

Narcotics-Free: Strong Community Development Models by Community Participation in the Lower Isan Region

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Abstract

In the past, most Thai people lived in rural areas more than they did in towns or cities. It was only recently that a lot of people began to move to towns or cities looking for jobs making up about 30 percent of total population of Thailand. Wherever they lived traditions (Buddhist and alike) and practices for or in everyday life. There were and still are differences from place to place. Drug problems, especially hard drugs were not known in most areas.

As the country moved into the development age, the population, to some extent, had experienced drug problems and severe consequences. Families, communities and authority had come together in order to solve such problems. The problems found included running after material wealth particularly among young and working people. As a part of looking for happiness, many were lured in using narcotics or hard drugs. The communities tried hard to get back to their previous drug-free position by solving drug problems and developed themselves by drawing financial and academic support from concerned government and private sectors during 1992-2001. They also received the Mother of the Earth Award.

For strong community development models with narcotics-free by community participation in the Lower Isan Region, the study found that cultural aspects were drawn into making strong communities. They included way of life, kinship systems, beliefs, rituals, traditions and thoughts, beliefs, rituals, traditions, and thoughts. The strong communities, based on cultural aspects could be used for drug-problem solving and community development.

Keywords: strong communities, narcotics-free communities, community participation, development model, lower Isan region

1. Introduction

Thailand had drug problems for quite a while due to drug smuggling across its long borders with neighboring countries. The problems affect Thai society and people directly and indirectly. The severity of the drug problems was found among youth and working people. Such groups of the people were very valuable human resources and they would be the ones to develop the country in the future

(Saengphoom et al., 2011: 1-2). Drugs were seen as threats to people and society. In the past, drug problems were solved by educating people about danger of drugs and therapies were used to combat drug addiction. The current idea, on the other hand, was to allow people to take part in prevention and suppression of drug, known as, drug-free strong communities (Keskowit et al., 1995: 1)

Currently, many communities had been awarded by the often offer of Prevention and Suppression due to being drug-free communities. Later, they received the Mother of the Earth Foundation Award (The Offices of Internal Security and Prevention and Suppression, 2006: 34-38). It was interesting to know about the historical background of the 6 communities, the management and their participation in the prevention and suppression of drugs.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study was threefold. 1) to study the historical background of strong narcotic-free communities by community participation in the Lower Isan Region, 2) to study the current circumstances and problems concerning development of strong narcotic-free communities by community participation in the Lower Isan Region, and 3) to study strong narcotic-free community development models by community participation in

the Lower Isan Region.

3. Approach

This qualitative research was carried out in 6 communities located in 3 Provinces: Nakhon Ratchasima, Buri Ram, and Surin. The research data included documents and fieldwork. The criteria used for community selection included an existence of a group or groups of people setting up for various community activities and were awarded the “Mother of the Earth Award” and received funding for three continuous years; and also received funding from the Narcotics Prevention and Suppression Office due to outstanding activities. The 89 informants were chosen using a purposive random sampling. The instruments used for data collection were a basic survey, participant observations, interviews, and focus-group discussions. The reliability of data was determined using a triangulation technique, and the analysis, based on the research objective, was done descriptively.

4. Results

For Isan Society and culture and historical background of development of drug-free strong communities by community participation in the Lower Isan Region, the study found the followings:

- 1) Ban Khok Mongkol, located in Tambon Sam Rong, was 10 kilometers from Amphoe Non Thai, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. The people living there spoke Khorat dialect and Central Thai. They were rice farmers, merchants, government officials, and workers. Some families there were very old. However there were some new comers. They all celebrated annual festivals in order to conserve Isan culture and build social solidarity. Drug problems hit the community the hardest in 1994. The people realized its danger; they stood up strong and fought with it. Within 2 years, the community could solve the problems successfully and was awarded the Mother of the Earth Foundation Award in 2004.
- 2) Ban Dua, located in Tambon Khok Kruad, Amphoe Muang, 4 kilometers from Nakhon Ratchasima Province. The people there had similar occupations to those of the people living at Ban Khok Mongkol. They had great respect to Thao Sura Naree. As Buddhists, they celebrated festivals and traditions. Since the community was located at the town skirt, the material culture was strong. There were a lot of workers living there. Drugs were widely used in the area in 1994. The community solved the problems effectively and was awarded the Mother of the Earth Foundation Award in 2005.
- 3) Ban Yang, located in Tambon Kui Suan Thang, Amphoe Ban Mai Chaipot, 74 kilometers from Buri Ram Province. The people there spoke Thai-Lao and Khmer dialects. Besides rice growing, people worked as workers, government officials, and merchants. They had drug problems in 1994. It took them 4 years to solve them. The community put a strong emphasis on development, and was awarded the Mother of the Earth Foundation Award in 2006.
- 4) Ban Pang Puay, located at 4 kilometers from Amphoe Nang Rong, Buri Ram Province. The community was half-rural, half urban. The people there spoke Thai-Lao and Khmer dialects. They were rice farmers, government officials, and merchants. Most of the people there were locally born. They were devout Buddhists and celebrated Buddhist traditions. They also competed for material culture and experienced urban working environment. Drugs were introduced into the area among young workers; burglaries, quarrels, and distrusts followed. The community fought with such problems in 2003. Three years later, the community was awarded the Mother of the Earth Foundation Award.
- 5) Ban Pa Chuen, Mu 10, located in Tambon Krab Cherng, 45 kilometers from Surin Province. The people there grew rice and other cash crops. Some raised silk worms. They celebrated the Buddhist traditions like most Thai people. For most of them, they had Khmer ethnic background. The community experienced drug problems in 1998, fought against them, and became drug-free community in 2001. The community was awarded the Mother of the Earth Foundation Award in 2004.
- 6) Ban Pa Chuen, Mu 20, located in same geographical area with Ban Pa Chuen Mu 10. The two communities used to be one but divided into 2 in 1998. The common ones were volatile and amphetamine. The communities fought against drug problem as early as possible and succeeded in 2003 and was awarded the Mother of the Earth Foundation Award in 2007.

Current circumstances and problems concerning development and strong narcotic-free communities by community participation in the Lower Isan Region.

- 1) The communities built their own thinking system; recognized their problems, and built strong communities in 4 areas. a) The communities under studies (Ban Khon Mongkol, Ban Pang Puang, and both of Ban Pa Chuen,

Mu 10 and Mu 20, put forward their way of life as a means to solve drug problems. First of all, the people living in the communities were reminded about their self-confidence of having responsibility in thinking, conceptualizing of analysis, planning, and working together systematically. The community leaders were all self learned individuals and were respected by the people there. b) The communities put a strong emphasis on kinship system. At the community level, the people should be related though kinship. Only Ban Pa Cheun, Mu 10 and Mu 20, the people were related to one another and could depend on their kinsmen for help. Most of the people in other communities lacked kinship relations; they had to take care of themselves. c) The people in the communities believed in Karma meaning the people who committed good deeds deserved good results and the ones committed terrible things also deserved terrible results. Buddhism, Karma, and sacred had a strong influence on the way people lived their lives. d) By Buddhist traditions, the people developed sense of responsibility, unselfishness, doing good things for the communities, practicing economic sufficiency, and were faithful to nation, kinsmen, and religion.

2) The people in the given communities managed their activities, such as, rituals, funerals, weddings, and Buddhist traditions by themselves. a) The communities had their own fund in order to support job improvement, drug problem solving, and other community activities. The communities also honored self learned men and women living in the communities. The youth and housewife groups also provided support in the communities. b) The activities in the communities were done based on kinship system. Families helped their members who had drug problems as much as they could. c) The communities used Buddhist belief to inform the people to stay away from drugs. They even had people come forward giving their vows not to the Statue of Thao Sura Naree to give their vows. d) The communities, based on Buddhist traditions and social institutions, such as, schools and temples, held ceremonies from which people could vow to stay away from drugs. They also gave household tags for drug-free families.

3) People in the given communities stood to gaining benefit from their cooperation and participation in drug problem solving 1) In their everyday life, they carried on their lives as usual and held decent jobs. The youth and housewife groups also shared experiences showing how to live well in the communities. 2) Based on the kinship system, family members could work and live well together. Separation and divorces were less than years earlier. 3) Based on Buddhist belief, the people in the communities committed themselves to do good things and stay away from doing evil things. They also respected other people's thoughts and beliefs. They all felt free to give their opinions or ideas concerning community development. They took part in conservation programs of traditions, the community woods, known as, Don Phoo-tha (Grandfather's woods), whiskey-free day rallies, and helping hands in the fields.

For current circumstances and problems concerning development of strong narcotic-free communities by community participation in the Lower Isan Region, the study found the followings:

a) The youth in the communities were more interested in science, technology, media, and material culture than building their own thinking system based on their traditions and culture. The study also found that the students going to schools in towns tended to pick up city habits which were different from their own parents and rural residents. As a result, it was difficult to build a unity of thinking system in the communities. b) Three communities (Dua, Monkol & Chaipot) had problems with continuity of running activities in their communities. The rest of the communities had problems with leadership of leaders and community supportive fund. c) There was a lack of cooperation of new members who later joined the activities held in the communities.

For a strong narcotic-free community development models in the Lower Isan Region, the study had determined three types of development models which were proposed and approved by the sample and all parties using focus-group discussions. The first model put forward the building of thinking system development built upon kinship system, belief and thoughts, self-confidence, responsibility, social participation, and working together. The second development model emphasized the management development enhancing safety, decent jobs, helping one another among youth and housewife group members, community network, karma, and vowing to stay away from drugs. The final model put an emphasis on cooperation and benefit sharing, such as doing good thing for people and communities; cooperation among various institutions: schools, Buddhist temples, and public administration; and revitalization of old community traditions.

5. Discussion

Discussion was built around the objectives of the study. It was very interesting to see why the Thai communities, urban as well as rural, were drawn into drug consumption. Ideally, the authority of all levels wanted to see how those communities adjust themselves to the fast changing world around them. What was true was that the people could develop overnight materially. They were lured into buying modern commodities on installment and in cash.

For young people, money came before anything else including their own culture. Many believed that they could solve all problems with money.

Upon the historical background of strong narcotic-free communities by community participation in the Lower Isan Region, the study found that before becoming strong narcotic-free communities, there were no amphetamine and volatile substance. As Buddhists, they celebrated traditions, lived well, and grew rice for household consumption. As the communities become urbanized, there were new faces, known as, industrial or construction workers moving into the communities. Consumer goods, entertainment, drugs of all kinds followed them. Some problems, such as burglaries happened so often. The authority and community leaders tried to solve them. Arrests of drug dealers were made. The more arrests were made, the more drugs sold in the communities. Drug dealing were difficult to detect due to changes of strategies. The people lived with fears. They could not trust strangers including their neighbors. To get out and get rid of the problems needed cooperation of internal institutions and people. Such was in agreement with Khanoksak Poolsawad (2004: 83-93) that solving drug problems needed people's awareness, acceptance, cooperation, decision making, effective public relations, and evaluation.

For current circumstances and problems concerning development of strong narcotic-free communities by community participation in the Lower Isan Region, the study found that as the communities became narcotic-free, it was urgent to maintain such a position although there were many things they could not control due to social and economic change. The communities lacked enough volunteers to solve problems that occurred more often in the communities. There were some farmers, who kept their land, wanted to farm like they did in the past. Members of the youth and housewife groups could not perform their duties as needed due to low support. In practice, the people needed to prepare themselves and their social institutions more than they did in the past. They needed integrated plans for community development. They needed active participation in community activities in order to gain social and economic benefit. Such was in agreement with Chackkrit Pingyapong and Others (2002: 108-113) that every community people performed together needed an evaluation. Group members could think and make their voice heard freely. Such was supported by Talcott Parson's theory (Chantachon, 2006: 75-81) that social system was composed of relations of related parts or sections; each could perform its functions fully without intervention of other parts and maintain social equilibrium.

Upon development model of strong narcotic-free communities by community participation in the Lower Isan Region, the study proposed to discuss the followings:

1) Thinking development model put an emphasis on the enrichment of the people's mind. First, the people accepted the fact that becoming narcotic-free communities was important and necessary for them. Second, they needed to stay strong economically and socially and such was seen as a great achievement of their community. Finally, they needed to keep such a status as long as possible. Such was in agreement with Institute for Social Research, Chulalongkorn University (2010) that the villages along the border put together their effort to keep away drugs of all kinds so that the old, young, men and women could lead their lives peacefully and happily.

2) Management development model. The model was based on the community's belief and faith shown by activities held in each community. They reflected the people's concern of grave danger of narcotics and their terrible effect on people and communities. The people believed that if they wanted their communities to be free of drugs, they had to do something to prevent drugs from getting into the communities. They could not just sit there waiting for the drug problems to go away. Such was in agreement with Chattip Natsupar (1995: 95-101) that community self-help was based on a principle that people lived together in group and helped each other.

Finally, the cooperation and benefit sharing model was based on the people's intellectual and life quality. The model emphasized group dynamics participation, and sharing experiences. Such was in agreement with Pairat Thecharin (2004: 12) that community should develop people's expertise and creativity; both were valuable capitals of the community. They could be used for community development.

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