Guidelines for Strengthening a Community: A Case Study
of Participatory Community Planning of Na Thap
Sub-district, Chana District, Songkhla Province

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to investigate participatory community planning. The data were collected through participatory observations, interviewing, and focus group discussions consisting of sub-district community drive team, community leaders, people participating in the community planning process, and related organizations in the community.

The findings indicate five procedures in the participation of community planning. These are community study, community planning, activities proceeding, obtaining activities results, and evaluation. There are also five procedures of community planning which consists of community preparation, community analysis, developmental direction setting, planning setting, and community planning operation. The community planning operation had combined the plans together by integrating the plans with other organizations’ and the integrated information. The factors that lead to strengthening communities are (1) community appreciation and participation in the whole process and supporting the usage of the existing resources in the community (2) local organizations coordination and valuing the importance of community participation by supporting in education, personnel, and budgeting in community planning process, along with applying the community plans/projects with their existing plans, and (3) having distinctive responsible organizations in any activities. The method of community planning composed of 1) community preparation by having exchanged information and regular meetings 2) community analysis using community people forum to seek solutions for community problems 3) setting developmental targets and direction. 4) community-centered developmental planning/ projects and activities, and 5) operating the community plan which includes self-reliant plan and integrated community plan efficiently.

Keywords: community planning, community participation, strengthening community
Background

The developmental planning has been in Thailand for a long time, since the first National Economic Development Plan in 1961. The plans had been focusing on developing infrastructure system, public utility system, education system, and economy. In The Eighth National Economic and Development Plan, the development concept had been adjusted from focusing only on economy to people-centered development, thus the development trend in Thailand had been turned from separating between economy and social to integrated development. The trend had been adjusted again in The 10th National Economic and Development Plan (2007 – 2011) which emphasized the strategy of social and community strengthening which help promote the stable foundation of development (Worawit and Amarawan, 2009). In practice, however, the decentralized community strategy has not actually been done by community participation. (Thailand Development Research Institute, 2006)

The participatory community planning had begun to take place since Thailand encountered the economic and social crisis in 1997. The crisis made the government recognize the importance of the grassroots or low – income population; therefore, it appointed The Government Savings Bank to form the special purpose institute to support and economically strengthen the communities. As a result, the Social Investment Fund (SIF) was found in 1998 for supporting, potential enhancing, and strengthening the communities (Ammar and Srawooth, 2002). The institute encouraged the communities to create their community development plans or the plans which are in relation to economic and social crisis recovery, in order to be permanent self-reliance. Many communities were urged into their own planning and budgeting. In 2007, the government has announced the establishment of The Committee of Strategy to Motivate the Well-being of People which is to be used in province level. The Ministry of Interior was the responsible institution to bring the policy into action in the areas. As a result, all communities must have their own community plan and use it as a tool to solve the problems, and for community development. So, the search for method in community development which has community participation from developmental direction planning, developmental planning in relation to their own institutions, activities planning in sub district level, sub district developmental direction planning in many aspects, and following up the development plan of other related organizations are the important factors
that have an impact to strengthening community and can be a guideline in community planning by truly community participation.

**Objectives**

1. To study the process of participatory community planning.
2. To study the factors and guidelines for community planning which leads to strengthening community.

**Framework of the study**

The community participates in community planning, setting planning direction in relation to the community and activities planning. The process begins with basic data survey of the community to estimate the community potential, problems analysis, solutions finding, activities preparation, and development planning/project. The participants in community planning are the community residents, the community leaders, related government and local organizations.

The results of community potential analysis and solutions for any problems found have been used to create community plan. The Community Plan composed of Health Plan, Household Development Plan, Economic Plan, Traditions Plan, Life and Assets Safety Plan, Natural resources and Environmental Preservative Plan, and Community Welfare Plan. However, the community plan must be completed and not overlapped with any other plans, meanwhile, integrated with Sub district Administrative Organization (SAO) Plan, District Plan, Province Plan, and other related Organizations Plan, in order to benefit the most in the community which leads to Strengthening Community.
Picture 1 Framework of the study
Research Methodology

This qualitative research used participant observation, interview, in-depth interview, and focus group to conduct information. The target group consists of 1) the community planning operation committee, Na Thap Sub district which composed of the officials from Na Thap sub-district administrative organization, school, community health center, non–formal education teachers, community development officers, sub district chief, village headmen, and 10 volunteers from the community 2) community leaders, community wise persons, and community scholars in the total of eight persons. Snowball activity was used among knowledgeable persons in the community to conduct the information regarding the community history; as the result the series of experiences has been created to use as one of the study tools 3) the participants selected from each community in the total of 52 persons. These participants have been selected from the community planning participants who are able to pass on knowledge and experiences from each meeting. These participants are selected from 14 villages, 3-4 persons from each village. The study process consists of 1) studying the community basic information i.e. household information (basic minimum needs), village information (NRD2C), five – year development plan, and sub district information in historical, geographical, and cultural context. The information was conducted by interviewing the committee, officials, community leaders, and community wise persons 2) examining community plan 3) studying participatory process using the participation of the committee, community leaders, and the participants in community planning 4) community plan usage and integration with related organizations 5) information analysis and brain storming from the stakeholders and related persons using focus group to suggest the ways of community planning and how to use the plan effectively.

Research Results

The study of community participation in community planning consists of five steps as following:
1. Community studying participation by allowing people in the community to participate in community study, community analysis, exploring the problems and its causes in the community, and prioritize their community needs. It is to encourage the community to learn about their own selves – community conditions, way of life, social, resources, and environment which are used as basic information for community planning.

The community members in Na thap sub district had participated since the beginning by attending the community meeting in village level through people forum. The participants are vary such as sub district chief, village headmen, SAO members, the members of Savings Group, Agricultural Group, Fishery Group, VHV (Village Health Volunteers), and Housewife Group, including religious leaders i.e. Imam, Khateep, Muezzin or Mosque administrative committee. The participants examined the community using SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the community and the opportunities in community development. Once the problems are stated, the forum then community – centered seeks for solutions. The additional solutions are sometimes added as to be more completed. Then the analyzed topics will be used to create the development activities.

The activities provided by the community members can be formed into three groups i.e. the activities that the community can perform alone, activities that performed mostly by the community but need cooperation with other organizations, activities that need support from other organizations which had participated in the planning process. In community people forum, there is a study about the situation of community resources from the past until present. The increase and decrease of numbers of community major resources such as aquatic fauna resources, mangrove forest, swamp forest and the impacts that effect the community way of life. After having learnt about the community situations in each village, the integrated community plan committee then used that information to investigate the prominence of the community for seeking of community identity.

2. The participation in community developmental planning. The participants presented plans/projects from each village which will be used for community planning. The presented plans were to be categorized into seven categories in the community people forum. These categories are 1) community health, 2) household development, 3) economy, 4) traditions and culture, 5) life and assets safety, 6) natural resources and environmental preservation, and 7)
community welfare. The plans presented by the villages in Na Thap sub district through the community people forum consists of 60 projects in 156 areas.

3. The participation in development implementation. It is the stage that bring plans into practice that allow local people to participate in benefiting the community by supporting in financial, materials, and labor including administrating, coordinating, or requesting for assistance from the outside organizations. Most of the plans/projects that had been created by the community which was “self-reliant plan” are the activities that are sub-categorized of these seven categories. Most of them are the projects that the community can implement alone but some of them may need cooperation with the local organizations or any other related organizations. Moreover, there are official leaders in nearly every activity since the community members recognize the importance of the activities and the community leaders – sub district chief, village headmen, ASO members, and religious leaders have good relationship with community members and had been performing some preceding activities.

4. The participation in being developmental beneficiary. The community members had learnt during the planning process and activity implementation which benefit the most according to the plans from each village as mentioned earlier in bringing the plans into practice section. It is obvious that the developmental planning process which starts in the community, by the community members has the benefit to people in the community. The most beneficially activities that the community implemented following the community plans are traditional and cultural related. The activities are both traditional practices – believes, traditions, and culture and community development. The benefit from the traditional activities is the community members proudly and happily participated. These activities are candle parade and Kathin which have tom – tom parade marching along the streets in the community along with local people and organizations, for example senior club, housewife group, VHV(s) (Village Health Volunteer) Schools, and SAO (Sub district Administrative Organization). There are also the Islamic traditional activities such as Mawlid which is held at the village mosque. The activities include Koran reading and pray for praising the prophet. Each village will hold the celebration on different days so people from other villages can join one another. Moreover, the developmental activity has benefits in all aspects i.e. the benefit from Na Thap canal preservative project, mangrove reforestation, and releasing baby fish into Na Thap canal which promotes the abundance of Na Thap Canal which is the important
natural resources of the community. The fishermen in Na Thap sub district have more catches which effect to the better quality of life.

5. The participation in developmental evaluation. The participation in evaluation aims to follow up the result, explore the problems, obstacles, and limitation of the activities in order to solve the problems immediately and use the mistakes as lessons for future plans.

The evaluation has been done by interviewing the community leaders and the participants from each community. The majority of the participants agreed that the result of the development project satisfied community needs. The evaluation depends on the community members but the most important indicator in community plan evaluation is the community leaders. The result of the activities will be accepted more or less depends on the community leaders and the committee who are the main coordinators between the community and outside organizations. The community plan has activities in many aspects and a long - five - year plan so the evaluation could only be done partially. The community members had participated in the activities that they planned more than the plans brought in the community by the outside organizations and all the activities that had been performed based on the community requirements.

Discussions

The participatory community planning is the cooperation in community development between community members and outside organizations. The support provided by the outside organization include in the form of associated development including learning process assistance and financial support. The significant factor that influences in the integrated strengthening community is participation of the community in each process as following.

1. Community appreciation. The appreciation of the community members to the community development plans/projects which was the result of the participation of community members in planning process is important. Once the community members realize how important the development planning is and how they will be benefitted from the plan, they will participate; as a result, the community has potential to develop and manage their own community. Prawet Wasi (1998) stated that the community plan enhances the ability of the community in order to strengthen and self – reliant develop in economic, moral, and health aspects including to advantageous community natural resources usage. The community
members then devotedly support the community by using the available resources i.e. mankind, funding, materials, and any other community developmental related resources.

The community appreciation indicates the participation of the community members as Chanwut Chairaksa (2005) had studied the indicators of community participation in local administration, the study found that the community participation in local administration which based on the participatory responsibility are brain storming, examining, supporting public activities, checking and verifying, attending and expressing opinions, and having sense of belonging to public assets or activities.

2. Local organizations cooperation. The main organizations that cooperate in every planning process are Sub district administrative organization, community development office, sub district chief and village headmen, community health center officers, officials from educational organization, graduate volunteers, and community development volunteers which has the sub district community development officer as main lecturer. The participation in planning process includes training the planning team in order to understand the process of community planning. The trained persons could supervise and assist in brainstorming process and would be able to advise the participants in regard to activities/projects and combine the plans with related organizations’. According to Erwin William (1976) who stated in regard to community development participation that community development cannot only be done by the community alone but also needs cooperation with related organizations. These organizations play a support role and participate in brainstorming and planning process of the community plan. It is decentralization and opportunity for the local organizations to participate and cooperate with in the community activities. Nakarin Mektrirat and association (2009) had suggested in regard to decentralization that the local administrative organizations ought to cooperate with the community and provide the participating opportunity for the community in community development planning.

3. Having official responsible institution. The community development activities/projects need to have responsible party or the host for any activity. This may be the local groups, local organizations, or central government organizations so that the community can participate in the development process efficiently. It is conformed to Akin Rapeepat (1994) who stated that the community ought to participate in development process by supporting resources, materials, labor, or participate in administration, coordination and asking for assistance from outside organizations.
Apart from activities implemented according to the plans, the integration with other organizations in the form of network activities is important. These activities are, for instance the family account and community potential enhancing training which has been performed by the cooperation between the cooperative project of poverty decreasing and social and well-being development committee, Songkla province and the target communities. This cooperative project is to further develop the community plan in regard to family account to the activity networking group which has members of 18 sub districts as associated organizations which have cooperative activities. It is conformed to the study of faculty of Management Sciences, Prince of Songkla University (2007) that it is necessary for the project implementation to have the associated organization participated in the brainstorming process. These organizations are local administrative organizations, government offices, private sectors, educational organizations, communities, and people sectors in order to arise learning process, participate in the community development planning bring about to associated organization. The associated activities are in relation to natural resources preservation, tourism promoting, community economic improvement, community conflict solutions, and the participatory management. As well as Weerasak Krueathep (2007) who had suggested the format of local administration in the network level in relation to community participation that the level of community participation in networking organization is high, thus the local development and administration is highly efficient. The integration with other sectors is the factor that can be adapted to the integrated community planning in the community.

The community planning participation in Na Thap sub district is not only the practice but also the important strengthening learning ability and process in the community. According to Patcharin Sirasootorn (2007) who had stated that the development should aim to strengthen the foundation of the community and assist from the thinking process to the solid practice. The community knowledge and local wisdom is the significantly important factor for the community learning process. The learning process and participation in community planning reflect to the strength of the community through the participation in many ways – livelihood, occupation, community support, community activities, ceremonies, culture, and community development. The community potential of Na Thap sub district which is related to natural resources which is conformed to the study of Seelaporn Buasai (2004) is that the natural resources is important and influences to other factors in the community especially in Na Thap community which has abundant fishery resources both in
Na Thap canal and the Gulf of Thailand. It is obvious that any activities occur in the community together with the targets, for example, participation in expressing opinion or activities are the guide to strengthening community which has the following processes.

1) Community preparation process. The community members are to understand the community planning which can be provided by community meeting and discussion. The lecturers will have community basic information i.e. basic minimum needs, NRD2C, community potential information, and family account. This information is used to verify the existing basic community database and its connection. The community members will then review, reflect on, and analyze the information which having community state and condition as conclusion.

2) Community analysis process. In the analysis process, the community members should learn about their community which can be managed through the community people forum. The information they need to acknowledge are community history, community migration, the past way of life, believes, the existing ceremonies, and culture and traditions. The moderator should have series of questions to encourage the participants to participate, learn, analyze, and understand the connection of the knowledge they have learnt during the forum. The information including community geography, plants, animals, environment, natural resources, physical impact and problems, relationship among community members, community leaders, and administrative community leaders, education, and the preceding developmental activities and results in order to plan the development strategy.

3) Developmental direction planning process. This process helps the community members foresee their own and the community future. The community should participatory seek solutions for problems they found during community analysis process. The “Things to do together” should be stated to plan the targets of community development, career and income improvement, and plan the development strategy according to the community needs.

4) Project/activity planning process. The community members ought to participate in the project planning definition as planned; however, it depends on the community managing ability. Each community will have both similar and different activities and they may have joint activities. The combination plans and joint projects not only stimulate the participation in community but also improve the relationship among them. In this process, the lecturers ought to assist the participants to define the projects/plans – which plans can be performed by the community alone, which ones that need to be cooperated with others, and which ones will
need support from outside organizations. The community members then participatory prioritize the importance of the activities which will be included in the community plan, and once the draft plan provided by the community members is completed, the verification and public hearing are necessary.

5) Implementation process. The implementation should be done in the community using divided plans - self – reliant plans and integrated (with other organizations) plans.

Conclusions

The study of Guidelines for Strengthening a Community: A Case Study of Participatory Community Planning of Na Thap Sub-district, Chana District, Songkhla Province aims to examine the participatory community planning and seek the factors and method that support the strengthening community. The findings indicate that all parties i.e. community leaders, community members, and local organizations had participated in the process of community planning. The outcome plan is self-reliant plan which the community can operate all activities themselves; thus the most activities are traditions related. Although the community can operate most of the plan themselves, however they still need support and coordination from local organizations in some plans/projects in regard to knowledge and budget for the most benefit of the community. The people in the community had participated from the beginning of the process till the end. These are brainstorming, action taking, result obtaining, and evaluation. The evaluation results will then become lessons for the better plan in the future. The integration of development activities with another organization will improve their development plans in many aspects; as a result, the community is strengthened and will be able to self-reliant administrate their communities in the long run.

Recommendations

Having knowledgeable lecturers and team who understand the process and target of the community planning, and know the target areas well is necessary. As a matter of fact, the better lecturing team will affect the success and efficiency of the community people forum in order to create community plans. The community ought to prepare some information other
than the existing basic data base – the basic minimum needs, the village basic information NRD2C, and community health information.

The efficient public relation is needed to promote the understanding of people in the process of community planning. It is recommended that all related parties i.e. government organizations, local organizations, and the communities get involved in the process. The community leaders needs to be supported in vary learning processes as so they can be role models in community people forum and be able to explain the concept of participatory community planning aiming to self-reliant community to ordinary people.

The administrator ought to recognize the importance of community plan and the process of participatory community planning and be able to integrate community plans with the existing organizations’ plans and bring the plans into practice efficiently.

References


