

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation : Factors Affecting the Empowerment of Communities in Rural Thailand
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This research has three objectives: 1) To analyze the community scenario with regard to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, 2) to figure out the indicators of community empowerment at the village and household levels, and 3) to study factors affecting the empowerment of communities in rural Thailand at the village and household levels. In carried out this research, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 76 fieldwork coordinator officers, 304 community leaders, and 1,520 community members, with regard to the Learning Network Areas in the four regions. Three forms of questionnaires were developed, pretested, and used to collect data in the field surveys. All relevant data were analyzed by the computer, using the SPSS/PC program with the descriptive statistics. The hypotheses, which depict the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables, have been tested with Path Analysis.

The findings are as following: 1) The rural profile at the village indicates the key strength is the existence of savings groups with active participation of community members, the weakness is long-term indebtedness, the opportunity is the existence of occupational groups and networks with active participation of the people, and the community threat is the rising of external debts, 2) Indicators of community empowerment at the village level, comprise the community's unity, the community's educational and training services, existence of savings groups, local leaders. and gender equity. While at the household level, the indicators comprise the household's unity, education and training, public-mindedness, honesty, household leadership. and gender equity, and 3) Factors directly affect community empowerment in Thai rural areas are (1) changes in demography, economy, society, public utilities, technology and local wisdom, politics and government, (2) participation in community activities, (3)domination by the public sector, and (4) problem learning and solving. Factors indirectly consist of (1) multi-partnership, (2) communications via various levels of

media, and (3) conflicts. Factors which directly influence participation in community activities consist of (1) communications via various levels of media, (2) multi-partnership, and (3) conflicts. Whereas factors which directly influence the community's capacity of self-reliance at a significant level are (1) changes in demography, economy, society, public utilities, technology and local wisdom, politics and government, and (2) participation in community activities.

At the household level, factors which directly influence empowerment consist of (1) changes in demography, economy, society, public utilities, technology and local wisdom, and government, (2) participation in community activities, (3) communications via various levels of media, (4) domination by the public sector (5) conflicts, and (6) problem learning and solving. Whereas factors which indirectly influence comprise (1) communications via various levels of media, and (2) domination by the public sector. Factors which directly influence participation in community activities at a significant level comprise (1) communications via all levels of media, and (2) domination by the public sector.

From the findings, it is recommended that: All individuals of households and villages should be encouraged to participate as members of at least one community group/organization, and this should be included as part of the Basic Minimum Needs (BMN) indicators. Civil assembly should be promoted at all levels-household, village, etc., in such way that all relevant stake-holders can take part in decision making processes, especially in solving local problems. Community members should be encouraged in their learning processes, with the application of local wisdom and universal knowledge, and they should be strengthened in conducting 'community-based research' with multi-partnership. The strategy of savings groups should be employed as a key instrument in implementing rural and urban community development, and as a foundation for boosting the One Tambon/One Product Project and for efficient management of the Village and Town Revolving Funds development. The philosophy of 'Sufficiency Economy' should be earnestly adopted for practicing self-reliance and building the preparedness to advance progressively towards the knowledge-based society. Data-bases should be developed and included into the website of thaitambon.com to be used as the central, standardized data. Public sector needs to take an active role in supervising and facilitating the local communities throughout the transition period of the devolvement of administrative authority to the local level. As a national policy, the management information systems should be developed, as well as the building of the community's capacity in utilizing the information technology on a continual basis.