

Transcript: The Livable Cities Action Program,

Discussion with Pi At at Chumchon Thai Office, December 24, 2004

- *Pi At used to work with the NGO POP (maybe still does) but now is working with Thai Community Foundation on the Livable Cities Project. Maybe she is the national coordinator in charge of the project?*

The **Livable Cities Action Program** is a special project that was designed and is being implemented by the *Thai Community Foundation* (NGO), with a budget that is supported by three sources: CODI, Thai Community Foundation and *Saw Saw Saw* (the *Thai Health Promotion Fund*, another independent public organization which gets its funds from the "sin" taxes on cigarettes, whisky and etc. Khun Paiboon was on the board). It is a three-year project, which began in February 2003 and we are now in the second year (second year will finish in February 2005). In the first year, we worked with 12 pilot cities around Thailand. Some are big cities, some small towns - variety in the choice of pilot cities :

North Region :

1. Uttaradit (only Municipal area),
2. Phrae (city only)
3. Chiang Mai (only a small area called Wat Gad, a historic neighborhood near Ping Riverside),
4. Mae Hong Son City..

Central Region :

5. Rayong (city),
6. Samchuk (on district in Supanburi province)

Northeast Region:

7. Mahasarakham (city),
8. Ubon Ratchatani (city)

Southern Region :

9. Ranong Province (district),
10. Pak Panang District,
11. Hat Yai
12. Pattani

How were the 12 cities chosen for the first phase? In the first year of the project, we looked for cities which already have people's networks, so we weren't starting from scratch - there was already some preparations. POP was already working in Mae Hong Son, for example, and had organized a network, we knew the people, etc. And we also looked for a variety of types of cities - big cities, small cities, etc, so we get different situations.

Every year, we have a big meeting to show what's happened in the project to the public. We try to show this to the *National Economic and Social Development Board - NESDB*. This is the policy-making body for the country. Some of our group dealing with major urban issues like garbage management, canals, historic neighborhood, etc. The NESDB has picked up some of our issues and made them part of the policy. So they are seeing that this is valuable, this approach. We are now planning the next meeting, at the end of the project's second year - it will be a very big meeting in Bangkok, where groups from all over the country come together. We also have smaller meetings in each region.

- **First year :** Working only in 12 cities.
- **Second year :** Working in 29 cities in 18 provinces. Similar work. It's already beginning.
- **Third year :** Somsok's plan is 100 cities! Maybe too many!

Use of big events : We organize a lot of big, public events as part of the Livable Cities Action Program. Big events are a powerful way of sharing and making known, and publicizing what people are doing, legitimizing it.

(from CODI Update:) Thailand's Ninth National Plan covers the 5-year period from 2002 to 2007, and there's been a lot of fanfare about the plan's promotion of more participatory urban development

processes and "livable cities for all." This may sound like wishful sloganeering, but with the help of a new project, twelve of Thailand's provincial cities are rising to the challenge, taking steps to tackle city-wide issues which touch the lives of everyone in those cities - the poor as well as the well-off.... The twelve cities make good examples of how small problems can push networks and cities into tackling much larger, structural problems of the whole city...

ADD STUFF ABOUT THAILAND 9TH DEVELOPMENT PLAN, with "Livable cities" goal. (get this from the CODI update)

Because we have experience with poor people in poor communities, our group working with the people in communities before. Then, TCF and Somsook tried to do something new – they had an idea that only working with poor communities is not enough. If you want to change something in the city, you have to work with other groups. That was the idea. So they designed this project as a strategy for working with more people from other sectors in the city – looking for many stakeholders and working with them.

And they used the project to spark off activities (*kitchakam*) which deal with issues that affect not only the poor, but also affects the rest of the city. So it wasn't just the issue of poverty, but issues like garbage management, canals, rivers, pollution, historic neighborhoods, environment. The issues which all relate to poor people, but also relate to poor people.

Livable Cities Project in Samchuk, Supanburi :

(90 Kms from Bangkok) For example, our work in Samchuk. In Samchuk, the problem is old city, a historic area of the city. In that place, our group organized the people who stay and work in an old market area which is located along a river. (See book of beautiful drawings by the architects) The buildings are mostly wood, built during the Rama 5 period, 100 years ago. Over the years, the market has gotten a bit run-down, but most of the old buildings and the whole area is intact – a very rare example of an entire 19th-century fresh market that has not been modernized or rebuilt. The people live there, so it's residence and business. *This market is famous for the food* – locally-prepared delicacies like (???), which people come from all over to taste. They are tenants, pay the rent to the Tanarak.

But the *Tanarak* (Municipal Mint department?) had the idea to demolish this old public market and build a new one, with concrete and sanitary tiles, the way most of them are now. But the people didn't want to destroy it. It is on public land, a public market, and the market vendors and stall-holders are tenants of the city. And when our project came to that area, we tried to talk to the people.

But another thing is very important: before our project came, Dr. Somkiet Onvimone (?), he is the Saw-waw (politician, minister? something in government, very powerful) he organized the people for this project to renovate the market instead of demolishing it, but just talking. But they set up a committee for 2 or 3 years. But everything was still quiet when our project came to that area and tried to rebuild that community again. And they agreed to keep the market. They tried to do everything. So we had to work with the Tanarak, with the Municipality, with the Market community people, etc. So we had to get everyone to agree to renovate the market.

- **First activity** : Cleaning the market : The first activity the people started by thoroughly cleaning the old market – giving it a scrub-down like it had never seen in 100 years! Big event. Everything very dirty and dilapidated.
- **Second activity** : Organizing a gala food fair : Then they thought about how to show the good food in this area, and organized a food fair! Very famous for the food, and the people try to feature this special quality by promoting this aspect of the market.
- **Third activity** : Reorganize again about the culture in that area – that place is a place where the Chinese and Thai merchants stay together – a mixed cultural tradition, with a long history of close friendship between the two groups. Very lively. Bring all those elements back. On the full-moon days, the committee organized all the market people to come together to pray to the moon together – this made everyone (especially the old people) very happy. This is a Chinese tradition, but the Thais joined, drink tea together under the moonlight – it's very nice – in this ancient market.

- **Fourth Activity** : They gathered stories from all the people and wrote a kind of history of the area, which has been published simply, in a small booklet.
- **Fifth Activity** : Opened a people's museum in the market. Inaugurated this museum in a big event and day-long seminar by Prime Minister Anurak (?) on December 11, 2004. Ministry of culture, Ministry of energy. Demonstrations. People still live there. Still functioning market. Preserve market.

The strong quality of this market community is that they never stop thinking up new issues to create activities and to bring people together – they are very resourceful organizers, with a lot of energy and they keep organizing all kinds of activities. They recognize that collective activities bind people together and create a base of mutual support, in ways that are fun, lively, friendly. To keep things active.

There is no NGO working in Samchuk! They don't like NGOs there! The first time, they thought our group was an NGO. We tried to work with them, and they were quite strong. They said, if the outside NGO wants to do something in that market area, they have to be strong or the NGO can't do anything! It depends on the people. They are very proud of the strength of their community. Their way of thinking is very good, very strong. They want to be the ones who make the decisions.

So the community was already strong, and somewhat organized, before our project. But the one thing that is important is that this is not the poor people area. They are middle class market merchants, prosperous.

Now the whole situation has changed. Plans to demolish the market have now been dropped, and the Tanarak has said that if the people want to keep the old market as it is, they agreed. And now the Tanarak has given the long-term lease to the market tenants. Now the only thing left is to make some improvements. So they have put this area to Baan Mankong to apply for assistance in improving the infrastructure and renovating some of the old wooden buildings. Make some improvements, but keep the old buildings, keep the quality. And continue the activities.

What was the role of the Livable Cities Program in Samchuk? Duang is working in Samchuk – different people in charge of different projects.

Who else was involved in the Samchuk project? The Tehsaban (municipality), the Rong-Rieng school nearby, Sapha Wattanatham (Government Culture Dept in that province), the CEO Governor in that province, elderly persons group in the area, the monks from temples in the area, also the architects from the Lat Krabang Institute University (they did the beautiful drawings).

Any savings and credit groups in the market? No, but they have a fund to run the program in that area. People put the money in a box. Use the fund how? Some for fixing up the buildings, some for all their activities like the fair. But the fund is not for loans for businesses. They have a committee in the market. It's more than 200 families – a big market. (check the figures)

Livable Cities Project in Mae Hong Son

Work on the Nong Chongkam : In Mae Hong Son we started to organize the people living in the poor communities first. There are six communities in Mae Hong Son city. They chose the issue about the Nong Chongkam. The Nong Chongkam is the big lake in the middle of the city, in front of the Wat Chongkam, a very beautiful old temple. A very crowded area around, with shops, hospitals, markets, commercial areas, etc. The physical area is quite OK – most of the people use the area for a cultural area. One community is on the edge of the lake, and the others are nearby – it's a small city.

One thing that is important – in this place the people are all from the same ethnic group – Thai Yai. So they have the same culture, they know each other, and the relationship is quite good. The first time that we started to talk about the city issues in Mae Hong Son, they write up about the Nong Chongkam. Because at that time, the water was very dirty and polluted. Many people give food to the fish, so that made the water very dirty and too many fish. Also, this pond is like a drain for all the water from the surrounding mountains, used to refresh the water constantly. The people thought that

the water had stopped coming so much from the mountain – only very little. People wondered, where is all that water?

1. **Survey** : So their first activity was to survey the rivers and canals that feed into the Nong Chongkam, to see what's happening to the water. All the way up to the mountains. In and out. So many people from the community – 100 people – came together to do the survey. They made a map and put down the problems of the water system.
2. **Multi-stakeholder dialogue and planning** : So many meetings about the Nong Chongkam. Make a plan to get rid of all the fish. Then plan to clean the lake. And for this activity, they have to talk to many people in the city – the CEO Governor, the municipality, the Irrigation Department, many departments who are concerned with the water and the lake. ***I think that is a very good way to get all the stakeholders to come together and talk about how to improve the lake. But the idea and the impetus is coming from the community network.*** But our group organized something to make the way like this, for this dialogue.
3. **Lake cleaning** : Now they have cleaned up the lake, and everything is quite OK.
4. **Still problem of dredging** : But there is still a big problem because there is a lot of mud in the bottom of the lake. They haven't dredged the lake in a long time, and the people can't do much about this. To dredge out all the mud would require a big budget and big equipment.

Appropriate siphon technology from the noodle-seller:

But one guy who sells quaitau (noodle seller) in one of the communities thought about how to get the mud out, using some kind of siphon contraption, powered by a bicycle wheel and rubber and a big pipe. Everyday he cleans his big quaitau pot using a kind of siphon, and he thought why can't we use something similar to get the mud out of the lake? He made some kind of contraption using a bicycle wheel (100 Baht) and rubber elastic to power the siphon. They use the difference between levels of road (higher) and lake (lower), put it and bring the mud up. I don't know how to describe. But it works! A big pipe they use - using suction. It is a siphon (Thai word = *gaa lak naam*). (*Dictionary: a tube used to convey liquids upwards from a container and then down into a lower level, the flow being forced initially by suction and maintained by atmospheric pressure.*) Usually it's only for water, but it works here! Very good! They put it under the water, and keep changing the place so it keeps sucking up the mud. *I have a picture, I'll show you.* This is the idea from the people!

Improving the lake to make it a natural recreation spot for the whole city : Many of the women in the communities in Mae Hong Son feel that this lake should be used for children in the city, to have a place to play, to swim - it is like a park now, a bit, but the Municipality had earlier put the concrete around the edge, so it's like a reservoir, not a public lake. Many women in the area they want to get rid of the concrete and develop the lake banks as softer, with grass, trees, planting. So this has become part of the plan for Nong Chongkam's development.

When the six communities in Mae Hong Son got together, did they start doing any saving, or Baan Mankong proposals? No. We didn't start from that. Because our livable cities project is something a little special, to look at *city-wide issues*, not just the poor communities.

People's plan made official : For this plan about the Nong Chongkam. Now the people's plan for Nong Chongkam has been made official by being made part of the city's local government plan, by the new municipality. So they will get some municipal budget. And we've been talking together - if the government wants to do something about the Lake, they have to have a meeting with the people there, to share with the people what the government wants to do. Now the people have done all this work, and they are part of the planning process, now - it is accepted. The land around the lake belongs to the city. At one end of the lake is a very beautiful temple.

The people's plan for developing Nong Chongkam includes :

- Removing the mud (dredging the lake) and improving the water quality
- making the children's park and public recreation area around lake
- removing the concrete embankment and making soft edges and landscaping around the shore.
- improve the whole area to be a "cultural" area for the people.

- Pedestrianize the road that runs around the lake, to make it off limits to cars (bicycles only)

Nong Chongkam starts other plans going : In Mae Hong Son city, the process started with Nong Chongkam. After the success of the Nong Chongkam process, the people have many many plans! Moving to other issues like :

Good mayor in Mae Hong Son : Also, the mayor in Mae Hong Son is very good - before he became mayor, he used to work with NGOs and with CODI and he understands this way of thinking and supports, and tries to bring many community-driven elements into his style of governance.

- **Doi Kong Moo** (a small mountain with a temple on top, famous for tourists to visit. Now so many hill tribe people are coming to squat on the hillsides of that mountain. And the communities said we have to talk about this - how to talk with the poor people to protect the area, without kicking anybody out. They worked with the hill tribe communities to build a small barrier using sticks, and the hill tribe people agreed not to build beyond that barrier, to protect the sides of this sacred hill. A compromise. So people are allowed to stay there, but cannot expand any further. Working on this issue they talked with the government also, with the forestry department, with the CEO governor, with the Municipality, and with the Livable Cities committee in Mae Hong son. This livable cities committee includes people from the 6 communities, municipality, the people from the hospital, from the schools, monks, NGOs (POP).

Every city and town in the Livable Cities program, has to have this kind of mixed committee.

- **Preserving the "Lamnaam Koo" - the last remaining natural river inside the city :** In Mae Hong Son, there are two major rivers flowing through the city. The Mae Hong Son River is on one side of the city. Many years ago, the government made a project to completely encase this river in concrete, so it's like a sewer. Too bad. But the other river, on the other side of town, has not yet been ruined by this kind of "development." And people really - the government has already put the concrete along the river already, many years ago. But the other river has not been spoiled. It is still natural. Still very beautiful. But the government has a plan to concrete this river also - they already have the budget to do it - 32 million Baht! But our project tries to stop that project! The first time when we learned that they have so much money to do this. Our group, with the Mae Hong Son Livable Cities Action Committee, we used made up a questionnaire, and went along the river to talk to all the people who live in neighborhoods along this inner-city river. The people all knew about this plan to concrete the river, and they don't want it. *Nobody wants it!* So we used the questionnaire and asked at every house - so we gathered this survey information, made a report which shows clearly that the people don't want the concrete, and we presented it to the CEO governor. And we've been able to stop that project, at least for a while. Not permanently. *Is there an alternative plan?* Yes, the next issue of the Livable Cities, we are talking about how to propose another plan for developing the river. We had a big forum last month - November 2004 - to talk about this issue. How to develop the river for people, not for construction contractors! So many government people came to that forum, and they talked very honestly about the many plans for Lamnaam Koo - they shared information about what they are planning, so the people know everything. It's all open now. It wasn't open before. Next year, we are going to organize a committee, with representatives from every department which has something to do with Lamnaam Koo to come together to talk again - what can we do. *Are any departments resisting this effort from civil society to change the city's official plans for the river?* No, they didn't say like that, but they say they have a budget. Maybe possible to use the budget in another way. We have to organize another forum to talk about this.

The main breakthrough in this issues is that people from so many sectors and government departments have come together to share information, ideas, views on this issue. Everyone can share and talk together about this important city issue. Now the committee has a strong confidence, because of the success with the Nong Chongkam.

Livable Cities Project in Chiang Mai

There are so many civic groups and so many vested interests in Chiang Mai - it's always that way with bigger cities. The bigger the city, the more complicated the set of actors, the higher the stakes. It's very difficult for the Livable Cities program there - it has not been as successful as other places.

First project : the revitalization of the old Wat Gad Quarter : But we have organized in the Wat Gate area - this area is the old city, across the river Ping. When the British-Borneo Company came to Chiang Mai, they cut the wood in the forest - it was a lumber company in the 19th century. That company set up a big Christian community in this area, across the river from the walled city of Chiang Mai. So many buildings built up at that time. When you cross the Nawarat Bridge, in the area where the Riverside Restaurant. Many beautiful old wooden houses. So we organized that area around the idea of revitalizing the area and getting local people to take control of how the area develops, before commercial and tourist interests take over completely and ruin everything.

But the difficult thing in this area is that so many people here are very rich. Plus there is a lot of tourism - shops, restaurants. This was our education in how to organize the people who are highly educated, upper middle class! It is very difficult, hard work! Hard to organize the rich! But we can learn a lot. Some people have masters degree, doctorate - difficult to talk to them. But this group has a long history of independent thinking, and have disagreed with the local government on many policies - not only the walking street! (Anyway, Chiang Mai's local government is notoriously bad, corrupt, making no end of bad decisions about the city, leading to the National Geographic dubbing Chiang Mai as one of the world's fastest "uglifying" cities. Big budgets, lots of chances to make money.)

But I found that when you organize the people who are interested in this issue - it's different from working with the poor. Here, they almost organize themselves - it's good. But the difficult thing is we cannot push them too much. We can try to talk to them in a good way, and let them do it themselves. So our role is less, giving them a push.

But we also found some poor people in this area also, a small group of 8 households who have been squatting for a long time on the public land along the Ping River. We tried to link these poor households to the upper-middle class group to work together on this area. For this issue, the 8 houses we've brought to the Baan Mankong to improve the houses and get a long lease. After talking with all the committee members in this Wat Gad area, it was agreed to make those 8 houses part of the area's plan, so they stay where they are, get improved and get long-term leases for the land. The land belongs to the National Department in charge of river piers and docks.

8 squatter families allowed to stay and upgrade : So far, this government department has agreed to allow the people to stay and to give them a long-term lease. But the only catch is that they have to improve their houses and do so in such a way that the new houses are "Lanna Style" (there is an obsession with making things look "northern" in this city - taking fake wooden crossed eaves onto shop-fronts or plopping hipped Lanna style roofs on top of high-rise condos). These houses are right across the river from the big fresh market (name?), very prominent, and linked to this area by a pedestrian footbridge. But this means the people will pay more. Traditional style with wood is very expensive, generally. But those 8 families are OK with this, and they'll take housing loans from Baan Mankong and find a way to manage. *To make cute little northern style houses!*

Other activities in Wat Gad :

- They have also set up a small **museum** in one of the temples in the area.
- They have also created a **book** which tells the history of the Wat Gad area.
- Restoring a big old house called the "**136 column house**"
- **Next plan about the traffic :** the Municipality has an idea to make this a pedestrian shopping zone, once a week. But the residents don't want that. They said no need to do like that - area should be open to walk all the time, not only on a Sunday! So they are going to prepare their own alternative plan about traffic and pedestrian issues.

Progress in people-government relations in Chiang Mai : But last time, when I talked to the local government in Chiang Mai, it was quite good! Because we organized many communities to get involved in the Baan Mankong project. And in that project, we have a city committee, with the Mayor sitting as the committee president. And now we can talk with him, in a good way. And I think he understands more about the way of our group working with the communities in Chiang Mai. And he is

more open. He said, *next time, if our group wants to share anything or talk to him, we are welcome to come see him anytime, the door is open.* He also said that if the community network has any problem, and want to meet with the local government, they should just ask him and he will open a forum with the people. I think it is a change - a little bit of a change, but real change. *(And for him, and for all the politicians, the Baan Mankong process is a real chance to get some political mileage! To improve things without having to pay for it! They can get votes from the community for sure! But most of the people understand that the money comes from the national program, not from these local politicians. So much politics in these big cities!)*

Livable Cities Project in Uttaradit

We're working after Acharn Pansoang - before he was working on the *Healthy Cities project* in Uttaradit. After he finished and we started with the Livable Cities Project, we went to Uttaradit and organized the same group of people who had been working with Acharn Pansoang. This group is mostly community leaders (*like Pi Nom and Pi Neng*) and is quite a strong group - they can organize themselves to deal with a variety of city-wide issues.

1. **The issue of waterways in the city :** The Livable Cities project is not directly working on poor communities, but has been looking at the issue of waterways in the city. But many of the city's poor communities are located along waterways - small squatter settlements along the canals, and the bigger community Kasem Raat which is on the Nang River. We cooperated with the Rajabhat University to do some research about the river system and their relationship to the river-side communities (?). Now they have expanded to other river-side communities, and to other district (Baan Keng Municipality) upstream, and link it together. How to clean the river.
2. **Recycling project in Baan Keng Municipality:** This is a semi-rural, semi-urban area, not very densely populated, on the same river, just upstream from Uttaradit - they are not very poor people. This project was an expansion from the Uttaradit project. We organized a recycling project in the area, and the government has agreed. The problem here is that the local government has serious solid waste disposal problems, no land-fill areas, and they have adopted a policy of promoting waste recycling, to reduce the amount of garbage, instead of only land-fill. But they don't know how to do it! Recycling is a technology they don't have any experience with. So they asked our Livable Cities group to help organize the people and start a recycling pilot project in the community along the river. This is not the saa-leng.
3. **Organizing the monks** to come together to support the people, working together and link it to Baan Mankong - not only in Boon Kook, but expand to other communities and settlement The monks are now supporting 6 or 7 settlements in their upgrading planning. *How are the monks supporting?* They come to have meetings and share ideas and how to help the poor people in many ways.
4. **Expanding the housing improvement in Jalerm Tham Community :** In one case, the temple owns the land one of the big communities is built on, as in the case of the Jalerm Tham community. This is where they built the famous "15-Baht per day" row-houses (total of 8 houses). But now we have expanded to the rest of the community. And the monks in the temple which owns that land have asked our Livable Cities group to organize the people to plan the next stage of housing and upgrading, because they want to approve the area for long-term lease to the people and do upgrading under the Baan Mankong program. Expand the project.
5. **Expanding housing projects to other communities:** Langlo Pawchaw, Jalern Bundit - and link it together in Baan Mankong. These two communities are not on temple land - land belonging to Tanarak and Lawpawchaw. Work planned together.

Livable Cities Project in Rayong

The Yongchindaa Street Project : Besides the redevelopment of housing and public park at Lam Rung Rueng (under Baan Mankong, one of the pilots) we also organized a project to revitalize the old commercial quarter of Rayong. It is a neighborhood of Chinese merchants who keep shops on the

ground floor and live upstairs. They are not poor, not rich - medium. Thanon Yonggindaa is the main street in this area, which used to be the main commercial center of town, when Rayong was a sleepy seaside port town. There are many beautiful old wooden shop houses in the area, built during the 19th Century, during the reign of King Rama 5. Now people know that area and come to visit. The economy in the area has improved since the project. *Was there any work to improve the houses?* Not much, just some painting. But this project has had a big effect in the city, and the revitalization process and energy has now spread out to other communities around Rayong.

Every community has its own history. Some communities said that in their area, many years ago some of the Kings - King Thonburi, King Thaksin - stopped there to eat, to sleep over night, to refresh themselves on a war trip, etc. There are many stories from the people of visiting luminaries. Something happened there. We organized the people to write down about their local history. *(We did this in Uttaradit also - but this was before the Livable Cities project - that activity was organized by Acharn Pansoang, before.)*

People's history is history too :

In all the cities where we're working, we try to get the people to write their own history, and the history of their community. Most of the formal history we get in books and school is the history of kings and great men, great battles and empires. We don't hear much about the history of ordinary people, and the small communities where they live their lives, from generation to generation. They have their dramas, their stories too.

Future plans for Livable Cities Action Program :

Each city is totally different. The activities and the group all depend on local situation. But the main idea is that in each place, we work on issues which affect the whole city - not only the poor or the rich.

We hope our project when we finish, the committee or mechanism in each city will continue, maybe getting funds from the Municipality. For example in Mae Hong Son, some government departments have already allocated local budget to support the projects initiated by the people under the Livable Cities process. It's not all coming from the project.

Has the mechanism become very strong in any of the other cities? There are many different levels. In Samchuk, the mechanism is quite strong. In Rayong it's OK. In Mae Hong Son, it's quite good. Chiang Mai is difficult. Uttaradit is OK. Phrae is not so good - there are many reasons. Some municipalities are quite new and don't understand about this kind of civic participation or bringing together of different sectors and interest groups in the city to share, to talk, to plan together. In others, the way the local governments are thinking has not changed - still thinking in the old way, feudal, top-down, patronage projects etc.

Is there a lot of exchange learning between cities involved in the Livable Cities project? Yes, we do this a lot! Many times. It helps a lot. Because the people can learn from each other. And the officials can talk to other officials, it's parallel.

One time, for example, the community in Samchuk was having some problems with their local government, and when they had a meeting with the people from Uttaradit, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, they brought this issue to share together. And the Municipal official from Bang Ken (near Uttaradit) said, "Let me talk to the local government in Samchuk and try to help the people!" And he did so, and it helped! They speak the same language, they have that way of thinking, they can understand each other. But it's something to try.

Also, the mayor in Mae Hong Son is very good - before he became mayor, he used to work with NGOs and with CODI and he understands this way of thinking and supports, and tries to bring many community-driven elements into his style of governance.

What I've learned from this work :

- Our group learns a lot of things from this project - everything can change, step by step, but slowly.
- When we work with so many different kinds of people, you have to accept some things - like diversity of thinking. You have to understand more people, and accept that you cannot always change the way they think. We have to tell ourselves to be cool, relaxed, because sometimes

these other ways of thinking make us angry! But even in the worst cities, where the local government is the most corrupt, most dripping with vested interests and no commitment to anything progressive - even there, we find progress, we find small signs of change. And those small changes are what we need to build on.

- When I'm working with so many different kinds of groups, and with people from so many different sectors, with different mindsets - it is very difficult. But we can learn something about people's participation. This is not participation *in theory* - but this is real participation through action - in thinking, planning, making decisions, making, doing, being active. I think the participation is very good in this program.
- I've also learned that the leaders and organizers from outside should not talk too much, should not know everything. Should be quiet and let the people talk. Our job is mostly to find a way to bring these groups together, and let them think, let them talk. And the organizer should not talk and talk and dominate everything - this is deadly -it cuts down the people's own chance to get involved.
- Do you find that in some cities, the professionals or official in the process tend to dominate? Sometimes like that, but we have to do some innovations in how we facilitate to make it more equal - there are tricks we can use at the meetings, breaking into separate groups to open the way for people to talk, etc. But sometimes even when we are all around the table together, we can help organize the discussion in ways that assure everyone gets room to speak and share.
- Real projects are much more powerful than all the talking in the world - participation through action is the most powerful of all. If the people can get active more, they can learn more, and understand more by doing. Not talk and talk! *I don't believe the people who talk a lot can change anything!*