



Humanized Thailand

Health Innovation

Stories from Communities





Humanized Thailand Health Innovation Stories from Communities

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Introduction

The National Health Commission Office (NHCO) is a government agency established under the National Health Act 2007. Its role is to coordinate and encourage all sectors in society - government, political, educational, social and private sectors - to work together on all health related issues, including the physical, mental, spiritual and social aspects.

"Social Movement" is one of the most important missions of the NHCO. The agency provides forums for people from all levels of society to come together and search for and share experiences about "Good Deeds". It also encourages the development of networks which aim to establish the appropriate tools or mechanisms which will lead to the creation of a "Humanized Society" or, in other words, to build "Social Well Being".

Back in 2004, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation provided funding for the National Health System Reform Office (HSRO) to implement a program which would gather innovative cases of health promotion created

by the common Thai people from various communities. The experiences compiled in this project can then be used as an important resource of invaluable knowledge for innovative sharing.

The HSRO asked a number of scholars and freelance writers to collect 57 innovative health cases from across the nation. All of the experiences demonstrated the learning process within the communities. These scholars and local intellectuals studied the cases and exchanged ideas among themselves in an attempt to fully convey the various conceptual viewpoints and experiences from diverse points of view. Only 20 cases were selected to be presented in this book.

This book, which was first published in 2005 by the HSRO, not only presents each experience individually, but also includes a synopsis and general overview by Dr. Seri Phongphit, a highly experienced expert from the Village Foundation, who specializes in community dynamics. The NHCO hopes that the health innovation stories from the communities compiled in this book will be able to exemplify the local wisdom and good spirit present in Thai communities today. It also hopes that this book will

help to sow the seeds of good deeds all over society and lead to a social movement towards the development of beneficial public health and social well-being policies.

The NHCO would like to express its appreciation to the participating community members for providing such in-depth information, and also to the writers and all who have played a part in the process and in the well-being of the communities. Special thanks also goes out to the people who have dedicated their lives and spirits to the collection knowledge and experiences which will be invaluable to Thai society in the time to come.

The NHCO is most grateful to Dr.Tanomwong Lamyodmakpol (Ph.D), Chairman of the Translators and Interpreters Association of Thailand, Mrs. Nantavan Petchwathana and Dr. Seri Phongphit for the translation of this book.

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Health Innovation

20 Stories from Communities

By Seri Phongphit

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B) Community Management

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- School, Community's Rice Mill, Rice Growers of Mekong Basin (Ubon Ratchathani Province)
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- "Khanaeng" Art Interacted with Dream and Share of Love: Dekrakpha School (Kids Love Forest School) (Surin Province)
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- Treasure of "Dong Yai", Free Way of Life, Local Way of Life (Amnart Charoen Province)
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A) Resources Management

In the past, people lived amid nature and alongside nature. It was an inter-dependent relationship with practices and rules that helped to sustain the balance between man and his natural surroundings. In the past people did not exploit nature to the same extent as has happened in recent decades, during which society has changed from a subsistent economy to capitalism, from self-sufficiency to consumerism. Natural resources have

been over-exploited not only for direct consumption but as source of cash income for modern living.

The deterioration of natural resources and the environment has had a significant impact on the well-being of communities, not only as source of income, but as source of life. Natural resources used to be considered the "mother" who gives life to people: mother earth, mother water, mother rice.

The rehabilitation of our natural resources and the environment would therefore mean the revival of the "mother" who gives us life.

On the island of Koh Yao Noi, the inhabitants make their living with resources from the sea. As a Muslim community, they used their cultural and social resources to restore their natural resources, which have been deteriorated by modern fishery for commercial purpose and the use of modern fishing instruments including large and sophisticated nets. Although it is illegal to use these fishing methods in the conserved areas, money and power allow some people to bypass these regulations.

The Koh Yao Noi islanders started with

education. They learned to understand the causes of environmental deterioration, and cooperated to find preventive measures and to gradually assist the rehabilitation process.

They started by forming small forums which grew into a network. This network then expanded from the local to provincial level and then to the regional level, covering the 13 provinces of Southern Thailand. This is proof that community power still exists, but it has to derive from a strong knowledge and networking relationship base.

These networks jointly devise plans for the rehabilitation and preservation of costal resources such as mangrove forests, seaweed groves, and biological diversity. At the same time, they collaborated to build a sustainable local economy, not relying solely on natural resources, but by integrating community management, increasing production for consumption and reducing expenditure.

In the case of Koh Yao Noi Island, NGOs such as the Volunteers for Society Foundation play an important role in facilitating the learning process as well as acting as

a catalyst to promote innovation and networking.

In the case of Phato Watershed, Chumphon, a GO such as the Conservation and Management of Phato Watershed also plays an important role. Individuals like Mr. Phongsa Chunam, who put their life and soul into their work, love and understand the environment, and appreciate community participation in the conservation of watershed forests, and the facilitation of the learning process for the survival of the community and its surrounding forests are also an important part of the process.

However, the case of Phato is a conservative model for environment preservation, which gives a lot of power to the government organizations. If there are more people like Mr. Phongsa Chunam this system could work, but in most cases it is not so. The amount of human resources and budget needed for environmental preservation under such models is simply not cost-effective.

The method used by Mr. Phongsa Chunam started with the learning process within the community, with the younger generation young people, which is

a good way to start. The question is would the forest preservation be carried on once Mr. Phongsa is gone?

This would not be much of a concern in the case of Khao Chamao and its vicinity, because there is a learning process managed by the community which started with a small awareness of forest preservation and some small activities. These grew in time and gave rise to many other activities. This is a result of innovative ideas and creative thinking of the community leaders and the young people who live in the area. They realized that the more they regenerated and preserved their natural surroundings, the more nature would give back to them in the form of life, and creative inspiration.

The learning process started with walks in the forest and ending with youth camping, where the younger generation learned about their native community and its natural surroundings. This has led to many other activities, such as a project which encourages people to build habitats and walking paths for elephants. There are many other activities such as the Savings Group, where members save one Baht per day. All these are related to both formal and non-formal education, it is learning from

real life and from nature.

The power of knowledge alone is not sufficient. The power of the Khao Chamao preservation group is derived from its network of communities, especially the network of the twelve sub-districts which link Khao Chamao preservation with community life. Emphasis is placed on learning and the self-reliance of individual families and the community as a whole. This is the basis for sustainability in the communities as well as for Khao Chamao, which is the communities' life source.

As for the Songkhram River, it is 420 kilometers long, originates from the Phuphan mountain range and flows through many provinces including Udon Thani, Nongkhai, Sakon Nakhon, and Nakhon Phanom. About 80 streams flow into this river before it joins the Mekong River at Tha-uthen District, Nakhon Phanom Province. The Songkhram River has been the life source for millions of people for hundreds and thousands of years. It is a source of water, food, and also a source of income for many. It has one of the richest and most biologically diverse ecosystems in Thailand, including all kinds of forests which grow along its banks, home to a

rich variety of plants and wildlife.

It is also important to know that Songkhram River has one of the most abundant fish populations in northeastern Thailand. The fish come from The Mekong River and swim upstream at the beginning of the rainy season. There is so much fish that the Songkhram River is renowned for its salted and preserved fish. This method of food preservation is a part of the local knowledge which has been passed down through the generations, as people do not eat only for sustenance but also enjoy eating and are always looking for a way to make food taste even better. This is also linked the well-being of a healthy community.

B) Community Management

In the past, formal community management was virtually non-existent as it was an integral part of community life. There were rules and regulations, rites and rituals, which people were born into and raised with. People were linked to each other and to nature by their

belief in "phi" (spirit) and "kwan" (soul) as is expressed in their local cultures.

In the past community management derived from the local wisdom of ancestors which is passed down through the generations. Most of the time this knowledge was taken for granted. As society changed and natural resources exploited, people faced a new reality, the scarcity of natural resources. They became confused and did not know how to adjust to this arising situation. They did not know how to manage their resources, their community or their lives. Once they are no longer able to rely on the on natural resources, the only way they can make enough money for survival is to move into big cities to seek work as laborers. Thus the community is weakened.

Some members migrate to urban areas in hopes that they would be able to earn a better living than in their rural hometowns. They work as laborers or set up small grocery shops, such as the Agricultural Community along the railway at Thaphra, Khonkaen. The area is till partly urban and part rural. There is still some land left for agriculture, although not as much as could be found

in the rural areas. However, with some education and proper management they are able to earn more than they would as laborers, or by purchasing raw materials from elsewhere to process within the community. They are able to make more profits by growing flowers themselves and turning them into flower garlands.

A few hundred square meters of land may not be much, but the community members manage to grow vegetables, flowers, raise some livestock, and implement innovative techniques such as using organic fertilizer, which adds more value to the products. They are able to gradually pay off their debt and regain financial stability for themselves and their families.

This may seem like a simple transformation but the community members struggled to adjust to this new way of life. It was not easy for these people to change from the way they lived in the rural areas. Without appropriate assistance it would have been very difficult and would have cost them much more capital. In this case the community was lucky to receive assistance from the Population Development Association (PDA), who facilitated the learning process and mediated

financial assistance from the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC). With the loan from the BAAC the community was able to gain access to basic infrastructure such as electricity, water and a better overall environment for their community.

As for the rural communities, there have been efforts to reorganize community life through innovative ideas. The case of Mueang Plueay Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO) demonstrates a new method of budget management. The most common method is to divide the budget among the village communities independently. Mueang Plueay considered its sub-districts an integrated entity, not as separate parts put together. They realized that the communities are all interrelated and interdependent. For example they devised a joint plan to build and improve the quality of roads throughout the district. The roads were built to make up an interconnected network, and not as independently constructed stretches of road as before.

The TAO secretary plays an appropriate role, not as traditional the "ruling class" or representative, but as a facilitator in the learning process and a catalyst to

encourage innovation and networking.

By doing so, the community became empowered. This in turn created pressure on the TAO council, whose members are rather conservative, to approve the plans. The TAO secretary alone would not have been able to convince the TAO council to do this.

This is a process which is scientifically based, as it starts with the setting of a common goal, learning common principles, community participation, and finally with good organization, putting the right person on the right job in the right place.

This process gives rise to intellectual power which can be used to solve other problems regarding health, natural resources, the environment, debt, livelihoods, etc. which are all interrelated and cannot be solved separately.

Certain questions have been raised in regards to the case of Nong Nong Village in Roi Et Province. The development program here is supported by a venerable monk, a native of the community, who has a high-ranking position in the province. The community organization is an imitation of the government structure

and system, with a cabinet consisting of a prime minister and a number of ministers. However, the question is the efficiency and effectiveness as the traditional government structure, which conventionally emphasizes reductionism can hardly be integrated. This is why the reform is ongoing to eliminate the conventional bureaucracy. The challenge for this community is how to wisely adopt some positive aspects of the government structure while finding its own integrated way to manage its development program.

Communities like Nabua Village, Nakhon Thai District, Phitsanulok Province, or Jansen Community, Nakhon Sawan Province, who put much effort in developing various "projects", should all attempt to find a solution to this riddle. The shortcomings of these projects are that the links between the projects are not evident. It is not clear how each of these projects act like pieces of a puzzle which can be put together to make a beautiful picture, an economic and social system which can move by itself without depending on external support.

The models of sustainable community management

are all based on knowledge, learning, and linking community activities for mutual support.

The issue which is unclear in many communities is learning. Usually, it is people from outside the communities who organize the learning process for the members. Usually there is a lack of consistency as there is often no strategic plan. A lot of the training does not respond to the real problems and needs of the community members. Most of the time villagers attend these events because they are compulsory, or because they were paid (*per diem*) to do so.

Many community projects are instigated by outsiders, such as GOs and NGOs, and it has become a form of dependency. Some of the community leaders became "middlemen" between communities and outsiders, hunting for "projects". This would be fine if there was transparency and community participation, but in many cases, such as that of Bansakhon (Sakhon Village), which has famous community leader, questions were raised in relation to good governance. In this case, if the community leader, who acts as "messianic figure", dies, the community members would not be able to take

on projects by themselves, instead, they would have to wait for a new messianic leader to take his place.

This is an important issue which is a real constraint on community management today. It is a question of building a system which will secure the sustainability of the projects and activities which have been linked together in an interactive and supportive way. This system should be able to move forward by itself and lead by group of leaders who represent the community as a whole. This way if one member dies, the community should still be able to carry on its development plan.

"A good and efficient system should assist people in doing the right things easily, and make it difficult to do wrong things". An example of this is the Klongpia savings group, which does not depend on one person, but on various factors, especially on joint efforts, joint action, and joint responsibility.

C) Networking and Relationship

In the past, people lived as a community, a group, a network, supporting one another and overcoming many problems together. People shared their labor, visited one another, made friendships, and lived amongst a spirit of kinship. Today society has changed. Some communities have preserved their traditional way of life while others follow modern official administration, which divides communities into villages, sub-districts, districts, and provinces. This does not help to create "communities" in the traditional sense. Nowadays people are so busy struggling to survive that they do not have time for one another like they used to. Everybody lives their own life and goes their own way.

However, some people who live in the same area and have the same professions, encounter the same problems, and have many things in common, start to build a network as in the case of the network of rice growers in the Mekong Basin, Ubon Ratchathani. The term network here means to establish a relationship and cooperation in production, processing, and marketing.

From here they see many other opportunities for cooperation.

The starting point of this networking stemmed from the issue of rice management. Farmers realized that even though they are rice producers, they play no part in setting the price for their produce, as this is controlled by the traders and middlemen. Initially these farmers thought that the merchants had bargaining power because they owned the rice mills, so they decided to build their own rice mills, only to find out that this is not the answer to their problems. They then realized that the most important issue for their network is education. The network needed to learn self-reliance as well as to implement a self-sufficient economy. It is a farmer's school and not a business enterprise.

The focus of this farmers' school is curriculum development, which is done systematically and methodically and is periodically monitored and evaluated. It also expanded to include other activities in order to respond to the needs of local communities. Its first and foremost goal is for "survival" and not how to "get rich". Projects included gas stations, organic

agriculture plots, and fertilizer factories among others. These may resemble business ventures, but are in fact only community enterprises for the basic survival of the communities.

All of this acts as a basis for a self-sufficient community life. There is continuous education through the local community radio station, where people can share information and knowledge. Although this process still experiences some problems and continues to rely on external funding, the communities should not engage directly in business as this time, as they are not currently ready. They need to set up their own economic system to ensure sustainability and self-reliance. Communities cannot rely on individual projects alone. Therefore, networking is the key to a successful community economic system. Members need to support one another, especially in relation to production and consumption.

Networking at different levels is becoming an important basis for the security and sustainability of the community's economy. One example of this is the integrated agriculture network in Nakhon Phanom

and six other provinces in the Northeast. They receive technical support from Thai-Belgian project and also receive training under the "Truth of Life" project, organized by the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives together with Santi Asoke.

The network's members have learned the importance of self-management and self-reliance, starting with each individual family, and then forming groups to support one another, and finally linking the groups together to form a network. They have reorganized their production by taking the surplus from family consumption and setting up a system to sell the products among network members, and even to external markets, although this is not the main aim.

The BAAC plays an important role in facilitating the learning process as well supporting community enterprises. Many of these activities become "community clusters", meaning a set of activities which support one another, such as organic fertilizer factories, animal feed factories, the production of soap, shampoo, washing liquid for home use, etc.

The importance of the network is its emphasis

on learning, with “research” from real practice, such as research on organic rice growing, the survey of monthly income and expenditures, etc. After a while, an assessment and evaluation is conducted. It is therefore a systematic research system which generates new knowledge which may not exist in text-books. They come from real life and real practices. This type of research can have an important impact on the communities and their networks, which are linked by their drive and determination to learn together, believing that this knowledge will empower them and lead to self-reliance.

The network of Nakhon Phanom and the six Northeastern provinces consists of 66 groups, with over 1,000 members. Members meet every month and there is a coordinator to facilitate the exchange of experiences and knowledge. The network is loosely structured with a main aim of education, self-reliance within the family, and mutual support between groups.

There are a number of other networks which have been set up and managed with the same purpose, but they may not be as successful. This is due to the lack of a clear understanding of the concepts of “network”

and "networking". They follow a ready-made formula of networking, without any innovative ideas. However, this is not the case with the Krabi Senior Citizens Group which continuously seeks out new ideas. They used their funding to purchase a palm plantation. This may seem like a normal investment on behalf of the group but it is actually much more than that.

The palm plantation was purchased on behalf of the Senior Citizens Group and was intended to be used as a learning centre as well as an activity centre for group members. It is a place where members can come together to share their experiences and knowledge about plants, herbs, and other matters. If everything goes as planned, it could become a good role model for innovative projects for other groups who receive funding to support their activities.

The term "networking" can have many meanings. Even in a single community a network can still exist, depending on the basis of this network and its efficiency in improving the quality of life and sustainable development for the community.

A small group of people in Nong Ya Ma, Roi Et

Province have come together to form a savings group and their savings reached 10 million Baht within a few years. However, without the community economic system as its basis it is purely "cash management". This situation could one day bring the whole community to a crisis. The high interest rates given by the savings group is higher than ordinary banks. This incentive triggers a rapid and high rate of deposits from members, who expect to be given a high interest rate. At the same time, the group has to find people who want to take out loans, so that the group will have interest available to pay its members. However, in this case there are no details regarding how members use the loans, how they repay them, and how much interest they pay.

The lessons learned from the One Million Baht Village Fund confirm that without education, and without a community economic system, the funds are seldom used productively. Instead, these communities often generate several million Baht in debt as a result.

According to M.J. Siddhiporn "Money is an illusion, virtue is real". This is something we can prove in our daily lives. If one makes money the most important

thing in one's life, one can easily fail in life. There is much more to life than just money. Money should only be a means to an end.

A community whose members live together in harmony are linked to each other on a spiritual level, and support one another, is a happy community. It is like a family, which is not commonly seen today. Even among families, it is difficult to find a happy family. The case of Nong Por and Poo Phai is therefore quite an unusual occurrence.

The relationship between this grandfather and his grandson is an example of a family that stands up to face the hardship of life together. This case is exceptional due to the innovative ideas of Poo Phai, who never stops inventing toys which are learning tools for his grandson who was unfortunately born with mental and physical disabilities. Thanks to Poo Phai's innovation and moral support his grandson was able to live a normal life like someone who had been born without any disabilities.

Intellectual power is the creative force which generates life. It is an endless power and continuously creates new things because it comes not only from the

intellect but also from the heart.

It would be a pity if schools and organizations only appreciated Poo Phai's work but do not draw any lessons or discover the real power behind these creative inventions.

D) Learning and Management

For people to be healthier and happier today there is a need for better learning and management. There should not be only doctors who take care of people's health, only teachers responsible for learning, only government officials taking care of natural resources and development, whereas the villagers and common people in society are only like spectators in a theater:

Learning for people in urban areas can be done through many channels. For example, the "Love through Breastfeeding" project encourages mothers to see the importance of breastfeeding. People may agree on the concept, but not many are able to practice it due to the conditions of modern life.

This network brings together a group of people to share their experiences and knowledge. There is a facilitator who helps to assemble and analyze the information from the individual experiences. They are able to identify problems, as well as contribute to a joint effort to find solutions. This campaign is used to improve the effectiveness of breast feeding and to encourage more women to see the importance of it.

Learning platforms for people in urban areas is an issue which should be given much attention. The network of breastfeeding mothers can be model or example for many other networks in urban areas, to help people be healthier and happier. Other examples include the Jor Sor 100 network and consumer networks which cover a variety of occupations, interests, and problems. These networks provide members with a platform to share their concerns, problems, and experiences. They are also a powerful tool as they reflect the real problems, needs, and experiences of people in society today.

This is a type of informal education. It is part of the educational reform along with formal and non-formal education. The following case is an integrated

one; it is so natural and spontaneous that we cannot say whether it is informal, non-formal, or formal education. This is the case of the Dekrakpa School in Surin. They have trained 8-9 groups of children, who learn from nature, the forests, and from real life. They interact with nature and the reality around them. They do not limit themselves to only listening to teachers in the classroom, by reciting facts or taking exams.

This sort of alternative schooling might not be directly included in the current education system exactly as it is, but the values and contents developed by this school could be used as a model for other schools, to learn from and to apply to their curriculums.

The difference between this school and others is the integration of process and output, life and learning, content and form of what is being learned. Many means are used to help the children understand life. Art, theater, music, poems, and creative thinking, help them to cross boundaries of imagination. In the words of Teacher Chued:

“Nature teaches us to be kind. The arts help us to be sensitive, to have an imagination, to see the beauty

of art and to draw inspiration from it, to draw, to think, to write, to express all this in our creations. Nature is a place for learning and creating.

When others see these creations, they can see the beauty of nature.

They want to experience the same feeling and this is how we are linked together."

"Nature is great. It is father, mother, and teacher to us, ready to support and teach us at the same time.

Those who understand the meaning of nature will have a strong spirit which is ready to be at one with the universe."

The experiences of teachers and students in this school in Surin could happen in communities today. There needs to be appropriate means, or at least a will to learn, to revive the relationship among village communities which face the same problems, such as the case of Bai Chanode Community. It all started with an attempt to identify for the real causes of the problems and crises in society and the community. With support from officials at the community health centre, teachers and some NGOs facilitated the learning process through

community platforms.

It began with one village then expanded to 28 villages covering six sub-districts, with a learning centre called the "Huay Leng Centre". Although there is not yet a local economic system as a result of this learning process, it is believed that if they are consistent, something new will emerge soon. This is only the beginning of a new era, but communities still have much to do in their reorganization.

The main issue today is developing learning resources which will have important impact on the emerging local economic systems, which are self-reliant. This is the case for many villages and over a thousand sub-districts all over the country. They have each implemented their own "community strategic plan", which is a learning process, during which communities research their potential, capital, resources, knowledge, and problems. They then analyze the data and search for solutions. This is a learning process for self-reliance.

The heart of this learning process, known as "people research and development" (PR&D) is that the community unites do their own research, by themselves

and for themselves. This encourages the communities to break away from depending on and waiting for assistance from the state and other outside sources.

This learning process helps communities to discover their own "treasures", such as the Dong Yai forest which covers over 4,000 hectares. There is one sub-district called Sangthonoi, with 13 village communities, situated around this forest in the area of Hua Taphan District, Amnart Charoen Province. This forest is ecologically diverse and is a food source and well as a source of fertile soil and water for the community.

Through strategic planning, the communities in this sub-district studied their natural surroundings and discovered just how deteriorated the environment had become due to the introduction of cash crops. Communities rediscovered their local capital, their actual situation, income and expenditure, as well as their debts and problems. They started to reorganize themselves by handling their own planning, something they had never attempted before. In the past, all of the planning was done by people from outside of the community and then imposed on them.

The communities learned how to manage their basic needs, such as rice, food, herbs, domestic items (soap, shampoo, washing liquids) and fertilizer. By trying to locally produce as much of these items within the community, they were able to reduce their expenditure, increase their income, and solve their problems. A study of the surrounding environment and forests increased environmental awareness. They realized that without the forest, they would lose an important source of food, forcing them to purchase it from markets instead.

Strategic planning means that the community takes the initiative to manage its own future. Up until now they have put their futures in the hands of outsiders, starting in 1961, the first year of the five year national economic and social development plan. When the plan failed, the grassroots communities, and not those who actually drafted the plan, suffered.

Community strategic planning is a synthesis of the new knowledge that the Village Foundation, gained from its experiences working with communities for many years with an emphasis on learning and searching for community capital. Important experiences which

have contributed to this method are those of Mr. Viboon Khemchalem, the network of Inpeng in Sakon Nakhon, experiences and the application of economic theories of Shayanov, the Russian thinker, and experiences of the Mai Riang community in Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province.

Mai Riang is a learning community. It has a group of leaders who are devoted to learning and have been searching for solutions to the community's problems by themselves for many years. They started from trying to solve the rubber problem by setting up a community factory with their own funds. They realized later that it was not sufficient to solve the rubber problem in the long term, as it is a complicated issue. They decided to develop a "Strategic Rubber Plan" by researching the history of rubber planting in Thailand ever since it was introduced about 100 years ago. This was done in cooperation with the Rubber Farmers Association of Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province. The government at that time did not recognize their efforts. However, subsequent governments did and together they were able to solve the rubber problem. This is one of the main reasons why rubber is able to fetch the high price

it does today.

After the strategic rubber plan, Mai Riang learned that rubber is only one issue in their community life and that there are many other issues they needed to tackle. They decided to carry out community strategic planning using the same methods as they did with the rubber problem. This time the plan would include everything in community life. This is how Mai Riang became a learning place for many.

Mai Riang has become a role model of how communities can restructure themselves, and set up their future plans in a systematic fashion, starting from the learning process within the community. Today Mai Riang organizes informal, non-formal, and formal education sessions using an integrated method, with the community as its centre. Learning ranges from kindergarten, primary, secondary, to tertiary levels.

Mai Riang has structured itself through a system of production, investment, marketing, and welfare, which community members operate themselves. Leaders act as only learning facilitators and joint management.

Mai Riang leaders helped community members

to regain their self-confidence through learning and research. They realized that in today's changing society there is a need for education in order to cope with the rapid transformations as well as to avoid being exploited by the larger system. For example, they even questioned why most people in their community died from the same causes as those in urban areas. They collected data and found because they were leading an almost identical lifestyle as their urban counterparts, therefore, it was inevitable that they would suffer from the same ailments. Knowing all this, they started to make changes to their way of life, their environment, their food, and their health. This is how they learned to discover answers for themselves instead of copying a ready made formula or trying to find answers from somewhere else.

Mai Riang is an important example of community enterprise, especially community enterprise clusters, which means a set of activities which complement one another and build a community sufficient economy.

Conclusion

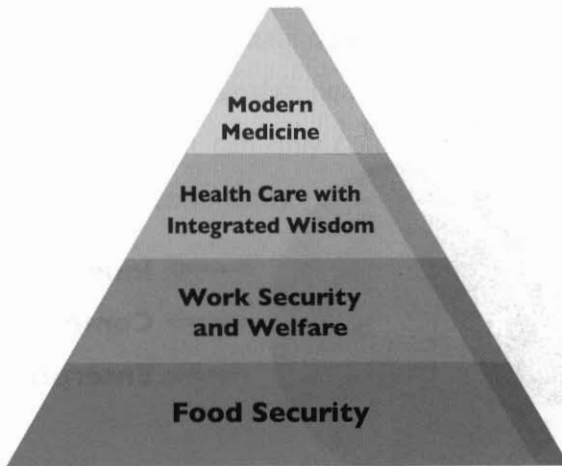
The numerous community experiences are like flowers in a field. Some are collected and put in a vase, not only for decoration, but so that the components, beauty and constraints can be studied, to find out the differences and similarities in order to draw lessons from them.

What can be concluded from each case is that elements of value and sustainability derive from the fact that the communities develop their potential through a learning process. The knowledge acquired is applied in the management of their resources as well as the further development of their assets. This process is an interactive cycle, as is demonstrated below.



We learn from communities that community health does not begin with hospital or doctors or medicine, but starts from:

1. Food security and a good environment
2. Secure employment and community welfare system
3. Integrated wisdom and knowledge about personal health care
4. Modern medicine and health services

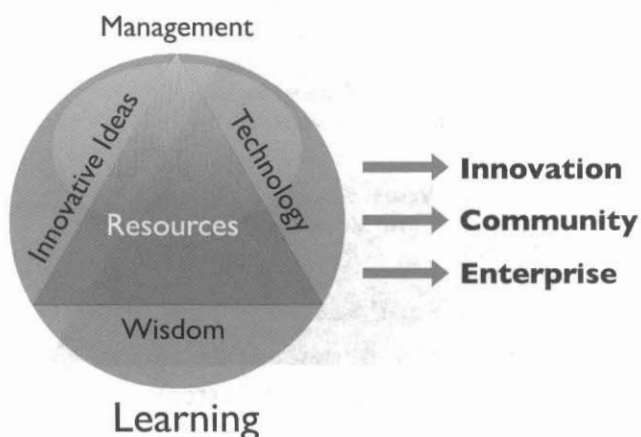


Community Health System

However, the learning process of communities is something which goes against the mainstream, which is dictated and dominated by consumerism and capitalism, resulting in endless desires and needs. Learning self-reliance needs to be an innovative process in order to empower the communities.

Innovation can be an integration of three elements:

1. Local wisdom
2. Modern knowledge and technology
3. Innovative ideas



The problem of community health today is the problem of public policy which imposes centralized ideas on to communities. Many of these policies have constraints and bias because they are not open for input from the communities themselves. The policy used is one ready-made formula that is applied to the whole country without taking into consideration the plurality of socio-cultural contexts. In many of the cases, each scheme expects a more political rather than social output. It would be difficult to talk about sustainable community health if the state does not "give health back to the people" as sustainable health is something which cannot be "given", it can only come from "inside" the people and their community.



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The main principle behind Nabua community's well-being promotion program is to encourage cooperation and coordination between the villages and communities in the area.

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Academic Platform by People of Nabua Community

Compiled and composed by Phaisan Rewthongchai

The foundation of the promotion of well-being in Nabua Sub-district, Nakhon Thai District, Phitsanulok Province, was the revival of activities implemented by the community. The learning platforms have been used at Nabua Community health centre since 1998. Mrs. Suwanna Mueangpraphang, the government appointed health authority, Pooyai (village headman) Prajerd Seerasan and the villagers, joined to share their opinions on the issue of developmental problems, specifically how to create healthier and happier conditions for Nabua residents. These issues led to the well-being promotion in the following aspects:

I. Community Enterprise. The Nabua Medicinal Herb Growers Group was established in 1998 and was promoted to Nabua Medicinal Herb Agricultural Cooperative in 2002. It was founded with 238 members and a capital of 44,510 Baht. The members were encouraged by the cooperative to cultivate and process various kinds of medicinal herbs. The herbal products could be sold both within and outside the community. With its noticeable performance results, the community organizations, community itself and state organizations gathered to support the extension of activities to various groups. These groups have carried out numerous activities, such as cultivating mushrooms, processing medicinal herbs into biological extracts and compost, growing organic rice and vegetables, processing medicinal herbs into food, drinks and medicine, raising pigs at Bannamlom Community and loom weaving by Nabua Community. All resources available to the community have been used in these ventures. When their success was evident, more groups were established and were assisted in terms of financial and technical support by the community organizations.

2. Finance. Nabua's financial management has been carried out through the groups and the community's financial institutions: **1)** eight village banks with 1,500 members and a revolving fund of 6,624,000 Baht **2)** 15 savings groups with members in 15 villages and a revolving fund of 1,120,000 Baht **3)** a poverty-solving fund **4)** a fertilizer fund **5)** the economic-solving fund of Nabua Tambon Administrative Organization **6)** the fund for Village Development Volunteers and Self Protection **7)** village and urban community fund.

3. Vocational Groups. The concepts of community business and financial management are linked to vocational promotion. There are different vocational groups in Nabua Community, including farming and farm crop groups, animal breeding groups and housewives' products group.

4. Environmental and Natural Resources Conservation. Groups of volunteers guard the forests against wildfires and exploitation.

5. Social Groups. These include the Tambon Health Volunteers Club, Amateur Thai Boxing, the Petanque Group, Local Wisdom Group, Housewives

Group, Youth Group, Funeral Group, Educational Institution Committee Members Group and the Village Peace and Security Group.

6. Politics/Administration Groups. These include the Tambon Administrators Club, Scout Group, Thai Volunteers for National Security Group, the Local Administrators Group and Tambon Administrative Organization.

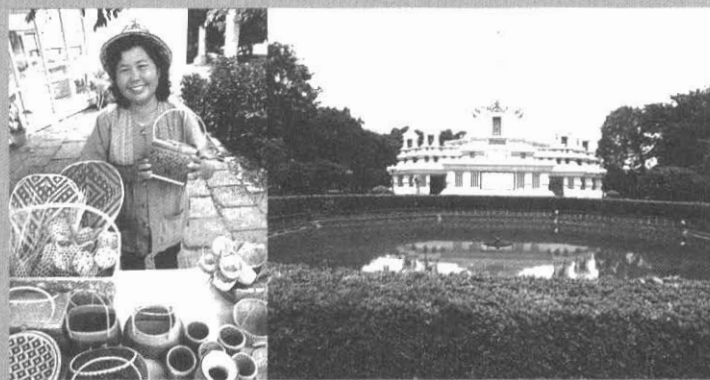
The main principle behind Nabua community's well-being promotion program is to encourage cooperation and coordination between the villages and communities in the area. Community power is encouraged through the learning platforms. The ideas are applied through all aspects of community development activities. These factors as well as social capital are also principles behind this program. Focus is effectively placed on the exchange of opinions, practices and experiences. These experiences are systematically transmitted through the village platforms, which count on the evaluation and progress of the community's holistic well being promotion.



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The main factor which facilitates the achievement of community well-being is the eagerness of community leaders, who have knowledge, virtue, and kindness towards the villagers, in revival of the community history and raising consciousness for their homeland

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Living Museum at Jansen Community

Compiled and composed by Suphawan Vongkamjan

Jansen Village is a community situated along the railway in Jansen Sub-district, Takhli District, Nakhon Sawan Province. In the past, archaeological discoveries have shown that the ancient Dhavaravati Kingdom was established here. The village is 88 kilometres from the province center and 16 kilometres from the mighty Chao Phraya River in the low plains, where the soil is fertile and the climate tropical. Today 350 families live in this community. The villagers in this area are originally from a number of different regions and earn their living by growing rice and vegetables and doing general labor

work. Jansen Sub-district grew prosperous through trade.

However, after the digging irrigative canals in 1955, the environmental conditions were altered and trade dried up. This is when the Chinese inhabitants relocated to other areas and the younger generation abandoned their hometowns to seek work in other cities. This brought an end to a number of activities. The community divided into smaller groups and became estranged, rarely getting together for community activities and everyone worrying only about their own benefits. Later, Luang Por (Venerable Monk) Ode (Phrakhru Nisai jariyakhun) brought harmony back to the community through the Dharma principles, joint projects and activities, such as the revival of traditions and cultures, restoration of ancient remains and archaic objects, etc. A great stupa containing Lord Buddha's relics was built and a museum was established in the temple and became the spiritual centre and an embodiment of community pride, eventually evolving into learning centers.

After his death, Luang Por Ode's work was carried

on by Luang Por Charoen (Phrakhru Niwatdharmakhan). The villagers enjoyed better economic stability, a higher employment rate and they were happier and became closer as a community. Applying wisdom to the development process, the villagers are able to use their potential as a tool in the community learning process. The temple with its Buddhist monks, the schools with their teachers and students, and the villager workforce are the fundamental components of the community. They are considered as the model of creative troubleshooters and have become the foundation of the Jansen grassroots community. Among the remarkable activities are the Young Guides Group, Loom Weaving Group, etc. The members are able to earn more than 3,000 Baht a month, part of which goes towards the maintenance of the temples. The "We Protect Jansen" Club has set up an annual activity calendar which includes all of the community's cultural and traditional events and festivals. The Jansen Community Way of Life Project was started in order to promote the community's religious activities, local cuisine, weaving, basketry, ancient-city sightseeing, museum trips and study tours.

Jansen community's structure for health promotion utilizes cultural and traditional dimensions in the learning process. The temple is used as a link between the community and its schools. More employment opportunities and income sources are introduced to the villagers and the school created new learning material based on local experiences. Every sector of the community is happy to work together.

The main factor which facilitates the achievement of community well-being is the eagerness of community leaders, who have knowledge, virtue, and kindness towards the villagers, in revival of the community history and raising consciousness for their homeland. Social capital is used in implementing different activities and maintaining their precepts, with the intention of living together peacefully.



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The members are contented to sell fresh flowers and garlands at the markets, so they enjoy participating in the project very much, as well as growing vegetables for themselves.

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"Mini MBA" in "Minifarm": Agricultural Network along Railways

*Compiled and composed by
Kraileert Taweekul / Prapatsorn Taechaprasertvitara*

The Banpai Centre for Integrated Agricultural Development or the Meechai Centre, which is an NGO, started and promoted the vegetable banks along the railway communities at Banrachakarn, Moo 7, Thaphra Sub-district, Mueang District, Khonkaen Province. Its goal is to improve the living standards for the local farmers by renting out land belonging to the State Railway of Thailand (SRT), drilling groundwater and providing water storage tanks. A pipe system was implemented

throughout the cultivation areas in order to supply water 24 hours a day to an area of 800 square meters per member.

The villagers have faced many problems, including lack of land and water for cultivation and for use in households; especially government employees, who live around the project plots, and have no land of their own. After retirement, it is difficult for them to buy land and houses of their own. The village leaders therefore contacted the Banpai Meechai Centre, after observing the Vegetable Banks along the railway in the nearby community.

Twenty six people agreed to join the project by renting land from SRT and borrowing money from the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives, to pay for the installation of the watering system, cultivation-plot preparation and other production factors. Such costs were supported by the Banpai Meechai Centre, however, the Centre played also played an important role in providing training, study tours, the implementation of management systems as well as the technology for the establishment of the Vegetable Banks.

Most of the members grow flowering plants, such as jasmine, aster, marigold and chrysanthemum. In doing this they are able to generate much more income than they would from growing vegetables on the same scale. Moreover, the members are contented to sell fresh flowers and garlands at the markets, so they enjoy participating in the project very much, as well as growing vegetables for themselves.

The members, with the help of external advisors, take over positions in the administrative management of the group. They play important roles in organizing the irrigation system, water distribution system, electric system, collection of water charges and other costs. The leaders and members have successfully collected about 80,000 Baht to use as start-up capital and to repair the irrigation system, which is shared among the members and giving profits back to the community.

The members are hugely satisfied with the project's outcome, and other villages have followed their example division of cultivation plots, as well as management and production methods. The results are an obvious outcome of the activities and are therefore

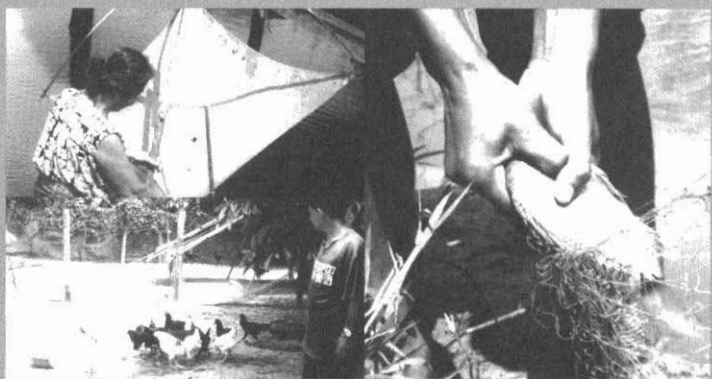
worthwhile for the members who participate. As long as they follow the regulations and procedures of the SRT, they will be able to make good use of this land for many years to come.



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The exchange of knowledge and experiences, as well as discussions and debates between members play an important role in the improvement of production and marketing procedures.

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Toom Home: Integrated Agricultural Networks of Nakhon Phanom Province

*Compiled and composed by
Krailert Taweekul / Prapatsorn Taechprasertvitaya*

The Integrated Agricultural Networks of Nakhon Phanom Province was funded by the Belgian Government through the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives (BAAC), to promote and support the integrated agricultural activities of local farmers in 6 provinces in northeast Thailand, which are Yasothon, Roi Et, Kalasin, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan. Even after support from the Belgian Government ended, the BAAC continued its

support by establishing the "Coordination Centre for Integrated Agricultural Projects" in Mukdahan Province.

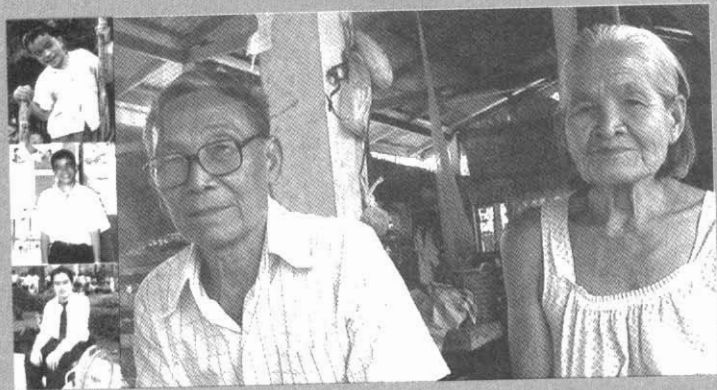
Thailand's economic crisis resulted in serious impacts on farmers participating in the project. The Coordination Centre needed to devise a plan to improve the situation. Strategies for reducing expenses, increasing income, collecting capital, learning by sharing experiences and building networks were therefore implemented.

The Integrated Agricultural Networks of Nakhon Phanom Province stemmed from the members' shared experiences during the economic crisis and the knowledge that they needed to come together in order to solve their common problems. They realized that despite their knowledge and skills, their quality of life was relatively low. Therefore, they came together to push forward the province's network systems forward by starting various activities in order to fight the crisis. Each district established its own subgroups within the networks, each group with its own distinctive similarities and differences.

Toom Home Centre acted as the core centre

of the Integrated Agricultural Networks of Nakhon Phanom Province. It is the coordinating center, meeting venue, exchange platform, marketplace, production house for grained organic fertilizer and also home to the province's Farmers School demonstration plots. The members in Na Kae District carried out various activities in their Farmers' School, such as producing organic fertilizer and experimenting with integrated agriculture. Members in Ban Phaeng District also experimented with organic fertilizer and integrated agriculture. Those of Phon Sawan, Pla Pak Districts, and Renu Nakhon mainly produced animal feed.

The Integrated Agricultural Networks of Mukdahan Province, under the management of the BAAC, acts as the coordinating centre to promote and join the groups together. The exchange of knowledge and experiences, as well as discussions and debates between members play an important role in the improvement of production and marketing procedures. Furthermore, both state and private agencies have also been invited by the coordinating centre to take play a key role in assisting the grassroots community networks.



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Poo Phai's love, generosity and care, as well, and his systematic way of thinking has gone into each piece of the diverse collection of toys he has created for his beloved grandson.

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The Weaving Webs of Love: Poo (Grandpa) Phai of Ban Sai Moon

Compiled and composed by Boonyong Kethhet

Even though no one can choose how they are born, we can all live our lives with hope. Some may fail in their endeavors but many insist to struggle on with patience.

Poo Phai, a common countryman, was born in 1932, the year of political reform in Thailand. He finished his education in Prathom 2 (Grade 2) and became a farmer as his ancestors did. After being ordained like a good Buddhist should, he was conscripted into the army. He had a family with a wife and children just like

the others in his culture. However, what distinguishes this man from those around him is the intellect and innovative spirit which he used to transform the life of his disabled grandson.

Poo Phai's love, generosity and care, as well, and his systematic way of thinking has gone into each piece of the diverse collection of toys he has created for his beloved grandson. The toys made by Poo Phai are not just meant to be fun, but each of them is a healing tool to heal each part of his grandson's body and mind. He tried to improve, mend, and reinvent the toys with the intention of bringing joy, fun and relaxation. In the past thirteen years, he has invented twenty-one types of amazing toys and continuously given moral support to his grandson who suffers from physical and mental disabilities, helping him to become more competent. Therefore, Poo Phai's grandson, Nong Por has received a gift of life from his grandfather.

Such methods, concepts and simple way of execution infused with the spirit of Poo Phai could keep on, in balance, a set of knowledge on local agriculture. They can not only be a beacon of hope for his young

grandson, but can also become fine examples for many neighboring families. Many institutions for disabled children should reconsider their roles and adjust their visions.

Each toy which was carefully crafted by Poo Phai is simple in appearance, whether it be a wooden horse, wooden elephant, hammer, pin wheel (maakpin), rake, mortar for pounding rice, tree house, ladder, double handrails, lute, pushable tricycle, wheel carriage, lift truck, sand sack, scissors, wooden slipper, etc.

Poo Phai and Nong Por are often invited to demonstrate the innovations to many organizations, even in foreign countries. Poo Phai's way of thinking and local wisdom is actually a form of health innovation. It can be said that the secret energy which is hidden in the community, and there still other similar forces hiding in the rural communities, just waiting to be discovered. If crises like the one which happened to Poo Phai do not occur, the inventions from local intelligence or of other local intellectuals might not be discovered. Poo Phai's endeavors and the love he has for his grandson have all played a part in supporting the achievements in

Nong Por's life today.

Poo Phai and Nong Por are tied together with love and understanding. On Nong Por's first day of school, Poo Phai had to carry him there. Later he invented a collection of creative toys with the intention that someday these toys will help Nong Por to become mentally stronger, patient and able to overcome the obstacles which were preventing him from living a normal life in society. Poo Phai's dream and hard work for Nong Por eventually came true. Not only is Poo Phai happy, but Yaa (Grandma) Sorn, Poo Phai's wife, Boonlom and Dum, parents of Nong Por, Thongsuk and Boonlorm, elder sisters of Nong Por are ecstatic as well. All came together to give Nong Por moral and physical support. Nong Por of those days had contracted and distorted limbs and his chest was always damp from saliva. He could not help himself in any way and was a pitiful sight to all who saw him.

Nong Por of today or Mr. Suriya Somseela, is a young man approaching twenty years of age He has almost completed his degree in computer commerce at the certificate of advanced vocation level. His physical

and mental capabilities are normal. He is lively, has a bright future and will be a valuable member of society. He has been nurtured by Poo Phai and all people of Ban Sai Moon, Sai Thong Sub-district, Sri Boon Rueang District, Nong Bua Lam Phu Province.



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The children learn that they need to be at one with nature and that nature is the teacher who teaches them to be sensitive, to see the beauty of nature, to have fun, to be mindful and to support each other.

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"Khanaeng" Art Interacted with Dream and Share of Love: Dekrakpha School (Kids Love Forest School)

Compiled and composed by Boonyong Kethhet

Teacher Khemthong Morat, who is known as teacher Chued to her students, in a partnership with her real life partner, Teacher Noyor Ariya Morat, established the Dekrakpha School (Kids who Love the Forest School) at Koom Pha Yao, Salangpun Community. In 1988, the Dekrakpha group was set up, and then it became "Dekrakpha School."

Teacher Chued and Teacher Noy have planted the seeds of virtue in their students' hearts. The art of

performance, playing, music and writing poetry make up every Saturday and Sunday for the underprivileged children in northeastern Thailand. Dekrakpha School is intended as an alternative learning experience with art activities used to motivate children to love and understand nature. A colorful image of nature is painted and crystallized in their heads and travels down to their little hands and fingers, inspiring them to create beautiful artwork and creative writings.

Dekrakpha School, an informal school which fosters creative thinking, was established on 16 Rais of land, surrounded by over 100 Rais of community forests. It is the learning center of Ban Pha Yao, Sam Rong Sub-district, Mueang District, Surin Province.

The young students are encouraged to think about, write down and act as they wish. Moral support and faith is given to these under-privileged children by various groups, so that the children can fulfill their potentials and achieve their dreams. These groups include the Sarnsaeng-aroon Foundation, Tung Sang Tawan, Katikala Co.Ltd., Green World Foundation, Payai Creation Co. Ltd., Dinsorsee Creative Group, the Group

of Artists, Writers, Poets, and Musicians, Makhampom Foundation, the Artists for the Young Generation Group, NGOs, etc. All of them come together to help the Dekrakpha Camp or Dekrakpha School overcome its obstacles to achieve its goals. Eight groups of children, with about one hundred per group, have already been nurtured by the Dekrakpha School.

The local villager's way life confidently follows the traditional wisdoms and customs. From the trekking trips the children learned the sustainable use of forests and medicinal herbs. Each of them has a diary to write down all this information. Local experts, elderly, and intellectuals are asked to join in to suggest and explain the "how to" techniques so the children can thoroughly understand the whole process. For example they get to learn about the dyeing procedures using natural dyes from boiling and fermenting. It is explained that cotton fabrics are washed in water, and then tied or folded into a wide variety of designs such as circles, stars and stripes, etc., before dipping the bundles to the natural dye.

The natural classroom under a canopy of trees and tree houses in the Dekrakpha School area are also

used as learning spaces as well as accommodations with a cool and pleasant atmosphere.

The children learn that they need to be at one with nature and that nature is the teacher who teaches them to be sensitive, to see the beauty of nature, to have fun, to be mindful and to support each other. They help each other to work on plays, writing scripts and dialogues, and designing hand puppets. They make plans and work together, building harmony among classmates and people of different ages. They are taught to observe in order to learn how to create their own work. Creative art and independent thinking radiate from this school. The more the art work is sold, the more inspired and creative the students become. Some of their pieces are sold for 500 Baht, while pieces by the younger students fetch around 100 Baht. The more productive they are, the more money they are able to make. Students must be armed with their diaries and pens at all times so that they can record information about the people they meet or whichever experiences they find interesting or noteworthy. The notes will be shared with and commented on by the teacher.

The children's imaginations can be observed through many of their writings.

Some of writings are creatively transformed into puppet plays or stage performances, such as the puppet play entitled "The Buffalo who does not Eat Grass", and the play entitled "Toomka." Whenever the children experience untouched nature, each day's experiences can be different. Teacher Chued gives comments and fills their little heads with information, to help them understand what they see. They are taught that we can learn a lot from nature. The relationships between animals, birds, plants and trees are raised and compared to family relationships. They can learn that the villains in the society of plants and animals are the same as those in human society. Some outside values can destroy the kinship system, local wisdom and structure of the family system.

Furthermore, the children learn about the harmony of music. The rhythm and the melody of music are used to adjust moods and feelings for relaxation, so they can open their hearts to absorb the aesthetics of art, nature and writing with an open mind.



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*A lot of fish is still left over; therefore
villagers had to use their local knowledge
in order to preserve the fish to keep it edible
for a long time.*

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Songkhram River Inherited for Adjustment

Compiled and composed by Boonyong Ketthet

During the great floods in November and December, Isaan (northeastern) people from many areas, especially the ones who have settled along the bank of the Songkhram River, enjoy a plentiful fishing season. Over 180 different species of fishes and other aquatic species thrive in these waters. The diverse species of fish in the Songkhram River include Pla kow (*Leucistics spp.*), Pla kra di (*Trichogaster trichopterus*), Common Silver Barb (*Puntius gonionotus*), Pla mor Anabas (*Testudineus spp.*), Pla sew kaew (*Clupeichthys goniognathus*), Pla kra mang (*Puntioplites proctozyron*),

Pla kae, Pla seu (*Toxotes chatareus*), Pla khow (Great sheatfish), Pla kot (*Mystus micracanthus*), Pla kob, Pla nang (Sheatfish), Pla peek kai (*Kryptopterus spp.*), Pla tong (*Notopterus spp.*), Pla yon (*Lalates hexanema*), Pla laad (Armed spiny eel), Pla joke (Thorn-eye loach), Pla moo (Ornate emperor), Pla cheum, Pla koon (Vaillant), Pla kerng (*Irrawaddy mystus*) and many more.

After being caught, the fish are cooked using many different methods including boiling, mincing, made into curries, grilling and frying to name a few. However, a lot of fish is still left over; therefore villagers had to use their local knowledge in order to preserve the fish to keep it edible for a long time.

Popular ways to preserve fish include drying, smoking or fermenting in salt (purchased from Ban Tha Sa-ard which is a salt pond in the middle of the Songkhram River). This salt-preserved fish is known as "Pla Dag" or "Pla Raa". The fish can also be made into Pla Som (sour fermented fish) and Pla Pan, as well as fermented and boiled to make Nam Pla (fish sauce).

Pla Raa or Pla Dag is well known as the most popular food for Isaan people. If there is no other food

in the house, but there is a jar of Pla Raa or Pla Dag, it is understood that no one will starve as Pla Raa can be used as an ingredient in many different kinds of curries, stews and other dishes.

The Songkhram River is the main waterway of the Sakon Nakhon Basin and stems from the confluence of many tributaries. It flows through the Pha Dong Panna-Pha Dong Pra Chow Forest Reserve, the Phu Pha Lek-Phu Pha Hak National Park and Phu Pha Ploen in Song Dao District, and along the west of Tad Phu Vong in the Lower Phu Phan Mountain Range. Eighty tributaries flow into the Songkhram River; these include the Yam River, Pla Haang Brook, Hong Ian Stream, Node Brook, Sam Yod Brook, Dong Brook, He Brook, Sim Swamp, Yom River, Oon River, Moa River, Saang River, etc.

The Songkhram River is 420 kilometers long and runs through a total of 25 districts and three sub-districts in four provinces. It flows through the districts of Nong Han, Thung Fon, Wang Sam Mo, Chai Wan, Ban Dung and a total of 21 sub-districts in Udon Thani Province. It flows through the districts of Ban Mueang, Song Dao, Sawang Daen Din, Charoen Sin, Kham Ta Kla, Akat Amnuai,

a total 21 sub-districts in Sakon Nakhon Province. It also flows through the districts of Phon Charoen, Seka, Bueng Kan, So Phisai and many sub-districts in Nongkhai Province. Then it flows through Si Songkhram District, and sub-districts of Sam Pong, Tha Bo, Si Songkhram, Na Due, and merges with Mekong River at Ban Tan, Chai Buri Sub-district, Tha Uthen District. The Songkhram River has a catchment area of 12,700 square kilometers and over one thousand communities have settled along both riverbanks due to the fertile soil.

If you look at both riverbanks of the Songkhram River during the annual flood periods, you can see the river overflowing by 3 - 5 meters and many species of fish are able to cross from the Mekong River into "Chai Buri Estuary" which is the end of the Songkhram River in Tha Uthen District, Nakhon Phanom Province. Huge numbers of fish swim up-river to spawn the Songkhram River's banks. This area covers wetlands which are home to a multitude of different species of aquatic plants, such as Seaw, Hoo Ling, Tom (Kra Toom), Krasin, Krabow, Kratan Nam, Hae, Kra Done nam, and Kra Sa Bamboo. These plants densely populate mass areas of up to

300,000 Rais. Furthermore, it is also home to a diverse variety of wildlife, including turtles, monitor lizards, squirrels, jungle fowl, teals and many kinds of wild birds.

These wetlands are a safe haven for aquatic animals to spawn. Their new-born are nurtured during the end of winter and the beginning of the dry season. When rainy season comes and water begins to overflow, the fully developed adults will leave for the main river. In the meantime a new generation of fish will take their place. Each time the river water floods the banks of the Songkhram River, it brings about the rotation of fertility in the area and the human inhabitants must once again adjust their way of life.

Nowadays, traditional fishing techniques have been abandoned for more commercial methods by many groups of people who live along the Songkhram River. Tools for fishing on an efficient-economy scale, and traditional product exchange systems, such as the "Nai Hoy Pla Dag (the master or the leader of fish catchers), have given way to destructive fishing methods which use equipment such as stationary trawl nets and modern machinery. The fish, which should be left to spawn

naturally, have unfortunately been prematurely caught by greedy and selfish merchants, capitalists and fishermen.

As time goes by, the plentiful aquatic wildlife in the Songkhram River has been drastically diminished. Some species have even become extinct. Furthermore, after the construction of a dam, the wetlands, which used to be an area of rich, fertile soil has also changed drastically. Kra Sa bamboo, an important food source for the inhabitants who live along the Songkhram River is also bordering on extinction. The villagers' way of life depends on the resources from the Songkhram River. However, sadly, these resources have been severely depleted.

The relationship between the community's way of life and the river is rapidly changing. The Songkhram River which was once beautiful and fertile will soon become only a legend.



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The younger generation, who are the future of our nation, must be virtuous and nurtured in a way that encourage them to grow up to be qualified adults and valuable assets to society.

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Thinking Process for Creative Wisdom of Bansakhoon

Compiled and composed by Boonyong Kettthet

Por (Father) Pai Soysaklang is one of the few local people of the Northeast who has been successful at integrated agriculture. He has accumulated the teachings of his ancestors ever since a young age. He was ordained as a Buddhist monk for ten years at Wat Chaisri, Bansakhoon. The traditional belief was that when people brought their children to be ordained, they would plant some trees in the temple and coconut and banana trees were planted for Por Pai's ordination.

After leaving Buddhist monkhood in 1965, the people of Bansakhoon unanimously chose for him to

become Pooyaiban (village headman). Por Pai started an effort to reorganize the administrative system in Bansakhoon. In this system the community was divided into 18 kooms (groups of houses), each with its own headman who has the absolute authority to make decisions on behalf of each koom. In 1982 the area suffered a serious drought. Many villagers left their communities to find work in Bangkok. In order to encourage people not abandon their hometowns, Por Pai started to create employment for the villagers by using 2,800 Rais of communal land which was being used for animal breeding at the time. Por Pai consulted with his villagers and requested 485 Rais of the land to plant mulberry trees for the cultivation of silkworms. This was the beginning of the first vocational group for the people of Bansakhoon.

Por Pai believed that community development should start from improving the community member's quality of life. Each family was encouraged to make use of at least one Rai of land. This project has led to fish ponds, chicken breeding as well as fruit and vegetable cultivation for domestic consumption. Por Pai acted

as the instructor by demonstrating different activities on his own land. The families were advised to grow crops of which they would be able to set the price themselves. Every family was also encouraged to breed six generations of chickens in each year and to grow crops sufficient enough for consumption within the household.

Por Pai never stops searching for new knowledge and building his body of knowledge with information from outside sources. He is a practical researcher whose theories have made great contributions to many communities by integrating traditional and modern practices. Many groups of people interested in agriculture were set up in Por Pai's locality and the nearby ones. Later, those groups joined together to form a network and the Northeastern Community College or "Maha Vitthalai Choomchon Isaan" was established.

As Por Pai highly respects H.M. the King and he has been a leader in implementing the Royal Concept of integrated agriculture. Through his concept of "think it out, share with others, practice well," networks of various vocational groups were established, including

silkworm cultivation, weaving, herbal medicine, traditional Thai massage, organic compost production, village fund, etc.

Por Pai's aim is to encourage the villagers and the community to learn sustainable self-reliance. The villagers cooperate in pooling their resources, such as land, water, soil, animals, plants and money. The process of debt elimination and the reduction of living expenses is achieved through a barter system among the villagers. Each month there are three meetings during which the families will meet and exchange different products. All the exchanges are recorded in account books. Villagers bring chickens, salt, chillies, eggplants, rice, fishes, several kinds of squash, cucumbers, mangoes, jackfruits, pla jom (pickled fish), pla dag (fermented fish), bananas, canes, sugar, etc., to exchange amongst each other. In addition they also set aside some of the crops which they have cultivated to share with each other for consumption and further farming.

Por Pai has always said that "we are so much in debt to the land that we can never pay it all back." Therefore, we must swiftly build up "an interest of

virtue". This means that the younger generation, who are the future of our nation, must be virtuous and nurtured in a way that encourage them to grow up to be qualified adults and valuable assets to society.

Furthermore, he has revived the community's forgotten local customs, traditions and culture, specially the language, history and traditional way of living, which should not only be part of their history, but should be put into practice.

This body of knowledge is also transferred to area's schools, colleges and universities. The teachers and students are persuaded to learn how to breed the cattle and domestic fowl, grow crops and to produce their own fertilizer. These ideas have spread to the villagers in Bansakhoon, Banpakkadya and other nearby communities. The people from other sub-districts, districts even other provinces who are interested in learning about integrated agriculture can come to join the activities. They are able to observe the learning process which facilitates self-reliance. The younger generations are welcome to an internship under the "graduate-returnee program," in line with the self-reliant

agriculture or the efficient economy concepts. Eleven projects have been planned to take the communities through the crisis. Learning centers have been set up to disseminate local knowledge on vocational development, Truth-in-Savings Group, the preservation of the ecosystem and the exchange of information, etc.

Por Pai appointed a group of eleven local intellectuals as the leaders of the communities. They are Por Maha Yoo, Por Chantee, Por Prakong, Por Sudhinan, Por Kham Dueang, Por Thong Lor, Por Siang, Por Charlie, Por Tut, Por Boon Tem and Por Pong. Another four local intellectuals represent the four elements. They are Por Pai (Earth), Por Tat (Water), Por Noo Yen (Air) and Por Bua Sri (Fire). The Thai-Isaan Support Club was set up with the intention of continuing to drive forward the empowerment from these four elements.

Por Pai's mission has been to devote his mind, body and spirit to this innovative network and to continue to extend the results. He intends to revive the traditional Issan way of life and to teach the Isaan people, who have been misguided by the modern way of life, to adjust themselves and learn self-reliance, with

the right direction, appropriate to their eco-region and ancestral wisdoms. One day in the not so distant future the people's health and well-being of body and mind will spread out to cover the entire region.



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The unplanned use of resources, which focuses more on monetary value than actual worth, will eventually have a negative impact on the forests and natural resources.

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Treasure of "Dong Yai", Free Way of Life, Local Way of Life

Compiled and composed by Boonrong Kettthet

The "Dong Yai" forest area, which covers approximately 25,000 Rais, is rich in bio-diversity. The Lam Nam Sebai river and its three tributaries, Kha Non Yang, Kha Kham Kwang and Kha Huay Siew, run through it to feed many natural swamps including Nong Han, Nong Jig, Nong Tor, Nong Khun and Nong Sam Kha. In the Srang Tor Noi are there are thirteen villages, in which live more than 1,500 families. 80,000 inhabitants form the communities scattered around Dong Yai forest. These communities are united in the mission to protect

the forests around which they have built their homes.

People believe that "Srang Tor Noi" is the "Saang" (pond), that was created when Thow Pha Dang's fireballs fell into the fields. Water has continually flowed up from these deep holes. The villagers use the water from these Saang or ponds for everything from drinking to agriculture. It is remarkable that the water has never dried up.

At any time if these Saang were covered with the grass and is not cleared completely by the farmers, they believe that some one in their family will get will fall ill or pass away. When the Saang are well tended, the sick will soon recover.

Mr. Adisak Thettham, the Assistant Pooyaiban (assistant village headman) of Ban Srang Thor Nai and Por Yai Thong Dam Sidhikhun of Ban Srang Thor Nok, give us some information about the area's historical background:

The transformation of the word "Saang" into "Srang" resulted from a misunderstanding of Amnart Charoen's ruler at that time. He came from another province and was appointed to work there; therefore,

he did not know the historical background of the area and did not understand the dialect. He misunderstood and named the district "SrangThor Noi". Fortunately, the word "Thor" still exists. It means a mark which results from being gored by a wooden spear.

Many public community platforms are provided for the expression of diverse dimensions of thoughts which foster the body of knowledge. Community strategic plans have also been implemented to research value, potentials, structural data, economic and social situation and alternative options. Information regarding community health, productivity, resources and knowledge, as well as economic data and domestic data, and etc., are thoroughly collected. The people are required to provide information regarding the value and worth of the fertile national resources in Dong Yai Forest. Even though the thirteen villages share the responsibility of protecting the forest, unfortunately, they tend to overlook the importance of and connection between all resource factors.

If the community business is jointly based, it can actually facilitate the acknowledgement of the value of

resources around them. They start to think and learn and to make sustainable use of their forest heritage, cultural capital and natural resources.

The thought-and-action process can be seen through the various groups in the community: These include the housewives groups, savings groups, Tambon Administrative member groups, herbal physicians groups, business agriculture groups, community factory groups, etc. Such groups express their standpoints and divulge important information truthfully and honestly for the benefit of other groups in the network. However, there is still a shortage of genuine learning factors, efficient management systems, and basic data collection. With materialism attacking them from every direction, the community may become weakened. The people's state of mind can be corrupted if they are not careful in their consumption, according to the community's traditional way of life. The unplanned use of resources, which focuses more on monetary value than actual worth, will eventually have a negative impact on the forests and natural resources.

Today, people of Ban Srang Thor Noi, Ban Srang

Thor Nok, Ban Srang Thor Nai and other communities scattered around the forest, are cooperating for their abundant and sustainable source of livelihood, which is the heritage passed down from their ancestors.

Savings Group of Nong Ya Ma: Savings for Welfare and Community Bank

*Compiled and composed by Tuang Unthachai /
Paibul In-ngarm / Yongbhund Bhunddongrang*

In the past, Nong Ya Ma Community was called Ban Nong Ya Ma. This community used to be where the cavalries fed and groomed their horses. This is why it was known as Ban Nong Ya Ma (Nong - pond, Ya - grass, Ma - horse).

In 1962, the 40% rice whisky distillery was built on state property in the area. An announcement was made by the Roi Et City Municipality that it would extend

its municipal boundary line to cover the Roi Et distillery so that taxes could be collected from the factory.

In 1997, the village was split into three Moos (villages): Moo 1, Moo 17 and Nong Ya Ma Municipal Community. Today, Ban Nong Ya Ma Community is split into 2 parts: Ban Nong Ya Ma Community affiliated with Roi Et City Municipality and the villages of Ban Nong Ya Ma Moo 1 and Moo 17, Rob Mueang Sub-district, Mueang District, Roi Et Province.

The beginning of community development for Ban Nong Ya Ma was the establishment of the Nong Ya Ma Development Fund demonstration store. Shares of 100 Baht were sold and the benefits were distributed among the shareholders once every six months. Furthermore, a committee meeting was also held each month. However, the project suffered many setbacks and was not as successful as anticipated. During 1995-1996 the community was able to solve its problems or found alternative options which were more in harmony with the community's way of life. The members are permanently employed in trade, with 20% of profits shared among them. This method worked well for the community shop

fund management, therefore everything went smoothly.

However, even ten years after the community shop was started, the monthly and yearly gross profits have not increased. Not much profit is made, thus providing very low incentive for the members to take part in the activities. This has resulted in the lack of new members wanting to join.

The main challenge is for Teacher Panom and the community's leaders to find out which kinds of activities will bring the villagers together, to share the benefits, and to cooperate to improve their own villages. This way the rich and the poor will become equally happy. A number of problems have been found regarding the fund raising activities for the development of Ban Nong Ya Ma. The villagers lack funds for their professions and for daily survival. People of moderate economic standing can help themselves, but a majority of the villagers have low income, lack of funding support, are not self-dependent, have no credit with the bank and are not trusted by the more wealthy citizens.

The relevant question is how can those with better financial standing in the community be persuaded

to help those who are less better-off. The wealthy could gain benefits from deposits while the poor could take loans from these savings or such deposits.

The first of November, 1998, was D-Day for the project. The villagers were encouraged to put between 50 Baht to 50,000 Baht per person into a joint savings account each month. There were 256 founding members who elected the Savings Group Executive Committee. Teacher Panom Chachiyo was elected act as Chairman of the Savings Group.

The management of the Savings Group had to agree to abide by and be bound by the regulations which governed the Savings Group for the Development of Koom Nong Ya Ma. These regulations, consisting of 7 chapters and 21 articles, are the agreements which all concerned parties must respect and refer to when making decisions. They became the norms in managing the community fund.

The funds for activities management are divided into three categories: monthly contributions or the 50 Baht per month savings to be received no later than the 5th day of each month; the deposits not exceeding

50,000 Baht per person; and the non-interest loans from other institutions. The interest rate for the deposits was determined by the General Meeting or the Organizing Committee, in order to facilitate management and fund raising.

An interest rate of no more than 15% must be distributed to the members. This loan interest was paid by the members to the group during the year. Members who have taken out loans must divide their repayment into at least three installments. Such refunds consequently became a source of income for the group. Not more than 20% of the net profits would be allocated for reserved capital and public capital, as well as for the committee members' bonus. The remaining income was divided to be paid as dividends. After two years they found that there were not enough revolving funds for the needs of its members. The amount of loans requested was also higher than the savings money and deposits each month. The Organizing Committee met to try to find out how to best use this capital for the members to gain the most benefits. The Cooperative Savings of Roi Et Teachers Ltd. was used as a role model.

Certain ideas from the Cooperative were applied to the savings groups, as follows:

1. the members who are willing to join the program for their own welfare, and the welfare of their spouses, children or parents, must donate a sum of 2,500 Baht per person to the Group. This amount will not be reimbursed under any circumstances.

2. in the case of a member passing away within 180 days of joining, the Group will contribute 2,500 Baht towards funeral costs.

3. in the case of a member passing away after 180 days of joining, the Group will contribute 50,000 Baht, but 25% of such money will be deducted.

These principles have unexpectedly been successful. 400 applicants applied for the first program and the revolving fund was 1,132,500 Baht.

The most important turning point was that the Group was able to solve the problem of insufficient revolving funds. The second program was then launched and collected a revolving fund of 1,000,000 Baht. The third program followed in due course and was also able to collect a capital of approximately 1,000,000 Baht.

A capital of 9,000,000 Baht is now being rotated in the village. The members can take out loans for professional and personal expenses. When the payment date comes around, the members can opt to pay only the interest or pay the interest along with the principal loan together. The amount of 9,000,000 Baht is therefore being revolved in the village, from the hands of Mae Yai Boon Mee, to the hands of Por Yai See, to the hands of Por Yai Chanta, and then to the community shop. The dividend is on average repaid. Some of it is provided for the members' funeral expenses when they pass away, and for releasing loans members.

From 1986 to the present, it has been found that working with savings groups relies on faith and trust in the leaders. The leaders are the backbone and must be persons with integrity, dedication honesty. Unity, which is the heart of joint savings groups, must to be exemplified among them. Since this kind of work cannot be done by one person, it needs a lot of people to be involved, including members and committees. All parties should be qualified, honorable, dedicated and must aim for the benefits of the village. The Committee should set a good

example for the members in order to build confidence, faith and honesty in taking out loans and repayment. The members will then have self-respect and respect for their organizations. They will learn how to manage their loans, how to divide the repayment of interest, and when the capital should be repaid. Social processes like the platforms of annual general meetings, village loudspeaker, and etc. are used as regulators.



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As the villagers are allowed to participate in the budget management process, starting from the thought process, organization, evaluation and appreciating in their achievements, the budget management enjoyed a huge success.

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Budget Management as an Integrated Project at Mueang Plueay Tambon Administrative Organization

*Compiled and composed by Tuang Unthachai /
Paibul In-ngarm / Yongbhund Bhunddongrang*

In the Mueang Plueay Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO), there are a total of six government officials, local authorities and employees. Eight villages are in its service area. There are 2,306 inhabitants in 620 households, as identified in census records. The area's annual income in 2002 was 4,766,395.07 Baht. The inhabitants earn their livelihood by farming and working as general laborers.

The village's transportation routes are in bad condition and it is difficult to transport agricultural products into town markets on the bumpy dirt roads. Each year the TAO tried to improve the roads but have been unsuccessful due to budget cuts and the fact that the budget for road construction was not approved by the government. A portion of the annual budget was allocated equally to each village for construction and development. Because the funding was equally divided between all the villages, the problems could not be solved. In Isaan dialect, this method of sharing is called "bang pood khan" (sharing equally).

Dividing the budget by the number of villages could not solve the problem of the far away roads. Such problems have continually occurred for a long time, therefore, Mrs. Khemthit Srirabkwa, the Deputy Chief of Mueang Plueay TAO, encouraged innovative budget management. The village community platforms have been used as tools for these changes. Each village opened its own platform to find out the specific problems and needs. The output was that the first priority for every village was the improvement of the roads.

The researchers consider that the participation by every sector, including the TAO Council, concerned authorities, administrators, villagers and especially the village communities, can contribute to the success of budget management. Every sector used village platforms for sharing their ideas on identifying problems, setting priorities and finding resolutions. The Tambon's principles in budget management, the participatory assessment among members of the TAO Council, TAO administrators and village communities were also made in the process. They had to make a joint decision on whether and how the roads are to be constructed.

Secondly, if any problems occurred, the Deputy Chief of Mueang Plueay TAO, Ms. Lin, and her party will make have a discussion prior to making the decision or requesting for resolution of the TAO Council. Working with transparency and accountability are also the main factors in building confidence and trust among the parties involved.

Thirdly, the power of the village communities is the main driving force behind the successful construction of the new roads. No individual, group of

individuals or organization could obstruct this force. The villagers enthusiastically donated funds to help the road construction engineers and workers. Everybody also lent a helping hand in the construction.

The last problem that the villagers in the Mueang Plueay Sub-district (Tambon) service area encountered was quite serious. They suffered alone from all kinds of difficulties and inconveniences. Suggestions for solving the problem were submitted to the Roi Et Province Administrative Organization. Coincidentally the organization had already planned a similar project at that time, so the project no longer needed to wait a budget to be granted.

The “pun pla (sharing fish)” or “bit of money” budget management could not solve the problems which were serious, complicated, costly and intertwined with other sectors. Now the village platforms started to evolve and led to the “integrated project” budget management. The serious problems can be solved appropriately by the admirable talents of Mueang Plueay TAO.

As the villagers are allowed to participate in the

budget management process, starting from the thought process, organization, evaluation and appreciating in their achievements, the budget management enjoyed a huge success.



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Community power is used to organize activities, build relationships between families, and nurture the cultural stream, which is the wisdom for solving problems, as well as leading to health promotion for community members.

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Family Relationship with Bai Chanode Network

*Compiled and composed by Atchara Khamchiangta/
Krissana Supsirisopa/ Sirirut Srisuttiphunporn*

The 1997 economic crisis seriously affected Samakkhi Village. The price of agricultural produce decreased, and villagers who had gone to the large cities to work as laborers were made redundant. Incomes did not cover expenditures and debts increased. Families broke up and various problems followed, especially drug problems. When the problems became more serious, the villagers consequently gathered together into small groups and tried to find ways to solve their problems. Support was given by the officials from the health centre

and many discussion platforms were opened for the villagers to join and to learn from other communities. They discovered that the fight against the crisis should begin within the family institutions. The concept behind the network is:

“The strength of families is the ideology; the local cultures and local wisdoms are the factors which elevate the members; the public spirit is the heart of teamwork; wealth, rank and admiration are sacrificed; relationships create the power; the link between the past and the present leads to the future; the networks are extended according to the communities' needs and the base of development is the family members.”

The Bai Chanode Network was eventually established and grew. The name “Empowered Community Network of Bai Chanode Group” was officially given in May 10th, 2001. Huay Lang Centre, the community learning centre, was established at Samakkhi Village, with Por Chaiyaphruk as Chairman.

The purpose of the Bai Chanode Network is to develop the inhabitants' potential by placing emphasis on the family institution. The Bai Chanode Network has

been expanded by its team of leaders, consisting of the Committee Chairman and community leaders. They have approached the nearby villages, and coordinated with the community leaders from a number of villages for the expansion of cooperation and joint ideology. The supporting budget has been granted to the team by the state, NGOs and the private sector. Furthermore, members are provided with assistance in implementing integrated agriculture project, reforestation, herb cultivation, domestic doctors, and the exchange of occupational knowledge. Vocational groups have been established in order to encourage training in new vocations.

The major strategy in the implementation of this project is to improve the strength of village communities. Emphasis is placed on joint learning and participation. This has resulted in a healthy community for the Bai Chanode Villagers. In the past, each of them earned their livings separately and independently, now they live together as a community, providing each other with physical, mental and social support. Community power is used to organize activities, build relationships between

families, and nurture the cultural stream, which is the wisdom for solving problems, as well as leading to health promotion for community members.



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The village motto is: monk leader as the heart of development, cooperation among villagers, optimistic economics, advanced democracy, tradition-culture preservation and actions in line with the Royal Concept.

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Cabinet of Ban Nong Nong Villagers

*Compiled and composed by Tuang Unthachai /
Paibul In-ngarm / Yongbhund Bhunddongrang*

Ban Nong Nong is situated in E-ngong Sub-district, Chaturaphak Phiman District, Roi Et Province. There are two villages: Moo 5 with 227 inhabitants and Moo 9 with 297 inhabitants. The soil in the area has a high level of salinity and there is a lack of water for drinking and domestic use. The villages are located in very remote and undeveloped areas.

The village motto is: monk leader as the heart of development, cooperation among villagers, optimistic economics, advanced democracy, tradition-culture

preservation and actions in line with the Royal Concept.

The community has the capital of a temple, Wat Sawang Aa-rom, Ban Nong Nong, a school; seven roads in the village, a communal marsh, a community forest and five kooms (residences). The villagers abide by the Heet 12 and Kong 14 as the traditional ways of life. Heet 12 are the customs and traditions for the 12 months and Kong 14 are the 14 rules which common people and administrative authorities should follow for in order to live together peacefully and happily.

Before the area became developed, the villagers suffered from drought and lack of water for domestic use and agriculture. The soil had a high level of salinity and farming depended solely on rainfall. The need for water became so critical that villagers relocated to Ban Nong Nong. That village was far from the district and provincial centers and the dirt roads were difficult travel difficult. The village school was so small that was to be merged with the school at Ban E-ngong.

Luang Por (the Venerable Monk) spoke of his inspiration and strong intention: "It has been imprinted in my mind all the times I preached, since the past up

to now. I am always thinking how to help the villagers of Ban Nong Nong escape from their suffering and poverty. I hope they can have an efficient livelihood and turn Ban Nong Nong into the Dharma Land-Golden Land. Dharma Land means happiness and peace, while Golden Land means prosperity."

In 1999, Luang Por suggested that to celebrate the auspicious occasion of H.M. the King's 6th Cycle birthday anniversary, Ban Nong Nong should transform itself into an "efficient economics" community, in line with the Royal concept, and to act as the pilot village for the eight main ministries of the government.

The small school, which was to be merged according to the Government's policy, was improved and raised its status to become the learning centre of the sub-district. This learning centre also improved the opportunities for the villagers in Ban E-ngong. The Health Volunteers Group and the health centre were established as the primary medical aid centers. Furthermore, Luang Por also placed emphasis on the physical development of the village. A zoo, roads, vocational groups and human development activities

were established. There are various vocational groups. The management system of the village was set up in the form of a cabinet; and the overall perspective of each ministry in the village and of the whole village can be seen clearly. This system facilitates management, solutions, budget allocation, and the direction of administration of the village.

Por Preecha Treepop, an expert in the social community sector and the Chairman of Roi Et Council for Community Organizations, believes that the villagers' faith for Phra Thamthitayarn is the main factor behind the development, because the villagers are willing to dedicate all of their physical and spiritual strength. They are encouraged to improve their village by themselves. This development process starts from intellectual development, not from the material aspect. The development starts from resources and capital available. The feat is to follow the old local wisdoms. Luang Por always said that we should "preserve the old and enhance the new."

The attitude of researchers was that the Dharma principles used by Luang Por to lead the development is

integrated with Bot Paya Isaan which are the instructions and traditional short stories for teaching the villagers. This can strengthen the continual force of development. The admiration and appreciation for the value of their community are promoted in the aspects of history, land for livelihood, households and existing soil resources. There is no need to wait for or request assistance from outside the community.

The development in Ban Nong Nong started from the available resources and capital of the villagers, such as the school, savings group, and diversified farms, so the village has been quickly improved. There are less imported goods from outside the community. The main strategy for the development is to increase the resources and capital within the village.

Furthermore, the unity of the villagers - the elderly, adolescents and children, occurred from their faith in Luang Por. He acts as an advisor and an umbrella to protect the village. The main factor in the development is faith, for what they are doing, and the confidence will follow.



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*The most important factors
are dedication, love and the unity
between the members.*
”



School, Community's Rice Mill, Rice Growers of Mekong Basin

Compiled and composed by Kanjana Tongtua

The network of rice growers started from a small women's organization called "Ban Muead Air Women's Group" in Kham Pom Sub-district, Khemarat District, Ubon Ratchathani Province. Ban Muead Air is a medium-scale village, with 135 families. The women gathered together to produce handmade barbed wire, shampoo, dishwashing liquid and herbal products for domestic use and for distribution. The group's work is widely acknowledged by people both inside and outside the community. Various groups come to the

village for the study visits, bringing about discussions and exchanges of knowledge.

Acharn Thong Suan Sodapak, the group's advisor, encouraged networking between the various groups, in order to create employment opportunities, generate more income and promote unity. The Women's Network of the Mekong Basin was consequently established. Through discussions and the exchange of knowledge, members were able to pinpoint the problems experienced by the farmers, including products, debts, price insurance injustice, etc. The conclusion achieved from various discussion platforms was that the farmers' problems must be resolved by the farmers themselves. This idea led to the linking of groups who have the same goals. The groups joined together to form "the Rice Growers' Network of Mekong Basin". These groups were established in the border districts of Khemarat, Na Tan and Pho Sai. The groups abide by the "efficient economics" principles and place heavy emphasis on the community's rice mill.

In the beginning, capital was generated from the rice grown on the members' paddies, which was

an average of 25 kilograms/each member. The whole amount was sold to the middleman merchants and they were able to raise an initial sum of to 40,000 Baht. In the second year, they were able to generate 80,000 Baht. The first project was used to build a community gas station, toilets and an office. A project proposal was drafted for approval from the State Insurance Fund (SIF). A community rice mill, with a capacity of 20 kwian (measure to paddy, 1 kwian equals to 16 piculs) was approved with a budget of 4,598,700 Baht.

During the early stages the community rice mill was run through trial and error and the whole procedure was a learning process for the entire community. The workers went through both good and bad times together. They had to be patient and struggled against all kinds of obstacles. The unity, understanding and dedication of parties involved, especially the women's group, were able to help them overcome these difficulties. The community rice mill was like a second home and the workers became like brothers and sisters. Each person's duty and responsibilities were clearly defined, yet all of them would join hands to work together.

Apart from the community rice mill, the network's activities also include the Agricultural Cooperatives and the Mekong Basin Women's Unity Group. Its responsibilities include a savings bank, marketing, selling rice to outside agencies, organic fertilizer factory, Farmers' Field School (FFS), community gas station, youth network, and the community radio station. All the activities are independently carried out and then intertwined to support each other.

The network is rewarded with cash and knowledge and knowledge. The village has become a popular study visit site and training centre of organic agriculture for many groups. 0.25 Baht from the sale of every kilogram is deducted and contributed towards the education fund. After selling their paddies, the members of the organic farming group will receive the rice husk from rice milling. These husks can be used to make organic fertilizer, thus reducing production costs.

The network's ultimate goal create and awareness of efficiency among its members, to transform their thinking process, to learn how to economize and to be patient.

As life goes on, so must the network of rice growers, with activities carried out with local wisdom and modern technology. The most important factors are dedication, love and the unity between the members.



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*The network encourages mothers to
breastfeed as long as they want or for at least
four months.*

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Love through Breastfeeding: Network of Mother and Child

*Compiled and composed by Prapoj Phuthongkam
Suchada Phuthongkam / Supannika Eimsansuk*

"Love through Breastfeeding" is a motto which conveys the love and close relationship between mother and child. It tries to communicate to mother's that nowadays breastfeeding is practical and no longer a hassle. The goal is to change the perception among urban mothers, for them to overcome shyness and to understand that breastfeeding is beneficial to the mother, the child and the family. This is the concept behind "The Breastfeeding Group" which appeared in the public eye in 2003.

The Breastfeeding Group provides expert information for the mothers. Emphasis is placed on the exchange of experiences among the mothers; this includes monthly discussions, discussion tours, training sessions and seminars on breastfeeding as well as quarterly pamphlets and the "Mother's Buddy" project. These activities can help mothers who are uncomfortable with breastfeeding to understand that they have friends who can support them. They are given counselling and the suggestions which can help them to be successful in breastfeeding. The "Mother to Mother" network was established to encourage the exchange of knowledge and also stories of successful and unsuccessful breastfeeding for between pregnant and the breastfeeding mothers. The network encourages mothers to breastfeed as long as they want or for at least four months. One of the distinctive strategies is for the mothers, children and family members; such as husbands and grandmothers, to participate in the activities together, since those people are most powerful in child feeding and breastfeeding. The "Breastfeeding Corner" project was started so that mothers can have

proper and private places for breastfeeding. Mothers are able to express their breast milk and keep it properly for their babies. In the past, when the mothers had to go out, they would either have to breastfeed before leaving the house or express their breast milk in washrooms. This project allows mothers to have a private place to express their milk while outside the home.

The Breastfeeding Group's success in publicizing itself and building a widespread network of members stems from the integration of academic concepts with the connection of networks. The academic concepts are simply communicated in the form of appropriate, regular and accessible activities. A linkage of networks is made among various agencies, both official and private. Information about breastfeeding is disseminated from the small groups of urban people into the provinces and breastfeeding is increasingly being promoted in Thailand. This is entirely beneficial to the body, mind and society. The Breastfeeding Group is an example of the health innovations which are improving the quality of life and well-being of Thai people.



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Another characteristic of Khao Chamao Conservation Group is the use of Dharma principles as a context for the group to encourage members to approach nature and accept the truth of life.

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Small World of Khao Chamao Conservation Group

Compiled and composed by Pornvilai Carr

The Khao Chamao Conservation Group, a youth group, was started in 1994. Ms. Bubpathip Chaemnil, the former learning camp organizer of Ramkhamhaeng University, at the age of 30, is the leader of the group.

Ms. Bubpathip or "Pi Fab," as called by the children, is originally from Ban Khao Din, Thung Kwai Kin Sub-district, Klaeng District, Rayong Province. She runs a book rental shop called "Moom Nam Jai" in a small corner of her mother's drugstore. It was the first bookshop in Ban Khao Din. The books include comics, fiction, non-fiction and children's literature.

Moom Nam Jai (Goodwill Corner) has become a center for children of all ages. Reading a variety of books can generate the exchange of ideas and experiences in a community. Their chats lead to the first activities outside the bookshop. The forest trekking and bird watching outings were arranged at Khao Chamao-Khao Wong National Park, 17 kilometres far from Ban Khao Din. Khao Chamao-Khao Wong National Park is the most fertile forest in Rayong Province and borders five provinces in the East, namely Sa Kaeo, Chachoengsao, Chon Buri, Rayong and Chanthaburi.

These small gatherings made it possible for the group to have regular meetings, some fun and to enjoy the advantages of forest trekking. It also resulted in many other activities and an increase in the number of members. They unanimously agreed that a group should be officially established. They jointly drafted simple objectives for the group, as follows:

- 1) to educate the younger generation about the protection of the environment and to foster an awareness of living together with nature;

- 2) to take part in lessening pollution in Khao

Chamao forest; and

3) to act as medium to enhance the awareness of the value and usefulness of Khao Chamao forest.

With these objectives, the trekking has become a charitable activity, with garbage collection in tourism locations, tree planting and cleaning graffiti left by tourists on the cave walls by rubbing mud from the bottom of the cave on it.

In 1995, the Group started to expand their activities from one-day trekking trips into a youth camp for environmental education called "Dream Camp... Beautiful Forest." The members participated in charitable activities in the National Park. Other activities include a cultural preservation camp called "Old Stories from the Homeland" and joint learning for the conservation of cultures, traditions and local wisdom. A campaign was also to publicize the problematic conditions under the name "Dramatic Media... Mobility for Dreams". This activity was performed both inside and outside the community. The members wrote the scripts and also performed. The pamphlet "Non Kraton (Atlas Moth)" was also published. The learning platform was provided

for the members. The "Return the Land to Create Food Sources for the Elephants" project aimed to solve the problem of natural resources and the environment. "The Development Project for the Youth Network of Klaeng District" was linked to the networks at different levels in order to cooperate with other youth organizations. The "School as Playhouse" project was also implemented.

A variety of activities were designed for the members depending on their age group. Another characteristic of Khao Chamao Conservation Group is the use of Dharma principles as a context for the group to encourage members to approach nature and accept the truth of life.

Today, it has been 10 years since the Khao Chamao Conservation Group was established. It is time for the group to start evolving. The "Dharma Army" will be set up. This is to expand the group by using marketing strategies to create a healthy community.

The last ten years was the time for "nurturing the children," but the next ten years will be the time for linking the community. It is the time to build up "the warriors" of the Dharma Army.



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*All of them are aware of the necessity
for cooperation
if they want to solve the crisis.*

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Local Fishermen's Club to Revive Phang-Nga Bay's Crisis

Compiled and composed by Parinya Panchaona

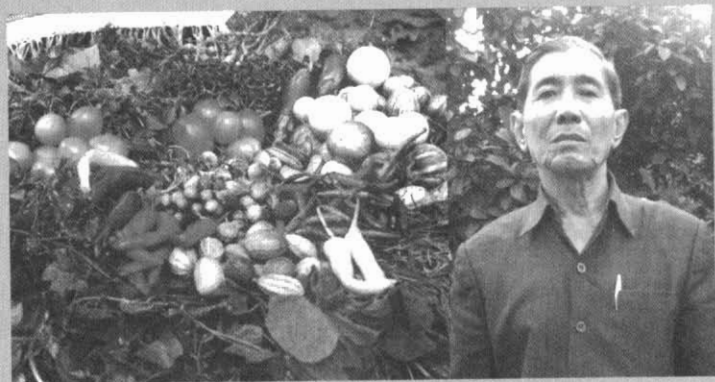
Koh Yao Noi Island is situated in Phang-Nga Bay, in the Andaman Sea. The area covers the territorial waters, mangrove forests, and a number of islands in Phang-Nga, Krabi and Phuket Provinces. People have migrated to the area due to its abundant natural resources. Groups of Thai-Muslims have established their own communities and earn their living from fishing. The community's way of life is to follow the doctrines of Allah, which includes strict and constant principles and doctrines and has that Imam is the important religious leader.

The area's abundant natural resources drew people from many different regions to migrate here in order to make a living. The community expanded and the number of inhabitants increased dramatically. Capitalism has taken an important role both socially and economically. Natural resources have been depleted in exchange for monetary rewards. Debts increased and quality of life worsened, especially since the Government started to push for development in the country with an emphasis on structural growth. The fishing industry is an issue which the state had put in the First National Economic and Social Development Plan. Productivity was encouraged for domestic consumption and for exportation.

The exploitation of natural resources in Phang-Nga Bay had seriously increased. Destructive fishing methods have become a serious problem. The deterioration of natural resources and the environment has become a community crisis. As the community became aware of these problems, the inhabitants realized that their way of life must be altered. They decided to cooperate to protect and revive the coastal resources, as

well as to restore their traditional professions. Thus, the Local Fishermen's Club of Koh Yao Noi was established in 1994.

At first, it was a challenge to manage the revival and conservation of the area's natural resources. The activities affected the relationship among the community members, dividing them into the commercial fisheries group against the local fisheries group and their conflicts have been passed on to the younger generation. Later, the Imam, the important religious leader and respected community member, called for joint discussions, and the conflicts started to dissipate. All of them are aware of the necessity for cooperation if they want to solve the crisis. The activities for the revival and conservation of the coastal resources include coastal survey, savings, fund raising and women and youth groups. These activities would increase the quality of life for Koh Yao Noi villagers. They have joined hands in keeping their vow to protect the sea, the breadbasket of Koh Yao Noi Community.



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All the activities place an emphasis on restoring purity to the environment and natural resources.

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Mai Rieng Community: Self-Reliant Management

Compiled and composed by Chuan Petkaew.

Mai Rieng is a sub-district in Chawang District. The community is located on a mountainous plain through which run the Tapee River. The inhabitants are the mix of natives and the Thai-Chinese who migrated into the area during the reign of King Rama V. All of them are Buddhists. The area's important natural resources include minerals, forestry, wildlife and forest products. The people earn their livelihood mainly by agriculture. The villagers settled down in kinship groups. They strictly adhere to their religious worships, traditional ceremonies and the conventional way of

living. However, even though Mai Rieng Community has abundant natural resources and as well as a rich cultural history, the villagers are still faced with poverty. The modern development process has changed the traditional relationship patterns in the community and as well as its culture. Furthermore, the natural resources have also been depleted. External factors strongly affect decision making, thought processes, the way of life as well as production methods. The relationship system in the community and the ecological diversity have been negatively affected by an agricultural system which emphasizes single crop plantation. Furthermore, advanced communication technology has brought new cultures and ideas into the community so rapidly that the inhabitants are not adequately prepared to handle it. Natural disasters, including storms and drought, have also pushed the community into poverty and lessened its self-reliance.

Prayong Ronnarong is a key figure in Mai Rieng Community. He accumulated knowledge from his family and his community as well as from the direct experience in his own life and the exchange of experiences with

others. This has made him realize that it is imperative that Mai Riang Community solves its poverty crisis and the community members must rely on themselves in order to achieve this. Mr. Ronnarong therefore decided to turn Mai Riang Community into a learning platform. Information was gathered at all levels, from families to groups and the community as a whole. This information was passed on to the members through the group's activities. By doing this, the information was also rotated around the community, so the villagers could select relevant and useful information. From this information community members could see the dynamics of their community, and such information could also be used for community development.

It is evident from these experiences that the main factors which support self-reliance in Mai Riang Community consists are the leader, information and the rotation of information. The community leader must direct the way of thinking, collect information about the community in every aspect and disperse this information through the learning platforms and practical activities. The villagers will eventually build up a body of knowledge

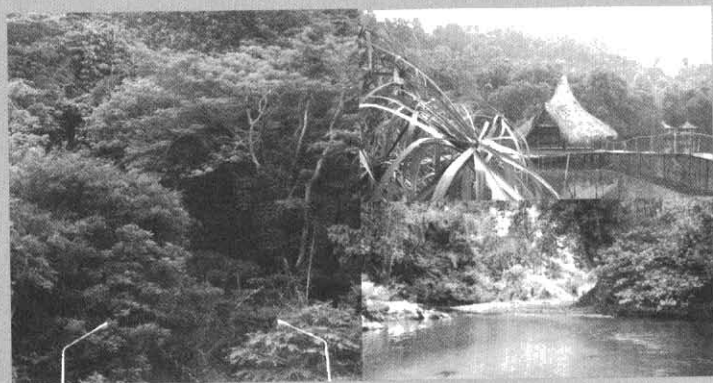
from this information which can then be used in the joint learning process. Mai Riang Centre for Education and Community Development, which Prayong Ronnarong and the community helped to establish, has become the community's learning centre, the development centre for employment and vocations, as well as the community's health centre. All the activities place an emphasis on restoring purity to the environment and natural resources.



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He does not want society to lose its advantages, therefore, his principles and practices depend on participation of society members, with an understanding of the principles, practices and the results.

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"Khon Yu - Pa Yung Project" at Phato

*Compiled and composed by
Chuan Petkaew / Srisuda Rattana*

Phato Watershed Conservation and Management Station is situated at Pak Song Sub-district, Phato District, Chumphon Province. In the past, it was called Phato Watershed Improvement Station, and was later changed into Phato Watershed Management Station, and finally into Phato Watershed Conservation and Management Station.

Phato Watershed Conservation and Management Station manages all activities concerning the river basin watershed areas. Under the "Khon Yu - Pa Yung Project",

many activities have been launched including reviving the ecosystem, establishing watershed check dams, promoting vetiver grass cultivation and training services, etc. The concept behind these activities is that the Phato Head Watershed Forest is a fertile forest, with many communities located in its midst. The villages have a tendency to continually encroach and destroy an increasing portion of the forest area. The project therefore emphasizes community participation by appointing a Project Committee whose duty is to work with various groups in the community. Each village in the project was asked to draft its own community covenant which would be used as an implementation framework of the Committee. The villagers' platforms are provided various activities by the villagers' organization. The officers of Phato Watershed Conservation and Management Station act as advisors on community forestry. Community forestry is the Royal Concept of H.M. the Queen that people can live peacefully and harmoniously with nature. It is an important philosophy in the implementation of this project.

Various activities have been implemented up

until now. The reforestation and the revival of damaged watershed ecosystem aim to revive the damaged forest conditions. An area of 6,000 Rais was reforested. Furthermore, demonstration sites have been set up to manage the forest living areas. Village platforms have also been opened, so that the villagers could come together to attempt to solve their problems, prior to accepting other methods of administration. At the demonstration site the working unit has implemented a four-level plantation to manage living areas in the forest, and to preserve the natural forest areas. The four-level plot was arranged as follows: stink beans (petai), betel nuts, coconuts, and durian are grown on the top level; mangosteens, *Lansium domesticum*, longkong and champaka are grown on the second level; robusta coffee, Bago (*Gnetum gnemon*) and other kinds of vegetables are grown on the third level; and on the bottom level there are chillies, eggplant, herbs and other kinds of crops, including rhizome crops. One of the important activities is the forest management for conservation. The forest areas are divided into three categories: conservation forests, use forests and living forests. To

manage the conservation forests, the fertile forest area is determined. Some areas are categorized as deteriorated forests, such as in the highlands on highly steep slopes, on mountains, and in the areas where mountains and plains meet. The community members set up rules and to regulate the activities in these areas. Such rules take into consideration the issues of altitude distribution and fertile forest boundary lines. Violators are prosecuted. However, reforestation was still on the increase and a patrol unit is set up in the area for an entire year. Tourism was also promoted. Another important activity which was also carried out was to move the villagers from watershed areas to voluntarily resettle in the lowlands.

The Khon Yu - Pa Yung Project committee allocated new land for these villagers to resettle on. The reforestation and revival of ecosystem was also carried out in the deteriorated forests. The rattan forest plantation is another activity which is actively carried out by the Station, because, in the past, harvesting rattan was one of the professions of Phato Villagers. Other activities under the Khon Yu - Pa Yung Project include digging

fish ponds in line with the New Agricultural Theory, education promotion for the students in watershed areas, the establishment of watershed check dams, the cultivation of vetiver grass, the improvement of infrastructure, the use and preservation of herb plots, eco-tourism promotion, the establishment of a watershed savings group, etc. All these activities have run smoothly under the Khon Yu-Pa Yung Project.

Pongsa Chunam is an important leader in implementing the Khon Yu-Pa Yung Project by the Phato Water-shed Conservation and Management Station. He is the leader in both the ideas and practices. He tries to follow the principles and to adjust and apply them in context. He does not want society to lose its advantages, therefore, his principles and practices depend on participation of society members, with an understanding of the principles, practices and the results.



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They can change the image from the persons who need assistances into the intellectuals, and increase the importance and dignity of the elderly as the gurus and the respected persons.

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From Capitalization to Wisdom: Value of the Krabi Elderly

Compiled and composed by Suwat Kongpan

The Krabi Senior Citizens Organization was established by representatives from 8 districts and a range of different organizations. They include representatives from the Community Organizations Network; the Group for Art, Culture and Local Wisdom: Likay Paa, Manohra and Nangtalung (Shadow Play); the Basketry Group and the Retired Government Officials Group. The Senior Citizens Committee was formed at the provincial level with elderly representatives from eight districts, two from each district, four representatives from

the Krabi Community Organizations Network's working group, and two representatives from the relevant official agencies in the area, such as the Health Organization, Provincial Welfare, Tambon Administrative Organization, etc. The committee has a total of 22 representatives.

In 2001, the Community Organizations Development Institute (Public Organization) granted a budget of 1,000,000 Baht per province to improve the quality of life for the elderly in each province. The Krabi Community Organizations Network divided the fund into 3 parts. An allocation of 850,000 Baht was used to set up a revolving fund for the operation of palm plantations. 100,000 Baht was allocated to the improvement in welfare services for the disadvantaged elderly and 50,000 Baht was contributed to management cost. Given the area's traditional way of life, its geographical characteristics and the livelihood of the inhabitants, the members, who are skilled in agriculture, decided to purchase oil palm plantations.

Apart from being like a tool which helps to bring together senior citizens from across the province together in a joint venture, another important objective

of this project is to ensure sustainable fund management. Spending 850,000 Baht on the palm plantation was a way to maintain and sustain the fund. The income generated from the palm plantations, after the deduction of operations costs, is divided into 4 parts; 30% is contributed towards the welfare of disadvantaged elderly, 30% goes towards maintenance, 20% is put back into the (one million Baht) fund and 20 % goes towards management services.

Presently, the income from the palm plantations goes into the Fund for the Elderly and is used to provide assistance to senior citizens in need. Furthermore, the Krabi Community Organizations Network is well known and widely acknowledged by many organizations. In the future there will be the more empowerment projects in various aspects, such as the development of welfare institutions and the learning centre for the elderly by using an area in the palm plantation as a meeting place as well as building houses for the elderly who need support.

Since 2003, the network members reached a unanimous agreement to implement a "one district, one

garden" project, so that the elderly in every district can enjoy the many benefits from having a garden. Further more the palm plantations have been developed into learning centers complete with hydroponics gardens and a wide variety of plants.

As the province's senior citizens form the core of this network, their efforts are widely acknowledged and they become a part of the community. They can link all groups of elderly to join hands in developing the process for the elderly, and increasingly interrelate the agencies to work together. The elderly will jointly have the power in determination of the direction they need from the agencies. They can change the image from the persons who need assistances into the intellectuals, and increase the importance and dignity of the elderly as the gurus and the respected persons.

