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**COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT:  
A CASE STUDY OF A SUB-DISTRICT  
ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION  
(SDAO) IN LOEI PROVINCE,  
THAILAND**

**SAOWAPA SUKPRASERT**

**PhD**

**2007**

**COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT:  
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ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION  
(SDAO) IN LOEI PROVINCE,  
THAILAND**

**SAOWAPA SUKPRASERT**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of  
Northumbria University  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Research undertaken in the School of  
Health, Community and Education Studies

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis presents an investigation of the community empowerment of a selection of key villagers and the SDAO (Sub-District Administrative Organisation) committee members in the Loei Province, Thailand. The research identifies an understanding of community empowerment through an exploration of the lived experiences and perceptions of the community people themselves, at the grassroots level.

These are challenging times for development in Thailand. Particularly at the micro level, community empowerment is central to community development, but its concepts remain elusive. This study is an attempt to clarify developmental features within the community. A qualitative approach with multi methods was adopted in order to allow the key people to express their understandings and experiences in relation to the concepts of community empowerment, and to identify approaches that are effective in strengthening the community. Six focus group discussions were employed in six villages. Twenty five key villagers and SDAO members were interviewed and invited to participate in the workshop held to facilitate further discussion of their lived experiences. Both non-participant and participant observations were also employed within the natural settings of the six villages and the SDAO meetings in order to depict the context of the community. This provided a rich source of data illustrating community empowerment which has never before been undertaken in rural Thailand.

The findings revealed that empowerment can occur at both individual and social levels. Mental strength, alongside self-reliance and self-sufficiency, as well as the peacefulness within the community are found to generate community empowerment. This was discovered to be strongly interconnected to the significant community contexts in rural Thai culture, particularly the development of community leadership, participation, learning and local government. The approaches of retaining a sense of community, generating participatory groups, enhancing culture and learning as well as building up citizenship, can be effective in promoting community empowerment in the future. Community empowerment is effectively generated within the community from the potential of its members who consistently contribute to community life. The people's being in, and contribution to, the community provides a source of dynamism as well as establishing its firm structure. This is indicative of community empowerment. This thesis makes a significant contribution to the discussion on how community development benefits from empowerment to sustain itself, via the potential of people, and to promote community strengths through its ways of life.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>BAAC</b>	<b>Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives</b>
<b>CSO</b>	<b>Civil Society Organisation</b>
<b>GO</b>	<b>Government Organisation</b>
<b>GDP</b>	<b>Gross Domestic Product</b>
<b>GDH</b>	<b>Gross Domestic Happiness</b>
<b>NESDB</b>	<b>National Economic and Social Development Board</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-Government Organisation</b>
<b>ORDPB</b>	<b>Office of Royal Projects and Development Board</b>
<b>OTOP</b>	<b>One Tambon One Product</b>
<b>PAR</b>	<b>Participatory Action Research</b>
<b>SDAO</b>	<b>Sub-district Administrative Organisation</b>
<b>SCCD</b>	<b>Standing Conference for Community Development</b>
<b>SCDC</b>	<b>Scottish Community Development Centre</b>
<b>TDRI</b>	<b>Thailand Development Research Institute</b>
<b>WCED</b>	<b>World Commission on Environment and Development</b>

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⌘

## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name: SAOWAPA SUKPRASERT

Signature:

Date: 23/01/2007

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction**

This thesis mainly focuses on exploring the community empowerment in six villages of a Sub-District Administrative Organisation (SDAO) in Loei province, Thailand, applying qualitative methodology in drawing upon a multi-method approach. This chapter outlines the background to the study, the rationalisation for this choice of subject and its distinctiveness. It provides an introduction to community empowerment and the research approach to outline the theoretical approaches applied and methods chosen to study the topic under consideration. Additionally, this chapter ends by describing the appearance of the research within the contents of each chapter as the structure of the thesis.

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Thailand's development trajectory over the past four decades clearly indicates an imbalance. While success measured in terms of quantitative indicators has been achieved, improvements in the quality of life seem to lag far behind. This can be explained by the weakness in Thailand's socio-economic, political and management systems which are centralised and insufficient (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2001). The Ninth National Economic and Social Plan (2002-2006) is a strategic effort to make a framework for medium term national development, consistent with the long term vision. It builds on the Eighth Plan that advocated a holistic people-centred development approach. In the Ninth Plan, major emphasis is placed on the development of human, social, economic and environmental resources. The aims are to improve the development potential of the regions and rural area by redistributing income on a more equal basis and decentralising development activities to regional and rural areas, and also to promote popular participation

in development through the empowerment based on the strength of people's learning, local wisdom and organisation (NESDB, 2001).

The ultimate goal of the country's development is the improvement of well-being and quality of life for the people. While people's participation and local power increase community empowerment, it has been indicated that there is still an imbalance in income distribution and the growth of urban and rural sectors. The community organisation, which is the significant basis of social and community development, has faced the problems of knowledge and skills management. Consequently, it cannot be reliant. One strategy is the adjustment of the structure of sustainable rural and urban development, in which the following features have been signified as important: 1) Building up community empowerment focuses on developing its process for social stability. 2) Resolving the poverty problem in both rural and urban sectors in conjunction with the participation of all sectors. 3) Creating dependent linkage between rural and urban development is signified. Economic basis development, organisation development and the economic activities that interrelate to both rural and urban sectors need to be empowered. And 4) integrating the mission areas via participation and being prepared for decentralisation by modifying area management and implementing networking (NESDB, 2004).

Interestingly, the 1997 Constitution has created enormous opportunities for further democratisation of and progress in human development throughout the country. The shift in institutional approach extends to the 8th and 9th National Economic and Social Development Plans, which embrace the principles of 'People-centred Development' and 'Sufficiency Economy' in providing broad-based strategy for human development, poverty reduction and reducing vulnerability to external shocks.

In addition, the King of Thailand has played a significant role in rural development over four decades ( Ekachai, 2000, NESDB, 2000, Office of Royal Development Projects Board ,2005).The present monarch has undertaken this role in support of the well-being and the empowerment of rural people. More than 2000 royal projects across the country were established as a result of

what he learned from the firsthand experiences of visiting rural community. The King's aim is to restore the natural balance, to enable people to become self-supporting (Paewsoongnem, 2006, ORDPB, 2005). He significantly advocates 'Sufficiency Economy', and its details will be presented later in Chapter Three, a Review of the Literature.

However, the King's economic and social ideas are in direct contrast to the government's wish to impose standards from the top-down and to act in a donor/recipient relationship with people (Phongphit, 2005). Such an approach also carries with it a degree of inflexibility (Paewsoonnem, 2006, McGirk, 2006). Although the 'Sufficiency Economy' has been the philosophy of the development schemes on the Ninth Plan, the King's message of slow but stable development was often lost on the country's policy makers. Every Thai government whether military or elected has had a tendency to accelerate rural development all over the country. It is debatable whether effective community empowerment can be achieved in rural Thailand through such macro policy approaches.

There are many challenging socio-economic and political issues in the rural village community. The village communities have faced the problems of income distribution inequality. The imbalance between urban and rural sectors is widening. The prices of industrial goods and farming products are also characterised by a large discrepancy. As community people have difficulties in producing agricultural products because of drought and flooding, their prices are unstable. They have to spend a great deal on pesticides, insecticides and chemical fertilisers. They cannot engage in farming activities throughout the year. In order to cover their losses, off-farm working is needed. Working in big cities is a solution, although they gain less than expected. This causes the collapse of family, and problems of social inclusion are raised. Furthermore, the political system is not structured. Local government at grassroots level is questionable in terms of transparency and accountability. The people's participation seems to be unreal, breaking down in the organisation of village communities. Therefore, these remain significant problems which need to be resolved.

### *1.1.1 Administrative Systems in Thailand*

In order to understand the administration, there are three types of system in Thailand. They are central, provincial and local administration. Local government includes municipality, provincial administrative organisation, the subdistrict administrative organisation (SDAO), the city of Pattaya and Bangkok metropolitan administration. Each has its own functions, jurisdiction and budget to perform its responsibilities (Department of Local Administration, 1997). Local government has been originated from the concept of decentralisation and democratic participation. Its intention is to support local self-sufficiency in any activities focusing on free and fair actions in both political and administrative organisation, as well as popular participation (Chayabut, 1997). Therefore, the Sub-District Administrative Organisation (SDAO) is the most decentralised formal organisation at grassroots level. Its functions are to develop and carry out all development projects in the sub-district and villages. The Act establishing SDAO as the form of local government dates from 1997. In terms of its authority, the SDAO is responsible for economic, social and cultural development within its own jurisdiction as indicated by law. The SDAO serves the development issues of a subdistrict containing about ten to thirteen villages. They are of intense interest in studying on its roles whether this organisation is a real manifestation of decentralisation.

### *1.1.2 Initial ideas*

My interest in developing a research study in the field of community study came about naturally as I have been working as a lecturer in this field for many years. The ideas originated as a result of a teaching career in the sociology department at Loei Rajabhat University. As the social research is developing, I have become interested in the roles of local government and whether it is the right method of decentralisation. However, when I started my fieldwork in the first stages, my interests were modified and focused more specifically on the key village people who were dealing with development issues. Also, I mainly

needed to identify people's lived experiences and perspectives towards community empowerment.

However, Thai literature revealed an apparent lack of appropriate methodology for a study concerned with describing community empowerment in both the views of the villagers and SDAO committee members. Indeed, a review of presumably relevant research did not reveal a study utilising techniques that enabled such description. In view of the inadequacies of published literature and the data gathered to this point, I made the decision to undertake this study. With a focus on a study of the community, I sought to discover community empowerment from the respondents' understandings and perspectives. Such a study would be unique. As such, it offered the potential to contribute to the field of knowledge about community development as perceived by key community people.

Consequently, when the fieldwork started, some questions emerged on this point, and it was clear that some clarification of ideas, from general to more specific, was required. My research question was not absolutely being tested but was a statement of my intention to study community empowerment. Furthermore, in order to give direction to the study, research aims and objectives were established. Notably, they were established before the stage of my fieldwork study and refined during the fieldwork, then finally reframed on the mid-point progression stage. In particular, the study aims to examine, through an exploration of community empowerment from the respondents, the key villagers and the SDAO committee members.

### *1.1.3 Statement of the Problem*

As previously mentioned, many significant problems occur, in rural communities within all socio-cultural, economic and political aspects. These are breaking down village community life and a concerted effort is needed to overcome this. Community empowerment is the main issue raised as a new paradigm in global development context (Craig and Mayo, 1995, Powell, 2001). Community empowerment is where community people can manage



themselves without waiting for government support and can identify their needs and problems by themselves (Phongphit, 2003, 2005). It can be established by people based on the process of people's participation through all political, socio-economic and cultural dimensions (Wasee, 1999, Tacha-atik, 1999). The community empowerment is a vital feature in the development context. A popular topic of discussion in Thailand nationwide, has been whether the people at grassroots level and particularly, whether the local government, could serve the community empowerment.

Although a very broad study of various SDAOs over Thailand was carried out, being a topic of interest to the general public as well as the new form of local government at the bottom line, there is no in-depth study on this issue. Techa-atik et al (1998) found that the development of the SDAOs in the Northeast part of Thailand was through collaborative learning among people and the SDAO, and included people's participation. This research concentrates more on the villagers' views to gain a further insight into how to build up the community empowerment. Korttoom (1998) suggested that both levels of leadership factors of the SDAO and levels of participation were high, as well as there being a significant correlation between the leadership factors and participation. Moreover, Thitathan (1995) argued that the strengthening of knowledge in the SDAO should emphasise the area of its structure and empowerment. Even though these other studies are concerned with the SDAO, the sole participants are committee members who were studied on a large scale and, in addition, all used quantitative approaches applying large scale surveys, surveys by postal questionnaires and targeted only its members. Most information did not focus on examining how to build up community empowerment from both groups of people.

In Loei province, there has been a strong campaign for elected members of the SDAO throughout the province, while the roles of the village headmen have been decreased. Moreover, the villagers did not understand the roles of the SDAO committee members in the development schemes (Saisara, 2000, Srihawong, 2002). Significantly, SDAO members are village key leaders; so they can take a turn as members. Also, there remains a shortage of research

which examines both the villagers and SDAO committee members. Moreover, the techniques of qualitative multi-methods are used in this research to let both groups meet to identify problems and share their opinions and perspectives on community empowerment together.

What interests me is whether this form of local government, the SDAO, has been practised in compliance with decentralisation and how the interplay between the members and the villagers has progressed towards achieving community empowerment. Therefore, in addition to community development, it is necessary to examine the understandings and interpretations of people with experienced attitudes towards community empowerment.

#### *1.1.4 Research Questions*

The previously mentioned issues led to my interest in studying in-depth, the understandings and the interpretation of villagers and SDAO committee members towards community empowerment and to addressing the following research questions:

- How do people build up pictures of community empowerment?
- What are people's understandings and interpretations towards community empowerment?
- How do people interact to generate meaningful data for enhancing community empowerment?

Consequently, although the previous research projects above gave the development context on the views of the SDAO committee members and how people gave their opinions on the roles and functions of the members, the community empowerment at the bottom line, or micro level, is still missing. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill in these spaces through the following aims and objectives of the study.

### *1.1.5 Aim of the Study*

This study aims to identify community empowerment from an investigation of the understandings and interpretations of villagers and SDAO committee members in Loei Province in Northeast of Thailand through the use of qualitative processes which allow the articulation of the people to be the vital part of the study.

### *1.1.6 Objectives of the Study*

In order to fulfil the research questions, the objectives of the study are formulated as follows:

1. To examine the community empowerment of the SDAO.
2. To critically evaluate the elements promoting community empowerment.
3. To explore in –depth in order to investigate the effective approaches for promoting community empowerment.

### *1.1.7 The Distinctiveness of the study*

This study attempts to contribute towards a clear understanding of the experiences and interpretations of villagers and SDAO committee members of community empowerment. There are three distinctiveness features in this study, as follows:

1. The study is unique in Thailand. There has not been similar research and no-one has studied this topic in this particular way before. It is an investigation which has produced the most effective ways to achieve the goals, reveal the resources available and the pathways open to interplay

between villagers and SDAO committee members on community empowerment.

2. The in-depth study has employed a multi-methods qualitative approach. The nature of the study as an ethnographic approach is added. The study was conducted in six villages in the Loei Province, Thailand. The study of human experiences and interpretations, especially learning from people in the community explains community empowerment from the bottom line and also signifies the elements and approaches for promoting community empowerment.
3. The research study indicates a contribution to the knowledge in the field of community development, particularly in the context of rural Northeastern part of Thailand. The key findings academically gained from the study can provide different and wider perspectives on community empowerment.

The following section explains succinctly the introduction to community empowerment, which is in the clear focus of the study.

## **1.2 Introduction to Community Empowerment**

The idea of empowerment has become vital to the rural development agenda in Thailand over three decades while empowerment through community participation has been the central issue in response to poverty and exclusion across the world (Taylor 2003:121). The concept of empowerment is located within the topic of discussion of community development, connected to self-help, participation networking and equity (Onyx and Benton, 1995). Empowerment is the taking on of power, at both individual and social levels.

The economic crisis has restricted Thailand since mid 1997, the first year of the Eight National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2002), in which

the new paradigm shift was firstly enforced from economic growth to a focus on people-centred development. The Plan was viewed as the response to the crisis. This crisis caused many economic and social problems and affected a large number of people at every level and sector. For instance, as there was increased unemployment in cities, the labour force has transferred back to rural areas. This in turn caused a lot of problems due to unemployment in rural areas. Some had no land to return to for agricultural activities, and had to trespass on conservation forests. Farmers could not engage in farming work all the year round; they had to work off-farm. This affected the social front. For instance, the collapse of the rural family caused social problems. Teenagers have become addicted to amphetamines. A lack of discipline led to a drop in ethical and moral standards. A greater materialism brought competition to earn more income and gain wealth in people.

Due to the complexity of the problems, both public and private agencies should co-ordinate to tackle them with an emphasis on human -centred development, the main philosophy of the Eighth Plan, through increasing the potential of people and community in readily participating in economic and social development, natural resources management and sustainable environmental preservation (NESDB, 2001). Therefore, the concept of 'community empowerment' has been considered as the sound and important alternative for development. It is the significant basis for alleviating socio-economic impacts, as well as the creation of a process for sustainable development in the future, which is one of the development guidelines of the Ninth Plan (2002-2006).

In addition, Buddhism is Thai national religion and has enriched the lives of the Thai people in all aspects for centuries. Buddhism has been the main spring from which flow its culture and philosophy, its art and literature, its ethics and morality and many folkways and festivals (Kusalasaya, 2006). Its values are living in the middle path which focuses on calming and understanding the mind, having insight in practice of self-sufficiency and reliance as well as independence (Prayuwong, 2005). However, the effect of globalisation process (Sweezy, 1997, Held et.al. 1999) driven by capitalism has rapidly transformed masses of largely self-sufficient Thai communities into consumers of capital-

intensive goods and services, mainly those provided by the transnational corporations. While only a small number of people perceive benefit through an increased standard of living, the majority fall to be victim to dependency, and poverty. With the increased emphasis on material goods the quality of life of both groups deteriorates and become spiritually void (Hutanuwatr and Rasbash, 1998).

Moreover, many studies have examined community empowerment as a group of people formulating community organisation: people learn, manage, identify and solve problem together. This cooperation for mutual benefits in the community is also supportive of other communities. Community empowerment is also recognised as voluntarily bringing together with mutual purpose and determination, friendship and assistance, continuous learning in problem solving and developing all aspects. The process of people's participation through all community dimensions would be based on the strength of the community (Tacha-atik, 1999, NESDB, 2001, Wasee, 1999, Sopchochochai, 1998). From this study of the Thai context, to present community empowerment, the components should be set as follows:

- People from various groups will be formed to be a community organisation whether registered or not.
- Having the mutual goals and benefits for members and the public.
- Having conscious self- reliance, help and friendships and a sense of belonging to the community.
- Freely participate in thinking, decision-making, working and being responsible for the community.
- Fully mobilise resources in the community with efficiency.
- Having various forms of learning, networking and communicating.
- Continuous undertaking for various groups.
- Continuous reinforcing the change agent in the community.

O'Neal and O'Neal (2003) view that giving power and enabling relationship within personal and family, socio-cultural, political and economic situations are the key concepts of the community empowerment. Therefore, community

empowerment could be both a personal and a social process through having a liberatory sense of strength, competence, creativity and freedom of action.

In summary, the above section provides a wide view of community empowerment in the context of development which is clarified further and in greater detail in Chapter Three, a Review of the Literature.

The following section describes the research approach applied in this study.

### **1.3 Research Approach**

I commenced by thinking of a new study with a qualitative methodology. In preparation, I studied qualitative approaches and undertook qualitative research-training seminars for a month in Bangkok, Thailand. I learned how to conduct fieldwork and observational and interview techniques. This made me more confident with the research methodology.

In addition, as the main aim of the research is to examine community empowerment, after studying some literature, I felt I needed to avoid the quantitative approach which is primarily concerned with statistical data. Finally, the qualitative ethnographic approach brings flexibility and sensitivity to encourage villagers and committee members to identify and present their ideas and perspectives on community empowerment.

The qualitative approach has been undertaken in the design of the research, using multi-methods consisting of focus group discussions, interviews, and participant observation. Moreover, the advantages of participating in the social events of villages in the study, and the attendance of SDAO meetings, are useful in gaining productive data in natural settings gathering during the period of the study. The data collection covered a period of eighteen months from February 2002 to July 2003. The two-day workshop was also held in order to create interplay between the villagers and SDAO committee members to identify problems together and assert an understanding of community

improvement which offered an alternative in developing community empowerment.

This approach provides sufficient information to enable the research questions to be answered. What I have kept in mind when conducting my research study is:

*'Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people' (Spradley, 1979:3).*

Additionally, the reason behind the methodological and theoretical approach used in this research is the emergent design which has no prior theories or assumptions. Instead, findings emerge from the analysis of the material collected. However, I, as a researcher, brought my existing knowledge to the study and have placed emphasis on how the perceptions and preferences of the participants impact on community empowerment. Moreover, Chapter Four of the thesis has presented in detail how to apply qualitative methods in study. This displays the research design which encourages the knowledge, understandings and experiences of villagers and SDAO committee members themselves to emerge.

Data analysis took place alongside the fieldwork. It commenced with the start of data collection and continued throughout until its completion (Patton, 1987, 2002). Its process was not carried out as a separate step, but started at the same time as data collection. It involved the categorising of data, as well as an interpretation of the findings (Bernard, 1994). The emic approach has been mainly used to analyse data. The emergent themes were presented in matrix displays, as suggested by Miles and Huberman, 1994.

In short, I found that the qualitative approach can be used to capture the process and also grasp the interactions of the SDAO committee members and key villagers, the participants, within their contexts from individual to whole level. Through extended multi-methods in the real situations and deliberate utilisation of qualitative methods, quality and productive data can be achieved.



The following section introduces the contents of each chapter as the structure of the thesis.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is presented in eight chapters as follows:

*1.4.1 This Chapter One* gives an introduction to the research and its background, drawing attention to the statement of the problem, aim and objectives of the study. The significance of the study is viewed as its distinctiveness. It also introduces community empowerment in the context of community development in order to create a clear understanding of this thesis and present the research approach.

*1.4.2 Chapter Two* contains an overview of rural Thailand, focusing on the national profile of the country, and the evolution of its development. Buddhism and globalisation in the Thai context is illustrated. The rural sectors are presented providing a clear view of rural Thailand and the challenges as well as rural Thai vision in this century. Also, democracy, the monarchy and rural development is presented. This chapter aims to contextualise the national rural schemes of the country.

*1.4.3 Chapter three* provides the review of the past and current literature on community empowerment which explains the main theoretical development and empirical findings. It describes the relevant issues supporting community empowerment. Literature is called upon throughout the thesis to contextualise examples, to provide evidence and to challenge. These issues surrounding community empowerment are calibrated to contribute to the discussion.

*1.4.4 Chapter Four* is concerned with the whole process of conducting this study. It outlines the research methodology and describes in detail the research design, explaining the choice of methods used to study community empowerment. A description of the fieldwork and analysis of the observation, focus group discussion, workshop and the interviews are provided in detail.

This chapter justifies the need for the methods which have been selected and then also views the limitations of the qualitative method and the techniques which have been chosen. Finally, the use of working in two languages is displayed.

*1.4.5 Chapter Five* introduces the study areas, focusing on the economic and social profiles of the Loei Province, Thailand. This chapter turns to a presentation of the findings, the Findings 1, of the research. It also presents the overviews of the SDAO in the province along with a detailed overview of six selected villages in order to gain a clear understanding of the chosen study areas. This includes results from the observations, participation in the social events and attendance of the SDAO meetings from natural situations.

*1.4.6 Chapter Six* presents and addresses the findings, the Findings 2, of the knowledge, understandings and experiences of villagers and SDAO committee members, the respondents, in relation to community empowerment. It examines the themes and findings emerging from the multi-method techniques of observations, focus group discussions, workshop and interviews conducted with respondents in the study areas.

*1.4.7 Chapter Seven* is devoted to a discussion of the findings of the research. In the discussion, particular emphasis is placed on community empowerment. The emergent themes are examined using examples and quotes taken from the transcripts of the multi- techniques used along with supporting research from existing literature.

*1.4.8 Chapter Eight* contains the conclusions drawn from the research of the thesis by summarising the main findings; along with their implications. This final chapter also portrays the strengths and limitation of the research. Attention is given to the policy and academic implications of the research findings. Recommendations from the findings and for further research studies are also offered. The possibility of future benefits is also outlined in this chapter.

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided the research background and formed the basis of the rationale of the study. It gives some detail of the initial ideas of the researcher which were then modified and focused on how people envision community empowerment in the context of development. The main research questions are formed. The objectives are formulated to examine community empowerment in the six villages of the SDAO in Thailand, to evaluate their elements and to explore the approaches in promoting community empowerment. In addition, the introduction to community empowerment is given in order to gain more understanding concurrent with the research approach. This chapter concludes with a brief outline of the chapters in this thesis.

In the next chapter, an overview of Thailand will be presented to enable an understanding of the background to the overall context in rural Thailand.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **AN OVERVIEW OF RURAL THAILAND**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces the overview of rural Thailand. It begins with a national profile of Thailand in order to gain a better understanding of the foundation aspects of the overall country. Buddhism and globalisation in the Thai context is illustrated. The evolution of development in Thailand during the past forty years is presented. This is followed by a discussion of economic crises and cultural changes in Thailand, which gives further information on Thai society as it approached the new millennium. An overview of the rural sector in Thailand is offered alongside its weaknesses and challenges. Moreover, the impact of socio-economic crisis is presented in relation to the significance of the 1997 constitution and rural vision.

The main purpose of this chapter is to contextualise the context of rural Thailand. Also, the presentation of the strategic implementation of rural development is included. The limitations of the agricultural sector are provided in order to give more information about how, at present, the rural farming population faces challenges. Also, democracy and the monarchy is illustrated in order to provide insight into their role in rural development.

#### **2.1 National Profile of Thailand**

Thailand is located in the southeastern region of Asia. The total land area of the country is approximately 513 thousand square kilometres. Located in the monsoon region, the climate is dominated by three distinct seasons: hot season, wet season and cool season. Average annual precipitation is 1,630 millimetres, although rainfall exceeding 2,000 millimetres is common in the Southern peninsula of the country.

The country is divided into four regions: North, Northeast, Central and South. The North is generally mountainous, with altitudes rising to over 200 metres above sea level. A large part of the Northeast is on the high plateau and is therefore dry. The land

in the central region is flat and relatively fertile and it is dominated by fertile land suitable for tree crops and with a long coastal line. The Southern Peninsula constitutes most of the country's 2,500 kilometres coastline. The topographical nature, soil characteristics and climate conditions influence agricultural specialisation and socio-economic development in each region (Office of Prime Minister, 2000).

Thailand's population was estimated at 64 million in 2005. The success of population planning over the last three decades has reduced the overall growth rate to 1.1 percent per year. In 2005, the average population density of Thailand was 117 persons per square kilometre with Bangkok, the capital of the country, having the highest density of more than 3,800 persons per square kilometre (National Statistics Office, 2005).

Thailand experienced rapid economic growth during the 1980s, sustaining it until the first half of the 1990s. The country's real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by about 5 percent in the early 1980s to a peak of 13 percent in 1988, and remained high, at around 8 percent, until the first half of the 1990s. Economic growth between 1988 and 1999 nearly doubled per capita income and improved household welfare dramatically. But while absolute incomes improved, income distribution between urban and rural areas, particularly between Bangkok and other regions, worsened (National Economic Social Development Board, 2000).

## **2.2 Contemporary Development Framework in Thailand**

Thailand is the only country of Southeast Asia never to have been colonised. Thai society is proud of its identity. The country is open and has been harmonious in its adaptation of external cultures in its way of life and its unique environment. It is generally a peaceful and caring society. The Thai people stick to religious principles based on rationality and moderation. Most importantly, the monarchy has been the centre of hope and confidence among Thai people for many centuries. In recent times, the Royal Kingdom of Thailand has made important socio-economic and political strides (Myers, 2005). The dawn of the twenty-first century is likely to see one of the most crucial periods of transition in the national development history. During the past four decades, advances in information technology have brought about rapid globalisation, and this dictates a need for the formulation of new world socio-economic

orders and the reevaluation of international relations. All of these factors have given rise to both opportunities and challenges for sustainable development in the country.

However, the country has faced many challenging problems throughout, both politically, socially and economically. The political system is not firm and loosely structured, although there has been no military government for a decade. Buying votes is an accepted practice for politicians. For five years, the country has been pushed to create and ensure economic stability. Rural people had been assured that they would gain more income with more intensive support from the government. Gradually, the government body has been questioned over the noticeable conflicts of interest and corruption. This presents the political system as unstable. It is not based on a moral standard. Moreover, there are some strong issues, for instance, the serious unrest and uprisings in the South. Aggressive conflicts continue at the three southern borders, and all agencies have dealt with this matter most carefully.

In relation to social matters, however, there are influences of foreign cultures and the use of foreign information by the existing media in various forms, for instance, advertising and recreational activities occur without scrutiny. This may result in the promotion of undesirable values based on materialism, consumerism and extravagance as well as wastefulness among new generations. Also, a family malaise has been recognised due to a higher number of homeless young children in big cities.

The following section is the presentation of the Buddhism and globalisation in the Thai context.

### **2.3 Buddhism and Globalisation in the Thai Context**

The current debate on globalisation has a broad area of general agreement, namely, that globalisation is the latest expression of a long-standing strategy of development based on economic growth and liberalisation of trade and finance (Hutanuwatr and Rasbash, 1998). Globalisation is a contested concept (Popple, 2006) and increases the potential of societies that can accommodate variety and involves 'increasing and deepening their interconnectedness in different parts of the world' with 'rising activity and power of multinational companies'(George and

Wilding , 2002:2). Moreover, globalisation has also resulted in Thailand in the overall development of adjusted international values regarding democracy, human rights and gender equality as well as increasing emphasis on protection of the environment. These values have arisen from a wider belief in development based only on economic growth and without due consideration of human, family, community, social and environmental dimensions, making it understandable in the long run. If no corrective actions are adopted, people and nature will not be able to co-exist harmoniously (NESDB, 2001). Globalisation is an expansion and continuation of the idea of development, which is rooted in the belief that the 'progress' of humanity is a linear, anthropocentric process (Hutanuwatr and Rasbash, 1998). Global vision has been presented as a borderless world, in which national economic boundaries are dissolving, and all countries are integrated into a unified global order (Afshar and Barrientos, 1999:2). Rai (2002) states that globalisation is shaping the material world of economy, together with the changing contours of social and cultural worlds. Globalisation is not a condition or a phenomenon but it is a process (Sweezy, 1997, Held et.al. 1999) which has been driven by capitalism. From the pessimistic view, it leads to craving, competitiveness, materialism and consumerism (Hutanuwatr and Rasbash, 1998). It is seen that globalisation is no longer something that we go for or against but just something that has to be accommodated (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2001).

However, from a Buddhist perspective, the very core of the globalisation process is the globalisation of craving. Craving is the root cause of all suffering (Hutanuwatr and Rasbash, 1998). Buddhism is known as the middle way which focuses on calming and understanding the mind, for such insight is what can liberate us from our usual preoccupation with trying to become happy by satisfying our cravings (Loy, 2006). Buddhist values can help rural people retain a level of self-sufficiency, reliance and independence. In rural life, Buddhism plays significant roles in way of living in middle path and simplicity with farming activities. However, lay Buddhists often use Buddhism only as a ritualistic function in life and few live according to the real teachings. Today most lay Buddhists actually worship money and 'successes' (Hutanuwatr and Rasbash, 1998). Community people have been induced to abandon cultures and way of life. Rural workers have been forced to sacrifice their labour for low wages for the sake of industrialisation. Rural farmers

have been relocated for big infrastructure projects in the name of development and economic growth (Hutanuwatr and Rasbash, 1998). While Buddhism encourages people to confront the existential suffering in life being self-sufficient and reliant in middle path simply living, modern culture offers a way to escape from this suffering with its prosperity and consumption. Rural community people are encouraged to satisfy craving by modern culture which is the root cause of suffering. Nowadays, they pay much for their luxurious goods. They are disheartened from the effect of globalisation with consumerism; the money-orientation has been arisen alongside the way of life of community people.

There are many challenging problems in terms of socio-economic and environmental issues that will be presented in the following sections on the evolution of development in Thailand.

#### **2.4 Evolution of Development during the Past Four Decades**

Although the history of development had been reviewed since the Suthothai era in 1238, the development schemes were presented by the first National Plan in 1961, which mainly emphasised the economic development of the country. Thailand has achieved an exceptional record of socio-economic development over the last 40 years, as witnessed by the rapid expansion of the economy at an average rate of 7.8 per cent per annum. The drop in numbers of people living in absolute poverty has surpassed all expectations, falling to only 13.7 per cent of the population in 1992, far outstripping the Seventh Plan's target of 20 per cent by the end of 1996 (NESDB, 1998). Thailand's sound economic position is internationally recognised. In addition, sustainable public investment in economic and social infrastructure has made a significant contribution to an overall rise in incomes, living conditions and quality of life.

However, there is an imbalance of income distribution between urban and rural sectors. Despite the impressive rate of economic growth, most of Thailand's economic activity and prosperity has remained concentrated in Bangkok, the capital, and its surrounding provinces. The average per capita income inside the Bangkok Metropolitan Region is still much higher than those found outside, and almost 12 times higher than in the country's poorest region, the Northeast. The gap between rich and



poor in the Kingdom has also widened over the last 40 years. In the four years from 1988 to 1992 alone, the top 20 per cent of households saw their combined income rise from 54 per cent to 59 per cent of GDP, while the combined income of the bottom 20 per cent of households—the country's poorest—dropped from 4.6 per cent to 3.9 per cent of GDP over the same period. This growing difference means an increasing number of Thais are being excluded from the general improvements in quality of life, and is proving to be a major obstacle to national development (NESDB, 1998, National Statistics Organisation, 1998).

Development efforts have provided wider access to both economic and basic social services. By 2000, around 98.2 per cent of villages had electricity, and many also had clean drinking water, which now reached impressive level 83 per cent of urban settlements outside Bangkok, and 27 per cent of rural villages. Road networks connecting provinces, districts and sub-districts now totalled 210,025 kilometres. Thailand's rural population now has greater access to education than ever before, with 97.7 per cent of school age children nationwide completing at least six years of basic education. In addition, improvements in public health provision have resulted in a significant increase in average life expectancy, from 63 years in 1990 to 70.6 years in 2001 (National Statistics Organisation, 2001).

However, fiercer competition for income and wealth in Thailand has brought with it greater materialism. This in turn has had a negative impact on people's behaviour, bringing about a lack of discipline, declining ethical and moral standards, and the rise of practices which centre around self-interest and exploitation of others. These unfavourable trends are threatening traditional Thai values and ways of life, and they have contributed to the collapse of families. Drug problems have been of much concern, for instance, the problem of amphetamines has spread across the country. There are a high number of drug traffickers. While there is strong retaliation by the government, this huge problem has still remained.

Furthermore, economic prosperity has started to alter the patterns of sickness and mortality, bringing with it the diseases of modern life, such as cancer, heart disease and high blood-pressure. The number of reported tragedies and deaths resulting from accident and natural disasters has likewise increased. Tragically and unexpectedly, the

south of Thailand was hit by the Tsunami disaster in late 2004 which has caused many socio-economic problems in that region.

Accelerated rates of economic growth have also resulted in the depletion of natural resources and deteriorating environmental conditions. During the four decades of development, no less than one million rai (2.2 rai= 1 acre) of forest was destroyed through commercial exploitation. Moreover, the problem of soil erosion and falling water quality has become increasingly significant. This caused the problems of drought in the dry season and flooding in the rainy season in every region. In terms of environmental pollution, poor air quality, high volume of dust, and noise pollution have become major concerns in Bangkok and other regional urban centres bear witness to the general worsening of environmental conditions. Environmental degradation has had a visible negative impact on quality of life of the people (Department of Natural Resources, 2000).

Consequently, it has become generally accepted that a process of development, which disregards natural resources, human values and local wisdom, customs and lore, is contrary to sustainable national development.

The next section is the presentation of the 1997 economic crisis, with a particular focus on socio-cultural perspectives.

## **2.5 The Economic Crisis and Cultural Changes in Thailand**

Societies throughout the world are continually developing, resulting in changes in demographic, economic crises, such as the one that hit Southeast Asia in 1997, and has had far-reaching consequences for thinking about development in global terms as, Thailand was faced with the situation of the 1996 export-slump. The country was finally confronted with serious economic difficulties in June 1997; the economy experienced a negative growth rate of nearly 2 percent in 1997, and dropped by about 10 percent in 1998. Production, investment and domestic demand collapsed, while unemployment increased substantially. Consequently, it has been asserted that Thailand has lost its competitiveness and that, in order to regain it and overcome the current crisis, it requires significant developments in many aspects of the internal

economy, especially the areas of technology and qualified technical labour (Thailand Development Research Institute, 1998, Myers, 2005, Siamwalla, 1997). As the country approached the new millennium, signs suggested an economic recovery was about to happen. GDP was estimated to have grown by about 3 to 4 percent in 1999 (Thailand Development Research Institute, 2000). Consequently, this caused rural labour employment to move back to rural areas due to the high increased unemployment in big cities. The problem of deforestation has occurred as people need more land for agricultural cultivation. It was hoped that the recovery process will continue to the year 2000 and beyond.

At the same time the consequences of the economic crisis have triggered fundamental reflection on the development path that Thai society has taken. This has raised a great deal of concern about preserving national heritage in the face of globalisation (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998). Additionally, there is a widespread concern related to claims of a change in Thai people's life styles. This concern is mainly socio-cultural, not economic (Wasee, 1999, Phongphit, 2003).

## **2.6 Overview of Rural Sector in Thailand**

In Thailand, municipality is defined as an urban area while others are defined as rural. Therefore, all villages are rural communities due to being apart from municipal laws. It is home to 40 million people, almost two-thirds of the country's population. More than 90 percent of these households are farmers, engaging in various agricultural activities and generating 11 percent of the GDP in agriculture output, the raw material base for Thailand's large agro-processing sector, and 25 percent of total export value. There are significant variations in the structure of production, the pattern of income and employment, and the level of development across the different regions. This reflects the different physical and environmental endowment, socio-economic conditions and trends in government expenditure and policies (NESDB, 2000, TDRI, 2000, World Bank, 2000). As the country is divided into four regions, the following regions are briefly presented to gain a clear understanding of rural Thailand.

*2.5.1 The North* The Northern part of Thailand covers one-third of the land area and about 21 percent of the population. It has good agricultural land, extensive forests, and

good water resources. However, farm sizes are relatively small leading to extensive migration in search of better farmland within the region and propagation of non-farm activities. Large pockets of poverty exist, particularly among upland hill tribes.

*2.5.2 The Northeast* The Northeastern part of Thailand covers one-third of the total land area and 44 percent of the rural population, and is the most populous region. It is also the poorest part of Thailand with almost 20 percent of the households below the poverty line (The poverty line is the household annual income as less than 20000 baht or 300 pounds). The combination of low agricultural productivity and low incomes has created massive forest infringement as well as large-scale migration to other regions for employment especially to Bangkok, the capital. It is evident that unemployment and under-employment are widespread (TDRI, 2000).

*2.5.3 The South* The Southern part of Thailand is made up of about 14 percent of the land area and this population has a well-developed economy, with large investments in rubber, aquaculture, fishery, tourism, mining, and natural gas development. It has low levels migration to other regions.

*2.5.4 The Central* The Central part of Thailand comprises of the western mountains and southeastern coast, and is the richest and most densely populated area. The economy is extremely well diversified among industry (due in large part to its nearness to the supporting infrastructure of Bangkok), agriculture in which the Chao Phraya Basin has rich soils and good water supply infrastructure, mining with granite cores in the west and basaltic cores in the east, and commerce.

Overall, Thailand has a large, dynamic rural sector that has played a key role in the country's economic growth and social development. This dynamism has been nurtured by the market-oriented development strategy that Thailand has followed for the past four decades, which has emphasised the role of the private sector and sound macroeconomic and sectoral management. Unlike in many other developing countries in East Asia, the Thai government has historically avoided a strong urban bias in its politics. Nonetheless, the past fifteen years of fast economic growth have created an imbalance between rural and urban development (TDRI, 1998, 2000).

## **2.7 Weaknesses in Key Rural Policy in Thailand**

Rural Thailand has been considered to be the poorest sector for centuries. The key policy weaknesses mentioned earlier included the following (TDRI, 1998, 2000, Siamwalla, 1998, World Bank, 2000):

*2.7.1* Poor macroeconomic management of the exchange rate and the large capital inflows during the boom economy fueled an increased demand for labor and capital in urban areas, higher than factor market trends would warrant, and undermined agricultural competitiveness.

*2.7.2* High effective rates of domestic protection skewed resource allocation away from rural activities to urban ones.

*2.7.3* Underdeveloped legal and regulatory provisions regarding land titling and collateral for typical rural assets relative to urban assets constrained rural finance markets.

*2.7.4* Insufficient public investment in key rural social and economic requirements undermined human resource development.

As a result, the overall rural sector has faced worrisome long-term trends in the pattern, equity, and sustainability of growth.

## **2.8 Key Rural Challenges in Thailand**

There are a large number of studies on the rural sector. Key challenges can be presented as the main problems in rural Thailand (TDRI, 2000, NESDB, 2000, World Bank, 2000).

*2.8.1* *Rural poverty remains a problem*, despite the fact that Thailand's impressive growth has raised income in many rural households. While the national poverty rate declined to 11 percent in 1996, there are still several problems: the incidence of poverty is greatest in rural areas, with 15 percent of people living in villages below the

poverty line; and there are extreme regional disparities, with the Northeast and North accounting for about three-quarters of all poor (National Accounts Division, 2001).

2.8.2 *Income inequality is growing*, despite the improvement in the decreasing incidences of poverty. Between 1988 and 1992, the income share of the top 20 percent of households rose from 55 to 59 percent of GDP, while the bottom 20 percent fell from 4.5 to 3.8 percent. Consequently, while Thailand had substantially lower income inequality than other countries in the Region during the mid-1970s, it now is among the most unequal distributions in East Asia. The increase in inequality was largely due to the skewed distribution of formal sector jobs across regions and sectors, and the limited access of the poor to secondary and vocational education (NESDB, 2001).

2.8.3 *Rural employment is limited*, which has spurred a massive out-migration of young workers to urban centers. The average annual migration rate increased from 420,000 workers in 1976-80, of which 80 percent was seasonal, to 992,000 in 1991-96, of which 70 percent was permanent. As a result, the number of employed persons in agriculture dropped from 20.5 million in 1989 to 16.9 million in 1995, mainly from the ranks of 12-24 years old. These labor dynamics reflect several factors: the higher wages offered by the fast growing industry and manufacturing sectors in urban areas during the 1990s; the limited absorptive capacity of agriculture due to production constraints, primarily scarce land and water resources; and the slow growth of rural industry as a result of market and policy failures that have promoted industrial concentration in the Bangkok Municipal Region (Department of Public Welfare, 2001).

2.8.4 *Environmental damage is widespread* as Thailand's past rapid economic growth has been accompanied by significant levels of pollution and degradation of natural resources. The rate of forest cover has declined from 53 percent in 1961 to 25 percent in 1998 as a result of unsustainable concession management practices, infrastructure development, and farmer encroachment. Soil erosion and river sedimentation are widespread in the North, largely due to weak watershed management and significant land use conflicts with upland hill tribes. Water resources are over-exploited and deteriorating in quality, and coastal resources are under great pressure as a result of over-harvesting of marine capture fisheries, poor environmental management of coastal aquaculture, and conversion of mangrove forests.

2.8.5 *Social capital is under-developed* as a result of several factors. Excessive political and administrative centralisation in Bangkok has undermined the development of local community institutions and grassroots participatory mechanisms. The limited access to primary health care and secondary school education in many poor rural areas has slowed human resource development. Also many Thais believe that urbanisation and migration have splintered family relations and social cohesion in rural villages.

## **2.9 Socio-Economic Crisis Impact in Rural Thailand**

After many years of rapid growth, as stated earlier, the Thai economy plunged into recession in the second-half of 1997 as a result of weaknesses in the banking system, the relative appreciation of Thai currency, declining wage competitiveness, external sector shocks and inappropriate policy responses, and structural weaknesses in key productive sectors. Domestic demand has collapsed, exports remain sluggish, corporate bankruptcies are increasing, and the financial sector is facing significant restructuring. The dollar purchasing power of the Thai currency has decreased by 40 percent, and high interest rates, designed to stabilise the exchange rate and manage aggregate demand have constrained investment.

The short-term economic outlook remains grim: the GDP declined by 8 percent and private consumption by 11 percent in 1998, with only marginal growth projected for 1999. The latest unemployment figures show that 1,463,000 people are unemployed and 989,000 underemployed (working less than 20 hours a week). When seasonally adjusted, unemployment rose from 1.4 percent of the current labor force in the 1997 wet season, to 3.1 percent in the 1998 dry season, and to 5.3 percent in the 1998 wet season (NEDSB, 2000). The impact of the crisis on the rural sector in Thailand has been particularly severe and has exacerbated many of the long-term unsustainable trends.

The total number of unemployed people in rural areas increased from 2.4 percent in February 1997 to 5.3 percent in February 1999. The poorest region, the Northeast, was hit the hardest, with an increase from 3.1 to 8.1 percent and a decline in real income of

25 percent. Underemployment also increased by a similar amount, from 2 to 3.7 percent of the labor force. The general impact of these labor market changes on the rural sector is well known: increasing unemployment and declining real wages in urban areas have resulted in a remigration back to rural areas, leading to a decline in household remittances, increased pressure on natural resources, and greater competition for agricultural land and limited off farm employment. The impact has been particularly harsh for the poor, particularly those receiving state welfare, such as pre-school children, the elderly and infirm, HIV patients, and other vulnerable groups. Since many poor households are net buyers of rice, the increase in domestic food prices arising from the depreciation of the Thai currency and the increased demand for rice exports in other countries in the Region suffering from droughts undermined food security and consumption levels. A particularly worrisome development is the increase in child labour and decrease in school attendance (Department of Public Welfare, 2001).

The proportion of poor is estimated to have increased from 11.3 percent in 1996 to 12.4 percent in the second quarter of 1998. Similarly, the income gap is widening, with the top income group enjoying a slight increase and the middle-income group facing a slight decline since 1996 (TDRI, 1998). In addition to these social impacts, high interest rates and the depreciation of the baht have constrained rural credit and led to reduced consumption of fertiliser and other imported inputs, resulting in lower rice production and increased food insecurity for poor households, in which output has also been affected by El Nino. Finally, reductions in government expenditure for rural infrastructure and social services have constricted rural employment and undermined rural health, education, and poverty reduction objectives (Office of Prime Minister, 2000).

## **2.10 The Implementation of the 1997 Constitution**

The crisis has precipitated a far-reaching review and restructuring of national economic and political priorities in Thailand. A new Constitution was promulgated in October 1997 and gave unprecedented emphasis to good governance, community empowerment, decentralisation, and social and environmental issues. Similarly, the Eighth National Economic and Social Plan and public sector investment program



were restructured in January 1998, and again in January 1999, in response to the new stabilisation efforts and the need to redress the short-term impacts of the crisis (NESDB, 2000).

During the current period of intense national debate, there is a renewed focus on the role of the rural sector in Thailand's short-term recovery and medium-term growth. The Prosperity Decentralisation Policy Committee has focused on the implementation of a strong rural development agenda in response to the crisis. A new, national Sub-committee on the Rehabilitation of the Rural Economy and Society was established in April 1998, with responsibility for implementing a Plan for Social Rehabilitation and Sustainable Rural Economy prepared by a partnership of government, private sector, and academic groups. Similarly, a new National Social Policy Committee was formed in June 1998 to provide policy advice on strengthening communities, poverty reduction, and social reform (NESDB, 2000).

Interestingly, for the first time in many years, there is a national consensus among Government officials, the private sector, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that a new rural development vision and strategy is needed—one that moves Thailand beyond the immediate crisis and lays the foundations for more balanced growth, increased employment and income for the rural poor, and improved natural resource management in the future (Office of Prime Minister, 2000).

### **2.11 A Rural Development Vision in Thailand**

Thailand is one of the few countries in East Asia to have conducted a comprehensive national dialogue about its social and economic future, and reached a remarkable degree of consensus from the people about the importance of redressing the rural-urban imbalance that had arisen during the past decades. This process started with the preparation of the Eighth National Economic and Social Plan (1997-2001), was fueled by the crisis, and culminated with the passage of the new 1997 Constitution. Consequently, the Ninth Plan (2002-2006), which includes the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, continues by aiming at improving the well-being of the rural people and reducing the imbalance between rural and urban

sectors. A clear and effective vision for rural development has emerged from this national dialogue, which emphasises the followings shared visions (World Bank, 2000, NESDB, 2000, TDRI, 2000):

*2.11.1* A rural population that is empowered, secure, and content. Rural community empowerment is recognised as significant.

*2.11.2* A rural economy that is balanced, sustainable, and equitable. Fair income distribution needs to be obtained.

*2.11.3* A rural development process that is holistic and centered on people and local community institutions.

*2.11.4* A rural development partnership involving local communities, CSOs, government, private sector, and academic institutions is required.

Similarly, there is widespread agreement among policy makers, both at macro and micro levels, about the key objectives for rural development. This has mainly focused on creating well-being in the rural people throughout the country. The following focused objectives are derived from the above shared visions:

- Enhancing the human resource development of the rural population is signified as important. The quality of life of rural people is now given a high priority.
- Strengthening local institutions, based on greater self-reliance, self-sufficiency and community participation is promoted.

- Increasing income and employment generation should be enhanced, particularly for the poor and those affected by the crisis.
- Effective building up a better protected environment is crucial.

While there is a broad national consensus about the importance of sustainable rural development, there are still many divergent views within Thailand about the specific strategies and implementation arrangements for achieving this shared vision.

The government continues to focus on the role of public sector policies and investments, and the importance of restoring economic growth, improving international competitiveness, and integrating the regional economy. Civil Social Organisations (CSOs), on the other hand, stress the importance of community institutions, ensuring local self-sufficiency, and developing social capital. Politicians and the private sector, understandably, are more focused on the short-term requirements of restructuring the corporate sector, rebuilding businesses, and finding jobs for retrenching workers. So there are still wide gaps among these sectors on the implementation of rural development practices across the country.

## **2.12 Rural Thailand Development Strategic Implementation**

Although there is widespread agreement about the implementation of rural development in Thailand, the above visions and objectives need to lead into practices in terms of providing more sustainability and equality of rural development. This depends on the interconnections of the following five aspects (World Bank, 2000, NESDB, 2000, TDRI, 2000):

*2.12.1 First, and the most importantly, local community organisations must be strengthened* in order to provide the institutional framework for people centered rural development and redress the excessive centralisation of political and administrative authority that characterised the past. This does not mean a return to independent, segmented rural communities, but rather ensuring that local institutions have the necessary human and financial capital to pursue their social and economic goals. Community empowerment is seen as crucial here.

*2.12.2 Second, off-farm employment and rural enterprises must be expanded* in order to generate the increased employment necessary to absorb surplus workers and boost incomes, as well as capture the value-added local agricultural production. This sector will have to become the new engine of growth in the future since the capacity of agriculture to expand is limited due to endowment constraints, the relative profitability of other sectors in the economy, and the continued aspirations of the younger work force for higher wage jobs.

*2.12.3 Third, rural finance markets must be strengthened* in order to increase the financial resources of local communities and channel more funds to productive rural investments. The goal here is not increased indebtedness for households, but greater community access to the investment loans, working capital financing, and the equity needed to establish new economic activities that create jobs, raise incomes, and reduce poverty.

*2.12.4 Fourth, agricultural productivity must be increased* in order to address the food and income requirements of poor households, the raw material needs of the agro-processing sector, and continued export growth. While the sector will continue to shed resources to fuel the growth of more productive parts of the economy in the future, there is not any question that agriculture will remain a core element of Thailand's rural development strategy and the country will retain some comparative advantage in agriculture production.

*2.12.5 Fifth, the management of natural resources must be improved*, in order to ensure the sustainability of rural development. In the absence of an effective regulatory framework, strong management institutions and adequate participation of civil society, Thailand's past rapid economic growth took a huge toll on natural resources and the environment. Natural resource activities such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism still have potential to play key roles in rural development, both directly as sources of livelihood and income for rural people, and indirectly through the supply of inputs to value added activities. To realise this potential, however, the current trend towards the devaluing of key natural resources must be effectively reversed, and the underlying causes remedied.

The following section provides the limitations of the overall agricultural sector in rural Thailand.

### **2.13 Limitations of the Agricultural Sector in Rural Thailand**

As previously mentioned, most Thai rural populations are farmers engaging in agricultural activities in all regions. They have faced many existing problems that signify the limitations of the agricultural sector in rural areas. The following are the obstacles of agricultural growth and development (Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 2001, NESDB, 2000, 2001, World Bank, 2000):

*2.13.1* The appropriate soil for cultivation has decreased except when trespassing in the conserved forests. It is, therefore, that agricultural business has moved to neighbouring countries like Laos and Cambodia.

*2.13.2* The water for agricultural activities has decreased due to industrial consumption and a decreasing amount of water. The proportion of water consumption in Thai people is less than the average use in Asia and the least in

South East Asia. In addition, there is a lack of effective management on water resources and irrigation systems.

2.13.3 The problems of land reform are remained. There is a delay of legal documents of land tenure. More than 20 percent of rural people are not secure in their occupation of tenured public land.

2.13.4 Although some labourers turned back from urban to rural areas after the economic crisis, this could be temporary. The agricultural sector will face the problem of labour forces during cultivation and harvesting seasons while young labourers move back to the industrial sector after the economic recovery. Although the government effort is to provide funding for all to create more agricultural activities, they seem to neglect this due to the higher wages of industrial sector.

2.13.5 The groups and organisations, both formal and informal, in rural areas are not effectively conducted in terms of supporting the agricultural activities of rural people. Most were organised and unable to continue their activities continually, although they are supported by local government or government organisations, such as the Sub-district Administrative Organisation (SDAO) or the office of community development.

2.13.6 The price of agricultural products is not stable, especially at the micro levels. Unstable situations force farmers to sell their products to middle men at low prices. Although there are price guarantees from the government sector, most occur too late, especially for the small scale farmers all over the country. Moreover, most small scale farmers are not able to access the information on the unstable price of products; it is, therefore, that this has caused the low potential of low negotiations. In addition, the problem of the food processing still occurred.

2.13.7 There is a lack of research and development on the academic agricultural aspects - these are less supported in terms of the factors of funding, networking, promotion and extension and primitive agricultural development from both GOs and NGOs. The extension system is hierarchically, bureaucratically implemented. It is, therefore, unsuitable for providing for all farmers, especially those who work on a small scale.

2.13.8 The price of fertilisers, pesticides, insecticides and petrol is growing, so investment in agricultural activities is higher. Moreover, there is a lack of sufficient labour which affects the overall farming process.

The limitations previously mentioned offer an understanding of the farming situations of the rural farming people. Small scale farmers have difficulties in engaging agricultural activities. In the Northeastern part of Thailand, especially, most are small scale farmers; and they have faced all the limitations mentioned above. The occupational context illustrates the way of life of rural people.

The following section provides an understanding of the roles of democracy and the Thai monarch in rural development.

## **2.14 Democracy, the Monarchy and Rural Development in Thailand**

This following section gives an insight into the transition to parliamentary democracy in Thailand.

### *2.14.1 Transition to Parliamentary democracy*

In 1932, the country of Thailand officially became a constitutional monarchy, though in practice, the government was dominated by the military and the elite bureaucracy for half a century. Full democracy did not arrive until 1992, when mass protests forced a military-backed government to resign. The head of government is the Prime Minister, who is from among the members of the

lower house of parliament, usually the party that can organise a majority coalition government ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics\\_of\\_Thailand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Thailand), 2006). In 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra and his party won landslide victory on populist platform of economic growth and development. The three outstanding policies from the policy platform of this party in 2001 election were 1) A universal health care scheme (30 Baht remedy for all illnesses); 2) A village revolving fund (1 million Baht to each village for micro-credit schemes); and 3) A debt moratorium for farmers. These policies gained much popularity from populations in rural and agrarian sectors, which had been excluded from the benefits of the high economic growth of the period before the crisis, and became a focal point in the formation of later policies, which took these target groups into careful consideration (Satasut, 2006). The government ran a strong campaign and experienced a landslide victory in acquiring seats in the House of Representatives. Thaksin became the 23<sup>rd</sup> Prime Minister and his party gained an absolute majority in the lower house of the Parliament under the 1997 Constitution. The prime minister, the richest man in modern history, became one of the most powerful prime ministers in the political history of Thailand. The general election held in 2005, resulted in another landslide victory for Thaksin and his party which controlled 377 seats in Parliament's lower house. Analysts believed that this success was due to the popularity of Thaksin's populist policies in rural areas (Satasut, 2006 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics\\_of\\_Thailand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Thailand), 2006).

However, Thaksin proceeded to become involved in a series of corruption scandals which led to widespread calls for his resignation. He was required to step down and asked for political virtue after avoiding paying tax when selling a huge amount of stocks to Singapore. He dissolved parliament in February 2006 and called a snap parliamentary election in April 2006. The election was widely boycotted by the opposition, leading to 38 unopposed seats of his party candidates failing to get the necessary quorum of 20 percent of eligible votes. As 1997 Thai constitution requires that all seats be filled to open parliament, this produced a constitutional crisis. After floating several suggestions and oppositions, in April 2006, Thaksin announced that he would step down as prime minister as soon as parliament had selected a successor. The crisis was



referred to the Supreme Court, which declared the election invalid. New elections had been set for October 2006. Until then, Thaksin remained as caretaker prime minister (Satasut, 2006, McGirk, 2006, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics\\_of\\_Thailand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Thailand), 2006).

#### *2.14.2 The role of the Monarch*

During his sixty year reign, the present King of Thailand has become a symbol of national identity and unity. King Bhumibol has proven to be a popular and powerful monarch whose vision based on Buddhist principles is direct towards the well-being of rural people. As monarch under the constitution, he has been committed to policies aimed at the population's quality of life. In 1955, he visited the poverty-stricken northeastern part of Thailand beginning decades of development work in rural areas. In 1969, the Office of Royal Development Projects Board was established to serve his duties on the development schemes (ORDPB, 2005).

For more than four decades, he has gone to make personal contact with derived communities in all remote parts of the country. His vision is seen as down-to-earth. He has learned from the poor, listened to them and developed projects after personal decades of working to improve the life of poor rural people. This enables him to experience the people's way of living, and from that to develop the idea of the Sufficiency Economy, which translates into 'enough to eat and to live with' (Paewsoongnem, 2006, ORDPB, 2005, Wasee, 1999). The Sufficiency Economy approach is the underlying common philosophy of the Ninth Plan (NESDB, 2000). There is a misunderstanding that 'Sufficiency Economy' applies exclusively to farmers. In fact, the King provides this guidance to everyone. Self-sufficiency means a good livelihood. It means living simply, in a way that is not harmful to other beings. This is something every one can begin practicing immediately (Phongphit, 2003, 2005, ORDPB, 2005).

As Thailand has a relatively young parliamentary democracy, the King has given advice on development to the government. Every new Cabinet has a

chance to listen to his speeches, with their insights into the situation of the nation. However, these ideas do not always easily match with the government's views of the needs of Thailand as a developing modern economy. Successive Thai governments have adopted rapid industrialisation and cash-crop monoculture as the national development strategies since the 1960s (Wasee, 1999, Myers, 2005).

Notwithstanding this, supporting development projects and being a role model for rural development of the country is central to the King's philosophy to development problems based on a 'keep it simple' approach (Wasee, 1999, Paewsoongnern, 2006). His New Theory concept of integrated farm management is in essence a system of managing resources so that villagers have everything they need for domestic consumption right in their back yard. It helps ensure farmers against external risk such as a drop in farm price. It promotes maximisation of land use for a farm family to become self-reliant. Also, the King conclusion has been seen as the Royal Development Study Centres, or 'Living Museums' which are situated in the roughest terrain of their respective regions. These centres are where the King conducts various experiments in reforestation, irrigation, land development and farm technology to find villager-friendly know-how that caters to each region. The goal is to restore the natural balance so the people can work on the land and become self-supporting and sufficient (Ekachai, 2000, Paewsoongnern, 2006, ORDPB, 2005, 2006).

It can be seen that the monarch has played a significant role in the development of the country. All of more than 2000 projects have led to sustainability of the Thai people. Interestingly, before initiating a project, the King always studies the place and the people who will be affected carefully (Wasee, 1999, ORDPB, 2005, 2006, Ekachai, 2000).

The international media seem to view his work differently. They presented quite different perspectives on the King's actions of political intervention. For example, in 1973, he intervened to end bloodshed during pro-democracy uprising against dictatorship. In 1992, he stopped bloody street protests against

the military, ushering in a people's democracy. Even in 2006, he ordered country's top courts to resolve the political crisis, saying it was a mess. Some even called him a political monarch (McGirk, 2006). In fact, these events were national political crises threatening the well-being of the Thai people. When parliamentary system of government was ineffective to maintain peace of the country, statesmen, scholars, members of parliament, students and people in general assembled and sought advice from the King. These were viewed by some international media as an obstruction to parliamentary democracy.

Successive Thai governments have not necessarily engaged the King's vision (Wasee, 1999, Paewsoongnem, 2006). Especially, the Thai government of Thaksin Shinawatra (deposed in the military coup of 2006) had been accused of being authoritarian and dictatorial. The media had been suppressed and manipulated (Phongpaichit, 2004). Thaksin has espoused a form of populism which explicitly challenges the ideal of democracy and the rule of law (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2002). In the election campaign which brought him to political power, he argued that law was often an obstacle which prevented leaders from solving problems. He rejected the competitive principle at the heart of the 'Westminster model' of parliamentary democracy. As he worked for people, then any opposition to him was 'against the people' and hence illegitimate. As he had only the people's benefits as his goal, then any opposition to him must be based on some private interest (Phongpaichit, 2004, Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004).

#### *2.14.3 Conclusion*

As this section was being written, a bloodless military coup in September 2006 overthrew the government, thus emphasising the fragile nature of democracy in Thailand. The military rules appear to have had the King's approval of their actions.

## **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the context of the rural sector in Thailand, which emphasised the evolution of the development in the country. Rural development schemes have been found as not yet reaching the intended goals because of various problems existing in the country. This chapter is considered to provide an understanding of rural Thailand in this century, which has been gradually modified up to present. Buddhism and globalisation in the Thai context has been displayed. Additionally, the government, non-government and people have continuously put their efforts towards improving the development in rural areas. This chapter has also outlined the evolution of development in Thailand during the past four decades. It has significantly presented the 1997 economic crisis as the modifying period of rural development throughout the country. The 1997 Constitution has been implemented, providing the chance for all sectors to begin cooperative working in order to create well-being in the rural people alongside the rural vision. However, there are many challenges and limitations in the rural sector for holding back its agricultural sector growth and development, especially for the small scale farmers. In addition, the presentation of democracy and the monarchy has been displayed to give an insight into parliamentary democracy and the role of the monarch in rural development in Thailand.

In the next chapter, the presentation of the contexts for inquiry will be offered as a Review of the Literature.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines past and current studies and research into community empowerment, illustrating the main theoretical developments and empirical findings. It presents the definitions, concepts and dimensions as well as early research studies in the sphere of community empowerment, evaluating and criticising the generated models. This is followed by the ideas and relevant issues supported community empowerment.

The main aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the current knowledge concerning issues surrounding community empowerment and its implication. Also, the perspectives of community development in Thailand are presented in order to locate an understanding of the development schemes in Thai community.

#### **3.1 Definition and Concept of Empowerment**

There are many discourses around the definitions and concepts of empowerment, and those of interest here mainly focus on contexts of community development.

Parsloe (1996) states that empowerment as a word entered social work writing and thinking during the late 1980s and early 1990s, but which represents a strand of thought with a much longer history. However, it is a term which is becoming familiar at present (Christian, 1998). Empowerment has been defined in literature in different ways but generally those focusing on issues of addressing power imbalances in social systems (Tembo, 2003). It is the taking on of power, at both individual and social levels (Onyx and Benton, 1995) and an inevitably political concept, though the extent to which this is apparent to those involved depends on their approach and the circumstances in which empowering work takes place (Adams, 1996, Popple, 1995, Graig and Mayo, 1995). Its concept is used in a wide range of contexts and situations, even sometimes in ways that seem contradictory

or incoherent (Stanley and Reed, 1999). Morley (1995) has also showed empowerment as an abstract concept. To understand it requires an analysis of power. How one depicts power determines whether there will be alertness to its full implications in social relationship.

However, Gore (1993) has argued that it is this productive conception of power that underpins notions of empowerment and of emancipatory or liberatory authority, - authority *with* rather than *over* others (p.120). Gore has stated that a fundamental challenge is how one person, or group, ethically and practically can empower another, and whether the absence of political reflexivity means empowerment could inform new forms of this process.

Similarly, Servian (1996) has discussed the concept of empowerment, which could be summarised as follows:

- Empowerment as access to democratic process: The right to vote, or a say in some other way, in political policies, as a major campaign by a large member of people throughout the world.
- Empowerment as taking leadership: Political leaders, senior managers and club and society committees are frequently the centre of competition for leadership.
- Empowerment as advocacy: We all have potential, but we all need support to get what we want or need. The provision of advocacy helps us get there. Solicitors, brokers, citizen advocates and parents or friends may empower in this way.
- Empowerment as spiritual enlightenment: Most religions, and certain philosophies, tend to promote empowerment through spiritual rather than material fulfilment.

However, Fook (2002) stated that the empowerment of one person or group might automatically mean the disempowerment of another, thereby unwittingly setting up two conflicts. Also because power is attributed from outside- that is, by virtue of position in the social structure-efforts to empower people and groups who are

marginalised might actually be experienced as disempowering, since this may not be their own understanding of their experience.

The concept of empowerment is located within the discourse of community development, and connected to concepts of self-help, participation, networking and equity (Onyx and Benton, 1995). The emerging literatures describe the changing nature of empowerment and also offer new opportunities for practice in community. This brings equal problems as the term 'empowerment' which has different meanings to different people. Forrest (1999) states that empowerment is a contested concept as a multi-level construct at personal, group organisation, community and class levels. The definition of empowerment has been demonstrated in many contexts as developmental aspects as emphasised by the building up of low-income and low quality of life families. Empowerment can be an intentional, ongoing process central to the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources (Phongphit, 2003, 2005). Phongphit further demonstrates empowerment in terms of development as necessarily being inside out rather than outside in. The potential of people evolves gradually with the empowerment process.

### **3.2 Dimensions of Empowerment**

Lee (2001) summarises three interlocking dimensions of empowerment: 1) the development of a more positive and potent sense of self, 2) the construction of knowledge and capacity for a more critical comprehension of the web of social and political realities of one's environment, and 3) the cultivation of resources and strategies, or more functional competence, for attainment of personal and collective goals. This includes people and the environment politically focusing on the development of society as a whole. It could be seen that empowerment is the key concept of community development. It is the process whereby we develop the theory and practice of equality (Ledwith, 2005).

In addition, Rahman (1990) has identified several dimensions of empowerment, which serve as developing indicators in relation to participation, which can be summarised as follows:

- organisation of the disadvantaged and underprivileged in structures under their own control;
- knowledge of their social environment and its processes being developed by the disadvantaged;
- self-reliance, an attitudinal quality, strengthening the solidarity, caring and sharing of collective identity;
- creativity;
- institutional development, in particular the management of collective tasks, and mass participation in deliberation and decision-making;
- solidarity-the ability to handle conflicts and tensions, to care for those in distress, and a consensus that all should advance together;
- progress for women in articulating their points of view, and the evolution of gender relations towards equality, assessed by women themselves (pp.45-49).

Rahman illustrates many dimensions of empowerment that concern the potential of people. Empowerment also implies that there are changes occurring in wider society as a result of grassroots changes: the development of human dignity, popular democracy, and cultural diversity. Precisely what empowerment involves is frequently unclear, and at the same time, it often becomes the objective of development rather than the means towards development (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001) Rahman also signifies the progress of potential of women in terms of gender relations which is concerned with equality, assessed by women themselves.

### **3.3 Empowerment as a process**

One core distinction in the above definitions is whether empowerment is seen as an active or a passive process. Thomas and Pierson (1995) outlined empowerment as a process of 'how people may gain collective control over their lives, so as to achieve their interests, and a method by which social workers seek to enhance the power of people who lack it' (p.4). Also, in this connection, Adams (1990) emphasises self-



help, defining empowerment as an active process of 'becoming powerful'. Payne (1997) identifies a similar transfer as empowerment 'seeks to help clients gain power of decision and action over their own lives' (p.226). Thus, empowerment as a process, from their perspectives, concerns the power that people can gain over their own lives. However, Parsloe (1996) has reviewed an interesting individual and group empowerment that involves a process that he calls-in a metaphorical sense-a 'talk'. Talk, for those who are interviewing, is a source of information. For those who are interviewed, it is a way of discovering the power of individual and group presence through conflicts. In this process some people can legitimise themselves through separation from others, while some find the opportunity to join others and in this way to discover their own capacities. Talk is the tool for finding the definition of the situation and the shape of a possible solution. Parsloe found that to ask a question could be a tool for empowerment for those who have no experience of being asked their views by someone with a genuine interest (pp.23-24).It can be seen that people can access empowerment via this process themselves.

Meanwhile, Craig and Mayo (1995) have identified empowerment as being collective community conscientisation in order to understand reality and use power, which even the relatively powerless attempt to challenge the powerful, and ultimately transform that reality through conscious political struggles. Skinner (1997) has viewed empowerment as a process of influence and control-a psychological experience, a process of analysis and understanding of the causes of deprivation and discrimination. It can be seen as a process of delegating power, enabling the group to have more direct control over its own sources. It leads to the development of a strong sense of personal effectiveness. It can build confidence and self-esteem. It can include exploring the dynamics of discrimination and how people internalise negative messages about their status and rights (Eade and Williams, 1995).Empowering people are people who have achieved collective goals through self-help and are also empowered through their own efforts and by pooling their knowledge, skills and other resources, achieving their own goals without recourse to an external dependency relationship (Mayo, 2000).

Dalrymple and Burke (1995) suggest that empowerment works on three levels. The level of feelings- in which feelings are discovered and shared. The level of ideas is

developing self-knowledge, self-definition and self-efficacy leading to changing consciousness. And the level of action is moving from the personal to the political indicating that empowerment means the taking on of power, at both individual and social levels (Onyx and Benton, 1995). In this connection, Ledwith (2005) states that in the process of empowerment, people have their dignity and self-respect restored which is a consequence of critical consciousness: the understanding that life chances are prescribed by structural discrimination, an insight which brings with it the freedom to take action to bring about change for social justice (p, xii). It could be seen from the literature that empowerment as a process is a means of strengthening people and then the community.

### **3.4 Gender Issues: A Dimension of Empowerment**

The twentieth century has seen rapid changes in many places in what are considered male and female roles (Karl, 1995). In relation to women and development, gender issues tend to be ignored in prevailing trends in development literature and work. The focus has shifted from women to the relationship between women and men, unequal power relations at all levels (household to global) and the need for development to become a process that is more gender equitable (United Nations, 1999). Gender is not a physiological but a social concept that refers to sets of culturally defined characters traits labelled masculinity and femininity (Peterson and Runyan, 1993:190). Gender is the social relationship between men and women in which women have been systematically subordinated (Moser, 1993:3). There are important two points in regard to this relationship. First, masculinity and femininity are not independent categories, but are defined in oppositional relation to each other: more of one is less of the other. Second, the relationship between men and women shows constancy in assigning greater value to that which is associated with masculinity and lesser value to that which is associated with femininity (Peterson and Runyan, 1993:5-7).

Hunt (2004) argues that to shift emphasis entails not only changes in legislation and policy, but complementary bottom-up community development approach and processes that understand and challenge oppressive gender relations and

create change towards greater power equality. Moser's (1993) view on such processes, if they are to redress the imbalance of gender power and contribute to women's development, would be that they need to meet the strategic needs of women, rather than practical needs. Strategic gender needs are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. Strategic gender needs vary according to particular contexts. They relate to gender divisions of labour, power and control and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women's control over their bodies. However, practical gender needs are the needs women identify in their socially accepted roles in society. Practical gender needs do not challenge the gender divisions of labour or women's subordinate position in society, although rising out of them (pp.39-40). The latter Moser considers as needs that perpetuate women's existing positions, whereas the former, including the need to participate in decision-making, would challenge existing structures and contribute to change and transformation.

The focus on gender looks at the roles and needs of both women and men and at how these are interrelated, and thus lessens the risk of marginalising women. Partnership and equality between men and women are the basis of strong families and viable societies in a rapid changing world. Creating greater gender equity will contribute to building peaceful, democratic and prosperous societies (Cornwall, 1998).

Therefore, men and women play different roles in society with their gender differences. It explores relations of power between and among them (Peterson and Runyan, 1993, Cornwall, 1998).

- *Gender Issues in Contemporary Thailand*

There are substantial gender issues both in rural Thailand in general and from the study in particular. Thailand has marked inequalities in achievement between men and women. Thai society is still dominated by men (Phurisinsit, 2001). Not many women have strong roles in politics and administration which can affect changes in society. The traditional view of men as protectors, leaders,

and who earn a living as breadwinners, and women as followers, homemakers and mother remains pervasive, despite the fact that many women now work outside the home. From early age, girls are taught to help with the family's domestic chores and to take care of younger siblings. In contrast, boys- especially in rural areas are encouraged to assist their fathers in the fields and to run and play outside the home (Thomson and Bhongsvej, 1995b). It could be seen the deep-rooted perceptions of the different roles of men and women shape the differential behaviour patterns of boys and girls. Boys are taught to be strong and assertive. Girls are taught to be submissive, soft-spoken, polite and non-assertive. However, Thai women may be viewed as having a relatively high degree of status and autonomy (Lerdmaleewong and Francis, 1998). Compared with women in many parts of the developing world, Thai women rank high in literacy, participation in labour force, and constitutionally-guaranteed equal rights (Thomson and Bhongsvej, 1995b; Yoddumnern-Attig, 1995). They have the right to choose their husbands, to maintain relationships with their relatives upon marriage, and to choose their place of marital residence. Within the family, Thai wives generally control the family budget and are key participants in important family decision. They are responsible for basic needs and when income is insufficient, women must substitute effort for income (Comer, 1996). Thai women act independently with a high degree of female autonomy.

Despite these characteristics, traditional values and customs have ascribed a subordinate position to Thai women, leading to gender discrimination in areas of religion, health, employment, representation before the law, and participation in political decision-making at all levels (Sopchokchai , 1995; Thomson and Bhongsvej, 1995b). While they may be active politically as campaign organisers, supporters and voters, recent statistics show that Thai women hold less than 10 percent of decision-making positions at the national and local levels (National Statistics Office, 2005).

In short, amidst gender disparities, men and women still work together. However, leadership mostly belongs to men while support is provided by women. Culturally, in community men always take the roles of giving speech in

public (Phurisinsit, 2001) while in small groups women have high levels of involvement in discussions. Meanwhile, when women play the roles of leaders, men tend to support them. Empowerment is illustrated by how women and men support each other. Gender is important as a dimension of empowerment when taking a close look at the relationship between actual men and women (Rai, 2002; Cornwall, 1998).

### **3.5 Community: A Sense of the Community**

There are many definitions of community all of which centre on a group of people. The shifting definition is brought about by differing interests which manipulate a term with multiple meanings to their own ends (Purdue et al., 2000). The community can be defined in terms of the shared common characteristics of the people in this group (Taylor, Barr and West, 2000). People may have common interests including a common cultural heritage, social relationships, common economic interests and experiences (Taylor, 2003). The sense of community mainly focuses on a sense of belonging, of solidarity, of shared identity and interests as well as the relationship ties of the family, neighbourhood, mutual support and social interaction and networking inside and outside of the community (Mayo, 1994; Gilchrist, 2003).

Community has been defined both subjectively and objectively. It is an experience of permanent, constant, stable social life. Community extends friendship and communion. Moreover, community is grand (Lee, 2001). It is mostly concerned with the people who live within it. The term is used very widely and all may mean something quite different. Although definitions vary in emphasis, they also share certain common features.

Similarly, Wasee (1996) states a more optimistic view that people in real community have to share the same issues together-both difficulties and happiness. It is about mutuality and neighbourline. Meanwhile Jordan (1996:164) wrote that community can serve to integrate membership groups with antagonistic interests, and to mobilise them for conflict, rather than sustain programmes for harmonisation and inclusion. It could be seen from different perspectives that it may stigmatise some kinds of living arrangement, and lead to unrealistic

expectations of community support that do not take sufficient account of structural inequalities in society (Murray, 1990).

Further discourses discuss whether the concept of community has undergone remarkable growth in interest at every level, including all local national and international levels (Craig, 1998). It is sometimes assumed that a community shares a common world view and set of norms. An alternative way of approaching the issue of community is to focus on how and where its boundaries are established in people's minds.

Community, communion, and communication are intimately as well as etymologically related. Communication is a fundamental prerequisite for social and emotional connections (Putnam, 1993, 2000). Robert Putnam signified a sense of community through the concept of social capital. He replicates social capital concerns with reciprocity, honesty and trust through the various means of human communication. It is the social sense that it is shared, agreed and understood between people.

### **3.6 Characteristics of the Community**

Similarly, community is characterised by many mutual links, shared values, dependence and acceptances, creating an almost natural status hierarchy. This alternative association characterises relationships by formal rules upon features of social environment; association is less natural and has to be constructed (Willmott, 1986). People have frequent interaction over a range of common aspects of their lives because their life takes place in the same locality. But community is more than shared locality-these communities are seen to possess characteristics of shared experience and value which go beyond mere prolongation. As Popple and Shaw (1997) have acknowledged, community is social movement as a source of solidarity, recognising and welcoming the diversity of community. Meanwhile Ledwith (2005: 32) outlined community as a complex system of interrelationships woven across social difference, diverse histories and cultures and determined in the present by political and social trends. Community is fundamentally a political concept (Popple, 1995) and as such it is saturated with power.

Ramon (1998) states that community is a symbol, an idea created by people of some forms of social life, agreement and shared conception leading to a shared reality about the nature and value of community (p.28). Lee (2001) documents a positive view that community is about self-identity and exists where people perceive or experience themselves as being in association with each other in special ways. It is not always in that fashion, although community is often thought as invariably positive. There are many contested issues surrounding community. Hughes and Mooney (1998) have suggested that community is symbolic, it appears almost as magical. Communities are always imagined. Perhaps they exist as a necessary fiction, through which attempts are made to make sense of the world, whereby links are forged and through which mobilisation and resistance to marginalisation and exclusion can be conducted.

### **3.7 Community Development in the Context of Rural Thailand**

The term 'community development' has been in place in Thailand since the First National Plan the early 1960s. This community development context has been implemented since then under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. The Department of Community Development was established in 1962 in order to promote the self-help approach, to enhance the participation and social inclusion in rural villages over the country. However, most of the projects initiated from the 1960s to mid 1980s, over two decades, were politically supported by the United States in order to prevent the spread of communism (Phongphit, 1990, Mayo, 2000) under many military Thai governments. This development was influenced by the patronage system of politics. The village setting has been defined as the community due to the geographical settlement of people. Community development workers have played significant roles in the development schemes of village and subdistrict levels. One is responsible for two subdistricts, which includes more than fifteen villages. Therefore, village headmen played active roles alongside the community development workers. Community villages had been implemented via the constructions of wells and roads as well as organising groups in order to provide a better living for people. The directive approach was mainly employed as well as the top down and bottom up approach which was used to illustrate the differences (Phongphit and Hewison, 1990, Phongphit, 2003). Gradually, the community

development process has been politically changed from patronage to donor-recipient systems (Phongphit, 2005). However, the reflection of rural community development could signify both positive and negative features due to the overall internal and external socio-economic and political contexts.

Afterwards, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the integrated rural development was disseminated, mobilising the cooperation of many ministries to provide integration for the better living of the poor in the community development projects all over the country. Both government organisations and non-organisations played significant roles in the villages, illustrated by the rapid rural development attempts of all Thai political governments while people organisations were politically and economically led by the community development workers, both GOs and NGOs (Phongphit, 2003). The non-directive approach (Batten, 1967) has been considered further. The later elective government was concerned more with concepts of decentralisation; therefore, the local government, like the Sub-District Administrative Organisation (SDAO) has been established since 1997. However, the present government has centralised the hierarchically of district officials to generate control over community people. Politically, this could be seen as part of the campaigns for electoral votes (Phongphit, 2005), although the government itself proclaimed in the Eighth and the Ninth National Plans of the late 1990s to be applying a people centred development at every level (NESDB, 2001).

Community in rural Thailand is considered to be characterised by shared values of solidarity and mutuality, based upon face-to-face communication and relationship as well as shared common interest. Butcher (1993) has suggested that the three values are as follows: solidarity: the relationship that sustains community members at an emotional level. Solidarity is being that which inspires affection, even loyalty, of an individual member towards the group, participation: shared activities with others, through which individuals are involved in realising common goals and playing a part in the collective life and aspiration of the group, and coherence: the embracing by individuals of a framework of meanings and values that provide some overall sense of their world.



It has been implied that community is a web of personal relationships, group networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour connecting people and links to places that they have shared. It derives from a common feeling based on sharing a place which creates a particular type of relationship. It relates to the characteristics of the members and the common interests and understanding which ties members together and gives those characteristics a shared significance (Flecknoe and McLellan, 1994, Jacob, 1995, 1996, Warburton, 1998, SCCD, 2001). It can be understood that the main two dimensions of community are place and people's feelings of belonging, and that this sense of belonging is more intensive than mere geographical boundaries (Stanley and Reed, 1999).

Similarly, Taylor (2003) has demonstrated that communities are dynamic entities, constantly reconstructing themselves in image and identity, achieving a balance between cohesion and diversity, leadership and participation, and the tensions between focusing inwards and scaling up to act in the wider environment: these will all likewise be moving targets.

All communities are groups, but not all groups are communities. The community could be categorised in three features (Willmott, 1989), the first is defined as locality or territory, second is as a communality of interest or interest group such as black community or Jewish community and the third is community as a common bond such as working for the same employer. This could be a useful categorisation and signify how community is a contested concept which has no universally agreed meaning (Popple, 1995, Hogget, 1997). However, Thai rural communities have a sense of belonging and mutual recognition and this concept often seems to be used to represent valued homogeneous achievement.

### **3.8 Post-modernism, Communitarianism: the Ideas of the Community**

Community has been given a post-modern and communitarian spin for the twenty first century (Henderson and Salmon, 1998). Post-modernism has focused upon diversity and difference (Mayo, 2000). It has rejected the theories as the story of human progress, and emphasis shifts instead from time to the study of space and place, the local and the global-in an increasing globalised world of mass

communications technologies which is also a world of increasing fragmentation, and difference (Watson and Gibson, 1995). Harvey (1990) has cited that postmodernism is the recognition of the importance of culture and communications. Williams (2004) has also viewed the critical post-modernism as conceptualising community empowerment by the interplay dynamics of power and culture. It theorises power throughout both macro and micro levels. Morley (1995) discussed power as often including references to both Marxist and postmodern positions. In Marxism, power operates in the social formation as ultimately grounded in the economic power of the dominant class. In a post-modern analysis, power is no longer seen as a reified possession, but as capillary-that is, exercised in every moment of social life. In this construction, power is conceptualised as a generative, productive phenomenon, as well as repressive (p.37). Interestingly, he stated that empowerment can be seen as an important process to motivate others and facilitate the development of their creative potential.

Communitarianism is a philosophy that sees family first and then the community as the site of moral norms and obligations, of responsibilities as well as rights. It is based on reciprocity and has advanced community solutions (Taylor, 2003). It has been written that communitarians challenge the liberal assertion that there are wholly rational foundations for ethics, politics and knowledge, arguing that what counts as justice can only be the rooted in human ways of life ( Frazer, 2000).The chances of human fulfilment are not offered by all communities, and this is recognised by communitarians (Taylor,2003). It is argued that inclusive communities are to be distinguished from other forms of community by their co-operative power relations, which enable all their members to participate in the collective processes affecting their lives be (Tam, 1998). Co-operative enquiry is the basis for what is accepted as truth, mutual responsibility based on common values and participation by all those affected in deciding how power will be exercised (p.8). Tam overlooks that the communitarianism imposes cohesion and sees common value, instead, as emerging out of co-operative enquiry and open exchange. He argues that such enquiry is a much stronger basis for democracy than electoral democracy. He sees this co-operative enquiry as an alternative both to authoritarianism and relativism. However, he argues that there are overarching values which are maintained across different cultures. He defines these as the

values of love, wisdom, justice, and fulfilment. He sees mutual responsibility, based on these values, as central to the communitarian ethos (Taylor, 2003: 39).

In this connection, Etzioni (1995) argues for communities where people take responsibility for themselves, their communities and neighbourhood. Communities should encourage positive behaviour by their members such as the development of trust and mutual support. These solidaristic behaviours, it is argued, form the basis of our interactions in families and local neighbourhoods, encouraging communities to support the unfortunate and condemn those seen as transgressing accepted standards of behaviour. Communitarian philosophy is particularly insistent upon the benefits of informal social control that communities can bring. Yet this is not without problems. The insistence on a moral solution to such problems as crime or social neglect clearly overlooks the importance of the material constraints individuals and communities face which can not be easily solved by moral exhortation (Hughes and Mooney, 1998).

Frazer (2000) has claimed that the theme of community has always had a central and prominent place in social theory. A number of connected problems are at the heart of social theory. Communitarianism reveals the relationship between academic, political and social theory, a very abstract philosophical and practical policy. Frazer has clarified communitarianism into three thoughts; these being philosophical, political and vernacular. Of these, the first two issues are the background in social science or law and straightforward politics (Etzioni, 1995, 1997), while the vernacular communitarianism means the ideas, ideals, understandings and theories of a range of political and social actors who think of themselves as community activists, or think that community is of value and community building an important political project. They express a range of beliefs and understanding of community, namely that people ought to do things themselves, not for themselves but for the community.

However, most communitarian social theory and philosophy is somewhat vague at explaining the community by exemplification rather than analysis-such as churches, schools, villages, clubs etc. Community refers to a range of social entities taken together, using the term as an umbrella encompassing churches, schools,

villages, etc. But most theorists emphasise a range of relations such as mutuality and solidarity and dwell on community and sharing. Communitarians differ in their interpretation of the value of community and their criteria for the relation of the community (Frazer, 2000). Communitarians look to the experience of community for moral guidance and promise. Mutuality arises from all the ways in which people are knit together by interdependence, reciprocity and self-interest. Its connotations include harmony, sharing, and commonality, as when we speak of mutual interests, mutual aid, mutual obligations and mutual friends (Selznick, 1998).

Dixon, et al. (2005) have suggested that communitarianism refers the understanding of community, human nature and individual identity. In this regard, communitarianism is recognised as possessing two characteristics within its theoretical base that sustain a broad consensus amongst community theorists, activists and workers: the acknowledgement of 'community' as an essential component within the formation of individual identity and as the means for citizens to achieve improved levels of personal well-being. While Popple (2006) concludes that communitarianism is prominent in the area of development as it is a commitment of partnership, accountability and active citizenship.

They have also pointed out the main theme of communitarians as the supremacy of community, where members experience active engagement, creating democracy that is united around shared core values to community empowerment. It is also associated with the sources of political and societal dimensions.

The following section is the presentation of Sufficiency Economy theory- a philosophical concept of strengthening people and community as well as the overall country in current development schemes in Thailand.

### **3.9 Sufficiency Economy Theory: An Idea of Empowering People, Community and overall Thailand**

The main strengths of community relied upon living within middle paths or moderately with self- help and self-reliance through local wisdom as well as the unity and the harmony of the community. This could be considered as the theme of Sufficiency Economy, the philosophy which was given by King Bhumipol the Great, the present King of Thailand, to lead to the more effective living of all Thais (NESDB, 2001). The philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, based on adherence to the middle path, is advocated to (a) overcome the current economic crisis that was brought about by unexpected change under conditions of rapid globalisation, and (b) achieve sustainable development. Sufficiency Economy is considered to be the main theory of this research, and can be summarised as follows:

Sufficiency Economy is the philosophy that stresses the middle path as the overriding principle for appropriate conduct and way of life of the entire populace. It is applied to conduct the way of life at individual, family, and community levels. At the national level, the philosophy is consistent with the balanced development strategy that would reduce the vulnerability of the nation to shocks and excesses that may arise as a result of globalisation. ‘Sufficiency’ means moderation and due consideration in all modes of conduct, and incorporates the need for sufficient protection from internal and external shocks. To achieve this, the prudent application of knowledge is essential. In particular, great care is needed in the application of theories and technical know- how and in planning and implementation. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen the moral fibre of the nation so that everyone, particularly public officials, academic figures, business people, and financiers adhere first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity. A balanced approach combining patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom, and prudence is indispensable to cope appropriately with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socio-

economic, environmental, and cultural change occurring as a result of globalisation (pp.1-2).

Rigg and Ritchie (2002) explored rural Thailand in terms of production, consumption and imagination, and their paper opens by providing a critique of the construction of rural idyll in Thailand. They view the 'Sufficiency Economy' theory that emerged as a reinvigorated effort to create a 'self-sufficiency' based on integrated agriculture. The vision of the traditional Thai village community is used as the template on which is new, reborn, and containing rurality.

In the King's address of December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1996 (five months before Thailand's economic crisis), the King of Thailand stated:

Being an economic tiger is not important. What is important is to have enough to eat and to live, and to have an economy, which provides enough to eat and live.... If we can change back to a self-sufficient economy, not complete, even not much as half, perhaps just a quarter, we can survive. We need to move backwards in order to move forwards (quote in Phongpaichit and Beker, 2000:193).

The King's vision, along with the applied and academic work of scholar and development workers like Nartsupa (1999, 2001), Kitahara (1996), and others, has been characterised as a 'localism discourse' to 'assert the significance of the rural community as opposition to economic growth...' (Hewison, 2001). Part of this localism discourse (now generally known as New Localism) emphasises the role of the traditional village as a self-sufficient and self-reliant economic unit. But the traditional village is also framed as an ethical social and cultural community where economics is subservient to other considerations (p.21).

Moreover, Mayo (2000) has written a viewpoint on the successful projects of community development, which could be suggested as being not only wells, roads and other community facilities and new crops, but more property and

the development of stable, self-reliant communities with an assured sense of social and political responsibilities. Equally, community strength itself depended upon self-reliance of the community freely and effectively and the capabilities of being independent, having self-supporting and self-possesses. Schumacher (1973), from his *small is beautiful* has outlined a significant suggestion that from the point of view of Buddhist economies, production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life, while dependence on imports from afar and the consequent need to produce for export to unknown and distant people is highly uneconomic and justifiable only in exceptional cases and on a small scale (p.53).

In addition, NESDB (2000) has presented an important study on this new approach to rural development in Thailand. It reported on the new paradigm for rural development strategy using Delphi techniques with the developmental experienced experts-GOs, NGOs and representatives from rural organisations over the country. The report is consistent with the new approach by suggesting a strengthening of local government agency, which differs from that of the community. In this regard, every surrounding dimension must be arranged to the parcelled support of the community strength. Moreover, the study of the NESDB team has given a clear understanding on integrated rural development with human beings as the centre for development in which indicators for the success of rural development implementation process must be emphasised. Six areas of the new paradigm are found for rural development as follows: They are supporting of community participation, natural resource management, increasing agriculture production efficiency, employment outside the agricultural sector and rural enterprises, rural financial and credit development and administration strategy and plan and project framework. The report largely focused on macro level of overall rural villages in Thailand; however, rural villages themselves have different contexts, facing various existing problems so that the strategies presented could not be the antidote for achieving the development over the country.

The following section will present the understanding of community empowerment which signifies the comprehension of the strength of the community.

### **3.10 Community Empowerment: 'The Strength of the Community'**

Community empowerment has become more vital and yet more overtly problematic than ever in the current global context (Craig and Mayo, 1995). Powell (2001) states that community empowerment is supported as a new paradigm based upon participation and has been discussed as the future strategy for social work in a more democratic society. Community Empowerment could be defined as a group of people in various villages assembling as part of organisations, then learning, managing and solving problems that have generated any changes as well as highlighting and economic, social, cultural and environmental development within the community and reflecting on the positive aspects outside. This community is the so-called group, party, community, village organisation, network or others that indicates cooperation for mutual benefits and is supportive of other communities (NESDB, 2001, Wasee, 1999). However, Forrest (1999) indicates that empowerment in the communities of Britain is also dominated by the trend of decentralisation. He illustrates the three essential strands of libratory empowerment which consists of autonomy, multi-level organisation and solidarity. It is accepted that individual empowerment which link to collective action and then creates the interrelationship between personal and group; group and organisation; organisation and community; community and class. This further extends the debate over the meaning of empowerment (p.104).

Community empowerment could be defined as joining a group or party or cooperatives or other names whether registered or not. It is established by voluntarily assembling with mutual purposes and determination, friendships and assistance. It contains continuous learning in problem solving and developing economy, spirit, society, culture and environment and having leaders that naturally occur through working. Community empowerment would be based on the process of people's participation through economic, natural resource, social and cultural dimensions (Tacha-atik, 1999, NESDB, 2001, Wasee, 1999, Sopchokechai, 1998).

In a similar vein, community members are able to get buffering and livelihood from community life; while in turn they are responsible for giving back: contributing to its strength, survival, and power. As empowered people join together to address and



act on community issues and wider political concerns, communities themselves become empowered. In turn, empowered communities serve a growing place for empowering people and a critical mass for grassroots and other forms of community organising (Lee, 2001).

The characteristics of an empowered community have been examined and summarised in the research studies of Tacha-atik (1999), NESDB (2001), Wasee (1998,1999), and Sopchokchai (1998) in rural communities in Thailand context as follows:

- Community members are confident in their potential for identifying and solving their problems and developing their daily lives.
- Community members are ready to participate in problem solving for themselves and for community.
- A continuing and dynamic community process is implied as a current path of life under the support of the community organisation's leaders in the forms of openness, participation, transparency, and accountability.
- All members participate in evaluating the community situation- drafting visions, thinking together, making decisions, implementing, monitoring and evaluating problem solving, and developing the community through community process.
- Community members generate learning processes through participation in community processes.
- Community plans have been formulated and consisted of every developmental aspect that focuses on self-reliance, mutual benefits and sustainable development.
- External assistance as a means to achieve community self-reliance.
- The community should have equal coordination networking with the development partners, such as villagers, other communities, local organisations, public and private sectors, businesses and academics.

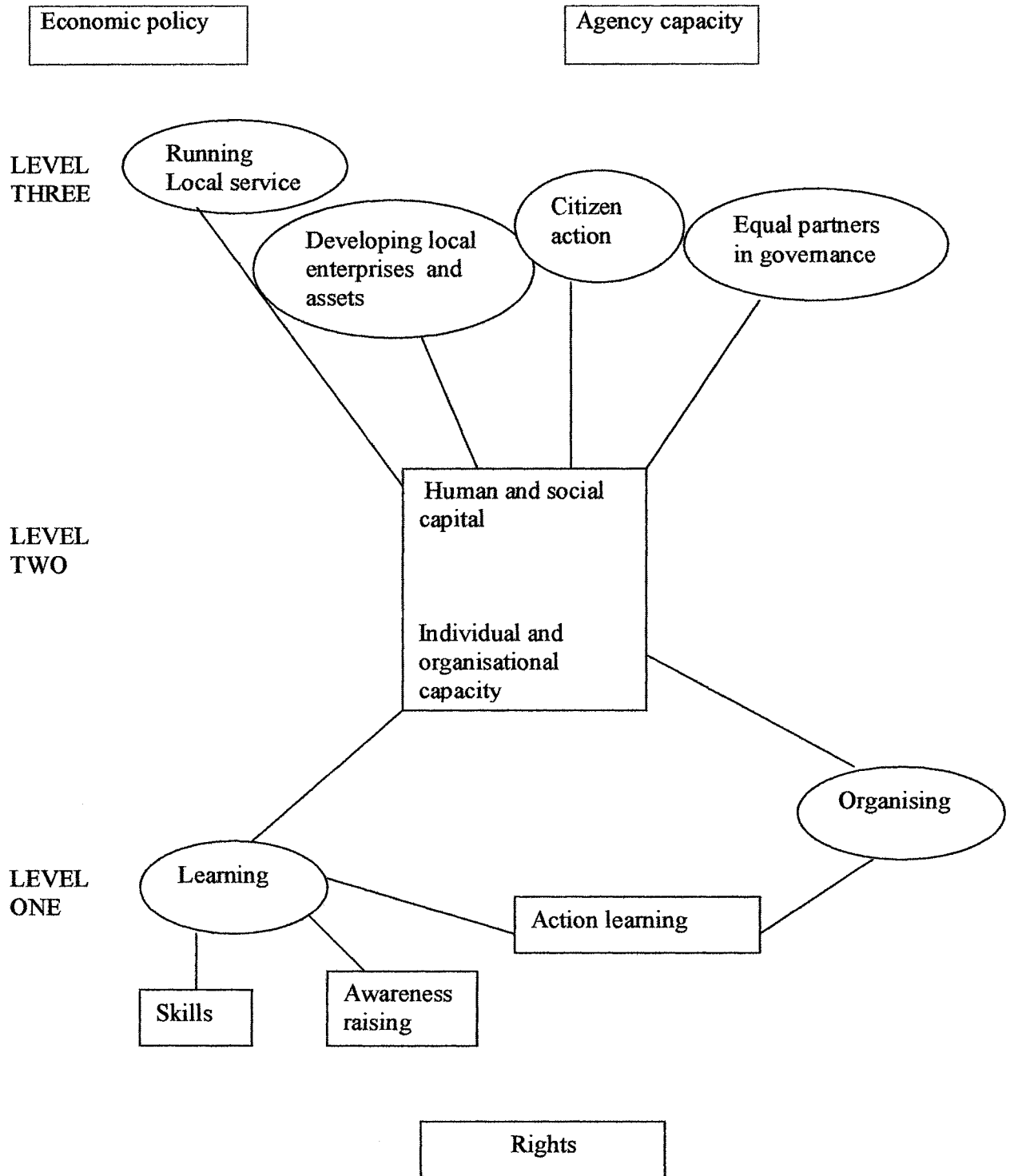
These studies have presented the optimistic views from best practices on community empowerment in Thailand, which is the combination of its ideal concepts promoting as well as stimulating its strength when Thailand has faced

economic crisis. It is outlined that community empowerment from these points of view indicates the process as having occurred in the rural Thai community.

The problem with these community action accounts of empowerment is that community action does not suit everyone. Emphasising the process in this way implies that without community action, people cannot become empowered. Similarly, O'Neal and O'Neal (2003) state that empowerment includes concepts of giving power, authorising or enabling relationships within the following domains: personal/individual and family, socio-cultural, political and economic. Paradoxically, it is questionable if this empowerment is strong enough that no one can really empower anyone else. Williams (2004) has also viewed community empowerment as how communities strengthen their ability to take collective action on issues of their choosing and to make positive changes in their environments. Its practice generally bases itself upon community development, which is an incremental process through which individuals, families and communities gain the power, insight and resources to make decisions and take action regarding their well-being. The actions of empowered community members can achieve desired changes and tip the power balance in their favour (Lee, 2001).

In short, community empowerment is a working relationship of people both inside and outside the community which takes a gradual growth. Taylor (2003) has proposed the three overall concept levels of community empowerment as The Three levels of An Empowerment Tree in the following figure:

Figure 3.1 An Empowerment Tree



Source: Taylor (2003:178).

From Figure 3.1 it could be identified that at Level One the community potential and building capacity, which are the essential foundations for effective community

change initiatives, are present. Without effective approaches to community learning, engaging and organisation, more high-profile initiatives are unlikely to be sustainable. The first step in empowerment is to build the confidence of community people. The roots of change at Level One are the local facilities, activities and educational activities that are required if individuals are to set out on the empowerment journey and gain the confidence and skills they need to engage in these initiatives. Level Two of this diagram represents the development level of the individual and collective capacity which are human, social and organisational capitals. This level also combines the relationship of all the capitals in the community. Then it provides Level Three, so that the community members take charge of their own futures, run their own services, develop their own economic enterprises and engage with outside agencies and other communities, whether of territory or locality, to ensure community change. She also speculates that the overall levels will depend upon the environment of the community which could be both inside and outside. She compares that to being like the tree that depends on soil, fertiliser and climate that nurtures the tree planted. She has suggested that the individual empowerment must be rooted in basic political, economic and social rights that underpin the citizenship of the people (Taylor, 2003:158, 176-179). Significantly, these three steps of the empowerment tree could be affected from both internal and external socio-economic and political contexts. Every step could be interconnected with each other. It is indicated that community empowerment is a process that allows individuals and groups to organise and mobilise themselves toward social and political movement (Laverack, 2003).

The following section presents the significant components of community empowerment.

### **3.11 Community Participation**

The route to empowerment lies through involvement and participation (Craig and Mayo, 1995). Development theorists and practitioners have lectured the world about the need for the participation of ordinary people in development for more than two decades (Shepherd, 1998). Shepherd defines participation by recognising that it is potentially conflictual and that redistribution of power is involved. This means that

there will be interests opposing participation, based on political affiliation, class, race, ethnicity or gender. Participation is closely tied to equity and empowerment.

The term participation has been problematic, with differing meanings based upon different perspectives. It is also a vital component of self-help and the empowerment process (Richardson, 1983). People must be involved in those decisions that affect their lives, thus gaining confidence, self-esteem and knowledge and developing new skills. Participation must be the sort that facilitates learning, action and the achievement of goals. There is an apparent consensus that participation is an important component of empowerment.

Cahill (1996)'s examination of literature on participation concludes that these concepts are hierarchically related, as shown in figure 3.2 below:



Figure 3.2 The hierarchical relationship between the concept (Cahill, 1996)

From that figure, it could be seen that participation means partnership working while involvement and collaboration can be seen as the passive participation.

However, Popple (1995) argues that participation tends to politically support the work of government policy in terms of enhancing social democracy. He gives the view that participation is to be appeased rather than to be liberated. Similarly, Shepherd (1998) has outlined participation as, ultimately, an aspect of political development. In rural development participation is not primarily about inclusion or the involvement of the poor in development projects, but about the development of organisations and sets of organisations in which the poor can articulate their interests, defend what they have, and stake out new field of promise. These organisations may be very small groups of individuals

but need to be linked with others in networks, associations and movements (Gilchrist, 2004).

- *Degrees or levels of Participation*

Participation in the context of development has degrees or levels of participation. Kemshall and Littlechild (2000) state that to assist an understanding the degrees or levels of participation broad themes are required. At a simple level, a distinction is drawn between full and partial participation: full participation is a process where power to determine the outcome of decision is shared equally. The word partnership is sometimes used to describe forms of participation. The range of participatory opportunities is sometimes presented as a scale or ladder, the most commonly quoted example being Arnstein's model (1969). Arnstien (1969) has provided an earlier example of measuring participation though the following 'ladder of citizen participation' see Table 3.1

*Table 3.1 The ladder of Participation*

8 Citizen control 7 Delegated Power 6 Partnership	Degrees of Citizen Power
5 Placation 4 Consultation 3 Informing	Degrees of Tokenism
2 Therapy 1 Manipulation	Non-Participation

*Source: Adapted from Arnstein (1969:217)*

From Arnstein's ladder of participation, there are eight 'rungs' from the bottom to the top-from the Manipulation at the bottom to the Citizen control-ranging from non-participation to Degree of Citizen Power. The ladder of participation offers only a few rungs that provide citizen power as genuine participation. Many strands of government and organisations are able to enhance consultation and often use of this word in policy statements seems to imply the expectation

of a resultant social equality (Watt et al., 2000). However, Arnstein (1969) argues that consultation is only one of the rungs in the degrees of Tokenism which is considered as passive participation and it is not a partnership working which could reach citizen empowerment.

Community participation could be seen as concerning economic development, empowerment and social justice (Mayo, 1994). It could lead to greater project efficiency and local resource mobilisation. Conversely it could also lead to local communities making increased demands for more services (p.65). In this connection, SCCD (2001) has stated that participation is about allowing people to become active partners in the regeneration of communities by contributing and sharing in decisions that affect their lives. Participation should enable people to have a degree of power and control in the processes with which they are involved. It enables individuals to build their own capacity and leads to a redistribution of power within the society (Taylor, 2000, Dutt, 2004).

Morrissey (2000) has discussed the pilot project on developing indicators of citizen participation which attempted to draw out the specifics of three broad categories of the following participation indicators: the effectiveness of citizen participation in an on going process of comprehensive rural development process indicators, the impact of participation on individual human development and community capacity developmental benefits, and the impact of participation on policy, decision-making or broader community change-instrumental benefits. However, Twelvetrees (2002) has examined horizontal and vertical participation. He has indicated participation by ordinary people in activities run by the community itself is sometimes called horizontal participation, while participation in programmes which are the responsibility of the government or other agencies can be seen as vertical participation.

Campfens (1997:461) has provided analysis from his six country studies on community participation, the North representing developed countries and the South representing those developing. The following participation factors are: an open and democratic environment, a decentralised policy with greater emphasis on local initiatives, reform in public administration, democratisation of professional experts

and officials, formation of self-managing organisations of the poor and excluded, training for community activism and leadership, involvement of NGOs and creation of collective decision-making structures at various levels that extend from the micro to the meso and macro levels and link participatory activities with policy frameworks. His work signified the importance of participation on the roles of community development and its empowerment.

### **3.12 Self-sufficiency and Self-reliance**

Both self-sufficiency and self-reliance are the key components of community empowerment. Ambiguously, the question of self-sufficiency remains in most empowerment discussions. How much must people do for themselves? How much they feel sufficient? It is genuinely how much empowering needs to be based upon the democratic community's development principles. Rist (2000) has developed interesting principles of self-reliance, aiming at the essence of social autonomy and its originality in compassion with the dominant model, which can be summarised as follows : what self-reliance is not, they are: self-reliance is not just a matter of first producing the goods needed by the most destitute layers. Such a policy can also be applied within bureaucratic-managerial perspectives.

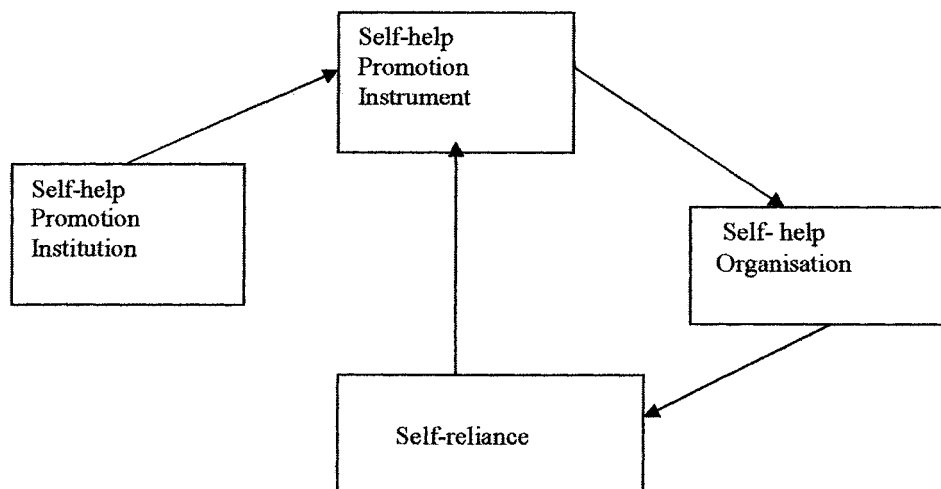
Meanwhile the bases of self-reliance are : democratic control of production is the basic condition for self-reliance; it prioritises the use of locally available factors of production and does not consider international trade as a substitute for research- it stimulates creativity and confidence in one's own values; self-reliance adapts the people's way of life to the locally existing factors and environment, with positive ecological and cultural results; it involves various forms of 'development' and rejects the imitation of imported models. Rist also expands his study at the national level on self-reliance, and states that in order to maintain our independence and our people's freedom, we ought to be self-reliant in every possible ways and avoid depending upon other countries for assistance. If the whole nation is self-reliant, it is exactly the ultimate goal (p.129).

Verhagen's (1984, 1987) examined community with the NGO, including an analysis of an experiment in participatory research and planning with small farmers



in Sri Lanka and Thailand, and revealed that self-help as a means to achieve self-reliance. It can be summarised that self-reliance is a state or condition whereby an individual or group of persons having achieved such a condition no longer depends on the benevolence or assistance of third parties to secure individual or group interests. By implication, a self-reliant group has developed sufficient analytical, productive and organisational capacity to design and implement strategy. This effectively contributes to the betterment of the conditions of life for its membership and the maintenance of its independent status. Self-reliance should not be confused with autarky. In present society, no group or community can survive as a self-sufficient unit. Interaction with other groups has become as unavoidable as it is indispensable. Self-reliance, however, implies a style of interaction. The relationship between self-help promotion institutions, self-help promotion instruments, self-help organisations and self-reliance as a self-propelling progress which can be illustrated as follows:

*Figure 3.3: Self-help promotion a part of a process*



Source: Verhagen (1984:24).

Self-reliance is the core component of empowerment. In addition, Hamsupothi (2003) examined self-reliance at village level in Thailand by pursuing this topic with several objectives. The research developed a set of indicators for the actual assessment of degrees of self-reliance in sampled villages. The study sought to formulate policy on self-reliance at the village level by using both qualitative and

quantitative approaches through group process technique, mainly the Delphi Technique. Hamsupothi has labelled a policy aiming at potential development for self-reliance must be declared by the government, with the strategies of structural reformation of administrative system in place to enable all ministries and departments to improve the development function and services for people; and further potential development of administrators, offices, community leaders and members of all villages. These two strategies have to be implemented in tandem.

Meanwhile, Hewison (2001), perhaps inevitably, points to a good deal of confusion, perhaps inevitably or at least difference of opinion, over what 'self-sufficiency and self-reliance' mean in the context of the discourse of localism. He sees it in absolutist, almost anarchic terms: self-sufficiency and self-reliance at the level of village and the move, it would seem, the better discussions (Nartsupha, 1991, 1999). Phongpaichit and Baker (2000) merely call for a greater consideration of local resources, technologies and capabilities where the local can be interpreted in terms of appropriateness- from the village, sub-district, district or province, up to the national scale. Another theme of these more moderate localists is their call for a 'moral' market to replace the amorality of the capital system (Rigg and Ritchie, 2002:21).

In contrast, historians, economists, anthropologists, rural sociologists and geographers have questioned whether villages in Thailand were ever self-reliant and subsistence-oriented, whether they could be characterised as 'moral' economies, and whether they were cooperate and egalitarian. Indeed some have questioned whether the 'village' in Thailand is an identifiable unit, and ever existed at all as units within the administrative reforms of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Critical comment on New Localism has also been concentrated among Western scholars (Rigg, 1994; Hewison, 2001). However, Rist (2000) gave a counterpoint that self-reliance is not the same as self-sufficiency or economic autarky, although food self-sufficiency is one of its objectives. Particularly, 'village' or 'community' in Thailand has still an ideal concept of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. The villages have all been supported by the government, especially by the present one which provided the village fund to all villages in Thailand, with the ideal ultimate goal to

promote self-management in the community. However, this seemed to reduce the self-reliance of the community.

As mentioned earlier, however, the key concept of an empowered community is how villagers become more self-reliant and more self-sufficient. The following section also presents community learning as an important component of community empowerment.

### **3.13 Community Learning**

The community learning process within community development helps people realise what is beneficial for the community and how to identify and solve problems together. Learning organisations are known as local wisdom, which is social heritage and tradition learning. It is taught through real hands-on experience and it is mostly taught to groups by a qualified, respected elder. There is a basic understanding that human desire is to know, to do, to be or to become. Learning is a process through which changes in the state of knowledge 'know what', skills 'know how' and values and dispositions 'know why' of an individual or of an organisation occurs (Butcher and Robertson, 2003). It is a powerful process of change- from ignorance to knowledge- from not knowing how to do something to being competent enough to do so. Learning also changes a person's behaviour permanently and continuously (Wasee, 1996, Phongphit, 2003). It is concerned here primarily with learning that goes on in the context of the community setting.

The process of learning within a community will happen by accident, because a person tries to learn by him or herself or within a group. Learning can occur within the family and community or outside the family and community (Wasee, 1996). The learning process in and of itself is a natural one, a process that is incorporated into everyday life and in human socialisation. It is dynamic and never ending; it is never static or finished, and knowledge that is relevant to the community, such as history, herb lore, culture and ways of living alongside life experiences which can be defined as the local wisdom (Phongphit, 2003, 2005). Therefore, the usage of the learning process is threefold: 1) to have knowledge of the truth, 2) to develop the

ability to integrate various knowledge together, and 3) to develop a conscience as a person who understands the relationship between themselves and their surroundings. There are three ways of learning 1) learning from the five senses (the environment), 2) learning from thinking, observation, and listening, all the while developing the ability to make good assumptions, and 3) learning through conscience, which lets a person make shrewder decisions based on morality. (Wasee, 1996, Phongphit, 2003).

- *Experiential Learning*

Experiential learning is learning that occurs in and through engagement with real day to day problems and issues. This learning takes place while planning to do something, while actually doing it, while reflecting on how it was done, in drawing out generalisations 'lesson' from the experience of doing it, and on deciding how things might be tackled differently in the future (Butcher and Robertson, 2003). From the theory of Kolb, learning through experience is learning that incorporates the mind, emotion, values, and thinking process of the various individual involved. The resulting knowledge is therefore an integration of experiences that changes through time. The process of learning thus can be divided into four types: 1) experience through hands-on work or experience, 2) decisions made from the exchange of ideas, 3) the birth of a new thinking process or principle, and 4) the use of the knowledge in the context of a new situation (Kolb, 1984; Dixon, 1994).

Community people have learned from trial and error. Knox (1977: 435) points out that adults are only more likely to retain information that they receive if it is meaningful for them and they are able to integrate it into the store of knowledge that they already have. So learning, it has been argued elsewhere (Jarvis, 1987, 2004), is the process of transforming that present experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and emotions. It is a matter, therefore, of modifying the individual biography, which in turn will affect the manner by which future situations are experienced.

Longworth (1999: 6-7) has stated the positive learning community is one that could be that which co-operates closely in making it a physically, economically, culturally and mentally pleasant place to live, where no-one is excluded from learning and in which learning is an enjoyable and rewarding thing to do. A learning community can make all its resources, especially its human resources, talents, skills and knowledge, available to all. It encourages its citizens to develop personal learning plans and use guides and mentors to develop their knowledge and skills. It mobilises special interest groups and the many informal organisations in which people congregate in the monitoring and preservation of a sustainable environment. It also celebrates learning frequently and encourages whole families to participate.

In addition, within the literature of organisational learning, there is a close link between concepts of empowerment and learning. Moreover, learning organisations often display a culture of empowerment (Watkins and Marsick, 1993). Peam et al. (1995) also suggested that it is not possible to become a learning organisation without a high commitment to empowerment. This has indicated direct implications for the management of organisational learning.

Active participation has itself been seen as a form of education in the broadest sense. Findings have emerged from studies in the United States, via a survey of respondents in community activities in rural areas, indicating significant learning being associated with community participation, and the greater the level of respondents' participation, the greater the learning (Lackey and Dershem, 1992). Rappaport (1998:226, 230) describes how, when people share their stories, they can create a new shared narrative: narratives create memory, meaning and identity among individuals. All communities have narratives about themselves and these have powerful effects on their members and their thoughts about themselves, their history and their future. Without community knowledge and skill, all social workers or community development workers are limited in their community work. People tend to be most positive about learning in adult life. It is concluded that adult learning builds upon people's experiences (Field, 2005).

Community learning can be seen from how people have formed and joined the groups by themselves. People join groups for a variety of the following reasons. They are engaging in shared activities (including education), gaining a sense of belonging and identity, providing mutual support, providing services or support for others in their community or another's, fight against a threat from outside or to defend rights and privileges that are under attack, trying to get a better deal for themselves and their community, and gaining influence in the wider environment (Taylor, Barr and West, 2000).

Informal education and mutual learning are important aspects. Through their involvement in groups and activities, people acquire and rediscover talents, skills, knowledge and understanding which enable them to take on new roles and responsibilities. This contributes to life-long learning by creating opportunities for reflection and the evaluation of experience, allowing knowledge to be shared through critical dialogue and building confidence amongst people who have neglected or abandoned their formal education at an earlier age. Community development encourages people to overcome those fears, prejudices and attitudes which restrict their participation and limit their self-esteem. (SCCD, 2001:8). Community learning is critical and information and knowledge are primary bases of the economy. Knowing history and making the connections to the present time is a key part of learning and leads to community empowerment.

The following section examines the significance of community culture which is one of the core mechanisms of community empowerment.

### **3.14 Community Culture: the Root of the Development**

Culture is variously perceived as a constraint, the glue that keeps the community together and a resource to be tapped in development (Cleaver, 2001). In the sociological sense, culture is defined as 'learned behaviours, nurture rather than nature, humankind's social inheritance, the skills, knowledge and accepted ways of behaving of the society, the way of life of society members, a design for living which is both learned and shared' (Haralambos and Holborn, 1991). In this sense, therefore, without culture, there is no human society. It has been suggested that

'culture' is probably the broadest concept of all those used in the historical social sciences. Culture is always defined anthropologically as the whole way of life (Mayo, 2000). The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology defines 'culture' as 'the accumulated stores of symbols, ideas and material products associated with a social system, whether it is an entire social system or family' (Johnson, 1995:68). Giddens (1989) gave a sociologically significant definition that culture consists of the members involved in a group, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create. He pointed out its concept that includes material as well as ideological aspects, societal patterns of work as well as its custom, family life, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits (p.310).

Chile and Simpson (2004) have stated that spirituality dwells within every culture and every geographical community because, as people search for meaning, spirituality becomes embedded in their ways of life (Fabry, 1980), and informs their ethics and desires. They have pointed out that religion is one of ways through which spirituality finds expression. Spirituality involves the relationship between the individual, the collective and the universe. Spirituality shapes relationships with people and their environment underpinning respect for diversity. This creates the basis of mutual interdependence. This interdependence is captured in the Buddhist concept of karma, symbolising the interconnectedness of human right and all reality. Community development based on spirituality includes at least the reduction of inequality, enhancement of personal values, social justice and empowerment. Buddha realised the human rights and freedoms were integral to growth and self-realisation and that social justice and full participation were essential to the organic interdependency of all beings (Jones, 1993).

NESDB (2001) has presented further themes developed from workshops throughout Thailand discussing the creation of blueprints for the National Ninth Plan dictating the future of Thai Society. This vision suggests it should be based on *Thai Culture* and conservations on Thai identity to promote change and desirable values in Thai society in three areas, namely: 'Quality society': based on balance and self-sufficiency. People should be responsible, practical and efficient with self-reliance and morality. 'Wisdom society or learning society':

Thai people should have a lifelong commitment to learning processes through local wisdom and be ready for improvement. And 'Harmonious society': created through the promotion of national cultural identity, generosity and helpfulness, especially to underprivileged groups of society and strengthening self-reliance in the community for well-being of the Thai society (pp.2-3).

Significantly, Thailand is known as a rich country in terms of cultural identity especially in rural areas. Mutuality, neighbourhood, shared value and vision, shared religious values as well as mutual unity are considered to be the core keys to rural culture. The challenges of contemporary society have transformed the monk's role as a community leader, from personal, social and ethical counsellor to social and environmental activists (Chile and Simpson, 2004).

The following section presents the leadership which is an important component of community empowerment.

### **3.15 Leadership: Leading to the Strength of the Community**

Leadership is supposed to be a substitute for rules, quotas and targets. Leaders can be trained to be capable across a wide variety of competences and to play different roles. According to Cook (1997), empowerment has to do with power which operates at various levels-within a person, between people and between groups. Correspondingly, it is possible to speak about empowering an individual in the absolute sense in which the person becomes more able to direct his or her own life and succeed in whatever they attempt. Secondly, it is possible to speak in terms of empowering a person relatively in relation to other specific people: and finally, to empower a group relative to other groups (Ugbomeh, 2001).

However, Purdue et al. (2000:3) have studied the community leaders with the conclusion that it is a strange animal that becomes involved in community politics. They also comment that much of observed community leadership behaviour has, in practice, been grappling with complexity, diversity and conflict embedded in the concept of community. Leadership always leads to create the promotion of community empowerment. Also, Shepherd (1998) explored leadership as a



culturally relative notion, and development agencies should attempt to reveal its characteristics in any particular place. This is not only about possessing competences, but also an interactive process. Followers have to be led, willingly, but usually with incentives and sanctions, and some support from both the narrow organisation and wider culture. Effective innovators are rare as a result, and should be cherished (pp.248-249).

Additionally, Tacha-atik , et al. (1997) have explored the role of rural villages' leaders in organisations in Northeastern Thailand, finding that the success of an organisation is highly depended on its leaders. Their study used in-depth interviews with people in 8 villages in the Northeast and largely focused critically on the common characteristics of the leaders as having the ability to manage the organisation, being unselfish, having charisma, and having good will. Leaders who have these characteristics have gained acceptance from their members. They also indicated that one leader may have many characteristics, for instance, being an ideal and activity leader at the same time. Leaders could be classified as ideal leader, moral leader, occupational leader, influential leader, leader who combine government and local activities and resource channelling leader.

However, Miller (2004) indicated that leadership must be located within the relationship between leaders and followers. He summarises that leadership is identified by many characteristics. These are the ability to maintain a following in a particular situation through the building of a trust founded on success, consistency and role modeling.

Community leadership is significant in the context of development especially in the rural community of Thailand. There are many types of rural leaders both formal and informal and all play important roles in community empowerment.

### **3.16 Discourses of Community Development**

Development is an idea, objective and activity. These are all interrelated (Kothari and Minogue, 2002). When the idea of development is examined, an area of theory is being explored. When the establishment of objectives is attempted, the process is

being delineated and the ideas are turned into practice. An examination of actual practice entails detailed analysis of activities. Such an analysis should tell us whether the objectives have been met, and in turn whether the theory has been realised (p.12).

Gilchrest (2003, 2004) has defined community development as being about the development of the capacity of local populations to respond collectively to events and issues that affect them. It is seen as a set of techniques rather than a body of expertise which incorporates a specific value system relating to social justice. It is a distinct and valuable approach which can be applied across a range of policy areas and in a variety of settings. Social justice, participation equality, learning and cooperation should inform community development interventions.

Community development has taken place in developed countries such as in Britain and the United States in an effort to respond to serve urban and occasionally rural loss (Ramon, 1998). Early efforts in community work have focused mainly on community development through self-help. The attempts were undertaken by missionaries in rural areas with funds donated by philanthropic organisations, aiming to improve health and community facilities and to establish residents' co-operatives (Parsloe, 1996). The roots of community development, as had been developed by the British in their colonies, lay in programmes for basic education-subsequently called mass education, to provide literacy training, and stimulate self-help initiatives in agriculture, health and other social service areas (Mayo, 2000). Work has been defined as community development because of a very clear focus on locality, such as the population in a region to prevent crime, since the place of a community is easily known as a focus for community initiatives (Ramon, 1998).

Community development has a long story in the developing countries all over the world. Midgley (1995) states that it is a way of responding to social dislocation arising from rapid social change and destruction by colonial powers of traditional social relations in colonial times. Community development maintained such traditional social relations as they continued to exist and sought to translate them into new social objectives by promoting participation in economic and industrial development. The mainstream of community work has been basically non-political.

The case of community work practice, by its nature, should be the most political sector of all (Parsloe, 1996)-development schemes in developing countries were characterised as corrupt and full of political patronage, self-seeking and inefficiency in the 1980s.

SCCD (2001:5) has stated that community development is about active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in issues that affect their lives. Powell (2001) has also argued that community development is an essential ingredient in inclusive practice because of its associations with consciousness raising, democratic dialogue and empowerment. However, community development can be a resource for a variety of political traditions. In radical pluralism with its cognition of conflicting and unequal interests, it is an organising tool to address excessive inequities. Within a structural conflict model those advocates of radical change adopt it as a means of political mobilisation to maintain existing hierarchies of privilege that can ensure tighter state control (Pople, 1995).

As Thailand is a developing country, community development has a different context because it is the only country in Southeast Asia that has never been colonised. Community development has begun in the country since the National First Plan, covering the past four decades, and heavily focused on economic development both in urban and rural areas. Community development in Thailand has been financially, politically and inclusively supported by the United States of America because Thailand was considered to be threatened by communism (Brokensha and Hodge, 1969, Mayo, 2000). The main efforts focused on the improvement of the living of local people applying the community development approach with the concept of promoting self-reliance and people's participation.

### **3.17 The 'Community Development Approach'**

Twelvetrees (2002) has examined a community approach from the main tasks of the community workers who work in small neighbourhoods. They usually operate in two main ways. The first way, titled the community approach, is to assist

existing groups or help people form new autonomous groups. This approach is the most unique in community work. It emphasises the objectivity of workers and implies that they will work 'non-directively' with people on what *they* decide to become involved with, whether it is running a playgroup or campaigning for better services. Another approach presented by Twelvetrees is the social planning approach in which a worker operates by liaising and working directly with policy-makers and service providers to sensitise them to the needs of specific communities, and to assist them to improve services or alter policies. In this view, Twelvetrees states all community workers need to be able to work in both kinds of approaches. In a similar vein, the community approach has been applied in a developmental context in rural Thailand for four decades but needs consistent improvements. The main approach has been mostly concerned with the non-directive approach as suggested by Batten (1957, 1967). He suggested this method was particularly suitable in non-crisis situations where the case was for stimulating people to think and act for themselves and thereby develop themselves, and become correspondingly strong.

Kelly and Caputo (2005) have presented the results of a case study that provides a unique approach and some interesting insights into the process of community development. It has indicated that grassroots initiatives could maintain their independence and autonomy while working with the government agencies. The study signified the distinctive strategy for directing the needs of the community in relation to community development, for instance community mobilisation, capacity building, planning, partnership and sustainability involved in community development within the roles of both government organisations and non government organisations. If community self-help is to be encouraged then there needs to be a serious investment in community development and social capital building. Both have the capacity to encourage mutual aid indirectly (Burns et al., 2004).

Community development has much to offer the Thai government and society generally but the community still faces the challenge of poverty, inequality, and out-migration, the causes of which are to be found in Thailand's social and political history and the present global political economy. However, the community

contexts are always different from each other so that the approach needs to be adjusted and properly applied due to the contexts of the community.

### **3.18 Sustainable Development: The Ultimate Goal of the Development**

The term 'sustainable development' has been in use for about three decades but has only recently been popularised. It derived originally from the biological concept of 'sustainable yield' within the field of long-term environment (Morris, 2002). The most common definition of the term derives from a report prepared for the World Commission on Environment and Development, published in 1987. It stated that humanity has the ability to make development sustainable-to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (p.8).

The first effort was aimed at the environment, which is only one aspect of sustainable development. Warburton (1998) gives a critical concept of sustainable development as follows: it is itself a critique, not only of earlier forms of development and their social and environmental consequences, but also of the way development has been undertaken in the past. The concept of sustainable development brings these ideas together and presents a fundamentally challenging shift in global politics creating, for the first time, an ethic which encompasses a challenge to the inevitability of poverty and inequality, recognising not only the need for economic development to meet human needs but also the imperative to halt environmental destruction, and which involves maximum community participation, empowerment and local activism (p.3).

There are a lot of discourses on the definitions of sustainable development and the term of 'sustainability'. It is critically defined that sustainability is the destination while sustainable development is the journey (Moseley, 2003). He also defined *sustainability* as the capacity for continuance into the long-term future. It is built around the notion of conserving capital, which could be summarised as follows: *environmental capital*, which comprises stocks and flows of energy and matter, and physical states such as climatic conditions or ecosystems, to which they give

rise; *human capital*, which comprises the ability of individual people to do productive work, whether paid or unpaid, and therefore includes their physical and mental health, their strength and stamina, their knowledge, skills, motivation and attitudes; *social capital*, which relates not to *individual* people but to social structure, institutions and shared values which enable individuals to maintain and develop their human capital and to be productive. It, therefore, embraces firms, trade institutions and shared values which enable individuals to maintain and develop their human capital and to be productive including trade union, families, communities, informal friendship networks, voluntary organisations, legal and political systems, educational institutions, the health service, financial institutions, systems of property rights etc. and *manufactured capital*, which comprises of material goods such as tools, machines, buildings and infrastructure, all of which contribute to the production process becoming embodied in its output (p.20).

To have sustainability for country development, the strengths and existing social capital in society should be considered, particularly within the community which is the core unit for making it self-reliant (NESDB, 2001). Jacobs (1995, 1996) cites that sustainable development requires participatory action, which includes an identification with democratic community because it depends on the 'the legitimacy and trust with which governments are perceived and the sense of citizenship which enables individuals to participate in civic society'. For this reason, sustainable development almost certainly implies a renewal and rejuvenation of the democratic process. It may be in the activities of NGOs and community organisations that positive change is most evident, as such groups are finding creative and lasting ways of making their - and therefore our - world better.

Whilst, Morse, et al. (2001) have examined sustainability indicators and the problem of integration, finding that sustainability indicators are increasingly seen as important tools of the sustainable development presenting sustainability indicators by drawing upon the results of a six-year research project based in a village in Nigeria. Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches comprised of surveys, semi-structured interviews and observations, they concluded that an element of qualitative integration incorporating value judgement and subjectivity is inevitable within a concept such as sustainability, even if one begins with what may seem like

sharp and quantitative sustainability indicators. It is argued that sustainability indicators are a product of development intervention rather than a desire to understand, and as a result carry with them the desired characteristics, from the donor perspectives, of efficiency and accountability.

It is interesting to note that sustainable development should satisfy all human needs-physical, mental, emotional and spiritual-through personal responsibility, mutual aid, government enabling, with minimum consumption of scarce resources (Ronney, 1995). It is also claimed that communities need to develop economic self-reliance as a basis for dignity and self-determination.

As mentioned previously, sustainable development is concerned with improving the overall quality of life as well as satisfying human needs. Moreover, sustainable development implies the need to have people-centred initiatives. Therefore, the sustainable development has been viewed as an implication of the community empowerment.

The following section focuses on local government and the idea of decentralisation, to examine if it is a supportive issue which strengthens the community.

### **3.19 Local government: An idea of Decentralisation**

Decentralisation is documented as a strategy rather than a new structure, but it is widely seen as a method of improving the responsiveness of local government. It is also seen as empowering because of the closer relationship between residents and officials that is said to be an aspect of more local service, but also because of the involvement of residents in democratic processes, such as council committee. Decentralisation was a major aspect of local government in the 1980s. It could be stated that decentralisation has been seen as a major strategy for empowerment (Servian, 1996). It is the involvement of individual citizens in decision-making and other participatory processes, and the values these rights represent. Empowerment is freeing from government, and the politics of decentralisation may also come under this heading. Angell et al. (2001) concluded that decentralisation could increase the potential of economic and political liberalisation for development. It could make a

real contribution to further efforts in reducing poverty; that local resources of human capital, entrepreneurship and natural resources could be put to better use under decentralisation. Furthermore, local government with energy and appropriate policies could work with local entrepreneurs to stimulate the process.

The alternative view is described as 'community governance' in the broadest sense; providing community leadership, co-ordination of services, democratic accountability, and a fair and efficient monitoring service. This requires the balancing of a number of conflicting roles, for instance, direct service provider, regulator, contractor, community representative, and enabler.

- *Sub-District Administrative Organization (SDAO): A form of Local government in Thailand*

The Sub-District Administrative Organisation (SDAO) is the most decentralised organisation at the grass roots level, and is a formal organisation. Its functions are to develop and carry out all development projects in the Sub-district. Its introduction has caused a historical change in local government systems in Thailand, in which the government decentralised its power to the people at a district and village level for the first time. In terms of its authorities, the SDAO is responsible for economic, social and cultural development within its own jurisdiction as indicated by law. These activities include the construction and maintenance of road and waterway systems, garbage disposal and wastewater treatment, prevention and relief of public disaster, promotion of local education, religion and culture, promotion of a development of women, children, youth, senior citizen and disabled persons, support of network resources and environmental development and management. Moreover, the SDAO may assume other duties such as providing clean water, providing and maintaining of public electricity, building recreation centres, public parks and sport centres, promotion of family industry, job creation and other social welfare activities. It is considered to be the real developmental organisation at a grass roots level to serve the real needs of community people (Department of Local Administration, 1998).

However, local government needed to have some flexibility, autonomy and independence, the qualities that local administrators complained constantly that they



lacked. Fox and Aranda (1996) indicated that the impact of decentralisation on government responsiveness depended more on the structures of governance than on funding flow. The impact of decentralisation on accountability depended upon how representative local government was before receiving additional external resources. Meanwhile Avebury (1990) proposed that participation and decentralisation through local government structures alone could not be very effective. The challenge was to make the state more responsive to the rightful demands of the poor and underprivileged. Local government for participation was used in such development. Local government was a form of induced participation (UN, 1990). In addition, the developing society had to initiate political development to make effective local government and empower more creative networking (Gilchrist, 2004).

The report stated that the strengths at Sub-District and village level depended upon community organisations. Those that had learned through local wisdom, had strong self-reliance and the ability to analyse in solving poverty and natural resource problems. There was a good relationship between the situations of learning empowerment and organisational development (Wasee, 1997). From past experience, however, the level of participation by villagers in village development planning and decision-making processes had been less than desirable. Instead, village development needs and plans had normally been formulated and initiated by several village leaders and government officers who decided for all villagers. The perspectives among villagers, in fact, indicated that community development was a government function. Many development projects failed to meet the real needs of villagers or failed to achieve development objectives. So they could not solve the problems confronted by villagers (Sopchokechai , 1998).

## **Summary**

This chapter is a review; it has outlined the traditions and advances made in the past and current studies of community empowerment. It has located an understanding of the involvement of the community empowerment context of this study. Meaningfully, community participation, self-sufficiency, self-reliance, community learning, community culture and leadership, and the roles of local government are

viewed as the main, significant components of community empowerment. Also, they are interrelated to enhance community empowerment. Furthermore, the sense of community, the idea of community as communitarianism as well as the theory of Sufficiency Economy have been indicated, clarifying a better understanding of studying the community and how to lead to empowering the community. The review has also linked to key perspectives of community development in Thailand.

In the next chapter, the research methodology will be presented explaining the overall methods used within the whole process of conducting this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to explain, describe and justify the methods applied in this investigation. Firstly, the fundamental concepts of the research design are presented to illustrate the ontological perspective, epistemological position and methodological strategy. Subsequently, the values of the qualitative research design are discussed.

The various rigorous methods used in this research are also detailed, namely the use of focus groups discussion, interviews and observations that explore, in-depth, the understanding of community empowerment in six villages in the Loei Province, Thailand. Moreover, the use of fieldwork is outlined along with an explanation of the strengths and limitations of the methods. In addition, the analysis of research reflexivity, ethical principles and trustworthiness as credibility are presented. Also, working in two languages is depicted in order to understand the issues faced by the researcher working in Thai and presenting in English.

Data collection periods started in February 2002 and concluded in July 2003; it took eighteen months applying the rigorous techniques previously mentioned. The two-day workshop was held in order to activate data gathering. Participant and non-participant observation was also employed through the researcher's participation in social events, activities, village forums and meetings as well as in attending SDAO (Sub-District Administrative Organisation) meetings. The total activities employed are 76 interviews, 6 focus group discussions, 1 workshop, 8 formal SDAO meeting attendances and 58 participant observations on social events and activities initiated by the SDAO, village forums and meetings and social activities in six villages. The details of the main methods, the number of participants and the total activities are summarised in Table 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 in this chapter.

## **4.1 The fundamental concepts of research design**

My study was shaped by the research questions to depict how people have gained experiences leading to community empowerment, how they build up pictures of community empowerment, what people's knowledge, views, understandings, preferences and interpretation of community empowerment are, and how people interact to generate meaningful data which enhances community empowerment. These research questions serve as guidelines to conduct an investigation over a long period of time in order to capture the complex development experiences of the participating villagers and the SDAO committee members within their lives.

I drew on Denzin and Lincoln's (1998:201) and Mason's (1996, 2002) view of the three 'inquiry paradigms', namely ontological perspective, epistemological position and methodological strategy. The ontological perspective is concerned with the form and nature of reality: how things really are, how things really work and social reality. The epistemological position encloses the nature of the relationship between the knower, or would be knower, and what can be known as well as how social phenomena can be known, how knowledge can be demonstrated, and what can represent knowledge and evidence of social reality. Finally, the methodological strategy constitutes the 'how', the methods used by the inquirer to discover 'what can be known' and what is the logic by which you go about answering your research questions. These were employed as the groundwork for the research design, and procedures.

The following sections review the discussion on the fundamental concepts of research design.

### *4.1.1 Ontological perspective*

The previously indicated research questions include these central issues: the pictures of community empowerment and what people experiences' leading to the community empowerment are. I perceived that the ontological nature of the knowledge required is the existing phenomena of the villages and how these

reveal community life in natural settings (Mason, 2002). I utilised intense and prolonged contact (Miles and Huberman, 1994) with the villagers and SDAO committee members in their natural environments.

One qualitative research feature was found to fit in with the ontological perspective at this point. This offers a possible application of longitudinal fieldwork which gives rise to 'closeness' (Patton, 2002) with the participants and the situations, and gives me opportunities to discover the subtle meaning of lived experiences in relation to the participant's views on empowerment.

#### *4.1.2 Epistemological position*

The epistemological position of the inquiry emphasises the relationship between the inquirer and the reality; in this matter the relationship between me, as the researcher, and the participating villagers and a group of SDAO committee members. The relationship is established as a bridge for the researcher to understand the knowledge sought, and lived experience in its dynamic world.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest a helpful practice: the researcher should attempt to gain a 'holistic view' 'of the context, and the local actors'. By holistic, they mean 'systematic, encompassing, and integrated'. Such a holistic view can possibly be gained through 'a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding, and of suspending', or 'bracketing preconceptions about the phenomena under study'. Bracketing refers to an acceptance of the conditions and nature of reality by reflexively acknowledging the researcher's biases, prejudices, held beliefs and commonsense (Miles and Huberman 1994:6). This places significance on the 'self' as human instrument in rendering trustworthiness in knowledge, or reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The relationship between the self and reality is a focal point of the epistemological position of the inquiry.

### *4.1.3 Methodological Strategy*

The methodological strategy is made up of the research design, methods of gathering data and data analysis. In selecting a qualitative approach, I had no expectation of gaining knowledge about the villagers' learning experiments, verification of hypotheses, or counting and measuring methods, but I learned that knowledge is gained through an 'emic' approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:205). It is inductively derived from a process in which 'local construction of meaning' has been involved by the villagers and a group of the SDAO committee members. This intrinsic meaning, expressed and constructed by those who possess knowledge, can be obtained through a qualitative procedure, which is described as follows.

### **4.2 Research Questions and Objectives**

Having based the research on these fundamental concepts, and related it to the qualitative approach of the inquiry, I sought to underpin the relevance of the approach with the research questions. They are:

- How do people build up the pictures of community empowerment?
- What are people's understanding and interpretations towards community empowerment?
- How do people interact to generate meaningful data for enhancing community empowerment?

Three objectives were brought into focus: to examine the community empowerment of the SDAO, to critically evaluate the elements promoting community empowerment and to explore in –depth in order to investigate the effective approaches for promoting community empowerment. From the objectives, I attempted to identify the specific methodology employed in gathering and analysing data.

The following sections present the qualitative research design in the investigation.

### 4.3 The Qualitative Research Design

My research study tends to emphasize the importance of understanding things from the points of view of the participants involved (Denscombe, 2003). Two main ethnographical characteristics are the routine and normal aspects of everyday life being considered as worthy of consideration in research data. The mundane and ordinary parts of social life are just as valid as special events and ceremonies. Ethnography prefers a holistic approach, which stresses relationship processes, connections and interdependency among its component parts. In addition, there is a concern to see things as those involved do, through which ethnography refers to the study of groups of community people, learning their lifestyles, meanings, understandings and beliefs (Denscombe, 2003).

What I have kept in mind when I have been conducting my research study is *'rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people'* (Spradley, 1979:3).

Collis and Hussey (2003:354) define qualitative research as a subjective approach which includes examining and reflecting on perceptions in order to gain an understanding of social and human activities. Creswell (1998) described the qualitative procedure as having these following characteristics:

- *Prolonged field involvement in the natural setting*: The qualitative study requires an in-depth knowledge of the subject in extended time is necessary for the researcher to participate intensively in fieldwork. Studying lived experiences in an ordinary and natural world needs active involvement. The study was conducted in the SDAO with 6 villages. It took a long time to generate the rapport employed in the method of data collections which took eighteen months. The researcher not only employed the methods used but also participated in the real village setting, taking part in social activities. Attendances at village meetings, village forums and SDAO meetings were prolonged field involvement.

- *Multiple methods of inquiry*: Since qualitative study aims to capture the multi-dimensions of reality, multiple methods are employed for this purpose. Various terms are included in this study namely ethnographic inquiry, fieldwork employing focus group discussion, participant and non-participant observations and interviews to investigate the picture of community empowerment from the views of the participants. These methods are believed to offer encompassing data on the phenomena under the investigation.
- *Interpretive understanding of reality, and emergent knowledge*: Tacit knowledge is studied from human lives and experiences (Polanyi, 1967). It is acquired from the deep engagement of the researcher with that knowledge. It is not acquired as a result of proving a hypothesis, or theory proving. On the other hand, it arrives through a series of research procedures. Knowledge concerning the participating villagers' and SDAO committee members' community empowerment was expected to derive from these stages: 1) suitable questioning (Creswell, 1998), 2) regularly examining the relationship of the researcher, participants and their environment, 3) critically reflecting on data gathering and analysing techniques, 4) interpreting data, 5) drawing conclusions based on personal and theoretical perspectives and 6) offering what is learned, and what should be further questioned (Wolcott, 1994). Inductively, knowledge emerges from the researcher's interpretation of the phenomena under study as emergent knowledge through these stages.
- *Focusing on social phenomena, interactively and holistically perceived*: Investigating a phenomenon, moving and developing in its situations and contexts is a process of qualitative study (Mason, 2002). The phenomenon is embedded with knowledge that can be disclosed when an interaction between the researcher and that knowledge take place. Meanwhile, the knowledge should be apparent in a holistic rather than compartmentalised way (Patton, 2002). The study explores the contexts of six villages which include the social



phenomena that occur interactively and holistically, thus indicating the community empowerment.

- *Awareness of critical reflection and sensitivity as essential qualities of the research self:* Since the researcher is the tool of the investigation, the sharpening of skills should be systematic and consistent. This engages an indication of the connection between the self and sensitivity to every aspect of the study. Creswell (1998) suggests that the researcher should state how the study takes shape and then demonstrate a careful examination of his or her own thoughts, feelings and reasons for behaving in a particular way in the research process. Biases and values must be accepted as a crucial etiquette of the researcher in displaying openness and honesty to research (Patton 2002, Mason, 2002). A study on community empowerment is categorised in human studies through study of the villagers' and the SDAO committee members' lived experiences, understandings and expressions. Stakes (2002) recommends that the methods can be found in ourselves, in our awareness and in knowing ourselves. This indicates that much emphasis is placed on the personal perspectives of the researcher to experience and understand the lived experience under study.

Reflecting on the literature on qualitative methodologies, it is probably fair to say that such methods generally share three fundamental assumptions (Patton, 1990, 2002): a holistic view, an inductive approach and naturalistic inquiry. This fits into a study of community empowerment.

The study was conducted based on the tradition of the qualitative research, ethnographic inquiry, which is presented in the following section.

#### *4.3.1 Ethnographic Inquiry*

I realised that the ethnography applied by the qualitative approach would bring flexibility and sensitivity, which in turn would persuade and encourage the respondents of my research to express their ideas, preferences and feelings on

the topic of the study. Ethnography is an approach in which the researcher uses socially acquired and shared knowledge to understand the observed patterns of human activity (Collis and Hussey, 2003: 70).

Ethnographic inquiry is concerned with capturing, interpreting, and explaining the way in which people in a group, organisation, community, or society live, experience, and make sense out of their lives, world, and society or group (Rudestam and Newton, 2001). It focuses on 'the understanding of social and cultural processes' in natural settings (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004:535). The researcher has to spend a considerable amount of time in fieldwork in order to study the phenomena in a real context. The matter of time is the 'critical attribute' of ethnographic fieldwork. This encompasses the meanings concerned with community empowerment from villagers and a group of SDAO committee members. Moreover, lengthy periods of involvement can allow the establishment of acquaintance, and relationships with the villagers and the SDAO committee members for the purpose of gaining '*thick description*'. Therefore, ethnographic inquiry can be used as an essential method to observe and capture the essence of ongoing development, within the contexts of community empowerment. It can fit well into the methodological categories of data collection and analysis in the study tradition.

The following section reviews the strength of the qualitative approach which was applied in the investigation.

#### *4.3.2 Strength of Qualitative approach*

One of the strengths of qualitative methods is the inductive, naturalistic inquiry strategy of approaching a setting without predetermined hypotheses. Rather, understanding and theory emerge from fieldwork experiences and are grounded in the data (Patton, 2002:129).

Mason (1996, 2002) states that qualitative research is based on methods of data generation which are flexible, and sensitive to the social context. In addition, methods of analysis and explanation building are also involved with

understandings of complexity, detail and context. He also argues that the qualitative research is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced. Its strength aims to explore a problem or describe a setting, process, social group, or pattern of interaction will rest with its validity. An in-depth description showing the complexities of processes and interactions will be so embedded with data derived from the setting that it cannot help but be valid (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

Qualitative research must also provide thick description (Geertz, 1973, cited in Holliday, 2002) which requires transparency. The description must be convincing and demonstrate how the connections were made and where they came from. Thick description is significantly different from triangulation. Triangulation is a device for investigating things and dates back to a positivist tradition, but thick description is a more creative device for piecing things together and understanding how things are interconnected-finding, describing, and understanding the interconnectedness of the diverse social elements of the setting as a small culture. This is emphasised in qualitative research on the capture and conveyance the full picture of behaviour being studied-holistically, comprehensively and in context (Punch, 2005:294).

Using multi-methods produces different kinds of data on the same topic. The initial and obvious benefit of this is that it will involve more data, thus being likely to improve the quality of the research. This also allows the researcher to see the topic from different perspectives and to understand it in a more rounded and complete fashion than would be the case had the data been drawn from just one method (Denscombe,2003). Moreover, qualitative inquiry strategically and methodologically aims to minimise the imposition of predetermined response when gathering data (Patton, 2002).

In short, the strengths of qualitative studies should be demonstrated for research that is exploratory or descriptive and stresses the importance of context, setting, and the participants' frames of references (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

However, there are some limitations in qualitative methods; as illustrated by the following section.

#### *4.3.3 Limitations of qualitative methods*

The qualitative approach has some limitations which I realised and cautioned. First, as a 'human instrument' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of data gathering, I should not assert my judgement on the data or respondents' values or beliefs because this action would result in biases. In terms of minimising biases, I adopted a reflective account on critical views of how some issues were developed and what measures were used to counter the issues and subjective views arising. Second, as researcher, I had to learn to be critical and analytical in viewing the 'subtle realism' (Hammersley, 1992, Altheide and Johnson, 1994) of the participants' views and actions. Third, I tried to represent faithfully and accurately the social worlds or phenomena studied (Altheide and Johnson, 1994:489). Preventive measures were appropriately used in every stage of the investigation such as the use of reflexivity and respondent validation in the research process.

The following section depicts the scope of the study and its participants.

#### **4.4 The scope of the study and the participants**

In order to ensure achievable objectives, the study explored one SDAO from one subdistrict in Loei Province, Thailand. Multiple techniques were required, mostly concerning the utilisation of human sources directly. The participants were villagers from six villages and the SDAO committee members. Using a variety of techniques may provide different perspectives on the situation, thereby increasing what is known about it (Bouma, 2000). A qualitative approach has been taken in the design of the research, and the use of multi-methods, presented below, is designed to provide sufficient data to enable the research questions to be answered.

The following section presents the first stage of the fieldwork and how the participants are involved in the study.

#### **4.5 The first stage of the fieldwork and access to the respondents**

The research's first step was to secure respondents and to research their environment. I viewed this as a vital first step without which community support for the project, the study would be impossible. The first stage was fieldwork aimed at building a good rapport, as well as gaining information on the process involved in recruiting key villagers as participants of the study.

Unstructured interviews and non-participant observation were used at this stage of fieldwork, with no previous plan or specific theoretical approach. The aim of the interviews was to recruit key villagers as participants with the criteria of being highly interested in village development and representing all groups of people in each village. The informants were then selected from these key villagers through a close rapport (Bernard, 1994). Moreover, the participants were contacted as reliable volunteers, willing to participate in the focus group discussions.

- *Building up a Rapport*

In conducting ethnographic research, it is essential that the researcher builds rapport between the informants and themselves. This is to create trust in the researcher and thereby reveal rich data. In practice, I created rapport to 1) obtain easy access to the participants; 2) show them my earnest intention to use their information in the research; 3) learn and use appropriate strategies to gain information from them; and 4) open the opportunities for their contributions in sharing knowledge with the public. Establishing rapport does not mean becoming close friends with the participants. I still adhered strictly to the role of researcher, although sometimes taking the role of counsellor. This is part of a healthy relationship. The role of researcher can produce distance between the participants and the researcher, which to some extent is productive. Distance can prevent 'over-rapport' or 'going native'

leading to bias arising when the researcher takes impressions of what is observed as realities (Hammersley,1992:199). Rapport and distance are important in addressing focus group discussions and interview methods. The participants felt free within the process of these methods in the focus group discussions, interviews and workshop. When I attended meetings of the SDAO, they simply viewed me as an observer who was allowed to take notes.

#### **4.6 Carrying out the focus group discussion**

The main purpose for conducting focus groups was to gain insights through the creation of a forum where respondents might feel relaxed to reflect and portray their feelings and behaviour. Also, the value of the technique lay in the unexpected findings often obtained from a free-flowing group discussion (Marlhotra and Birks, 2000). Morgan (1997) defines the focus group as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic 'how the define the community empowerment and how to strengthen the community' determined by the researcher. In essence, it is the researcher's interest that provides the focus, whereas the data itself comes from group interaction.

Focus group discussions were based, typically, on homogeneous groups with similar backgrounds; all the participants were key villagers, interested in development issues. Focus groups involved open-ended interviews with groups of five to eight people on specially targeted or focussed issues (Patton, 2002).

Also, the ultimate goal of conducting focus groups in my study was to learn about participants' attitudes and opinions on the topic of my interest, and these studies clearly illustrated the value of such data. I, however, preferred to go beyond attitudes and opinions to emphasise experiences because discussions of these issues produced a livelier group dynamic. Participants were more than happy to compare their different experiences, and were not reluctant to challenge someone else's opinion. I emphasised perspectives because, although attitudes and opinions were typically treated as small, discrete parts of a participant's thinking, a perspective implies a broader basis for specific attitudes and

opinions. Focus groups involve communication within a group of people, rather than the one to one communication normally associated with interviews (Denscombe, 2003). An emphasis on perspectives brought together attitudes, opinions, and experiences in an effort to find out not only what participants thought about an issue but also how they thought about it and why they thought the way they did (Morgan, 1997:20).

Focus groups are used in the study in multi-method studies; they typically add data that is gathered through other qualitative methods such as observations and interviews. The model is clearly an ethnographical one, which has traditionally involved a blend of observation and interview (Bloor, et al, 2001, Morgan, 1997).

#### *4.6.1 Recruiting the Participants applying Snowball Sampling Technique*

The villagers from six villages were surveyed by means of unstructured interviews at the first stage of fieldwork. The interviews were carried out with the recruitment of villagers who played important roles in the development work and activities in the villages. The main purpose of conducting focus groups was to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group (Morgan, 1988).

The snowball technique was used in order to gain access to a particular group of people who fit the category, and there was no publicly available listing. I used this technique by first approaching the village headman and asking him or her who was available and to nominate others that they knew. Then they nominated others under the criteria of being key persons who played important roles in the villages (Bouma, 2000). The sample was not intended to be representative of the village, while the objective of the sampling was to assure that a range of experiences and the key persons were included. Therefore, there were eight relevant people participating in the focus group discussions in six villages.

Snowball sampling is an approach for locating information-rich key informants (Patton, 2002). I began the process of snowballing by employing unstructured interviews with a broad group of knowledgeable key villagers who were interested in the role of development. The villagers were asked who knew a lot about development issues or to whom I should talk about development schemes. By asking a number of people who else to talk to, the snowball got bigger and reached eight participants in each village who would be involved in the focus group discussions (Patton, 2002). Snowballing is useful for developing the numbers of the focus group participants involved and the issues linked to the research. The participants were carefully screened to meet certain criteria. They had adequate experience with interests in development schemes and the community empowerment issues being discussed (Marlhotra and Birks, 2000). They were all homogeneous participants to take part in focus group in terms of demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

#### *4.6.2 The roles of the moderator*

I, the researcher played the vital role of moderator in the focus groups. I established good friendships with the participants spoke in local dialect, kept the discussion moving forward and probed, applying a motivational technique used when asking questions to induce the respondents to enlarge on, clarify, or explain their answers and draw out insights. I studied the key characteristics of the moderator. I possessed knowledge of the discussion topic, developed skills and experiences directly from the first group and moreover, gained a better understanding of the nature of group dynamics. The first group was shocking. It involved participants participating from thirteen individuals so it was difficult to deal with. However, I gained more experience and I followed the qualities needed by focus group moderators. I quickly developed an empathy with group members, combining kindness to make my participants feel welcome, combining with firmness to stop particular individuals taking over the discussion. I introduced myself and let the participants know the objectives of my study and the reasons for their presence in the groups- to share their ideas and perspectives on the topic that I raised. I tried to be permissive, allowing the flow of discussion. I stimulated intense personal involvement and also



encouraged participation from the more unresponsive members (Malhotra and Birks, 2000).

#### *4.6.3 Planning and conducting focus groups discussions*

As I had many chances to attend and participate in qualitative methods training, although not as a moderator, I still felt confident in the role. There were three colleagues with me, one took responsibility for note taking, one for inviting respondents and persuading them to sit in a circle and the refreshments and one took care of tape recording and photographs. One, located in the village, had to be responsible for the venue, confirming the time and place with the participants. We set the dates, times and places for all six groups. Each village had eight participants who would take part in the groups. All were set up well; everyone was ready and prepared for each group. Furthermore, my colleagues and I studied the focus groups, exploring expectations and techniques to ensure the benefits of conducting focus group discussions.

The physical setting for the focus group was also important. A relaxed, informal atmosphere helped group members forget they were being questioned and observed. The big advantage of this approach was that the participants were usually comfortable participating in the environments that were not alien to them (Malhotra and Birks, 2000). Therefore, I chose a temple in each village as the location for focus group discussion. These were places where the participants were happy to talk and willing to open up to the moderator. My colleague served light refreshments before the session, making more available throughout; these became part of the context of relaxation. Some were pleased to be able to take the refreshments back home for their children.

It was necessary to build up a friendly atmosphere with the participants and to explore, in-depth, their beliefs, feelings, ideas, attitudes and insights regarding the understanding of their own village considerations, situations, development issues and community empowerment concerns. The six focus groups which were conducted, lasted from two hours, two and a half and three hours. They took longer than expected as they should not run for longer than one hour, one

and a half or two hours (Denscombe, 2003, Patton, 2002, Bloor et al, 2001); this was because the more productive data came after the sessions. They appeared most enthusiastic after the tape recorders were turned off.

In summary, a focus group was conducted and at the end of the session, two participants were selected as the representatives to take part in the workshop, which would be held during the period of data collection. The respondents nominated two participants to be representatives of the group. The nominees willingly accepted and gave their phone numbers to the moderator to keep contact.

#### *4.6.4 The advantages and limitations of conducting the focus group discussions*

The main advantages of focus groups in comparison to observation and interviews are the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time based on the researcher's ability to assemble and direct the sessions. The strengths could be summarised as the production of an opportunity to collect data from groups discussing topics of interest to the researcher. Focus groups were more controlled than the observations and, because of the participants-defined nature, in-group interaction in the focus group setting was less controlled than individual interviewing (Morgan, 1997). I employed focus groups as they are being used increasingly as a way of learning about public opinion on a variety of issues. I facilitated the discussions, ensuring that they stayed on topic but did not express views. The focus group allowed the researcher not only to identify issues and attitudes but also to see how various people from the group responded to others' positions. A well-run focus group provided a window on an interacting community (Bouma, 2000).

Good and friendly interactions among participants enhanced data quality- most participants provided checks and balances on each other (Krueger and Casey, 2000). The group of people were all key villagers who dealt with the development aspects found as the homogeneous group on a specific topic, the community empowerment and from their lived experiences. It was found interaction among participants enhanced data quality. They tended to provide

checks and balances to each other; they tried to fulfil each other's points of view. Moreover, some gave further samples to support what they presented. They weeded out false or extreme views (Krueger and Casey, 2000). It was also found focus groups were enjoyable to participants, drawing on human tendencies towards social relationship (Patton, 2002). It took longer than intended - some sessions lasting two or three hours - and more interesting data was also added. This was a powerful method of qualitative data collection where a small group of people were interviewed as a group (Punch, 2005).

However, there were many disadvantages of conducting focus groups because the participants were, in some sense, in an unnatural setting with rules on discussion allowing for only one speaker at a time. My participants had high involvement in discussions, particularly through giving some examples to support each other's points of view. The focus groups were limited in verbal behaviour, consisted only of interaction in discussion groups and they were created and managed by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). The available response time for any particular individual was restricted in order to hear from everyone (Patton, 2002). With eight people and two to three hours for the group, no more than twelve questions were asked. Culturally, my participants asked if I could help them, for instance, on the village project proposal. Also, when I conducted the focus groups, it was during the hot and rainy season. Due to the heavy rain and thunder strikes, I had to postpone the discussions for several times. It was also difficult for managing the groups with the villagers but my colleagues could be very supportive on this matter.

#### **4.7 Conducting Observations**

Observations were a related data collection strategy as one of the main techniques used in this research. Its functions are to obtain rich details of the subject under study. It required me to increase my awareness, to raise my level of attention, to tune into things that are not usually tuned into (Spradley, 1980). The research design in this kind of investigation remains flexible and the details of the approach are often modified as the research proceeds. In this form of investigation, the setting is defined by the participants, and their views cannot

be known until the investigation begins (Bouma and Atkinson, 1997). Moreover, observation is an effective way of finding out what people do in particular contexts. It can provide ethnographic fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, Darlington and Scott, 2002). Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting. Observation allowed me to discover the here-and-now interworkings of the social events and activities via the use of the five human senses (Erlandson, et al, 1993). It is a fundamental and important method in all qualitative inquiry. It is used to discover complex interactions in natural, social settings (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

I chose observation in conjunction with other methods of data collection. Observations were used in the early stages of the study, and it could be a useful way of understanding the context of the phenomenon under investigation and working out what the important questions to be asked are (Darlington and Scott, 2002).

Because of the limitations of times and expenses, I could not employ full participant observation in the every day life of the village settings. I was not a full participant in all activities in the villages. Therefore, participant observation was employed in social events, activities and village forums and meetings. In addition, non- participant observation was conducted through the method of gathering data, focus group discussions, interviews, the workshop and meetings of the SDAO. In employing non-participant observation, I was not part of the action but stood apart and looked on. I was not part of the action observed (Bouma, 2000). In both participant and non-participant observation, I took detailed notes during activities when permitted, for instance, at the forums and village meetings and at the SDAO meetings. At other times I waited until later to take notes, for in stance, after a wedding ceremony or after participation in the Songkran festival.

#### *4.7.1 A Part-time Observer*

For the reason above, I decided to be a part-time observer to observe the activities and social events that were held in the villages. These were three village forums, three village meetings and three village social activities. Moreover, I observed the four activities which were initiated by the SDAO. The main reasons that I observed these activities was my concern with the naturalistic settings and to communicate with the participants who were the key people in their real situations. The three village forums consisted of those on the Village Fund project. In each village, the civil society forum identifies the people's needs, and the forum of determining the village plans to submit to the SDAO. Also, the three village meetings were held at least once a month in each village. Additionally, I observed the three villages social activities, the rituals and customs as well as the activities held, for instance, the big cleaning day on the Buddhist Sabbath days or on special occasions, the wedding ceremony and the activities on the King's Birthday and the Queen's Birthday.

One rule that I had to follow, whatever the observational study, was to tell the truth that I was a researcher conducting a doctoral research study on the topic of community empowerment. This information was given to the headmen/headwoman and then they disseminated it in the village meetings that a lecturer from Rajabhat Institute Loei was conducting the study in the six villages. First, they were distrustful whenever they saw me take notes. After being informed by the headmen, they began to understand how I participated in the social events and the village forums. Some clarified the events for me. I tried not to take detailed notes during activities but I waited until later to record events. In this instance, honesty was the best policy alongside the building up a good rapport. When villagers knew what I was doing, they understood why I had to take notes in my observational role.

Moreover, I found participant observation technique was employed as the core strategy of the investigation. As observation can be used at different stages of the study and for different reasons due to no static social setting, there were always a range of activities; I decided to observe within each activity

(Darlington and Scott, 2002). It took at least two to three hours within each event and most of all; field notes were necessary. Note takings were undertaken at every event being observed. As soon as I finished each observation, I wrote up my reflective comments on the process as soon as possible, and sometimes within the study areas with my colleagues.

#### *4.7.2 Observations: SDAO Meetings Attendances*

The observations of the SDAO meetings were also important aspects. This stage was expanded from the observations due to it generating more data from the committee members in a natural setting.

I asked for informal permission from the members to attend their meetings. The meeting's observations were conducted a total of eight times. The purpose of setting the observations was that I expected to see the behaviours and interactions of the members in their natural settings. I was allowed to take notes and photographs but not allowed to use a tape recorder. It took a period of six months. In some meetings, the subdistrict headman, the eleven village headmen and some officers -for instance, the health officer- were invited to participate. The meetings always took for two or three hours, provided a wealth and useful data. I sat in on eight meetings in order to observe the way issues were formed and debated and decided on by taking notes using the observational forms.

#### *4.7.3 Strengths and Limitations of Observations*

Observations can afford access to events as they happen. It also requires little active effort on the part of those being observed. Observation can take place at the same time as an activity that would already be happening (Darlington and Scott, 2002). More advantages of observation include an ability to report on a larger range of behaviours, a greater variety of interactions with the study participants and a more open discussion on the research topic, of course, the advantage of being able to observe behaviours in their natural contexts (Morgan, 1997). Both participant and non-participant observations were used in various data gathering techniques. However, participant observation could not

be complete as I could not be a full participant, being unable to live alongside the people as they lived. I could not participate in all their rituals and routines due to the limitations of time, expenses and being at work. I missed many important naturalistic events in the study areas.

#### 4.7.4 Recording observations by taking notes

It was necessary to record what I saw or heard in an attempt to store qualitative data, impressions, conversations, pictures, phrases or facial expressions. Several techniques are often used in recording qualitative data. Field notes are still the basic method used by ethnographers who utilise ordinary human observation to discover the nature, shape and operation of human social life (Bouman, 2000, Layder, 1993, Miller and Dingwall, 1997). My notes written from the observations were clear, detailed and accurate. It was written in the observational form that presented as a sample below:

*Table 4.1 Observational Form*

<p><b>Setting</b> <i>The village 4 meeting</i>  <b>Date</b> <i>25 April 2002</i>  <b>Time:</b> <i>from 1940pm to 2145pm.</i>  <b>Participants</b> <i>78 people in the village</i></p>	
<p><b>Description of setting</b> <i>In the temple, it was announced to confirm the villagers by the village broadcast tower</i></p>	
<p><b>Description of events</b></p> <p><i>The village headman convinced people to pay money for the school lunch programme and 3 women to cook in school a day on weekdays. The village was provided the village fund from the government while the formal talks were lively among the villagers proposed the number of people who would responsible for the village fund, needed fifteen people to implement the fund for the needy villagers and for the group of people having revolving fund. He told the description of the Fund and some people asked about more details.</i></p>	<p><b>Researcher's Comments</b></p> <p><i>The headman is so powerful, taking only seven minutes to conclude the session of the school lunch programme. Very surprising. The formal meeting took only a half an hour while the formal talks were lively among the leaders both formal and informal. Most people left with great pleasure, the leaders continued talking and also asked me about how to manage the fund. The roles of leaders are significant.</i></p>

To summarise, there were eight SDAO committee member meetings. Also, there were fifty-eight activities in six villages that were observed and participated in. The findings of these non-participant and participant observations and the SDAO meeting attendances could provide a wealth of data as presented in Chapter five.

In short, the observations were rigorous and wide ranging, due to various events being employed as well as participated in, and the diverse activities.

#### **4.8 Conducting the Interviews**

For the first set of interviews; forty-four short interviews were employed in order to recruit participants to the focus groups discussions in eleven villages. Unstructured interviews were employed at the first stage of the fieldwork. The main purpose was for research respondent recruitment alongside the snowball technique. The short unstructured interview guides were concerned with who was interested in the development schemes of the villages. Then, because of the time and expenses constraints, the number of the villages was decreased to six study areas. Later, the selected respondents were involved in the six focus group discussions of the six villages as presented above in the stage of carrying out of the focus group discussions.

##### *4.8.1 Carrying out the Interviews with the SDAO committee members*

Unstructured individual interviews were employed with thirteen SDAO members before they participated in the workshop. At this stage of data collection, I defined my respondents as key informants who provided rich data. Both the SDAO committee members and key village respondents offered support for the project under the following agreed conditions.



They could be defined as the key informants of the research. The key informants were people who were particularly knowledgeable about the inquiry setting and articulate about their knowledge. As respondents, their insights could prove to be particularly useful in helping an observer understand what was happening and why, and, moreover, they could be helpful in learning about subgroups to which the observer did not or could not have direct access (Patton, 2002).

The relationship between the researcher and informants was fluid and varied in intensity. The key informants would probably be individuals who supplied information because of their positions in the community (Williams et al., 1994) but had no other ongoing relationship with the research study or the researcher. The informants would start as a respondent, answering questions, and then probably become an interpreter, explaining observations and expanding on questions. Finally the informants became a collaborator. Researchers often share accounts with key informants, who serve both an ethical and a methodological function' (Agar, 1986). The interview was a conversation with purpose, so it worked well with the committee members who gave a lot of detailed data about the topic of the study, community empowerment.

#### *4.8.2 The Key Informants Interviews*

There were twenty-five key informants from this stage of data collection who were interviewed. Individual interviews were used with the committee members twice; the first time aiming at gathering general data and then focusing on community empowerment in the views of the members. Interviews were considered to be a significant technique in qualitative research (Babbie, 1998, Bouma and Atkinson, 1997 and Patton, 2002). Thirteen SDAO committee members were involved. The second interviews with members were in order to apply a checking process on the previously provided data in whether they agreed with its accuracy and, moreover, this provided an opportunity to summarise the findings, which was the first step of the data analysis.

#### *4.8.3 The Pair Interviews with the Key Informants*

Interviews in pairs were used with key informants who were the key villagers selected from the focus group discussions. There were six pairs from six villages. The aims of the pair interviews were not only expressing and experiencing their views on the topic but also allowing the member checking whether their information given at the focus group stage was being accurately interpreted.

The interviews commenced with the building up of a friendly relationship. I allowed each interviewee to talk about what interests them. I tried to avoid interrupting them. The advantages that the interviews offered in terms of control stem from closer communication between interviewer and informant. The interviewer could thus typically use more subtle cues to control the direction of one-on-one conversations compared with what is necessary to guide a group discussion. Moreover, the other distinct advantage of the interviews occurred when the goal of the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of a person's opinions and experiences. Therefore, when the goal was to learn about each informant in detail, individual interviews had an obvious advantage (Morgan, 1997). Furthermore, Agar and MacDonald (1995) argued that the dynamics of interviews place more burden on the informants to explain themselves to the interviewer, so that the elaboration of initial statements often occurred with relatively little input from the interviewer.

#### *4.8.4 The Strengths and Limitations of the Interviews*

The interviews emphasised the control available through private contact between the researcher and participant (Morgan, 1997). Kitzinger (1994b) reached the conclusion that comparisons of individual and group interviews were about context and validity. Thus, if people actually acted differently in groups than they did alone, then group and individual interviews necessarily demonstrated the different aspects of the overall behaviour pattern. Interviews are a good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, and definitions of

situations and constructions of reality. It is one of the most powerful ways we have to understand others (Punch, 2005:168). The interviews were expected to generate themes of community empowerment.

In general, qualitative research is associated with depth rather than width (Bouma and Atkinson, 1997). This meant few people were interviewed; taking time over several weeks or several months. In my study, the periods of interviewing took a long time because of the participants' routines and sudden floods. The arrangement of pair interviews of respondents also took a long time because of the individuals' engagement in their routines.

Participants were interviewed to find things we could not directly observe. Feelings, thoughts and intentions could not be observed, thus the purpose of interviewing the informants was to allow the researcher to enter their meaningful and knowable perspectives which were able to be made explicit (Patton, 2002). However, data from the informants from interviews represented their perceptions, and some were limited, selective and biased. Therefore, interviewing was more rigorously employed with the other methods.

The following section reviews the organisation of the workshop which was a vital technique in providing the respondents with the opportunity to share their knowledge, visions, and experiences on the research questions together.

#### **4.9 Organising the workshop**

The workshop was a technique designed to increase the quality of data. In total, twenty five participants, who were the key informants, participated in the workshop. They were all informed that the workshop was mainly aimed at sharing ideas and opinions among the participants, who were SDAO committee members and key villagers who were from the focus group discussions. The workshop provided them with the opportunity to learn together. They all were willing to participate in the workshop- all volunteered to take part in the research process and gain experience from the workshop.

Key informants must be trained or developed in their role, not in a formal sense, but because they will be more valuable if they understand the purpose and focus of the inquiry, the issues and questions under investigation, and the kinds of information that are needed and most valuable (Patton, 2002:321).

Therefore, the workshop was held in order to let the participants be together in sharing their experiences and perspectives on a topic that interested them. There were twelve key people and thirteen SDAO members invited to join the workshop, giving a total of twenty-five participating respondents.

The aims of organising the workshop were introduced to them- to identify the problems and solutions of the subdistrict, moreover, to create a review of the knowledge aimed at understanding the community. It was designed to let the participants have a great chance to meet each other in order to recognise the problematic issues and resolutions together. They could reveal their perceptions, ideas and perspectives and preferences towards their community. Then, they were encouraged to present their perceptions on what they thought was community empowerment and how it could be maintained or improved.

The workshop was held over two days, the first day applying SWOT analysis in mobilising the participants to realise their viewpoints on the community, which led to have shared visions on community empowerment. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threat) analysis is a tried and true tool of strategic analysis. The role of SWOT provides the stimulation of self-reflection and group discussion about how to improve their firm and position it for success (Dess, et al, 2005). SWOT, therefore, was applied as the point of discussion. It is the tool used in the early part of an initiative to create sustainable improvement. It could be used from an organisation-wide perspective (macro level) or within the group (micro level) to help organisation, decision-making, planning and implement strategy for change and sustainable improvement (Kehoe, 2004). It answered the question: what our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were in our community.

The first day was mainly aimed at knowing, understanding and recognising the subdistrict as a community amongst the participants. The second day focused

on learning together on community empowerment in general, identifying problems and solutions together and then, viewed shared visions on community empowerment. At the end of the session, the research study was presented to them in order to provide member checking and respondent validation.

It was indicated that the participants had a chance of learning together, building up a better understanding of real situations. The following table shows the schedule of the two- day workshop:

*Table 4.2 The schedule of the two-day workshop*

<b>Date / time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>People in charge</b>
<b>27 July 2002</b>		
900am- 930am	Registration	
930am-1000am	Opening ceremony session and Keynote speech	The vice president of Rajabhat Institute Loei
1000am-1030am	Introducing the participants Introducing the aims of the workshop, Creating an agreement on the workshop	The participants and the organisers
1030am-1050am	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
1050am-1150am	Identifying the strong issues/ the strengths of the community	The participants/the guest experts and the organisers
1150am-1250am	Identifying the weak issues/ the weaknesses of the community	The participants/the guest experts and the organisers
1250am-1350pm	<i>Lunch</i>	
1350pm-1450pm	Identifying the opportunities / of the community	The participants/the guest experts and the organisers
1450pm-1550pm	Identifying the threats / of the community	The participants/the guest experts and the organisers

1550pm-1610pm	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
1610pm-1650pm	Discussions and conclusions the SWOT analysis of the community	The participants/the guest experts and the organisers
<b>Time/date</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>People in charge</b>
<b>28 July 2002</b>		
900am-930am	Registration	
930am-1030am	The session of empowerment in rural community	The guest speaker
1030am-1050am	<i>Coffee break</i>	
1050am-1150am	Identifying the problems, solutions in the community	The participants , the experts and the organisers
1150am -1230am	Discussion on the community empowerment and why the community could not yet be strengthened	The participants and the guest experts and the organisers
1230am-1330am	<i>Lunch</i>	
1330pm-1500pm	Discussions on the various elements that could promote the community empowerment	The participants and the guest experts and the organisers
1500pm-1520pm	<i>Coffee break</i>	
1520pm-1630pm	Reviewing and concluding the outcomes of the workshop	The participants and the guest experts and the organisers
	The conclusion remark of the Research study	The researcher and the participants
1630pm-1640pm	Closing ceremony	The vice president of Rajabhat Institute Loei

The actual schedule was slightly different from the planned schedule due to the high involvement of participants in discussing the problems occurring in the community. The first day was effective in applying SWOT analysis to identify and recognise what the subdistrict was in order to understand the situations

which could be both internal issues and external issues that holistically affected the area. Meanwhile during the second day, participants were divided into four groups and discussed the topics provided in the schedule.

There was high involvement significantly identifying problems and solutions in the community and, moreover, allowing participants to learn from each other and build up an understanding of their own community in a friendly atmosphere. They also gained a better relationship by discussing and sharing visions with each other, playing games as well as having coffee break and lunch together. After organising the structure of the workshop, during the event itself, workshop, I was able to become an observer and a note taker in the role of non-participant observation.

The workshop took two days but its process was quite complicated. Beneficially, I could get along well with the participants and some issues were proposed as the development issues of the SDAO. When I continued gathering data by attending the meetings of the SDAO, the issue of enhancing the organisations was proposed and credited from the workshop, as well as raising the roles of community awareness on the drugs problems. Most of the participants gained experience and placed significance upon the process of the workshop. These views were evaluated via the completion of evaluation forms; the outcome indicated the usefulness of SWOT analysis techniques and how they could experience them. However, the workshop had its limitations at the first stage due to its formal nature and the expert giving a keynote speech properly. But when they were stimulated to discuss the application of the SWOT technique, there was high involvement.

In summary, the main methods used in this study, its total participants and methods as well as total activities during the period of eighteen months of data collection are shown in the following tables:

*Table 4.3 The Main Methods Employed of the Study*

<b>Methods</b>	<b>Features</b>	<b>Claim</b>
Observations	Extended periods of contact	Understanding of culture
Focus group discussion	Open-ended	Understanding interacting community
Interviews	Relatively unstructured	Understanding 'experience'
Workshop	forum	Understanding Shared visions

*Table 4.4 Participants and Methods of the Study*

<b>Type of Participants</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Method of Data collection</b>
1. Villagers from 11 villages (recruiting the key villagers)	44	Unstructured interview Non-participant observation
2. Villagers 2.1 two groups 2.2 four groups	21 32	Pilot focus group discussion Focus group discussion Non-participant observation
3. SDAO committee members	13	Unstructured Interview Non-participant observation
4. SDAO committee members Villagers	13 12	Workshop Non-participant observation
5. Villagers (post workshop interview)	12	Pair Unstructured interview Non-participant observation
6. SDAO committee members (Post workshop interview)	13	Unstructured interview Non-participant observation



*Table 4.5 Total Activities in the Study*

<i>Number of Activity</i>	<i>Details of Activity</i>
76 Interviews and non-participant observations	44 Recruiting Participants interviews through snowballing 26 SDAO interviews 6 Key villagers pair interviews
6 Focus groups Discussions	1 group in each village with 8 participants while 13 participants in the first group
1 Workshop	13 SDAO committee members 12 Key villagers and 5 experts and organisers participating in a two day- workshop
8 SDAO meetings	8 formal SDAO meeting attendances
58 Participant Observations on the activities of the SDAO and in 6 villages	4 social activities initiated by SDAO on festivals and sport events 18 village forums 18 village meetings 18 Participating in village social activities

These three tables not only display the multi-methods designed of this study, but present and clarify how the methods also evolved to ensure credibility.

Additionally, the results of the study as well as its strength, lie upon the basis of the respondents who were involved at every stage of the research. Most of all, the researcher learned and gained experience from them.

The next section discusses the ethical principles used throughout the investigation.

#### **4.10 Ethical Principles**

Ethical issues arise when the researcher deliberately conceals his or her position, whilst living among people, who are being studied, in order to get into their personal lives without their consent (Bulmer, 1982). In conducting this research overall, I clearly stated the purpose of the research in all activities when permitted access to study areas and participants through verbal negotiation. Culturally, I achieved a clear understanding of the conceptual purpose of the research with all participants. As I never concealed my position and informed them frankly and honestly about the research purposes and all activities that occurred, they willingly and voluntarily took part without having to sign informed consent forms. Verbally, I followed the elements of informed consent (Rudestam and Newton, 2001). When possible, I met and informed them about the details of my research project; for what purpose, how and why I felt they met the criteria of being a participant. For example, I informed them why they were selected to participate in this project- they had experience of being key villagers dealing with the development in the community. Then I asked if their consent would be granted. For instances, as a time commitment, I asked for two hours to complete the focus group discussion. I asked for a two -day workshop with providing mini truck fare, refreshment and lunch provided for all the participants. They all willingly gave me their mobile and home numbers to ensure the confirmation of the date of the activities. The committee members also received my mobile number to inform me by telephone about possible attendance their meetings. Moreover, throughout my research, participation was always voluntary; I also kept thinking on and judging the handling of the ethical issues (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

Any information gathered about participants during the study would be treated as confidential as far as was possible, and their anonymity protected. The participants enjoyed a degree of anonymity that encouraged more open and honest answers, free from the influences of the presence or appearance of the researcher. The major ethical principles that were considered when conducting research were, firstly, respect for participants including their autonomy and dignity (Robson, 1998). Anonymity protected the participants by not identifying the villagers with any of the opinions they expressed (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The participants' names

would appear fictitiously in the research report. The basic principles of research ethics were utilised by the researcher, with high respect for the dignity of the persons, groups and organisation participating in the research.

Confidentiality was applied for the protection of the participants in the research by not disclosing sensitive information and ensuring that any data used was not traceable to the community or villagers participating (Collis and Hussey, 2003). This usually consisted of obtaining permissions from the participants at every stage of the investigation- conducting focus group discussions, interviews, taking notes, tape recording and taking pictures- to ensure confidentiality. Field notes and records were kept in secure places and to ensure that sources could not be readily identified names and other identifying information were disguised.

Meanwhile, the close relationship that, at times, developed between the participants in the research and the researcher raised ethical issues. It was essential to develop a high level of rapport with the individuals and groups (Bouma, 2000). I was fully aware of my position as a researcher, and a lecturer at Loei Rajabhat University which my participants knew well and, finally, after getting a close relationship, all of them enjoyed being willing and voluntary participants in the research.

The next section reviews the data analysis processes.

#### **4.11 Data Analysis**

The data analysis of the study commenced with the start of data collection and continued throughout until its completion (Patton, 1987, 2002). The process of data analysis was not carried out as a separate step, but started at the same time as data collection. It involved the checking of data, as well as an interpretation of findings (Bernard, 1994). Taking field notes was the first step of analysing in the field and moreover, field notes were the most important determinant of the subsequent use of qualitative analysis (Patton, 2002). Analysable data for the study was obtained through interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and included interview tapes or transcripts, observation field notes, transcripts and notes from focus group discussion. Qualitative analysis required more effort to read and reread data notes,

reflect on what was read and make comparisons on logic and judgement (Neuman, 1997). The ideas for making sense of the data that emerged while still in the field constituted the beginning of the analysis- they were part of the record of field notes. Recording and tracking analytical insights that occurred during data collection are part of fieldwork and the beginnings of qualitative data analysis (Patton,2002).The focus group discussions, interviews and observations were transcribed as soon as possible after taking place and, during the field work, preliminary analysis was undertaken.

Data analysis in my study involved a twofold approach. The first aspect involved data analysis at the research site during data collection. Qualitative analysis depended from the beginning, on astute pattern recognition (Patton, 2002).The second aspect involved data analysis away from the site following a period of data collection. This second aspect was conducted between site visits both prior to and after completion of data collection (Erlandson et al., 1993). Miles and Huberman (1984:21) state analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification. Concepts and theories are developed from the data through a persistent process of comparing ideas with existing data, and improving the emerging concepts and theories by checking them against new data collected specially for this purpose. The analysis of qualitative data is best described as a progression, not a stage; ongoing process, or one one-time event (Erlandson. et al, 1993).

Analysis involves the separation of things into their components parts. More specifically, it involves the study of *complex* things in order to identify their *basic elements*. It calls on the researcher to discover the key components or general principles underlying a particular phenomenon so that these can be used to provide a clearer understanding of the aspect in question (Denscombe, 2003: 119). Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to a mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds a grounded theory (p.112). When data collection formally ended, it was time to

begin the final analysis. There were two primary sources to draw from in organising the process: 1) the questions that were generated during the conceptual and designed phases of the study, prior to fieldwork, and 2) analytic insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection (Patton 2002: 437).

- *Inductive and Emic Approach in Data analysis*

The strategy of inductive design is to allow important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the study without presupposing what the important dimensions will be (Patton, 2002). The researcher sought to understand the multiple interrelationships amongst dimensions of community empowerment that emerged from the data without making any prior assumption.

Inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data. Findings emerge out of the data, and through the analyst's interactions with it. Qualitative analysis is typically inductive in the early stage (Patton, 2002:453).

The best place to start inductive analysis was to make a list of defined key phrases, terms and practices that were special to the participants in the setting studied. Bartunek and Louis (1996) state that people who are insiders to the setting being studied often already have a view of it and any related findings are quite different from that of the outside researchers who are conducting the study. The emic approach is mainly employed to analyse data. It was the insiders' view on all categories used by the participants in the study areas. The inductive approach was applied for the form of analysis. The resulting analysis grows out of that groundedness (Patton, 2002). Data analysis comprises the following steps:

1. *Summarising data: Data Reduction*

Qualitative research tends to produce vast amounts of information, which then needs to be summarised. Summarising is necessary for several reasons. I initially conducted the research to answer a particular question, and it was time to relate the evidence I collected to the question I was asking. The records of interviews, observations and focus

groups discussions could be systematically read and the key issues, concepts and opinions identified through thematisation. To summarise the data required a great deal of discipline (Bouma, 2000). The approach in analysing the interviews and focus group discussions was to code data in terms of ideas and themes (Bouma and Atkinson, 1997).

Field notes also contained what participants said in direct quotations, or as near as possible recollections of direct quotations, which were captured during fieldwork, recording what was said during observed activities as well as responses garnered during interviews, both formal and conversational. Quotations provided the emic perspective- the insiders' views which were considered to be at the heart of most ethnographic research (Fetterman, 1989:30).

Several stages of analysis were undertaken, summaries of focus group discussions, interviews and observations were written, and this contained rich information on community empowerment issues. Therefore, to summarise the data is the data reduction.

## *2. Categorising the themes into main themes and sub themes*

As the transcribed data was accumulated, rereading, then categorising and identifying themes was essential. In categorising data, I discriminated aspects on the judgement that they had equal properties. I also grouped them into classes, seeing each group of data as members of a class, sharing the similar properties. I found categorising themes reduced the complexity of data reduction. I identified the main themes as the following examples:

- a. Understanding the concept of community empowerment;
- b. Significant elements in community empowerment;
- c. Elements promoting community empowerment;
- d. Existing elements in community empowerment;
- e. Approaches promoting community empowerment and
- f. Factors that hold back community empowerment.

The identification of themes was useful for the matrix display in the next stage of analysis which ensured that no important themes were left.

### *3. Data Displaying: Conceptually Clustered Matrix*

A conceptually clustered matrix was used to display data in final stage of data analysis, its rows and columns arranged to bring together items that 'belong together'. This outcome can happen in two ways: conceptual, where the researcher had some prior ideas about items that derived from the same overarching theme; or empirical, which derives from early analysis. I found that informants gave similar responses when they were asked different questions. The basic principle, however, is conceptual coherence. It is needed to format the displays of all of the relevant responses of all key informants on one sheet, as this allows an initial comparison between responses and informants and lets us see how the data can be analysed further. It is found that with, the preceding displays, a conceptually clustered matrix could be helpful when discovering some clear conceptual themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994:127-131). I reduced the coded chunks to four kinds of entries: labels (e.g. self-reliance , quotations and short summary phrases). I found the data analysis sheet was big and, therefore; I pasted it on the wall in my house. However, I could progressively reduce a giant chart by using summarising phrases and sample short quotes as shown in the example on table 4.6.

*Table 4.6 Conceptually Clustered Matrix: Community empowerment*

*Research questions*

<b>Informants</b>	<b>The understanding of community empowerment</b>	<b>Elements Promoting community empowerment</b>	<b>Approaches to strengthen the community</b>
Village 1	Self-reliance and community participation	Community learning, what they learned in how to grow new crops and make their organic fertilisers.	Retaining unity, mutual understanding, the spirituality brings their unity and mutual aids.
Village 2	The roles of leaders, both formal and informal leaders.	Self-sufficiency , alongside self-reliance	Enhancing community culture, The roles of family and the respect for the elderly, the carer.
Village 3	Calmness , unity and mutual aids	The helpful and supportive characteristics of both formal and informal leaders	Building up the senses of belonging and senses of community.

*4. Drawing conclusion*

From data displayed in the applied conceptually clustered matrix, I drew conclusions in data analysis by reading across the rows that gave the most important profile of each informant and provided an initial test of the relationship between responses to different questions; noting relations between variables. Reading down the columns was a tactic used to make comparisons between the community empowerment of village 1 to 3. All made conceptual coherence (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This is where most of the data and information could be pulled together to provide some coherent conclusions on the issues of each participant.

The data was reassembled into key themes and arguments, which were the results of data summarising, reducing, categorising, rereading and compiling.



The next section outlines the presentation of reflexivity on the significance of the role of the researcher in the investigation.

#### **4.12 Reflexivity**

One of the characteristic features of ethnography is the significance it attaches to the role of the researcher's 'self' in the process of the research. The ethnographic researcher needs to go beyond mere reflection (Denscombe, 2003).

Reflexivity has entered the qualitative lexicon as a way of emphasising the importance of self-awareness, political and cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective (Patton, 2002). To be reflexive is to understand an ongoing examination of *what I know* and *how I know it*, and to have ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment (Hertz 1997: viii). Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and the voices of those one interviews and on whom one reports (Patton, 2002).

Reflexivity refers to the technique by which researchers turn the focus back on themselves to evaluate their influence on the findings and interpretations. Miller and Dingwall (1997) stress the critical nature of this exercise that there is great importance to reflexivity and must know the place in the data. The researcher has to be aware of influences of the researcher being part of the data. Whatever comes out the result of this interaction between the researcher and the data also needs to be aware of. It was found that the participants responded to me as a lecturer who could give them some advice at the first stage of data collection. I realised they viewed me as a newly experienced teacher who needed to learn more in the village setting. I was aware that my status, age, gender, appearance and manner influenced the informants' responses to my questions. Therefore I let their answers flow without framing them. In turn, I consequently shared my knowledge and brought my own perceptions, opinions and experiences to the interviews and moderation of focus group discussions. I felt many of my participants spoke to me in a way that was

more informative, especially after the periods of flooding that meant my colleagues and I could be supportive for them. This made them trust me more. However, feelings of empathy could not be avoided during the discussions with key informants on their problems due to unfair systems.

As, at the time I was in the field, the village fund allocated by the government was a hot issue, I also shared my knowledge of carrying out a village fund with them. As Gubrium and Sanker (1994) state, the qualitative approach not only accepts the researchers' ability to know but also precedes their ability to theorise and respond to whatever they brought to the research context.

Keeping field notes is the best method of supporting the process of reflexivity. This helps the researcher be reflexive and engage in some form of self analysis during the research study (Burgess, 1993). I kept field notes and then refined and discussed them with my colleagues. I also had a research assistant who took notes on the observations, interviews and other activities during the fieldwork.

In conducting the research study, I utilised some of the methodological tools that ensure its trustworthiness, as presented in the following sections.

#### **4.13 Building Trustworthiness**

It is evident that trustworthiness can be assessed and strengthened in qualitative studies (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, unlike quantitative, judgement on trustworthiness is based on different criteria. Concepts such as validity, reliability, and objectivity are replaced by analogous terms, such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:219). Being alone as a researcher, and 'human instrument', I assured the trustworthiness of the study by:

- Designing the research using multi-methods in gathering data for the purpose of triangulating it to achieve credibility;
- Having a clear, complete, and detailed description of the study (Brown, 2001), a 'thick description' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which was

achieved by a) a thorough and systematic process of gathering data; b) being a critical observer and writer in keeping reflective field notes throughout the process of data gathering and data analysis; and c) establishing 'openness' by describing the choices I made, activities have done, and why and how each step of the study was carried on.

- Ensuring credibility and dependability of the data gathered by using triangulation and respondent validation. These two methods and how they were applied are explained in the following paragraphs.

#### *4.13.1 Credibility*

Credibility refers to the re-proving of findings. As with many areas of research, there is ongoing debate about which methods are suitable to ensure credibility. Notably, I found several factors contributed to the credibility.

- The number of observations and interviews made: the more observations and interviews, the greater the credibility of the findings. This was checked with the research participants themselves-what their activities meant to them, either in the formal interview or a further stage of data collection -and taking the preliminary analysis back to them for verification (Darlington and Scott, 2002).
- The member checking process in the stage of the data collection: member checking is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. It is directed at a judgment of overall credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).
- Rigorous methods for doing fieldwork that yielded high quality data in that the methods of analysis and systematic analysis strategies were systematically examined with attention to issues of credibility (Patton, 2002:552).
- Because the researcher was the instrument of qualitative inquiry, some information from the researcher is included (Patton, 2002). The credibility of the researcher, although a novice in qualitative approach, but having been trained for the fieldwork of qualitative inquiry, for instance, being trained to be a prepared observer, learning to pay attention and acquire recorded field notes and then gain more confidence in conducting research applying

rigorous multi-methods to validate and triangulate methods (Patton, 2002). Also, this research study was partially funded for PhD research study by the National Cultural Commission of Thailand and Loei Rajabhat University.

As they became evident, these were incorporated into my approach in this investigation.

The next section discussed the use of different research techniques in the same study, including triangulation and how the study can be assured via member checking as respondent validation.

#### *4.13.2 Triangulation*

Triangulation is an attempt to understand some aspects of human behaviours by studying them from more than one standpoint (Brown, 2001). It can increase the reliability of data and the process of gathering by corroborating information gathered from different sources. Triangulation played an important role in the design of the study as a means to build up trustworthiness in the data. It refers to soliciting data from multiple and different sources as a means of corroborating and illuminating a theme or theory (Rudestam and Newton, 2001:100). Through methodological triangulation (Collis and Hussey, 2003), I examined the data from different gathering procedures: focus group discussions, interviews, observations and workshop. This, however, does not imply all sources necessarily say similar things, because different parts of the community have different views. I compared the respondents' views concerning community empowerment from the data. This provided the thick description which was a creative device piecing things together and understanding how they were interconnected, finding, describing, and understanding, the interconnectedness of community empowerment (Holliday, 2002).

#### *4.13.3 Member Checking: Respondent Validation*

Credibility, dependability, as well as conformability in the study can also be assured by a method called respondent validation, or 'member checking' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Member checking was conducted at the end of the focus group discussions and interviews by summarising the data and allowing the participants to correct immediately errors of facts or challenging interpretations. It was also conducted in informal conversations with the participants (Erlandson et al., 1993). In addition, in the workshop, before the closing session, I asked the participants for twenty minutes to listen to the data of the focus group discussions. While listening the participants confirmed the data, clarified some points, and added more information. I also took that opportunity to ask them to clarify any questionable points that I needed them to explain. The reason that the written transcript was not presented to them was simply one of time constraint. The participants worked long hours with heavy work loads, some working in the fields. The workshop could provide the opportunity for them to reflect on their focus group transcripts for validation, with emerging analysis being recycled through them. They agreed that it was better for me to tell them what I recorded and discussed together in the following interviews. This is the most important technique for establishing credibility.

The next section illustrates the presentation of working in two languages which were used throughout the study.

#### **4.14 Working in Two Languages**

The study was conducted in six villages in Loei province, the Northeast Thailand. Both Thai and English languages were used. Thai was employed with the participants and later, English was implemented. The two languages were utilised on the process of the study as follows:

*4.14.1 Data Collection* Thai was used with the participants verbally in the methods of data collections. As I have been in Loei province for

thirty years, I can speak Thai-Loei dialect fluently, when I dealt with the participating villagers, I spoke this dialect with them, for instance, in focus group discussions and interviews. The purpose of using this dialect was to deeply understand the information given by them. Thai and Thai-Loei dialect could be used as a medium of communication. However, all fieldnotes were written in Thai (See example with its translation in Appendix 6).

*4.14.2 Preliminary Analysis* Data were transcribed and analysed from Thai into English at preliminary analysis stage. For instance, Thai fieldnotes from observations were transcribed and then translated into English in the observational form (See Table 4.1). I switched Thai fieldnotes into English at this stage as soon as possible after the fieldwork. Thinking in English was commenced at this stage of summarising data as preliminary analysis. However, some were written in both Thai and English and due to the difficulties of translation some issues occurred in the village settings (See section 2.2 below).

*4.14.3 Analysing data* When analysing data, I translated the remaining Thai themes into English and displayed these themes in the matrices (See Table 4.6). English keywords were firstly used to capture the main ideas as themes. The sub themes were displayed to support the main themes. Fully thinking and writing in English was deployed.

*4.14.4 Fieldnotes and quotes presentation* I translated the fieldnotes and quotes of participants into English presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, taking care to make the translation very close in meaning to the original Thai version. Thinking and writing in English was used for presenting the findings from the analysis. The quotes presented were brought from fieldnotes to support themes and sub themes.

In addition, when overall working in two languages, I found the prominent features as follows:

### ***1. Positives***

*1.1* Keywords as themes made me think systematically in English. For instance, mental strength could be defined as human being development and signified the personal strength and then the community.

*1.2* In presenting fieldnotes and quotes in the Findings I and II of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I was careful to make its translation very close in Thai version meaning in order to present the pictures of community empowerment from the villages' contexts and from the perspectives of participants.

*1.3* Dictionary used from Thai-English and English-Thai bilingual dictionary was helpful in the study. Moreover, the Language-Thesaurus Microsoft Word programme was beneficial for thesis writing throughout to ensure academic English writing. Reading was satisfactory.

*1.4* Redrafting-Writing and thinking in English as many drafts as possible benefited the whole thesis writing. Each chapter was redrafted at least four times.

However, working in two languages was challenging as the following indicates:

### ***2. Difficulties***

*2.1 Time consuming* Data were preliminarily analysed in the field. Thai fieldnotes transcribed into English demanded time. This affected the thesis writing process, for instance, in Chapter

5 and 6, presentation of the Findings I and II of the thesis. Redrafting was needed.

*2.2 Challenging translation* Some activities could not be transcribed into English due to its difficulties and cultural context. For instance, I applied non-participant observation in social event, the villagers' ritual of 'asking for the rain' with the cat was difficult to translate into English. While the theme was that people had high levels of involvement in cultural ritual activities, the descriptive details of this event were difficult to translate, and to translate literally might have had the effect of parody.

*2.3 The limitations of English translation* Even with taking great care in translation from the fieldnotes, some terms were not accurate in their English version. For instance, the term 'social capital' in Thai was only used by Thai academics. Trust, reciprocity and face-to-face communication of villagers could be replaced with this term while it was a slightly different meaning from western academics. This could be both bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). Moreover, when I switched Thai into English terms, it was necessary to describe more in details from the Thai cultural context, therefore leading to lengthy presentations.

*2.4 English Spoken* In the United Kingdom, supervision was held in English which I found difficult in the first years. Therefore, all comments and agreements were required in written English after supervision meetings to ensure full understanding between supervisors and student.



## **Summary**

This chapter is concerned with the whole process of conducting research. It has described the rationale for the selection of the methodology employed in the investigation. It ranges from the early stages of evolving research ideas, research design, choices of data gathering methods and the data gathering process, to data analysis. It presents each step of the methodological issues used under study. It describes the protocols of qualitative methods with multi-methods techniques used, as well as the alternatives selected to suit the contexts of the study, including the justification of their employment. It also addresses trustworthiness as a vigorous constituent of the study.

Through a multiplicity of methods, of focus group discussions, observations, interviews and the workshop and inductive analysis approach, I could provide the theoretical themes of community empowerment. In essence, these themes contained the answers to the research questions. Moreover, the section of working in two languages, both positives and difficulties in the research process, has been presented.

In the next chapter, the exploration of the overview of the study areas, Finding 1, is to be presented in order to build up an understanding of the background to the overall context of the six villages under study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FINDINGS I: AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY AREAS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter of the thesis provides an overview of the study areas. It begins with an introductory description to Loei province, Thailand where the study is located. Then, it proceeds to describe an overall socio-economic and political profile of the SDAO (Sub District Administrative Organisation) and overviews of six selected villages are provided. The profiles result directly from the researcher's attendance and participation in meetings of the SDAO, activities held by it, village forums, and social events occurring in the six villages during eighteen months of data collection, employing non-participant and participant observations. In addition, documentary studies from the provincial and SDAO reports and handouts are significantly utilised.

#### **5.1 An Introduction to Loei Province: Socio- Cultural and Economic Contexts**

Loei is a province in the upper Northeast of Thailand (See Map in Appendix 1). The average of land level is 400 metres higher than the sea level. Its city is located amid a sea of mountains. The province is about 520 kilometres from Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, with a total area of 11,426 square kilometres, a small remote calm town located very near the borderline between Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic.

##### *5.1.1 History, Geography and Demography*

Literally translated, 'Loei' means 'beyond' or 'to the furthest extreme', a name most suitable for this province that lies in the northernmost part of the Northeastern region bordered by Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Mekong River. The Loei River is the main waterway of the province besides

the Mekong River. The town has been established and named since 1871 and then promoted as a province in 1913 according to the law of the governing administration. Fortunately, culture represents people's peaceful way of living. There are three ethnic groups- Thai Loei, Thai Dam and Thai Phuan. Their language differs greatly from the other local northeast dialects, while its accent is beautiful and most similar to the Laotian language (Loei Cultural Centre, 2001).

Though part of Northeastern Thailand, its geography and climate is similar to that of Northern Thailand. Consisting mainly of mountains, large and small, it is cold and foggy in the winter and searing hot in the summer.

Currently, the Loei province is governed by 14 districts, 89 sub-districts and 880 villages, all of which are administered to be 1 town municipality with 20 urban sub-communities, 13 sub-district municipalities, 84 sub-district administrative organisations (SDAO), 5 sub-district councils and 1 provincial administrative organisation. The total population is 634,053 with the provincial GDP and per capita income of people ranking fifty-second in the country and fourth of the northeastern region. However, the rural economy income is low, ranking sixty-fourth of the country and thirteenth of the northeastern region (Loei Provincial Statistics Office, 2003).

### *5.1.2 Religion and Cultural Conditions*

Most people in Loei are Buddhists and they harmoniously live with the few Christians and Muslims. There are 546 Buddhist temples and 14 Christianity Churches, yet only 1 Mosque in the province. Most rural people do not work on Buddhist Sabbath days which are four days in a month. The peoples' rituals, customs and traditions are included within the religious activities throughout the year.

In addition, developing people's awareness in natural improvement and peaceful, harmoniously living is the primary concern. The project of 'Loei healthy city with lovely people' project is disseminated throughout the

province. It equally promotes mental strength and reinforces social orders alongside policies for a clean and tidy environment. The theme of the Sufficiency Economy is disseminated. Such concepts help to encourage community empowerment.

### *5.1.3 Educational Perspectives*

Primary and secondary education is compulsory education throughout Thailand. Students from age 7 to age 12 have to attain primary education, while students who finish primary education will continue secondary from age 13 to age 18. Each level takes 6 years. There are 453 primary and 32 secondary schools. Also, there are high educational tertiary levels, consisting of 5 vocational institutions and Loei Rajabhat University to serve higher education. These are considered to create formal education within Loei. However, non-formal education provides education concerning life skills such as cooking, bakery, hair dressing, engine repair and etc. The courses take three months, six months or a year to finish and award certificates on completion.

### *5.1.4 Political Issues*

Loei people fill elected political roles at every level, especially national level, currently holding four representatives in the national house parliament. In the last election in 2001, seventy-eight percent of eligible people voted for the representatives at national level, while less than fifty percent were interested in voting at the local elections, for figures such as the SDAO members or the provincial administrative members. However, the political concerns are more empowered; people are interested in the government projects that encourage people's participation in political issues.

### *5.1.5 Agricultural aspects*

The majority of the population of Loei are farmers developing up-land cultivation. The cash crops are rice, corn, sugarcane, maize, cassava, tapioca, cotton, kapok, soybean, sesame, pineapples, rubbers and flowers. Most farmers rotate these crops depending on their location and seasons. Livestock of cows

meat and dairy cows are also economically effective. The provincial government has promoted the growing of fruit, flowers and rubber trees in the region. The most popular fruit crops are sweet tamarinds, longans and lichees. Western flowers are also promoted as economic crops. These fruit trees and flowers have substantially increased local farmers' annual incomes. However, this region has little in the way of large-scale business, service or industry, other than agro-industry such as soy bean, cotton and sugar factories (Loei Agricultural Office, 2003).

#### *5.1.6 The Marketing Challenges*

However, there is a lack of effective marketing management in the agricultural sector; agricultural goods. The off season period is always a hard time, therefore, some go to work in big cities like Bangkok or sell lotteries in other provinces (Loei community development office, 2003). This causes a lot of problems afterwards. The problems of agricultural products, and the improvement of agro-industry in the province by promoting cash crops and cash livestock and fisheries have been cautiously approached. The enhancement of growing rubber trees, raising meat cows, dairy cows, turkeys, hens and fresh water fishes are encouraged.

#### *5.1.7 The Promotion of Multiple Crops*

Moreover, the promotion of the multi-agriculture is promoted in terms of improving the self-reliance of the farmers. The integration of growing rice, fisheries, and multiple crops are considered better than growing mono crops for industry. Therefore, the multi- crops for multi- purposes are promoted along side using organic fertilisers to reduce high investment and make better environmental conditions. However, the use of chemicals remains widespread. The province has been ranked top in the use of chemicals for killing weeds. Education aimed at providing knowledge on the application of chemical –free agriculture is distributed (Loei Health Office, 2003).

#### *5.1.8 Natural resources in the province*

Loei holds high potential in its natural resources as there are national parks which are popular in the context of eco-tourism. The overall areas and weather throughout the year are suitable for agriculture, including crop cultivation, livestock and fisheries. On the other hand, the province has faced many problems concerning the destruction and invasion of natural resources and environments. Some are unlawfully and unheedingly exploited by some groups of people and thus, they are carelessly and destroyed. People are unaware of conservation and utilisation therefore natural resources are deteriorating.

#### *5.1.9 Eco-tourism and agro-tourism Promotion*

Meanwhile, the vital government policy is to enlarge the tourism industry thereby earning more national income. This could be a great high opportunity for enhancing both eco- tourism through the concern with the natural resources and agro-tourism with multi-cultivations. The development of tourist personnel and information is required alongside tourist cooperation between two countries. The subdistrict product, One Tambon One Product (OTOP) is promoted. The natural tour and home stay is also promoted alongside eco-tourism and agro-tourism. The project of twin towns tourism between Loei and Luang Pra Bang, the old capital of Lao People's Democratic Republic, is to be enhanced in the near future ( Loei Provincial Office, 2003).

#### *5.1.10 On the Borderline*

Areas of the province are close to the Lao People's Democratic Republic; therefore, border trade and investment is promoted. People from Laos come and buy both industrial and agricultural goods. Some people living on the borderline have played the role of middleman in selling products to the Lao people. Export goods are mostly construction, electrical and consumer goods. However, there are many tensions between Thailand and the Laos PDR.

Problems are concerned with the abuse of drugs- the amphetamines and heroines. The problem of drug traffickers is also of much concern.

#### *5.1.11 The Province 's Visions and Concerns*

The Loei province is proud of its identity, culture and the natural resources. The development of the province aims to improve the area in terms of reducing natural deterioration and generating forest rehabilitation. Better living conditions are encouraged alongside harmonious living with peace and wisdom. Also, an increase in income from the tourism industry is needed, as well as increasing the rate of cross-border trade into neighbouring countries (Loei Provincial office, 2003). However, there are many challenges. The social issues, such as the drug problem, are of high concern.

In summary, this section provides an overview of the province, derived mostly from documentary studies using provincial reports and handouts. There are three main points; the living conditions of people, the socio-cultural and economic aspects and the provincial concerns.

The following section presents an overview of the SDAO, which is chosen as the study areas. It includes from both the documentary studies and observations.

### **5.2 An Overview of the SDAO under the study**

Documentary studies (SDAO, 2002, 2003, 2004), participant and non-participant observations during attendance of the SDAO meetings and conducting a workshop as well as participating extensively in SDAO activities, provide the overall overview of the SDAO under this study.

#### *5.2.1 General Information of the SDAO*

The SDAO (Sub-District Administrative Organisation) is a form of local government at grass roots level. The SDAO under study is responsible for 11

villages in a subdistrict. Each SDAO is always named after the name of the subdistrict.

There are 22 SDAO committee members who are directly elected from the villages, two representatives from each village. Moreover, there are 18 officers at the SDAO office who act as the government officers and workers who supply general and secretarial support within, for instance, the civic or financial units, that are mainly responsible for supporting the roles and functions of the members.

### *5.2.2 Climate and Geographical and Topographical Conditions of the SDAO*

The climate is similar to other areas in the north. There are three seasons; the rainy season begins in May ends in October, a period of six months. The area is influenced by the southeast monsoon. The winter begins in November and goes on for a period of three months until January. The summer, or hot season, starts in February and ends in April, a period of three months. The temperatures in general rise and there can be summer thunderstorms. The area is around 52 square kilometres or 29,425 rai which is divided into 25,544 rai of agricultural land, 3,166 rai of residential area and 715 rai of public forestation (2.2 rai = 1 acre).

### *5.2.3 Population, Occupation and Annual Income of the SDAO*

There are eleven villages in the subdistrict, comprising of 2,356 households, with a population of 9,087. Most people are farmers. They grow rice, corn, soy bean, cassava, rubbers, flowers, sugar cane, sweet tamarind, bananas and vegetables. As some villages are located nearby to the Loei River and some waterways, the various fresh water fish fisheries are one of the main products. Also, some people are merchants, hired labour, unskilled labour, business and government workers.

The annual average income per household is 55,404 Baht (800 pounds) which is over the poverty line of 1,865 households while 460 households are under the



poverty line; the Thai poverty line is 20,000 Baht (270 pounds) per household per annum. Thus a high number of households gain better than the average (Loei Provincial Statistics Office, 2003) income.

#### *5.2.4 Ethnic Group of the SDAO*

The ethnic group of people in this subdistrict could be divided into two categories, one is Thai Loei and another is Thai Esan- people who immigrated from the other provinces in the Northeastern part and some are from other parts of Thailand. The language used in communication and the spoken language is Thai-Loei. However, the villagers are likely to speak the central Thai officially or when there are other people from the central region in the villages.

#### *5.2.5 The SDAO's duties*

The SDAO has been given a wide range of duties. Its general duty is to develop the sub-district economically, socially, and culturally. Mandatory duties include the provision and maintenance of roads and waterways; preventive health services and control of contagious diseases; prevention and relief regarding public hazards; promotion of education, religion and culture; promotion of the development of women, children, youth, the elderly and disabled; protection, care-taking and preservation of natural resources and the environment.

In terms of the committee members, these are divided into two groups of the members; they are executive council members who are responsible for checking and accessing the implementations of the administrative members and the administrative committee members in charge of the eleven villages' development issues according to their roles and functions.

#### *5.2.6 The SDAO's perspectives, lessons learned from the study*

Conducting participant and non-participant observations, the researcher could attend and participate in village meetings, forums, and social events of the villages and social activities, which were initiated by the SDAO members.

Moreover, the researcher was also allowed to attend SDAO meetings in order to gain more understanding and minimise bias as much as possible. Note taking was allowed during the meetings but tape recording was not. The following aspects represent the implementation of the SDAO.

#### *5.2.6.1 Economic Perspectives*

The economic policy was aimed at increasing better living and sufficiency in the community. Promoting and supporting the groups, various agricultural products and facilitating the community market to retail products were reconsidered. The SDAO supplemented the occupations of people to increase their family income. Implementations on this aspect were concerned with the promotion of agricultural products, for instance, the community market, shops, funding and support of economic groups as well as the promotion of tourism.

The SDAO did not pay much attention to the economic perspectives of the people. The community market was concerned with providing a place for the products for sales, rather than for community agricultural products. The sufficiency raised was not distributed into practices. Especially, roles on solving the unemployment and reducing poverty, seemed to be neglected. The market was provided, but not for community products because the SDAO lets outside people sell their commercial goods on Thursdays. This caused environmental problems relating to garbage disposal, the process was untidy and dirty, as well as creating traffic problems.

#### *5.2.6.2 Social Concerns*

In the social aspect, social problems, in terms of drugs problems and social order were raised; therefore, a solution was suggested by promoting the warmth of the family, the harmonious ways in the lives of people, religious minds, and increasing social order. The SDAO tried to reduce all social problems and promoted better living for people.

However, the above concerns had not materialised into action, and there were only a few projects relating to social issues. It seemed that while these issues were discussed, and opinions were shared they were then passed on to all the village headmen for their own solutions. Similarly, the chairman raised social problems such as teenagers making loud noise at night and fighting and then passed them to the village headmen rather than finding a resolution in the meetings.

- *Social Activities*

Social activities were organised to bring about participation among the people, for instance, via sports or recreational events, which were initiated by the SDAO at least once a month. On the other hand, only a few villages participated. Meanwhile, the Centre of the Rights of Women and Children was established by the SDAO in order to be the centre of social welfare for women and children. People did not recognise whether it was necessary, but rather only that the centre had been built without a good understanding of what the Centre would be, or whether it would serve any of their needs as well as providing activities for them.

#### *5.2.6.3 On infrastructure aspects*

Infrastructure issues were the main problems. The necessity of roads construction, improvement of electricity, water supply, public telephones and mail boxes and the improvement of ponds and waterways to better support the people's agricultural activities seemed to be the first priority of all the meetings. The SDAO was largely concerned with the convenience of roads for all villages. Electricity improvement and the communication system were required. Principally, there were always long discussions on this topic before deciding which villages, or even which roads, would be built or improved in which area. Plans were written, but

so frequently, that members could change them due to their flexibility and were prioritised and reconsidered.

However, it still seemed to be unfair for some villages where the maintenance and improvement of roads was still poor. Some members could strongly convince most of others to improve or maintain infrastructural conditions. The members and headmen had to prioritise the infrastructure projects again via a vote. Some were pleased with the results while others were not.

#### *5.2.6.4 Political and administrative aspect*

Political and administrative aspects needed to be developed; hence, a policy was aimed at improving the effectiveness of the SDAO and in educating their members to work more efficiently. Also, the aim of the SDAO was to promote a better understanding in people on political democratic issues and an understanding of the roles of the local government, the SDAO in relation to all people. The efficiency and effectiveness of its roles and functions were required.

In the last SDAO committee member election, there was a large campaign and, moreover, there was strong competition between two groups of members, who would play the roles of administrative members and council members. Therefore they agreed to take their turn after two years. It took a long discussion, however, and they also gave reasons how they would benefit from two-year, rather than four- year, term. The atmospheres in the meetings improved, bringing about the cooperation of its members.

#### *5.2.6.5 On natural and environmental aspect*

The deterioration of natural resources was widespread; therefore, the SDAO policy aimed to conserve and improve their conditions. An increase in the number of trees in the community forest was required. On

the occasions of the King's and the Queen's birthdays, tree growing campaigns were implemented. Big cleaning days were supported by the SDAO. Moreover, elephant grass growing along on the Loei river banks in order to prevent the soil erosion was encouraged. Unexpectedly, after growing the elephant grass for a month, heavy flooding occurred. Therefore, projects of check dam construction were proposed in order to prevent the floods.

Although there were many plans to conserve natural resources, they had never really been implemented. The Loei River was still used without consideration.

#### *5.2.6.6 On tourism aspect*

Tourist attraction was poorly conditioned, thus, the policy of the SDAO aimed to improve the area alongside the improvement of the economic conditions. The SDAO provided a location, a public pond, to be a tourist attraction requiring a lot of funding. It served only three villages located in this area. However, the place was promoted by organising social events on Songkran day, yet only a few villages of the eleven in the subdistrict participated in this event. This indicated that some villages did not recognise this location, generated from the agreement of its members, and not from the needs of people.

#### *5.2.6.7 On Public health aspect*

Public health problem was a concern and accordingly, the SDAO policy aimed to create a campaign promoting better health for people. In this aspect, the SDAO displayed concern and publicly announced the possible outbreak of diseases and how to prevent them, for instance, how to practice family planning, prevent rabies, cholera, AIDS, and bird flu, the drugs campaign, and good health and hygiene for mother and child. Also, the dissemination of the Act of Public Health for All was implemented.

There are two health stations in this subdistrict; located in village 1 and village 5. The health officers of the stations played the role in health services especially the midwifery and the campaigns mentioned above. The chief of the officers took part in the SDAO meetings and informed of any outbreak.

#### *5.2.6.8 Healthy People Promotion*

A campaign encouraging exercise and better health in the community was promoted by conducting aerobic exercise. The SDAO supported this matter by allocating the budget for tape and songs, and health officers supported the trainers. All this entailed was a group of aerobic exercises in every village to serve this government campaign under the project of Health for All.

However, there was a serious health problem. For instance, the rabies vaccine was discontinued. Subsequently, a child was bitten by a rabid dog and finally died. This topic was seriously raised. The members and health officers were called upon to take responsibility, but a compromise was finally reached by respected people.

Therefore, the health conditions were of high concern. Health volunteers were supported to attend the training courses by the SDAO. However, although there was a health broadcast and display boards were announced health concerns, this project did not work well because people did not have the capability to create the health habits needed for prevention rather than treatment.

#### *5.2.6.9 Educational Perspectives*

The SDAO policy is aimed at improving the ethical values of people, promoting both formal and non-formal education, supporting the school lunch programme and the generation of educational materials. The local wisdom in every village was supported. Popular philosophers in each

village were promoted. For instance, the indigenous herbal experts in village 1 were supported to produce herbal products, which were then promoted as the subdistrict product. Bamboo wickerwork experts in village 5 were also promoted as the indigenous persons. The SDAO encouraged young people to learn how to do bamboo wicker work. However, only a few young people were interested in it.

There are 3 primary schools, 1 secondary school and 1 university, Loei Rajabhat University in this subdistrict. The SDAO mostly supported primary education. Some educational materials were provided for instance, many sets of computers with some additional budgeting for school lunch programmes and the provision of milk. The SDAO supported funding for sport events and ethical projects in schools.

In addition, school principals were invited to attend the SDAO meetings, reporting on the implementation of primary education. The principals asked for cooperation on taking care of young children on the traffic safety, especially on Thursdays when the market was held. However, the secondary school and the Rajabhat university presidents never took part in the meetings, although there was a close relationship as some members used to be the students at the university.

#### *5.2.6.10 On Cultural aspect*

Unity, harmony and mutual aids were considered as culture. People signified their rituals and religious traditions, especially on the Sabbath days. Therefore, these could be their ritual days and also the opportunity for various and diverse activities after the morning religious ceremony. For instance, the Songkran day and the subdistrict sport events were used in order to promote the relationships and social inclusion of people and teenagers. Only a few villages took part because some were not pleased with these activities. They complained that they were not from the real needs and they involved a large amount of funding which seemed not worthwhile.

In conclusion, the SDAO do not have direct control over the village people. Their members have to deal with village headmen and the other representative members. Although the SDAO invited the subdistrict headman and all the village headmen to participate in the meetings, some came only for a short period, leaving the meetings before completing the sessions without giving any reason. This caused misunderstandings, and could widen the gap of understanding among them.

However, the SDAO's points of view signified the importance of community leaders in helping them implement effective community practices. The infrastructural aspects became the most important issues in their concerns, while other issues were of much lower priority.

### **5.3 The six villages under the study**

The following sections provide overviews of the six villages under the study which provide the community context. They are drawn from observation; attending villages meetings and forums, participating in the activities and social events and taking part in the activities initiated by the SDAO.

The village meetings and forums were always held at night times in public places such as schools and temples. The meetings and forums were announced via village tower broadcasts. Meanwhile there were various and diverse activities and social events, such as sporting events, marriage ceremonies, traditional religious and school festivals or other celebrations. Significantly, the data obtained in each village differed due to the contrasting activities and events occurring in each village during the data gathering periods. Some villages provided rich data, whereas others provided less.



## **5.4 An Overview of Village 1**

### *5.4.1 General Information of Village 1*

There are 224 households, with a population of 811. Most villagers are Buddhists with only 12 Christian households. In 1933, three families of siblings migrated from the large village on the other side of the Loei River. It was named after the leader of the first group of people. The reason for this migration was because there was flooding. The village, as clustered settlement, is located on a low plain. The area is around 1,484 rai, divided into 1,282 rai of agricultural land, and 202 rai of residential area.

### *5.4.2 Economic Perspective of Village 1*

The major occupation was farming, mainly rice, soy bean and vegetables. Besides, there was sweet tamarinds and corn up-land cultivation. Labour construction was also found. Villagers had to pay a great deal for their fertilisers. To reduce the cost of farming, they organised a group to make organic fertiliser. This group was supported fund by the SDAO and the Department of Community Development Office. The fertiliser and the weaving groups were the strong economic collectives. However, most villagers' income was still low, being under the poverty line, and were in debt. They owed money to the village fund, the Bank of Agricultural and Cooperatives and wealthy people. Therefore after periods of cultivation and harvesting, people went out to sell lottery tickets in the big cities. Debts with high interest were paid back to wealthy lenders. Paying debts on time was recognised through people strictly fulfilling their promises although they had to work outside.

### *5.4.3 Educational activities of Village 1*

There was an education-extension school in this village. Classes were offered from kindergarten to secondary level. The total number of students was 76 with 16 teachers. The school principal and teachers had a good relationship with the people. In addition, there was a development centre for young children

established by the Department of Community Development office. The centre is now responsible for 124 young children with age of 2-5 and is run by 5 caretakers. The school usually arranged activities where most villagers took part. Moreover, there was also an activity in which pupils took part in cleaning up the village. This also helped build up awareness in the pupils' minds in spending time for the community benefit. People also willingly took part in school's activities such as Children's day. The teachers also always joined the village meetings and forums.

#### *5.4.4 Health conditions of Village 1*

There is one public health station that could serve this village and others nearby. However, if the symptoms were serious, patients would go to Loei hospital. There were three village health volunteers in charge of providing knowledge to villagers so that they took precautions in their health conditions. They took responsibility for the surveillance of and prevention against village-borne diseases. Villagers did not realise the importance of water and food hygiene. They still preferred to drink rainwater and ate food that was not completely cooked. However, the health project of exercise could work well. The aerobic group was held and could increase its number of participants.

#### *5.4.5 Socio-Cultural Events in Village 1*

The relationships among the villagers were of a relative or kinship pattern. The villagers paid respect to older people. They usually consulted the elderly on merit-making occasions and traditional festivals. Although there were some Christians, they lived harmoniously with the Buddhists. There were two temples in the community and one Christian church. Their various traditions included, for instance, the marriage ceremony and the living in a new house ceremony.

#### *5.4.6 The Heredity learned in Village 1*

The division of heredity in the past was made equally, including the father and the mother's shares. Whoever stayed and looked after the father and mother would eventually receive these shares; usually the youngest son or daughter. If the heredity was able to be divided between son and daughter, the son would normally receive less or none, owing to the belief that males are stronger. When a man got married, he would move away to live with his wife's family and look after the wife's father and mother instead. However, at present, any inheritance was equally divided, with no difference between sons or daughters. The child who stayed and looked after the parents would receive the parents' share of the heredity.

#### *5.4.7 The Religious Marriage Ceremony in Village 1*

A marriage ceremony was held and the researcher was unintentionally invited to join it. There was no tradition, such as the so-called blind marriage, at present. Most villagers get married between the ages of 20 and 25. Marriage endowment was agreed upon by both parties and depended on the status of the two families. The parents of both the bride and the bridegroom were responsible for finding and scheduling the auspicious wedding date. Usually, they consulted an elder relative or their respected monks for such a date. In general, wedding ceremonies took place during the even months, according to the belief that even months would bring good fortune and happiness to the couple. Traditionally, a man asked for the hand of the woman to be his bride. The girl's father and mother would ask for a marriage endowment, on which both sides had to agree according to its appropriateness. The ceremony was not too complicated as it was simple and held at home. Also, there must be a spirit calling ceremony where the bride and bridegroom had their wrists tied with sacred strings of cotton and in some cases money which had been given as presents. People joined the wedding party without invitation cards but via word of mouth, and brought money in envelopes, even no envelopes to give to the couple. It was customary to pack food at the party for the guests to take home after the feast was over.

#### *5.4.8 Administration of Village 1*

The administration was governed by a headman, two assistant headmen and fourteen village members of the development committee, besides; there were two members of the SDAO. There was a subdistrict headman who lived in this village as the supervisor of the village. Leaders governed their community with democratic principles, using meetings and forums as a means for civic assemblies. However, only a few leaders took actions by giving speeches, and some expressed pessimistic views rather than sensible opinions on developmental issues.

#### *5.4.9 The hot issues from the forums of Village 1*

Amphetamine drug addiction was seen as the main issue for the teenagers. Leaders always raised this problem in the forums and meetings and tried to find solutions. The leaders also pointed out the problems of SDAO implementation in representing the patronage system of the members who were not transparent and accountable. Both formal and informal members were not pleased with its roles. They mostly complained how they were unfair for the developmental schemes. Although some issues, such as the high costs of road construction and improvement, were clarified by its members who were the representatives, some leaders specified that this village was on the opposite side of the SDAO.

#### *5.4.11 Pride of Village 1*

Villagers indicated that the unity of the village was considered to be its pride. During the flooding period, they supported each other well. In religious events, they willingly took an active part in, donated some money to and shared ideas and perspectives on them. As there are two temples, the significance of religious events was meaningful. Also, they were proud of having a community market, here called the evening market.

However, the positive views on multi-agriculture were important. They turned to grow rice, soybean, vegetables, up-land cultivation, fruit and fishery. This concept aimed at reducing their expenditure, earning more income and having work throughout the year. Significantly, it aimed at trying to achieve the concept of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

#### *5.4.12 Challenges of the Community in Village 1*

The village forums and meetings signified the challenges, such as the lack of economic and social groups. People occasionally tried to organise the groups such as the cow group and the tamarind group in order to negotiate a good price for these products. Although these groups were supported by the SDAO and the Community Development office, they failed due to a lack of group leadership and their voluntary basis. Some groups were organised by the community development worker, such as the women's group, youth group, but they had no activities.

Both formal and informal leaders seemed to be aggressive and ineffective. This indicated the low participation levels of people, for instance, when the meetings or the forums were held, only a few people took part. The problem of amphetamines was also a major concern. One of the main problems was the soil problem. More chemical fertilisers and chemical weed killers were used, the more the soil deteriorated. Therefore organic fertiliser was used to replace these techniques, although some villagers recognised it took a long time to produce and was less effective than the chemical fertilisers.

Although the villagers gave up gambling, they still bought lottery tickets, legalised by the government, twice a month. This caused them to spend wastefully.

In summary, this village has the following outstanding features:

- Religious events that could attract the high involvement of people.
- A community market initiated by people.
- Dissatisfactions with the roles of the SDAO.

- Concern surrounding organic fertilisers.

Data were gathered as evidence of the observations illustrating a sense of community, providing its characteristics, the mutual aids and understanding and face to face relationships. Also, villagers face changeable socio-cultural and economic conditions; they learn how they could be more self-reliant and self-sufficient to gain a better quality of life in a different style. Paradoxically, participation as a means or dimension of community empowerment could not yet be genuine. They are involved, or become involved, and share with each other, but it is not yet real joint decision making. The leaders lead this process and are very influential.

Also, this village provides rich data because when I took the observations, more social events and village activities occurred here, than in others.

## **5.5 An Overview of Village 2**

### *5.5.1 General Information of Village 2*

Village 2, established in 1983, was divided from a larger village. Its name was taken partly from the prosperity of the old village. There were 270 households, with a population of 1,078. The area was around 2,000 rai, which was divided into 1,647 of agricultural land, and 353 rai of residential area. There was no land for public forestation. The settlements were clustered and in line. Its planning was well organised and the villagers donated land for the village hall and provided public space for playing sports.

### *5.5.2 Economic Perspectives of Village 2*

The major occupation was farming, rice, corns, sugar canes, soybean, sweet tamarind and bananas, which were the main crops. Villagers went to the big cities to hire out their labour in Bangkok areas or in big cities after cultivation season. They were usually employed as short term factory workers. Their jobs could be both permanent and temporary. The villagers became more interested in multi-agriculture. Therefore, pond digging was a necessity. Their annual

incomes were above the poverty line, yet most were in debt. The wealthy people outside also loaned them money with high interest rates. They tried to overcome this problem by managing the village fund, to let villagers borrow with low interest.

### *5.5.3 Education and Public Health Conditions of Village 2*

There is no school so the children have to go to another village nearby or schools in town. The villagers wanted their children to further their study at higher levels. After primary school, they pursued the compulsory secondary level but they mostly went to secondary schools in town.

There is no health station in this village. When people got sick, they often went to Loei Hospital. Otherwise, mother care, such as the prenatal care was managed by the health officers, most mothers went to the health centre in the neighbouring village because they were accustomed to the officers and the health station became a place to meet each other.

There was a group of village health volunteers but they dealt mostly with the project of health surveillance and prevention. One of the volunteers was a nurse who was very well respected. HIV prevention was the primary health campaign in this village particularly pursued through written signs warning about its danger. They also warned about not smoking and drinking by creating written warning signs in every house. Warnings of some disease were available due to their previous training, such as the Leptolophosis and rabies. So during the rainy season, there were signs concerning the Leptolophosis by wearing top boots, and being aware of rats. While in dry season, all dogs were shot to prevent rabies.

### *5.5.4 Socio-Cultural Perspectives of Village 2*

Most villagers were Buddhists and only five Christian families. There was one temple. There were many beliefs that concerned their occupations- for instance, everyday before leaving the houses to the paddy fields; individuals had to offer

the food to the spirits of the paddy fields. This would bring a great harvest and sufficient rain. This belief had been common practice for years. However, if there was drought, older people still believed that this was because of some bad deeds of people that brought the nature punishment.

Also, villagers had good relationships with each other. As the village was made up of semi-urban and rural areas, there were many people with different occupations living together. Some could not participate in the activities - for example, the people who were the government officials seldom attended meetings. On the other hand, in terms of donations towards all activities, they willingly paid more than others.

#### *5.5.5 Administration of Village 2*

Village 2 was governed by the village headman and two assistant headmen. There were fourteen village development committee members who were also responsible for the development schemes. The leaders could organise village meetings in the temple and convince the villagers to take part in activities. The news of the government was announced to villagers via the leaders in meetings and from the broadcast tower.

There were two representatives of the SDAO, and they had great responsibility. In the meetings, they always had a session to inform the villagers and signify the roles of the local government. Both formal and informal members were listened to by villagers and then involved in activities. For instance, they were devoted to organising activities on Buddhist Sabbath days like the big cleaning day and the improving of the drainage system, all of which was informed by the leaders. Moreover, they convinced people to work on farming activities rather than going out of the village. They signified how it was not worth working in the big cities. The concepts of self-reliance and self-sufficiency were always raised.



#### *5.5.6 The Pride of Village 2*

Herbs and herbal products were the community pride. There were many philosophers who were herbal experts. These indigenous people enhanced the community in terms of transferring this knowledge. Many young people were interested in learning how to use herbs and produce herbal products. The members could produce herbal products as the one of the products of the sub district. The women's group was interested in producing instant herbal drinks and was on the process of refining this. They were currently seeking community product certification.

#### *5.5.7 The Challenges of Village 2*

As they had many cash crops, the main problem people faced was the destruction of their crops by pests and insects. Equally, the more they used pesticide and insecticide, the more the number increased. Therefore, the use of herbal pesticides and insecticides in cultivation became the innovation. This did not work well due to the resistance of the pests and insects. In addition, the prices of soybean and corn were decreased, although this village could produce an abundance of them.

The villagers gave up gambling but played only during the funeral ceremony. They still spent a lot of money buying lottery tickets. Some behaved erratically in finding good numbers for buying them; as well as spending most of time taking risks in this matter. Some went to ask for good numbers from monks and fortune tellers. On the date of lotteries, they paid a lot of attention on the results from the radio and television.

In conclusion, data gathered as evidence in village 2 has the following outstanding features:

- Herbs and herbal products and their possible improvement.
- The roles of both formal and informal leaders are to compromise and to be optimistic.

- Multiple crop agricultures are promoted to lead to sufficiency and the reliance of people.
- Villagers have a shared vision on working in the community, rather than going to work outside.
- Health conditions are of high concern.

The data give a sense of community and its characteristics. Leadership is important in the development context. The people's participation is always a matter of concern with the leaders. Villagers join the decision making process by giving their shared opinions on applying integrated agriculture. However, they keep spending money and time wastefully in buying lottery tickets.

## **5.6 An Overview of Village 3**

### *5.6.1 General Information of Village 3*

Village 3 is located on the southern side of the Loei River. It named after the mouth of the water stream. It was established in 1773. The first group of people migrated from the central part of Thailand and Laos. The area is around 2,293 rai divided into 1,942 rai of agricultural land, 183 rai of residential area and 168 rai of public forestation. There are 140 households, with a population of 492. The agricultural land and public forestation is the widest in the subdistrict. The old style of ancient Loei houses still remains.

### *5.6.2 Economic Perspectives of Village 3*

Farming of rice and soybean cultivation was the major occupations. There were various kinds of cash crops, primarily rice, soybean, corn, red bean. Growing vegetables was productive along the banks of the river. As there was a lot of agricultural land, multi-agriculture was also supported to gain more benefits. The villagers' annual income was higher than the poverty line, but most of households were in debt. They borrowed money from many sources. Also, there was a village fund project so villagers could borrow money and then give it back to the banks, thus creating revolving debts. However, they seldom

borrowed money from the private sector with high interest as they had done. In the off- season, some went to sell lotteries in the big cities.

### *5.6.3 Educational Conditions of Village 3*

The school could serve three villages. It was the compulsory school at primary level. Therefore, it was convenient for all teachers and students. There were 5 teachers and 84 students at present. As the village was not too far from the city centre, some children went to schools in town. There was a village library, known as the reading place. Although there were many books and newspapers, few people used it. It was just the place for discussion, taking a rest or waiting for the mini-bus. At night there was a group of teenagers who used this place for recreation-for chatting, playing guitars and having a picnic. It was the recreational centre rather than the reading place.

### *5.6.4 Public Health Conditions of Village 3*

Villagers went to the health centre and hospital when their family members were very sick. Also, there were many signs in the community persuading people to quit smoking and drinking. Village forums demonstrated the high expenditures of households on this topic. However, some still kept on smoking and drinking. In addition, the village health volunteers took responsibility for the surveillance of and prevention against village-borne diseases. They were trained in midwifery; some certified to deliver babies. The HIV problem was of much concern. Moreover, a disease of great concern was Leptolophosis, of which field rats were the carriers. They had to be aware of this disease, especially during the rainy season. Dengue fever was also addressed by warning of mosquito bites. Public health conditions were a worry to the villagers.

### *5.6.5 Socio-Cultural Perspectives of Village 3*

Everyone in this village was Buddhist. They seemed to be scrupulous as they always went to the temple in the mornings. All the traditions and cultures were

mainly concerned with religious ceremonies. For instance, the tradition of feasting the spirits of the ancestors occurred. This took place on a Wednesday in the first week of May- not the Buddhist Sabbath day when it had to be postponed to the following week. The feasting ceremony was held for the spirits of the ancestors. The leader of the ceremony was an elder of the village who calls for donation money. He brought the following items for offerings: 4 chickens, 4 bottles of white whisky, 5 bowls, 4 pieces of prepared betel nuts for 4 bites, 4 cigarettes, flowers and incense sticks and candles. All households had to send at least one member to participate in the ceremony. The ritual started with the leader saying to the spirits 'today is a good day. I am the representative to bring the food to you so that you would make it rain according to the season, make the paddy flourish and yield great harvest, make us live in happiness, and protect our children forever'. The villagers then held trays of food and other offerings as a present to the spirits to conclude the ceremony. The offerings would be eaten by the villagers at the spirit house and would not be taken home due to the belief that it would create bad luck for the family. And the day after that, they would invite the monks to pray for all. That was the final act of the ceremony.

#### *5.6.6 The Roles of the Leaders of Village 3*

The headman always played the lead role in development. There were two assistant headmen and fourteen village development committee members. There was an administration chart written displaying the people responsible for village development activities. There were the names of the leaders and the committee members and their duties written as public information in the village hall. The hall also provided information by writing the numbers of households, the numbers of males and females, the occupations and other statistical information on the village groups and projects which were conducted. For instance, information on the livestock group, the rose group, the women's group and the youth group was posted on the board informing all villagers and the readers. Moreover, the villagers were also divided into four groups. The main reasons were to decentralise the key people in each group and let them govern themselves in keeping each group of houses and areas clean and tidy.

There was always a high level of involvement in village meetings and forums. This displayed the village democracy as originating from the villagers. The leaders convinced people to join the activities. The leaders distributed the activities to the four parts of the village to manage. For instance, on the big cleaning day, one group was responsible for cleaning all the roads and the garbage disposals, one was responsible for cleaning the drainage systems and one was responsible for cooking lunch and providing water services for all.

### *5.6.7 Pride of Village 3*

The community strength was that every household owned their farm land. The soybean was the main crop, and made a high income for villagers. However, chemical fertilisers and pesticides were needed and required a high investment. The price of soybean was still very low. The middle men always came to buy soybean directly. Most villagers could not bargain the price, and the middlemen were business partners of the leaders. However, growing soybean caused the further problem of using a high level of water, especially during dry season.

Unity and harmonious living was its pride. There was also an abbot, who was respected by the people. The abbot and old monks always participated in meetings and the forums. They always gave suggestions on the development activities and way of life.

### *5.6.8 The Flooding, the main Problem of Village 3*

The main problem was flooding. As the village is located on the mouth of the river, therefore, floods of their agricultural land damaged their crops every year, but not the residential areas. Elephant grass growing was implemented by the SDAO in order to slow down the speed of the water. Unfortunately, after growing the grass for a month, a serious flood occurred and not only the agricultural products were damaged but also the people's houses. Whenever it rained heavily, villagers had to be aware of this problem. People proposed a big project to the government and asked for help from the representatives of

parliament to solve this problem. It would require a large amount of funding to construct a dam for flood prevention.

In conclusion, it could be suggested that village 3 has the following outstanding features:

- Villagers have high involvement village meetings and forums.
- Village information is displayed and warning signs are placed in every household.
- Decentralisation in the village is of high concern.

Shared opinions, experiences, visions signify the community characteristics. This also leads to genuine participation in that people are in a joint decision making process. Culture is also signified through tradition and the Buddhist way of life. Living with sufficiency and reliance is of much concern. The decentralisation of village democracy is distributed with high involvement.

## **5.7 An Overview of Village 4**

### *5.7.1 General Information of Village 4*

Village 4 was established in 1899. The first group of people migrated from a large village which had a cholera outbreak. The village was named after the village main stream, which is a branch of the Loei River. It has a cluster settlement. There are 135 households, with a population of 624. Village 4 is on a low plain of the stream while some areas are mountainous. The area is around 850 rai divided into 605 rai of agricultural land, 136 rai of residential area and 109 rai of public forestation. The villagers rely on the ancestors' forest for their living. A primitive style of living still remained.

### *5.7.2 The Economic conditions at Village 4*

Growing rice, soybean, rubber trees, banana trees and fisheries were the main crops. Bamboo shoot preservation was the main product. The growing of various mushrooms was also well known. They had both natural mushrooms and grown mushrooms which could grow naturally in the public forestation.

This indicated the fertility of the forest. They enjoyed the natural mushrooms more than the farmed ones, which were also more expensive.

Most of their annual incomes were over the poverty line, as villagers produced food for themselves all year. Raising fresh water fisheries was good but the price given by the middlemen was low.

Women's groups were enthusiastic to learn many things; such as the preservation of banana. Moreover, they wanted to have their own market. They decided to use the community space as a weekend market, which they displayed great pride in. However, it was not worthwhile due to so many villagers selling their food products, while only a few were there to buy. In addition, public relations were needed for other villages on this matter. There were many agricultural products and fish produced, but the marketing process and system were obstacles. Although they were organised in groups, negotiations on the price of products were limited.

#### *5.7.3 Educational Conditions of Village 4*

There was no school, so students had to go to school in another village nearby. Villagers willingly supported schools. For instance, the school lunch programme was supported by all in terms of providing two women a day to cook lunch in school on weekdays and also donating money to buy food. The villagers participated in school activities, such as on the Mother's Day. They brought food for all teachers and pupils took part in the performance. They also got involved in school meetings when they were invited to give extensive cooperation. However, some villagers complained it would be more practical if this duty was shared by all villages not only theirs.

#### *5.7.4 Health Conditions of Village 4*

There was no health station; therefore, villagers had to go to a station in another village instead. There were fifteen village health volunteers performing in a group who were in charge of providing knowledge to villagers to take

precautions in their living standard. They took responsibilities for the surveillance of and prevention against village-borne diseases. All were trained to have first-aid skills. In the meetings, the headman also provided time for them to inform of the situations of public health, such as diseases that came from rats and mosquitoes. However, it was also difficult for them for prenatal care. When they got sick, and if the symptoms were serious, they had to go to Loei Hospital using community trucks which were provided by the SDAO members, who were the representatives and the headman.

#### *5.7.5 The Roles of the Abbot in Village 4*

The relationships of the villagers displayed neighbourliness; in that they performed mutual actions and displayed understanding. They were aware of both economic and social groups. They encouraged each other to not leave their community to work in other provinces. All are Buddhists and most do not work on Buddhist Sabbath days. In particular, the elderly greatly believed in and respected Buddhism. There was a temple, where is located in their ancestor's forest. They paid great respect to the monks, especially the abbot, who was also one of the respectful informal leaders. The abbot's preaching was always concerned with self-reliance and self-sufficiency and how the diligent people could solve poverty. They were quite scrupulous- if the Sabbath days were on weekends, they also brought their children to the temple.

#### *5.7.6 The Activities on the Sabbath Days*

Furthermore, the leaders always organised village activities on the Sabbath days. The big cleaning day was held and most people took an active part in it. The headman afforded some budget from the SDAO to repair the drainage system. After much hard work, they had a big dinner together. They willingly got involved in the activities. The headman always convinced the villagers to join activities initiated by the SDAO. However, the youth group was not interested in getting involved, due to it taking a long time to interact with another village and that they previously fought with the teenagers at the sport event last year.



#### *5.7.7 Administrative conditions of Village 4*

Village leaders both formal and informal were very powerful, especially the headman. There were fourteen village development committee members who represented all the economic and social groups. There were five village development consultants who were old respected people.

In the meetings and forums, some decisions were based on the highest number of votes. However, leaders especially the headman, always took the active role of the meetings and forums. He had high leadership skills and eloquence; therefore, he could finish the sessions of the meetings or forums easily. For instance, he could create an understanding of the village fund and convince the villagers to propose the committee of the village fund within forty minutes, while other villages required a long debate in this session. Before concluding the sessions, the headmen also allowed some people to present some health issues from health volunteers. Then, he concluded the sessions with how the leaders provided trucks for the needy people to travel to the hospital and how they were available for all.

However, after formal meetings, there were always informal discussions among the key people, featuring about ten to twelve people; there were various and many detailed topics, such as how to improve the village market and how to invite the neighbouring villages to participate in the market. People worked in their village through out the year. Multi-agricultural activities were promoted. Also, leaders asked for support from government agencies to provide equipment for digging ponds without contributing any funding. This matter pleased the villagers greatly.

#### *5.7.8 Pride of Village 4*

The pride was the women group which was strong and effective. There were many groups which represented both the economic and social aspects. They were initiated, then gradually and continuously supported by the Community

Development Department, the SDAO, the office of non-formal education and many other offices in the province. The women had voluntary awareness and always shared with each other. There were twelve economic and social groups and were supported by various agencies. Some groups needed to mobilise stocks from villagers while some did not. The economic groups, such as the fish group, the pig group, the saving funds group and the women's group were well-organised and most were led by women.

Furthermore, women were willingly supported by their leaders and men. The multi-agricultural and community economic groups were all in the process of improving. One of the groups of which all villagers were proud was the social welfare group, which aimed at helping the underprivileged. The group leader was the headman, as well as there being a large number of members.

In addition, there was unity, solidarity and a high level of participation. People got involved in activities inside and outside of the effective leadership. However, some groups were ineffective because some villagers were already members of many groups. They wanted to be members due to needing to borrow from the revolving funds. If some groups were not supported, it was difficult to conduct activities. This seemed to be unsustainable. The management and marketing was a further challenge. Most villagers were in debt and circulated and rotated to pay back money within the groups.

#### *5.7.9 The Village 4's Challenges*

There were some groups of people who hardly took an active part in any activities or attended any meetings. They were often government officials and business men. They had to work on weekdays and village meetings were always held at night. Equally, this participation was pseudo-participation, not genuine participation, and they were strongly led by the leaders, particularly, the headman, who could play an important role in persuading people to join activities. Although he was still young, he could be seen as a wealthy, strong man capable of helping people and could be a role model. However, the headman had a good relationship with the SDAO members and that they were

in business partnership. Therefore, the conflict of interest was cautiously mentioned but only in the informal discussions.

In summary, the following features are outstanding in village 4:

- The community market is initiated by the villagers.
- There is a strong headman who supports all activities and is very helpful to the villagers.
- The plentiful public forestation that provide various natural kinds of mushrooms and bamboo shoots.
- Learning is of high concern with the villagers.
- There are many strong social and economic groups.

Villagers signify a sense of belongings and sense of bonding and many face to face relationships. The high involvement leads to participation although it could not be genuine because most are convinced by their leader, the head man. The economic groups work well and its active role is played by women. The groups are well organised and have their economic activities within their community. Villagers are enthusiastic to learn more. They also created the community market themselves. Sufficiency and reliance are shown through these practices.

## **5.8 An Overview of Village 5**

### *5.8.1 General Information of Village 5*

Village 5 was established in 1981, as part of its separation from a larger village. It was a line settlement located on one of the main roads in the province. The village was named after the big tree of the village, now being used as the ancestor's tree. There were 216 households, with a population of 827. The area was around 2,500 rai, divided into 1,250 of agricultural land, 530 rai of residential areas and 720 rai of public forestation which was plain and mountainous.

### *5.8.2 Bananas and Para Rubbers: The Economic Perspectives of Village 5*

Although farming was the main occupation, there were various occupations due to the village's location in relation to the town. There were government officials, merchants and farmers. There were many cash crops; rice, soybean, vegetables, rubbers and bananas. Banana preservation was considered to be a village product and became one of the products of the subdistrict, supported as the OTOP. The banana group increased its number of the members and tried to make its product in full cycle -from growing to preservation and then marketing. The management of the group was not very effective; it was supported by some borrowed funds from the SDAO but could not return them back on time.

In the last ten years, the villagers turned to grow rubber because the price was very high. In addition, the government supported this and applied policy on the price via the rubber assurance. There was a great hope in the people that the rubber would become the main cash crop. They planted rubber while not even knowing how to extract rubber sap from the trees.

### *5.8.3 Socio-Cultural Perspectives of Village 5*

All villagers are Buddhists; and there was a temple. The Buddhist Sabbath days were the most meaningful days. Villagers placed highly value religious activities. From village meetings and village announcements from the tower broadcast, the leaders strongly influenced people to participate in religious activities. The topics at meetings covered how to promote the religious activities and invite people to take part. There was also well known temple with a well known monk who was paid respect by the people in the province and its neighbours. For instance, there was a merit ceremony that attracted people from Bangkok to make merit in this temple. It was called Kathin. This religious event was broadcasted and informed to all areas for many weeks and brought about high involvement. Moreover, old people believed some of the bad deeds of the villagers had brought the punishment of nature when it was flooding or drought. Then they made a merit asking for forgiveness from nature.

#### *5.8.4 The Leaders of Village 5*

The headman was elected directly from the villagers for a four –year term. There were two assistant village headmen and a village development committee, which consisted of 12 key villagers. They were responsible for the development issues and activities. The key people had a meeting twice a month, but the meetings were mostly were informal rather than formal because they discussed issues without any specific topics. The atmospheres of these meetings were warm and friendly.

#### *5.8.5 The Expectation of the Rubber trees Growing Problem*

The 2 representatives of the SDAO took part in the meetings and always identified the problems of the village and the subdistrict. For instance, they mentioned growing rubber trees in the forestation areas and were aware of the potential flooding in the future. All drew the conclusion that the villagers should not plant the rubber trees in rows or not on mountainous areas. Specifically, they should grow them untidily and only at the foot of the mountains. There would be flooding in the future due to not reducing the speed of the water when it rained heavily.

#### *5.8.6 Educational Supports of Village 5*

There was a primary school. All people supported the school and also provided women to cook lunch in the school lunch programme. They went to school every weekday and also brought some meat, pork and chicken. They enjoyed cooking with other women from other villages. The headman organised this meeting of the women's group, including cooking for the school lunch programme. The women set the menus for the school lunch and discussed how they could provide nutritious food and appropriate menus. Moreover, on the school's activities, for instance, on the Children's day, people joined the activities by persuading all parents to go to school, then made a merit and played games with all the teachers and students.

### *5.8.7 Health Conditions of Village 5*

There was a health station and the group of health volunteers was strong. The importance of the five food group intake and exercises was discussed. It was an exercise campaign to illustrate the signs of how useful the exercises were. They discussed how to maintain good health and occasionally prevent diseases. Wearing top boots was recognised as preventing for Leptolophosis disease while typhus fever was prevented by destroying the rustics of mosquitoes. However, when they discussed health conditions, overall, they were more concerned with treatment than the prevention.

### *5.8.8 Pride of Village 5*

Integrated agriculture was promoted without the use of chemicals. The water supply was managed by villagers, but it also had to be extended as the water quality deteriorated. Unity and harmony in the people was also its pride. There was no need for police and solicitors due to the understanding and cooperation. For instance, there was a case in which a man's dog bit the fighting cock of another member. The owner was very angry and wanted the dog owner to compensate for the loss of the cock at a very high price. They could not reach any agreement. Finally, an elder, respected by the villagers mediated in this case by simply telling them to recognise how they should be neighbourly and cited many conflicts from other villages. Then, they agreed and joined each other in dinner without paying for the cock. They remained friends and never mentioned the dispute again.

Very strong campaigns for not smoking, drinking and buying lottery tickets were found. These worked well because this issue was always raised. However, some continued doing these things, spent money wastefully and were in debt. However, the village fund was well organised, due to its very good management of the members who were mostly pensioners. It was rewarded an amount of money to continue the fund. The village fund members generated ideas on how to resolve villagers' financial problems.

### *5.8.9 Challenges of Village 5*

Villagers faced problems of weeds, insects and pests and, therefore, had to use chemicals such as pesticides, insecticides and chemicals for weeds, yet all were resistant to it. This made high investment in the growing of rice and all up-land cash crops. However, knowledge of the non-use of chemicals was disseminated. People recognised how much they used chemicals. But they continued using the chemical fertilisers, especially pesticide for killing weeds. In the meeting, they discussed a field trip to other villages to learn how to make organic fertilisers.

In conclusion, Village 5 has the following outstanding features:

- Banana preservation is well-known, although group management is not very effective.
- Rubber is believed to be the future cash crop but is a great worry because of the probable flooding problems.
- Religious and school activities can bring about high involvement.
- Chemical free crops and organic fertilisers are of high concern.

Culture generates high involvement, particularly through religious activities. Face to face relationships are retained. The abbot plays an important role in disseminating the concepts of self-sufficiency and self-reliance through his preaching. The concern with how to reduce the cost of living is also illustrated. This brings about shared vision and opinions in the villagers.

## **5.9 An Overview of Village 6**

### *5.9.1 General Information of Village 6*

Village 6 was established in 1970 as part of a separation from village 1, due to its larger population. It is located on the northern side of Loei River. It is made up of both clustered and line settlements. There are 133 households with a population of 525. The area is around 1,619 rai, divided into 716 rai of agricultural land, 512 rai of residential area and 391 rai of public forestation. Its name was taken from the big trees in the village.

### *5.9.2 Economic Perspectives of Village 6*

Farming was the main occupation. People grew rice, soybean, sugar cane, sweet tamarind, and some vegetables. The vegetables were pesticide free but chemicals were still used to kill the weeds. Rubbers had been planted for four years. The villagers hope that the price of rubber will remain as high as it is presently. As the village is located near to the river, villagers raised fish in the confined areas but this did not work well due to the heavy rain that made the water unclear and inappropriate for fish raising.

In agricultural activities, villagers had to spend much for pesticide, insecticide and chemical fertilisers, while still recognising the danger of chemicals. They tried to make organic fertiliser, but they failed due to it taking a long time and only a few being interested. The incomes of the people were low, and some had to leave the village to sell lottery tickets and work in big cities. Some villagers raised water buffaloes both for ploughing and selling. They took buffalo to sell at the cattle market in the big city. This made for better income.

### *5.9.3 The Weaving Group of Village 6*

Most women were in the weaving group producing high quality woven cotton products. They could fabricate cotton products from local materials until it became OTOP. However, the investment required was high because they had to buy raw materials from the neighbouring provinces. They tried to use natural colours despite its high cost due to not having raw materials in their village. They improved their cotton fabrics by making more products, such as purses, eyeglass cases, mobile telephone cases etc. However, they faced marketing problem.

### *5.9.4 Educational and Public Health Conditions of Village 6*

There was one primary school but no teachers lived there. Therefore, school activities were not well -organised because the teachers always left the village early. The school provided a school lunch programme which worked well and



brought about high involvement in the villagers. The teachers also provided milk for all students and took care of their hygiene. All of which was appreciated by the villagers.

There was a public health station at the village which also served three others. Mostly the health officers were responsible for prenatal care and conducted many health activities for mother care, such as exercises for pregnant women. Moreover, there was a group of village health volunteers responsible for the broadcasting of the outbreak of diseases. They were very active and could even deliver babies and manage first aid because of their previous training.

#### *5.9.5 Socio-cultural Perspectives of Village 6*

Most villagers were relatives of other members. Most are Buddhists, while only 4 households are Christians. They got along well with each other. There was a Buddhist temple. Villagers had high involvement in religious ceremony. For instance on Songkran day, they would all come back to their village even if they were outside in other provinces. It was important for all families to pay respect to older people. Young people would pour water into their hands or take a bath water for them in order to show their gratitude. Even though this occasion was held by the SDAO, it was specifically for this village.

#### *5.9.6 Administration of Village 6*

The village headwoman governed this village with two assistant village headmen. There were 12 village development committee members. They all used meetings as a means of democratic demonstration, but there were only a few people who came to participate in the meetings. Therefore, formal meetings were seldom held while the informal meetings always took place at the village headwoman's house. There were two SDAO committee members who were women elected directly by the people. They always participated in village meetings and told villagers about the news and what had happened in the SDAO, and tried to clarify what the SDAO had done for all, but only a few got the messages from them.

The efficacy of the leaders was illustrated during the flooding period, as they organised people to assist each other through mutual help rather than getting support from outside. They arranged a strong women's group to cook for all the villagers and generated support well without asking for help from many agencies. The villagers were proud of themselves and their leaders.

#### *5.9.7 The Woman Leader of Village 6*

The leader of the village was a woman who was influential, helpful and supportive. She could organise the village's activities effectively and took great responsibility for every developmental aspect. She tried to organise groups in order to negotiate the price of the agricultural products. She always attended the meetings of the SDAO and never left before the end of the sessions. She was very active in announcing information on the village broadcast tower every morning. She preferred informal discussions rather than formal among the villagers. She was powerful in terms of securing funds from the SDAO and some agencies such as from the Community Development Office and the Non - Formal Education Office to support the economic groups.

#### *5.9.8 Pride of Village 6*

Many buffaloes were raised as villagers believed in their usefulness. They also use them as ploughing labour and raised them as meat to sell. Some foreigners went to see them. The group was supported by the SDAO, and became quite profitable following the sale of the buffaloes. This increased the number of the members. They could even join the cattle market in the neighbouring provinces. However, some of the buffalo owners were not pleased with ploughing with buffaloes; they liked using tractors due to their longer working hours and more consistent output. They wanted to sell the animals at the cattle market.

The women group was strong and also played an important role, being well supported well by the men. Moreover, the infrastructure and facilities of this

village were much better than the others villages in the study areas. But in summer, the lack of water still remained the main problem.

#### *5.8.9 Challenges of Village 6*

However, as the village was a semi-urban and rural community, there were various occupations. Therefore, it was quite difficult for them to conduct meetings at anytime, even night. Only a few were able to attend, so the village broadcast announcement tower was important. The village headwoman and the assistant headmen announced news everyday. Therefore, village news which was required knowledge was broadcast by the headwoman via the village tower. However, that this was only one-way communication.

In conclusion, village 6 has the following outstanding features:

- The weaving group is well known and its materials are of qualification standard.
- The female leader is influential and the women's group is strong.
- The village broadcast announcement is important.
- There are various and diverse agricultural activities.

There are a sense of community and face to face relationships. The characteristics of community were that villagers share a sense of identity and shared vision and opinions. Villagers have a high involvement in religious ceremonies. Although they use the village broadcast announcement instead of holding formal meetings, informal meetings are held regularly among women's discussions. Both formal and informal leaders play an active role in developmental issues.

### **Summary**

This chapter has provided background and context in the study areas. It has outlined an introduction to Loei Province in the Northeastern part of Thailand where the study areas are located. The multi-method of non-participant and participant observations were employed throughout the study and participation

in the social activities. They produced the context of the SDAO (the Subdistrict Administrative Organisation) that has given a better understanding of its roles and functions. Also, data show the gradual improvement and efforts of the SDAO to serve the needs of the people in order to meet the goals of decentralisation.

Particularly, an overview of the six villages presents their socio-economic and political outstanding features and different sorts of activities. This chapter has displayed the results of the study, the findings 1, giving a wealth of data that indicates the various contexts of the villages. The profile of the villages represents the rural northeastern community which maintains a sense of bonding and face-to-face relationships. The development issues are mostly taken up within the roles of the leaders. Group activities represent the people's participation and potential learning. Villagers have high involvement in religious ritual activities. The activities create further illustration that support their community ways of life.

The overall findings 1 show the data gathered as the evidence to provide a sense of community, the characteristics of the community, participation, leadership, learning, and culture. This also signifies how the contexts of villages are powerfully evident. These are analysed into community empowerment.

Meanwhile, the results of the study, the presentation of the findings, the findings 2, Leading to Community Empowerment, will be exhibited in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **FINDINGS 2: LEADING TO COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to present part two of the findings, dealing with community empowerment revealed by key villagers in six villages and SDAO committee members. These people expressed their points of views, experiences and understandings concerning community empowerment through the methods of focus group discussion, interview, observation and workshop. Emergent themes with relevant sub themes were identified in these areas: an understanding of the concept of community empowerment; the significant elements in community empowerment; the elements promoting community empowerment; the existing elements and approaches promoting community empowerment; and issues that weaken community empowerment.

The key themes are presented and supported by evidence from the field notes as follows.

#### **6.1 Theme 1: Understandings of the Concept of Community Empowerment**

It was very difficult for respondents to define the concept of community empowerment. The term was abstract. It was a combination of many aspects to support each other. Mental strength in the people was recognised rather than the improvement of the material welfare. How people live happily and calmly is addressed. The following issues signify the understandings of the concept of community empowerment.

### *6.1.1 The mature human beings: the strength of the mind*

These samples were raised to present mature people who could be helpful rather than receiving support from others. The characteristics of mature people were depicted as the understanding of community empowerment concept derived from the respondents' experiences. The following sample extracts are from the discussions giving evidence about the empowerment concept.

..... Community empowerment is development of the human being. We can be free from others' help and support and moreover, we can manage everything by ourselves (Focus group discussions, village1 and village 5, March18, May 28, 2002).

.....our community could not yet be strengthened. To be empowered is able to gain better living conditions, earning more sufficient income, and having low debts. Being with family together, not being apart is the strength but some have to leave to sell lottery tickets (Focus group discussion, village 2, April 2, 2002).

The respondents provided positive discussions on empowerment, involving happiness and calmness alongside the development activities. Being together in the family gave an understanding how community manifested itself, via an indication of the family warmth. However, some villagers had to go to work outside, selling lottery tickets twice a month, which lasted for at least six days at a time. Therefore, some left their family and children, letting old people take care of them. The following sample quotes depict the understanding of the concept of community empowerment.

..... It is the people's strengths both mental and material. It is the sufficiency of the mind. (Focus group discussion, village 3, April 3, 2002).

..... One element cannot achieve the empowerment.... being free from debts, not rely on the prices outside as well as we can learn the resource management and can solve problems (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002).

The respondents depicted the strength of the psychological aspects of people. They also indicated how they were free from being in debt, while recognising other people's financial difficulties.

### *6.1.2 Happiness and calmness in the community*

Living with happiness and calmness could be defined as community empowerment. The following extracts indicating the peaceful living can define empowerment.

..... there are many distinctive characteristics concerning with happiness and calmness (Focus group discussions, village1 and village 5, March18, May 28, 2002).

..... the peacefulness can represent empowerment. All have to support the better living conditions (Focus group discussion, village 6, June 12, 2002).

Happiness, calmness and peacefulness also signified community empowerment. This includes good face to face relationships via reciprocity and the trustworthiness of the people. This social cohesion can provide understanding of its concept. Community empowerment brings dignity which their villages have tried to achieve.

### *6.1.3 Self-Reliance and Self-Sufficiency*

The terms of self-reliance and especially self-sufficiency seemed to be much more influential in contributing towards the respondents' understandings of the concept of community empowerment. The respondents from the interviews appreciated it as shown by the following quotes.

Nee and Win:..... community empowerment as if it is self-reliant and peaceful community. There are no drug problems, price of goods problems and other harmful problems.

Suri:..... The community empowerment is people empowerment. They have jobs all year round. The term, self-sufficiency as the King has given to us all is most needed to be considered.

Suri is 57 years old, and an informal leader in village 4, who is respected by the people. He said sufficiency in mind presented both people and community empowerment. Likewise for Yan, a good tempered village man, when was asked about community empowerment.

Yan:..... it is needed to look at the people's minds rather than the material issues.

Api :..... The strengths of groups, organisations, cooperatives are signifying the empowerment. People can identify problems and overcome problems.

Api, a village headman who is well educated and wealthy. He mentioned the significance of the people in empowering the community. The following extracts are from Pat and Boon, who live in the same village:

Pat:..... The strength of both material and mental is the empowerment. The community life is the human life. The friendships of people, the powerful minds, and people at good work with good spirits are empowering themselves and community.

For Boon, the well-used environments and well-being of the community are also significant:

Boon :.....People have occupations all year round and have good living conditions. The well-used environments can be noted as the qualified people who think of the next generations.

Similarly, Chien has given the definition of empowerment as the process within creating self-reliance and self-sufficiency of the people. Staying permanently in the community depicts empowerment.

Chien:....Empowerment is the concept of self-reliance, and how people learn how to survive and have good living conditions.

In summary, in theme 1, most respondents discussed how the strength of the people should be concerned with both material and mental strengths. Moreover, peacefulness with happiness and calmness are the evident points of empowered life and this emphasises the empowered community. The reliance on sufficiency is suggested as the main concept. All of these are interrelated.

However, this could be the ideal concept of community empowerment, as it would be difficult in practice. For instance, people had to borrow money from the middlemen who came to buy their products. Then they had to pay this back with high interest, both in kind and in cash. The terms of self-reliance and self-sufficiency seem to be ideal. Also, the Sufficiency Economy, the philosophy of the Ninth Plan, was disseminated while the present government tries to encourage people to spend more. Moreover, it was publicised regularly that the government guaranteed wealth of people. Being in debt was the most prominent feature of contemporary village economic life.

## **6.2 Theme 2: Significant elements in Community Empowerment**

There were significant elements in community empowerment. They were self-reliance, self-support, self-sufficiency and self-moderation, these elements were all interrelated alongside the farming activities of the people.

- *The assertions of self-reliance, support, sufficiency and moderation*

This confirms that the terms of self-reliance, self-support, self-sufficiency and self-moderation were indicators of the strength. The real meanings of those



terms signify the human dignity. The following extracts are from the respondents' discussions.

..... It is not only self-reliance but it also includes self-support, self-sufficiency and self-moderation. .... We are being in debts forever unless we try to be free from the extravagances. The prices of agricultural goods are much lower from the industrial goods (The workshop, July 27-28,, 2002)

Moreover, the prices of the agricultural products or even the village handicrafts, differed significantly from those of commercial products. Village people consume goods at a higher price than previously. Most people are in debt which has now developed into a borrow cycle. The following quotes are from the discussions of the workshop and the SDAO meeting.

..... We have the revolving fund; we owe the Bank of Agricultural and Co-operatives for our cultivations, crops, fertilisers, pesticide, insecticide and etc. Moreover, we have got the village Fund. We are in the cycle of debts. The problems we have faced are from ourselves (The workshop, July 27-28, 2002).

..... There is the close link of self-support. To reduce being so extravagant, we have to produce some shampoo, soaps for ourselves by ourselves. People in village 4 and 5 have found how to reduce the costs of living (The SDAO meetings, April 3, June 4, 2003).

Most of the respondents indicated that self-reliance, self-support, self-sufficiency and self-moderation were all related to each other. The definition of the empowerment is greatly concerned with these terms. The following extracts are from San and Nee, illustrating their assertion on these conditions.

San :.....Its concept lies upon being self-reliant and self-support. It is the people's dignity. The self-sufficiency that the King has given to us, all must think about it.

Nee:..... We have to think first before spending money due to many luxurious goods. We must be aware of sufficiency in mind.

To summarise then, the data indicated that the application of self-reliance, self-support, self-sufficiency and self-moderation could be the terms most suggestive of the empowerment. The integrated agriculture was disseminated to people to progress agricultural activities throughout the year. For instance, the slogan of the community was, broadly speaking '*grow what you eat and eat what you grow*', indicating the self-reliance, self-support, self-sufficiency and self-moderation of people. Also, the knowledge of applying the New Theory in relation to the concept of the Sufficiency Economy, and the philosophy of the Ninth Plan was evident in many families. These were good examples of integrated agricultural activities and supported the reliant and sufficient concepts, which could be both mental and material aspects.

On the other hand, the villagers spend their money wastefully; for instance, on buying lottery tickets. They even practice the revolving of debts, meaning they could borrow the funds from the many resources provided. Incredibly, the villagers could save their rice for consumption throughout the year but still have to sell to clear their debts. For example, they have to sell their goods at low prices to middlemen. In addition, the present government keeps encouraging people to spend more in order to raise the GDP of the country. This indicates how the self-reliance, self-support, self-sufficiency and self-moderation are difficult to practice in community lives.

### **6.3 Theme 3: Elements promoting Community Empowerment**

In Theme three, there were many elements that could promote community empowerment. These were the roles of community leadership, participation, learning and the role of local government. These elements were also interrelated.

#### *6.3.1 The roles of community leadership*

The role of leadership could be the sub theme of the elements promoting community empowerment. There was a significant relationship between the power of both formal and informal leaders. Village headmen and sub-district headmen could be defined as formal leaders while the respected old people, monks, and leaders of social groups were the informal leaders. The following quote indicates the significance leadership.

... .. If we have stronger leaders, we can gain many things such as the supports from the government and any agencies. In contrast, we are having low influential leaders; it is difficult for our village to go forwards (Focus group discussion village 1, March 18, 2002).

The respondents are concerned about powerful leaders, due to the comparison between their own village and others. The main component of village development is the influential leaders. The following quote presents the importance of the leadership roles.

... .. Our village headman could convince our villagers to donate money for the school lunch programme and asked our women for cooking at school. He is powerful (Focus group discussion, village 5, May 28, 2002).

The headman in village 5 has been in this position for 1 year; he is young at 27 years old but also influential. For instance, it took only a few minutes to manage the session in a friendly atmosphere, even though it was about donating money to the school lunch programme, not for a merit, and could have taken a long time. Nong, a member of the SDAO, gave his point of view on community empowerment.

Nong:... The village 5 headman is educated and active so that village is going forwards. He is a democratic leader as he keeps persuading people to take part in the meetings and activities.

Nong has been a member of the SDAO for two years. He mentioned it was difficult to have a perfect leader, not only in terms of leadership qualifications but also in acceptance from the villagers. Also, the following discussion supports leadership.

..... amphetamine drugs problem terribly makes us so worry about our young teenagers. Strong leaders would be influential on the teenagers' parents, then, this problem would be declined (Focus group discussion village 2, April 2, 2002).

When discussing on the role of formal leaders and how they feel about their main duties, the following quotes present the importance of leadership.

..... the leaders are the role model. Most are well-rounded, intelligent and sacrifice. We preferred the leaders who were well educated but now, we consider the properousity and generosity (Focus group discussion village 3, April 18, 2002).

..... the leaders of the groups are significant. The informal talk of creating new crops and livestock always interest us, they make us work within our village (Focus group discussion village 4, May 7, 2002).

The discussions revealed how leaders take active role in sharing activities and how informal discussions among them could bring confident motivation in farming activities. For Mali, potential leaders are dependent on their respectful characteristics in terms of sacrifice and generosity. She signified how leaders played their role in development activities.

Mali:..... most leaders provided their trucks for the villagers to the hospital in case of emergency..... the headwoman created the banana preservation. She manages better than men.

However, a lack of understanding can often influence villagers from Kanya's point of views. She indicated the in active leaders.

Kanya:.....some leaders always misconceptualise the work of the SDAO. Some were unaware to comply with its agreement..... for instance on the co-operation to

convince people to pay taxes for the garbage disposal.... whilst they claimed the members spending the budget wastefully. Some can not prioritise the projects.

For Kom, the potential of community leaders leads to community empowerment. It could be via social heritage that the next generations are enabled to empower each other.

Kom:..... Community empowerment represents the vigour and energy of leaders. It is a good sample for the young people to follow the good deeds of our generation..... The leaders of women's groups are energetic. The leaders of the soy bean, the bamboo shoot, and the weaving groups are women.

Kom mentioned that strong leaders both formal and informal, were needed to make a powerful community. Likewise for Win and the discussion, a high attention and willingness of in the informal leaders enabled important actions.

Win:..... Women leaders sacrifice themselves and time for the improvement and the progress as well as the better conditions of our living. They even went to another province in order to learn how to preserve the banana and papaya.

..... We always hold our activities and meetings in the temple. The monks always give good suggestions to us in terms of morale and spiritual supports. They convinced us to take best care of our children for keeping away from drugs (Focus group discussion, village 6, June 12, 2002).

Win informed of the characteristics of both formal and informal leaders in empowering each. The term 'sacrifice' is determined by active manners. Pas and the discussion signified on how important leadership was.

Pas:..... Leaders can convince the participation ..... during flooding period in September, the vigorous leaders can relief the problems by persuading people both inside and outside. They created a big women group for cooking for all.

..... Although the role of the local government is increasing, the leaders still play the key actions (The workshop, July 27-28, 2002).

To summarise, then, community leaders, both formal and informal, play the significant roles in developing activities. This indicates that there is a close link between leadership and community empowerment. This must be located within the relationship between the leader and followers. Villagers could see the importance of making connections with other agencies. Also, they could be the role models and are accepted by the people.

However, the community leaders could be the headmen and then take a turn as the SDAO committee member in the next elections. Some were the business partners of others. Therefore, they could see both the strong and weak points of others. They play the roles of the local politicians; they could relate to the

headmen and SDAO committee members and then try to run for being the membership of House of Representatives in the future.

### 6.3.2 *Community Participation*

One key finding to emerge from the analysis was that people's participation promoted the strength of the community. The respondents identified that the substance of people's participation. The following sample quotes are from the discussions in village 1.

..... There are a few people involved in the meetings even though in the hot topic like the village fund. Some only attend but never talk. Conducting the group is difficult. We cannot afford the budget like other villages can (Focus group discussion village 1, March 18, 2002).

The importance of people's participation is dependent on the understanding of the villagers. Mutual understanding highly signifies people's participation; on the other hand, the lack of understanding seems not to play a crucial role in participation.

Yong: ..... The headman broadcasts the news by using the broadcast tower in the mornings but we need to meet each other.....It is difficult to hold the formal meetings, however, we always discuss on the village issues in a small group.

Informal meetings require a more friendly atmosphere as there are many village topics which should be discussed together. The villagers play a role of passive participation. The following extract is from Pas who indicated the importance of participation.

Pas:..... On Songkran day, they brought their elderly to take part in this festival although we had to be responsible for them.

Win and Suri recognise how people feel free, and willingly take part in the meeting and activities in the village settings. This is illustrated by their following statements.

Win:..... The drugs addict of the teenagers was the main problem but we found the solution of treating them and we strongly care for the prevention of drugs. We are free of drugs and our village is called the white village for the first village in this sub-district.

Suri:..... We decide not to grow cashew nuts because it is not suitable for us and for our soil even though it is promoted by the Agricultural Promotion Division.

Win and Suri strongly agreed that a high level of participation leads to community empowerment; hence, both formal and informal village forums

provide a good sample for participation. Equally, villagers can become familiar with participation in the forums, and develop enthusiasm in the developmental issues. The following quotes are from the discussions in village 4.

... .. We did not have our own market. Some raised the problems of being dirtier and only a few would not join the market or it would not be worthwhile but finally all agreed. Until now, we have had market for 4 times already and have on Sundays. (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002).

The respondents indicated that participation was displayed in terms of planning, initiation and implementation. For these participants, the discussion indicating the significance of the participation is quoted as follows:

... ..In the evenings, there is a big group of women conducting the aerobic dance in order to build up better health. At the beginning, there were only a few people but increased its numbers later. Most enjoy being in the project (Focus group discussion, village 3, April 18, 2002).

When asked about community empowerment, the respondents from village 4 again indicated active participation, which signified their positive view. The respondents accepted that passive participation also has benefits, and that they gained much from the SDAO. Likewise, for Wan and Porn, who are leaders of the women and bamboo shoot groups, the following quotes reveal their perceptions of people's participation.

.....The activities which are arranged by the SDAO have been spent a lot of budget. We were so surprised that on Songkran day on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, only a few villages joined the festival. We brought our old people to take part. We were awarded as the best village that occasionally took part in the project initiated by the SDAO (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002).

Wan:..... I went to Nongkhai to learn how to manage the woman group. Although I found it was not so beneficial, this made me gain better experiences.

Porn: .... The SDAO committee members took my group members and me to the fieldtrip to Khon Kaen , in order to find out the market for selling our bamboo shoot preservation and most of all, having fun and gaining more experiences.

Also, for Yot, the discussion indicated that the potential of the community is dependent on active participation.

Yot:..... Women's group is active because of thinking and doing together. They create the revolving fund by themselves and it is helpful. They understand every step of their process.

... ..participation must be occurred willingly...the formulation of groups and cooperative as well as forming the network is the involvement. This should start with the informal organisation first (The Workshop, July 27-28, 2002).

From the workshop, respondents recognised what real participation was what led or forced participation was not. The process of planning, implementation and evaluation is needed. The following extracts are from these discussions, which address participation.

..... We have a chance to express our ideas and exchange freely our opinions amongst each other (Focus group discussion, village 5, May 28, 2002).

..... the SDAO create the activities. The sport activities for the young people, the activities on the Buddhist Sabbath days, the festivals can mobilise people's participation (The Workshop, July 27-28, 2002).

..... We have to concern with the projects that lead to people's participation. We have to reconsider why people in our subdistrict did not take part in the activities initiated by the SDAO (The SDAO meeting, June 4, 2003).

To summarise, most respondents gave their positive points of view on people's participation, suggesting that was the significant element in promoting community empowerment. They also differentiate between participation that was either active or passive. Both could be important. Willingness and the process of decision-making were much concerned with real participation. Significantly, the participation was primarily supported by the roles of leadership. Moreover, high participation in the groups can provide high numbers of group members which can generate support from many agencies.

However, this led and forced participation was inevitably apparent. The active leaders could provide active participation while the ineffective leaders could not. Only persuasive participation was led by the leaders. People could not be incorporated into the process of decision-making, although they willingly joined in sharing activities. It could be argued that it is not genuine participation, as it is passive and low participation and relies on the status of leadership even in groups and the community.

### *6.3.3 Learning Community*

The learning community is one of the sub themes which depict one of the components of community empowerment. Villagers learn all the time to gain further knowledge, and adjust themselves to the changes of society. Moreover, the learning process has helped people realise what benefits the community and

how to find solutions to problems occurring collectively. Learning has been known as the local wisdom, utilising social heritage and traditional learning which has been modified throughout the years. The following extracts are quoted from the discussions.

..... As we grow herbs, up to now we produce herbal packages. We have learned from our ancestors from generations to generations. The packages of herbs for reducing pains are well known (Focus group discussion, village 1, March 18, 2002).

.....Our experience is to learn among ourselves. We used to find the bamboo shoots from the forests nearby, actually we have learned the preservation from our respected elders (Focus group discussion village 4, May, 7, 2002).

Most of the respondents gave evidence of how they recognised community learning. The following quotes are samples from the discussions.

..... We have found learning amongst ourselves and from outside villages as well as from our generations in order to gain better living. We do not go to work outside. So we have to find and create more jobs besides our farming seasons (Focus group discussion, village 5, May 28, 2002).

..... Some groups can manage well so they are supported by the SDAO and other organizations. The weaving and fertiliser groups can organise effectively, besides all members have to deposit their money every month and they can borrow the money from their groups (Focus group discussion, village 6, June 12, 2002).

What the respondents gained from their experiences could gradually increase their learning. The following quote is from the discussion and illustrates how people's engagement in learning within their farming living conditions was recognised:

..... we have learned from our experiences, as we were recommended by the Agricultural Promotion Division to grow economic crops but we failed because there were no markets such as the cashew nuts, the cabbages, the tomatoes, the chili. The prices were low (The Workshop, July27-28, 2002).

Learning is a process suggestive of community empowerment amongst its participants. It is taught through real hands-on experiences and mostly by a qualified, respected elder. There is a basic understanding that humans desire to know, to do, to be or to become. They, themselves maintain their local wisdom and will transfer it to the next generations. The following quotes are from the interviews with Win , Porn and Wi.

Win:..... The women group can manage and organise well. They conduct bamboo shoot preservation, rice in bamboo and they have their own fund. The group is improving so it is supported by many agencies.

Porn:..... We grow a lot of bananas and herbs. We have been taught how to make shampoos and soaps from our herbs for ourselves by the community workers.



Wi: ..... We have done a lot of work but we still poor. We have to set our own price rather than let the buyers set for us. We were cheated by the people outside. We need to be trained on management.

These individuals, who are the key persons playing important roles in women's group, have faced many situations that they mentioned as being a process of trial and error. They agreed this was the way to learn from real situations. The following extracts from the SDAO meeting provide in-service learning.

.....some groups can represent the product of the subdistrict promoting 'one Tambon One Product project' but some face marketing and management problems. So we will allocate an amount of fund for the training project (The SDAO meeting, April 3, 2003).

.....During the beginning of June, we are going to have a training project focusing on the management, the curriculum of the meeting is now on the process, the chairman has asked for the lecturers, the resource persons from Rajabhat Institute Loei. It could be 5 key persons from each village (The SDAO meeting, April 21, 2003).

To summarise then, most respondents gave evidence that community learning was the significant element which led to community empowerment. This could be local wisdom, learning through experience and gaining more knowledge in terms of training. The data showed how people learned from trial and error from real life. Old people transferred their local herbal wisdom to the younger generations. Moreover, there were many agencies that dealt with training, providing to people, for instance, with the Community Work Office, the Non-Formal School Office, the Loei Rajabhat University and the Bank of Agricultural and Cooperatives. Villagers enjoyed in-service training. Some could apply to improve their products and could earn more money from food preservation.

However, the villagers were not pleased with the training courses, for instance, with the fact that they could not apply management and marketing to their real situations. Most products have faced these problems. And although integrated agricultural activities were enhanced, people still turned to grow mono crops like rubber and had to provide high levels of investment on this. Growing rubber is propagandised by the present government. The price in the meantime is good because it is assured by the present government, but it is probably not guaranteed in the future with others. They will probably gain more experience and learn more lessons in growing cash crops with unstable prices.

#### *6.3.4 The roles of local government*

The local government, the SDAO, has been modified over the years since its establishment in 1997. It seems quite difficult for people in the villages to clearly understand its role, due to the lack of information. In previous days, headmen always played the important roles in the village, but currently, the SDAO is significantly evident as the local government at the grass roots level, as well as holding the greater role of allocating budgets to the developmental schemes of every village. The committee members are administered by village's representatives and formed as administrative committee members and the council of the SDAO. Although the roles of local government were a sub theme of the element promoting community empowerment, people still questioned how this type of local government could really play the role of decentralisation.

The following quotes are from the discussions, interviews and the SDAO meeting.

... .. the SDAO is still new form for us, its roles concerning about building up the quality of lives of our people. We are informed from time to time how significance of the grass roots level local government but we think it is overlapping (The Workshop, June27-28, 2002).

..... the committee members are trying to be much different from the villagers; they are acting like the government officers. What they have done as the development projects is mainly concerning about the construction of roads. We think there is the conflict of interests so the SDAO's role is still unclear (Focus group discussion, village 1, March 18, 2002).

People do not understand the roles of the SDAO, the local government, clearly. There are many functions but the members were only recognised for the infrastructural functions rather than others. That is why people keep raising the subject of corruption and conflicts of interest. The following quote gives an example of how it was perceived that the SDAO did not serve the development schemes, but the members focused more on administrative duties.

..... The benefits of the SDAO are mainly for its members. They approved the projects such as going for fieldtrips, buying a new car, having air-conditioned office and they act like the government officers who are being our representatives. They have their own uniforms; it seems they are different from us (Focus group discussion, village 2, April 2, 2002).

However, the SDAO members recognised that within its role that it would take time for people to understand the concept of local government, and decentralisation.

.....We have been tried hard to distribute our roles to the community but the regulations of the SDAO have been frequently changed and modified. It takes time for a better understanding amongst people, the headmen need to help us to clarify this problem. Our problems are mostly concerned with the people (The SDAO meeting, May 30, 2003).

For Sonta, Win and Yong who are the SDAO members, they also signified the SDAO has not yet achieved the ideas of decentralisation.

Sonta:..... SDAO does not serve the roles of local government and decentralisation. Some could influence and convince each other, the informal meeting is important. They put themselves in different groups.

Win:..... The members mostly initiate the projects focusing on the infrastructure construction more than the social welfare or other improvement of people's living.

Yong:..... There are not development plans concerning about the better living of the people. Some members are the business partners.

.....The plans of our SDAO have to be approved by the headmen but some seldom attend or participate in the meetings, therefore it is the wide gap of misunderstanding. We have to learn more and more what the roles of us being the members (The SDAO meeting, May 22, 2003).

The analysis revealed that there are two main issues in the role of local government which focus on the SDAO. The first issue presented is the negative views, while a more positive view on the SDAO suggests it could achieve the ideas of decentralisation. The development projects which are initiated by the committee members are useful and beneficial for the people's needs. The following extracts are from discussions and the meetings and illustrate the importance of the role of the local government, the SDAO.

.....The SDAO is helpful. The women group is highly supported in terms of funds and the herbal group as well as the fish product group. They also maintain the roads construction and road improvement (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002).

..... the members create the development issues such as road constructions, the drainage systems improvement and provide the funds to the occupation groups (Focus group discussion, village 5, May 28, 2002).

... .. We have 2 representatives being the members, we should trust them, and they are on the process of learning how to serve the concept of local government and then, the lessons learned would let us know the benefits we could gain from the SDAO (The Workshop, July 27-28, 2002).

Also, the SDAO, the local government tries to adjust itself to meet the people's needs. The significance of its representatives can provide an understanding on its roles.

..... We have to concern with all villages ,the plans of the recent year will focus on the education affairs rather than the constructions so do not worry about the justice, we will do fair budget allocation. All headmen should make a better understanding between people and the SDAO (The SDAO meeting, May 22, 2003).

..... When people have better understanding on the roles of the SDAO, they will participate in the projects more than before. All of the people's needs (The SDAO meeting, June 30, 2003).

To summarise, the data revealed that there were both positive and negative views on the roles of the SDAO, the local government. The positive views given show how the SDAO as supporting the development schemes in the villages. The groups, both social and economic, are strengthened by the provision of allocated funding. The representatives could be the voice of the villagers in the local government body. The activities initiated by the SDAO could widely generate participation and meet the people's needs, for instance the groups are funded. The infrastructural aspects could satisfactorily provide convenience for people. For the SDAO, its modification will take more time and possibly enhance the ideas of decentralisation and lead to community empowerment.

However, the data also depict negative views that the roles of the SDAO have not yet been understood and accepted by people. Some questioned why they had to pay for garbage disposal while the SDAO itself was already funded by the government. The members were seen as being different from the people. Moreover, wastefully, the members spent funds on fieldtrips and luxurious office, signifying how the members did not play the role of decentralisation. Some villages got unjust allocations from the SDAO as the representatives are in the opposite side of the administrative body. The members are the business partners of constructors which lead to conflicts of interest. Also, unwanted activities were initiated and only a few villages took part in them. Consequently, this caused high budgetary demands for the performance of worthless activities. This topic had also complaints in the village forums, showing how the SDAO should be more cautious when they instigated activities which needed more participation.

## **6.4 Theme 4: Existing Elements in Community Empowerment**

It was recognised from the data that community culture, unity and solidarity, could be the existing elements of community empowerment. It depicts rural village culture as containing face to face relationship and neighbourhoods of people.

### *6.4.1 Community Culture*

Community way of life, as community culture, was the existing element which referred to empowerment. It was one of the key themes emerging from the analysis. Most of the respondents were concerned with rural Thai culture. Many discussed the intensive culture, which was still maintained and could be combined with community empowerment. The following key components signify the core rural culture.

- *Religion and Beliefs*

Most villagers are Buddhists. The moral principles of Buddhism are very important. As the three principles of Buddhism are to do good, avoid evil and purify the heart, there are a lot of teachings of the Buddha. The following quotes are from the discussions and interviews, as well as the SDAO meeting, and present the importance of religion and beliefs in leading to the empowerment.

.....Our village is calm because we are Buddhists. We also use the Sabbath days for the public unity besides going to the temple in the mornings. The monks are respectful. We are proud to do good deeds following the morale principles of Buddhism (Focus group discussion village 3, April 18, 2002).

..... It is our beliefs in the spirit soul of the village. We care for each other and for the spirituality that we understand as the spirits of our ancestors that protect us from disasters and most of all, to attain the calmness (Focus group discussion village 4, May 7, 2002).

..... We agree that we share with each other and we are having mercy. We have to concern the projects that integrate the moral supports (The SDAO meeting, May 22, 2003).

Likewise, for Mali and Kanya suggestive of the strength of the community lay in calmness and the beliefs of Buddhism.

Mali:..... The principles of being in the middle path and the self-sufficiency and the concepts of self-reliance and sacrifice are the concepts of Buddhism.

..... The special occasions of Buddhism such as Visakhabucha, Makhabucha and all the Sabbath days are meaningful for creating the activities for all. Most people take part in praying, meditating or listening to the monks giving a sermon. Not only the religious activities but also the integration of the development activities such as the big cleaning day, the sport events amongst ourselves and the neighbouring villagers (The Workshop, July 27-28 , 2002).

The following extracts indicate the empowerment of the community in terms of the mental development. Peacefulness is depicted, as well as honesty and sacrifice. Self-reliance and self-sufficiency are presented as the core components of being a Buddhist.

.....Buddhism is what we believe in and it is the stability of our heart. ... ..we believe in good deeds, we pay respect for our elderly which consists of the mercy and forgiveness (The workshop, July 27-28, 2002).

.....Honesty, sacrifice, self-reliance, self-sufficiency and mercy are the characteristics of the virtue of all Buddhists (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002).

.....Although we there are three households that are not Buddhists, they are identical. All of us play respects to the elderly; we comply with the senior people, they build up the sense of belongings (Focus group discussion, village 6, June 12, 2002).

On the other hand, some of the respondents discussed that young people were not interested in praying or listening to the sermons of the monk. It was because they were not yet interested in the religious activities, as they were just teenagers, and they only took part in activities such as sports and the development activities, the development activities. The following quotes are from the leaders of the youth group, Nai and Chai:

Nai: .....Although young people are not interested in going to temples, we take part in the sport activities. However, some are still students so we can not go to the temples. But we believe in what our elderly suggestions. It seems our consents make them happy.

Chai:.....Our young people are observing the good deeds of our elderly or our ancestors. They are our role models and we will be old. Seniority is our culture whilst the elderly do not understand us well due to making loud noises singing and shouting by some of us at the night time... the elderly always forgive us when we err.....

In the beliefs of Buddhism, seniority and spirituality are considered to be the culture of the community. Most of the respondents gave optimistic views on mental development, as it could not be materialised but was the first step in

going forward. This makes the community peaceful. However, it was realised that young people's behaviours widened the gap as they did not want to join the religious activities. Although they did not fully take part in religious activity, they could see how their parents acted as role models in making rituals and merits as well as how they maintained close relationship.

#### 6.4.2 *Community unity and solidarity*

The community unity is considered to be the great deal of the integral factor of all the development issues. It has implied community empowerment. The harmony and shared aims and visions amongst people are part of the strong culture. The following extracts are quotations from the discussions of the participants.

.....The unity is the strength. When we face the conflicts, we can easily overcome or find the solutions. Most are pleased with the compromise. We never need lawyers or any justice procedures at all (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002).

..... Although we have faced a lot of problems, we understand well and we are close to each others, being relatives and help each other (Focus group discussion, village 5, May 28, 2002).

The respondents gave more evidence on how their culture could play a role in generating unity. The discussions offer a mutual understanding and support its ability to provide unity, which, in turn could reduce conflicts.

..... Poverty is the weakness of our community but we have low conflicts. It is because we understand each other well (Focus group discussion village 6, June 12, 2002).

This key finding has emerged from the analysis of the interviews relating to unity and solidarity, which manifest empowerment. The following extracts, indicating the unity, are from the interviews with, Pas and Nee.

Pas:..... Although we have faced the problems such as being in debts as well as the poverty, we still live together peacefully.

Nee:..... High cooperation comes from the solidarity which is our social heritage from generations to generations.

To summarise then, community unity and solidarity lead to a mutual understanding that helps and supports what is considered to be community culture, particularly, its close relationships amongst villagers. It is concerned with mutual understanding in supporting its member. Most feel like they have a

blood connection with each other whenever they are experiencing hard times, they can help each other. Cultural and religious events and celebrations present opportunities for people to initiate and maintain friendly relationships and neighbours. However, there are also opposing pressures in the community; for example, young people do not want to go and make merit with old people. They do not want to go the temples and do not give food to the monks in the mornings. They do not fully join the religious activities. They even fought with each other within the community and outside it. They also made very loud noises with their motorcycles at night time. The data also evidenced young people leaving Buddhism, and the occurrence of separatist movements, substance abuse, and a generation gap between the elderly and the young people.

The following section presents theme five of the approach to promote community empowerment.

## **6.5 Theme 5: Approaches promoting the Community Empowerment**

It was found in the data that there were five approaches promoting community empowerment. The following sub themes from the data analysis indicate how to empower the community.

### *6.5.1 Community inclusion: community unity needed to be maintained*

Community unity was the pride of the community and led to community empowerment. It was also shown to require maintaining within the community, particularly through keeping in touch with each other. Good cooperation, relationships and neighbourliness could create unity. This could be transferred to the next generations. The following quotes are the samples from the interviews of Porn, Kanya, Pas, Win, Santa, Khom and Ken in which they discussed maintaining unity in relation to the possibility of strengthening the community.

Porn and Kanya:..... Unity makes the village strength. It must be transferred this pride to the young people..... we will have less conflicts in our community.



Pas and Win:....Our village still well exists: people can live and share our resources happily together providing good cooperation and close relationship.

Sonta and Khom: ..... When we face our hard times for instance, the flooding problems and the drug problems, all could be declined by supporting each other.

The term mutuality was also used to support the unity in the villages. This could be depicted as community inclusion which was again raised as the main issue in promoting empowerment. The following extracts are from the discussions and the SDAO meeting providing significant data on maintaining unity as one of the best routes to strengthen the community.

..... Both formal and formal discussions through the activities make us understand each other. We talk to each other, not only in the meetings. Discussions make us a better understanding (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002, village 6, June 12, 2002).

..... We have only a few conflicts and never putting cases to the law court. We have to talk and to discuss to each other (The Workshop, July 27-28, 2002).

.....It is needed for us to create the activities which could motivate people to be involved. The approval of the projects will concern unity. We keep up being united and it is needed to provide to the young children (The SDAO meeting, May 30, 2003).

The interaction of people through talking and discussion was significant, especially on an informal basis, while formal discussions were not in keeping with the villagers' characteristics. From the village forums, people did not performed public, formal speaking, and only occasionally organised formal discussions. This approach could jointly create a sharing of experiences amongst people. Inclusive living together with trust and relative connections was still remained. The existing unity of villages was a role model and would be disseminated to the next generations. The sense of community lies in the face to face relationships.

However, there were some conflicts among villagers. The most serious one concerned boundaries and plots of land. This happened when they wanted to measure what they owned to either sell or leave as a legacy. Some had disagreements when they had to elect representatives. Because of community unity, these conflicts could be managed without putting cases to or notifying the law courts. Respected people played major roles in this compromise. They pointedly drew attention to the significance of unity in the village setting, and

let the concerned parties rethink their neighborhood relationships to enable the conflict to be reduced and then resolved.

### *6.5.2 Genuine participation needed to be generated*

The respondents mentioned that building up people's participation was a method of empowering the community. People should be involved in identifying problems and solutions. They had to make decisions on the events and situations by themselves. The following quotes are from the respondents' views and indicated that real participation is needed.

Lai.....It is needed for us to take part in activities. We are provided the chances to decide what we are going to do for ourselves.

Mon...We are not on the process of decision-making. We have taken orders to participate in the activity such as the village fund project which was given by the government.

For key villagers such as Lai and Mon, it was important that respondents take part in the village activities. The data indicated the decision-making process led to genuine participation while being told to take part did not. Leading or asking people to join any activities by the leaders could create only the passive participation. The respondents gave their views on generating real participation leading to empowerment. The following extracts are from the discussions and meeting, and depict the further significance of authentic participation.

..... We are informed or forced to be involved in the projects initiated by the SDAO passed our leaders. They just told us to take part in the Songkran festival. It is needed to be on the process of decision-making (Focus group discussion, village 3, April 18, 2002).

... .. Village forums and meetings are good because we present our views, perspectives and expectations to the activities. We are able to create the Sunday market by ourselves (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002).

The respondents recognised both active and passive participation. Being instructed to join activities is not real participation, whilst the identification and solution of problems by the people themselves could lead to active participation. The projects initiated by villagers could bring people into and make them responsible for what was decided collectively. The process of decision-making relied upon participation.

.....The projects must concern with the high involvement otherwise, we can easily waste of funds for implementing the activities that are not from our needs. The

improvement of roads mostly is from the damage causes of flooding (The SDAO meeting, March 16, 2003).

The respondents indicated a high involvement in the villages' forums and meetings that could indicate people's needs. They could be enabled to be incorporated into the process of decision-making, and its implementation, leading to possible benefits. On the other hand, some villages could not hold village forums, and some development issues, like the improvement of roads and waterways, were dealt with directly by the villages' leaders and the SDAO committee members. The data also indicated this as low participation due to the occurrence of unneeded activities initiated by the leaders.

### *6.5.3 Social and economic groups had to be organised alongside learning and networking*

Social and economic groups in the villages were important. There were many groups in the villages often taking the form of informal organisations. Some were organised by the villagers themselves, initiated by the Community Development Workers, the Non-Formal Education Officers and the NGO. The concept of learning and networking was a high concern. This could be an approach which empowered the community. The following extracts from the respondents reveal their views and opinions on this approach.

..... We have weaving group, fish group, agricultural group, marketing group, health care voluntary group, revolving fund group and the women or the sewing group. The women group works well because of strong leader and members. When our groups are getting stronger, we are supported by many agencies. However, our aims are being sustainable (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002).

..... The fertiliser group is well-organised. It is increasing the number of members and the funds. They have their own regulations, they have to deposit their money every month and they can withdraw their money for multi-purposes uses. However; some group like the banana group can not work well, there is no activities, and the SDAO stop supporting them (Focus group discussion, village 6, June 12, 2002).

Organising groups was not only a source of empowerment but that also developed self- management and learning. People learned from trial and error which could help identifying significant lessons. People could be members of many groups, some of which worked well while others did not. Some groups were organised in order to get funding from other agencies, such as the Community Development Office. In turn, some workers just wanted to organise

groups in order to further their career which was not fair on the people. The groups were organised, but there were not any activities at all-just a name or even group sign. Some groups were provided with funding which was then taken by the members, as they agreed to distribute it as loans among themselves instead of building up activities. Some faced the problem of marketing and management, and this required training-both formally and informally. Strong groups were mostly generated by people learning from trial and error.

Furthermore, continuous education is required by community learning. The following quotes are from the discussions and meetings, and illustrate the significance of groups, the learning and networking.

.....It takes a long time for the weaving group to be empowered. They faced marketing problem. They were cheated by some merchants. The bleaching is also their problem, they have to concern more with our environment, and they even drain waste water without consideration on the vegetables and trees for killing weeds. However, they have found the solutions (Focus group discussion, village 1, March 18, 2002).

.....The groups could create the jobs throughout the year. The sewing group in our village is doing well. People will not migrate to the big cities when they are off-season or people do not have to go for selling lotteries and some were cheated because they sold on credits while they bought in cash (Focus group discussion, village 5, May 28, 2002).

..... We have approved the budget allocation for the groups especially for the fish groups that have faced the floodings. We are provided the funds from the government for this disaster (The SDAO meeting, March 16, 2003).

Most respondents recognised the importance of organising groups and learning within them as an aspect of the empowering process. It could create skilled young labour within the groups. These groups could generate profitable activities throughout the year. They could assist locally, like the weaving group and herbal product groups. This could be an approach to strengthen the community. On the other hand, some groups faced a lot of problems, such as marketing, low prices and high investment, and some members thought it would be more beneficial to go out and sell lottery tickets twice a month instead. It was not worthwhile, in weaving, to use natural materials rather than the chemical colours which caused environmental problems. They drained polluted water to the trees and even watered their vegetables with it. Health problems were discussed and this improved the members' understanding on environmental issues. A better understanding on this matter made people learn how to treat waste water. However, this meant that weaving activity required more investment.

There were several dimensions to each group; such as leadership, participation, learning, friendship and mutual understanding. The education of members was a long process and part of this learning experience. The significance of a social group, like the cremation group, it provided them with money to pay for a funeral ceremony on the death of a family member. Economic groups, for example the weaving group, faced a marketing problem and the low price of its products. These problems could be solved gradually through their networks. The networking provided links for individuals and organisations.

Appointed groups did not work well while groups initiated by the people themselves could be strong and sustainable in the future. The effective groups could provide interaction between members and future networking, while ineffective groups could not. Networking provided relationship for people within and outside the community through their activities. In this way, learning and networking could sustain its implementation.

The following extracts are from SDAO members Pong and Pin offering the evidence on the importance of organising groups which could lead to community empowerment.

Pong:..... There are many aspects in the groups. There are management, friendship, discussing, identifying problems, sharing and regulation. Some products could be the products of our sub-district such as weaving and herbal products.....the community development workers provide marketing.

Pin:..... The women group could manage well during the flooding periods, they cooked for all people and many people from outside helped us. The teachers from Rajabhat University, from Mahathai School gave us some food and money to manage this activity.

Most respondents were also members of various groups. They agreed that being in groups was not only about membership but also the many activities that occurred according to their interests and skills. These included a wide variety of processes of organising and maintaining the groups, as well as educating the members through the group process in order to improve group management. The members gained a shared visions, ideas, perspectives and benefits through their group activities. Furthermore, they, created friendships, mutual understandings, self-management and reciprocity among themselves and others via their networking. Then they could be supported by other agencies. On the other hand,

there were many groups that failed their implementation. They had no continuous activities and could not create networking. It was found these were groups in name only with no activities.

#### *6.5.4 Social and psychological value on culture and religious beliefs needed to be placed*

All the respondents stated the significance of religion; Buddhism, which is the core culture. The respondents recognised that rural culture, which was concerned with the way of life, was influential on empowerment. There was mutual understanding, friendship, respect paid to each other and the culture of religious beliefs. The beliefs, as the preaching of Buddha, were considered to be universal and tended to promote empowerment through self-reliance self-sufficiency. These placed social and mental value on culture and religious beliefs in order to strengthen the community. The following extract is taken from the respondents.

..... Being at the middle path in every aspect is the key concept of Buddhism. In addition, the concept of self-reliance is revealing to empower both at personal and community levels (Focus group discussion, village 2, April 2, 2002).

The cultural and religious beliefs played an important role in empowerment. Reliance and the sufficiency were significant, especially in the psychological aspects along with effecting how people could work in their own villages. However, villagers waited for support from both local and central government. They asked for help through, for instance, loans from the local government, when these were not received loans, they complained for the unfair treatment. Most of them spent wastefully, through buying the lottery tickets or luxurious things and were not worried at all about being in debt.

The people faced problems concerned with the cost of living, so religious values capitalising on sufficiency needed to be reconsidered. Strength of mind was raised as leading to empowerment, as extravagant living could weaken people, the family and thence the community. However, people kept on spending a great deal of their consumables, and then they faced difficulties paying back high interest on any loans they had acquired.

The approach of being self-reliant was an aspect of human dignity. The Sufficiency Economy, the philosophy of the Ninth Plan given by the King was also offered. The pride of the community was its culture, including many abstract issues and the beliefs of dominant religion. The value placed on this was very significant, as shown by the religious activities on religious days such as Makabucha day, Wisakhabucha day and on Buddhist Sabbath days. On the other hand, most teenagers and young people could not join the religious activities on Sabbath days which fell during the week. It was evident that young people spent wastefully on luxurious items and did not probably understand the concept of the Sufficiency Economy. There was a big generation gap in their approaches to this.

#### *6.5.5 The roles of community leaders, local government as well as the government needed to be adapted*

The roles of community leaders were one of the main components reinforcing the empowerment. The role of government, at both local and national levels, was seen to be significant. These points were all related to each other. Therefore, in terms of strengthening the community, all leaders were required to adapt their roles. The following quotes illustrate the adaptation of the roles of leaders, local government and the government itself in order to strengthen the community.

.....The government supports are needed but it should support directly to our village, not to the SDAO because its project are mainly focus on the road constructions and improvement which cost big amount of budget. The members spend money wastefully going for their fieldtrips, building a new office, having air- conditioned rooms and buying a new truck. They are acting like the government officers and wearing uniforms (Focus group discussion village 1, March 18, 2002).

.....The roles of the headmen are decreased. The SDAO should adapt its roles to promote them because they are much closer with people rather than the members. The leaders should be more empowered (Focus group discussion, village 2, April 2, 2002).

The roles of formal leaders, like the village and subdistrict headmen had been modified since the SDAO was established in 1997. Some of them were not pleased with this change as they wanted to manage funding directly in the villages, not under the control of the local government. The SDAO allocation of funding was unfair for some villages. Respondents raised the point that SDAO members spent a lot of money on its administrative body and more on

infrastructural improvement than the other development schemes of the villages. How the members acted as officials signified the difference between villagers and members. This illustrated a negative view of the SDAO.

However, the following extracts illustrate the need for adaptation in the government itself in relation to the local government, the SDAO.

.....The SDAO members are supportive but the roles of the government should be adapted. It should provide the funds more than this to the SDAO because the SDAO knows our problems better than the government. For instance, the women, weaving and fish groups are supported (Focus group discussion, village 4, May 7, 2002).

.....The government does not recognise our poverty problem as well as the SDAO does. The members participate in village forums. Moreover, the SDAO is concerning on the activities. The government should adapt its role to give more supports on its implementation (Focus group discussion, village 5, May 28, 2002).

The local government, the SDAO, took on the role of development in the village. The government should allocate more funding and let the SDAO work with the villagers. On the other hand, some development projects from the government went directly to the village setting and provided strong roles for the leaders. This presented the political activities of present government. The present government did not support the concept of decentralisation. For instance; the village fund was directly given to the villages, thus providing the fund for the villagers. This indirectly benefited the next political campaign in that the political party acting as the present government gained more support in the next general election.

Moreover, the following quotes from the interviews indicate how important the roles of the leaders, the local government and the government are in creating adaptation in order to strengthen the community.

Pong:.... The village headmen should cooperate with the roles of SDAO and make better understanding with their people.

Pat:..... the leaders especially the village headmen have to adapt their roles to give more supports to the SDAO activities. They have to learn to understand well on the roles and functions of the SDAO which is the local government at the grassroots levels.

Sai:..... It should take more times for all leaders to understand the roles of the SDAO because it has just been established and modified.

The common view was that the adaptation of local leaders, local government, the SDAO and government was needed to support each other. In terms of the



SDAO, the local government, it took time for people to understand how this type of government was beneficial to them through granting them their representatives. Cooperation amongst leaders at every level was significant. Most of all, the benefits of the people should be the primary concern. Focusing on the benefits to people in the community, all leaders, including the local government and government, needed to support each other being good coordinators. On the other hand, all the leaders and members played the role of politician at every level. The village leaders could take turn as members of the SDAO. Political benefits could be found in the conflicts of interest. Some of these figures were named as local politicians.

To summarise then, in theme five, it was found in the overall data that to access community empowerment was a process which represented a combination of these approaches. Also, villagers and the SDAO committee members' who were respondent illustrated the contexts of each village, each of which differed from the next. Some owned more gainful natural resources, while others had less. This is offered in Chapter Five. Therefore the contexts of the villages are important in relation to the approaches to empowerment.

However, the following theme that was accidentally found in the data, could illustrate the factors that hold back community empowerment.

## **6.6 Theme 6: Factors that hold back Community Empowerment**

Contrarily, there were factors which indicated that the community could be limited in its empowerment. There are many sub themes as factors that hold back community empowerment as follows:

### *6.6.1 Community could not yet be strengthened*

There were many findings from the analysis that present why the community could not yet be strengthened. The villages were not really or sustainably self-reliant due to a lack of skilled and young labour, weak and inactive leadership, a low sense of belonging to the villages, inability to form a network, weak and

low potentiality of self-management and development of villages, and lack of people's shared visions.

- *Lack of skilled and young labour in the villages*

As most villagers encouraged their children to attain higher education, young generation did not want to work on agricultural activities. Some worked in town in non-agricultural activities and came back in the evening. The villagers had to hire a labour force from other villages during cultivation and harvesting periods. Although integrated agriculture was disseminated and most agreed that it could offer the agricultural work throughout the year, the hiring of labour was needed. Also, villagers had to pay high wage. For instance, the planting of rubber was agreed in a village, yet they had to hire labour from other villages to do so. People at the ages of over forty were involved in agricultural activities. Some sold their lands to the government officials, merchants and others. How the community could be empowered when it lacked skilled young labour was not evident. However, villagers did not want to migrate from their villages. Although some sold their plots of land, they still kept on living permanently within their villages.

- *Weak and inactive leadership*

Leadership status provided high involvement and could lead to community empowerment. However, there was weak and ineffective leadership. It was possible for a leader to be the village headman simply because his father had held this position before. Some were leaders because they were wealthy and powerful, although they weak and inactive as leaders (See the quotations on Pages 183-184).

Some leaders were followers of the SDAO committee members. Some did not play active roles in development schemes. From the meetings of the SDAO, some did not pay attention in the meetings, and some left the meetings without any reason. Some villages could get funding to repair the roads in their village after the flooding period; yet the most seriously

damaged roads in one village got less than the others. This demonstrated how important the leaders were. The headman did not attend a meeting provided by the governor to allocate the funding for roads repaired. As the present government always has many projects directed to the villages, some village could provide the pilot project location to receive the funding while others could not.

The village headmen leaders took turn in being the representatives of the SDAO committee members, while others resisted this process. This could widen the gap between headmen and members. The villagers liked to compare their leaders and headmen with other villages (See the quotations on Pages 183,185). For instance, they were not pleased with how their headman did not know how to ask for the funding allocations. The weak and inactive leaders could not be located within the relationship between leaders and followers.

- *Low sense of belonging*

There was a low sense of belonging. There were many public infrastructures, such as electricity, public telephone, water supply, community hall, schools, public health stations and temples, but the data indicated that only temples were regarded functioning by people who were aware of voluntary supports in all aspects. Some villagers did not pay attention to the maintenance of the public services and infrastructures. They left this to the leaders and expected them to be responsible for this matter. For instance, there were many garbage disposals bins provided; but some people did not use them. Also, in their weaving and dyeing process, some people drained polluted water from dyeing without consideration or even used it to water their vegetables (See the Quotations on Page 201). Incredibly, some believed that it was good for killing weeds. They were not aware of their hygienic and environmental conditions.

Also, there were many public telephones in villages, but they were all out of orders. This low sense of belonging could be more defined as a low voluntary sense. However, this particular sense could be generated by the leaders convincing them, for instance, that conducting activities on special occasions such as on the King's and the Queen's birthdays, were opportunity for people to gather and clean the village's drainage systems, schools, and temples. This shows how people could be led while having a low sense of belonging to public infrastructures.

- *Inability to form a network*

There were many groups or social and economic informal organisations. Some worked well because they could access the information and support from individuals, groups and organisations. All group members and government officials, like the community development workers, could facilitate networking by generating opportunities for villagers to meet each other and then helping them keep in touch with one another. Strong groups such as the weaving, the fertiliser, the mushroom or the herbal groups were getting stronger. Their activities occurred throughout the year. These groups became better organised and empowered (See the quotation on Page 200). Then, they were provided opportunities from the community workers, the officers of non-formal education and the SDAO members for interaction with people inside and outside the community. They could learn and share their products and then, eventually, form networks.

On the other hand, there were many groups who could not run their activities although they were supported by SDAO or the community development workers in their organisation such as banana preservation and handicraft groups. They could not operate transparently, so they turned to let all members to borrow money instead and worked individually rather than as a group. They even

undercut the price of each other's products. As a result, more interactive relationships within the group could not be created. They were not able to form a network within or outside their community (See the quotations on Page 201). Moreover, the SDAO stopped supporting them and asked for the return of the funding. They seemed to be in the process of trial and error without end.

- *Low potential of self-management of the village*

Some villages had high potential of self-management. For instance, villagers picked the mushrooms from their forestation areas and gained enough money to live on. Moreover, they could learn how to preserve their mushrooms and even provide a small market. Other villages could not do this well and went out to sell lottery tickets in big cities (See a quotation on Page 179). They had to leave their village and left their children with older people, and their children were brought up with television, computer games and compact disc players. This would cause a lot of problems afterwards. Moreover, some could not earn additional money rather than working within their villages. Some had to borrow money to invest selling lottery tickets and tragically some were cheated when they were paid on sale. They sold on credit while buying them from the government agency in cash.

The low potential of self-management in the village could create permanent debt. Some did not buy extravagant or luxurious goods but put high investment in new crops. For instance, most villagers grew chemical free vegetables in one village and then they faced a marketing problem. However, it was not entirely their fault because they did so on from the advice of the Agricultural Extension officers. Furthermore, they could not predict what the future held, and some turned to grow rubbers due to its high price under the present government's policy. Subsequently, some academic agricultural lecturers gave their views on this matter, stating that this would probably cause more flooding problems in the future.

- *Lack of people 's shared visions*

It was very difficult in some villages to conduct village meetings or village forums. Only a few could attend and most of these are the leaders. Then, they described this as low involvement. Equally, the village broadcast was used to announce village news and let the villagers know what the leaders had decided. This illustrates the low involvement and depicts low participation. However, there were many informal discussions on developmental aspects among villagers; but they were not included with the leaders. For instance, leaders agreed to organise a ceremony of elder people on behalf of the SDAO, but the villagers did not want to take part because it was difficult to take the old people to another place by mini truck and, most of all, it had only the leaders' agreement. Therefore, no old people from this village took part, and this issue was raised as failing to present the needs of villagers (See the quotations on Page 187).

Furthermore, some leaders were not on the same side as the villagers when they became the headmen or the representatives in the SDAO committee members. They became local politicians only to join the network of national politicians. They gained both financially and in power, and this made a wide gap between them and the villagers.

### *6.6.2 Vicious cycle*

Being in debt is the most prominent feature of village economic life. They borrowed money from many sources both inside and outside the community, and thus they could revolve their debt. As there were many funding sources provided, such as the Bank of Agricultural and Cooperatives, the Village fund, the fund of the village groups and wealthy people, they borrowed and then paid off these debts by revolving funds. Some borrowed the money to spend wastefully, for example buying the lottery tickets or luxury goods such as motorcycles and mobile phones. They had to pay back a great deal every

month. If they did not have enough money, they could easily borrow more. Some borrowed from wealthy people at high interests. Their expenditure was higher than their income. Spending wastefully was a distinct feature of community life (See the quotations on Pages 179,182).

As the present government allocated the village fund directly to every village all over the country, people were more confident in spending money. Only a few saved alongside their expenses. Paradoxically, becoming wealthier was promoted by the government with the dissemination of the concept of Sufficiency Economy. There was no certainly that people who borrowed would be richer, and how people in rural Thailand could become rich with the low price of agricultural products. The government's propaganda led people to spend more in order to increase the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the whole country.

In conclusion, the vicious cycle of poverty, ignorance and poor health conditions still remained. Poverty is caused by the high expenditure on various industrial goods and being in debt. Ignorance is caused by a lack of learning and awareness of the changes in contemporary society, while poor health conditions are caused by high consumption of what can not be produced within the community.

In summary, it is evident that a community could not yet be strengthened and the vicious cycle could hold back its empowerment. As already mentioned, in themes one to five, a community could be compared with people's lives. It could learn more, face many problems, some of which could be identified and then gradually resolved, while others still remained and faced changes. Yet most significantly, they all keep on within their community life.

## **Summary**

This chapter has outlined the findings 2 comprising of six principle themes and sub themes concerning the factors constituting the participants' interpretation of

community empowerment from their experiences. The study examined the theme findings that emerged from the interviews, the focus group discussions, the workshop and the observations. It has indicated the key themes that emphasise the exploration of an understanding of the concept of community empowerment, the significant elements in community empowerment, the existing elements in community empowerment, and the approaches promoting community empowerment. Significantly, the resultant findings are conclusive. In community empowerment, all its concepts, elements and approaches are interconnected. However, some weaknesses and challenges that can hold back the empowerment are presented.

The discussion of the findings will be carried out in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DISCUSSIONS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to discuss the key findings from the investigation and offers clarification of various results. It discusses the information presented of the concept of community empowerment, and the elements signified as promoting community empowerment. In addition, the approaches for promoting the community empowerment from the analysis of the study are presented and discussed.

Before the discussion, the profile of the respondents is presented in order to gain a better understanding and reflect the overall characteristics of the respondents participating in the study. The key findings are discussed here and related to the literature. In addition, some models generated from the study are also displayed as suggested approaches arising from the study's implications.

From the outset, it is significant to address that, as this research was conducted in the Northeast region of Thailand, within one province, and six villages from that region, caution must be exercised when attempting to generalise from the results. This is because the contexts of villages in each region are different from each other. Also, the Sub-District Administrative Organisation (SDAO), a type of local government, established at the local government since in 1997, is in the process of modification and progression. As it is responsible for the development issues of all villages in the subdistrict, there are various contexts of the villages to deal with.

In addition, this chapter provides an understanding of the data analysed from Chapter Five and Chapter Six. Employing the multi-method approach, including focus group discussions, interviews, observations, conducting the workshop and attendance of meetings, as well as participating in social events

in the study areas, wealthy data are generated. The key findings are presented alongside the discussion.

### **7.1 Profile of the respondents**

Before providing any discussions of the key findings, the profile of the respondents' information will give an interesting introduction to the findings. It is not intended to introduce the information as a statistical analysis of data, but rather to detail the respondents to ensure a representative sample. Thus, an introduction to the respondents is presented, along with their profile and personal interests.

In this investigation, male respondents outnumbered their female counterparts as the respondents participated in the multi-methods presented in detail in Chapter Four. In total, there were sixty-six participants; forty-four male and twenty-two female. Therefore, caution needs to be exercised because of the imbalance in gender distribution, as there may be an unintentional gender bias. The majority of the key villager participants were in the age range of 35-62 years old while they were only 5 respondents who were in the age range of 24-30 years. Also, respondents who were SDAO committee members were in the age range of 33-64 years old. Within the respondents' educational attainment, only 7 respondents had attained a level of higher education level, most being educated to secondary and primary levels. Furthermore, all respondents had permanent and firm occupations and a stable income. They were farmers, contractors, pensioners and merchants. They all were interested in the development issues of their villages and subdistrict. This, in turn, could be seen as influencing the responses to their needs and awareness of the importance of community empowerment.

The following section presents the definitions and concepts of community empowerment given by the respondents within the discussions.

## **7.2 What the respondents said**

### **7.2.1 Messages from the data 1: the Community Empowerment**

#### *7.2.1.1 Sense of community: Assets of the community*

The six villagers under study were rural and semi-rural areas. The key theme emerging from the study was that people had face to face relationships and lived neighbourly together within the community. They had a sense of community. The findings of the study support those of Banks et al, (2003), in which community generally has positive connotations, conjuring up visions of warmth, care and neighbourliness. Community members in the study areas had a sense of community and were able to interrelate this sense with value.

The data indicated that community people had extended family, and family and kinship relationships were significant. Culturally, members had to take care of young children and the elderly. On the other hand, the elderly had to babysit children when their parents worked in the fields, or even went to work in the big cities, for example, to sell lottery tickets. Therefore, they had to leave their villages, albeit temporarily. Employment after cultivation and harvesting time could hardly be found. Children were brought up by the elderly instead of their parents, causing many social problems afterwards.

The findings of the study also corroborate those of Mason's study (1996), in that the community in the ordinary sense involves four different elements. These are shared values, a shared way of life, identification with the group and its practices and recognising each other as members of the group. People are homogeneous and, basically, community refers to people having something in common. The basis of community is shared values as well as the place, the village in which they are linked together by factors such as common ethnic origin, religion and occupation. Most people were Buddhists, and only a few were Christians, making them the same ethnic group. Most people did not work on Buddhist Sabbath days, and therefore community activities such as religious

activities, village forums and meetings could be held then. Also, most were farmers; their occupation depended upon climate dimensions, in which the rains were significant for their crop cultivation. Because rice is part of the main dish in every meal of all Thais, it is the main crop and consumes much water. When they faced the drought problem, villagers agreed not to grow soybean after rice cultivation because it is another crop which needs water in the dry season, and they had to keep water for consumption and their animals. On the other hand, some people did not recognise the water shortage, some let their water buffaloes soak in public reservoirs, and some grew soybeans in summer. Therefore, these issues were raised and questioned due to their lack of compliance with the agreement.

The findings in this study support the definition of community as one of shared values, solidarity and attachment. This has been suggested as a cosy world, belonging and solidarity where the individual could feel at home (Delanty, 2003, Ledwith, 2005). Three community values can be described as solidarity, participation and coherence. Solidarity mainly refers to the relationship that sustains community members at an emotional level. It also refers to internal community solidarity which defines a sense of community (Butler, 1993, Crow, 2002). The people felt they belong to the community and the community belonged to them. They were involved in shared activities with each other, through which the individuals involved identified their common goals. The definition of community as a sense and a web of personal relationship and group networks can be the foundation of community empowerment (Flecknoe and McLellan, 1994, Gilchrist, 2004).

From the views of the respondents, community empowerment was unity and the reciprocity (Robson, 2000, Dixon et al, 2005). Community people tried to cope with the challenges. For instance, they identified the importance of the school lunch programme. Women took turn to cook lunch every day for their children, and some villages did not cook at school but at home, taking the food to schools to be served at lunch time. The school lunch programme could be sustained for years ahead due to the high cooperation. It required voluntary work from women and good organisation. However, there were a few conflicts,

particularly concerning young people for instance, as they often made loud noises at night and did not want to participate in religious rituals. They suggested that monks always took too long in praying. There was a gap between the elderly and the youth, but all always willingly took part in sporting activities. From the village forums, some young people attended but did not participate- they just kept quiet. Paying respect to elders is a rural cultural issue. Homogeneity and harmony should ideally arise to replace complexity and conflict (Berner and Phillips, 2005:24).

#### *7.2.1.2 The interlocking community*

The findings of the study support those of Gilchrist (2000, 2004), suggesting that well- connected community can be achieved when people feel part of a web of diverse, interlocking relationships and build up networking. Moreover, sustainable development requires support for community infrastructure, including the growth of informal networks, increased participation in activities and the strengthening of local democratic processes. The people's sense of community derives from their perception; it could be real or imagined, being linked into the dynamics of a complex system of relationships and interactions (Lee, 2001). Examples of this are evident in the data, particularly one village establishing its own market, needed by the neighbouring villages to sell products such as fish and meat while that village sold vegetables, mushrooms, bamboo shoots and its preserves. This captures the idea of reciprocity in creating partnerships and networking. However, middlemen played important roles in the community market; they came to buy the products and large amounts of preserved bamboo shoot on credit and did not pay this back to the people. Therefore, this made them aware of people outside the community, and they did not trust outsiders in terms of marketing and networking. The brokers always have a sense of exploitation; some bought the people's products in bulk on credit, and never paid back to the villagers. Some also bought material products on credits. This placed the bamboo shoot and weaving groups in financial problems.

### *7.2.1.3 The responsive community*

The responsive community is concerned with responsibility that articulates a core idea of communitarianism. The key findings of this study fit into the literature which indicates that community is essentially the moral foundation and expression of the citizenship of responsibility and participation (Etzioni, 1995, 1998). Communitarianism claims to understand the functioning of a real community (Ledwith, 2005). The family and school are the typical institutions which can cultivate the kind of citizenship required by a responsive community. Etzioni is very vague on what constitutes a community. His idea of community is expressed very much in terms of personal closeness, locality, small groups and personal responsibility for society. One of the main themes in communitarianism is social capital as the basis of democracy and citizenship (Delanty, 2003). The findings also reflect the communitarianism as a commitment to partnership, accountability and active citizenship (Poppo, 2006). For instance, people took part in the village forums discussing the topic of how to prevent Leishmaniasis, AIDS and rabies. They agreed to place warning signs detailing how they could prevent these kinds of diseases in the public hall and even in front of their own houses. However, the term accountability is questionable, as some village forums and meetings pointed out how the SDAO committee members played the roles of the business partners, thus creating conflicts of interests. They did not spend money on the infrastructural aspect transparently.

Interestingly, trust, reciprocity, respect and communication are the foundation of building up the social capital. Social capital is a community asset and community network (Putnam, 1993, 2000, Murray, 2000 and Burns et al, 2004). The family played the role of taking care of family members especially the young people and the elderly. Culturally, they would never let old people stay alone or in home care, they had to be taken care of for the rest of their lives. The data depicts good communication via face to face relationships throughout. This identified the social capital. However, the data indicated that some of the underprivileged people were paid monthly by the government, and their relatives actually took care of them. The phenomenon of family malaise is

found when parents have to go and sell lottery tickets in big cities, leaving their children with the elderly.

#### *7.2.1.4 A range of issues concerning the community empowerment*

The respondents viewed community empowerment as a range of issues. Many gave its definition and offered their expressions from their lived experiences. They mostly defined community empowerment as directly concerned with the personal empowerment (Barr and Hashagen, 2000). This included both material and psychological strengths. Community empowerment brought dignity and integrity to the people (Ledwith, 2005) and they reflected that it was defined by peacefulness, calmness and happiness within the community, alongside its development as being the capital (Phongphit, 2003, Wasee, 1999). Moreover, most respondents suggested self-reliance and self-sufficiency were the influential concepts of community empowerment. For instance, this could be seen as the people whose physical and mental assets were stable and firm. On the other hand, some features could hold back community empowerment, for instance, when communities were not self-reliant and depended on external factors, such as waiting for government subsidy via the village fund, or intending to borrow without having any projects to increase their income—villagers just wanted to borrow it. As they had a right to borrow, they could create cycles of debt and face difficulties when they had to pay back. They had to pay a great deal for pesticide, insecticide and weed killer, while most prices of agricultural products were dependent on middle men. Their losses forced them have to work outside their villages.

#### *7.2.1.5 The empowered community as the empowered people*

The findings in the study also support those of Nartsupa (1995, 1999) who characterised empowered people as those who could strengthen the community in return. The community people are to be developed to:

1. Be more self-reliant, self-sacrificing, aware of public belongings and not be selfish.
2. Be self-disciplined and aim to working.

3. Be intelligent, honest, self-sufficient, economical and patient.
4. Be able to think, critique and be sensible and reasonable in decision-making.
5. Be dharmic patient, criticised and aware of differences in people.
6. Be sporting in spirit and to admire others.
7. Be able to work and deal with others, both leaders and followers.

The characteristics above are used to define empowered people. Everyone can become empowered (Craig and Mayo, 1995, O'Neal and O'Neal, 2003). It could be suggested that people-centred development is concerned with the characteristics of self-reliance, self-sufficiency and others in order to develop empowerment (Rahman, 1993). How empowerment is achieved is up to the people concerned (Byrne, 2001). To be empowered was to feel power surging into oneself from other people and inside, specifically the power to act and grow (Morley, 1995). The characteristics of both formal and informal leaders were as mentioned above. For instance, one village headman was elected because he was wealthy and generous. He made his truck available for all people to attend hospital whenever required. He provided his house as the public hall, letting people come and share their dialogues and also offering drinks and snacks for them. Moreover, most formal and informal leaders were sporting in spirits, for example, they forgave a fight between the young people and tried to compromise on this matter by raising the village unity.

The data indicated that empowered people who were economical, diligent and good were self-sacrificing and could be a role model for people in the community. This indicates personal empowerment (Barr and Hashagen, 2000), and the findings reflect Barr and Hashagen's study. They examined personal empowerment in terms of individual learning, knowledge, confidence and skill and the findings show empowered people are self-reliant and self-sufficient, people who keep their lives firmly in order and never borrow money from many sources. They live in the middle path being a role model, maintaining their integrated agricultural activities all year round. Most of all, these empowered people did not go to work outside community.



#### *7.2.1.6 The political concerns in the community*

The findings displayed a concern about political concepts, both at the local and national levels. The people focused on politics, especially during election periods. Their democratic lives are much different from the western context, in which people did not reveal which party or candidate that they would vote for. Thus, the findings challenge the political concept, as people involved their lives in the context of their social and environments to gain political power (Adams, 1996, Graig and Mayo, 1995, Wallerstein, 1993). For instance, there was a large scale electoral campaign, and people were approached by campaign leaders of every party. The buying of votes was evident. During election periods, people waited in their houses for the money that they could receive from political parties. There was even a high profile campaign in the election period for members of the SDAO. The conflicts of interest and corruption on road improvement and construction were hot issues of the campaigns and needed to be more transparent in the next committee members. The political atmosphere was uneasy at that time.

The community people did not want to talk on the political perspectives during the election periods although they paid high interests in it. In addition, Lee (2001) found that the empowered people could join together to address and act on community issues and wider political matters, thus empowering the community as a whole. From the research findings, respondents related to political concerns in that while empowerment was implied when power was shared, it should not be the power of a few who improved themselves at the expense of others but the power of the many who found strength and purpose in a common vision (Rowlands, 1995). The data in this study support that of Dalrymple and Burke (1995) who suggest empowerment works at three levels. The first was the feelings that the community people have discovered and shared. They have a sense of belonging and are aware of the development of their own community. The second is the level of ideas that they developed through the self- knowledge; self-definition and self-efficacy which leads to a changed consciousness. People were conscious of political concerns in negotiation. They beneficially used their village forums. They placed

importance on discussions, both formal and informal. For instance, people accepted a change in growing crops, organic vegetables, and applied organic fertiliser. They organised a group to negotiate the price of organic vegetables from the Division of Agricultural Promotion before growing them. The Division guaranteed the price and tried to solve problem of marketing. However, some villages could not hold village meetings or forums easily, due to the fact only the leaders were able to attend, so the leaders broadcast information from the broadcast tower instead. Moreover, local democracy depended on the potential of leaders. They mostly convinced people to take part in activities rather than people willingly participating themselves.

However, the findings challenge the third idea; it is the level of action. Only a few people move from the personal to the political, most leaders played a role of political action. They wanted to be the politicians at a local level, like the SDAO members, and then improve themselves to be the representatives of the House of Parliament at a national level in the future.

#### *7.2.1.7 Bottom up meets top down: the alternative for the grassroots*

The findings also support the study of the NESDB (2001), in which the concept of community empowerment has been considered as a sound and important alternative for development all over the country, from grassroots to a national level. As the NESDB is responsible for the development plans of Thailand, it has been learned over the last four decades that development schemes must be modified from the bottom line up rather than top down planning. Therefore, the National Ninth Plan (2002-2006) focuses on the strength of the community at the village level and is dominated by the trend of decentralisation (Forrest, 1999). As there are about 7,000 subdistricts in the country, and each consists of 10 villages in average, so if each subdistrict is improved and strengthened, the whole country will consequently be empowered. However, the contexts of the subdistricts or villages are different from each other. For instances, the village in the study areas has plentiful forestation areas, people could pick up bamboo shoots in rainy season and mushroom afterwards. Their village is plentiful while others are not.

The findings of this study also challenge that of the NESDB, as most the concepts of community empowerment are from the key scholars and could hardly be applied in practice nationwide. The findings indicated that at the subdistrict level, the roles of the SDAO mainly focused on infrastructural aspects and took a large percentage of the budget. This indicated a conflict of interest because some members had business partners. This tended to create corruption in the construction of concrete roads at the subdistrict level. The other aspects, such as those socially based like the improvement of employment, were intentionally neglected.

The findings of the study tie in with their categorisation of achieving a balance between cohesion and diversity, leadership and participation (Taylor, 2003) which is beneficial in empowering the community. For example, leaders and villagers generated discussion on topics of how the people would improve their quality of life and not work in big cities during the off-season. They drew the conclusion that full employment all the year round was needed; therefore, the multi- agriculture was necessary. There were both long and short term crops available. The promotion of rubber-growing could generate cash from the forest, alongside the raising of livestock such as turkeys, hens and fish, which were encouraged. The village fund was provided for villagers who wanted to develop multi-agriculture. However, integrated agriculture needed high expenditure for investment, and know-how as well as the diligence. Although there were good samples of achievement, some villagers did not want the risk of high investment, and kept working outside.

Unity, mutual aids, mutual understanding, mutual generosity and co-operation were defined as the community strength. For instance, most villagers were frugal spending less luxury goods, while increasing their agricultural work to earn more income. Moreover, the villagers consumed their own products and sold those remaining. Chemicals free fertilisers were disseminated. The promotion of value added community goods came via One Tambon One Product, which is the promotion of the product of the subdistrict. For instance, the herbal product in village 1 and the weaving product of village 6 were also

promoted. On the other hand, some qualities of the products could not meet the community standard leading to difficulties in terms of marketing and managing problems. Some sold their products on credits and were cheated, and thus faced financial problems. Therefore, if problems could be solved, products would be improved.

#### *7.2.1.8 Gender awareness within the community*

It was found in the data that both men and women were used to working together. Both men and women engaged in agricultural activities and went to work temporarily in big cities together. Women tried to earn more family income (Comer, 1996) alongside men. Some SDAO committee members were female. Data signified how men and women kept on working together having discussions extensively in the village meeting and forums. The findings illustrated more gender equality, especially; there was a village headwoman who had high level responsibility. She could organise activities and took part in the SDAO meetings. Moreover, in flooding period, she could organise the women's group to cook for all villagers. Women's groups were significant to initiate both economic and social activities within community to support their better living. It was recognised that they began with a small group concerning high levels of involvement. Although rural families were dominated by men (Phurisinsit, 2001), women decided some significant community issues. For instance, women provided many productive discussions on creating their own market and gave examples how to have gradual improvement rather than rapid success. How they expressed their ideas not to work outside the community which caused a lot of problems signified the gender differences of thinking holistically. Women gave the reasons that they had to take care of their family members. Although working in big cities could earn a lot of money, it is not worthwhile to leave their children with the elderly. They could afford enough when they picked their bamboo shoots from their forestation area and sell its preservation. These data signified women were active in their own lives and the community and the empowerment of women led to greater community empowerment (Dullea, 2005, Keller and Mbwewe, 1991). The roles of women working along side men on earning sufficient family income, initiating both

social and economic activities illustrated horizontal partnership working among them and contributed to building democratic community life (Dower, 2003, Cornwall, 1998, Twelvetrees, 2002).

The findings also support the study of Karl (1995) and Desai (2002) that document the concept of empowerment of women as a goal of development projects and programmes. Women played the roles of decision-making when they were in small groups and had informal discussions. This brought about women's participation that could be citizen participation (Morrissey, 2000). For instance, they could organise the aerobic exercising groups in every village and brought about high levels of participation. Most women's organisations were well supported by men.

However, the findings illustrated the gender differences, for instance, most leaders were men and they held the roles of leading discussions. How influential village headmen could convince people to take part in village activities. Women's groups were enhanced, for instance, before closing village sessions, the headmen had the responsibility to invite women's group to inform villagers about their activities, for example, the health volunteers advised how to destroy the larvae of mosquitoes to prevent dengy fever. Moreover, women worked harder than men both with family, group and community work (Lerdmaleewong and Francis, 1998). Women took part in the process of decision-making in the family, for instance, in village 4, they preferred working within their community, picking mushrooms and building up their capacity (Rees, 1991) by learning how to preserve them. This is referred to as the strength of the community in practice.

The following section presents the elements that could promote the strength of the community.

### **7.2.2 Messages from the data 2: The elements of the community strength**

One of the key themes was concerned with elements which could promote community empowerment. The main features indicated that there were many

key components which facilitate this process. It was noted that they were not distinctively separate from each other.

#### *7.2.2.1 The roles of the community leadership*

The roles of community leadership were the relationships between both formal leader and informal leaders. Each form of leader serves the community to have a better chance of community capacity and, likewise, community empowerment (Laverack, 2001, Kirk and Shutte, 2004). Village and subdistrict headmen were formal leaders while respected people, monks, and the leaders of both economic and social groups were indicated as informal leaders. They all played important roles in leading development activities. Outstanding and experienced individuals, both formal and informal leaders, were accepted. A strong leader was able to convince the villagers to take part in the sanitary project, cleaning the drainage on the Buddhist Sabbath days. He could inform young people in the youth group to make garbage bins for public use. However, there were less public projects in the villages with less influential leaders.

Since the SDAO has been established as the local government, the roles of the village and subdistrict headmen have been decreased. Thus, the village and subdistrict headmen, who had been powerful, were not pleased with this situation. Some did not want to participate in any activities initiated by the SDAO. Consequently, this means if they could not get along with the SDAO members, it affected the development issues. Also, some benefits were neglected. The findings revealed how leaders were being able to deal not only with people but also with the SDAO members to gain benefits. Also, the findings agreed with the study of Servians (1996), in that he viewed the concepts of empowerment not only an access to the process of democratic issues but also, as being concerned with taking leadership. The bottom up approach helped ensure social stability and cohesion, as well as requiring a process that built on local strengths and promotes participation and leadership. It also required ownership of both the problems and solutions (Simpson et al, 2003). Leaders played important roles in leading community empowerment. The significance of this participation was raised in meetings, for instance,

suggesting it would take a short time to repair the temple. A big dinner was also held funded by the SDAO. This showed the good relationship between them.

On the other hand, many headmen ignored the activities supported by the SDAO. They did not inform villagers on news or activities such as the rituals held by the SDAO. They attended SDAO meetings for short periods leaving before closing sessions without any reason. These findings challenge the study of Forrest (1999), which suggests that community empowerment in Britain is dominated by the trend of decentralisation. In this sense, community development in contemporary Britain encourages and develops local initiatives, and tries to assist in the delivery of nationally developed policies at the local level (Popple, 2006).

Meanwhile, in Thailand, the SDAO has been downsized by the present government. For instance, it initiated projects providing the village fund directly into the villages. The SDAO did not concern itself with the implementation of this. When some villages conducted meetings and raised some issues, the members had no rights or ideas about this. As a result, the chief of districts and community development workers took on the roles of giving comment. This widened the gap between the villagers and the SDAO. Instead of empowering local government for decentralisation, the national government reduced its roles and enhanced that of the central government because the chief districts and the community workers are under the Ministry of Interior. This continues empowering hierarchical centralisation. It appears designed to create a foundation for the preparation for the next election.

#### *7.2.2.2 The substance of people's participation*

Both active and passive participation were important in driving community empowerment. Community participation leads to a redistribution of power within society and its primary goal is to give proper responsibility for, and control over, their lives (Dutt, 2004). The participation found in the study findings is only pseudo-participation, passive participation or partial

participation due to the decision-making processes mostly being controlled by leaders. The findings were congruent with the participation presented by Arnstein (1969), leading to the definition of eight ladders of the participation. The findings support only the first two ladders, the levels of therapy and manipulation which are considered to be non-participation or pseudo-participation. The next ladders are informing, consultation and placation, the degree of tokenism or partial participation (See also Chapter Two). However, the participation which is needed is precisely the last three ladders, which are being partnership, delegated power and finally citizen control. This is the participation which provides the degree of citizen power or active participation. For instance, during the election period, leaders even convinced people to vote and some told the people how one party would benefit them more than another. Buying votes ran alongside participation in political issues both at national and local levels.

The findings also align with the study of Kaewsong (1992), who found people's participation could only be set at a level which is passive. The second level of participation is partial. Although the route to empowerment is through involvement and participation (Craig and Mayo, 1995), real participation is rarely found. The decision-making process is left in the hands of their leaders. For example, one village leader who spoke, could finish his session eloquently, could quickly finish his session persuading people to donate money for the school lunch programme and provide three women to cook every weekday without any discussions. He took the role of eloquence and the people took the role of passive participation.

The findings also fit into the categories developed by Oakly (1995), that presented the concept of participation as needing attitude changes, understanding, humanity, flexibility and patience. He also stated that participation could be created from a small project due to its understanding of people. It could be explained that there are various forms of participation. For instance, villagers decided not to grow cashew nuts since the profits gained were not worthwhile even though this economic crop was promoted by the Agricultural Promotion Division. They identified marketing problems and



discussed them by raising what they learned from the other villages where people grew cashew nuts and faced these problems. However, among active participation, there were those who preferred to play passive roles. Some kept quiet in meetings or forums while they spoke at length after the sessions.

### *7.2.2.3 The implicitness of learning community*

The learning community was the key finding theme which helped promote community empowerment. The respondents suggested that people learned all the time, from the past to the present. Knowledge was constantly being gained, whether from inside and outside community, from themselves, from their ancestors, from their experiences and from trial and error. Thus, learning was known as local wisdom, including both social heritage and traditional learning. The respondents found that learning was considered to be a process, which could be transferred from generation to generation. For instance, people grew herbs and then produced a herbal product in instant drinks. Most of all; the herbal products were promoted to be the product of the subdistrict. However, this product had a marketing problem arising from the standards governing food and drug intake. They could sell the herbal pain relief more effectively due to its external use. Also, these products were in the process of modification for improvement.

Also, the findings of this study support the concepts of Chiengkul (2001) and Wasee (1992) that proposed the process of learning within the community as happening all the time by accident, and how people learned within groups. The findings indicated that people belonged to various groups according to their interests and skills and in order to increase their income. This means they developed their ability to find answers to their problems within these groups; they learned from trial and error and moreover, this process was ongoing. People's learning is natural and constant in human socialisation. It will never be static and finished. Therefore, they were able to find the solutions to problems and develop the decision making process. They accepted the experiential learning (Kolb, 1984, Butcher and Robertson, 2003, Jarvis, 1995, 2004).

The findings also agree with the study of Watkins and Marsick (1993) in that they have viewed the learning organisation as having a culture of empowerment. This may be described by the fact that learning in groups makes people more powerful and confident to deal with problems within these situations. Moreover, the NESDB (2001) presented the theme that Thai people should have commitment to the learning process through local wisdom. The findings of this study are concordant with this theme due to local wisdom, social heritage and traditional learning being modified over the years. It is necessary to transfer this to future generations.

Learning in the community mostly represents the lifelong learning and experiential learning (Butcher and Robertson, 2003). Also, the findings of this study support the literature which indicates that people can share experience and stories, to create a new shared narrative: narratives create memory, meaning and identity among individuals. They tell the members and others something about themselves, their history and their future (Rappaport, 1998). It was taught through real hands- on experience and mostly to groups by a qualified, respected elder. This was a basic understanding that humans desired to know, to do, to be or to become. For example, the women group learned how to conserve bamboo from their respected elders. After this, the local market was established. The herbal group also learned from their ancestors how to make a herbal relief product. These skills, passed on as local wisdom, have been retained. In addition, people kept what their ancestors taught them on how to pick up natural mushrooms. They should never cut them with knives or there would be no mushrooms in that area any more. It was recognised as being founded on scientific reasoning because some knives were dirty and rusty, causing damage to the mushroom fungi. However, in terms of training, some villagers did not want to learn anymore. Some asked for payment and mini truck fare when agencies organised trainings for villagers.

#### *7.2.2.4 The intensive community culture*

Community culture is a key element to empower the community. Rural Thai culture was described by the respondents. Similarly, culture was seen as the collective aspects which concerned religion and beliefs, and unity. Moreover, it was its way of life and spirituality. All of which could generate and motivate community empowerment.

The findings of the study are in accordance with the community culture which defined rural Thailand as a community. The investigations were concerned with a culture that would link to every issue within the tradition of the community. Community could be mainly perceived as meaning, as shared networks of relationships, neighbourhood and importantly, members who came together for mutual supports characterised by shared values of solidarity and mutuality based upon face to face communication (Nartsupha, 1995, 1999, Ellis, 2000, Crow, 2002). It may be described by the fact that community people are involved in neighbourly, face to face relationships and have mutual understanding.

The study's findings reflect the research which has been carried out into the dimensions of empowerment. For instance Rahman (1990, 1993) identified several dimensions of empowerment which serve the developing indicators about participation. His study revealed self-reliance as an attitudinal quality which is strengthened through solidarity, caring and sharing of collective identity. The findings illustrated that it was concurrent as a source of solidarity (Crow, 2002, Popple and Shaw, 1997), which was the ability to handle conflicts and tensions, to care for those in distress and a consensus that all should advance together. It is to describe solidarity as community culture. The rural extended family plays the important role of taking good care of children and the elderly. Moreover, the culture of paying respect to the elderly was strongly evident. For instance, young people obeyed the teachings of the elderly, who could in turn find a compromise in the fights between young people by reconciliation allowing them to maintain their previous relationships. The awareness among people of unity with neighbouring villages was raised.

There were beliefs, for instance, that taking care of their parents would bring good fortune and happiness to the carers. However, although family and kinship played great roles in bringing up and taking care of its members, some had to work outside the community and left their children. Therefore, that problem of this generation gap remained. Some parents have to leave their children with grandparents twice a month while they sold lottery ticket. Accordingly, they are advised to take part in integrated agricultural activities which provide work throughout the year within the community, thus maintaining their way of living.

The findings also indicated that there were many beliefs concerning their farming occupation. For instance, they had to offer food to the spirit of the paddy fields. This would bring a great harvest and sufficient rains. Being mostly Buddhists, they believed in good and bad deeds and moreover, for example, they believed that serious drought and floods were a punishment from nature. These beliefs are tied with religion and encourage solidarity and, moreover, make them aware of the need to conserve their natural resources such as the river and forest. However, some people do not listen to each other, for instance, those using the river without consideration. While raising fish, they used some nutritious food which polluted river, especially in dry season.

#### *7.2.2.5 The assertions of self-reliance, self-support, self-sufficiency and self-moderation*

The findings to promote community empowerment are distinctively suggestive of the dignity of the human being. Self-reliance and self-support are considered to be related to each other as the main concepts of community strength. Also, true self-reliance or self-support could not exist without self-sufficiency and self-moderation. Integrity represents the power of the human being.

The findings of the study support the theme of the NESDB (2001) that proposed that the community should rely on living in the middle paths or live moderately with self-reliance, as well as with unity and harmony. This fits the theme of the Sufficiency Economy, which modified this philosophy bestowed

by the Majesty the King of Thailand to his subjects as the guiding principle of national development and management at all levels. The key words of the philosophy are self-reliance and self-sufficiency, which are alongside each other in strengthening people's minds. Sufficiency is mainly focused on that of the mind and an awareness of living in changing societies. Moreover, it is part of all development issues in Thailand during the National Ninth Plan (2002-2006). In addition, the NESDB is subsidised by the present government to disseminate the core theme of the Sufficiency Economy over three years. Consequently, the theme of sufficiency is recognised by community people together with the New Theory, known as integrated agricultural practice and also given by the King of Thailand.

However, the New Theory has been proven to work in the royal initiated projects since the practice demands integration of high investment in budget and manpower. When there is no external support, this is hardly possible. Although the theory of the Sufficiency Economy is disseminated all over the country, it is an ideal theory and hard to understand and apply in practice. The Ninth National Plan has applied the theory to be as a core theme, but the government itself has spent a large amount of its budget on various projects, and seems to neglect the theme of the theory. The theory is held but it has not been integrated into the situations where community people can collaborate to make it work. The data indicated only a few people could maintain integrated agriculture and understood the theory, yet all agree that it is suitable for all people. It is desirable, therefore, that the NESDB should disseminate this theory into practice within the next two years (NESDB, 2001). However, it has been distributed through the praxis of the ministries, such as the Ministry of Interior, to the community development workers, that they would seem to be working *for* people rather than *with* people. It seems to shift from the patronage system to that of donor and recipient (Phongphit, 2005). For instance, in the village forums, they were more active than villagers, and persuaded them to organise the groups, such as the fish group as they seemed to neglect the full cycle of raising fish that encompassed the learning process, the fish feeding and the marketing. The group was established, and the members had to borrow the fund and rely on fish food from an external merchant. Finally, they had to sell

the fish products only to the merchant who supplied the fish food. This process resulted in them being in debt for the rest of their lives. In addition, the community development worker provided a budget for women who made a kind of cookie. They organised a group but faced marketing problems and modified the fund to revolve amongst them instead. This worked more effectively than when the fund was provided for organising the group at the beginning of the project.

As both the terms of self-reliance and self-sufficiency are religious beliefs as well as the dignity of the human beings, the findings concerned with being self-reliant and self-sufficient are representative of empowerment. Hewison (2001) also viewed these terms as the contexts of localism discourse concerning the moderation of living and moral issues as significant. My research findings fit into his study in terms of sufficiency and moderation. The data findings indicated that people, who were role models, were self-reliant and self-sufficient. These people could be reliable not only on physical needs but also the mental. For instance, during the flood periods, they organised relief wherever possible and provided their trucks to move people to stay in the schools, organising women to cook for all. Moreover, these people convinced villagers not to work outside community. They were successful in their moderate living and applying integrated agriculture. They had their own ponds and could grow multi-crops all year round and raised fish. They also grew long term crops like teaks for future saving. This has supported the theme of the Sufficiency Economy and New Theory which is primary integrated agriculture proposed and disseminated for the improvement of rural community lives.

The findings were also in line with the study of Mayo (2000), which stated that community empowerment, depended upon self-reliance freely and effectively as well as the abilities of being independent, having self-supporting and self-possession. Therefore the findings tie in with Mayo's study but focus more on religious beliefs, Buddhism and concern with self-reliance and self-sufficiency. For instance, monks in the community always chanted about keeping people's lives and taking pride in being reliant and sufficient. They gave many examples about how people have faced problems of working outside community. They

even told people about what His Majesty the King has done for all Thais and how hard times should be endured. The findings also support the study of Paster (1996) that addressed two aspects of empowerment, the first being personal empowerment. For example individuals are responsible for supporting themselves in order to feel empowered in their lives regardless of their circumstances. The second dimension of empowerment relates to the way in which we work with others to nurture their sense of self-esteem, autonomy and growth. However, only a few people carry out integrated agriculture because it required high investment and more space- especially the digging of ponds for storing water for dry season agricultural activities. Moreover, the sales of long term plantations are neglected.

#### *7.2.2.6 The roles of local government, the SDAO*

Local government as an element to promote community empowerment is presented as a key finding by the respondents which manifests in both positive and negative views. The local government, the SDAO, was found at the grassroots level and could promote the strength of the community in terms of supporting the needs of the people. However, the roles of the SDAO were not yet accepted due to a lack of understanding and uneven distribution of benefits. It was represented as a source of conflicts of interest-through business partnerships on road construction-and did not achieve the ideas of decentralisation.

The findings reflect studies which have been carried out on the impact of decentralisation on government responsiveness and its implications for accountability (Forrest, 1999). For instance Fox and Aranda (1996)'s contribution has been through the development of decentralisation, while the SDAO seemed to lack accountable governance. It is at the stage of development and modification and needs to be more practical. For instance, the importance of people's participation in strengthening community networks, local events and small grassroots groups could create civic renewal and participatory democracy (Gilchrist, 2003). Community empowerment is greatly

needed for the development of decentralisation. Also, the SDAO members should be more sensitive in terms of their accountability and transparency.

Furthermore, Areeya et al (1996) examined the roles of SDAO within self-government as not achieving the goal of local government, whereas, it increased the potential power of those acting as government officials. This study's findings were congruent to theirs because the elected members did not have either enough knowledge or understanding of their own functions and could be easily controlled by the members who were more powerful. This could be as the cases of conflicts of interest. Moreover, the findings stated that strong leadership could easily deal with the SDAO. This may be explained by the fact that the members were those who intended to play political roles. They were viewed as local politicians and mostly seemed interested in improving their status and becoming provincial and national politicians in the future. They dressed in uniforms similar to that worn by government officials. This seemed to create a widening gap between the members and community people.

The findings also reflect those of Angell et al (2001) who suggested that decentralisation could increase the potential of economic and political liberalisation for development. Decentralisation could make a real contribution to further efforts to reduce poverty; so that local resources of human capital, entrepreneurship and natural resources could be put to better use. Furthermore, local government with energy and appropriate policies could work with local entrepreneurs to create reciprocal stimulation. Whilst this is different in the context of decentralisation in Thailand, the central government still plays the important roles of in development all over the country. The situation of Thai decentralisation does not work well due to the political culture in the villages, complete with a patronage system and lack of understanding of people in local government. Also, the findings revealed two views on this issue, both positive and negative. Although their work does not support the findings of the research study, its conclusion is that local government needs to have some flexibility, some autonomy and independence, and that these are the qualities that local administrators complained they lacked is very interesting. Moreover, the role of the government itself should be reconsidered; it should support local



government rather than reduce it. The objectives of overall community development need to be modified to encourage and develop local initiatives and decision making (Popple, 2006).

There is a close link between decentralisation and participation; Avebury (1990) proposed that participation and decentralisation through the local government structure alone could not be successful. The challenge was to make the state more responsive to the rightful demands of the poor people and underprivileged. Local government was a form of induced participation. Avebury's study reflects that of the research but is of limited use, especially in the study areas. A greater understanding of participation and decentralisation would be gained if we had insight into the specific needs and problems of people. From the findings, for example, high and low levels of participation tended to arise from effective or ineffective decentralisation. Committee members played roles in decision-making process, and most shared their perspectives on the development issues of the subdistrict, mostly focusing on the infrastructural improvement and construction. They seemed to neglect providing the socio-economic conditions. It may be that as the SDAO was only recently established in 1997, infrastructural conditions were still needed.

Also, elements of the findings were concordant with the studies of Tacha-atik (1999), NESDB (2001), Wasee (1999), and Sopchokechai (1998) which presented community empowerment as being based on the process of people's participation through economic, natural resource, social and cultural dimensions. Those were that people had mutual goals in benefiting members and the public, maintained conscious self-reliance, help and friendship and a sense of belonging to the community, fully mobilised resources in the community with efficiency, included various forms of learning, networking and communication, provided continuous undertaking for various groups and continuously reinforced the change agent. However, the data indicated that people did not understand the roles of the SDAO. Some did not comprehend why they had to pay tax, for example, for their garbage disposal. The roles of local government needed to be disseminated via better public relations.

Moreover, all the key people in every village could take a turn at being a committee member in the future.

### **7. 2.3 Messages from the data 3: how to improve community empowerment in the future**

The key themes emerging from the analysis of the respondent's were considered as appropriate ways to improve community empowerment in the future. The following five aspects are presented as follows:

#### *7.2.3.1 Maintaining the unity and solidarity of the community*

This is an approach that the respondents are proud of. The best way to maintain unity and solidarity is to be in constant touch with each other in both formal and informal situations. Being in a neighbourhood and having face to face relationships whilst remaining close to each other, occasionally in terms of taking part in community activities, could create unity and solidarity which maintains and empowers the community.

Talk, trust and communication make the community unified and solid. The findings support the study of Putnam (1993, 2000) and Burns et al, (2004) that are concerned with the enhancement of social capital. They have recognised trust and communication as the main elements tying people together and building up the social capital. These connect with unity and solidarity. The findings indicated that calmness and a sense of being unified and solid could strengthen of the community in the future. However, there were many issues that could hold back the community calmness. For instance, the issue of amphetamine drugs was raised. People discussed how to resolve this problem. The drug campaign was conducted by using a poster to persuade all to avoid drug addiction. The promotion of evening sport events was also carried out. Moreover, the discussion on this topic was disseminated and, finally, it was agreed to name the village as the 'white village', free of drugs. However, there were problems during the campaigned when some posters were destroyed. It

was implied that several influential people and officials were drug traffickers. Some were murdered during the serious government retaliation. This brought difficulty, while the leaders pointed out that those involved were outsiders and not from the community.

#### *7.2.3.2 Building needed activities to access genuine participation*

It is analysed that people's participation is significant on the route to empowerment. Respondents focused on activities which led to participation. They argued that people must be involved in the process of identifying problems and solutions as well as in the decision-making process. This could empower the community via participation in activities. The findings in this study support the literature which indicates that the route to empowerment is through the involvement and participation of the people (Craig and Mayo, 1995, Shepherd, 1998). Participation is sharing with others, especially in the decision –making process, and derives from involvement in activities. When the activities are based on the needs of people, they willingly participate. On the other hand, if the activities are initiated by the SDAO rather than the people's needs, they lack true participation. Participation is about allowing people to become active partners and should enable them to have a degree of power and control in the process with which they are involved (SCCD, 2001).

The data indicated most activities were initiated and organised by the leaders. Community people were instructed to take part. In mid April, for instance, there is a festival which is very meaningful for all Thais, Songkran day. Most villagers wanted to carry out activities on their own within their own villages, while the SDAO organised activities for the elderly throughout the subdistrict. As the decision-making process was carried out only by the members, it was difficult to persuade the elderly to participate in this activity. Only a few were involved, while the SDAO spent a large amount of their budget implementing it. This widened the gap between the villagers and the SDAO leading the villagers to raise this issue in future meeting-whether this activity was worthwhile or not. It should be reconsidered if the activities held would bring about genuine participation or only create passive participation.

### *7.2.3.3 Organising groups and educating community learning as well as networking*

There were many groups, economic and social, organised in the community. Most of them were not registered and thus informal. The respondents implied that these groups constituted a learning process, as well as management dimensions. The organisation of groups was significant in terms of increasing income. Moreover, the activities in the groups varied according to people's interests and skills. All respondents were actually members of various groups in the community. Members gained not only economically but also socially through shared visions, ideas, perspectives and benefits. These could be holistically defined as community learning which is experiential (Butcher and Robertson, 2003). Networking was also needed to provide a better learning process and strength in the groups. All this could be an approach to empower the community. Community groups should also actively influence the development of their neighbourhoods (Tam, 1998).

The data in the study also support the literature which indicates that the community learning can be seen in the information and joining of groups by the people themselves (Taylor et al, 2000). However, the majority of groups in the community were not formed individually, but by the community development workers. Some worked well while others did not. Either networking or its value as a skilled and strategic activity was required in community involvement (Gilchrist, 2004). For instance, the women's group could work well because they recognised how they formed a group. They could organise and implement activities that were required. The preservation of bamboo shoots interested them, causing them to learn how to preserve both bamboo shoots and mushrooms, which were abundant in their village. They faced a problem of marketing in the beginning but were supported by the Non-Formal Education Office. Thus, the bamboo shoot group could be implemented through organisation, learning and networking. Moreover, the members had to be concerned how to improve their groups gradually and consistently. On the other hand, many groups faced problems of organisation, implementation, management and marketing. For instance, the fish and weaving groups had to

buy raw materials from outside the community at prices which increased every year. The fish food was costly and only available from the company that sold them the fish. Although banana products were good, the group faced a financial problem because they sold their product on credit. They had to borrow the funding from many sources and some spent the money for other purposes. The overall picture was how people could get through the process of learning via trial and error. They all need to create networking both within and outside community.

#### *7.2.3.4 Placing social and psychological value on culture and religious beliefs capitalising upon self-reliance and self-sufficiency*

As mentioned above, the respondents stated that religious beliefs of Buddhism were closely link of the strength of the community. Moreover, the collective way of life was a rural culture indicating the community's pride. The religious belief was in self-reliance, self-sufficiency and placing social and psychological value on being aware of and compliant with the needs of others. It was concerned with mental psychological development rather than material growth. The data in this study support the literature which indicates that spirituality dwells within every culture and geographical community. Because of people's search for meaning, spirituality becomes embedded in their way of life. The religion that developed around people, was a response to spiritual wisdom and a means of connecting them to a common faith based on their ideas and practice. Most spiritualities, like religious beliefs capitalising upon self-reliance and self sufficiency-which are one of the themes of Buddhism - can acknowledge 'inner peace' and well-being as coming from deep awareness (Chile and Simpson, 2004).As most Buddhists believe that every thought and action has consequences on people and the environment, it has karmic effects (Keenan, 1996).

The data indicated that role models were empowered people who were self-reliant and self-sufficient, did not borrow the money from the village fund and tried to avoid being in debt, being sufficient and pleased with their own lives. Meanwhile, they also played the roles of being diligent, having multi-

agricultural work all the year round and never going out to seek employment outside the community. This indicates the theme of religious value, which represented the strength of mind. The principles of Buddhism and the spirituality of honesty, sacrifice, self-reliance and self-sufficiency and mercy of the people could provide strength to the community. However, 'inner peace' could hardly happen because there were many things that affected the community, both directly and indirectly. People had to rely on external factors due to the price of agricultural products as they could not set their own. The price of all insecticides, pesticides, chemical fertilisers, and weed killer were increased. Moreover, they faced the problems of middlemen who exploited them by agreeing loans with high interests. Furthermore, they spent a lot of money on industrial goods, having mobile phones, and motorcycles, and spending wastefully on legal lottery tickets. Although the signs promoting sufficiency and reliance were placed throughout the villages, people continue to spending wastefully even though they could afford less.

#### *7.2.3.5 Adapting the roles of community leaders and the roles of local government as well as the government*

Most of the respondents stated that the roles of community leaders could reinforce the progress of the community. Their roles were close to those of the SDAO as well as the government. These all were related to each other. The roles of village and subdistrict headman had been modified since the SDAO was established. Therefore, it was necessary to adapt their roles and be more cooperative. Local government was a form of induced participation. They needed to be much more concerned with the needs of people and supportive of each other. The findings of the study support the literature which indicates that within local government, the alternative view is described as 'community governance' in the broadest sense providing community leadership, co-ordination of services, democratic accountability, and a fair and efficient monitoring service( Angell et al, 2001).

In addition, the roles of local government, local leaders and government need adjustment to include more partnership working and participation (Wasee, 1995).The leaders controlled the decision-making process and then let the

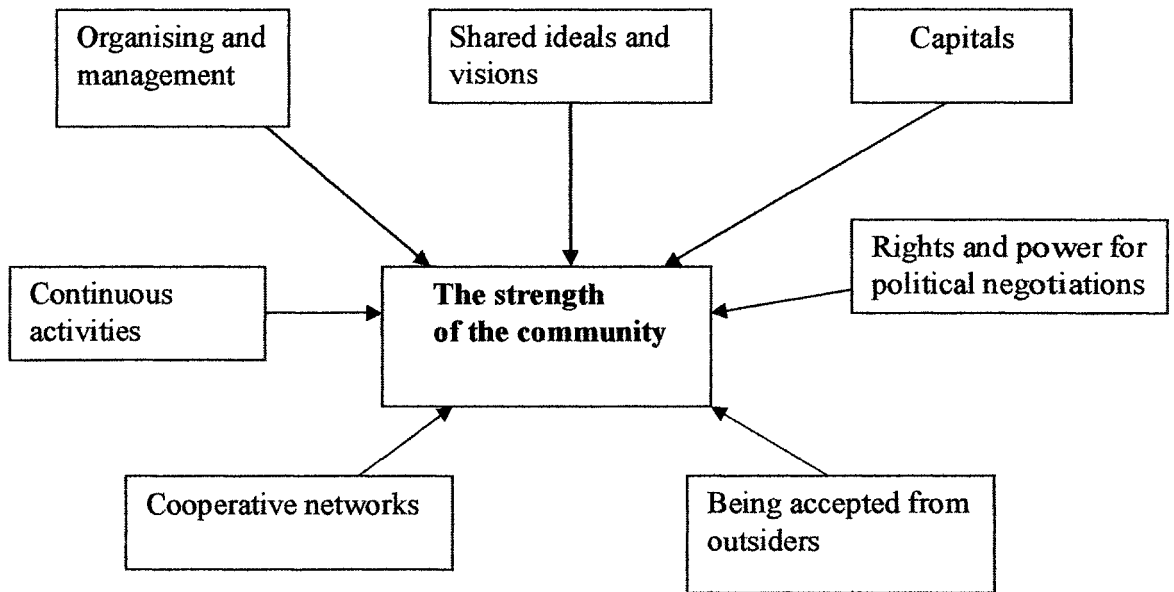
people participate (Phongphit, 2003). This was not real participation. The government itself, for example, destroyed the culture, the way of life of the community indirectly. It provided the village fund; leaving its management by people who could then borrow with low interest. Some villages did well while others did not due to their management. Villagers faced difficulties when they had to pay the funding back.

The following section presents of the literature from the Thai context. It utilises the study of Kaewhawong (2000) that examines the views of Thai scholars who were experts on rural development from GOs and NGOs. The presentation is concurrent with the discussion of elements that could promote community empowerment that emerged from the data of this study.

### **7.3 Comparison in the literature – the Thai context**

These findings reflect the existing research on the elements of community empowerment. Also, Kaewhawong (2000) study suggested the components that could be issues enhancing community empowerment. Interestingly, this was a major project proposing the process of strengthening community from rural development experts in general. The following figure also illustrates a view on the seven elements from his study.

Figure 7.1 The components to enhance the strength of the community



Source: Adapted from Kaewhawong (2000:62)

From the figure, there are seven important components for enhancing the strength of the community. The following discussion covers this study's findings with his components mentioned above.

*7.3.1 Shared ideals and vision:* This was indicated as fundamental within the culture and was characterised community capital. It is to seize people when together and in a community. Also, there were shared visions leading to a better-living. All suggested motivation in people to be aware of self-belongings and participating in development activities. This required to reach active rather than passive participation. Most people were convinced to participate. Moreover, the creation of a sense of belonging was difficult; it must coincide with the public mind and citizens. For example, people did not recognise health effects of villages' environment. Some drained polluted water from colour bleaching into streams and even watered their vegetables with it. Also, when most public telephones in the villages were not in use, they just left them unrepaired.



*7.3.2 Organising and management:* Community empowerment was reflected by the strength of groups or organisations. Thus, organisation can generate activity and cooperation, which means appropriate groups, organisations, staffing, networking and effective distribution can occur within the community. For example, the group of aerobic exercise brought about health in people, mostly women. Moreover, the five groups of nutrition campaign were held in every village, especially to awareness of the dangers of food that was not completely cooked. This began with women rather than men because they cooked and provided food at home. However, raw meat was extensively eaten during festivals; men enjoyed eating raw fish and half-cooked meat.

It was arguable whether good resource management could be mobilised within the community because of the decision-making process to create civic infrastructure development. On the other hand, most people were not involved in the process of decision-making, particularly as to develop civic infrastructure was to promote civic cooperation, as well as generate the definitions or criteria of success and evaluation. The data indicated the low standardised conditions of road constructions. The villagers claimed that it was not worth spending a large amount of money. The conflicts of interest were questionable.

*7.3.3 Continuous activities:* Kaewhawong presented this component as being fruitful and vital in the community and its membership expansion. This could bring about various participations, activities, groups and organisations. The data indicated that activities were formulated and organised mostly by leaders and the SDAO, not from the real needs of people. They were convinced to participate. The data indicated that the religious ritual activities were willingly participated in by the villagers. For example, they extensively discussed the topic of who should be the host of the big religious ceremony. People could willingly provide their own funding and share their duties.

*7.3.4 Capitals:* One of the components enhancing community empowerment presented by Kaewhawong was community capital. This consisted of community leaders, both formal and informal, and whoever was responsible for the

community through playing roles of community citizens. His findings illustrated that it agreed with this study. The leaders were very important key people at village level. The successful leaders had a great ability not only to deal with people, but also with the SDAO members and other organisations outside. On the other hand, these people were involved in conflicts of interest. Some were partners of business owners with interest in, for example, road construction businesses which could earn a lot of money from community construction. The problems of corruption and patronage systems arose.

*7.3.5 Cooperative networking:* This component of Kaewhawong's study signified the cooperation that could bring about various activities, groups and organisation. The cooperative network could be both inside and outside community. This led to a public mind and public decision-making, which was considered to be the process of identifying problems and solutions. Cooperative networking and community learning can promote each other and gain benefits. However, networking is a long process; and it has to be developed through trial and error. Networking should begin firstly within the community informally. However, community development workers, some officers from Non-Formal Education Office and some people from some institutions are supportive to networking. The data showed how people raised the topic of conducting multi-agriculture. Good examples were raised in terms of having employment throughout the year. For example, they would not need to buy fertiliser because livestock could produce organic fertiliser and food for the fish. However, the problems of high investment and the difficulties in getting loans from the banks were raised. Then, discussions began through cooperative networking. This led to decision-making in some villagers, while others preferred to keep on growing mono crops and facing the problems of marketing and low prices.

*7.3.6 Rights and political power negotiations:* This power could come from being in a community, leading to the rights of people, rights for natural resources management, rights for setting strategy and rights for development benefits which could bring justice for all. This component of his study has challenged these findings as the respondents did not mention about their rights and political power negotiations. This may be explained by the fact that community people,

especially the rural Thai people, did not generally mention political issues. Moreover, they were concerned about the right of power negotiations on particular issues. They left this power in the hands of the leaders. For instance, the headman convinced people to vote for a candidate of one political party because of their concern with the price of rubber, which was grown by the people. However, many people discussed extensively, for example, on the unreasonable expenditure of the SDAO members on road construction. They questioned the provision of poorly constructed roads. They asked for transparency and accountability in the local government's implementation. Moreover, people were concerned with resource management. In the village meeting, for example, they agreed to let their forest heal itself for many months, from August to November. They did not allow people to pick up any natural mushrooms during these months. They all conformed strictly their own regulations.

*7.3.7 Being accepted from outsiders:* This component of Kaewhawong's study indicated the potentials of people as being possibly accepted by outsiders. This could increase the community's confidence, leading to higher competence and community potentials. These findings have challenged this component because the respondents found their community has not yet been fully strengthened. Acceptance from outside was not of great concern to them. Only some community products are accepted by the outsiders, such as the herbal products, weaving products and preserved bamboo shoots and mushrooms. All are needed to be improved in terms of marketing and management. The data also recognised that if the quality was improved, acceptance would occur. For instance, when the community is reliant and the quality of products have been improved, this will indicate the potential of the people.

The following section presents of the approaches to strengthen the community which are the overall pictures from the analysis of the study and discussion.

## **7.4 Approaches to strengthening community- analysis and discussion**

The five highlighted approaches emerged from the data are as follow:

### *7.4.1 Retaining the sense of community*

This approach is considered to be the main implication. The sense of community has been discussed above as being as an asset of the community. The findings of the study are mainly concerned in terms of shared characteristics, and people who have a sense of belonging, of solidarity, of shared identity and relationships (Mayo, 1994, Gilchrist, 2003). Moreover, this sense could be defined as using social inclusion as well as social capital to tie people together. The data indicated the sense of trust, respect and reciprocity as the foundation for building up social capital (Putnam, 1993, 2000 and Burns et al, 2004). This involvement will always remain complementary to the work of public and private organisations, but it is a contribution which can make a difference by strengthening community life (Murray, 2000). Face to face relationships has already existed. For example, voluntary involvement can be seen in social activities such as religious ceremonies, wedding parties and funerals. Dialogic interactions are evident in the community rather than debates. Talk is viewed by Parsloe (1996) as a metaphorical sense, intervening and being a source of information. It generates individual and group empowerment. However, this voluntary sense is hardly found in regular systematic social contribution. Temporary social contributions are found in terms of religious donations and for particular events such as flooding periods. There are only health volunteers who warn of outbreaks in the community such as dengue fever during the rainy season. They were aware of health conditions but there were no other voluntary sections. Therefore, there were temporary social voluntary contributions.

### *7.4.2 Generating participatory community group activities*

It is the process of community empowerment as a response to the movement through promoting the capability of people for work, being responsible for their community benefits, and being in touch with each other in groups according to their interests and skills. Also, they could be included in all socio-economic and

political aspects. All must be organised and planned from the bottom-up by people and giving them the opportunity to express their needs within both formal and informal forums. Additionally, the group's activities not only bring active participation but also share with others. This finding reflects previous studies, which seek the sharing of decision-making, especially through 'joint decision-making'. Participation and integration is of great concern in this approach, both as process and result. It reflects the study of Heller et al. (1998), who found the benefit of participation was the important component of power sharing and organisational efficiency. He stated that participation was valuable as a process, even for those who were concerned with participation as a result. Also, leaders, both formal and informal, as well as the roles of local government, need to shift from being commanders to facilitators of participatory groups' activities. It is needed to mobilise and motivate people's participation. There were many groups that were organised and could provide benefits for their members. For instance, the weaving, bamboo shoot preservation, mushroom and herbal groups could adapt and organise from the beginning due to the needs of the members. The members identified the improvement of products and how they had to work after the cultivating and harvesting periods. The group activities also provided a sense of belonging and pride in the community. Most of all, they could maintain their lives whilst working within the community.

The generation of participatory community group activities can be an approach to enhance the process of community empowerment in response to all issues by the promotion of the potential of people in groups and in community. For instance, the women's groups in village 6 were being so active because they were supported by their men. The gender issue could be supportive of each other. The group activities could provide gender participation and openness in democratic lives. On the other hand, some groups did not work well. The fish, organic fertiliser and banana groups faced the problem of marketing. The management among the members lacked improvement and they faced debt problems due to their reliance on middlemen who loaned the fish food to them. Although fish production was high, they could not yet be independent from debt and exploitation.

### *7.4.3 Enhancing community culture*

The awareness of self-reliance and self-sufficiency is mainly concerned as the core culture. These terms come from religious beliefs being in strength of mind rather than material growth. Servian (1996) viewed empowerment as spiritual enlightenment. He presented that most religions and certain philosophies, tended to enhance empowerment through spiritual, rather than material, fulfilment. Also Wasee (1999), the famous Thai scholar, proposed a new wisdom which, in accord with integrated wisdom, focused on localisation, communalisation and civil society. The main concept was the strength of Thai rural culture to signify community empowerment. Thai society is searching for new wisdom because the current wisdom that is ruling the world is western in approach, and could create highly and unwanted competition and violence. We have to deal with a value which is focusing on the human being and being together. Wasee also proposed the concepts of GDH (Gross Domestic Happiness) replacing the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) whose indicators are different. It consists of a harmonious society, warm family relationships, community empowerment, refined culture, good environment and the implementation of the Sufficiency Economy. However, this idea does not work well, as it is intangible and society seems to be materialistic. Most accept it as the ideal concept, but not in practice, while the needs of better living are of much concern with the materialistic needs of community people.

Consequently, this approach deals with enhancing the community culture that is concordant with his concerns. Rituals of celebration build on common solidarity and cohesion by expressing gratitude, joy and a sense of belonging (Lewidh, 2005). Morality, ethics and merits are raised to be culture through an awareness of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. As mentioned earlier, these terms are concepts of Buddhism, while Thais have just faced an economic crisis, and the Sufficiency Economy must be dealt with in every community. Schumacher (1973) suggested on economy that from the point of view of Buddhist economies, production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life. The data of this study indicated the culture of family relationships in being great carers for children and the elderly. For instance, the

elderly would spend the rest of their lives with their family; they would never need to find another place to live. Daughters would be carers, and if there was no daughter, the son and daughter-in-law would then be responsible. Moreover, the theme of Buddhism can be viewed as the culture, including the beliefs in good and bad deeds of people. On the contrary, family malaises would affect community culture. The data indicated the elderly had to babysit young children instead of their parents who they had to go to work in the big cities. The problem of the generation gap in lacking warmth in the family is possibly a cause of many social problems, for instance, the drug problems of the teenagers.

#### *7.4.4 Promoting community interactive lifelong learning*

The central goal here is to promote interactive lifelong learning (Jarvis, 2004) through continuous action in terms of being a learning society. Community interactive lifelong learning consists of local wisdom, management processes and networking. Interactive learning is always taught through real hands-on experience and mostly to groups by a qualified, respect elder. There are many styles of learning. People have a high potential to learn from each other, their experiences and through local wisdom. Interactive learning could facilitate joint empowerment. There are many issues occurring and each has different contexts. However, the most important factor is that people realise the importance of learning, and then hold groups or organisations, managing learning through networks. Learning networks have to be established through the main organisation which acts in cooperation, transfer facilitation and transforming concepts including stimulating members to learn by themselves. This is experiential learning (Butcher and Robertson, 2003). Knowing history and making the connections are key parts of community development (Babacan and Gopalkrishnan, 2001).

The data indicated that people learned successfully from their trial and error throughout. The findings showed that people learned from their own experiences, for instance, understanding that they could collect bamboo shoots and mushrooms easily from the forest. They learned how to preserve bamboo shoot from their ancestors. They improved the quality of its preservation from a

training course provided by non-formal education officers to meet the community standard. They learned of difficulties when they sold their products outside, thus, the village market was established. However, this did not work well, therefore, it was necessary to use public relations in the neighbouring villages to sell and buy at the market. Discussions at the village forums on the topic of the sustainable market were held.

However, outsiders played the role of middlemen and exploited the products by buying preserved bamboo shoot and mushroom on a wholesale basis. Some days, there was no bamboo shoot and mushroom left, and this made neighbouring villagers disappointed. People solved all problems by raising this issue, as it would make the village market unsustainable and conflict with the theme of gradual growth. This overall process is a learning one and part of their lifelong learning. Democratic discussions were required, enabling participation and, especially, decision-making. They recognised this process could be endless.

#### *7.4.5 Building up community citizenship*

The findings of the study challenge the views of Taylor (2003) who is critical in outlining the potential for community empowerment. Taylor has illustrated the growth of community empowerment as the empowerment tree which has three levels (See also Chapter Three). The first step in empowerment is to build in people the confidence to realise the assets existing in the community. Organisation is concerned with skills, learning and awareness. The data in the findings support this level. People developed their skills through learning to improve their occupation, such as raising fish within their rice fields at cultivation time, and then catching them during the harvest. They could organise occupation groups although some were formed by community workers. Level Two is concerned with individual and organisational capacity as well as building up social capital. The data also indicated that there was social capital in terms of building up trust, reciprocity and communication (Putnam, 1993, 2000). For instance, they adapted how to grow new crops, such as chemical free vegetables. They learned how to make organic fertilisers and then used them disseminating the process all over the village. Informal group discussions were occasionally



arranged. It is a way to build up trust and communication. Informal talks and discussions were always evident throughout and led to the decision-making. For instance, they agreed to make the organic fertiliser and tried to reduce the use of chemicals, especially for killing weeds.

On the other hand, some people continued using chemicals and washed their agricultural tools in the public reservoirs, a probable cause of health problems. At Level Three, community members can move through- it is to take charge of their own future, run their own services, develop their own economic enterprises and engage with outside agencies. The data indicated that people are hardly able to meet this level- most were farmers, and their living conditions depend on the rainy season. They could not set the prices of their own agricultural products and had to pay a great deal for chemical fertilisers, insecticides and pesticides. They also had to get loans from the banks for their investment. Therefore, they were in debt and had to migrate to hire out their labour in big cities. It was difficult to meet the citizen action, as it was suggested that individual empowerment must be rooted in the basic political, economic and social rights that underpin citizenship (Taylor, 2003). Similarly, on the view of communitarianism, taking responsibility is a development of citizenship (Tam, 1998). Pearson (2001) also emphasises partnership working as the key mechanism in the delivery of policies to combat poverty, promote social inclusion and revitalise democratic citizenship. The findings of this study challenge the study of Mayo and Taylor (2001) which states that partnership-working reduce bureaucratic and professional power, thus promoting decentralisation and participation from the private, voluntary and community sectors as well as individual citizens. For example, people have an interest in politics particularly during the electoral periods both at local and national levels. Buying votes is commonplace. Therefore, building community citizenship is a challenge in strengthening the community.

In summary, retaining a sense of the community, generating participatory community groups, enhancing community culture, promoting community interactive lifelong learning and building up community citizenship are the approaches which strengthen the community. These approaches could be illustrated as in the following figure:



approaches for promoting community empowerment are manifested, analysed and discussed as the main implications from the study. These approaches presented are strongly interconnected to each other and interrelated to the context of the community.

In the next chapter, therefore, the conclusions from all these findings and discussions will be presented, along with the wider academic implications and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Introduction**

This final chapter concludes the thesis by extending the discussion of the findings to outline its unique contribution to the areas of study. Following this, the implications of the findings of the study and implications on planning for all policy makers, educators, community development workers, the local government workers, and educational curriculum planners as well as on specific areas of the literature are presented. It illustrates the strengths and limitations of the research along with proposing recommendations for future further studies arising from the findings.

In addition, this chapter takes account of the benefits of the study as a whole in the overall conclusion.

#### **8.1 Contribution to the areas of the study**

This study was unique in Thailand. It is in contrast to all previous studies. It presented an exploration of the opinions of the bottom line people in the context of actual development practice. Furthermore, it employed both qualitative methodology and multi-data gathering techniques that recognised facilitating learning from people. As a result, it provided new insight into the realities of the approaches how to strengthening the community. Therefore, the main contribution of the study is to understanding community empowerment in the context of community development by building up from the potential of people, and to promote strengths through community way of life.

These are challenging times for community development in rural Thailand. Community work has tried to empower rural people in a variety of ways: restoring spirituality; making government more responsive to people's needs; organising groups; creating participation; and developing and enhancing economic power and alternative forms of provision to the local government. Its relationship with the

government in this process has taken several different forms: making it work more effectively and seeking to extend its provision, attacking it, defending it and now either acting as its agent or seeking to find the cracks in the system through which empowerment can be drawn in order to make the community become dependent on external support. Different relationships have reflected different analyses of power and the state: from consensus and system failure, to the recognition of conflicts of interest within both state and community (Taylor, 2003).

#### *8.1.1 Empowerment at the individual and the social levels*

At the individual level, the study is much concerned with the self-reliance and self-sufficiency of people. Mental strength is personal empowerment. Meanwhile at the social level, community empowerment is the people unity. It is greatly concerned with happiness and peacefulness fostered by people sharing with each other. The assumption of power on or within people is not in accordance with empowerment, both at individual and social levels (Onyx and Benton, 1995). People placed importance on peacefulness and how they lived together as a community. For example, if there was conflict within the community, people could cope with it via compromise and without going to court or notifying the police. Leaders pointed to peacefulness through the solidarity, neighbourliness and good face to face relationships amongst the people.

#### *8.1.2 The contexts implies community empowerment*

In addition, how people retain solidarity could imply community empowerment. Participation is also a vital component of self-help and the empowerment process (Graig and Mayo, 1995). Along with self-help, local decision-making and control services from the literature review in Chapter Three, there is another approach also embedded which is concerned with rural community culture as well as its way of life. That is about how people could maintain their way of living, utilising their own natural resources such as picking mushrooms and bamboo shoots from their forestation areas and selling them within their community. This could imply empowerment alongside the community way of living. This signifies the contexts of villages. However, villages with less plentiful resources, faced hard times after

cultivation and harvesting times, and their members had to work outside the area, such as by selling lottery tickets. This caused many socio-economic problems. The possible collapse of family is clearly of concern.

### *8.1.3 Community development discourse*

Within the discourse of community development, community empowerment probably comes closer to the ideal. People can identify their own needs and the constraints; they determined alternative solutions. One of the main contributions of the study is to gain a better understanding of the community functions which lead to community empowerment. Community empowerment is the strength and foundation of community development in recognising its dimensions of personal empowerment, positive action, community organisation and participation. This could improve the quality of community life, strengthen the community and finally encourage a healthy community (Barr and Hashagen, 2000). The outcome of this study could enlighten the development aspects of the stakeholders in the villages, and thus play beneficial roles in developing organisations. The potential of people to maintain their community way of life signifies empowerment, for example the integrated agricultural activities which can be carried out throughout the year could offer constant farming work. The practice of '*grow what you eat and eat what you grow*' could indicate the empowerment of the family in their engagement with multi-farming activities. However, integrated agriculture needed high investment in terms of digging ponds, and most could not afford this.

### *8.1.4 Understanding of community culture*

The strength of the contribution is in creating a better understanding of community culture. As I am a lecturer in the sociology department of community development study, how to learn from and deal with community people is a necessary consideration. The study of a specific community culture, which is mainly people's way of life, could lead to illustrate every aspect of the holistic community context. Consequently, one of the main contributions of the study is its significant benefit to my teaching career; I will from now on more specifically focus my teaching in applying community culture and way of living in my future teaching on the courses

of community development studies. The courses are Community Socio-Economic Environment, Rural Development, Juvenile Development, Community Study and Analysis and Solution of Community Development. These courses have outlines which consist of the theories and practices on how to study community contexts in socio-economic perspectives, analyses and solutions of community development. Therefore, more specific concerns on community culture will provide better learning on community development courses. For example, in the course of Juvenile Development, the outline is to study the principles of juvenile development, psychological aspects, the juvenile plan, problems and solutions, while more concern is now needed on young people's needs and perspectives in order to learn their culture. Meeting their needs and gaining more understanding on their perspectives will probably be successful in the study of Juvenile Development.

#### *8.1.5 Local wisdom holder*

Moreover, as I am a lecturer on the course of Foundation of Thai Living, I will place more importance on local culture and the local wisdom holder in order to gain a better understanding of the local way of life and application of knowledge in the more practical aspects of rural people. For example, it is learned from the study that people were not allowed to cut mushrooms with knives because this would destroy any future mushroom crop in the area. From a scientific viewpoint, this is thought to be because rusty knives can damage the fungi producing future mushrooms. Villagers had to take care of nature-for instance; the forest must have time to heal, so village regulations against disturbing forestation areas are significant for conserving their resources.

In summary, this research study has stimulated a recognition of the importance of community culture within most courses of community studies. More research studies are needed to apply an ethnographic approach, particularly in a village setting. Therefore, when there is a curriculum development, it is necessary to include these research studies to support the idea of developing courses into practice. However, it is difficult to apply the research results to improving courses. There are only a few discussions on this application while the lecturers are mostly

concerned with the problems of the teaching and learning process. In addition, this research hopes to be relevant and contribute to a new conceptualisation of development in the rural community of Northeast Thailand. Community empowerment has fostered self-reliance, self-sufficiency and community-based initiatives, and all approaches are rooted in community culture. These draw upon local experiences and do not rely on imposed goals and practices.

## **8.2 Implications of the study**

The study highlighted four important issues which have been seen as the main implications for practice. The implications of the study are as follows.

### *8.2.1 The awareness of community culture and religion*

The application of religious activities revealed in the study could promote community empowerment. Thus, culture can be defined as the different ways human groups structure their behaviour, worldview, and the rhythms and patterns of life (Wynetta and Schlesinger, 1999). Culture is a broad term in that it may apply to people on the basis of power, religion, education, and other divisions. These features are important in order to learn to promote empowerment and cultural heritage and pride (Lee, 2001). The Buddhist Sabbath days are meaningful for people; for example, people could be trained to conduct community activities. They performed religious rituals in the mornings, and then they cleaned their village and had a large lunch together. Thus, they culturally shared their common interests. The study also implies the usefulness of applying culture and religion to strengthen peoples' minds and encourage community empowerment.

### *8.2.2 Human and social capital*

The study suggests that human and social capital in the community is important in empowering the community. Human and social capital consists of the leaders and people who have high potential in resource management. The concept of social capital is that of a shared resource which is derived from the renewed interpersonal networks of voluntary associations and trust generating interaction amongst citizens



in face to face conversations (Gittell and Vidal, 1998; Taylor, 2000, Putnam, 2000). Community empowerment was defined, for example, from how people get along well together, keep in touch and have face to face relationships. The high potential of people in identifying needs and problems and then finding alternative solutions signify human capital, for example how they learn to stop using inorganic fertilisers and to produce organic vegetables. Meanwhile social capital implies how people keep good relationships, giving mutual help and being supportive to each other. This could be seen during the flooding period, when they shared food with each other. However, while a common difficulty always drew people together easily, some villagers were cheated by middlemen who dealt with them in selling cotton material products on credits; the brokers being people in the same village.

### *8.2.3 Working and learning with groups*

Working with groups of villagers has been the theme of rural development since the 1970s (Shepherd, 1998). It could be seen from the study that people in the groups could play strong roles in the provision of services and using their positions to enhance the control of assets. For instance, the mushroom group learned how to preserve the mushrooms even though the fresh product was still readily available. They created the village market to sell agricultural products. This worked well, but when no more were available to pick, some consumers were disappointed. It was then that the wisdom of learning the preservation techniques became apparent.

The findings of the study implies from working and learning with groups in the community that 1) Group membership was voluntary, homogeneous and the members had common interests as well as belonging to the same socio-economic category. 2) Small socio-economic groups allowed open and intensive discussion, an active participation. 3) Group leaders were elected by members, and leadership was rotated and, most of all decisions were taken by collective deliberation. 4) Regular meetings, saving and credit fund activities helped to build unity and cohesion. 5) Most decisions were taken by the groups; external agents provided advice when asked. 6) Among village people activities are initially directed at improving livelihoods (Burkey, 1993). The active groups, for instance, the mushroom, bamboo shoot, women's and the fertilisers groups are working and

learning groups. The members were all farmers and did not want to work outside the village as they recognised it would cause a lot of socio-economic problems. They learned how to preserve bamboo shoots in order to meet the community quality standard. They took part in discussions among themselves and felt free to talk about how they could benefit from the village fund. The leaders took turns and allowed open discussions on any topics, even that of the unclear local government when they spent wastefully on activities. They willingly donated to the school lunch programme and volunteered to cook in school. The fertilisers group tried to make organic fertilisers and used them instead of inorganic fertilisers, although most villagers kept on using chemicals. Groups are effective in rural village development, for themselves as contributors to the wider interest that could sometimes remain based on relationships which are informal, trustful and spontaneous. However, it is human nature to look for a flow of advantage from participation in group activity.

#### *8.2.4 The dissemination of the Sufficiency Economy*

In order to function better as a community and to gain better living for people all over Thailand, the study has an implication for the dissemination of the concepts of the Sufficiency Economy (NESDB, 2001, see Chapter Three of the thesis). It is argued here that past research into community empowerment has failed to recognise the sufficiency of the people which can strengthen the psychological aspects. The findings of this research reinforce the need for the dissemination of the Sufficiency Economy, whose importance has emerged in this study, but whose concepts are intangible and therefore difficult to comprehend. As the NESDB is responsible for the dissemination of these concepts all over the country, as well as the cooperation of many ministries, for example, the Ministry of Education, all within three years, it is necessary to do this through various practical activities (NESDB, 2001). A later generation of development programme promoted 'self-help', 'self-reliance', and 'self-sufficiency' as a method of spreading the benefits of development more rapidly to a larger group of people (Shepherd, 1998). However, the term 'self-sufficiency' was significant to empowerment, for instance, the concept of being in the middle path made people reflect on the sufficiency of their lifestyle. The signs displayed in the villages, '*grow what you eat and eat what you*

*grow*’ illustrated people’s concern with being sufficient. They were, however, in debt due to spending money wastefully on buying lottery tickets and luxury goods. So while they accepted the ideal of self-sufficiency, it was difficult to practice. Integrated agriculture, providing work throughout the year, could be the model for self-sufficiency in practice.

#### *8.2.5 The route to rural development and sustainable development*

It is evident that rural development is an experimental process. It relies on local people’s knowledge, managerial abilities, skill in problem identification and assessment of solutions and social and economic relationships. The empowerment in this study would also imply there were changes going on in wider society as a result of grassroots changes: the development of human dignity, popular democracy, and cultural diversity. The strength is based on individual development and leadership; and group activity, which may be networked into associations and development strategies which respect local knowledge, people and institutions (Shepherd, 1998). The study has an implication that overall community empowerment was a means of rural community development and sustainable development. Community development work remains a powerful and unique form of practice for those people wishing to engage in work with communities (Pople,1995).For instance, how people keep on living within their own community illustrated how their community could be sustainable for them. Community people did not want to work externally, they kept on picking their mushrooms and bamboo shoots from their forestation areas. Moreover, they retained their community life striving to work in agricultural activities throughout the year. They have learned via trial and error within their community. They found, however, that some new crops, such as rubber trees, could probably cause flooding damage in the future.

#### *8.2.6 Building up the participation and the roles of local government*

The study illustrates the roles of the local government as decentralised and tending to bring about participation amongst the community people. The mechanism of local government at grassroots level is open for all people to play important roles in

its development. The importance of developing local government is to build up participation in the development process. The study has a proposed implication for people's participation as follows:

1. Building up a sense of belonging in the people in relation to the local government by stimulating them to understand its implementation at the grassroots level. People should understand civic roles and civic rights. All need support from the government itself -the bureaucratic organisations, NGO, and academic institutions. Participation, for instance, depended on the potentials of the leaders. Some village headmen could convince people to take part in activities initiated by the SDAO easily while others could not. Moreover, people did not really understand the roles of the SDAO, the local government. They were more concerned with the village fund, distributed by the government directly to the villages.
2. Creating the community conditions for people to present their ideas, perspectives, and opinions on development issues by means of regular meetings alongside the roles of the local government. It was recognised that some villages could organise meeting and forums efficiently. People enjoyed taking part and sharing their views, for example on the topic of preventing drug addiction and AIDS. However, as it was difficult to hold meeting in some villages, informal meetings were held and the village headmen and headwoman used the village broadcast tower to relay news and inform of activities.
3. Continuously increasing the potential of community people to inspect local government by accessing its information and implementation. This would lead people to be aware of the value of having this kind of government, which includes the idea of decentralisation, and, moreover, willingly to participate effectively in its roles. As previously mentioned, people still did not understand the roles of the SDAO on the development features in the subdistrict. Most of the SDAO projects were concerned with infrastructural aspects. So, attendance of meetings by village headmen was significant,

while it was noted that some did not attend and some left early and without reason.

Therefore, the study implies that programmes and processes need to focus on capacity-building that leads to empowerment, not only of individuals but also of the community, and in the context of community development. It could be seen that empowerment is the key concept at the heart of community development (Ledwith, 2005).

### **8.3 Implications for Planning**

The findings of the research study have implications for public policy, especially in the arena of community and rural development as well as the development throughout the country. It gives implications for planning to the following parties:

- policy makers on both community and national levels
- rural community study and sociology curriculum planners
- Critiques and challenges

#### *8.3.1 Implications for policy makers*

The policy makers at both community and national levels should revise the roles of local government, community development workers and government officers. In service training needs to be given to those implementing this. The degree of bureaucracy must be decreased in order to provide better services leading to the development strategies at all levels.

There are eight ministries in Thailand responsible for rural development; therefore the community must be strengthened as a means to the overall rural development, and sustainable development of the country as a whole. A policy of aiming at the potential development of self-reliance and self-sufficiency at the village level should be declared by the government. This policy should contain two strategies: structural reformation of the administrative system to enable all ministries and departments to improve development functions and services for people; and the

potential development of administrators, officers, community leaders and members of all villages. This must be central to the development on the basis of community culture's relationship with cultural pluralism and multi-cultural understanding rather than providing some projects to all. This means it is necessary to learn from community people.

### *8.3.2 Implications for curriculum planners*

There are many academic subjects in the areas of rural community studies at the higher education level. The curriculum planners should utilise the study of community culture, as indigenous knowledge should be the fundamental basis of community studies and rural sociology. The students or the learners must be trained to recognise the community culture by applying an ethnographic approach in learning with local people to gain a better understanding the ways of life they have cultivated. Therefore, all courses in these areas must insert the conceptualisation of the particular community culture into their curriculum. The role of education in contributing to development assets will gradually pass to the young generations at all levels of education. The curriculum planners have to concern themselves more with community culture, focusing on community ways of life. This should not only be theoretical as at present, but more practical. For example, a study of local wisdom holders is needed to nurture pride in the culture of the farmers, who engage in agricultural activities, growing rice and providing food for all.

### *8.3.3 Critiques and Challenges*

The critiquing and challenging issues that may lead to community empowerment are the following:

1. Human-centred development is considered to be as quite ideal and intangible as the community empowerment which is the development framework at the community level. This is because it could not be applied flexibly in every particular community. As a result, each community has its own contexts, its own individual differences, its own roots and backgrounds, its own way of life and its own implementation. Therefore,

community empowerment could not be standardised for every community. On the other hand, each community needs to determine the appropriate approach for strengthening its own community. It could be clarified that the promotion of community empowerment is the insiders' process; not the outsiders'. Therefore, the process of sharing ideas, vision and actions promoting the community strength is crucial, rather than waiting for the outcome of community empowerment. In addition, the important factor continuously enhancing this process is the comparative study of each village. This would provide the levels of community empowerment in various communities and then maximise the exchange of ideas, experiences and knowledge in terms of networking.

2. Poverty and conflicts still remained as the outcome of the development implementation from many decades. The income distribution gap between urban and rural people is still wide. The government allocated much-needed resources in building up the infrastructures for investment facilities. Therefore, urban areas are being developed in terms of job-creation. Consequently, the imbalanced development affects the rural sector to face poverty and deterioration due to both diminishing natural and human resources being exploited as raw materials and non-skilled labour in the urban sector. Also, the educational system does not support community culture and neglects indigenous local wisdom. This causes young labourers to migrate from the villages to big cities. Therefore, the family which is the fundamental basis of culture has declined and resulted in the degeneration of the local community culture.

Additionally, the imbalance between the rural and urban sector could increase the already high numbers of rural people who could not access living factors, especially land, water resources, forests and the enabling factor of education. This causes a vicious cycle throughout the country. If the social structure remains imbalanced like this, it not only deteriorates socio-economic and indigenous aspects indefinitely, it tends to increase conflict and violence which directly affect community empowerment. The conflict from natural resource allocation is considered to be the crisis in

rural Thai society. It is because the power and patronage system is the fundamental basis of Thai culture. Therefore, the empowered community is used to resolve problems as well as to maintain the community resources.

3. Although the present 1997 Constitution determines the democracy mechanism which provides political transparency as assessed by people, the politics of patronage have still remained and attempt to maintain unfair power and status without giving power to people to gain self-government in local government. Political issues are concerned with development schemes. The local government members are politicians and most are the business partners of constructors. Moreover, there had been intense campaigning during the election period. Buying votes at every level is commonplace. There is a very close relationship between the local government and central government in terms of political benefits. The patronage system gradually turns to be donor-recipient (Phongphit, 2003). Some projects, for instance the village fund, were distributed to all villages throughout the country in line with the government campaign of '*tomorrow-rich*' for rural people. This has never been true since Thailand implemented the National Development Plans for four decades. Although the Sufficiency Economy has been disseminated, the government remains focused on mega projects which do not serve rural sectors. This can directly and indirectly affect the movement of community empowerment.
4. Thai society is a bureaucratic state; therefore, the promotion of community empowerment is resisted by bureaucracy, especially modifying the ways of thinking and behaviours in order to reduce conflicts of interest and bureaucratic corruption. As a result, bureaucratic reform is the challenge to accept the dignity and ability of the community people in terms of approaching the new paradigm of implementation, rather than to gain convenience and benefits. On the other hand, bureaucratic reform must support the strengthening mechanism of community empowerment. The roles of community development workers, for instance, need to change to those of good facilitators accepting the tacit knowledge of community people, rather than simply outstanding leaders. Their roles should move



from organising people, to letting them raise their hands and contribute after listening. They have to stop creating activities and then convincing people to take part in them. This could lead to real participation, where currently it is only convincing participation.

5. Internal issues in the community are very important for community empowerment itself. This could be the promoted issues or the obstacles to enhancing it. The community has faced economic problems -low income, high expenditure, unstable income, debts and poverty. The problems of the production process are getting worse due to degenerating natural resources. Moreover, social institutions such as the family, school, and temple, are declining in terms of strength of mind because of the lack of scrutiny of the values of materialisation and consumerism. Furthermore, community groups and organisations that are established have low potential to manage themselves, and not enough knowledge to empower themselves.
6. Overall social development requires a better paradigm to manage the complex society, especially the perceptions of beliefs, values and opinions of the people. The need for this study is pressing. Consequently, the study on community empowerment is an issue to persuade and convince each community to do this for itself. In addition, the horizontal system must be provided to weave together and coordinate all systems. From the overall study, learning from people, from their understanding and perspectives, gives a better paradigm on development. It shows how the context of the community is powerful and it interweaves with the potential of people. How people could retain their lives within their community contributes to developing a better paradigm. There is no destination of community life, so how people have potential to retain their peaceful living within the community signifies empowerment.

The following section presents the overall strength and limitations of the research.

## **8.4 Strengths and Limitations of the research**

The ethnographic approach as transdisciplinary field and methods of data gathering employed in this study provided an opportunity for an analysis of all aspects promoting community empowerment at the grassroots level (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The findings of this research add to the calls for new approaches to community study. It provides a unique insight into the approaches to strengthening the community in the context of the Northeast rural Thai community.

### *8.4.1 Strengths*

The strength lies in the multifaceted research which took a long period in gathering data with multi-methods. The qualitative methodology used allowed the researcher to learn throughout the study. Adjustment and modification was the strength of the study in employing qualitative approach. Some techniques were applied during the periods of data gathering. For instance, the SDAO meeting attendances were used in order to avoid bias (See also Chapter Four, Methodology).

The outcome of the research is intended to be its strength, that being not to rapidly increase community development schemes. On the other hand, this would affect the community in a time-consuming fashion due to the overall community culture awareness based on sufficiency and self-reliance. Therefore, when the key people are aware of these concepts, this could also raise extremely positive points of view towards rural community development which could then lead to sustainable development in the long run.

Also, the process and outcome of the research study benefits the participants, as well as the researcher, in learning from each other. The intangible values of community culture, its way of life, are significant in terms of studying the development aspect in the villages of Northeast of Thailand. Most of all, the study supports the remarkable answer that *'Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people'* (Spradley, 1979).

#### *8.4.2 Limitations*

The strengths of the methods used are evident, yet several factors have not been considered in terms of their impact on the research, and the researched. There are some limitations to the research, even though the study has achieved its aims and objectives.

As this study is unique in applying multi-methods of data collections, it was quite complicated for the community people and researcher at the first period of data collections. As ethnographic research was employed the most significant method, for instance participant observation, could not be effectively employed, so the applied methods were used instead. Most of the limitations arose in the methodology used to study this subject.

Firstly, the multi-data collection methods generated an overwhelming amount of rich data. It is perhaps by virtue of the rich data that resulted from the investigation of the community people, that the researcher was overwhelmed and unable, at times, to deal with it. Clearly, the use of field notes allowed these issues to be addressed at a later date. Undoubtedly, however, there were times when addressing issues immediately would have been beneficial to the area under study.

Secondly, how to recruit participants from the focus group discussions in order to take part in the workshop resulted in the outstanding young people disappearing from the research process. Culturally, people give precedence to the elderly, yet, ideally, participants should come from every group. Therefore, it would be more practical if the research project needed to conduct in a village setting, to ensure that both old and young participants are available.

Thirdly, the potential to generalise the findings of this study to the wider villages over the country, by virtue of its small sample typical of qualitative research, may be questioned. The researcher does not have a dispute with this matter. Indeed, some of the findings are not generalised given the context and culture of the conditions in which community people's opinions were gathered is significant to the approaches to the community empowerment. It may not be possible to

generalise the results of the study to the rest of the community in Thailand, or to the western world, because the research study is entirely from one province in Northeast Thailand.

Fourthly, the contents of the research are mainly focusing on the community empowerment, which is a highly intangible but multi-faceted development: for people to define it, the research issues must be a deeper analysis of what was seen in the community settings. There are various particular issues and problems concerning the strength and, even, the vulnerability of the community. Therefore, studying in greater depth in each community, employing the ethnographic approach, would be more practical and might allow for greater benefits being more appropriate in each particular context. More studies of this kind are needed if we are to learn the truth about how to strengthen the community to meet the genuine development in village settings.

Despite these limitations, this study is useful as baseline data relating to the examination of community empowerment from the views of the people who deal with the developmental aspects.

The following section presents the recommendations for further studies.

## **8.5 Recommendations for Further studies**

There are many gaps in knowledge and understanding of how to strengthen the community in specific areas. This section of the thesis points to future directions for further research studies which may result from the issues and themes emerging from this study. Based on the limitations and results of the study, some recommendations should be considered for future research.

### *8.5.1 More concern on specific contexts of the community*

In terms of the concept of community empowerment, the research revealed positively that it was relevant to the strength of human beings and was mainly concerned with the self-reliance and self-sufficiency of people, especially in its

psychological aspects. There is a need for further research into the promotion of self-reliance and self-sufficiency in the minds of individuals and then to link this to the community as a whole. If possible, it would be desirable to select a village as a community in each region in order to compare the perceptions of the people not only from the views of key people, towards community empowerment and so have a complete picture of the approaches to strengthening the community. As the regions in Thailand are different in the contexts of geography, human settlement and, especially, culture the comparative study of perspectives could beneficially explore in more detail the context of villages in each region.

#### *8.5.2 More concern on indigenous wisdom*

One such theme was the key element for promoting community empowerment reliant upon learning in the community. Informal learning or learning from experience and from their ancestors as local wisdom was highly significant. It would also be more beneficial to study, particularly in-depth, the potential of people and indigenous knowledge of the community to lead and enhance the human and social capital. Recognising indigenous local wisdom in each village would be desirable to elicit more information and gain a richer picture of how to strengthen the community in a more sustainable manner.

#### *8.5.3 The significance of young generations*

Great concern needs to be placed on the young generation's points of view as they will play important roles in the future. One of the limitations of the study was its restriction to the views of only the key informants. The views of the younger generation seem to be missing. Culturally, Thai rural people always let the elderly speak while young people keep quiet. This implies the respectfulness of young people towards people who are older. The study of this topic with these people would fill the gap here. Moreover, eventually, these young people will take a turn at being responsible for their community. This would help strengthen the community in the long run.

#### *8.5.4 Applying Participatory Action Research (PAR)*

In the study context, community empowerment has to be understood within the broader context of each community being different to the next; some villages had high potential in their leaders and effective groups, as well as gaining support from local government, while others did not. Linked to this, one particular community must be examined in more in-depth, applying the participatory action research (PAR) approach. Generally, community was the subject of research and the people were the subjects of information gathering. Meanwhile, in PAR, the community is an important part of the research team. With PAR, it is the responsibility of every researcher in the group, as well as the users of the research, to be more collaborative and synergistic. Its methods could be applied for people's participation in need assessment, identifying causes of community problems, as well as solutions, during the period of conducting the research. To summarise, PAR methods have been designed to promote critical thinking and reflection, as local people work alongside external experts in researching their own problems (Chambers, 1983, 1997).

The importance of the results expected from such research would be for the people and the process of learning within community. Through sequences of learning and reflection between community people and outsiders, new insights could be elicited, which could set the framework for the development of appropriate community development strategies (Mayo, 2000). PAR is not only concerned with focusing on the relationship between the research team and the participants, but also in all internal and external relationships throughout the project and beyond. PAR will benefit not only the researcher but also the community itself.

The following section presents the recommendations from the findings.

## **8.6 Recommendations from the findings**

The findings of this study lead to the following recommendations.

### *8.6.1 Community culture needs to be nurtured*

The particular indigenous community culture needs to be nurtured and cultivated by all levels - the central government, local government, academic institutions, NGO and especially by the community people themselves. Therefore, gaining a better understanding in the context of the particular indigenous culture of each community is essential alongside providing and supporting the projects of development in the community. Consequently, there is a need for genuine support; hence, the roles of the government and local government should be modified to supplement the community and not impose upon it. Cultural perspectives are needed to help people empower themselves. The community is a living organism. There is no destination, it will, therefore, exist forever. It must survive and live in its own ways and moreover, be based on its particular local indigenous culture as mentioned earlier.

### *8.6.2 The roles of local government need to be modified*

As the role of local government at grassroots level, the SDAO need to modify themselves to support strongly the roles of community activities rather than initiate the social activities directly itself. On the other hand, the community activities should be enhanced by the SDAO in letting each community host the social activities and then let each village take a turn; therefore, the SDAO takes action on the roles of support in terms of budget allocation in every community. Each village has its own context; therefore, its own needs must be a necessary concern. The research outcomes should be presented to the local government in order to generate ideas related to effective coordination of community activities which should be organised from time to time to promote people's participation.

### *8.6.3 Learning community needs to be supported*

Learning is one of the main issues promoting the community strength, especially in the groups. Accordingly, it should be supported and enhanced by all levels- the central government, NGO, local government and academic intuitions. As management and marketing is needed from the group's implementation, various learning issues should be provided throughout by community broadcasting, forums, meetings and groups. All parties should work in collaboration with the community. There should be a clear understanding of the roles of community development workers which must be modified in line with the demand for facilitation due to the lengthy process of learning. This could not be rapid development; it consumes time to lead to sustainability. Moreover, the PAR process would provide for the needs of community people to study their own problems and identify causes, as well as find solutions, by themselves. Learning would be supportive of community empowerment in the long run.

### *8.6.4 The Sufficiency Economy is disseminated into practice*

The Sufficiency Economy should be disseminated to every community in order to recognise the concept as trying to raise the awareness of people on wasteful budget spending. The concept of the Sufficiency Economy is needed alongside all socio-economic activities in the community. As the religious traditional principles and activities are important for the people, not only development activities should be held alongside these activities, but also the dissemination of sufficiency and self-reliance in practice on religious days. These concepts should be voiced and discussed to benefit all people in village periodically. Moreover, they should be publicly displayed on readily recognisable community signs. The integrated with multi-crops needs to be gradually and continuously promoted by all sectors.

### *8.6.5 Local leadership in- service training*

There is a need for genuine support, clear information and achievable incentives in order to encourage community leaders to play the roles of leadership. The opportunity for training to understand their roles should be opened to all



community leaders. As the local government has been established to serve decentralised authority, a clear understanding of their roles community leaders should be better able to cooperate. Local instructors could take responsibility for in-service training as intensive co-ordinators of support at ground level.

#### *8.6.6 Socio- economic groups need to be supported*

The study revealed the importance of working in groups in the community. Therefore, various socio-economic groups in the community based on people's interests should be supported periodically and provided with networking links. It could be seen that strength in the groups leads to strength in the community. However, vulnerable socio-economic groups are also in need of support. This should not only be in terms of long or short-term fund distribution or revolving funding, but also in terms of improving skills and knowledge.

#### *8.6.7 Gender Awareness needs to be nurtured*

Gender awareness within governmental and non-government bodies must be increased, and, and strategies and mechanisms for gender equity must be strengthened. Gender awareness must be translated into policy and action (Karl, 1995). Awareness building and skills building among women themselves is equally important so that more women gain confidence to participate in decision making and grasp their rights, and continue the process of empowerment. Women had roles in decision-making process alongside men. The important of gender differences needs to be nurtured together with the socio-economic groups as previously mentioned. Supporting more income and knowledge will provide the opportunity for women to work within their community. The women's groups and voluntary groups, for instance, the village health volunteers need to be nurtured. Improving skill and knowledge are necessary to support the women's groups' implementation. The gradual improvement of various women's groups will provide better living leading to sustainable community life.

#### *8.6.8 A willingness to volunteer needs to be encouraged*

The promotion of voluntary action in groups is also recognised and supported in order to maintain the senses of belonging, caring, sharing, unitising, self-help, solidarity, rootedness and social ties in the community. The government and local government should strongly support voluntary organisations and people in the community.

#### *8.6.9 The participation of young generations*

As previously mentioned, there is no final destination for the community and, therefore, local wisdom or indigenous knowledge must be transferred to the younger generations. Consequently, the projects initiated by any groups or organisations need to concern themselves with the participation of young people. These people will carry on the development issues in their community in the long run.

#### *8.6.10 Local democracy needs to be more empowered*

The macro systems, for instance the government itself, could be developed to assist and empower local democracy. The 'bottom up' must match the 'top down', particularly with regard to equality, replacing previous exploitation. However, the government has presented 'the donor-recipient approach' which has been developed from the patronage system.

In summary, these recommendations could be moved forward alongside the context of the community in an interdependent manner. These lead to community empowerment in the context of community development.

### **8.7 Final Conclusion**

I appreciate that it was a great opportunity to conduct this research. It is concluded that it has achieved its aim of investigating community empowerment and identifying its approaches to strengthen the community. The implications of the

findings go to the heart of the debate about sustainable rural development. They affect policy makers, community workers, educators and planners. They provide new insight into the realities of research and evidence based practice. This study has implications for continuing the specific area of empowering the community.

What stands out from the findings are the important role of community culture and the awareness of people, as well as genuine participation driven by both need and awareness. Community capacity building is what leads community empowerment; starting with the potential of people and not the various projects. This study has also drawn on the experiences of the significant creation of a learning culture in such partnerships as are essential for coping with these problems and making the most of opportunities to tackle social exclusion and encourage the active citizenship of community people.

It is hoped that this study contributes to the fields of community study, rural sociology, rural development and community development work and planning. This thesis makes a main contribution to the discussion on how community development benefits 'empowerment' to sustain the 'community' and promote 'strength through the potential of people and community way of life'.

In summary, whether community empowerment is enhancing community development, rural development or the route to sustainable development, partnerships of diversity between government, local government, non-government, community organisations, academic institutions and community people are strongly required in order to maximise the potential of people. The bottom-up initiatives need to positively complement and harmonise with top-down ongoing support and facilitations.

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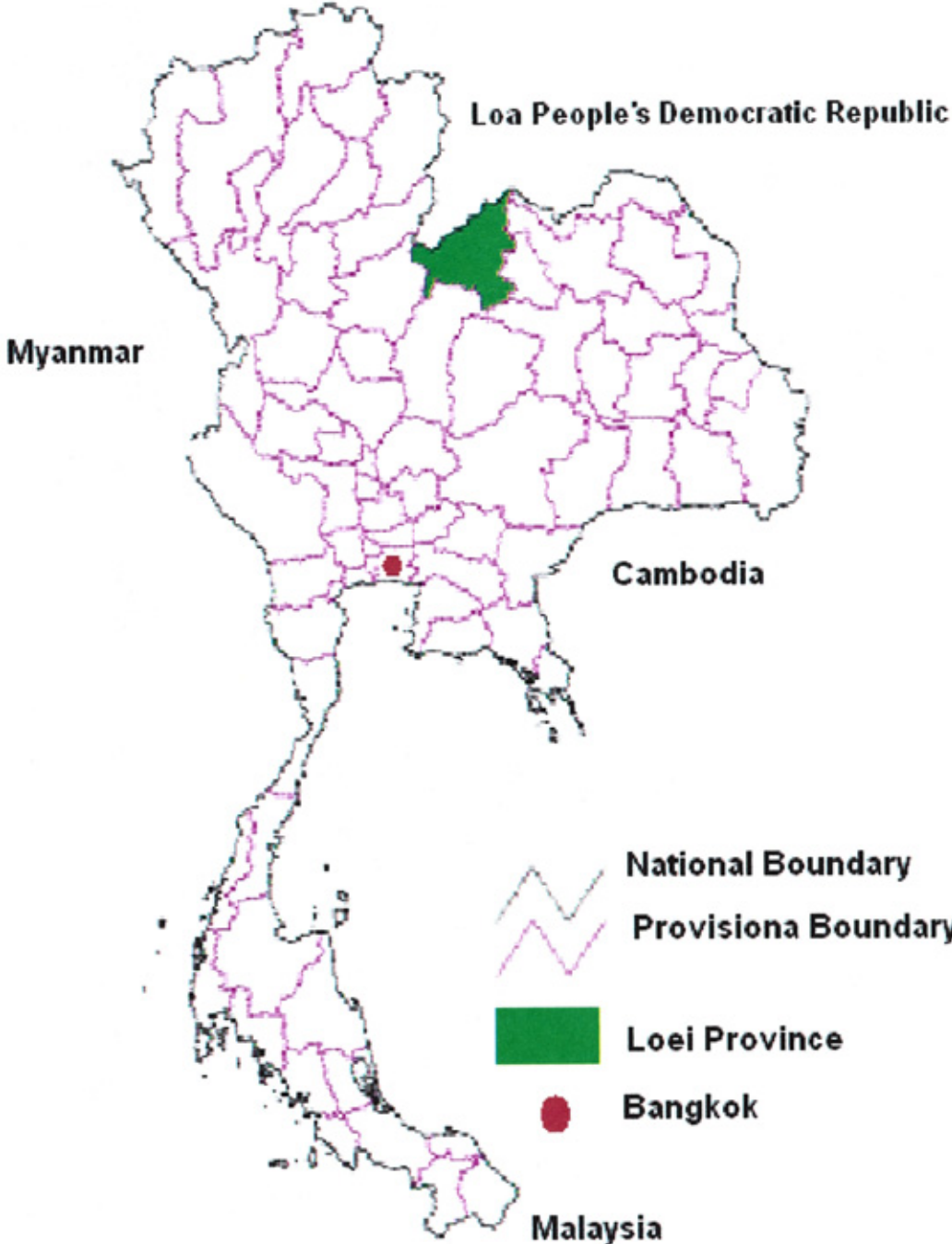
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**APPENDIX 1: MAP OF THAILAND**



## **APPENDIX 2: Unstructured Interview Schedule for Recruiting Participants**

1. Introduce the research project to the respondents.
2. Besides the village headman when problems occur who do you deal with?
3. Who is involved with the development aspects in this community?
4. Who plays the pivotal role in running development features in this village?

## **APPENDIX 3: Focus group Discussion guide**

1. Introduce the research project to the respondents.
2. Setting up agreement on focus group discussion process.
3. What could be defined as the pride of the village?
4. What have you recognised being the most satisfying issue in the village? Why?
5. What makes you feel upset or worry about your village? Why?
6. What could you define community empowerment?
7. What is the most significant element that could lead to community empowerment? Why?
8. What are your opinions towards the local government at the grass root level?
9. What is the best approach to generate community empowerment?
10. Conclude the session by selecting participants for the workshop stage.

## **APPENDIX 4: The Unstructured Interview Schedule: SDAO committee members**

### **4.1 The First Interview schedule: Pre-Observation Interview**

1. Introduce the research project to the respondents
2. Personal Information - Age, Major and Minor Occupation, Education attainment and Marital Status
3. How long have you been elected as the member?
4. Reasons for being SDAO committee members.
5. What are the most outstanding developing features in this sub-district?  
Please specify and give reasons.
6. What are needed to improve and why? Please specify.
7. What are the challenges in SDAO?
8. What are the directions for development for implementation?
9. What are your opinions on roles and functions of SDAO?
10. Has SDAO achieved the idea of decentralisation? Why and Why not?
11. What are your perspectives on participation? How do they take part in?

### **4.2 The Second Interview Schedule: Follow-Up Interview**

1. What are your opinions in community empowerment?
2. In what way do you think community empowerment important for your Sub-district?
3. What is the most significant element that leads to community empowerment?
4. How do you create community empowerment?
5. How do SDAO support villages be strengthened?
6. What is the best approach to promote community empowerment in the future?
7. What are the other perspectives on community empowerment and community development?
8. What is the ultimate goal of community empowerment?

## **APPENDIX 5: The Unstructured Interview Schedule: Pair Villagers Interview**

1. Introduce the research project to the respondents
2. Personal Information - Age, Major and Minor Occupation, Education attainment and Marital Status
3. How do think about the development perspectives in your village?
4. In what ways do you want the outsiders to assist your village on development aspect?
5. How do you concern with the GO, NGO and other academic institutions in related to the development in your village?
6. What do you think of the implementation of the SDAO?
7. Could SDAO support the ideas of decentralisation?  
Why and why not?
8. Do you think your village is being strengthened? Why and why not?
9. In what ways, do you think community empowerment is important to your village?
10. How can you promote community empowerment in the future? In what ways?

## **APPENDIX 6: Sample of Field note**

### **Sample of Fieldnote: Interview**

**Interviewee:** Pong (Pseudonym)

**Interviewer:** Saowapa Sukprasert (the researcher)

**Notetaker:** Atchara Artkaew

**Date:** 19 November 2002

**Time:** 1730-1917 hours

**Venue:** Pong's house in Village 3

#### **1. Personal Information**

Age: 48 years

Occupation: Contractor

Education attainment: Bachelor Degree in Public Administration

Marital Status: Married with two children

Position: Chair of SDAO council for two years

#### **The researcher introduced the research project to the interviewee**

- Informing about the objectives of the research, it was looking at the community empowerment through learning from key people's perspectives on this matter.
- Informing the objective of the interview- a source of data collection
- Building up a rapport and relaxed atmosphere. In a friendly and sincere verbal and non verbal communication, the researcher asked the interviewee to feel free to give information, from your own experiences.
- Informing the period of the interview that would last about an hour or one and a half hour.

**Interviewer:** What do you define the concept of community empowerment?

**Interviewee:** It is very difficult to define this concept. It can be compared with the strength of the people. The strength of people's mind and the mature human being can be defined. How people live happily together and how community is calm without any serious problems.



These signify community strength. Moreover, unity among and between people illustrates community empowerment.

**Interviewer:** So community empowerment is up to people.

**Interviewee:** That is right because community is a living organisation. How people have good face-to-face relationship 'good communication' 'keeping contact with each other' 'paying visits to each other' provide community strength. This is community life and its unity means empowerment. Moreover, community empowerment could be compared with mature people 'not rely on outside support', 'self-reliance and let the needy rely on', 'not waiting for help' and 'the stability of mind', this signify the dignity of human being. People with mental strength illustrate this concept. However, it is difficult because people rely on help from outside, waiting for government support and ask help from SDAO, asking funding for group support although there is no activity within that group.

**Interviewer:** In what ways, do you think community empowerment important for your sub-District?

**Interviewee:** It is important because it is rooted in development scheme at every level. It is a strong basis of all socio-economic and political development due to people strength and then community. Most of all, it is leading to be sustainable in the long run.

**Interviewer:** Do you mean sustainable development?

**Interviewee:** Right. How people can continue community life engaging farming work *within* their community, do not have to work outside which cause lots of problems, leaving their family with their elderly. Some do but it is not worthwhile. So community strength; it is ground work leading to be sustainable.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned all socio-economic and political development. How does community empowerment interplay with it?

**Interviewee:** Right. Working on farming work throughout the year can earn more income for family expenses. The SDAO now is providing community market, people can sell their products. It is enough for working within community. How people have good relationship and mutual aids represent good society. We trust each other living with neighbourhood.

**Interviewer:** And political development?

**Interviewee:** Participation is the best for political development. People are more interested in politics at all levels. How more people want to be SDAO members is a good sign for local level. People's participation for voting, campaigning is much better. However, the last SDAO election , there was a very strong campaign but we could agree to take two year term for SDAO administration instead of four year term. The political atmosphere is declined. SDAO meetings are open to all who want to attend but only a few attend. Even though, we invite all village headmen to attend the meetings, some do but some leave before closing sessions.

**Interviewer:** At the national level?

**Interviewee:** People are interested more too but buying vote is commonplace because they get money. They follow the policy of the present government, for instance, the village fund project and 30 baht treatment for deceases are concerned. The SDAO does not any responsible for the village fund. This seems the present government does not signify the role of the local government; they gave the money directly to people to manage. Some could do well but some could not.

**Interviewer:** That is very interesting feature. What is the most significant element that leads to community empowerment?

**Interviewee:** Strong leadership is leading to community strength. Leaders could play the roles in development. They can convince people to take part; they can bring about people's participation. They are not

only the leaders but also the roles models. People have high respect to their leaders. Leaders can provide network within and outside. If we concern with community empowerment that means the leadership has to be involved. The headmen of village 4 and 5 are influential, they can lead their villages, and they can propose many projects, for instance for the women's groups. They always attend the SDAO meetings and make a better understanding between their villagers and the local government. However, people have to concern how they are self-reliant and sufficient. People nowadays spend a lot of money, being extravagant in spending, for instance, buying lottery ticket both legally and illegally. They spend much with unnecessary items, mobile phones, motorbike, earning less than spending, most are in debts.

**Interviewer:** How do you create community empowerment?

**Interviewee:** That is an interesting question. People's participation is the best way to create community empowerment, in any activities. This would make people share with each other. Activities will support the understanding and relationships of people. Most religious and social activities such as on Sabbath days, the tradition as Songkran day could bring about people to take part. How people get involved with community activities will create community empowerment and it is up to the leaders too. Moreover, groups' activities will make people work and keep on community life alongside their agricultural activities; they can earn more income for their family. How women can organise group implementation well such as 'weaving group in village 6' and 'herbal group in village 2', they learn from trial and error. They learn how to improve their products; they can make instant herbal drinks. It is on the process of improvement.

**Interviewer:** How do SDAO support villages to be strengthened?

**Interviewee:** We support community groups as mentioned such as women's groups, herbal groups, fertiliser groups which are well organised in terms of funding. We provide them to borrow the fund without any interest or give them as the revolving fund. Some can

mange well, some can not. However, nowadays, providing better infrastructures are more concerned. This cause a lot of budget. Road construction and improvement, water supply, road improvement after flooding are necessary in the mean time. In the future, if our infrastructure in our sub-district is improved, the SDAO support will be given more widely.

**Interviewer:** That means the infrastructure improvement is the first priority.

**Interviewee:** Right. Good conditioned roads; electricity and water supply are their basic needs. People like to compare these conditions with other sub-districts; this matter is significant for first priority.

**Interviewer:** What is the best approach to promote community empowerment in the future?

**Interviewee:** Having activities together from time to time, this will create and nurture better understanding among people. Engaging multi-crops both short term and long term provide family income throughout better than working outside. Enough to eat provides family strength and then the community.

**Interviewer:** What are the other perspectives on community empowerment and development?

**Interviewee:** Continual activities provided strength and how people work in informal groups with continuous activities. Being self-reliant and sufficient is leading to personal strength and then community strength. Development should be gradual.

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much. This is the last question. What is the ultimate goal of community empowerment?

**Interviewee:** Keeping on community life, working within community, not going outside whether temporarily or permanently is the ultimate goal of community strength. This can go back to the first question that

community is a living organisation, people's strength is the community strength.

**Interviewer:** I have learned many things from you. All your productive information will be academic use. Thank you for your cooperation.

**Interviewer's comments after the interview session (Keywords provided)**

(This participant willingly gave productive information with friendly atmosphere)

- Community leadership
- Self-reliance and self-sufficiency- engaging in multi-crops
- Community activities - high levels of involvement in religious activities
- Group activities-well organised - so well being supported
- Community interaction, unity and peacefulness
- Retaining community life

**การบันทึกข้อมูลภาคสนาม : การสัมภาษณ์**  
**บันทึกข้อมูลการสัมภาษณ์คณะกรรมการองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล**

ชื่อผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ : นายพงศ์ (นามสมมติ)  
ชื่อผู้สัมภาษณ์ : ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์เสาวภา สุขประเสริฐ  
ชื่อผู้บันทึกการสัมภาษณ์ : นางสาวอัจฉรา อาจแก้ว  
วัน เดือน ปี ที่สัมภาษณ์ : 19 พฤศจิกายน 2545  
เวลาที่สัมภาษณ์ : 17.30 – 19.17 น.  
สถานที่สัมภาษณ์ : บ้านนายพงศ์ หมู่ที่ 3

**1. ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์**

อายุ : 48 ปี  
อาชีพ : รับเหมาก่อสร้าง  
ระดับการศึกษา : ปริญญาตรี สาขารัฐประศาสนศาสตร์  
สถานภาพการสมรส : สมรส มีบุตรจำนวน 2 คน  
รายได้ต่อเดือน : 50,000 บาท/เดือน  
ตำแหน่ง : ประธานกรรมการสภาองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล ระยะเวลา 2 ปี

**นักวิจัยแนะนำโครงการวิจัยต่อผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์**

-แนะนำจุดมุ่งหมายของโครงการวิจัย คือ การสร้างความเข้มแข็งของชุมชนจากการศึกษาความคิดเห็นผู้ที่มีบทบาทสำคัญในการพัฒนาหมู่บ้าน

-แนะนำจุดมุ่งหมายของ การ สัมภาษณ์ คือ การสัมภาษณ์ในครั้งนี้เป็นการเก็บข้อมูลภาคสนามของผู้วิจัย

-สร้างความสัมพันธ์ สร้างบรรยากาศที่เป็นมิตร ทั้งทางกายและทางวาจา และรู้สึกถึงความจริงใจ สามารถตอบคำถามได้ตรงประเด็น และตรงตามประสบการณ์ตามความรู้สึกนึกคิดของผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ ได้อย่างเต็มที่

-แนะนำเวลาที่ใช้ในการสัมภาษณ์ คือ ใช้เวลาในการสัมภาษณ์ 1 – 1.30 ชั่วโมง

ผู้สัมภาษณ์ : ท่านคิดว่า ความหมายเกี่ยวกับความเข้มแข็งของชุมชนเป็นอย่างไร

ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ : เป็นการยากที่จะให้ความหมาย ความเข้มแข็งของชุมชนเปรียบเทียบกับความเข้มแข็งของจิตใจของคนที่เปรียบเทียบกับได้กับ

ว ฒ ภา ว ะ  
แต่ในระดับชุมชนแล้วความเข้มแข็งน่าจะหมายถึงคนที่อยู่ร่วมกันอย่างมีความสุข ชุมชนมีความสุข ชุมชนไม่มีปัญหา รุนแรง ชุมชนมีความสามัคคี

ผู้สัมภาษณ์ : ถ้าอย่างนั้นความเข้มแข็งของชุมชน ก็ขึ้นอยู่กับคนในชุมชนใช่หรือไม่

ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ : ถูกต้อง เพราะว่าชุมชนคือ องค์การที่มีชีวิต การที่คนในชุมชนมีความสัมพันธ์กันอย่างใกล้ชิด มีการปฏิสัมพันธ์กันเป็นอย่างดี มีการไปมาหาสู่ซึ่งกันและกัน มีการติดต่อสื่อสาร ซึ่งกันและกัน และนี่คือชุมชนที่มีความเข้มแข็ง นอกจากนี้ความเข้มแข็งของชุมชนยังหมายถึง การที่คนในชุมชนสามารถพึ่งพาตนเองได้ ไม่รอความช่วยเหลือจากภายนอก

มีความพอเพียง สามารถเป็นที่พึ่งของคนอื่นได้ การมีความมั่นคงทางด้านจิตใจ  
แ ส ด ง ถึ ง คุ ณ ค์ า ข อ ง ค น โ ด ย เ ฉ พ า ะ  
แต่เป็นเรื่องยากเพราะคนในชุมชนยังรอรับความช่วยเหลือจากหน่วยงานภายนอก  
จ า ก รั ฐ บ า ล จ า ก อ ง ค์ ก า ร บ ริ ห า ร ส ่วน ต ำ บ ล  
ซึ่งกลุ่มบางกลุ่มในชุมชนที่ได้รับความช่วยเหลือจากองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล  
ไม่มีกิจกรรมกลุ่มเลย

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** ท่านคิดว่าความเข้มแข็งมีความสำคัญต่อตำบลของเราในด้านใดบ้าง  
**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** สำคัญมากเพราะเป็นพื้นฐานของการพัฒนาทุกด้าน  
ไม่ว่าจะเป็นด้านเศรษฐกิจ สังคม และการเมือง  
ซึ่งทั้งหมดนี้จะส่งผลต่อการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนในอนาคต

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** คุณหมายถึงการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนใช่หรือไม่  
คุณสามารถอธิบายความหมายของการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนได้หรือไม่  
**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** การพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนคือการทำที่คนในชุมชนใช้ชีวิตอยู่ในชุมชน ทำไร-  
ทำนา หรือมีอาชีพเสริมอื่นๆ ก็อยู่ในชุมชน ไม่ไปหางานทำนอกชุมชน  
ซึ่งจะทำให้เกิดปัญหามากมาย เกิดปัญหาการละทิ้งครอบครัว  
ก า ร ล ะ ทิ้ง บุ ต ร ห ล า น ไ้ ผู้ ส ูง อ า ย ุ ดุ แ ล ดั ง นั้ น  
ความเข้มแข็งของชุมชนนำไปสู่การพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** ความเข้มแข็งมีความสำคัญต่อการพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจ สังคม  
การเมืองในชุมชนอย่างไร  
**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** การที่คนในชุมชนสามารถทำอะไรทำนาตลอดทั้งปี  
ก็ทำให้สามารถหารายได้ตลอดทั้งปี อีกทั้ง องค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล  
ก็มีการสร้างตลาดสดชุมชนขึ้นเพื่อให้คนในชุมชนได้นำผลิตผลทางการเกษตรมาจำหน่าย  
จึงทำให้ชุมชนมีรายได้เพิ่มขึ้น และการที่ชุมชนมีความเอื้อเฟื้อเพื่อแผ่ต่อกัน  
มี ค ว า ม สั ม พั น ธ์ ที่ ดี แล ะ มี ก า ร ช ่วย เ ห ลี อ ชั้ ง กั น แล ะ กั น  
ทำให้สังคมในชุมชนมีความไว้วางใจซึ่งกันและกัน และมีความสุข

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** การพัฒนาด้านการเมืองของชุมชนเป็นอย่างไร  
**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** ประชาชนในชุมชนมีความสนใจด้านการเมืองเพิ่มขึ้น  
มีการติดตามข่าวสารทางการเมืองมากขึ้น รับฟังข่าวสารทางการเมืองมากขึ้น  
มีการสนใจในการสมัครเป็นสมาชิกองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบลมากขึ้น  
ถึงแม้ว่าการเลือกตั้งสมาชิกองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบลที่ผ่านมาจะมีการแข่งขันกันสูง  
มีความขัดแย้งกันบ้าง แต่เราก็แก้ไขโดยให้เข้ามาบริหารมีวาระเพียง 2 ปี  
เมื่อมีการปรับเปลี่ยนหมุนเวียนกันทำงานบรรยากาศในการทำงานก็ดีขึ้น  
และในการประชุมคณะกรรมการองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบลแต่ละครั้ง  
ก็เปิดโอกาสให้ประชาชน ผู้ใหญ่บ้าน ตัวแทนกลุ่มต่างๆ  
เข้า ร ่วม ร ับ ฟั ง ก า ร ป ระ ชุ ม ต ำ ว ย ท ุ ก ค ร ั้ง

และเปิดโอกาสให้แสดงความคิดเห็นในที่ประชุมได้ แต่ก็ยังมีบางคนมาร่วมประชุมแต่ก็กลับก่อน ก่อนที่จะปิดการประชุม

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** แล้วชุมชนให้ความสำคัญกับการเมืองในระดับประเทศอย่างไร

**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** ชุมชนให้ความสำคัญในการเลือกตั้งมากขึ้น แม้ในช่วงการเลือกตั้งที่ผ่านมาจะมีการซื้อสิทธิขายเสียงอยู่บ้าง แต่ก็มีการติดตามนโยบายของรัฐบาล เช่น โครงการกองทุนหมู่บ้าน โครงการ 30 บาทรักษาทุกโรค ถึงแม้ว่ารัฐบาลจะไม่เห็นความสำคัญขององค์การปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่น ในการรับผิดชอบบริหารจัดการโครงการกองทุนหมู่บ้าน ซึ่งรัฐบาลได้ให้เงินกองทุนไปยังหมู่บ้านโดยตรง และบางหมู่บ้านก็สามารถบริหารจัดการกองทุนได้ดี บางหมู่บ้านก็ไม่สามารถบริหารจัดการกองทุนได้เลย

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** องค์ประกอบที่สำคัญที่จะนำไปสู่ความเข้มแข็งของชุมชนคืออะไร

**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** ผู้นำที่มีความเข้มแข็ง บทบาทของผู้นำในการพัฒนา ผู้นำที่มีความสามารถในการชักนำให้ประชาชนมาร่วมกิจกรรมของชุมชนได้ และเป็นตัวอย่างที่ดีของคนในชุมชน ซึ่งผู้นำที่ดีนั้น มีทั้งผู้นำที่เป็นทางการและไม่เป็นทางการ ผู้นำสามารถสร้างความนับถือให้กับคนในชุมชนได้ มีเครือข่ายทั้งในและนอกหมู่บ้าน เช่น ผู้ใหญ่บ้านหมู่ 4 และหมู่ 5 ซึ่งเป็นผู้นำที่มีความเข้มแข็ง สามารถเสนอโครงการมากมาย และพัฒนาหมู่บ้าน เข้าประชุมสม่ำเสมอ สร้างความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบลกับชุมชนได้เป็นอย่างดี ถึงแม้ว่าผู้นำจะมีความสำคัญแต่คนในชุมชนก็มีความสำคัญเช่นกัน คนในชุมชนต้องพึ่งพาตนเองได้ มีความพอเพียง รู้จักประหยัดในการใช้จ่าย แต่คนในปัจจุบันฟุ่มเฟือยในการใช้จ่าย เช่น ซื้อหวย ซื้อมือถือ ซื้อมอเตอร์ไซค์ ซื้อรถยนต์ เป็นหนี้เงินกู้ทั้งในระบบและนอกระบบ ทำให้เป็นหนี้สินมีรายได้น้อยกว่ารายจ่าย

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** ท่านคิดว่าจะสร้างความเข้มแข็งของชุมชนได้อย่างไรในสถานการณ์นี้

**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** เป็นคำถามที่ดีมาก การที่เราจะสร้างความเข้มแข็งให้กับชุมชนนั้นต้องใช้เวลา เริ่มจากการสร้างความสัมพันธ์ซึ่งกันและกันในชุมชน การสร้างการมีส่วนร่วมของคนในชุมชน คือการที่คนในชุมชนมีส่วนร่วมในเรื่องของกิจกรรมต่างๆ ร่วมกัน ไม่ว่าจะเป็นกิจกรรมทางสังคม กิจกรรมทางศาสนา ประเพณีและวัฒนธรรม เช่น งานบวช งานแต่ง งานศพ ประเพณีเข้าพรรษา ประเพณีออกพรรษา งานบุญประจำปี งานบุญขึ้นบ้านใหม่ เป็นต้น นอกจากนี้ยังมีกิจกรรมกลุ่มในชุมชน นอกจากการทำอะไรทำนา เช่น กลุ่มแม่บ้าน กลุ่มสมุนไพร กลุ่มทอผ้า แม้จะเรียนรู้แบบลองผิดลองถูกก็ตาม ยกตัวอย่างเช่น กลุ่มสมุนไพรผลิตเครื่องดื่มสมุนไพรซึ่งก็มีการพัฒนาคุณภาพผลิตภัณฑ์แบบค่อยเป็นค่อยไปจนประสบ



ความสำเร็จ

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :**

องค์การบริหารส่วนตำบลสนับสนุนการสร้างความเข้มแข็งในชุมชนอย่างไร

**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** เราสนับสนุนกลุ่มต่างๆ เช่น กลุ่มแม่บ้าน กลุ่มทอผ้า กลุ่มสมุนไพรร ในเรื่อง ของ เงินทุน บางกลุ่มก็ให้การสนับสนุนแบบให้เปล่า บางกลุ่มก็ให้สนับสนุนโดยมีข้อแม้ คือการให้ยืมเงินแบบไม่มีดอกเบี้ย บางกลุ่มก็สนับสนุนแบบให้ยืมแบบมีดอกเบี้ยต่ำ ซึ่งบางกลุ่มก็สามารถบริหารจัดการกลุ่มได้ดี บางกลุ่มก็ไม่สามารถบริหารจัดการกลุ่มได้ บางกลุ่มไม่มีกิจกรรมของกลุ่มเกิดขึ้นเลย บางกลุ่มก็ต้องยกเลิกกลุ่มไปในปัจจุบัน การให้การสนับสนุนกลุ่มได้ลดน้อยลง เนื่องจากต้องให้การสนับสนุนด้านสาธารณูปโภคก่อน เพราะถนนหลายสายในหมู่บ้านถูกน้ำท่วมเกิดความเสียหาย ไฟฟ้า น้ำประปา ใต้รับ ความเสียหาย และชำรุด ถ้าในอนาคตเมื่อปัญหาด้านสาธารณูปโภคลดลง และดีขึ้น องค์การบริหารส่วนตำบลก็จะให้การสนับสนุนกิจกรรมกลุ่มมากขึ้น

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** ในระยะนี้เน้นการพัฒนาสาธารณูปโภคเป็นอันดับแรกใช่หรือไม่

**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** ใช่ ( น้ำไหล ไฟสว่าง ทางดี ) ซึ่งเป็นเรื่องที่ต้องสนับสนุนเพราะชาวบ้านชอบนำไปเปรียบเทียบกับองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล  
อื่นๆ

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** อะไรคือวิธีที่ดีที่สุดในการส่งเสริมความเข้มแข็งของชุมชนในอนาคต

**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** ส่งเสริมให้มีกิจกรรมในชุมชน เสริมสร้างความเข้าใจอันดี การส่งเสริมเกษตรทฤษฎีใหม่ การปลูกพืชระยะสั้นและระยะยาว ทำให้มีงานทำตลอดทั้งปี จึงไม่มีคนออกไปทำงานต่างจังหวัด ทำให้ครอบครัวมีความเข้มแข็ง และชุมชนเข้มแข็ง

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** มีมุมมองเพิ่มอีกหรือไม่เกี่ยวกับความเข้มแข็งของชุมชน

**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** การมีกิจกรรมสม่ำเสมอ ทำให้เกิดความเข้มแข็งได้ ไม่ว่าจะ เป็นกลุ่มเล็กหรือกลุ่มใหญ่ ทำให้สามารถพึ่งตนเองและเพียงพอ และการพัฒนาต้องเกิดแบบค่อยเป็นค่อยไป

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** อะไรเป็นเป้าหมายสุดยอดในการสร้างความเข้มแข็ง

**ผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ :** การทำให้คนอยู่ในชุมชนได้ ไม่ออกไปทำงานนอกชุมชน ทั้งแบบชั่วคราวหรือถาวร เมื่อคนเข้มแข็งชุมชนก็จะเข้มแข็ง

**ผู้สัมภาษณ์ :** ขอบคุณ ครั้งนี้ได้เรียนรู้จากท่านในหลายสิ่งหลายอย่าง ข้อมูลที่สัมภาษณ์ในวันนี้จะใช้ในการวิชาการเท่านั้น

ความคิดเห็นหลักจากการสัมภาษณ์

- ผู้ให้ข้อมูลเป็นประธานคณะกรรมการสภาองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล
  - ผู้ให้ข้อมูล มีความเชื่อมั่นในความคิดของตนเอง
- ให้ข้อมูลโดยตรงตามความคิดเห็น ให้ข้อมูลในบรรยากาศที่เป็นมิตร

(มุมมองสำคัญในการสร้างความเข้มแข็ง ของชุมชน)

- ผู้นำชุมชน
- การพึ่งพาตนเอง
- การพอเพียง
- การมีภารกิจกรมกลุ่ม
- การมีกิจกรรมในชุมชน
- การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์
- ความสงบสุข
- การมีการเกษตรผสมผสาน เกษตรทฤษฎีใหม่
- ใช้ชีวิตอยู่ในชุมชน

**APPENDIX 7: LETTER FOR REQUESTING PERMISSION FOR THE  
FIELDWORK**

Issued/2002

Rajabhat Institute Loei  
Loei- Chiangkhan Rd.  
Muang District Loei, 42000

7 January 2002

Subject: Requesting permission for conducting the fieldwork

Dear Headman Village 1,

I am Assistant Professor Saowapa Sukprasert and a lecturer at Rajabhat Institute Loei. I am conducting a PhD research project at Northumbria University titled 'Community Empowerment'. As part of the data collection process, I would like to request a permission to conduct the fieldwork in Village 1 under your jurisdiction by attending the village meetings, forums and other social activities as participant observer during February 2002-February 2003. The data from my observation will be utilised in my research project.

I hope my request will meet with your kind considerations. Thank you very much.

Sincerely yours,

Assistant Professor Saowapa Sukprasert

Issued/2002

Rajabhat Institute Loei  
Loei- Chiangkhan Rd.  
Muang District Loei, 42000

17 November 2002

Subject: Requesting permission to attend the meeting of the Sub-District Administrative Organisation committee

Dear Chairman of the SDAO committee,

I am Assistant Professor Saowapa Sukprasert and a lecturer at Rajabhat Institute Loei. I am conducting a PhD research project at Northumbria University titled 'Community Empowerment'. As part of the data collection process, I would like to request a permission to attend sessions of the meetings during December 2002-July 2003 in order to obtain data for my research project.

I hope my request will meet with your kind considerations. Thank you very much.

Sincerely yours,

Assistant Professor Saowapa Sukprasert



ที่ พิเศษ/๒๔๔๕

สถาบันราชภัฏเลย  
ถนนเลย-เชียงคาน อ.เมือง จ.เลย

๔๒๐๐๐

๗ มกราคม ๒๕๔๕

เรื่อง ขออนุญาตเก็บข้อมูลภาคสนาม

เรียน ผู้ใหญ่บ้านหมู่ที่ ๑

เนื่องด้วยข้าพเจ้า ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์เสาวภา สุขประเสริฐ ตำแหน่ง ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ระดับ ๘ สถาบันราชภัฏเลย กำลังศึกษาต่อในระดับปริญญาเอก มหาวิทยาลัย Northumbria University ประเทศอังกฤษ กำลังทำวิทยานิพนธ์ เรื่อง การสร้างความเข้มแข็งของชุมชน

ดังนั้น ข้าพเจ้า จึงขออนุญาตเก็บข้อมูลภาคสนามในหมู่บ้านของท่าน เช่น การประชุมหมู่บ้าน และกิจกรรมทางสังคมต่างๆ ของหมู่บ้าน เพื่อนำข้อมูลไปใช้ในการทำวิทยานิพนธ์ ทั้งนี้ โดยจะเริ่มเก็บข้อมูลตั้งแต่เดือน กุมภาพันธ์ ๒๕๔๕ – กุมภาพันธ์ ๒๕๔๖ หวังเป็นอย่างยิ่งว่าจะได้รับความอนุเคราะห์ด้วยดี และขอขอบคุณมา ณ โอกาสนี้

จึงเรียนมาเพื่อโปรดพิจารณาอนุญาต

ขอแสดงความนับถือ

( ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์เสาวภา สุขประเสริฐ )  
ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ระดับ ๘



ที่ พิเศษ/๒๔๔๕

สถาบันราชภัฏเลย  
ถนนเลย-เชียงคาน อ.เมือง จ.เลย

๔๒๐๐๐

๑๗ พฤศจิกายน ๒๕๕๕

เรื่อง ขออนุญาตเข้าร่วมประชุมคณะกรรมการองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล

เรียน นายองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล

เนื่องด้วยข้าพเจ้า ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์เสาวภา สุขประเสริฐ ตำแหน่ง ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ระดับ ๘ สถาบันราชภัฏเลย กำลังศึกษาต่อในระดับปริญญาเอก มหาวิทยาลัย Northumbria University ประเทศอังกฤษ กำลังทำวิทยานิพนธ์ เรื่อง การสร้างความเข้มแข็งของชุมชน

ดังนั้น ข้าพเจ้า จึงขออนุญาตเข้าร่วมประชุมคณะกรรมการองค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล เพื่อนำข้อมูลไปใช้ในการทำวิทยานิพนธ์ ทั้งนี้ โดยจะเริ่มเก็บข้อมูลตั้งแต่เดือน ธันวาคม ๒๕๕๕ - กรกฎาคม ๒๕๕๖ หวังเป็นอย่างยิ่งว่าจะได้รับความอนุเคราะห์ด้วยดี และขอขอบคุณมา ณ โอกาสนี้

จึงเรียนมาเพื่อโปรดพิจารณาอนุญาต

ขอแสดงความนับถือ

( ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์เสาวภา สุขประเสริฐ )  
ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ระดับ ๘

## APPENDIX 8: PHOTOGRAPHS

### FIELDWORK



Focus group discussion



Focus group discussion



Interview with SDAO member



Interview with SDAO member



Pair Interview



Workshop



## MEETINGS AND FORUMS



SDAO meeting



SDAO Meeting



Youth group meeting



Village Fund informal meeting



Village Fund Forum



Village Forum



## PEOPLE'S WAY OF LIFE



Participant observation in social event for the elderly



Participant observation of the Songkran Festival



People's daily life



Silkworm farming



Weaving



Cotton trading in the village