

BAAN UNRAK PROJECT



**A sanctuary for destitute
Children and Mothers**

BAAN UNRAK PROJECT CHART

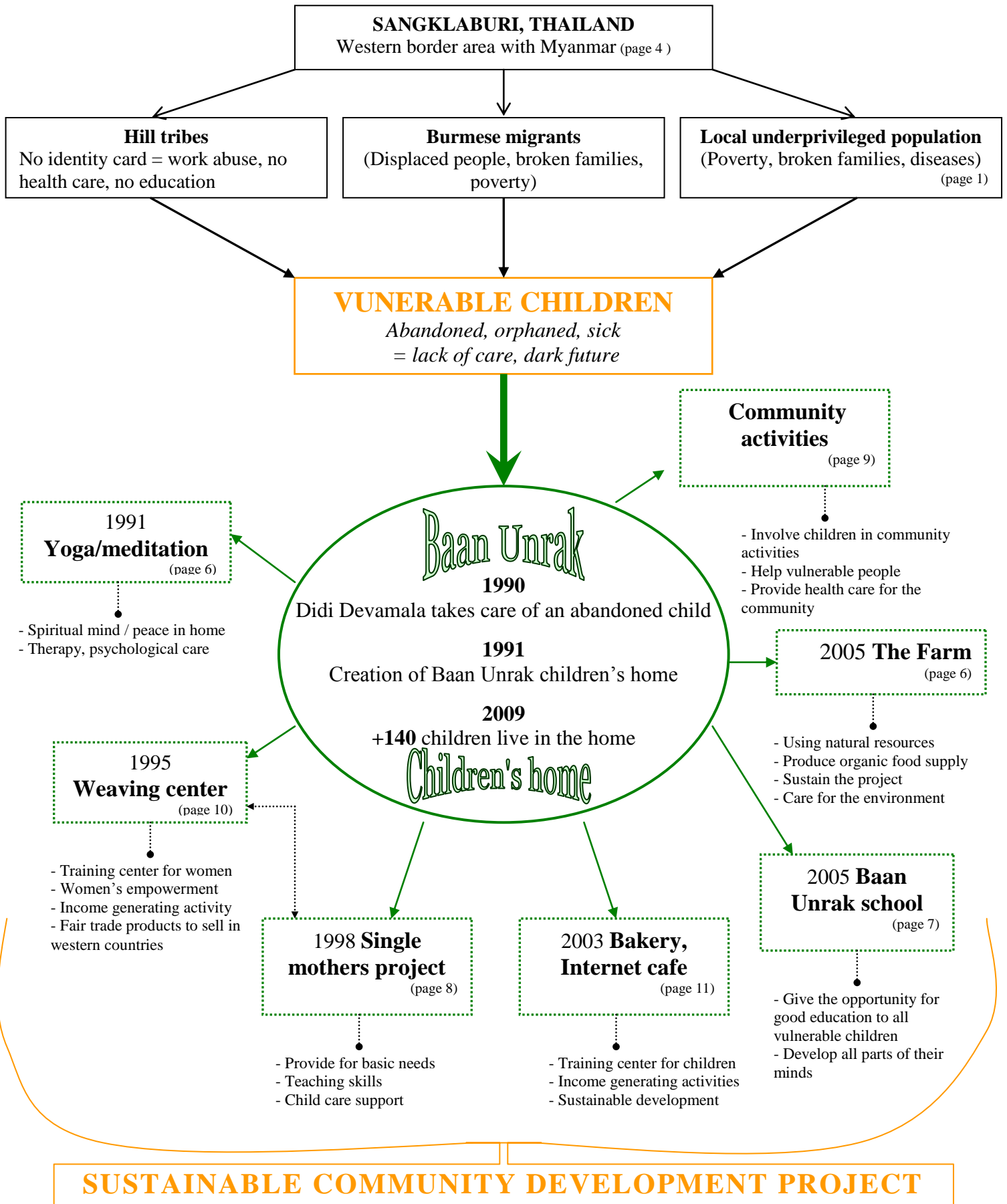


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I.BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF NEEDS

1) Baan Unrak's mission: An orphanage for destitute children

Baan Unrak children's home, established in 1991 in Thailand, gives destitute children and abandoned mothers a home and hope for a better future. Baan Unrak, the "Home of Joy," provides basic needs to more than 140 children, and support to several abandoned mothers.

2) Sangklaburi: Seeing behind the beauty

Baan Unrak is located in Sangklaburi, in Kanchanaburi province in western Thailand. Sangklaburi is in a remote area, where tourists take elephant rides and trips into the jungle. Because of the peacefulness, and the beautiful environment (mountains, the lake and waterfalls), the local tourist industry is expanding.

Sangklaburi is also ravaged by poverty and disease.

In 1988, the government built a dam to bring electricity to Bangkok. This caused the flooding of much land. The local community faced relocation and loss of livelihoods.

Sangklaburi is only 22 kilometers from Three Pagodas Pass, at the border between Thailand and Burma.

The border is quite porous, so it is easy to enter Thailand. After arriving, most of the migrants can not leave the border area because of their illegal status.

An influx of refugees and immigrants, fleeing war and slavery in Burma, has added to the region's economic problems, including high unemployment.

Most of the refugees in the Sangklaburi area are from the Mon and Karen states, which are targeted by the terror campaign of the Burmese military. According to UNHCR, half of the displaced people are children, and 15% are under five years old.

3) Reasons for the abandonment of children

People are unable to care for their children and abandon them for a variety of reasons. Most of the time, one of the parents is sick or has died early.

Because of their illegal status, migrants are more vulnerable to poverty, disease and cultural changes. As a result, families are easily destroyed. Sometimes men decide to seek work in Bangkok and never come back or come back with a disease such as HIV. This often leaves the women to care for their children alone.

Moreover, migrant women are easily recruited for forced labor or into sex industry. These women are unable to care for their children. Because of their financial or work circumstances and/or because of the stigma of single motherhood they abandon their children at a hospital or a home like Baan Unrak. The extreme poverty of the area also causes the local and hill tribe communities to bring children.

They often bring children to the home not because they don't love them, but because they have completely lost hope.



II. THE CHILDREN HOME

1. Baan Unrak's unexpected beginning

In 1986, Didi Ananda Devamala came to Thailand to work on an agricultural and environmental project. Upon arrival in Thailand, she worked as an English teacher. She also opened a small study center for children in a slum.

Three years later, Didi went to Sanghlaburi to start her agricultural project. An abandoned wife asked Didi to help her take care of her child. Both mother and baby suffered from severe malnutrition and other illnesses. So she thought that she could provide some temporary help.

People heard that Didi could look after abandoned children. The villagers saw how she was helping the children and trusted her.

A Karen peasant's wife died, leaving six children. Her husband could not look after the children because he had to work. Didi took in the youngest girl, who was six months old, and her four elder sisters.

The number of children staying at the house increased day by day, and Baan Unrak became an orphanage. Today, there are about 150 children. The project is managed by Didi Devamala and Didi Aanuraga (Baan Unrak School), by local staff and by volunteers from around the world. Baan Unrak also employs housemothers who provide love and care to all the children, and especially the infants.

2. A growing project

Between 2004 and 2006, the number of children increased dramatically. The home became crowded and it was decided to buy some land and build a bigger children's home. In June 2006, the children moved into the new building. Now the project is able to properly take care of all the children.

During the last ten years, Baan Unrak developed various small scale projects, such as opening an education center and starting income generating activities. These benefit both the children and the community, and establish another link between them. We also start a farm and we are growing organic vegetables and fruits, as well as spices and herbal medicines for our own consumption.

Baan Unrak children's home has become a community development project, with the aim of making the home more self-sustaining. The project uses local and available resources and promotes environmental concern among the children and the community.

3. Yoga and Meditation – A therapy

Children learn Yoga and meditation, which teaches them concentration and helps to ensure their psychological and physical well-being. Group meditation sessions are held mornings and evenings in the home. It provides moments of peace. At these times, the house is silent.

Kesala Insa, aged 12, said that yoga has improved her health. *"I got sick very often, but after learning yoga, my health has improved and my mind is more peaceful"*



III.BAAN UNRAK SCHOOL

For several years, we tried to send Baan Unrak's children to Thai government schools. They faced many barriers such as language (most of the children do not speak Thai when they arrive at Baan Unrak), or a difficult personal history. Moreover, the government schools were overcrowded and provided our children with a poor quality education.

To further our mission, in 2004, we opened a school for Baan Unrak's children. In addition to providing education to the children, the goal is to build an environment where students can develop all parts of their minds and become active learners.

The education is based on the ideas of Neo-Humanism. This focus, combined with small class sizes, allows the teachers to provide individual attention to all students, especially those with special needs. Every few months, we provide teacher training in Neo-Humanist methods and in understanding the problems of parentless children.

Many volunteers from around the world come to teach English. The children need to be fluent in Thai and English, to ensure their future integration into society. We try to give each child an opportunity to continue his/her study at the high-level school, in Bangkok or in Kanchanaburi. Baan Unrak school includes a nursery and kindergarten. This provides care for the youngest children and gives their mothers, who come to us in emotional distress, an opportunity to rest.

Baan Unrak school also welcomes children from the surrounding area. Children of migrants or hill tribes people often face difficulties integrating into the government schools, as they are often unregistered. In 2006, Baan Unrak school was providing education to 180 children, more than 100 came from the community.



IV. THE SINGLE MOTHERS PROJECT

The influx of refugees and economic poverty has caused many problems in the area. As a result, families break apart. Husbands abandon their wives, who become single mothers. It is very difficult for a woman to survive alone, and almost impossible if she has a small child. In general, nobody gives jobs to mothers with small children or pregnant women. Single mothers are viewed as a social burden.

While taking care of abandoned children is important, we think that it is also necessary to address the mother's needs.

Mothers who have to give away their children are usually depressed. They believe that their future their children's futures are hopeless. We decided to help them cope with their difficulties.

Baan Unrak provides abandoned mothers with rice, milk and temporary shelter. While providing for their basic needs, we encourage them to care for their children and help them build better relationships with their children. Sometimes we let them stay with us until they are stronger. Mothers who intended to give their children away slowly change their minds while staying at Baan Unrak.

The goal is also to help them become self sufficient, as they will not remain here all their lives. We provide them with opportunities to learn new skills and to become active participants in the project.



V. ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITY

1. Health Programs

Diseases, such as malaria, typhoid and dysentery, and health problems related to poor sanitation, are scourges of the Sangkhlaburi area. Sangkhlaburi's hospital is not adequate. Villagers from the forest often die before they can reach the hospital. Health centers in the forest often cannot help them.

Migrants and hill tribes' people don't have access to health facilities because they are unregistered. Most of the time, they will not be accepted by hospitals or they do not have enough money to buy the medicines.

To address this issue, a mobile medical unit was established in 2003 at Baan Unrak. We provide the community with medical care. We focus our work on HIV patients. We provide emotional support by visiting them regularly and giving them monthly therapy.

2) Relief programs

Baan Unrak has organized relief programs in the surrounding villages and refugees camps, distributing food and clothing. Baan Unrak teenagers manage most of the relief programs.

The Tsunami's relief action

After the Tsunami, some of the oldest children went in the affected area to help the victims. During the relief, migrant people were neglected by both the authorities and the NGO's because of the language barrier. As most of our children speak three languages: Thai, English and Burmese, and in some cases Mon or Karen as well, they could sometimes help the people more effectively than professionals.

Children have to be involved in community activities as a part of their education. We believe that helping others in need always helps oneself. These kinds of activities make them proud of themselves, and gives them confidence. It raises their self-esteem without increasing selfishness.

3) Helping and sharing the lives of the eldest

In 2006, we started a project in partnership with *Generation Journey*, a UK based organization. Our children visit old people around the community and provide them with care and attention. We are also developing a project where children will interview old people about their roots and their personal histories. Our aim is to preserve the knowledge of the elder community through writing a book.

VI. TRAINING CENTER AND INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES

1) A weaving center providing employment for women

A sewing and weaving center was begun in 1995 to provide employment and empower for local women. The center produces scarves, textiles and ready-to-wear clothing.

The weaving center also provides training to the mothers of our project who are interested in learning new skills. After being trained, some work outside and some continue to work for the center. Currently, 12 women produce traditional fabrics with local hill tribes designs and sew them into scarves, blankets, bags and clothing. Baan Unrak children are involved in finishing the products and sewing simple items such as purses.

This project was also designed to generate income for the whole project. For the moment, the center produces and sells enough to sustain itself.

Over time, as the quality of the products has risen, we have gotten more opportunities to export them to western countries. Some are sold by a fair-trade organization (Commercio Alternativo) in Italy because they meet the high standards.

We also opened a small shop in Sangklaburi to sell our handicrafts to visitors and to the community.



2) The bakery and the internet café: A sustainable project

After more than ten years, there was an urgent need to develop other activities which could partially sustain the whole project. Also children were growing up and had to learn technical skills to ensure their integration into society.

In 2003, we opened a bakery and an internet café. Tourists as well as local people are welcome to enjoy pure vegetarian products and access their email.

In the bakery, children learn how to cook different kind of food. Mothers are also taught how to cook properly for their children. Some of the eldest children also work in the internet café where they can practice their English with the tourists and also learn computer skills.

Baan Unrak has designed this project based on principles of sustainable development. This is also a way to experiment with various activities, such as producing herbal medicine for our sick children, composting, making bricks, recycling garbage, planting seeds, growing organic spices and producing tofu and gluten.



VII.ORGANIZATION INFORMATION

The Neo Humanist Foundation

Baan Unrak Project was started under the Neo Humanist Foundation and is registered as a Thai charity through the Social Welfare.

The Neo Humanist foundation is a non-political, non-religious and non-profit organization. It works towards the creation of a healthy human society, where everyone will be able to meet their basic physical needs and develop all aspects of their personality. It also promotes a universal outlook, a feeling of concern for the welfare of others and love and respect for the natural world.



How to help us?

Baan Unrak project needs money to cover the expenses of running the children's home. Food, clothing, medical care and school fees represent the main expenses. The children's home by itself needs around 450'000 bath each month.

Our main income comes from **individual sponsorships** of children. The sponsors give money regularly, which provides reliable funding. As the number of children has increased, we need to find more individual sponsors, especially for the education of our older children.

Regular donations help us to develop our project, improve our facilities and develop new activities.

We also encourage **companies** to donate various products, such as rice, milk, soap, medicines, etc...

Volunteers from all over the world are welcome to help Baan Unrak school with teaching the children or working in the office.

If you need more information, please contact us at the following address. If you wish to sponsor a child, send an email to one of the following addresses and we will send you the sponsorship guidelines.

Baan Unrak

99 -1 Moo 1, Nonglu

Sangklaburi, Kanchanaburi 71240

Thailand

Tel/Fax (66) 34 595428 – Mobile phone: (66) 9936-2426 (Donata Dolci)

E-mail: baanunrak@gmail.com (for volunteers) or baanunrak2005@yahoo.com

Website: www.baanunrak.org

It is also possible to contact us in Bangkok, to get the address, please contact our office

If you wish to help us now, you can send money to the following account.

Ac/name: Neo Humanist Foundation

Bank name: Siam Commercial Bank

Ac/Number: 6792062584 Sangklaburi

SWIFT code: SICOTHBK

Thank You!
Thank You!

