



The Synergos Institute

**Bridging Local Needs with National
Realities through Participation:
The case of Khun Paiboon
Wattanasiritham**

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Khun Paiboon Wattanasiritham

"It was symbolic that we were going to formulate the National Development Plan through a process that is very participatory. It was symbolic of a new pattern, a new process that no more is the planning going to be done by the government alone."

- Khun Paiboon Wattanasiritham, on the drafting of the Eighth Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001)

Introduction

The participatory process of development had been institutionalized in many countries in the world. The concept of consensus-building in decision-making was inherent in old Asian cultures. In Thailand, the practice of consensus-building was believed to reflect the influence of Buddhism, which advocated harmony within the family, community and workplace.

The Thai peoples' participation in governance was quite new. The country was a monarchy until 1932 when a coup d'etat transformed its political system to a representative democracy. Through direct elections the Thai people first experienced public participation. However, public participation was given little attention in many other areas. The State still held all decision-making powers, particularly in formulating national development strategies.

As early as the country's Fifth Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP 1982–1986), the Tambons (sub-districts) were already mandated to employ a participatory approach to planning. However, it was widely believed that this was not carried out, purportedly due to the "lack of mechanisms" to undertake it.

The formulation of the 1997 Constitution provided the impetus for strengthening the people's participation in governance. This Constitution, known as the participatory constitution because it was drafted in collaboration with people representatives, explicitly acknowledged the right of the public and the communities' participation in the preservation and utilization of natural resources. The principle of peoples' participation as stated in the 1997 Constitution referred to all government decision-making processes including that of making decisions related to national planning and development.

The Constitutional provisions laid the legal foundation for people participation in governance. The challenge lay in the formulation of processes and procedures that would ensure "real people participation towards fairness in decision-making and the balanced pursuit of development."

The Development of the "Third Sector" in Thailand

From Welfare to Political, and Then to Developmental Organizations

Non-governmental organizations in Thailand began as far back as 1868. These organizations were mainly vehicles for the religious sector to provide welfare and development assistance

to the poor. In the early 1900s, welfare associations started to increase, mostly in the rural areas.

Development-oriented organizations as they are known today started to emerge after 1932, but the term “NGO” was unheard of in Thailand until the 1980s.

After World War II, a strong nationalist sentiment arose among the Thai's. A deliberate effort by the Thai government to promote nationalism was noted. As a result, many philanthropic organizations were established under royal patronage to encourage the people to give donations through the royal family.

The first non-government development organization formally registered with the government was the Foundation for Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM). Dr Puey Ungphakorn, former Governor of the Bank of Thailand and former President of Thammasat University, founded TRRM in 1967 to help the rural sector pursue development. Later on, the Thai King accepted TRRM under his royal patronage, thereby paving the way for the greater participation of non-government organizations in rural development.

The people's participation in the affairs of the country increased following the 1973 uprising by the university students. Many committed Thais were motivated to either form their own or join various people's organizations such as labor unions and farmers' organizations, in support of the students' struggles. Several foundations were established to provide emergency care, funeral and other related services to the poor and to activists. However, from 1973–1976, several of these organizations experienced severe threats from right-winged and military-related groups on suspicion of being communists. After another coup d'etat in 1976, most of these organizations closed down and several of their members fled to the jungles to join the Communist Party of Thailand with the intention of seeking an “alternative solution” to the problems they attributed to government.

When the Vietnam War ended in the mid-70s refugees flooded Thailand, and with them foreign funds and international NGOs. Most local NGOs grew solely dependent on international funding and were heavily influenced by them. The development models promoted were markedly Western-influenced.

In 1980 the Communist Party of Thailand was abolished, paving the way for the emergence of more democratic governance. A number of activists returned from the jungles to resume their NGO work. Several other NGOs were established and became more actively involved in the State's affairs for two major reasons: an increase in the number of development-related problems, and the growing public perception of government's ineffectiveness in tackling these problems.

The Government – NGO Relationship

The government's attitude toward NGOs shifted substantially between 1980 and 2000. From 1932 to the early 1980s, the military and its appointed civil bureaucracy dominated the Thai political system. Political observers noted very little people participation, if at all. Recognizing only charitable institutions, government was suspicious of other types of NGO and viewed them as posing obstacles to government's plans, particularly when these NGOs openly opposed State initiatives. The State regarded any of their moves whereby they motivated people to ask for better shares of resources or to participate in decision-making as

“signs of communism.” Consequently, the State “applied brutal force or harsh legal measures” to such. During this period there was no space for civil society organizations to develop.

After the fall of communism in Thailand in 1980, the relationship between the government and NGOs gradually improved. Some government agencies started to work with NGOs using their knowledge and first-hand experience in working with the local people.

In 1984, recognizing the need for NGO involvement in rural development, the Thai government launched the Village Development Fund Project under the National Committee for Coordination on Rural Development. In one conference, rural development strategies including government-NGO coordination were discussed. This resulted in the formation of a government-NGO joint committee on rural development.

In 1985, the NGO-Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-CORD) was established to promote the formation of NGOs, their collaboration, and the coordination of their joint activities. NGO-CORD was also set up to create public awareness on NGO activities and to articulate and propose the people's visions and plans to the government. In recognition of the contributions of the NGOs to national development, a provision in the Sixth Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) 1986–1990 stressed its importance.

By the late 1990s the contributions of NGOs to development were well-recognized alongside their role as development partners. Their role increased even further when the 1997 economic crisis set in, partly because of the crisis' connection to globalization. A number of NGOs had been opposing globalization for a long time. Further, the crisis showed the need to emphasize even more the importance of mobilizing local communities and grassroots organizations.

Meanwhile, the 1997 Constitution enshrined the people's right to unite and form associations, farmers' groups, NGOs, cooperatives or unions in sections 45 to 47, which stated:

Section 45: A person shall enjoy the liberty to unite and form an association, a union, league, co-operative, farmers' group, private organization or any other group. The restriction on such liberty under paragraph one shall not be imposed except by virtue of the law specifically enacted for protecting the common interest of the public, maintaining public order or good morals, or preventing economic monopoly.

Section 46: Persons so assembling as to be a traditional community shall have the right to conserve or restore their customs, local knowledge, arts or good culture of their community and of the nation and participate in the management, maintenance, preservation and exploitation of natural resources and the environment in a balanced fashion and persistently as provided by law.

Section 47 A person shall enjoy the liberty to unite and form a political party for the purpose of making political will of the people and carrying out political activities in fulfillment of such will through the democratic regime of government with the King

as Head of the State as provided in this Constitution. (Pls. check against the original for any missing words or punctuation marks.)

The National Development Plans of Thailand

Formulating Development Directions

In the four decades spanning 1960 to 2000, Thailand had eight national development plans. The first National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP 1961–1966) defined development as “catching up with civilized nations.” The development programs then focused on the provision of basic physical infrastructure such as roads, electricity, hospitals, and irrigation systems.

The Third Plan (1972–1976) was the first that added a social dimension to national development. It addressed the uneven development between rural and urban areas. However, this Plan made no major changes from the previous ones, aside from mentioning a number of unrecognized problems. The most significant and most successful element in this plan was the target of reducing population growth rates as a strategy for rural poverty alleviation.

The Third Plan was carried out at a time of dramatic political upheaval. In October 1973 a major student demonstration ended the military government and the “economic and political stability” attributed to it. Under a parliamentary system, Thai political parties had to secure votes by proposing welfare programs that benefited the poor, including free health care.

The Fourth Plan (1977 – 1981) was drafted during a time of political instability. It differed from the previous ones in that it did not go into project details. Instead, it summarized problems resulting from previous development strategies such as uneven income distribution, and the deterioration of natural resources and the environment. Its major new element was health care provision in the rural areas, a concept influenced by WHO’s flagship project, “Health for All by the Year 2000”. This element became the most successful part of the Fourth Plan.

The government included specific programs for the poor in the rural areas in order to win them over from the lingering influences of communism in the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1982–1986). The need to have the peoples’ full participation in development programs, a concept influenced by a World Bank mission that visited rural Thailand in 1980, was highlighted. Two separate development plans using the area development approach were introduced. The first was the Development Plan for Poor Rural Areas, which sought poverty eradication in the backward rural areas and required the Tambons (sub-districts) to employ participatory approaches in local planning. The second was the Eastern Seaboard Development Plan, which supported heavy and light industry development that would use the natural gas in the Gulf of Thailand.

The Sixth Plan (1987–1991) sought to maintain growth and stability. It addressed education and human resource development, which were viewed as “the main elements vital to the

country's pursuit of industrialization and an export-led strategy." This Plan was the first to establish the importance of NGOs in development work, particularly in rural development.

In the Seventh Plan (1992–1996) the government included economic and business organizations, and philanthropic and social development organizations in planning for human resources, improving the quality of life, and in conserving the environment and natural resources. It was the first plan that included the concept of sustainable development.

Up until then, development plans were conceived and written by a small group of planners—"a limited circle of thinkers" or technocrats following a "top-down" approach. As a result, these plans were widely criticized by many sectors which alleged that they "did not reflect a balanced approach to development." The plans, its critics said, "emphasized economic growth without much concern for the social dimensions of development."

Seksan Prasertkul, a student leader during the popular uprising on October 14, 1973 and a new leader of the Por Khun Por or People's Democratic Society, commented that:

"...ironically, most of the damage to the environment and communities were being inflicted by the government itself. A product of electoral politics mired with money and power, the Thai government has acted as an independent interest group, unaccountable to people at the grassroots level. The National Development Plans exemplify these ill-conceived policies, because they allocate resources without local consultation."

Prof. Pasuk Phongpaichit, a prominent Chulalongkorn University economist, agreed, saying that,

"Bad governance was one of the causes of unequal development – the allocation of resources to one group of people at the expense of another." This according to the professor, "spread seeds of discontent among those who were forced to sacrifice in the name of development."

Prof. Saneh Chamarik, Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission and former president of the Local Development Institute (LDI), added that

"The government's policy of industrialization and export-led agriculture has resulted in the rapid growth of the urban sector but left farmers bankrupt. Chemical-intensive monoculture destroyed the soil and polluted the water. The degradation of natural resources and the resulting poverty will eventually lead to the collapse of the rural sector".

Khun Paiboon Wattanasiritham, veteran development worker and former Director-General of the Government Savings Bank, stressed the need for "comprehensive social reform." He noted,

"While the political and bureaucratic systems had learned to facilitate the growth of the people's participation, other powerful sectors including the legal system, the economic sector and the media, still lagged behind."

He added,

"While empowering community-based organizations remained an important strategy for rural development, making local administrations transparent and accountable is also crucial. We still need

to map out how the local state agencies can cooperate with community organizations or other interest groups, so that the people have access to the government's decisionmaking processes and the formation of macroeconomic policies."

On the other hand, government planners maintained that the provisions for people participation in the sixth and seventh plans were not realized primarily because of the absence of systems, procedures and viable mechanisms to make real the mandate.

Development planning in Thailand radically changed during the drafting of the Eighth Plan (1997–2001) in 1995. The Eighth Plan, prepared during the bubble economy, was the very first drafted with the participation of multi-sectoral representatives. It centered on human development as a strategy to achieve progress. It worked with fundamentally different assumptions, and gave greater emphasis to local control of resources, public participation, ownership of small-scale businesses and the management of resources. The plan also focused on local savings and resources and a self-reliant economy.

The Early Stages of Participation in Thailand

In 1991 an international NGO known as “Organizing for Development: an International Institute (ODII)” wanted to introduce a way of institutionalizing participatory processes throughout Thailand, in the belief that although the country's Fifth Plan mandated the participatory process, the Tambons could not do so because they had not been trained and no institutionalized mechanism for this purpose was available. ODII therefore offered to introduce and pilot-test a holistic, self-organizing process known as “Appreciation, Influence, Control” (AIC) during the implementation of one of its projects.

AIC involved “thinking and working together in a highly participatory and interactive manner throughout.” It was based on the “principle of the three sources of power— appreciation, influence, and control.”

“Appreciation” involved understanding reality coupled with using the imagination in formulating a common vision. “Influence” involved the interactive search for the path toward realizing the vision. It also entailed the search for “strategies.” Meanwhile, “control” involved getting down to real action or “operating plans” that brought concrete results.

ODII had tested the AIC process in a collaborative project with the Population and Community Development Association (PDA), which was the largest NGO in Thailand, as well as with the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), the country's most prominent research institute. The ODII believed that the AIC process was an effective tool in participatory development planning and that NGOs could assume the new role of facilitator as an essential feature of this planning intervention. It took about a year for the NGO Coordinating Committee on Development (NGO-CORD) to accept the idea of the “facilitative role of NGOs” in national planning.

Shortly thereafter, another new challenge emerged. How would this process run “on the ground,” considering that the concept of collaboration between the government and the people, and the concept of public participation in decision-making and planning were new to both the government and the grassroots? To spread the use of AIC in the rural areas, ODII

trained a small group of Thai facilitators. One of them was Khun Paiboon Wattanasiritham, then President of the Foundation for Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM), the oldest development NGO in Thailand. Acknowledged by ODII as a key actor in spreading AIC throughout Thailand, Khun Paiboon Wattanasiritham recognized that promoting AIC was part of his job. He said,

“I managed to take seven high-ranking persons with me to attend a four-day AIC workshop run by ODII in the USA. They in turn have advocated for or created the demand for the AIC workshops, many of which I helped organize. Other AIC-like workshops were asked for through contacts with myself and with TRRM from various quarters. Moreover, my development activities were such that they normally call for participatory processes for which AIC is well-fitted.”

That same year, the World Bank sought ways to support the Thai government in forestry issues related to the Global Environment Fund (GEF), particularly in dealing with the issue of people in the forest. ODII was asked to provide assistance in the design of a workshop using the AIC process. ODII, in turn, contacted Khun Paiboon who agreed to facilitate the workshop.

The workshop objective was to find ways to create collaboration between the people living in the forests and the government, on how best to protect the forests in Thailand. During the three-day workshop, TRRM brought together four diverse groups of stakeholders: government workers, forest villagers, NGO workers and scholars. Throughout the process, the participants discussed realities, possibilities and strategies for bridging the two sectors. The outputs of the workshop were action plans detailing steps and implementing guidelines, including sectoral responsibilities.

One of the key success factors of the workshop was Khun Paiboon’s facilitation together with Dr. Prawese Wasi, chairperson of the Local Development Foundation . “They were able to create the right environment for the participants to keep open minds and to listen to each other,” observed the organizers. Khun Paiboon himself said:

“I have never really been conscious about whether or not I am a leader. I’ve never thought about it. I have just been doing what I think must be done. It just happened that I think, on the one hand, I have the kind of mentality that works well with other people. I feel at ease working with different kinds of people. I don’t have much trouble coming into relationships, that is, I find that I can accept people as they are. I get along well with different types of people whether they are extroverts or introverts.

“My work with various sectors with diverse backgrounds and mentalities may have facilitated matters. I think it helps that I myself come from a rural village and continue to go back and live among villagers. I have also been fortunate to have worked with different organizations under different settings. The variety of my experiences has helped me appreciate distinct kinds of people.”

Mr. Paiboon also placed great emphasis on his Buddhist training. He said that there were many frustrations and difficulties in development work, but his Buddhist discipline helped keep him hopeful. He persisted in the face of failure. He practiced positive thinking and maintained constructive relationships. He integrated Buddhist concepts in the seminars he facilitated. According to him,

“When we seek popular participation, the interaction between and among people is very important. Consensus-building, Buddhist practices, and learning from each other worked well in the seminars. Instead of accusing one another, the participants collaborated. The results are better and greater.”

He added,

“Buddhist concepts of compassion, truth, wisdom, and many more, all work to support participatory development planning.”

The first successes encouraged other NGOs and government agencies to use participatory processes. In 1993, Dr. Orapin Sopchokchai of the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), in cooperation with the Population and Community Development Association (PDA) and the Community Development Department (CDD) of the Ministry of Interior, organized a project that sought ways to increase women's participation in village development planning and decision-making. The project built on previous findings on the importance of including women in the development process, from planning and decision-making through implementation.

Gradually, the NGOs mainstreamed people's participation in all aspects of development planning. TDRI conducted continuous research with the Interior Ministry, in advocating participatory development in villages and sub-districts throughout Thailand.

PDA held over 81 participatory workshops over the past three years at the village, sub-district and district levels. TRRM, for its part, organized workshops for government agencies and public sector organizations, such as universities and hospitals. It also worked with community organizations, NGOs and private sector organizations. TRRM's urban counterpart, the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO), organized workshops for people's organizations working with urban poor communities.

Given the tools for participatory development and the successes with grassroots development planning, government and the NGOs made a serious concerted effort to promote the widespread participation of the “third sector” in national development.

Drafting the Financial and Fiscal Master Plan

In 1994, Khun Paiboon, through the TRRM Foundation, initiated a two-day multi-sectoral seminar/workshop attended by various sectoral representatives that included government officers, NGO leaders, members of the academe, community leaders and business leaders who were supportive of social work. According to Khun Paiboon,

“The seminar/workshop was partly in response to the Finance Minister's wish to meet with development workers and leaders of grassroots organizations. I also hoped that creative initiatives could result from such a workshop.”

The seminar/workshop advocated for more support for community-building and for generating strategies to strengthen communities. It discussed how community organizations could be strengthened and could serve as the base of social development in Thai communities. The different sectors resolved to advocate the creation of institutions and

mechanisms to support communitybuilding work through savings and credit movements. The resolution also called on government to provide more credit facilities. The result was that government agreed to increase rural development funding as well support for community- building. Khun Paiboon said:

“At that time, I was the president of Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement and we organized a two-day seminar. The Finance Minister attended, and some leaders of NGOs, some academic people, some community leaders, and some business persons who are more inclined to work in social and community development were similarly present. We worked very intensively. The outcome was a resolution, a common agreement, that either an institution or mechanisms should be set up to support community-building work. It would be utilizing among other things, savings and credit movements, and also the credit facilities provided by government to such an institution.

“That seminar resulted in the government’s agreement to increase credit facilities through a fund, which at that time was called the Rural Development Fund, and also added some other dimensions of support.”

Encouraged by a successful first gathering, the organizers called a second gathering of sectoral representatives the following year. That again led to significant policy outcomes, the most significant outcome of which was the initiation and eventual adoption of the “Financial and Fiscal Master Plan for Social Society.” This master plan aimed at strengthening organizations as well as developing a community-driven system for improving the economic positions of Thai’s grassroots peoples including the urban poor.

Khun Paiboon added that:

“In the following year, we organized another one, this time with a new Finance Minister. Again it was a congregation of people from different sectors, from the government—a Cabinet Minister and high-ranking government officers from different ministries—NGO leaders, community leaders, academic people and some business leaders. That meeting led to a policy that came to be called the “Fiscal and Monetary Policy for Society,” and was to be adopted by the Minister of Finance. Among the many policies [recommended], the one with the highest priority was the setting up of a financial institution or bank or an organization to support community-building. Actually that policy later on led to the setting up of what is now the Community Organizations Development Institute or CODI. [Also] because of that seminar, I think it partly it had a strong influence on the Minister of Finance for him to come up with a new policy to support community and society through fiscal and monetary measures. Another policy that has materialized [out of this gathering] is the setting up of what is now called the Thai Health Promotion Foundation.

One of the priorities of that Master Plan was to establish a bank or financial institution to support community-building. This led to the setting up of the Community Organizations Development Institute or CODI. Prior to the multi-sectoral summits, the Finance Ministry had no explicit fiscal and monetary policies for social development.

The Public Organization Act made CODI possible. The Act empowered the government to create public organizations by passing a royal decree (resolution) at the Cabinet level that did not have to go through Parliament. The degree, just the same, gave government more flexibility to accommodate the need for new organizations to address the needs of society.

Drafting the Vision of the Eighth Plan: A New Hope

By 1993–1994, participatory development had been gaining momentum in Thailand. The chance to bring the new paradigm to the national level came in late 1994 when plans for the drafting of the Eighth Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997–2001) started. A new Secretary General of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), the body that advises the Cabinet on development planning and policy, was appointed. Upon the recommendation of Khun Paiboon, the Secretary-General of NESDB agreed to hold interactive discussions on the vision for the new Plan and to get inputs from others for the drafting of the National Plan.

The Secretary-General, in collaboration with Khun Paiboon, initiated a workshop in which some 60 leading social thinkers as well as leaders from the NGO community participated and expressed their ideas and perspectives on the proposed Eighth Plan. The workshop, the first of its kind, enjoyed considerable media attention thereby emphasizing its importance. More than 100 journalists or twice the number of workshop participants covered the event. Khun Paiboon said of his involvement:

“I was actively involved in designing and facilitating the participatory process, particularly the multi-sectoral intensive planning workshops and the national gathering attended by some 1,500 people who were divided into groups of 10 persons each, to brainstorm on the vision and strategies of the National Plan. I was also involved in the actual drafting of the Plan, utilizing inputs from the many workshops, conferences and meetings.”

He added that previous plans were formulated by technocrats following a top down approach to planning. As a result, these plans were widely criticized by other sectors which said that the plans did not reflect “a balanced approach to development.” He agreed, adding that:

“The weaknesses of the previous development plans were that these were conceived and written by a small group of planners – a limited circle of thinkers. The plans’ emphases were on economic growth as opposed to a wider social dimension. In the Eighth Plan, the vision is clearer—human development is given focus.”

As ideas were generated, the importance of two-way interaction became even more apparent. Several other multi-sectoral conferences, intensive planning workshops and meetings followed. These activities were capped by an ambitious conference of over 1,500 people from all parts of Thailand and from all walks of life, including politicians, business executives, NGO leaders, government officers, community representatives, farmers, slum dwellers, monks and nuns, teachers, engineers and doctors. No less than the Prime Minister was present. He gave his seal of approval to the participatory planning process.

The Problems and Difficulties of People’s Participation

“People’s participation” had been a key element since the Fifth Plan. However, the concept did not mesh with the Thai political culture, which intensely promoted a patron-client system.

The multi-sectoral gatherings initially encountered several difficulties. The task of convincing sectoral representatives on the importance of their participation was as equally daunting as the task of convincing government of its merits.

Many doubted whether the inputs or suggestions contained in the participatory plan would be put into practice. The conveners and facilitators were actually learning on the job. A number were uncertain that the process would work. Further there were times when the mix of participants was not well-balanced or some participants missed some of the sessions. These incidents constrained the progress of the meetings.

As the workshops and dialogues proceeded, communication channels were opened and the relationships between the organizers improved. Deeper learning became possible as an appreciation of the importance of participation and of development in general evolved. The participants were learning from each other.

The sub-regional workshops involved about 60 people each, thirty to forty percent of whom came from communities and the grassroots, while the rest represented NGOs, the academe, business and government. The inclusion of as many women as possible was stressed.

Finally, during a synthesis workshop, representatives from each of the sub-regional workshops gathered to share and discuss their ideas. In all of these workshops, action plans were drawn up. But mainly the reasons behind these workshops were as follows: to create partnerships, stimulate dialogue and generate ideas to be used in the Eighth National Plan.

Khun Paiboon said that there were several problems and difficulties inherent to the process of participatory development planning. According to him, “The involvement of many people from various sectors means ensuring an appropriate ‘mix’ and making sure the design and facilitation of the process would be done well. It takes much time to bring about satisfactory results.”

The Opportunities Arising from the People’s Participation

The initiatives to introduce and expand the people’s participation in development had multifaceted outcomes. The participatory process encouraged many NGOs to believe in the authorship of the Plan. Khun Paiboon added:

“Basically, the more participation, the stronger the feeling of ownership and hence the more effective the implementation of the plan. Participation also leads to better inputs to the contents and better responsiveness to the realities, problems and aspirations of the people, for whose benefit the Plan is intended.”

The participatory workshops undertaken at the grassroots level resulted in the creation of a more balanced community development plan. This contrasted with the previous practice of centralized planning and government agency-driven development projects, which had less potential for success since the villagers took no ownership and had no incentive to cooperate in the implementation of the plans.

A number of the resulting development plans were carried out by the communities on their own, while other plans were presented to the Tambon (Subdistrict Councils) and other development agencies for support or incorporation into the sub-district and provincial development plans.

At the end of the NESDB participatory planning process, a ground breaking Five-Year National Development Plan evolved along the lines of the new development paradigm. For the first time, the National Plan emphasized human-centered development rather than purely classical economic development. Its objectives included increasing community participation in national development, while its implementation strategy followed the integrated approach that called for cooperation between agencies and stakeholders in designing, implementing and monitoring plans and projects.

Most significantly, the citizen's rights to unite and form associations were enshrined in the 1997 Constitution under sections 45 to 47, which stated that the people had a right to organize themselves to conserve or restore their customs, local knowledge, arts or good culture of their community and of the nation and participate in the management, maintenance, preservation, and exploitation of natural resources and the environment.

Further, the Constitution contained provisions for the institutionalization of NGO representation in all committees responsible for enacting laws related to education, health, and welfare. Khun Paiboon added:

“Now, government’s relationship with civil society had been improving albeit somewhat slowly. In fact, even the National Security Council now works closely with NGOs because they had started to realize the NGO’s potentials. In addition, people’s movements and actions at the local and regional levels have proliferated, including many networks as well as networks of networks. Also, government agencies have come to adopt people’s participation as a matter of course, although the quality of such participation may not be quite satisfactory as yet.

The Task of Bridging

Khun Paiboon downplayed his role in promoting participatory development in his country. He attributed his role to serendipity. He added that he did not have much convincing to do since:

“I was lucky. One day, I was invited to attend this meeting on social development and poverty reduction, which was chaired by the Prime Minister. After the Secretary General (of NESDB) finished talking, I was asked by the Prime Minister for my reaction. So I made the suggestion about participatory development. At that time, the Secretary General was the first non-economist appointed to the post. He was a political scientist so he was very open to the idea of participatory planning. So I helped organize the special forum participated in by about 60 leading social thinkers. The objective of that forum was to draft the vision and strategies for the Eighth National Plan.

However, most people who knew did not dispute the fact that it was Khun Paiboon who set off the “spark” that lighted the “wildfire” in participatory development. Khun Paiboon also cited hard work as a major factor.

“As Managing Director of the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO), which I helped set up in 1992 and remaining so until 1997, I was instrumental in making community/people-centered, participatory development a reality on a national scale among the urban poor. So when it came to conceptualizing and drafting the Eighth National Plan, the concept of human-centered, participatory development had real experiences and achievements to refer to.”

Khun Paiboon stated that problems in collaborative work often arose from several shortcomings. This was the gap that he had tried to bridge in the past. According to him:

“If there are any problems at all, it is more because of a lack of knowledge, a lack of understanding or a lack of information or some limitation on the part of each sector. Example, government may be bound by laws and regulations, some of which are not appropriate. But as government officers, they have to abide by those laws and regulations, and very often they interpret the laws and regulations not too positively or not in a very helpful way.”

“For example, people in the development sector or NGOs, would like to see the government supporting NGOs work more, including, the granting of some tax benefits to NGOs as well as people who donate money to NGOs. But we may find that government officers in charge of mandating tax regulations tend to interpret the regulations very strictly, and don’t try to come up with ways and means to be more helpful. That’s not because there is a real conflict but because the government people have not been able to understand or appreciate fully the value that NGOs and civil society bring about.”

Likewise, Mr. Paiboon believed that many businesses in Thailand would want to support development work but they had not been fully tapped. He said:

“Businesses may want to support development work but there are other alternatives and demands on their resources that they have to meet. So it is not always that they come to give support. But, in any case, I know government people and government work; I also know business people. It is very often that I have been able to be a middle person or an arranger of meetings, bringing people together and getting them to talk about issues of common concern. In a number of cases, of course, it becomes beneficial.”

“There have been a series of events where there was a need for support and understanding from the political sector which makes the decisions. A Minister’s support and understanding, for example. In other cases the understanding of high-ranking government officers, or the thinking of NGOs or community leaders may be required. Well, I would try to understand or to think from the point of view of each of those different categories of people.”

Khun Paiboon the Person

Khun Paiboon was born on 24 March 1941 in Ayutthaya, a rural province in Thailand which has a rich history. He grew up knowing a simple life, surrounded by nature, particularly rice fields. Later he went to Bangkok for schooling and came to learn about the ways of the city. Still he remained a “true rural boy at heart.”

He received an economics degree from the University of Hull in England in 1967. His professional career started with the Bank of Thailand (Central Bank), where he worked for thirteen years until 1980 when he assumed the position of president of the Stock Exchange of Thailand, a semi-public organization. In 1983, he joined a commercial bank—the Thai Danu Bank Plc—as senior vice president for five-and-a-half years. His first twenty-one years with the government and the private sector provided him the opportunity to know people from various sectors and organizations well. The network that he established proved valuable when he crossed into the development sector. As he himself put it,

“As an officer of the Bank of Thailand, I had worked closely with the private sector. Later on, I also had the opportunity to work with bureaucrats, other bankers, business people and industrialists.”

“I knew little of the poor sector then. I only began to know people in the development sector when I actually moved out of the business sector and worked full time with an NGO. That was when I started to really appreciate the work in the people or development sector.”

Khun Paiboon joined the Foundation for the Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement (under Royal Patronage) in 1988. This organization, established by Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, started the rural development movement in Thailand. In 1992, he became the Managing Director of the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO) under the National Housing Authority. He served as a Senator from 1996 to 2000, and as the Director-General of the Government Savings Bank from 1997 to 2000.

While he was the Director-General of the Government Savings Bank, he managed to focus the Bank’s attention to development work. He made rural development an integral part of the Bank’s activities, while remaining actively involved in the work of the different sectors i.e. government, development, civil society, academe, business, through chairmanships or memberships in various committees, councils or commissions.

In 2002, his principal positions were as Chairperson of the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) and member of the National Economic and Social Advisory Council (NESAC).

Role Models and Motives

Khun Paiboon considered Dr. Puey Ungphakorn and Dr. Prawase Wasi, both Ramon Magsaysay Awardees, as his role models. Khun Puey was his revered mentor and one of the most respected people in Thailand. He served as Governor of the Bank of Thailand for 12 years. He was also Rector at the Thammasat University for some years. He founded the Foundation for Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM). Of him Khun Paiboon said:

“He was governor of the Bank of Thailand when I received a scholarship from the

Bank to study overseas. In fact, Dr. Puey started the scholarship. Then I met with him more in my early days at the Bank, partly as a staff member and partly as a volunteer of the Foundation (TRRM) which Dr. Puey founded.

“At that time, there was political trouble and Dr. Puey was accused by the military government of being a communist. Of course it was not true. He was a man of integrity, ability, and courage. Often it is difficult to find three key ingredients in one person, but Dr. Puey had all three. He was not afraid of saying things that displeased the government. His record was unblemished. He was so honest.

“He was a man of great intelligence, great vision, great skills in the management of people and conflicts. He was very kind, very gentle and astonishingly compassionate. When he died, there was an exceptional number of writings about him, praising his numerous virtues and abilities.”

If you were Thai, you would know Dr. Puey.”

The other significant figure in Khun Paiboon’s life was Dr. Prawase Wasi, another wellknown person in Thailand. Khun Prawase was responsible for many constructive and reform ideas with far-reaching results, particularly where political reforms in Thailand were concerned. He once chaired a committee in which Khun Paiboon was a member. The committee was to draft political reforms in Thailand and initiated important beginnings such as the creation of a new constitution that led to reforms in the political systems of the country.

“Although Dr. Prawase is already 70 years old, his ideas are still very creative and very constructive. He thinks clearly of things we often cannot think of. Like Dr. Puey, he is very kind, very gentle and a highly intelligent person. He is very much in favor of collaboration and has been advocating multi-party collaboration for many years.

“I regard myself as being most fortunate to have opportunities to work with Dr. Prawase on many issues related to community-building, social development, political reforms, and health, among others.”

Influences in Life

Asked how he would like to be remembered, Khun Paiboon said that such thoughts did not occur to him at all.

“I am a practicing Buddhist. As a practicing Buddhist, I meditate or train my mind. When you meditate, the concept of self becomes very insignificant. The self is insignificant. That’s how you reach what is called in Buddhism as ‘the cessation of mental and spiritual suffering.’ It is the attainment of peace. You attain mental peace when you lose yourself.

“You lose yourself by contemplating the true reality – the absolute truth, the noble truth. When you get to that stage, the idea of self is insignificant. And you get into the habit of not thinking about yourself.”

The Future

Despite the richness of his experiences, Khun Paiboon was brimming with ideas on projects that he wanted to undertake. “I suppose I am a thoughtful person, that is I think a lot. In the morning, every other day, I try to exercise and jog. When I jog I also think—I think of what to do in the days ahead and so on,” he stated.

One project on his pipeline was the creation of the Social Management College, which would be set up under CODI. Of this he said:

“The objective of the Social Management College (SMC) is to focus on knowledge management for community-building and civil society promotion. By knowledge management we mean the compilation and creation of knowledge; its distribution, analyses, synthesis, transformation and upgrading. It also involves standardizing knowledge into manuals or kits. Thus, from knowledge, better utilization, higher understanding and greater usefulness are achieved.”

According to Khun Paiboon, knowledge management is now undertaken by many community networks at their own levels and in their own way. The role of the SMC would be that of a coordinating mechanism to ensure that knowledge management is more systematic and complete, and would ultimately become an important tool for developing communities and civil society.

Rising Up to the Challenge of Innovative Work

Khun Paiboon admitted that being a hands-on person, he works somewhat more than what is expected of chairpersons. He tended to become actively involved in most of the discussion sessions he attends. He declared,

“I was the first managing director of the UCDO (the predecessor of CODI). That is why I have close relationships with the people working here (at CODI). So I often get substantially involved with the work of CODI, as requested by the management of course.”

In addition to his responsibilities as Chairperson of the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) and as a member of the National Economic and Social Advisory Council (NESAC), he was also active in a number of other fields including democracy development, good governance, the anti-corruption movement, peace-building and conflict management, health promotion, philanthropy and social welfare, poverty reduction strategies and programs, and so on.

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