphoe* Mueang,



Chiang Rai, is strictly prohibited from being built by materials other than bamboo, and they must open their village to people from morning to afternoon. Thai authorities fully control the village's management and development, and there should not be any changes that occurred in the village as it will ruin the concept of authentic tribal life and culture. There has been no development for the road infrastructure, and the environment management is handled by using eco-friendly materials and non-fossil fuel activities. This can be considered as a rule to limit their capacity to develop the village. Moreover, by holding refugee status identified with the pink card, Karen "longneck" women are still living under *nikhom* policy and have their mobility restricted. For the villagers in Chiang Rai, they are still allowed to go around the town, even register the children in the local schools or go to the hospitals nearby, but if they want to travel, they need to have permission from several levels authorities.

## 2.6. *The Struggle for Sustainability for the Karen Hill Tribe*

Until the present day, the Thai Constitution has not recognized laws to accommodate indigenous people's citizenship and instead issues a special identity card for the hill tribes identifying them as people belonging to hill tribes, including for the Karen hill tribe. In order to regulate the movement of the hill tribes, aside from setting up *nikhom*, the Thai government also employs a color-card system, known as the alien cards, as they have not yet possessed Thai citizenship (Duran, 2017). Currently, there are three categories to recognize hill tribespeople in Thailand based on the Cabinet resolutions and laws passed to reflect the level of the state's acceptance of the citizenship status; there are (1) Original highland people, born in Thailand from 10 April 1913 to 13 December 1972. These people and their descendants are entitled Thai citizenship, (2) Legal immigrants, who entered Thailand either before or on 3 October 1985, can apply for citizenship through naturalization after living in the country for five consecutive years. If they have children born in Thailand, they can apply for citizenship to the Interior Ministry. (3) Illegal immigrants, who entered Thailand after 3 October 1985, cannot apply for any legal status and must be repatriated. If they have children born in Thailand, they must be repatriated, too (Yee, 2005).

Previously, the Karen hill tribe would hold a blue card or a green card with a red border to substantiate the ID card. Presently, the authorities issue the pink cards (*bat chompuu*) to all categories of ethnic minorities who reside in Thailand without Thai citizenship, but mostly to identify the Burmese displaced persons (Khaochan, 2009). This policy brings contradictive sense in terms of development targets and citizenship rights for the hill tribes. First of all, the hill tribes are restricted from having free access mobility. To travel beyond their own district's borders, the hill tribes must seek permission from officials to pay fees mostly. Some sanctions for the violators are fined between hundreds to thousands of baht, or worse, relocation of areas designated as national parks, forest reserves, or wildlife conservation areas. Restricted mobility illustrates the daily realities faced by many ethnic minorities without legal status (Sakboon, Controlling Bad Drugs, Creating Good Citizens: Citizenship and Social Immobility for Thailand's Hill Ethnic Minorities, 2013).

Due to this movement limitation, hill tribespeople cannot easily find job opportunities to improve their economic status or even access the low-cost healthcare service as it is only reserved for Thai citizens (the thirty-baht-per-visit-scheme). Moreover, this curb also results in human insecurity. The Karen people are still under structural differentiation in terms of economic arrangements from the local Thai people. For example, they cannot participate in a formal industrial mode of production or enter a formal work as employers and cannot open the bank account or even procure a driving license. Consequently, their income will be dependent and mediated merely through direct cash transactions in seller-buyer and employer-worker relationships (Rajah, 2008). The lack of citizenship also inhibits their access to land ownership and subject to the relocation of the family (Kesmanee, 1995). As the state classified people's mobility and goods as illicit, the hill tribes are susceptible to manipulation and exploitation (Tapp, 1989). As such, they were working with underpaid wages or human rights abuse. Lack of citizenship serves as the major risk factor for exploitation and trafficking for hill tribes in Thailand (Yindee, 2001).

As part of advocating fundamental rights for the indigenous people, the Network of Indigenous People in Thailand (NIPT) enforces an indigenous rights-based approach to the Thai government. Accordingly, the government has been adopting some laws and policies that can be considered auspicious to indigenous people, to some extent. Some cabinet resolutions, changes in government regulations, and amendments to Acts in recent years are moving toward increased pluralism in Thailand. For instance, Revisions to make it possible for children without citizenship to go to school in Thailand in the Fourth Amendment of the Nationality Act (2008); Revisions to make it possible for children without citizenship to go to school in Thailand in Second Amendment of the Civic Registration Act (2008); Regarding the right to health care for ethnic minorities without citizenship in local hospitals in Thailand (2010); Regarding the restoration of the way of life of the Chao Le (Moken or Sea Gypsies) ethnic group in southern Thailand in Cabinet Resolution (2 June 2010); and Regarding the restoration of the way of life of the Kariang (Karen) ethnic group in western and northern Thailand in Cabinet Resolution (3 August 2010). Nonetheless, the execution of such laws and policies has not been unwavering. Moreover, Thailand's legal system is not set up to appropriately handle racial discrimination as it is not recognized in domestic legislation, and is only broadly included in the Constitution that all Thais are considered equal under the law.

### 3. Conclusion

Thailand applies the classical definition of development in terms of macro development to achieve the targets of SDGs for the hill tribes by implementing various national policies and development projects. Thailand considers development as a multidimensional process involving significant changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions and the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of absolute poverty (Todaro, 1985). One apparent aspect of macro development in Thailand can be perceived by rapid infrastructure development and industrialization. However, in progressing the macro development, the micro aspect of development is less seen. The hill tribes are still considered a non-dominant group with their own indigenous culture, resulting in the policymaking (for the hill tribes' development) steered without their social and political participation.

In the northern provinces of Thailand, there are still found a countless number of Karen people living as refugees in isolated hills areas between Thailand-Myanmar borders. Thailand has issued development programs to fulfill the fundamental rights mentioned in SDGs (1-4) for the hill tribes, and one of the options is to promote tribal tourism. This tourism relies on the concept of tribal experience, in which the tourists and the hill tribes can interact with each other. The tourists will gain experience, and the hill tribes will have monetary benefits. This way is offered in order to elevate the chance for the Karen tribes to secure their life from extreme poverty (SDG 1), open access for foods (SDG 2), education (SDG 3), and health (SDG 4), although it is still limited due to citizenship concern.

Sustainable development for Karen women in Thailand occurs only in terms of sustaining the tourism industry, while other aspects, like people's participation and rights to move, have not considered in the issued policies. In the refugee camps and the village, Karen women are living under a similar concept of *nikhom* (temporary shelter). However, many Karen women chose to move to the village because they expected to have their own space and privacy under the small house made of bamboo by promoting their cultural identity of "longneck." The presence of temporary shelter policy reflects Thai policy to accommodate Karen refugees temporarily, this makes Karen women vulnerable to the policy of repatriation at any time. Although Thailand has pushed Karen hill tribe people's economic and social life by the tribal tourism industry, their development is yet sustainable.

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