

Case on Participation in Thailand

(Based on the AIC Process)

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ODII



by

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"I recognized that this [AIC] process is very important. It gives power to people, power of imagination, creative imagination. And by doing that together, they create power, collective power." -- Dr. Prawese Wasi, recipient of the Magsaysay Award in Thailand

I. Introduction

Participatory processes of organization have been utilized throughout history in all parts of the world. In Thailand, the concept of consensus building in decision making is inherent in the culture, particularly due to the country's Buddhist influences. But, like in many other countries, decision making in development planning is often carried out from the top and dictated down to the beneficiaries at the bottom. This often leads to a failure to meet development objectives and the real needs of the people. But there is now a serious effort in Thailand to change this.

Although the country's Fifth Five Year National Economic and Social Development Plan mandated that the Subdistricts (Tambons) be participatory, they had no mechanism for doing this. But recently, a holistic, self-organizing process known as Appreciation, Influence and Control, or AIC, has provided a way to truly bring in peoples' voices in their own development. It has offered a framework and technique for systematically maximizing the potential for successful organization in Thailand. This is the story of how AIC has been used and spread throughout this country at every level--from village to national and in all sectors of society. The results are quite amazing and there is a great deal of hope that participatory processes can be institutionalized throughout the country in order to bring about more human-centered development.

II. Introducing AIC in Thailand

The AIC process was formally introduced in Thailand through a project initiated by Organizing for Development: An International Institute (ODII), the developers of AIC, and carried out in cooperation with the Population and Community Development Association (PDA), the largest NGO in Thailand, and Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) in 1991. ODII, sponsored by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was requested to study women's organizing abilities in order to better understand how women's contributions could be more effectively incorporated into the development process. A secondary purpose was to test out the AIC process at different levels. The project included three operating sections:

- (1) a training of trainers workshop to introduce the process and to train members of the PDA staff and researchers from TDRI to use the AIC process in carrying out a variety of development planning workshops,
- (2) some 16 village-based development planning workshops, 4 regional and one provincial level synthesis workshops; and
- (3) national level workshop to look at the policy implications of the results from the research on women's organizing abilities.

The training of trainers workshop was conducted over a period of four days. Some 35 Thai participants got exposed to the AIC process by using it to design the village level workshops that they soon would be conducting. Within two weeks of the exposure to the philosophy, the methodology and logistic requirements, teams of five facilitators/researchers fanned out the country side to conduct the village planning sessions.

The village development planning workshops brought together a variety of representatives in the villages, from village headmen to women community leaders to youth, aiming at having an equal number of men and women present. The villagers were taken through the three phases of the AIC process, looking at the present realities of their village and how they got there, brainstorming as many ideas as possible about their ideal village, discussing strategies of how to get from the present reality to their ideal visions, prioritizing the different options, and then setting action plans which they could commit to implementing. These workshops were followed by district level synthesis workshops where representatives from the villages presented their priorities to government officials (such as officers from the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Education), development officers and to the other village

representatives, in order to share information and ideas, discuss strategies and to look into possibilities of support for implementing their plans.

Action research was done on women's organizing abilities through observing the ways in which women influenced decision-making, organized around tasks and participated in group planning. Many lessons were drawn from this project including the potential power of using the AIC process in organizing communities around their own development and identifying the importance of women's unique role in the development process from planning, designing and decision-making in addition to implementation.

While this first project focused on village development planning at an operational level, a second workshop was held to deal with government policy concerning the role of women in development. A one day workshop was held in Bangkok which brought together stakeholders at the national level, including several ministers. In light of the insights gained from the research, the Ministry of Interior announced its intention to call for legislation that would include women as a partner in the planning processes at the village and other levels.

Because the AIC process was found to be so effective as a tool to involve the grass roots, the question was how could such a process be made available more generally. The organizers, ODII, PDA and TDRI, started to see a new role emerging for NGOs, namely the role of a facilitation as an essential feature of development. Yet, the relationship between the Government and NGOs was full of tension from years of suspicion and mis-communication. ODII took upon itself to act in a consensus building role to get the two parties together--the government and the NGO community.

After a year of quiet diplomacy, the idea was finally embraced by a committee chaired by the Prime Minister and set up to coordinate between NGOs and the government. A workshop was organized by the NGO Coordinating Committee on Development (NGO-CORD), the Office of the National Cultural Commission and ODII to seek a way for NGOs and the government to collaborate on rural development. ODII provided the funds. A small group of Thai facilitators were trained by ODII in the AIC process to facilitate the three day workshop attended by representatives from government agencies, the NGO community and the private sector.

It was a difficult task bringing together groups that tend to have opposite views and normally have a hard time understanding each other. In addition, the facilitators were actually learning as they implemented the workshop themselves. One significant outcome was that the concept of AIC and the potential for its use in bringing diverse people together to work towards a common purpose began to be understood and to take root. One of the facilitators, Khun Paiboon Wattanasiritham, Director of the Thailand Foundation for Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM) who has become a key actor in spreading AIC throughout Thailand, sought further ways to apply AIC and subsequently, the process took on a life of its own within the Thai context.

III. Thailand's Application of AIC

The chance to further apply the AIC process came about in 1992 when the World Bank was seeking a way to support the Thai government with forestry issues related to the Global Environment Fund (GEF), particularly in dealing with the issue of people in the forest. ODII was asked to provide assistance in

design of a workshop using the AIC process. ODII, in turn, contacted Khun Paiboon who agreed to facilitate a workshop. The purpose was to find ways to create agreement between the people living in the forest and the government on how best to protect the forest.

A three day workshop was organized by the World Bank and TRRM, bringing together four diverse groups of stakeholders: government agencies, villagers, NGOs and scholars. Throughout the process, they looked at realities, possibilities and strategies for bridging these two. They worked out action plans with specific steps and guidelines of how these would be implemented, including who would be responsible for what and when.

The fact that leading personalities such as Dr. Prawese Wasi and Khun Paiboon, who were well-known and respected both organized and attended the workshop, added to the success of the project. They were able to create the right environment for the participants to have open minds and to listen to each other. In addition, subtle adaptations in explaining AIC concepts were made in order to make the ideas more understandable to the participants. The use of Buddhist concepts worked especially well in the Thai context. This was the first time the AIC process was applied completely by Thai organizers, and it took a unique shape based on the Thai environment.

At the same time, Dr. Orapin Sopchokchai of TDRI (an organizer of the original Women's Organizing Abilities Project) was interested in learning more about the AIC process and implemented a project in 1993 in cooperation with PDA and the Community Development Department (CDD) in the Interior Ministry. Its main objectives were to:

- 1) find ways to increase women's participation in village development planning and decision-making,
- 2) study the AIC process in order to formulate policy recommendations for development officials and
- 3) increase women's participation as committee members in Village Development Committees.

The project began with training of government development officials, development agents from NGOs as well as representatives from the Training Division of the CDD to be AIC moderators. These moderators then facilitated 40 village development planning workshops throughout the country (involving a total of 1,225 villagers), using the AIC process.

The aim was to have women make up 50% of the participants at every workshop, which was achieved reasonably well, particularly when the purpose of the workshop was thoroughly explained.

This project reinforced the findings of the first Women's Organizing Abilities project in terms of the

importance of including women in the development process from the planning and decision-making stage through implementation. It also confirmed that AIC is an effective mechanism for enhancing women's participation in village development planning and decision-making processes and that it helps create a more balanced community development plan which unlike centralized planning and government agency-driven development projects, has more potential for success as villagers have more incentive to see them implemented successfully.

The outcomes of the project were numerous. Many of the resulting development plans were carried out by the communities on their own, while other plans were presented to the Subdistrict (Tambon) Councils and other development agencies for support or incorporation into the Subdistrict and Provincial development plans. A moderator's manual and video-tape detailing AIC techniques and processes for conducting village workshops were also developed. After participation in the project, the Community Development Department added the AIC approach to its Community Development curriculum to be taught to all new development officials. It was further recommended to the CDD that AIC village development planning workshops be carried out once a year before formulating Subdistrict development plans. Finally, it expanded the recognition and understanding of AIC to the government sector and villages and districts throughout Thailand.

IV. Spread of AIC throughout Thailand

Since these initial projects, the AIC process has been tested, taught, applied and spread throughout the country. TDRI has helped institute its use in the Interior Ministry and spread its concepts in villages and subdistricts throughout Thailand. PDA has held approximately 81 AIC workshops over the past three years at the village, subdistrict and district levels and has incorporated it in its operations, training all PDA Center Directors, providing regular staff training sessions on the AIC process and is currently developing an AIC training video. TRRM has organized AIC workshops in government agencies, public sector organizations such as universities and hospitals, community organizations, NGOs, private sector organizations as well as holding multi sector policy dialogue workshops and some training of trainers workshops. Its urban counterpart, the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO), has organized workshops for people's organizations working with urban poor communities. Other facilitators have organized AIC workshops in various sectors from business organizations to the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare.

Many of these workshops have focused on strategic and policy planning and organizational development. For example, the government run Nopparat Rajthanee Hospital used the AIC process to develop its mission statement, to create unity among its staff and to improve the quality of its services and the welfare of its staff. It used AIC as a framework for creating a common vision and coupled with TQM techniques in implementing the action plans.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's AIDS Control Division of the Department of Public Health used AIC to develop its Five Year Plan including the participation of representatives from the government, NGOs and communities. Through these numerous workshops, the AIC process has developed recognition as well as being tested in multiple settings.

V. AIC at the National Level

While demand for the AIC process expanded throughout the country, the process was endorsed by the NGO-CORD which recommended and approved the use of AIC as a technique to promote a New Development Paradigm of participatory development throughout the country.

As the call for a New Development Paradigm spread, the opportunity to put AIC into practice at the national level came about in late 1994 with the plans for drafting the Eighth Five Year National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001). The new Secretary General of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) which is the main governmental body that advises the cabinet on development planning and policy, was very open to the idea of participatory planning. Upon the suggestion of Khun Paiboon, the Secretary General agreed to hold some interactive discussions on the vision for the new plan, to get input from others for the drafting of the National Plan.

A workshop was held utilizing the appreciative stage of the AIC process, allowing leaders from the NGO community as well as leading thinkers to express their ideas to the NESDB who was present just to listen. It was the first time that this kind of workshop was held and its importance was clear by the more than 100 journalists who covered the event (double the amount of participants in the workshop). It was held at the Palace of Love and Hope and there was much symbolic significance and hope surrounding this meeting.

"It was symbolic that we were going to formulate the National Development Plan through a process that is very participatory. It was symbolic of a new pattern; a new process. That no more is the planning going to be done by the government." -- Khun Paiboon, Director of Thailand Foundation for Rural Reconstruction Movement

Many ideas were generated and discussed and the importance of this interaction became apparent. This workshop was followed by a more ambitious meeting organized by the NESDB, attended by 1,500 people from all over Thailand and from all walks of life including business executives, farmers, people from slums, monks and nuns, teachers, engineers and doctors, and the then Prime Minister, in order to discuss their ideas for the Plan. To encourage interaction, the old model of presentations and dividing into big groups was abandoned and the concept of small group interaction learned from the AIC process was tried. The logistical problem of organizing over 100 small groups was ingeniously overcome by using the dining room and tables big enough for 10 people each, spaced far enough away to manage the noise level. In this way, the idea of participatory planning and small group interaction gained acceptance and has since been used in other settings as large as 1,800 people. Over one and a half days, opinions were expressed, ideas were shared and recommendations were made.

It was then suggested by the Chairperson of NGO-CORD to use participatory processes at the provincial level in the formulation of the Eighth Plan and AIC was chosen as the technique to be used. TRRM in coordination with NGOs, the NESDB and other government officials as well as provincial authorities, organized nine provincial level AIC workshops throughout the country over the course of six months. The first meeting had many difficulties as much had to be explained about the AIC process and there was a lot of uncertainty about whether this would work or not. The various organizing bodies had many different points of view on how the workshops should be run and it was difficult to have a lot of control

due to the number of people involved in the organization.

As the workshops went on, the relationships between the organizers improved and a real learning process began. There was a growing understanding of AIC and about development in general. They were all learning from each other. The workshops involved 50-60 people each: 30-40% from communities and grassroots with the rest being NGOs, academics, business people and government officials (a five party partnership) with an additional emphasis on including as many women as possible. Finally, a synthesis workshop was held which brought representatives from each of the provincial workshops together to share and discuss their ideas. In all of these workshops, action plans were drawn up, but mainly they were organized to create partnerships, stimulate dialogue and generate ideas to be used in the Eighth National Plan.

At the same time, the NESDB used other methods of stimulating participation in drafting the Eighth Plan. It created three subcommittees covering the areas of 1)human and social development, 2)rural and regional development including natural resources and the environment and 3)developing the economic strength of the country. These subcommittees were made up of 30-40 members from government, business, NGOs and rural areas and they held participatory workshops as well. The NESDB also created a P.O. Box for anyone in the general public to send in their own ideas. A final workshop of 1,800 people from the Prime Minister to community representatives was held to present the draft of the final version of the Eighth Plan in order to get feedback.

As a result, the entire planning process for the Eighth National Development Plan has been participatory. Most significantly, the Plan itself responds to a new development paradigm, utilizing an integrated, holistic approach to bring about more efficient and sustainable development. For the first time, the National Plan emphasizes human centered development rather than economic development. Its objectives include increasing community participation in national development while its implementation strategy follows the integrated approach calling for cooperation between agencies and stakeholders in designing, implementing and analyzing of plans and projects.

VI. AIC and the Future

In order to support the participatory objectives of the National Development Plan and to support its implementation, options are being looked into to help build capacity for participatory processes throughout the country. The UNDP is considering supporting such an endeavor, anticipating the need for a large core of participatory development facilitators in order to support the Plan. It estimates that 12,000-28,000 facilitators will need to be trained in order to support the implementation of the Plan at all levels of society. It sees the AIC methodology as the best suited

for this effort due to its holistic approach to development, its emphasis on empowerment of people and its attention to creating an enabling environment by bringing in relevant stakeholders, all of which are consistent with the National Development Plan. As it is also widely known and accepted throughout Thailand, it is one of the leading methods to be used and supported in such a project.

The Social Power Development Club (or AIC Club) has been created for participatory development practitioners and facilitators to exchange their experiences and to learn from each other. It is also acting

as a driving force for setting up models of participatory development throughout the country, creating partnerships and networks between institutions who could support these processes and deepening the understanding of participatory process in preparation for the implementation of the National Development Plan. As the demand for AIC and other participatory processes increases, this core group is becoming an important agent for carrying out the ideals of the Plan. The hope is to decentralize the training of trainers to be carried out by institutions such as regional and provincial universities who can more efficiently undertake these activities.

There is also a growing consensus that the Sub-district (Tambon) level should be targeted for strengthening in order to support participatory development. Since 1995, Tambon Councils have attained legal personality which, for those with large enough incomes, has meant wider authority and independence. The need has been identified to prepare these Councils to become participatory bodies which will be responsive to the needs of grassroots people, particularly women, and which can support capacity building for individuals and communities by becoming learning and information centers on technology for change, self-reliance and sustainable development. To do this, a project is being undertaken by the Institute of Technology for Rural Development (ITRD) at Chulalongkorn University along with other universities, research institutes, NGOs and with the cooperation of the Ministry of Interior. A major component of this project is to train provincial and Tambon level leaders on the AIC technique who would run AIC development planning workshops at the Tambon and village levels, covering 160 Tambons and including over 6,000 village leaders.

VII. Conclusions

The Thailand case of utilizing AIC is a unique and impressive story. Through the efforts of key leaders, their willingness to experiment and learn by doing and their understanding of and commitment to participatory processes, AIC has become widely known and used at every level and virtually all sectors of Thai society. It has adapted well to the cultural context of Thailand which has enabled it to be broadly embraced.

Moreover, the AIC concepts have generated a learning process in Thailand with its own momentum. Through interaction, new relationships and partnerships are being created which bring about greater understanding and stronger support mechanisms for creating change. People are beginning to think about development and organizational systems in a new way. The Eight National Development Plan itself calls this a paradigm shift, where people are put at the center of development in a more holistic framework. The importance of participation in planning and decision making by all relevant stakeholders, including women is being accepted and more emphasis is being put on human capacity building, rather than on traditional objectives of economic development.

The Thai people have demonstrated a great capacity to grasp the ideas of this New Development Paradigm, to apply its ideals in its own setting and to take it to a higher level of understanding through practice, research, improvement and continuous learning. The Thai case serves as an important model for the international development community as well as for governments, organizations, businesses, institutions and communities everywhere. With the lessons learned, a concerted effort by the international community to implement this New Development Paradigm has the potential to bring about

a more holistic human centered development on a global level which will respond to the real needs of the people.