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2008

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Originally published in the Proceedings of the EDU-COM 2008 International Conference. Sustainability in Higher Education: Directions for Change, Edith Cowan University, Perth Western Australia, 19-21 November 2008.
This Conference Proceeding is posted at Research Online.
http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ceducom/42

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The Development of Community Business Networks of Sanpapao, Nongyeang and Sunnameng Sub-districts in Amphoe Sansai, Chiang Mai to Strengthen Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to probe the characteristics of community, and community businesses and their development through a co-learning process between researchers, communities, and their alliances.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) was used as a tool to analyse response from 80 members of 10 community business groups in Amphoe Sansai, Chiangmai. Participants included professors, students, communities and alliance organizations to participate in identifying issues and their underlying cause in addition to developing and implementing an action plan based on the experience of the participants.

The results indicated there was a disconnect between the local wisdom and technology which led to the establishment of the "Harn Nam" project, the local handcraft conservation street. The collaboration between different organizations (e.g., local administrative organizations, Department of Community Development, Sansai community, Poverty resolving group, government agencies, private organizations) resulted in an exchange of ideas, and a willingness and commitment to participate in a collaborative process with benefits to educators and students. This accumulated knowledge could then be used to further develop a model for community development based on the appropriate context.

The use of PAR as a research framework facilitates the development theory appropriate to community phenomena by applying system analysis and thinking system appropriate for the implementation and the development of the important role players, which were leaders and members of the groups. Furthermore, this framework has the potential to increase future participation of local people within the community for better adaptation within the Thai society.

Keywords: Community, Community Businesses Network, Co-learning

INTRODUCTION

The strengthening of the community can be accomplished by the development of human resource as the centre of the community. This mechanism may be referred to as the whole body development in which it is beneficial to all concerned parties in the community in terms of spiritual, economic, social, political and environmental aspects. This may be achieved by increasing its potential and creating environmental conditions which contribute to the strengthening of the community for self – development (Techawanit, 2000 : p.17).

People in the community are encouraged to participate in the analysis of current situations, community problem finding, determination of ways for solving the problems, decisions in activity selection, implementation and evaluation. These issues may form the basis for solving problems and difficulties within a community. Ideally this process should start with the community. (Suwan, 2000 : p.16).

For example, the community business groups in Chiang Mai province realized that on the community business which is only dependent on the assistance of the government sector, cannot be sustained or strengthened. This is highlighted in one area where government policy for the support of the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) project is being reduced, besides, the assistance does not meet the needs of all community business entrepreneurs. Furthermore, many agencies do not sincerely support community business entrepreneurs. In fact, the communities have several natural resources and prominent folk wisdom which do not impact on the community business without any affect towards the community's way of life.

In light of the issues raised above, the community business groups in Sansai district, Chiang Mai province have formed 10 groups which aimed to solve these problems. Participatory action research (PAR) was adopted as the underlying framework for the research to provide an opportunity for academicians, developers and people in the communities to share or exchange their ideas and combine their strength for positive community development.

The objectives of this research were to investigate the following:

Characteristics of the community and community business of Sanpapao, Nangyaeng, and Sunnameng sub – districts, Sansai districts, Chiang Mai province;

Determine ways for the development of community business alliances of the three sub–districts;

Identify mechanisms for the construction and development of mutual learning process among teachers, students, local people and concerned agencies; and

Identify and document the outcome of the mutual learning process.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The research was conducted in the community business of Sanpapao, Nangyaeng, and Sunnameng sub – districts, Sansai district, Chiang Mai province. The research aimed to achieve the following.

General Outcomes:

Obtain ways for the development of community business networks for sustainable self – reliance.

Identify a method of analysis for the potential of the community business.

Determine a mutual learning process which can be adopted by the communities or concerned agencies.

Develop an understanding of processes which may be useful as a guideline for the sustainable strengthening and development of the community business.

Teachers and Students:

Obtain forms and ways for the development of community businesses which can be adopted by other communities

Obtain the co-learning process and new body of knowledge from the communities which can be applied for the benefit of all community members.

Community Agencies:

Obtain the co-learning process which can be used for solving the problems and it also meets the needs of the communities

The outcome can be used in the determination of policy the next time.

The Research Question was:

How can the community business groups of Sanpapao, Nangyaeng, and Sunnameng sub–districts sustain and strengthen and develop their community business alliances?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

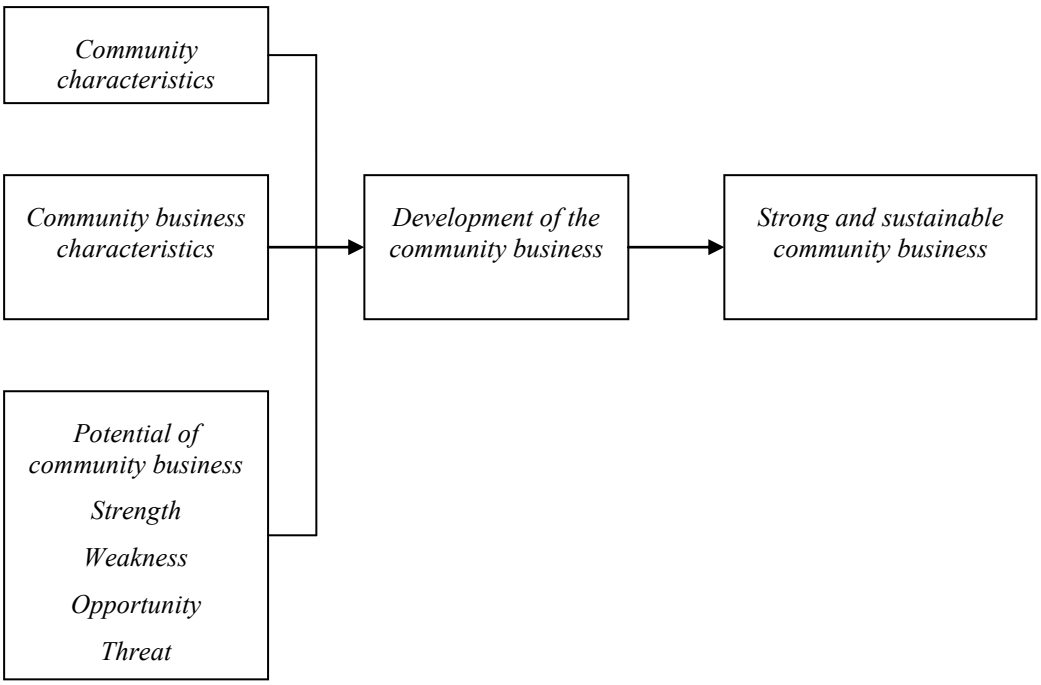

Figure 1: Concept framework of the research

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

The respondents in this study were 10 groups of community business in Sansai sub-district, Chiang Mai province. Each group selected a group head and secretary to serve on the management committee. Details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Numbers of group members in each community business group.

Community	*Group*	*No. of members*
Sanpapao community	*Cotton hand weaving group*	*4*
	Koi Kon ka porcelain sculpture group	*8*
	Baan Chiangsaen handicraft group	*3*
Nongyaeng community	*Khanom Jeen and Chilli paste group*	*7*
	Cloth scraps handiwork group	*4*
	Baan Dongcharaenchai weaving group	*5*
	Wooden lampshade and toy group	*8*
	Sornchan herbal group	*13*
Sunnameng community	*Artisans of Sansai group*	*23*
	Northern charming cotton group	*5*
Total		***80***

Procedure

The creation of partner relationship - the research team reviewed concepts and held informal meeting of all stakeholders.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) the research team identified problems and their causes and sought unique ways for systematic problem-solving by engaging members of the local population at a suitable local venue, discovering evidence, and reaching conclusions.

Participatory Planning for Action (PPA) the research team prepared the plan for the communities and coordinated the implementation with various concerned agencies.

Experience transfer was conducted during the project implementation and after completion.

Analysis

The research team had analysed the obtained data by the transfer of mutual experience in terms of problem analysis, causes of the problem and ways for solving the problem. Qualitative method was also used for data analysis together with monitoring of data obtained from recording. This was done based on the actual incidents.

RESULTS

Community Characteristics

The three communities in this study shared similar characteristics and cooperated with each other, they were unique and helpful to one another. They grouped themselves in order to develop their careers and communities by using their respective folk wisdom. The museum of Rongmeng temple was used as

the centre of their spirit. Also, these communities could maintain their Lanna culture and tradition up to the present. Most of the community members were engaged in farming and were elementary school graduates. They were organised headed by village heads, sub-district heads and the sub-district administrative organizations.

Community Business Characteristics

The community business of each group was organized in the form of both formal and informal grouping in which each group was sometimes dependant on one another. Based on the SWOT analysis for finding competition potential of each group such as marketing, finance, and group management, it was found that they had to improve their potential in all aspects. Moreover, some groups could not identify their potential whereas some others needed assistance from concerned government agencies and were not self-reliant

The following were the outcomes of the development of community business alliances:

The community business could analyse encountered problems and causes of the problems. It was found that their way of lives had been changing and their community business was not strong and sustainable. The research team found that doing community business which was only dependent on government sector could not make the business sustainable.

The community business could find ways for solving the problems. The research team had sought for local wisdom in the three communities and finally found that these communities had a well-known tourist spot - the museum of Rongmeng temple. Besides, the community business groups had applied their folk wisdom and raw materials to the production to their products the groups of Sansai artisans and the group of cotton hand weaving.

The community business could gather human resource business groups, and community power. They grouped themselves based on their common problems. The leader of each group initiated the investigation of problems, causes of the problems and problem solving. This was initiated by eight community business groups and the other two groups followed them thereafter.

The community business could coordinate or negotiate with other external organizations and institutions. The community business groups could propose the project on the road of local handicraft conservation under the “Harn Nam” project to the external agencies for the negotiation of resource and technology exploitation. They had negotiated with the sub-district administrative organizations of Sanpapao, Sunnameng and Nongyaeng, the Community Development Division of Sansai district, the caravan for poverty alleviation of the government agency, the agencies responsible for strategic aspects of the Upper North provinces, the agency responsible for strategic aspects of Chiang Mai province and the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

The community business could practice on problem-solving. They could coordinate or do activities with external agencies. Besides, they could implant their members on self-reliance and they gave moral support in the case that some of them foiled in doing something. The community business groups had learned through experiential learning and the lessons from the successful conditions. After finishing the research, it was found that they were able to do their tasks without supervision which was headed by the core leaders of the community business groups.

Co-learning Process and its Outcome

The research team, teachers, students, community, and various concerned agencies participated in the co-learning process. The main way was through brain storming which aimed to ensure the correct procedures were followed. Through the use of the participatory action research process, these participants shared their strengths cooperatively in the learning process. Teachers and students were

good at analyses but they did not know the problems well whereas various concerned agencies had skills in practice and resources but they did not know the problems well. They also were not as competent with the analyses as compared to teachers and students. Meanwhile, the community business groups knew the problems well but they had less experience with potential on the analyses and resources than the various concerned agencies.

It was also found that the point of view of the communities had changed a lot. In the past, the communities mostly waited for the assistance of the external agencies. After these external agencies moved out of the communities, the community activities assisted by the external agencies faded away. The communities had a concept to develop themselves in order to be self-reliant after they had learned about the process on participatory action research. They were eager to develop their community business groups and to improve the landscape of the location of their business groups. Moreover, there were more communication and dependence among their community business groups. They considered the "Harn Nam" project as the way for their community business development in which they were able to learn more about the success, failure, obstacles and conflicts occurring in the working process.

LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

The community business development using the participatory action research in this study still encountered obstacles in the community business grouping. This was because of the different potential of each community business group which made it difficult to determine a common point of collaboration for the groups. For example, the research team and the people in the communities were unavailable at similar times which resulted in incomplete data collection. Thus, the research team changed the schedule for informal discussion and data collection. Some participants were not well versed in the research process and found it difficult to convey their thoughts in the written language. Some community members could not clearly differentiate their strength points, the weakness points, the opportunities, and the threats of the community business. Thus, the research team used the SWOT analysis as the medium to inform participants. Finally, time constraint was an obstacle in this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank you for the research fund supported by the Thailand Research Fund.

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