

LOCAL WISDOM FOR PREVENTING VOTE-BUYING: A CASE STUDY OF EASTERN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this survey research is to identify local wisdom, which can be effectively used to prevent vote-buying and then to make suggestions to relevant people and agencies. The researcher gathered all the information from two sources. The first source consisted of leaders in voluntary community development work in seven provinces in eastern Thailand, and the second source consisted of leaders and people in three sample communities, selected on the basis of their proven success in applying local wisdom to the prevention of vote-buying.

The research suggested the following measures for preventing vote-buying:

1. Communities should advise voters: to reject vote-buying by reminding them that they have already accepted money from other candidates; to accept money without feeling obliged to vote for those candidates; to organize activities to promote democracy and foster positive attitudes toward it; to organize activities aimed at bettering local social and economic conditions; to organize activities aimed at creating community leaders and strengthening the community; to organize anti-vote-buying campaigns, as well as no-vote selling pledges in which villagers agree to sign their names to a pledge. Other suggestions include organizing voluntary village agencies to oversee vote-buying behaviors, installing local opinion boxes and surveillance cameras at voting sites; as well as inviting independent journalists to voting sites in order to report on election news.

2. Suggestions for relevant agencies are: to enforce written promises not to buy votes on all kinds of candidates' campaign billboards; to have undercover federal election monitors in the area; to offer rewards to people who spot vote-buying and report it to authorities; to encourage eligible voters to exercise their voting rights; to provide voters with transportation to the voting sites, thus preventing candidates from

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doing so as a form of vote-buying or any other kind of voting misbehavior; as well as to seek cooperation from banks in checking all kinds of money transfers during elections.

3. Specific suggestions for election organizing agencies are enforcement of the following: vote-counting from all voting sites must be performed at a single site; all election committee members are to be from other constituencies; transferring one's household registration is not to be allowed prior to an election due to possible vote-buying; all candidates are required to declare their assets prior to and after an election; the assets of candidates who violate election regulations are to be seized if the violations are proved to be detrimental to the public interest, etc.

Keywords : Preventing vote-buying, local wisdom.

INTRODUCTION

Vote-buying in all kinds of elections has long been in existence in Thailand and it has become an increasingly serious problem (Chantarawong, 1977). Public groups and other agencies have been trying to be more politically involved and have organized independent agencies to curb vote-buying behavior and other dishonest behaviors by politicians. The Constitution of B.E. 2541 authorizes independent agencies to oversee elections to ensure honest political elections (Ratanachot, 2001).

Vote-buying has evolved into a complicated political practice, driven by the traditional patronage system, in which benefits are shared between the patrons and the patronized, thus creating informal but strong multi-layered networks (Rabibhadana, 1975). This system has been further exploited to violate political election laws (Scott, 1977). Head-vote-recruiters, or *hua kanaen*, through whom votes are bought, have long been key figures in this political misbehavior. Vote-buying and selling, thus, has become so widespread nationwide in elections at all levels that it has become more difficult and elusive to spot and intercept. Effective solutions for tackling this problem have yet to be found. This research, accordingly, has started with the intention of finding a possible solution

to this national problem by identifying the wisdom of local villagers, who are well acquainted with vote-buying and selling behavior.

The objectives of this study were (1) to identify local wisdom which can be effectively used to prevent vote-buying in parliamentary, senatorial and all other kinds of elections, and (2) to make policy-related suggestions to relevant election organizing agencies and people, which can also be the basis for future Constitutional amendments.

Note* Local wisdom here refers to knowledge, ability and other ideas or inventions derived from local villagers' experience to be used to solve problems; they can be long accumulated or just recently conceived (Kumboonreung, 2001; Vasee, 1987; Chantasoo, 1993; Poonnotok, 1988; Ramitanon, 1993; Santasombat, 2001).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers have collected information in two steps from two sets of people:

Group 1: Voluntary community development work leaders and local community leaders well experienced as electoral volunteers in seven provinces in eastern Thailand.

Group 2: Community leaders and people

in three sample communities where it has been proven that vote-buying has virtually been non-existent; thus the researchers assume that local wisdom in the three areas has been effectively

applied to prevent vote-buying. The three selected communities are Tambon Bangpra, Chachoengsao Province; Tambon Tapong, Rayong Province; and Tambon Khaosok in Chonburi Province.

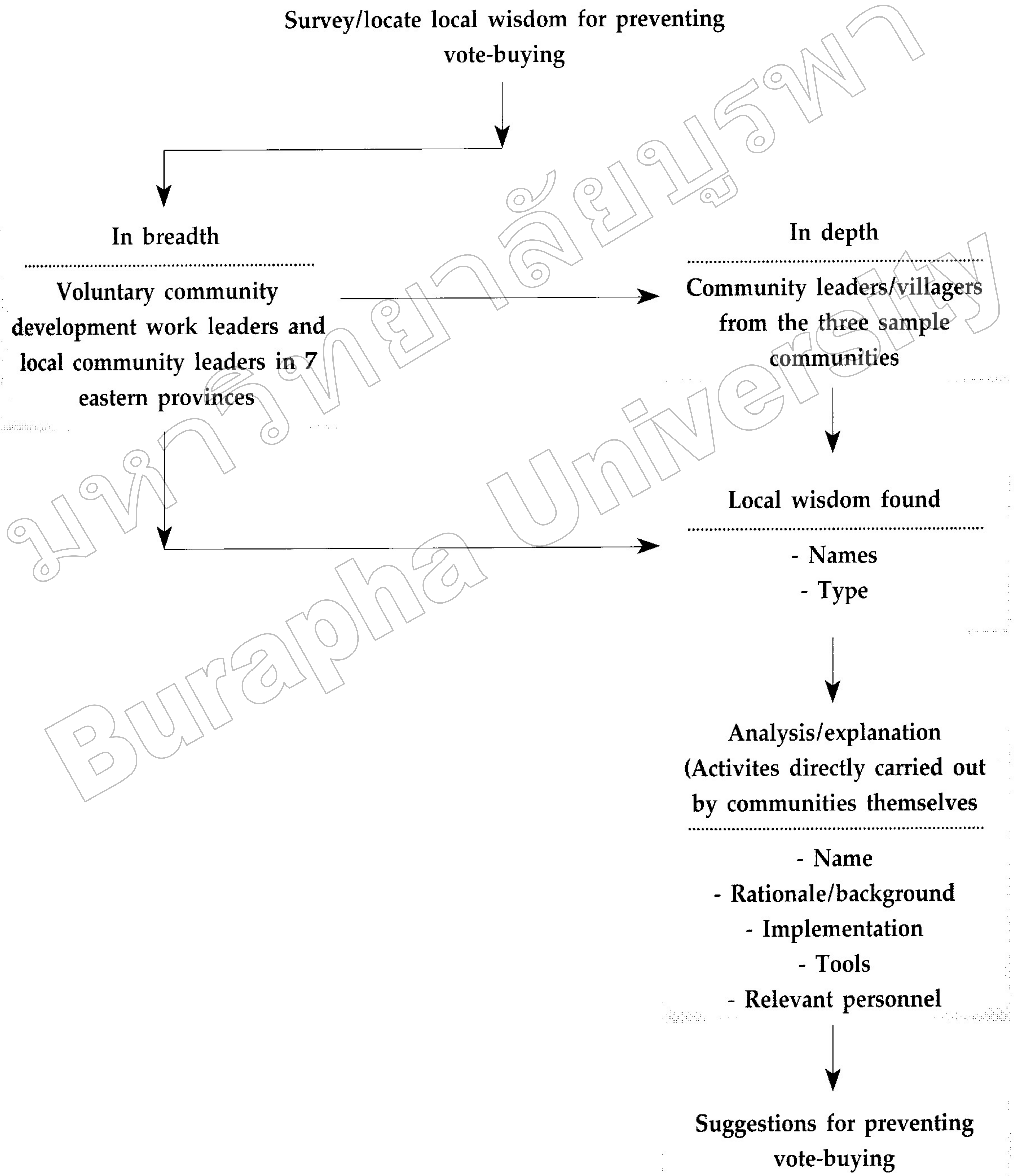


Figure 1. Research framework.

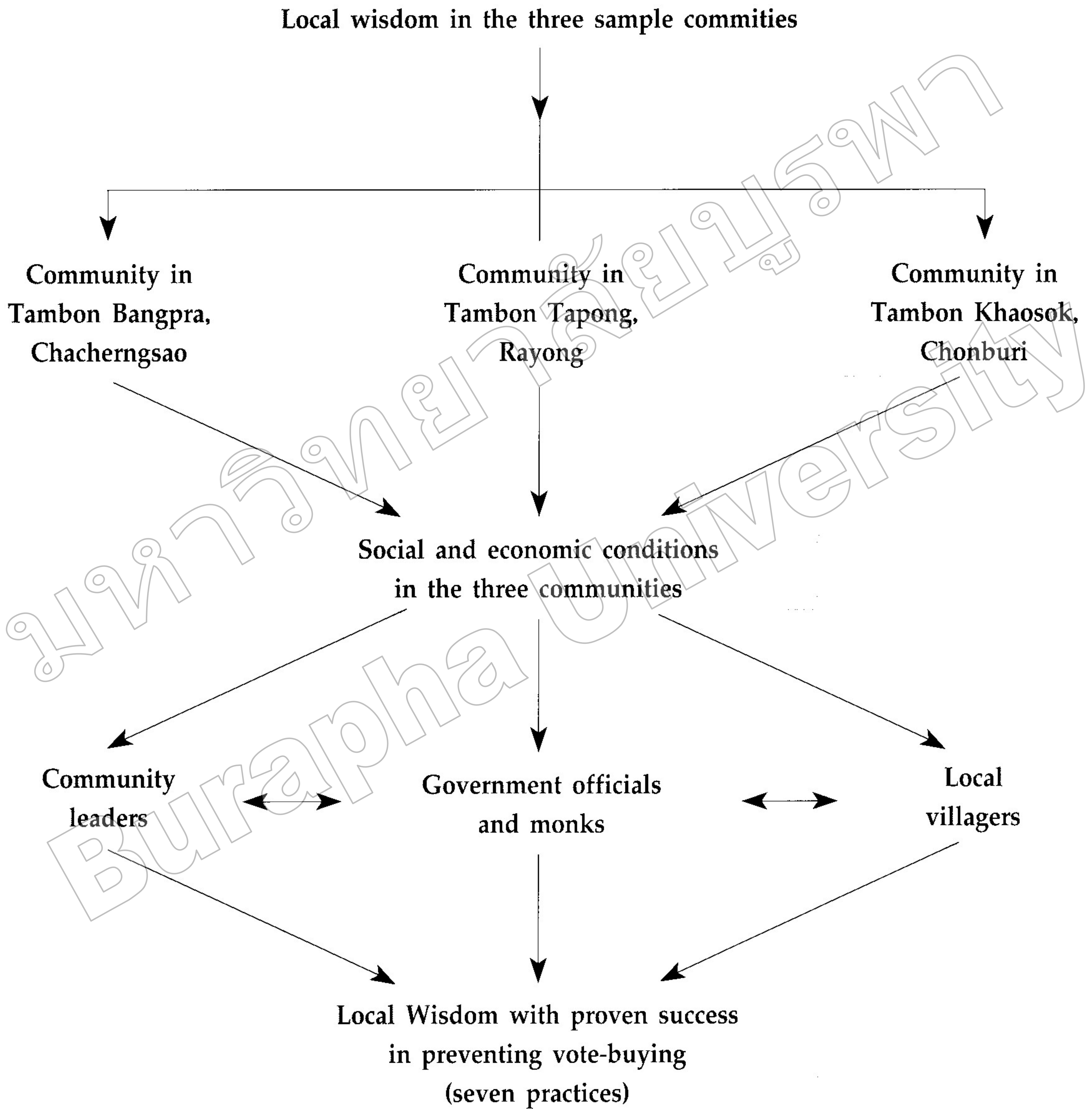


Figure 2. Sources of local wisdom in three sample communities in eastern region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The local wisdom found in group 2, which has been put into practice with proven success.

These are (1) rejecting vote-buying by reminding candidates that villagers have already accepted money from other candidates; (2) accepting money without feeling obliged to vote for those candidates; (3) organizing activities to promote a true understanding of democracy and to foster positive attitudes toward it; (4) organizing activities to improve social and economic conditions in the communities; (5) organizing activities to create community leaders and strengthen the community; (6) organizing anti-vote-buying campaigns; and (7) organizing no-vote-selling pledges in which people voluntarily agree to sign their names to a pledge.

The practice of rejecting vote-buying by reminding candidates that villagers have already accepted money from other candidates

This practice could not be traced back to its origin(s) and how it has been passed down. It is thought that the transfer of this practice is oral and may have stemmed from a sense of self-preservation while trying not to hurt the feelings of vote-buying candidates or *hua kanaen*. It is logical to assume that the practice has been firmly established from those community leaders who have set a good example for villagers, who in themselves have a good conscience and are well aware of their voting rights. Other people setting a good example for villages are *hua kanaen* and political neutrals who have implanted positive attitudes in the villages; hence contributing to their no-vote selling communities (Rodkeow, K., 2003).

The practice of accepting money without feeling obliged to vote for candidates

This is a very old practice, passed down orally through generations of villagers. No one is able to determine when it was started. The practice is not found only in the three sample villages, but also in a number of communities

around Thailand. Villagers believe that the candidates buying their voting rights are those intending to be corrupt after winning the elections. They then consider it right to retaliate against those candidates by promising them a vote without feeling obliged to actually vote for them. These groups of people—mostly the legal-minded ones—are not worried about the consequences of breaking their promises since votes are cast in a private ballot box where the voter cannot be watched or checked. However, there are some groups of people who keep their promise out of fear of the complicated consequences (Sinrat, 2003).

This practice of accepting money without feeling obliged to vote for the candidates is sometimes risky since those involved in vote-buying, mostly local powerful people, may compare the ballot outcomes to the money they have spent on buying votes. Those who have not been elected may later take revenge on the so-called vote sellers who have betrayed them. However, this practice will become an effective means of preventing vote-buying in other elections since the vote-buyers have learned that vote-buying in these specific areas is not going to guarantee them an election victory (Klumunkong, 2003).

The practice of organizing activities to promote a true understanding of democracy and to foster a positive attitude toward it

Community and village leaders have agreed that this method of preventing or curbing vote-buying, though may take a long time and requires cooperation from a lot of people and agencies, is sustainable. When deeply implanted with a true understanding of democracy and political conscience, villagers will be strong enough to resist vote selling. Consequently, vote-buyers then will have to think twice before buying villagers' votes (Kumphocha, 2003).

The practice of organizing activities to improve social and economic conditions in the communities

This practice is the most desirable for villagers for it is commonly seen as a way to raise their standard of living and economic status. The transfer of this practice to generations of villagers started with the continuation of subsequent income-generating projects organized by the villagers themselves, together with the observance of the local traditions by the villagers and community leaders. The improved economic conditions will naturally reduce stealing and other crimes, thus logically resulting in better social conditions. Better socio-economic conditions, then, give strength for villagers to effectively resist vote selling (Chuarnarong, 2003).

The practice of organizing activities to create community leaders and strengthen the community

This practice of creating community leaders and strengthening the community is firmly rooted in and made effective by the community's socio-economic and educational development, as well as the honesty fostered among community leaders. Prerequisites for strong communities with capable leaders are sufficient income, which enables villagers to resist selling their voting rights, adequate education to make people aware of the purpose and negative outcomes of buying and selling, and also the unity of caring villagers, who lead simple, debt-free lives. Villagers' resistance to voting misbehavior is enhanced by their community leaders who are not exploited by any politicians or political parties. Instead, they carry out their duties without fear of the influence of the local, powerful people. Strong leadership and strengthened communities, when successfully created or fostered, will guarantee clean elections and thus promote true democracy. This practice of organizing activities to create community leaders and strengthen the community depends, however, on a number of factors such as support from the public sector, good community leaders, as well as unity among community members (Klumunkong, 2003).

The practice of organizing anti-vote-buying campaigns

Vote-buying in these sample communities was prevalent 5-6 years ago, a consequence of close relation or friendship with vote-recruiting agents, but this behavior has been greatly reduced. More and more villagers have refused to sell their votes out of fear of criticism from their neighbors who have kept an eye on people or families rumored to sell their votes. As a result, vote-buying then has become more difficult, though efforts such as giving political team or campaign jackets to gain favor from villages are still somewhat made. With more people resisting vote-selling, it has become possible for communities and their leaders to assume more active roles in organizing anti-vote-buying campaigns; these come in the form of meetings between village committee members and villagers on the matter of upcoming elections and working together to draw up public relation plans. Public relations are most commonly carried out through the village's news broadcasting tower or key figures in the meetings, who notify members of their families of the events. The community also involves village schools in anti-vote-buying effort by organizing a march to each individual household to encourage villagers to respect their voting rights and refuse to sell votes, citing the damaging consequences of this voting misbehavior. With everyone involved in the campaign, the vote-buying and selling behavior has become greatly reduced or almost eradicated from the villages (Silpachai, 2003).

The practice of organizing no-vote-selling pledges in which people voluntarily agree to sign their names to a pledge

The practice of making no-vote-selling pledges has been adapted from public relations campaigns organized to convince people not to sell their votes. This is an activity whose success has never been assured. To make this general anti-vote-selling activity more directed and more

effective, the village committee has agreed to organize a no-vote-selling pledge in which villagers voluntarily sign their names to a pledge. This idea makes use of the fact that villagers normally have in mind who they want to vote for—usually those who are always present in the village and support village activities when needed, not those who show up only during the election times. The practice, which truly reflects local wisdom, fosters good feelings among the villagers and respects their dignity. This practice does not end at the name signing, but it extends to the follow-up period(s) in which the results of the signing are studied in order to see (with statistics) if there is an increase in the number of people signing their names to a pledge, and whether the vote-selling has decreased. Along with this practice, it is essential to create unity among villagers and promote positive attitudes to true democracy. In addition, devoted, honest and politically-clean village leaders should also be fostered, since they are key figures in leading the community to prosperity, and in the eradication of vote-selling (Sinprem, 2003).

The experience-based suggestions, derived from local wisdom in sample group 2 (community leaders and people), relevant to election organizing, and suggested activities.

These are (1) election committee members for all kinds of elections should be from other areas or constituencies (Boonkerd, 2002); (2) vote counting from all polling places should be done at a single site (Boonklin, 2002); (3) transportation to the voting sites should be provided for voters (Choksombat, 2003); (4) cooperation from banks in checking all kinds of money transfers during elections should be sought (Sinprem, 2003); (5) all candidates should be required to declare their assets prior to and after an election (Boonkerd, 2002); (6) the assets of candidates who violate election regulations should be seized (Boonkerd,

2002); (7) voluntary village agencies or special guards should be organized to oversee vote-buying behaviors; and (8) local opinion boxes should be installed for suggestions and information on vote-buying behaviors (Chalerm, 2003).

The local wisdom derived from the data collected from the local leaders in seven provinces in eastern Thailand (sample group 1).

This can be categorized into (1) experience-based suggestions for election organizing to prevent vote-buying and (2) suggested activities to prevent vote-buying.

Experience-based suggestions for election organizing to prevent vote-buying.

These are (1) election committees at all levels must be strictly impartial and must enforce election regulations fully (Chaisanor, 2002); (2) bureaucratic systems must be strictly impartial (Choonhasi, 2002); (3) vote counting must be performed at a single site (Iamsa-ad, 2002), (4) committee members at voting sites must be assured of authentic documents and of non-rotating ballot casting (Jokkaew, 2002); (5) election committees at all levels must be from other communities or constituencies (Muangpa, 2002); (6) candidates' daily spending should be limited; and (7) transferring one's household registration is not to be allowed prior to an election as means of preventing possible vote-buying (Kajohnkidakarn, 2002).

Suggested activities to prevent vote-buying.

These are (1) organizing anti-vote-buying and selling pledges, or seeking a written promise not to buy and sell voting rights (Kamon, 2003); (2) requiring a written promise not to buy votes on candidates' billboards of all types (Boonkerd, 2002); (3) religious leaders should be encouraged to be involved in raising villagers' awareness of the consequences of voting misbehaviors (Kungjai, 2002); (4) organizing voluntary village agencies

to oversee elections or to conduct public forums for elections (Srisurak, 2002); (5) having undercover federal election monitors in the area (Mongkonborirak, 2003); (6) authorities assign patrols to prevent vote-buying and selling or to threaten those who commit voting misbehaviors (Ngermbukkol, 2002); (7) installing surveillance cameras at voting sites and inviting independent journalists to fully report on election news (Papkreum, 2002); (8) rewards should be given to people who spot vote-buying and report it to authorities (Pornpongsawat, 2545); (9) installing opinion or complaint boxes (Rodkeow, S., 2003); (10) inviting all candidates to clarify their policies (Simakorn, 2002); (11) increasing the severity of punishments for vote-buying (Siuram, 2002); (12) rewards should be given to people who exercise their voting rights (Supot, 2003); (13) assigning outside agencies or organizations to oversee elections (Tanapingpong, 2002); (14) vote-recruiting agents, or *hua kanaen*, should be forbidden, thus preventing vote-buying (Tiemtawin, 2002); (15) the mass media should be truly neutral and brave enough to report the truth (Tunwiset, 2002); (16) having effective public relations activities to create understanding of true democratic elections, as well as to create positive attitudes and ethical values (Udomsook, 2002); (17) villagers to accept money without feeling obliged to vote for vote-buying candidates (Vasanavin, 2002); (18) having figures respected by villagers to teach them about voting misbehaviors, and consequences (Vinitchayakul, 2002); (19) providing voters with transportation to voting sites, thus preventing candidates from doing so as a form of vote-buying; and (20) seeking cooperation from banks to check if there are any suspicious money transfers during elections (Wangkarn, 2002).

Of the activities mentioned above, ten can be carried out directly by community members themselves. They are (1) organizing anti-vote-buying and selling pledges, or seeking a written

promise not to buy and sell voting rights (Wilailert, 2002); (2) involving religious leaders in raising villagers' awareness of the consequences of voting misbehaviors (Torasaynee, 2003); (3) organizing voluntary village agencies to oversee elections (Winitchai, 2003); (4) installing opinion or complaint boxes (Boonked, 2002); (5) inviting all candidates to clarify their policies (Boonklin, 2002); (6) allowing *hua kanaen* in the elections (Chalerm, 2002); (7) having effective public relations activities to inform villagers as well as create a true understanding of democracy (Silpachai, 2003); (8) villagers to accept money without feeling obliged to vote for vote-buying candidates (Sinprem, 2003); (9) having figures respected by the villagers to teach them about voting misbehaviors, and consequences; and (10) installing surveillance cameras at voting sites or taking a lot of photographs as part of reports on election news (Muangpa, 2002).

SUGGESTIONS

A number of opinions and experience-based suggestions derived from the local wisdom for preventing vote-buying have been revealed, and classified into four main categories by the researchers. They cover (1) suggestions for communities to carry out themselves, (2) suggested activities for relevant agencies to prevent vote-buying, (3) suggestions for election organizing agencies to prevent vote-buying, and (4) suggestions for further research.

Suggestions for communities to carry out themselves.

The communities should (1) advise voters to reject vote-buying by reminding candidates that villagers have already accepted money from other candidates; (2) advise voters to accept money without feeling obliged to vote for those candidates; (3) organize activities to promote true understanding of democracy and to foster positive

attitudes toward it; (4) organize activities to improve social and economic conditions in the communities; (5) organize activities to create community leaders and strengthen the community; (6) organize anti-vote-buying campaigns; (7) organize no-vote selling pledges in which people voluntarily agree to sign their names to a pledge; (8) apply religious teaching to the prevention of voting misbehavior by citing consequences and the notion of sin; (9) organize voluntary village agencies to oversee elections; (10) install opinion or complaint boxes; (11) invite all candidates to clarify their positions on issues; (12) forbid voting recruiting agents, or *hua kanaen*, in the elections; (13) have figures respected by the villagers teach them about voting misbehaviors; and (14) install surveillance cameras at voting sites and invite independent journalists to fully report on election news.

Suggested activities for relevant agencies to prevent vote-buying.

These include (1) requiring a written promise not to buy votes on candidates' billboards of all types; (2) having undercover federal election monitors in the area; (3) authorities assign patrols to prevent vote-buying and selling or to threaten those who commit voting misbehaviors; (4) rewards should be given to people who spot vote-buying and report it to authorities; (5) increasing the severity of punishments for vote-buying; (6) rewards should be given to people who exercise their voting rights; (7) assigning outside non-government agencies or organizations to oversee elections; (8) recruiting the mass media that is truly neutral and brave enough to report the truth; (9) providing voters with transportation to voting sites, thus preventing candidates from doing so as a form of vote-buying; and (10) seeking cooperation from banks to check if there are any suspicious money transfers during elections.

Suggestions for election organizing agencies to prevent vote-buying.

These include (1) election committees at all levels must be strictly impartial and must enforce election regulations fully; (2) bureaucratic systems must be strictly impartial; (3) vote counting must be performed at a single site; (4) committee members at voting sites must be assured of authentic documents and of non-rotating ballot casting; (5) election committees at all levels must be from other communities or constituencies; (6) candidates' daily spending should be limited; (7) transferring one's household registration is not to be allowed prior to an election as means of preventing possible vote-buying; and (8) all candidates should be required to declare their assets prior to and after an election; violate election regulations should be seized.

Suggestions for further research.

An additional research should be conducted with expanded research sites and should be conducted with larger, different and more varied sample groups. Research methods should be adapted to suit time and budget in order to produce more valuable information. The orientation of the research could also be made more qualitative or quantitative. In addition, interview procedures, and sample and data collecting methods should be improved. Other recommendations include the use of advanced quantitative analysis, additional variables, and the application of statistical package in social science. Future researchers are also recommended to combine the qualitative and quantitative research methods. In addition, the research framework and relevant theories should be adapted or modified. However, what should be maintained are the specific problems that informed the research and its objectives.

The opinions, suggestions and approaches derived from the research have proven to be effective in preventing vote-buying and selling.

However, the application of these forms of local wisdom depends on the community cultural context, social structure and strong leadership in the community. It takes time to develop effective methods to prevent voting misbehaviors. Favorable socio-economic conditions, education, and sincere

support from the public sector all play vital roles in preventing vote-buying and selling. Furthermore, it is left to researchers and academics, then, to seek more knowledge in order to provide relevant agencies and the general public with useful suggestions for solving the problems facing our nation.

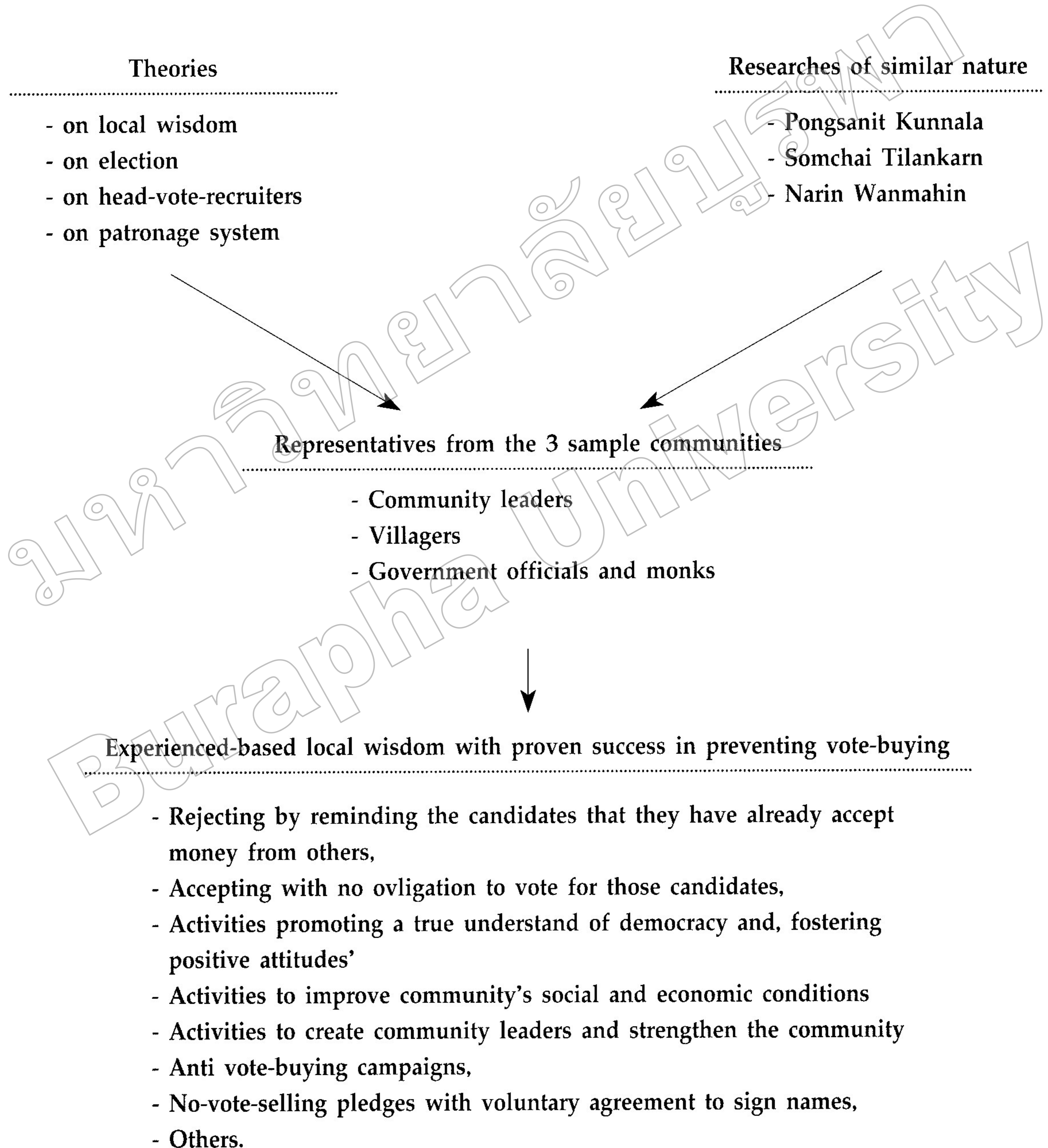


Figure 3. Research outcomes on local wisdom derived from 3 sample communities.

**THEORIES AND RESEARCH
FRAMEWORK**

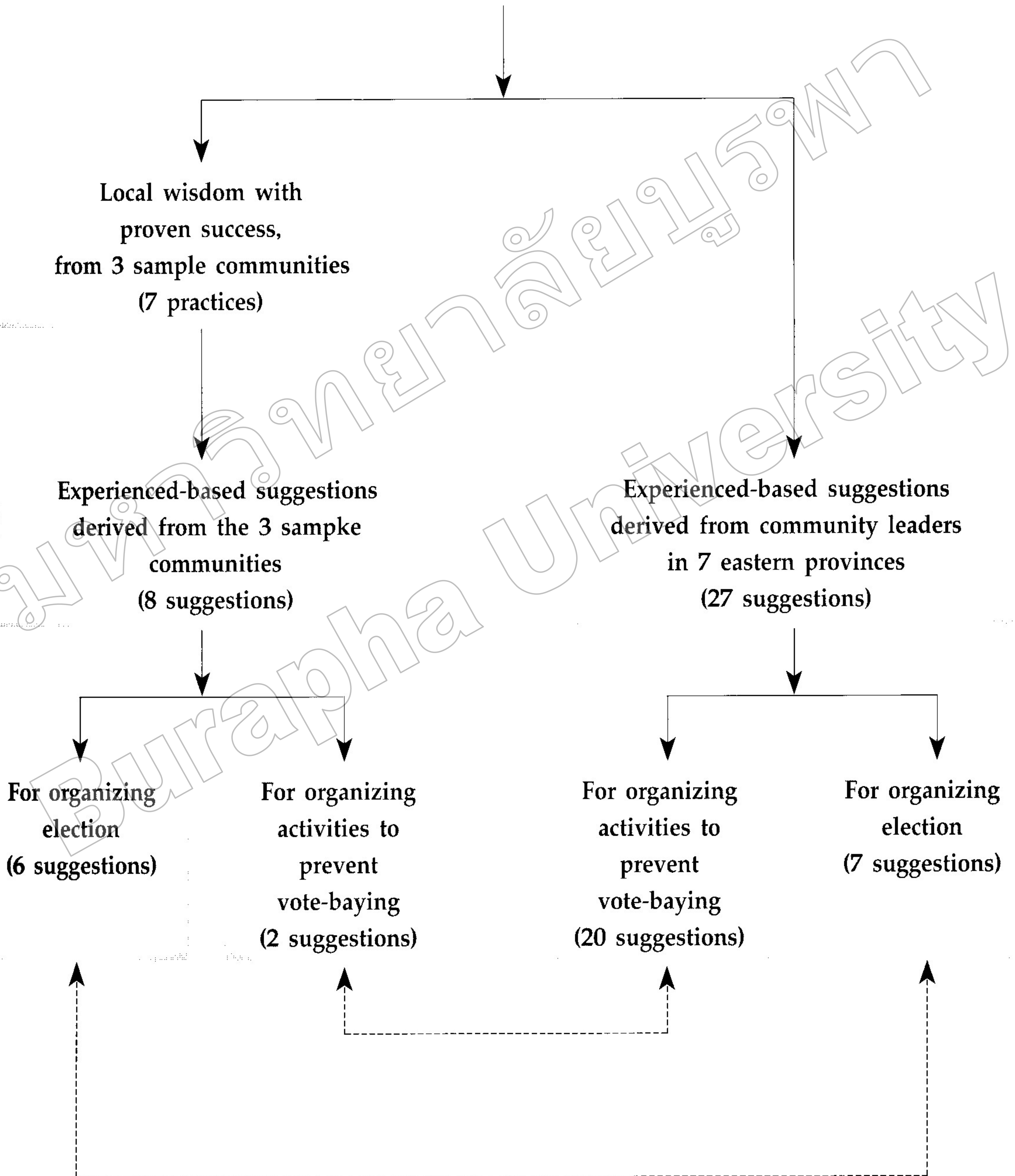


Figure 4. Research summary on local wisdom for preventing vote-buying.

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