



## People's Participation in Community Development\*

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### INTRODUCTION

Community development is a learning process from which all actors—villagers, development officials (both government and non-government), business representatives, and experts—will learn and gain experience together as development progresses. True and sustainable development cannot take place through force or order, but it will naturally happen when all actors equally and democratically **participate** and share their ideas, visions, and responsibilities to steer and implement their community or village development. One approach to create sustainable rural development is through giving the main actors, which means villagers who are living in the community, an equal opportunity to think and plan their own future.

**People's participation** in community affairs has been considered an important rural development policy, initiated since the establishment of the National Rural Development Program (NRDP) in the fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan in 1982. It was commonly understood that the rural administration system was created toward the transition from top-down to bottom-up planning system. The system also established a bottom-up planning structure where rural development plans would initially be formulated by people at the village level. During the past years, efforts to strengthen people's participation in village planning and community development has often been far from desirable. Many rural administration obstructions, such as highly centralized controls of the line agencies, lack of a practical approach to strengthen people's participation, and no commitment to integrate people into community development, were encountered. In 1994, the new Tambol Council Law was passed, which marked a major effort to decentralize decision-making power to people. A challenging question, now, is not only how to set up and strengthen this local self-governing body, but also how to ensure that people will democratically participate in decision-making processes and can effectively control the Tambol Council.

Villagers are usually willing to cooperate with one another to satisfy their mutual interests and needs. They may be inhibited from doing so owing to obstructions in communications or for other reasons, such as lack of opportunity or favorable circumstances. But it can be assumed that the people's will to participate in the betterment of the community is ever present and that it will find expression spontaneously or through outside stimulation. Therefore, it is important to find a practical approach to help enhance and provide opportunity for people to participate effectively and democratically. The A-I-C approach, which is a participatory planning technique, is experimented at the village level to understand and find way to achieve this goal to stimulate people's participation in community development.

Village participants, however, must include both men and women who represent all interest groups in the village, such as village leaders, various women groups, business groups, farmers, and disadvantaged groups. While including representatives from various groups is important, female participants in village development planning enriches the processes. The previous TDRI project on "Women's Organizing Abilities" found that women's voices and concerns in the community are equally important to community development and welfare as most women reflected needs to initiate social, education, health, and environmental projects, while most men pay more attention to economic, agricultural, and infrastructural development. Combining both sides' needs and concerns creates a more balanced community development plan.

This report summarizes findings and recommendations drawn from the several TDRI's projects, the most

important one entitled "Strengthening Women's Ability to Participate in Village Development Planning and Decision-making Processes: An Action Research," funded by WELD/CIDA. The detailed case studies of 40 villages in eight provinces are in the main report (in Thai). In addition, to facilitate and disseminate ideas of people's participation in village development planning and decision-making processes, the project produced a moderator's manual, explained village workshop processes, the A-I-C and moderator's techniques. This manual is primarily developed for development officials (Pattanakorn) from the Community Development Department (CDD), the Ministry of Interior, and other field development workers working with non-governmental organizations. In addition to the manual, the project, in cooperation with the CDD, co-produced a 30-minute video presentation detailing the A-I-C techniques and processes to conduct a village workshop.

## **THE ACTION RESEARCH AND ITS OBJECTIVES**

The project is an action research project: a combination of research and actual implementation of village development planning and decision-making processes at the village level. This 18-month project was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through the Women's Economic and Leadership Development Program (WELD) with following objectives:

- (1) To examine and identify mechanisms to enhance women's participation in village development planning and decision-making processes;
- (2) To study and design an appropriate A-I-C method to be used by development officials (both from governmental and non-governmental organizations) in the village development planning system; and
- (3) To find ways to increase the number of and to promote opportunities for women to participate as committee members in the Village Development Committee (or Kor Mor).

To achieve these objectives, TDRI, in cooperation with the Population and Community Development Association (PDA) and the CDD, the Ministry of Interior, launched a pilot study in 40 villages in the northern, northeastern, southern, and central regions (Chiang Rai, Phitsanulok, Maha Sarakham, Buri Ram, Surin, Pattani, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Ang Thong). In each village, the project organized a village development planning workshop using the A-I-C approach (sometimes known as the New Development Paradigm); the workshop simulated a village planning forum which integrated men and women who represented various interest groups into village decision-making processes.

As an action research, the nature of the project was slightly different from a regular research project that generally aims to gather information, analyze, and propose policy recommendations. This action research project focused on participation of all parties involved and learning experiences received from the project. Although a main purpose was to formulate policy recommendations, this project—using village cases to examine and conduct experiments on the A-I-C approach to facilitate village development planning—also offered learning experiences for all parties or actors involved with the project. The primary result of the action research project was the benefits that each actor gained from participating in the project. The project's actors included villagers, development officials (from GOs and NGOs), researchers, and policy-makers.

A total of 1,225 *villagers* (690 women and 535 men) in selected villages had a chance to participate in a real village planning forum, using the A-I-C approach in organizing village workshops. In each village, villagers were invited to review their development status and make suggestions about their future. Toward the end of the process, they agreed upon a list of village development activities or projects, divided into three main categories: activities to be carried out by villagers themselves; projects to be proposed to the Tambol Council; and projects to be proposed to other development agencies. Since these development activities were formulated by villagers themselves, a sense of belonging and ownership among villagers was created; they sought funds for the projects, organized teams and managed village development activities; above all, they wished to see the success of their development projects or activities. Many development activities were successfully carried out after conclusion of the workshop, especially projects

undertaken by villagers themselves, i.e., garbage management and village beautification projects.

*Development officials* participating in the project were trained to become familiar with village workshop processes and applications of the A-I-C concept, and were then able to be A-I-C moderators. Through the project, this new approach taught them to look at village development from a different perspective; they became more democratic and people-oriented. The project examined two models: the village development planning workshop conducted by "Pattanakorn" or government development officials, and the one conducted by development agents from a non-governmental organization—the PDA. Therefore, development officials participating in the project included those from both government and non-governmental organizations. The project designed the A-I-C workshop processes to be consistent with the rural development system and suitable for villages in Thailand, and then trained the selected development officials to be workshop facilitators or moderators. The project also invited representatives from the Training Division, the CDD, Ministry of Interior, to participate in this learning process. After understanding and learning about the A-I-C approach, the Department requested assistance from the project to launch and experiment with this process in the Department, starting by training 10 CDD trainers of the CDD Training Division who later added the A-I-C approach to the Community Development curriculum (or CD process), and trained the first new CDD officials at the Training Center in Banglamung in April, 1994. In addition, the CDD has tested the technique in several of its development projects, such as the rural poverty eradication project in 1995 and the natural resources and environmental project in 1994. These activities helped expand the learning horizon of the A-I-C approach into the government sector, as the village case studies implemented by the project were limited.

The case study method used in this project gave *researchers*<sup>1</sup> an opportunity to examine and understand the village development planning and decision-making processes that allowed villagers to participate. Women's roles and abilities to participate in this process and their outcomes were also recorded and analyzed. Researchers collected background materials on village socioeconomics, history, population, development activities, and cultural life; this information helped researchers to understand the village situation and to aid in communication with the villages. It was not intended for detailed analysis, and was not part of the raw materials of the research. All the raw data for each case study came from observation and interviews with the project's participants—villagers and workshop moderators. Through observation, interviews, and participation in this action learning processes, all researchers learned more about village development as well as people participation processes, and could gather the first-hand information to write case studies, and formulate conclusions and policy recommendations. Reliability of the findings was assured by redundancy which occurred from repetition of the process in many villages.

*Policy-makers* not directly involved with the project may directly benefit from it. For those involved in rural development, the project offered first-hand experience and recommendations regarding people participation in village development planning and decision-making processes, as well as a practical model—a more effective and democratic rural development planning. For those involved with women issues, the project clearly shows that women's participation in village development planning and decision-making processes and their roles in community development are important and useful. Lesson learned from each village workshop help to identify methods to integrate women into village development planning and decision-making processes.

## **THE A-I-C APPROACH FOR VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

Using the A-I-C approach in action research gave us an opportunity to test and refine this planning tool for Thai contexts. The project's concepts, ideas, and design were based on a previous TDRI project on Women's Organizing Abilities conducted in 1990, when TDRI and PDA jointly experimented with a new development planning tool, known as the A-I-C concept, developed and introduced by the Organizing for Development, an International Institute (ODII), a non-governmental organization in Washington D.C. The A-I-C concept has its origins in a concept of a power field and the effect of the environment. In the center of the power field is an actor with a purpose. It is the purpose that is actually the source of power. Within the boundaries of the "self," the power is characterized by relation of control. Beyond the field bound by the actor's control lies an area or relations to others characterized by influence power. The outmost

boundary, beyond the influence of the central actor, consists of relationships of appreciation. Dr. Smith related the power field to policy planning formulation and later designed a planning process using the A-I-C concept.<sup>2</sup>

Implementing this action research, the project refined the approach for the Thai community development contexts, expanded sample size to 40 villages covering four regions to test whether the tool can be implemented in different environments and culture, and trained selected development officials in both governmental and non-governmental organizations to learn more about GO and NGO's performance. Basically, the approach used for village development planning forums is a planning process that combines the best of several brainstorming techniques, together with the A-I-C technique. It is considered to be people-centered, democratic, and cost-effective.

Based on the A-I-C concept that recognizes the power relations among stakeholders in the village, the village workshop, using this approach, encouraged every single participant to become the center of a power field built around his/her purpose or interest in village development. Each participant (individuals attending the workshop) was then interactively involved in the situation. Objectivity in the traditional sense was not possible. Each villager developed a personal responsibility for his/her relationships in village development to the whole village (appreciation mode), to the others (influence mode) and to the self (control mode).

The village workshop proved the strength of grass-roots participation in the development process. While most development officials had always thought it difficult for villagers to plan their own future, the project found the opposite to be the case. A two-day village workshop consisted of five sessions: opening, appreciation, influence, control, and concluding sessions. The *opening session* was designed to guide villagers into the A-I-C village workshop; games sometimes were used to break the ice and to reduce the power gap among villagers, especially among men and women and among leaders and villagers.

- *Appreciation session (A)* comprised two sub-sessions: analysis of the village reality (sharing ideas and discussing the village's situations, success stories, problems, and development opportunity) and conception of an ideal village for the future (creating a shared vision of their desirable village situation). The picture-drawing technique was used in both sessions because it helped to stimulate some participants to discuss their ideas; combining picture-drawing and group discussion techniques also served to restrain other participants who tend to dominate discussions and helped to formulate village development goals—development vision.
- *Influence session (I)* served to identify the best development activities or projects to achieve the ideal development state agreed upon during the appreciation session. Villagers were asked to define rationales and consequences from each development activity and then set their own development priorities.
- *Control session (C)* served to transform development needs and ideas into actions. Villagers formulated their own action plan by identifying key participants or villagers to oversee projects, planning activities, defining resources, and setting time-frames: all details necessary to implement their ideas. Enthusiasm to implement development activities was strongly developed during this session.

The *concluding session* was added to get the villagers' agreement and commitment to implement their development activities. Moreover, this session discussed and selected representatives to attend the Tambol Council meeting. In several sub-districts where the A-I-C workshops were organized in every village, the project arranged a Tambol Council meeting, inviting village representatives, including women to discuss villages' development projects proposed by villagers in each village. The meeting proved useful to the villagers who attended the meeting, as they had an opportunity to learn from others' experiences—assistance was being offered to help development their community—and often they agreed upon integrating several village development projects into a single project to be added into the Tambol Plan. This meeting also enhanced the women's opportunity to discuss and attend development planning forums beyond the village level.

## VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES AND THAI RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Real changes within a community occur when men and women look within themselves to find their own ways to solve problems, plan their future, and take part in the development process. Thus, a community development plan must be initiated by the people within a particular community. In Thailand, the bottom-up planning principle has always been stated in rural development policy and plans, as appears in the National Economic and Social Development Plan. The Fifth Plan, for the first time, created a rural development management and planning structure from the national to village levels to carry out such a policy. From past experience, however, the level of participation by villagers in village development planning and decision-making processes has been less than desirable. Instead, village development needs and plans have normally been formulated and initiated by several village leaders and government officers who decided for all villagers. As a result, most villagers paid little attention to community development projects, especially projects that have a long term impact such as social, educational, and environmental projects. At present, the perspective among villagers, in fact, indicates that community development is a government function. Many development projects failed to meet the real needs of villagers or fail to achieve development objectives, and they do not really solve the problems confronted by villagers. Unfortunately, the enormity of financial resources and technical assistance devoted to community development over the past two decades to eradicate poverty and improve the quality of life of rural Thai people has been a waste; many people have raised serious questions about the government's previous efforts and performance. One management obstacle was that there was no practical and simple approach for development officials who were ordered to carry out the people-participated policy for them to use in the field.

To correct this problem, a new approach to involve people in community development must be considered. One way is to bring all interest groups together to plan democratically their future, solve their own problems and undertake community development with some financial and technical assistance from outsiders; then true development may take place. The project introduced a village planning model, using the A-I-C approach in Thai contexts, to involve people in community development processes from the beginning, which is planning the development.

The project findings indicate and confirm the necessity to involve villagers, both men and women, in community development planning and decision-making processes. Villagers, when given the opportunity to think, debate, and decide what should be done to improve their community, will be willing to work hard to see the development projects succeed in order to fulfill their vision. Centralized project planning and government agency-driven development projects do not fully serve the needs of local people or really solve the problems; they should be eliminated from the Thai rural development administration. Prompting people to participate in community development process through planning and decision-making processes not only creates a sense of the community but also raises the awareness of the importance of development projects for the community. The A-I-C approach is a tool that provides a way for villagers to participate in community development planning. Its techniques and concept are feasible, simple, and cost-effective. The technique is easily understood by development officials both in government (CDD workers) and non-governmental organizations. Particularly, most CDD workers are those who have already acquired some basic knowledge as moderators, so that only some additional training regarding the A-I-C approach is needed.

At present, the Tambol Council Law will allow local people to decide and manage their own resources and community. To establish a local administrative body that is sensitive to the people's needs, and is democratic and effective, village planning functions must be strengthened. Villagers must become actively involved in deciding their development directions and overseeing their own community development. If villagers become actively involved, they can monitor the progress of all development projects and control the Tambol Council themselves.

The A-I-C approach is a planning technique which can be used to stimulate interest and raise development awareness among villagers. The study found that, if used correctly, it can be a considerably powerful tool. But the A-I-C approach is not a magic technique for the success of village development. To use the A-I-C

approach, three major things are needed.

- Skilled and experienced moderators who understand the A-I-C approach and concepts to conduct the workshop at the village level.
- Village stakeholders or representatives of different interest groups to participate in village workshop.
- Follow-up action by development officials upon conclusion of the workshop, who may help provide technical or financial support for some village development projects.

## **WOMEN'S OPPORTUNITY, ABILITIES, AND ROLES IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Women make up statistically half of the population and they are important actors in village development. Women are a target group in development; as well, they comprise human power and resources to help implement and maintain many development projects at the community level. At present, however, the majority of women are socially, culturally, and politically barred from participating in community development planning and decision-making processes. Traditionally, Thai society holds that it is a woman's role and duty to take care of domestic chores, while men are expected to deal with tasks outside the house. Adhering to this concept, most Thai women are not aware of and/or overlook their roles and duties within the community, and they have little opportunity to participate in politics and decision-making processes. The elected village leaders and village development committee members are examples; at present, the majority of these are men.

Recognizing the fact that women comprise half of the villagers and are important actors in village development, to successfully achieve village development goals, therefore, village women must be included in community development planning and decision-making processes. The project, designed to integrate half of women in development planning and decision-making processes, found that when women are included, an opportunity was created not only for women to express their ideas and needs but also for village leaders, most of them are men, to listen, learn, and understand women's needs and concerns about village development. On the other hand, women participants in the processes also learned more about others' needs and concerns. The A-I-C technique helped to stimulate this learning experience and communication among men and women, and it can be considered as a mechanism to enhance women's participation in village development planning and decision-making processes. Through the workshop process and techniques, women dramatically gained more confidence in expressing their ideas and needs to other villagers.

When women were actively involved in the processes, women's perspectives drawn from different life experiences created a better and more balanced community development plan. Men, for example, considered development in terms of infrastructure, such as road and bridge construction, electricity, the establishment of revolving funds, and new farming techniques, while women, having different viewpoints and daily life experiences, usually paid more attention to social and health problems; their project proposals included education, child care facilities, nutrition programs, health-related projects, and environmental projects.

The A-I-C processes facilitated women's participation in the village decision-making arena which used to be male domain. Bringing several women representatives together with male counterparts to discuss village development proved to be useful; women, as a part of the community, understood the importance of development projects and felt responsible for implementing them. Since women effectively and successfully participated in the processes, men, particularly village leaders, recognized women's abilities and the necessity that they be included in community development. The male perspectives about women's roles and place in the society changed; they thought of women as equal partners in development. Women were selected to help in community activities and later these women were elected to be committee members of the Village Development Committee (Kor Mor). (An increasing number of female village committees in the villages, implemented in the project in Ang Thong, evidences the clear impact of this project.)

The idea to include women as equal partners in village development planning and decision-making processes has evidently offered a higher status to women in community development. Women no longer

are a target group, they have become project owners—the ones who initiate the development projects, not merely those who carry out projects initiated by others. As a result, development projects will reflect the real needs of women and the community.

The project also found that most of the women who attended the village workshop and had thought about and discussed village development during the workshop actively become a driving force in getting the project implemented. The workshop helped to stimulate development awareness among women's groups in the village. They work together to lobby to get their development projects considered, funded, and implemented; and, finally, they oversee the projects to make certain that their mission is accomplished and the villagers' vision is fulfilled.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The project highly recommends that both government and non-government development agencies directly responsible for community or village development should seriously consider and find way to involve people in village development planning and decision-making processes. The A-I-C technique is a practical brainstorming tool for development officials; the project found that the technique is suitable for village development planning.

To successfully implement the rural development policy of bottom-up planning approach and people participation in rural development processes, the project recommends that the Department of Community Development, Ministry of Interior, should be the government agency that has the potential to carry out this task, as it is the Department's mandate and there are sufficient and qualified personnel to be trained as village workshop moderators at the sub-district level. NGO development officials who are trained as A-I-C moderators can assist the government in some areas where there are no moderators. A team of NGO development personnel can be subcontracted to organize village workshops. However, the NGO team must closely coordinate with government officials at the sub-district and district levels, so that development projects and technical assistance can be arranged for villagers.

In 1994, the Training Division of the CDD included the A-I-C approach into its curriculum on community development process to be taught to all new development officials (Pattanakorn). This pilot testing and the project's findings demonstrate that the Department as well as most of the present development officials will be able to implement the policy. In addition, information about the A-I-C technique and concept can be disseminated to all CDD staffs in every province, using a 30-minute audio-visual presentation and a manual that details the A-I-C technique and the village workshop approach. What is needed are development officials with an open mind and the willingness to learn this new approach. Therefore, if the Ministry of Interior wants to use the A-I-C approach for village development, it is important to set a clear policy guideline. To implement the policy, a series of seminars should be organized for government officials at all levels. It is important that senior executives at the departmental level understand and support this policy. Senior management support and upstanding is also necessary for many non-governmental organizations that want to use the A-I-C technique in their community development programs.

Although the CDD officials at the sub-district level are already trained and qualified to be moderators, and although the A-I-C technique is quite simple, a training session for the CDD workers (Pattanakorn) is necessary to help them better understand the workshop's process and gain sufficient confidence to effectively conduct village workshops using the A-I-C technique. From the project's experience, a village workshop can be conducted and managed by one moderator, but the process will be easier to implement and more enjoyable for all—villagers and development officials—if it is run by a team of moderators. In practice, each district should form one or two moderator teams to organize village workshops and Tambol Council meetings within the district.

Use of the A-I-C technique in village development planning is recommended to be carried out once a year prior the formulation of Tambol plans to ensure that villagers' needs and concerns are discussed, and that both villagers and CDD workers have sufficient opportunity to review and consider development projects and activities to be submitted to the Tambol Council.

In addition, village women should be stimulated and encouraged to take a more active role in village development planning and implementation. Since completion of this project, many policy-makers and planners in both government and non-governmental organizations have recognized the importance of women's roles in village development planning and decision-making processes. It is important that development officials from both GOs and NGOs become more gender sensitive, and seriously recognize that women are important actors in community development.

A village planning workshop that invites 50 percent of female participants enhances the opportunity for women to participate in village development planning and decision-making processes, and provides an opportunity for women to get involved in community development activities. While the project found that many women participants are able to plan their development projects and can efficiently and effectively participate in community development, some, especially those who are young, poor, disadvantaged and uneducated, are less able. Programs and projects to develop self-confidence, negotiation techniques and planning skills should be designed and implemented for this target group.

While women's needs and concerns are heard and discussed at the village levels, little attention will given at the Tambol Council level if there are no female representatives to debate the issues, women's needs and concerns from village level are often forgotten. It is important that the Tambol Council structure and the component of the committee members be reconsidered, so as to add more women into this decision-making body.

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