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process relating to the construction of the dyke”.

The dyke was then demolished and shallow wells were constructed to replace the reservoir as water sources for Grandma Hai and other villagers.

“However, one cannot conclude that the victory of Hai was a victory for the grassroots movement,” said Prapas Pintobtaeng, an academic at Chulalongkorn University, who completed his doctorate degree with a thesis on people’s movements in Thailand. Prapas said the “Grandma-Hai phenomenon” suggests that Thai society still doesn’t understand the root cause driving the poor to the streets.

“It’s a unique case, the people gave her sympathy. Her age was an object of pity for Thai society. Once it is presented on a “reality show” programme, her grievances are solved. Mass demonstrations by the poor though are still considered a bother to urban people,” he said.

However, Prapas said,

the events demonstrated that at least Hai knows what kind of weapon she needs to use to overcome difficulties.

Sitting on the partly demolished dyke with betel nut in her mouth, Grandma Hai told *The Nation* when we visited her home in Ubon Ratchthani’s Natan sub-district two years ago that she decided to solve the problem with her own hands because she had enough of the empty promises from the government.

“No more waiting for the government,” she said, insisting that she had never agreed that the rural-development office could turn her family land into a reservoir.

“The government only cheated me,” she said.

Through the many years fighting for justice, she cannot estimate how many nights she spent camping in front of the provincial city hall and Government House in Bangkok.

Realising the fight for justice is too big a task for one person, she joined the Assembly of Northeastern Small-Scale Farmers in the early

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1990s, and fought with them for about six years.

Unfortunately, nothing improved. Realising that the assembly did not have sufficient bargaining power, she quit the group and stopped fighting temporarily to make a living instead. In 1999, a new round of fighting began. Hai joined the Assembly of the Poor (AOP), a large gathering of victims of government policy and development projects around the country. She hoped the power of the AOP, as a national organisation of the poor, would force the government to hear her voice.

After five years with the AOP, Hai realised that the assembly was not the answer. Many issues came under the AOP umbrella, and her problem seemed quite insignificant when compared to the dilemmas of other people. Hai quit the AOP when the government denied her request for compensation.

From the Prem Tinsulanonda administration to Thaksin Shinawatra, Hai received nothing as a result of being a good citizen.

The latest demonstration was in 2002 when her youngest daughter Nampetch gave birth to her 54th grandson. Hai reached the conclusion that mass demonstrations could not bring her justice or a better quality of life.

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The victory Hai won by hand has become an inspiration for grassroots people to fight for their justice.

Despite her advancing age, Grandma Hai is not sitting back, but is out to help the many others who are poor.

“I cannot rest at my Ubon Ratchathani home because so many farm grievances remain unresolved,” she said last year when joining the rally for a farm-advocacy group to push for representation of the underprivileged in the government’s decision-making process. ■