

Abstract

The study on “Empowerment of Occupational Groups: The case of Social Development Center no. 26, Buri Ram Province” is an attempt to explore factors contributive to the strengthening of occupational groups under the Program to Support Those Who Have Received Skill Training in Buri Ram. It also aims to explore obstacles to the strengthening of occupational groups and how to strengthen the groups. The study's methodology is based the combination of qualitative and quantitative surveys. Targets included members of mattress weaving group and group processing the mattress into various products. The 120 members have been supported by the Program to Support Those Who Have Received Skill Training in Buri Ram, an initiative of Social Development Center no. 26 in Buri Ram. Questionnaires have been used to gather data and statistical software for analyzing and processing the data including basic statistics, percentage, standard deviation value, and relations of factors. As for qualitative study, informants who have been interviewed included one staff member of the Program to Support Those Who Have Received Skill Training in Buri Ram, Social Development Center no. 26 in Buri Ram, Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the mattress weaving groups (Ban Kruad and Thai Charoen groups, two from each group), altogether five informants.

It was found that members of the groups are women from the age of 41 – 60 years. Most of them complete elementary education, work as farmers and each earn less than 3,000 baht a month and therefore have to find extra jobs. They have joined the occupational groups since they want to generate more income. Study of contributing factors to the strengthening of the occupational groups sheds light on contributing factors including leadership, participation of group members, group management, community's roles in group organization, support from outside agencies, and the group's marketing.

Regarding perception of the strength of the occupational groups, it was found that overall members think their groups' strength is fair. They opined that their groups tend to be strong on setting out rules and regulations, followed respectively by efficient

group committee, accomplishment of groups' objectives and follow up activities including the setup of the group's fund.

Regarding obstacles to the strengthening of occupational groups, in order, they include a lack of market or outlet to increase their sale of products, too little participation of group members, a lack of cash flow to support groups' activities, inconsistent coordination with officials, insufficient support as to skill trainers, poor leadership among leaders, and low participation of group members. As to the solutions, they suggest that quality of the products be improved, more marketing skills be instilled, more regular meeting be held to enhance group unity, seeking financial support from outside and savings among group members to build up a fund to support groups' activities. State agencies should value and support the mobilization of the groups and keep feeding them information. Roles and duties of leaders should be clearly defined and reviewed. Members should be encouraged to express themselves in order to promote groups' solidarity and love and to bring about efficient implementation.

The researcher recommends that leaders of the occupational groups should be equipped with knowledge concerning their occupations and be able to use it to help the groups to generate income. Group members should try to express themselves as much as they can. For weaker occupational groups, they have to intensify efforts to publicize their products/merchandise and state officials should help to supervise and encourage the groups to continue implementing their activities. It is essential that during the group's inception, the officials have to constantly provide information and monitor the mobilization of the groups. This attentive supervision shall help to give moral support and increase confidence among the members of the occupational groups and the community.