

News about CODI

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On October 26, 2000, UCDO officially merged with a Rural Development Fund to become a new public organization called **The Community Organization Development Institute (CODI)**. The royal decree which brought CODI into existence allows development activities launched under UCDO to continue, but also provides a new opportunity for some big changes in how the organization works and how it relates to the poor community organizations it supports. The decree makes CODI a legal entity with the status of a "public organization." That status provides larger scope, greater possibilities, more flexibility, broader linkages and much-expanded possibilities for collaboration between urban and rural groups.

The big question in recent months has been how to reorient UCDO's system and working culture to create in CODI the kind of organization which can actually translate those elusive concepts of decentralization and participation into day-to-day practice, so that poor people (both urban and rural) become the prime movers in the creation of a self-development movement among Thailand's poor communities. Here are a few notes on recent developments at CODI :

1. Creating a new administrative structures:

Mixed Governing Board and National Community Advisory Committee :

The decree stipulates that like UCDO, CODI will be governed by a mixed board comprising members from government, communities and external "experts" (i.e. NGO and private sector), and institutionalizes the presence of community leaders at CODI's highest decision-making body. The strong position of people's representatives in the board is a crucial element in CODI's operating structure and symbolic of processes throughout the organization.

After intense discussions, it was agreed that the people themselves would select the three community representatives on the CODI board, through a far-reaching search process which involved the participation of organizations across the country and the subsequent creation of a 25-member *People's Forum* (later called the *Community Advisory Committee*). This forum includes five experienced and widely-respected community leaders from each of Thailand's five regions, and from the very beginning was part of CODI's structural backbone.

The search for these 25 community leaders began with sending out letters to the full range of community organizations, NGOs and development agencies working in Thailand's five regions, asking each to nominate the three best community leaders in their region. A committee was set up to review the nominations which came flooding in from around the country. The idea behind this selection process was that people weren't proposing themselves, as in a political election, but were being proposed by a wide spectrum of community, professional and government organizations with whom these activists had worked. In most regions, the names of certain particularly strong leaders were proposed many times by many different organizations, and this made the selection committee's job easier. In the final choice for each region, consideration was also made in order to balance the presence of men and women, urban and rural leaders, distribution between provinces and between different kinds of development activities. But the important thing was that people in all the organizations had a chance to participate.

This *People's Forum* functions like a council, but almost everybody is reluctant to call it a council, or to make it so formal that it starts behaving the way most current political systems in Thailand behave. For the time being, it is primarily a community forum, and its job is to discuss issues, check what's happening and to advise CODI and give direction on what it should do. Whatever ideas are going to be proposed to the board are first discussed among these 25 senior community leaders. The forum meets before each monthly CODI board meeting, to discuss points and direction relating to the board's meeting agenda, talk over the important issues to be settled and to make suggestions which then inform the board meeting.

The forum's first job was to select the three CODI board members from among themselves. After this, it was formally agreed that this broad group of 25 senior community activists from around the country should continue in its advisory role as the *Community Advisory Committee*, linking community process in each region. The committee meets every month to review CODI's performance and to discuss community processes and government policies which affect communities in all the regions

BOX : Community leaders check the process :

Here's an example of how the *People's Forum* works. Early on, CODI received 500 million Baht from the former government for a new loan program in rural and urban areas along the lines of the Miyazawa Fund. Everyone in CODI was keen to get it going right away, but when the idea was put to the forum, their emphatic advice to CODI was "*Slow down with the money!*" Instead, they suggested taking at least three solid months to understand the wealth and experience already there - to get to know all these new groups, find out who's doing what and ask how they want CODI to support the work they're already doing. This advice was taken seriously, and a three-month period of intense learning, travel and discussion is now coming to a close. The idea was clearly not to promote CODI - as an organization or as a fixed set of available services - but to look at how people are already working and see how CODI could strengthen that work and link it to other efforts at a wider scale to achieve people's aspirations. All this came out of those 25 senior leaders in the *People's Forum*.

2. Establishing regional and provincial mechanisms to decentralize decision-making :

Since it was established eight years ago, UCDO has chalked up a lot of experience, but in the organization's earlier working system, it was the staff who were in charge of going around the country, carrying news and doling out budgets for various community activities. The process of decentralizing CODI's decision-making has begun with setting up coordinating teams in each region to take over a lot of these tasks. These teams have been set up by the five community leaders from the *National Community Advisory Committee*, who then invite friends from various sectors in their region to join - NGOs, local government officials, community development department, agriculture ministry, professionals, academics - whoever they feel is supportive and goes along with the people's direction. Because these regional coordinating teams know their region very well, they can then go around meeting with community groups, working out plans for going into each province, assessing what kind of groups are doing what kinds of work, and setting up a support process for strengthening the region's overall development.

In each region, a secretariat is being set up, and a CODI manager is appointed, but the regional coordinating teams have the greater decision-making power. Eventually, *People's Forums* will gradually be established in each region, comprising community representatives with direct links to community committee at the provincial level, and the five leaders who sit on the *National Community Advisory Committee*. Representatives from various networks operating in that province (such as the Community Village Network, the Credit Union Network and the Railway Settlement Network) will also sit in these regional-level *People's Forums*.

All these structures and processes are being kept very loose and flexible as they grow, so each region can develop its own process to fit the particular character and political culture of that area. In all these processes, the intention is that as many decisions as possible are being made by the people, and CODI takes on the role of secretary of the people's movement. That means that when the communities, *People's Forums* need some resources for whatever they've organized, CODI should find a way to support. In drafting CODI's first year plan and budget, plans are being set and budgets are being worked out in each region, so people in each region are involved in planning the working process and the budget involved from the very beginning.

3. Redefining the relationship between CODI and the people's process :

The relationship between this new CODI organization and the already-existing community processes throughout Thailand is extremely delicate and has to be clear to everyone. Nobody is proposing that suddenly all these diverse and independent community development processes be suddenly swept under CODI's official wing. Instead, CODI is proposing to accept what people are already doing and to use all the mechanisms and tools at its disposal to support that, to strengthen it, to legitimize it, to give it a legal umbrella, and to link it into a larger movement towards self-determination and self-

development. CODI is one of their tools - a new and potentially powerful tool, but a tool which they can use as they see fit. There are, though, two crucial conditions for support from CODI, which everyone has agreed are most important :

- ***the community has to be the key actor.***
- ***the process and activities should try to link with others***

This doesn't mean that CODI will no longer initiate programs, but with the built-in balancing mechanisms of the national and regional *People's Forums* to discuss and share ideas, any new programs will automatically go through the scrutiny and revision of many layers of people's control. Many are asking whether CODI will be primarily interested in savings and credit activities, as under UCDO. CODI is open to all groups of people that would like to work together, and is not restricted to savings and credit. But within this openness, CODI will continue to energetically promote savings and credit, which continues to be a very important tool - people need to have their own financial resource in order to build self-reliance and self-sustaining development in the long term.

BOX : Dealing with a lot of new issues :

On a recent trip to southern Thailand, the leader of one group told Somsook, "We have a serious problem. We are the network of fishermen and we face many problems from the big fishing boats and from the government's policies which cause so many problems for our ways of fishing. So what are you going to do about that?" Here is her response :

We don't know! We don't have the answer to these problems! We are not very good with different issues, but we are good at linking people together, at finding a way that people can discuss together find the solution together. We can provide some backup, some financial assistance or loans to do that, help you link with others who can help, help provide some status to give formal clout to whatever solutions you develop - that's what we're good at. With so many new, critical issues opening up, it becomes harder and harder for CODI to focus on specific issues at all. And while this may be confusing, it can be a blessing in disguise, because it means we don't have to focus on the issues - the people have to. And we just have to focus on people and their process, make sure they have the tools and the back-up to do things by themselves. This way, people in each region and each province can make systems which are relevant to issues they feel are important. This approach is fundamentally different from the way most development interventions focus on specific issues or constituencies - *not on a people's solution-finding process.*

Loans in CODI :

As with the UCDO's Miyazawa loan program, people in each province will link together and loans will be used as a mechanism to create new interactive space for people to learn from each other, to make decisions as a group and to share their experiences at the regional level. It's not a case of somebody sitting in a high desk somewhere in Bangkok approving or rejecting proposals it receives from groups far away which it doesn't know. Each province and each region will review its own proposals and make its own decisions about using resources - whether grant or loan finance - and CODI's role will be to make sure the process is working to strengthen the community process at all many levels, and is operating in ways that are fair, participatory, open and transparent.

Change of structure within CODI :

When CODI changed from UCDO, the status of the organization changed/. Formerly, UCDO was just a project under the NHA, although we also have certain flexibility but all our regulations have to be under NHA and we do not have legal entity of our own. Being a "public organization" which is a very new kind of government institutions as ways to reform the existing system, it allows much more freedom to work - this kind of organization it's possible to get Gov. subsidy and support, but has to be very clear how you are going to do it, clear result. CODI has been set up under this category, and we are considered to be apart of the state employees, but contract will be renewed every three years, so there will be a system to assess and review the performance of each worker every three years whether to renew or not renew the contract.

On finance and budget, we are, in fact, supported by the fund, we still try to use about 4% of the Fund to allocates for the organizations expenses and overheads, and certain proportion can take care of yourself - salaries, development budget, expense of process, everything! Still self sufficiency is a major policy. IN this way CODI can help coordinate or operate other special project from additional

budget from other development activities such as environment activities through DANCED , special loan program like MIYAZAWA, or coordination with Social Investment Fund for Welfare Fund, or The Old Ages Program, etc., or other government projects as new tools for community development process. These development program the budget can come from the budget bureau or any other sources inside or outside the country directly.

This organizations can link directly to the budget bureau,

which means you can apply for little more money, for special kinds of programs, and link these resources directly to the communities, without having to go through all these hundreds of departments which slow down and screen all the good things out. Here we are in a position to shoot it directly to the ground! To the people. This is, in principle, something a public organization can do - so we can propose it and get the money directly. You could make a fund - maybe fund for managing natural resources, maybe for welfare, maybe for forest, maybe for children, coastal village, etc. We can start by making funds of various particular purposes and then let the people in the whole country think in that area and use the community mechanism at provincial level to thin of that issue in their constituency, as a group. For instance, talk about natural resource- what is the problem in our province. Some exploration. What are the subjects, and what are we going to do together in this province? Use the different issues to link people to develop their skills and capacities together, and use the fund as a way to boost this. If you make these different tools for different important subjects, it's going to help communities develop their thinking and their capacities! Like the welfare fund, got people thinking...Invent these tools and funds to allow people to work together. We can change the whole country by people this way not too far ahead. So they work together among themselves and show a good example to learn from. Cross learning, then mobilizing into a higher level and impact relevant policy and management.

In the past three months, lot of meetings here and there.

The 25 meet about once a month, but this has been touch for some of the members, who have to come a long way from villages ("climb mountains" etc.) and so maybe not so often. New problem for UCDO, previously everybody from cities and easy to get transport, communications, etc. So now we're trying revolving meetings, the 25 community leader meeting, we try to change the place in different city as much as possible. (but still not too much further than BKK, meet in BKK and shift whole group to city. A whole new world of rural and environmental concerns - farming, organic farming, pesticides, rural debt, wetlands, coastline management, fishing, etc. The City folks in UCDO staff and community leaders in the Urban community network are getting a crash course on rural issues..., and of course, rural to the urban's, and in the interconnectedness of agriculture and urban economies.

Farmer story:

At the meeting held in Supanburi (association of farmers) came. Farmer leaders told themselves - one leader told that she and her family had become sick from so much fertilizer, so tried organic fertilizer, little changed. Gov. had suggested that if rice farmers have debts, they should ;use chemicals to make two or three crops a year instead of one. Make more money. But these people tell no! We found we had more debts when she has more farming a year, needs to spend more capitol on investment in farming. More capitol outlay, fertilizer, outside investment. So more debts. But once a year very good, very prepare, so her debts are lower and her health is better. Housewife type advice -- her husband is farmer, but she is leader in movement - "The husband is only to follow, man should work in farm, I make decisions! Let the men stay home. The thinking work has to be women, the hard work has to be men."!

We are starting CODI with the richness of networking already there.

There are networks in the city and in rural, what we have to do is multiply these networks and find ways they can learn from each others. Multiplication in many ways - learning, more organization, expanding, linking, starting new ones, growing in lots of ways. So when something happens here, it goes quickly to other places. But these are not just linkages for linking sake : These linkages have to produce different things and have stronger capacity to determine and control what they link and show the alternative systems to society. Then little by little they will have their roles in local situations, because they are the reality and the BETTER! Just allow it to grow a little - no need to ask for power, because you already have power. The truth is like that now there is too much money comes only from the government, and people don't know each other well enough, and sometimes we don't know these

issues well sufficiently. Linking we know better, we have money, we are in a better position. And open up this resource to groups directly.

Rehiring process, everybody had to re-apply for their jobs. The people who come from UCDO have new selection, and now everybody has a 3-year contract, Every year assessment. Some feel insecure. Lot of questions. This is exactly the way the system, in fact, all public system should be: once you become a government employee it shouldn't mean that you go forever until you die without doing anything. Here is something to keep people awake! If you do the good work, there will surely need you. The security is how we work. If we work very strongly, it's very secure work! People need to find a way to learn and be very active - that's security. Security becomes something so clear - a truer security, very strange sense for bureaucrats, means you have to stay there forever. Very passive. This is more the entrepreneurial spirit, keeps people awake! Introducing an entrepreneurial - and a new way of working, because now the workers themselves are not carrying the money around any more, because now we transfer the money to the regions - they open the account with the committee over there, so budget is transferred to there. And when the worker goes to any province, it has been discussed in that forum before - so workers just become a tool! Any authoritative people who cannot keep up with this change of relationship will feel very difficult with this - they don't have the money in their hand and can't tell people what to do. It is the way you change the relationship between the worker and the people and the organization and the people as a whole..