Photographs of life in the Saphan Phut community portray pervasive poverty in which dirty dishes, ragged clothes and refuse are scattered all over the living quarters of this marginalised area of Bangkok.

The daily hardships faced by residents were captured by its young inhabitants in a photography development project titled "At First Sight".

Resident Natthanon Chaengsuk, 21, said, "It's like a path of one's life, whether smooth or bumpy, it is up to us [to make a change]," he added.

Initiated by Unesco Bangkok volunteer Linda Germanis, the At First Sight project encourages residents to photograph their daily experiences and challenges, and to get others to volunteer.

She said, "At First Sight, through community photography, pursues the objective of presenting a series of photos taken both by international volunteers and members of the local community in Saphan Phut to show, as a symbolic dichotomy, how everything we are looking at can open dialogue, whether between ourselves, or with others."

Ms Germanis' dedication to the Saphan Phut community has been recognised by Thai authorities, who named her an "outstanding volunteer for her valuable contribution to Thai society".

The award was conferred by the National Commission on Social Welfare, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, and the National Council on Social Welfare of Thailand, and was presented to the Italian national on Thai National Volunteer Day on Oct 21.

Ms Germanis said, "This award represents the opportunity to tell a story to a wider audience in order to help bring about positive change to the lives of those less fortunate."

Unesco Bangkok colleague Ratchakorn Kulsawet added, "In the beginning we planned to train just a small group of teenagers in basic photography so that they could capture scenes that represent their ideas about themselves and their community, so that they could have an input into how development should progress.

"As it turned out, at the first training session at the community centre, many children came to observe and requested the opportunity to learn photography." A photography training session has been held once a week since July and will conclude this month.

Unesco Bangkok's Sirisak Chaiyasuk said, "These children don't realise they have capabilities. They are rarely given a chance to prove them and they don't know what to do with their lives. People shouldn't even ask if these children attend school. I don't even know if they will have food on the table tomorrow."

Some of the photos taken by the young residents were selected by an international organisation in Brazil for a slide show exhibit, and an eBook, to show diverse perspectives from photographers around the world. Some images have also been submitted to photography contests, organised at national and international levels, to highlight pressing development issues.

A booklet containing pictures and commentaries taken by the young residents of Saphan Phut is due to be produced.

For further information about At First Sight, visit http://atfirstsight.ning.com or contact Linda Germanis at l.germanis@Unesco.org .

Rojana Manowalailao is a media and communications officer at Unesco Bangkok. She has a master's degree in Communication from the University of Missouri-Columbia, US, and a master's in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Tefl) from Thammasat University. She has been a teacher and journalist. You may contact her at m.rojana@unescobkk.org.