The AIC Process:

Generating Shared Visions for Community Development

in Southeast Asia

Prepared by **D. James MacNeil**

Center for International Education
djmacnei@educ.umass.edu

I. Introduction: Participatory Development

"Participation" is arguably the most commonly mentioned term in the field of international development today. It has become an abstract concept, a mode of operation, an explicit output of projects, and, to some extent, an ideology. The concept was first defined in United Nations resolutions in the early 1970's, which indicates that its antecedents arose many years earlier. Progressive British colonial administrators were advocating participatory techniques in the 1920's and 30's to tackle widespread health problems in India. After the revolution in 1949, the Chinese government launched a nationwide campaign calling for popular participation to eradicate schistosomiasis and other diseases (Midgley 1986).

In the field of business management, "participative management" arose out of the work of Kurt Lewin and his colleagues in the 1940's. One of Lewin's seminal principles from this period rings true in current community development programming throughout the world, namely that people are likely to modify their own behavior when they *participate* in identifying and analyzing the problems and devising the solutions. Furthermore, people are more likely to carry out decisions that they themselves have made (Weisbord 1987, Johnson and Johnson 1982).

By the early 1980's participation was already recognized as the issue most written about in the field of rural development (Chaufan in Dudley 1983). In 1981, a group of experts appointed by the UN to discuss community level action in popular participation defined it as:

The creation of opportunities to enable all members of a community and the larger society to actively contribute to and influence the development process and to share equitably in the fruits of development (UN 1981, p. 5).

A recent formulation from the World Bank *Participation Sourcebook* states that "Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them." According to the sourcebook,

The key characteristic of a participatory approach is the collaborative stance that project sponsors and designers take in carrying out these steps so that the stakeholders influence and share control over the decisions that are made (World Bank 1997).

The *Participation Sourcebook* emphasizes the contrast between *popular* participation and *stakeholder* participation. Earlier formulations of the participation concept tended to call for popular or 'broad-based' community participation - i.e. participation of all members of a given community, with special provisions for disadvantaged and voiceless members such as the poor or women. Many of these formulations failed to recognize the complexity of communities, with their internal webs of power relationships, and their connections with external institutions such as the state and private sector services. When the participation concept was applied in projects, development practitioners soon discovered that this formulation could not adequately address the complexities of real communities with their complicated composition and situatedness in a greater context. Indeed, popular participation turned out to be an ideal, and its message appeared increasingly more Utopian. An unfortunate consequence of the attempt to apply this ideal of popular participation is that its detractors have been able to gain credibility in their dismissals of participatory approaches.

The shift in thinking to stakeholder participation began with the recognition that the participation of all groups, or representatives of these groups, from inside *and* outside the community, is of equal importance as each individual member of a community. Since stakeholders are those individuals or groups that are actually or potentially involved in or concerned with the outcome of a particular initiative, their participation in project design and implementation has become an essential feature of development projects.

Recognizing the complexity of communities and the role of various stakeholders inside and outside the community, the concept and practice of stakeholder participation has gradually replaced popular participation. The antecedents of the stakeholder approach can be also seen in early community development theory. Ross, for example, did not use the term 'stakeholder' or 'participation', but he did call for the "*involvement* of the *major subgroups* of the community through the accepted leaders of these groups" (Ross 1955, p. 22, my italics). He also emphasized "process objectives" in addition to mere focus on "content". To meet process objectives, the focus was not on content but on the initiation and nourishment of a process in which all people of a community are involved, through their representatives,

in identifying and taking action in respect to their own problems. The emphasis is on cooperative and collaborative work among the various groups in the community (be it functional or geographic) to the end that they may develop capacity to work together in dealing with problems which arise in their community. (Ross 1955, p. 22)

Despite the shift to stakeholder participation, problems with participatory approaches may still arise when project holders and stakeholders are not in agreement as to whether participation is a *means* or an *end*. There is potential for one project partner to understand people's participation as a cost-effective and equitable means to meet project goals, while the donor agency might have as another agenda the promotion of participation as an empowering end in itself. Some have argued that participation can function neither solely as a means or and end (Dudley 1993). A more constructive approach would be to get beyond participation as a *principle* and look at the *practicalities* of how participation fits into overall development programming. The concept of "participation" is also beset with controversy that could be avoided if one uses other, more concrete terms instead. What was once called "collaborative management" or the "villagers' contribution" is construed by some critics as an abuse of the principles of participation by the state, or a "manipulative" mode of participation (Midgley 1986; Dudley 1993). In his assessment of applications of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in Vietnam, Theis (1994) suggests that it may be more instructive and productive to avoid the term "participation" altogether and to look at PRA as a process of *negotiation* between stakeholders.

Misunderstandings of community participation can also stem from misconceptions or unchecked assumptions concerning the agent or unit of participation - the individual, the people or the community. In the literature, development proposals as well as policy statements 'communities' are typically presented as self-contained wholes, or virtually closed systems. Mentions of community participation usually refer to the "the lowest level of aggregation", or a rural village, as the unit of participation. For many international development agencies this rural village looks like the archetypal African village, the self-contained Asian village or the Latin American campesino settlement (Midgley 1986). In emphasizing communities' independent, self-contained aspects, development theorists and planners have overlooked an essential feature of communities - that they are *open* systems. While communities appear to maintain their stability through internal structuring, they are also embedded in a greater context, of which they comprise a part and upon which they depend.

The widespread conception of communities as closed systems reflects the Newtonian worldview that posits fundamental laws of material reality and a universe of isolated, interchangeable parts. Although the Newtonian worldview was originally articulated in the field of physics and formalized in mathematics, its mechanistic metaphor has shaped thought and practice in community development, as well as education and the social sciences in general. Despite serious challenges to Newtonian physics in the 20th century by Quantum Theory and the Theory of Relativity, the Newtonian metaphor continues to dominate in these other fields. In the area of education, for example, Hartwell (1997) has suggested that it takes about 100 years for scientific theories and ideas to affect the content, processes and structure of schooling. The structure and content area of community development similarly appears to lag behind the emergence of new scientific paradigms.

Systems thinking offers a new metaphor and a new way of thinking for community development planners. Systems theory, as developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy and other biologists in the middle of this century, is a theory of wholeness that sees living systems as integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of the smaller parts (Capra 1996). Systems thinking is a conceptual framework for seeing the patterns that inhere and the structures that emerge in the natural operation of living organisms and organizations.

According to Bertalanffy, a living organism is an open system because it needs to feed on the influx of matter and energy from outside itself to survive. "The organism is not a static system closed to the outside and always containing the identical components; it is an open system in a quasi-steady state...in which material continually enters from and leaves into, the outside environment" (Bertalanffy in Capra 1996, p. 48). This steady state is characterized by continuous flow and change and has an innate capacity to self-regulate, or *self-organize*. Later, scientists in several fields would elaborate on models of "self-organization". Self-organization is the process through which a living system, such as a community, organizes and regulates itself through networking and feedback (Capra 1996). What is relevant to community development is that these theories claimed that self-organization requires a content flow of energy and matter *through* the system. By analogy, a community can effectively self-organize when it is an open system, i.e., it is able to take in information and resources from the outside and integrate them into its own structure. Another key feature of self-organizing systems is that new structures emerge and new behaviors form when the system is 'far from equilibrium' (Capra, 1996). What biologists refer to as disequilibrium might be analogous to what community organizers and educators call "creative tension".

In his enormously popular exposition of systems thinking, *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1991) refers to the "creative tension" that emerges within a community when members try to manage the gap between their present realities and their shared visions (Senge 1991, p.150). AIC - Appreciation, Influence, Control - is one model of self-organization that looks at communities as open systems and also seeks to optimize this creative tension. As will be seen in the cases below, if this creative tension is brought out and maintained in a constructive manner, then new capacities for action will develop.

II. AIC history and philosophy

AIC - Appreciation, Influence and Control - is a *self-organizing process* and an approach to collective planning and action that recognizes the complexity of communities and importance of power relationships. AIC is a philosophy and a process that was translated into a model for organizing development work in the late 1970's and early 1980's by Dr. William Smith, who currently directs the Overseas Development: an International Institute (ODII).

The main concern of AIC is the process of how "purposeful systems" (i.e. groups, villages, teams, communities, nations) self - organize themselves. The AIC philosophy maintains that power relationships are central to this process of self-organization. The philosophy states that *purpose*, rather than other common indicators such as wealth, prestige, knowledge, is the source of power. What concerns AIC, then, is the *relationship between purpose and power* (Smith, 1997 website). AIC gets its

name from what Smith (1998) calls the three "fundamental and universal relationships involved in the design of any purposeful system - the relationship of the part to the whole (appreciation), the relationship between the parts of the whole system (influence), and the relationship of the individual parts to themselves (control)."

As an organizing process, AIC consists of:

A. Identifying the purpose to be served;

B. Framing the power field around that purpose - those who have control, influence and appreciation relative to that   purpose;

C. Selecting those with the most influence relative to the purpose (stakeholders) from the three framed groups and designing a process of interaction between them; and

D. Facilitating a *self-organizing* process which ensures that the stakeholders:

1. Step back from the current problems to fully appreciate the realities and possibilities inherent in the *whole system*;

2. Examine the logical and strategic options as well as the subjective feelings and values involved in selecting   strategies; and

3. Allow for free and informed choice of action by those responsible for implementing decisions. (Smith, Website, p. 2, my italics)

In Appendix I of the World Bank's *Participation Sourcebook,* AIC is described simply as a workshop-based process where diverse stakeholders are enabled to appreciate (A) each others' views by *listening*, influence (I) feelings, values and ideas through *dialogue*, and control (C) by taking responsibility for and committing to action (World Bank, 1997).

AIC is not a specific tool, nor is it attached to a particular methodology. It is a framework that guides the efforts of organizers and planners to design methodologies and tools that are specific and appropriate to local conditions and each phase of a planning or organizing cycle of a particular program (Smith, website).

The philosophical roots of the AIC approach are in the work of such pioneers as Kurt Lewin in the social sciences and Fred Emery and Eric Trist in the field of management. Lewin's vast and lasting contributions to social science, management and education, include the idea that groups are more productive than individuals, and that learning is most productive when it is done in groups whose members can interact and then reflect on their mutual experiences (Johnson and Johnson 1991). He was also one of the early proponents of 'participative management', which recognized that people are more

likely to act on decisions that they themselves take part in making. Following Lewin's intellectual inroads, Trist, Emery and others, redefined the workplace by applying systems thinking to the field of management. These thinkers ushered in a new management paradigm that replaced scientific management (where people were considered as extensions of machines and technical systems were of primary importance) with an approach that aimed to optimize a blend of technical *and* social systems. The new management paradigm called for a participatory approach that was cooperative rather than competitive. While the scientific management paradigm emphasized the organization's or company's purposes only, the new paradigm included individual and social purposes, as well (Weisbord, 1987).

The working philosophy of AIC was discovered by a student of Trist's, William Smith, while he was working as a consultant for the British Overseas Airways Corporation's Italian branch. Smith was enlisted by BOAC to determine the source of poor performance of this branch, and then to design and carry out measures to improve operations. Smith had little managerial control and was thus unable to use incentives to reward or disincentives to punish. But with a minimal intervention he was able to transform this branch of BOAC into the top performing airport of the network (Smith 1998). Smith initially applied industrial engineering concepts but could find no particular weak points in the system. All departments and employees had the capacity to run an efficient operation. Interpersonal and interdepartmental relations appeared to be smooth and traditional means were sufficient to work out differences. Abandoning the industrial engineering approach, Smith began to explore the principle of a sociologist, James D. Thompson, who claimed that organizations run not on norms of rationality but on norms of *purpose* (Smith 1998).

What individuals and departments lacked was a sense of purpose. They could not see how their daily worked mattered. The simple intervention that Smith carried out was to gather examples of good performances in the company and circulate an account of them in a periodic newsletter. In the process of interviewing people about their good performances and in providing a newsletter to all employees, Smith was creating what he came to call an "appreciative field". People began to see their relationship of themselves to each other and to the whole, and this had a profound impact on employee initiative and productivity (Smith 1998). It turned out that an increased appreciation for the work of others and for one's own relationship to the whole had increased employees' sense of purpose. This enhanced sense of purpose was empowering in that it increased the self-efficacy of each individual.

Since then, AIC has been developed into a comprehensive philosophy and approach to development. It has been modified into innumerable variations and applied in over ten countries. In some countries, it has taken on a life of its own and continues to develop and spawn new approaches and methods. One country where this has occurred is Thailand, to which case we now turn.

III. Participation and community development in Thailand

Thailand is a country that occupies a geographically, historically, and more recently, economically, central place in mainland Southeast Asia. Once a buffer state between the colonial possessions of Great Britain (Malaysia and Burma) and France (Laos and Cambodia), Thailand has developed a flexible and

tolerant approach to political organization and development that permits experimentation with new methodologies. Beneath the turbulence of the political and economic developments of the past three decades (notably several episodes of military rule), there is an underlying socio-political stability that has prompted a steady rise in the efficacy of the state as well as the emergence of a 'civil society'. In 1995, Thailand had a population of 58.2 million with a per capita GNP of $2,740 (UNICEF 1997).

Popular participation officially entered into Thailand's development policy parlance in 1982 with its inclusion in the strategy of the National Rural Development Program of the fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP). Due to the lag between enactment and realization of these new policies, popular participation achieved only mixed results during the 1980's (Sopchokchai 1995). During this period, people's participation was largely the domain of local and international NGOs. In 1994, a major precondition for realizing increased popular participation was instated, namely the establishment of democratically-elected , *Tumbol* (sub-district) Councils. The new councils differed from the former councils in that membership included representation from communities above and beyond the usual administrative positions recognized by the government. To complement the organizational adjustments and further promote decentralized decision-making in development, the government began to encourage more inclusive people's participation in development planning and decision-making.

The government has recognized that institutional mechanisms must be created and/or enhanced in order to provide opportunities for increased participation in planning and decision-making. To this end the government enlisted the Community Development Department (CDD) to facilitate the participatory planning process and strengthen Tambol Councils. The CDD, established by the Thai Ministry of Interior in 1962, has a mandate to "work with rural people with the aim of raising their living standard by helping them help themselves" (CDD 1987). Although the interpretation and practice of this mandate has changed over the years, the basic thrust is still the promotion of self-help and cooperation. During the 1980's, the principle of "encourage[ing] maximum people's participation in development activities" began to appear in CDD policy statements (CDD 1987). Today, the CDD administers 9 main programs at the village levels, including women's development, youth development, village credit unions, as well as advising and building the capacity of the Tambol Councils. The CDD is represented and served in the field by the *pattanagon* ("development worker"), who is usually responsible for one district.

IV. Applications of AIC in Thailand

The AIC model was initially applied by Thailand's largest rural development NGO, the Population and Community Development Association (PDA), in cooperation with ODII, the Community Development Department (CDD) and the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) . This was part of ODII's *Leadership for Development: Women's Organizing Abilities* initiative that aimed to understand women's roles in planning and organizing in 10 countries (Costa Rica, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Sweden, Thailand and the United States). After a successful pilot run in the early 1990's, PDA has continued to apply the AIC model to participatory planning for projects that include women's empowerment, reproductive health improvement and natural resource management (pers. comm.). With funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Women's Economic and

Leadership Development Program (WELD), CDD and PDA piloted the AIC process in the project *Strengthening Women's Ability to Participate in Village Development Planning and Decision-making Processes*. This initial application in 40 villages throughout the country was researched and documented by TDRI. This collaborative effort yielded results that were compelling to the academic community and the government.

Realizing the effectiveness and suitability of the AIC model to the rural Thailand context, the Ministry of Interior proposed another action research program for TDRI to test the potential effectiveness of AIC on a larger scale. In 1996 TDRI launched an action research program on a CDD-implemented project called *Strengthening the Governance Capacity of Tambol Councils*. The goal of the research program was to test the suitability of the AIC process for promoting participatory planning and strengthening the governance capacity of the newly established *Tambol* (sub-district) councils. Another objective of this research program was to assess the effectiveness of the CDD's *pattanagon* ("development workers") to facilitate the AIC process, thereby performing the role of "change agents". These two projects are described and analyzed in turn below.

Strengthening Women's Organizing and Decision-making Abilities

The principal activities in this project were village-level workshops, district-level synthesis workshops, and a training of trainers (TOT) for AIC. Thirty PDA staff and four TDRI researchers took part in the four-day TOT conducted by ODII. These master trainers then carried out a initial round of workshops in 16 villages in order to test and refine the workshop process into a standard process for use in the remaining villages. Each workshop lasted 2 and 1/2 days. This process was subsequently compiled and published as a handbook for community development workers by PDA, the CDD and TDRI (Sopchokchai 1994).

Workshops were held in villages or at PDA's "Community-based Integrated Rural Development Centers". Each workshop had 30 participants, consisting of 15 women and 15 men. The participants represented important stakeholder groups in the community, such as merchants, women's groups, youth associations, and village leaders. Two or three facilitators conducted each workshop, while one researcher observed, gathered data, and evaluated outcomes.

According to TDRI researcher, Sopchokchai, AIC in the Thailand context consists of "a process of connecting and communicating with and between others...of creating an opportunity for each member in a community to create and access information and ideas...so that community will be able to create a common vision and stimulate collective action." (Sopchokchai 1995, p. 2)

The specific content of the workshops was divided into three sessions: (see appendix for full description of workshop)

4. **Village development experiences**: Villagers, particularly elders, describe their experience with village development, milestone events, and changing social and environmental conditions over the years. The workshop then divides into focus groups (women, men, youth) to describe (in words and drawings) the development and conditions of the village in the past and then in the present.

5. The ideal , or "developed", village : The focus groups then discuss the ideal state of their developed village and the problems that need to be overcome in order to achieve this ideal state. They then sketch their individual pictures of the ideal village, share the pictures with the group, and sketch a common vision picture that incorporates the ideal visions of each participant. Each participant then proposes several development activities or projects that would lead the village toward the ideal state. The large group then discusses, negotiates and prioritizes the activities.

6. Action planning: The workshop participants review and agree on the common vision, the prioritized activities, and break into groups to develop action plans for particular activities that the group will be responsible for.

Outcomes

It was found that the AIC process creates an enabling environment for women to participate in brainstorming and for diverse opinions to be voiced. In general, women's participation shifted emphasis to development projects and strategies that focus on social development and quality of life issues. This could easily be observed from the focus group visions of the ideal village. The ideal village of men invariably featured tractors tilling fields and harvesting grain, electricity poles, and permanent bridges. In addition to the men's infrastructure-oriented visions, the women would include improved health clinics and schools and a cleaner safer village environment, depicted by covered wells, enclosed latrines, and flowering plants along the roads (Sopchokchai 1994 and pers. comm.)

Even in a short workshop, women's' capacity and confidence in analyzing and articulating ideas appeared to increase. Men also had the opportunity to appreciate the role and potential of women in development planning. Women interviewed were usually pleased with the process, as they were able to voluntarily participate in programs - as thinkers *and* doers - and not merely assigned to the program as doers (Sopchokchai 1994).

Research findings have also raised several concerns about the ability of the AIC process to promote effective women's participation (Sopchokchai 1991). In calling for 50% women involvement, the AIC process encourages the participation of women. Women who participated most effectively were usually those women with higher levels of education, holding influential positions, having seniority, status and economic standing, and credibility due to previous involvement in community development projects. This suggests that more 'marginalized' women members either do not participate in the workshops or that they are not active participants. Since most of the above concerns also apply to men, it is not a concern specific to women's participation.

In general, some traditional patterns of inter-gender behavior were observed throughout the workshops. Many women are not yet sufficiently assertive, hesitant to express themselves, and often yield to the ideas and proposals of men. Research teams did suggest, however, that women participants were constantly working "behind the scenes",

influencing the process in subtle ways (Sopchokchai 1991). This raises provocative issues for the qualitative researcher of participatory processes - e.g. what is effective or active participation? While some women participants may be hesitant to express their opinions in the workshop, they be just as effective - working in subtler ways - as someone who is assertive and outspoken. Another dynamic not yet understood is how participants, particularly women, influence the process *outside* of the workshop, at home in the evenings between workshop sessions.

Strengthening the Governance Capacity of Tambol Councils
The goal of this action research project was to strengthen the governance capacity of the newly established tambol councils, the lowest-level administrative unit of the Thai government system. In particular the project aimed to assess the efficacy of the AIC process as a mechanism for facilitating multi-stakeholder participation in development planning. A secondary, yet crucial, aim was to assess the suitability and potential of the Community Development Department's *pattanagon* to facilitate the AIC process and to serve as "change agents".

This action research project was designed and implemented to foster a *learning process* that included the participation of government officials, researchers/policy advocates and community members/people's associations. The specific steps of this learning process are reflected in the projects objectives:

7. Mobilize awareness and understanding of the learning process in relevant government officials and various stakeholders;

8. Train pattanagon in the AIC process and philosophy and specific training and facilitation methods;

9. Initiate a participatory planning process at the community (village) level; and

10. Organize workshops at Tumbol councils to negotiate the proposals and plans from the community-level AIC planning workshops. (Sopchokchai 1997)

Stakeholder analysis

TDRI was responsible for project design and implementation. TDRI's interest, or stake, in the action research project was to draw conclusions for policy recommendations regarding strategies for institutional strengthening, the role of pattanagons in facilitating bottom-up development planning, and the suitability of AIC in creating a learning process that includes purposeful learning of many stakeholders. The government agencies, represented by national, provincial and district officials and pattanagons, were interested in policy and programmatic ramifications. The people were represented by the Tumbol council and members of various community stakeholder groups. The Tumbol council was interested in gaining timely access to the development aspirations and ideas of communities and in

exploring the practicalities of shared development planning. The stake of the community members was to develop a shared development vision and, by proposing specific projects to the tumbol council, to influence development planning.

Implementation - the setting

The project was implemented in 9 villages and at the tumbol council of Chomphu *tumbol* (sub-district), Saraphee District, in the province of Chiang Mai in August- September, 1996. Project planners deliberately chose this time frame in order to complete activities and prepare proposals for the tumbol council's consideration in its development plan for fiscal year 1997.

Chomphu Tumbol covers an area of 13,741 km^2 in the Chiang Mai Valley. In 1996 Chomphu had 6,446 inhabitants (1,920 families). Most of the people of Chomphu have completed primary education and work as agriculturists. In recent years, more farmers have migrated seasonally to urban and peri-urban areas to work in factories. The tumbol derives its budget from a combination of diverse local tax sources and government allocations. In 1996, income amounted to 8,972,900 baht and outlays amounted to 8,818,990 baht (US$ 358,916 and 352,760 respectively, at the exchange rate at that time)

(Sopchokchai 1997). The tumbol council in Chomphu was established with an open election in September, 1996. It is composed of a seven board members and 21 general members from local communities. The proximity to Chiang Mai, the convenience of transportation and communications, the diversity of local economic activity, and the existence of a reasonably well-functioning, local administrative system made Chomphu a suitable sight for the action research project (Sopchokchai 1997).

Implementation - steps

The first step in implementation was the selection of the target areas. The project leaders then held a series of meetings and visits with principal stakeholders to clarify the goals and objectives of the project. They emphasized the meaning of the AIC process and the importance of the role of pattanagon in the institutional strengthening of the tumbol councils.

The second step was training the pattanagon who were chosen to participate in the project. Twenty-five pattanagon received training for two days on AIC philosophy and how the AIC process could be integrated into existing institutional structures to enhance participatory planning for development. This was followed by two days of field practice carrying out an AIC workshop in a village.

The third step was to carry out the AIC workshops in 9 villages. After a trial run in the first village, the pattanagon divided into 8 teams to facilitate the workshops in 8 villages. A total of 293 villagers participated in the workshops (154 men, 139 women). These villagers represented various stakeholder groups, such as women's groups, youth groups, merchants, village leaders, and community members who sit on the tumbol council.

The workshop format and activities were essentially the same as the one described above in the *Strengthening Women's Organizing and Decision-making Abilities* example.

The final step was the tumbol council meeting, which was held on 22 September, 1996. The purpose of this meeting was to review the data and proposals that were generated in the AIC workshops in the 9 villages and to decide on which proposed activities they would include in their plan and budget for the fiscal year.

Results of AIC Process

Increased influence

In all 9 villages AIC effectively set the stage for collective development visioning and planning to take place. Perhaps the most important impact of the AIC workshops was the creation of new relationships between village stakeholders and tumbol council members and the fostering of improved relations amongst villagers. These new relational forms were based on the increased *appreciation* that comes with sharing of visions, information and aspirations. Village stakeholders had a new vehicle through which to *influence* the thinking of tumbol council members. Tumbol council members, with their newly enhanced *appreciation* of villager aspirations and visions, defended villagers' proposals with more fervency and efficacy at the tumbol council meetings (Sopchokchai 1997).

Increased appreciation - from purpose to power

The workshops also stimulated villager interest in the development planning process as well as the activities of the tumbol councils. Villagers gained increased appreciation of their own role in the development process as well as an appreciation of the role and the efficacy of the tumbol council member. Being able to place themselves on the development map enhanced the villagers sense of purpose. The empowering effect of this increased purpose was evident when villagers expressed interest in attending the tumbol council meetings - a request they had never made before. Because of logistical constraints (mainly the limited capacity of the venue for the meeting) most of the villagers were unable to attend, but they kept careful track of the process through correspondence with their representatives.

As communities see the importance of their tumbol council representatives - who are now advocating for specific proposals developed by the communities themselves - it is anticipated that villagers will take the election process more seriously and select representatives who are genuinely committed to development and the democratic process. This outcome has potential to bring about the realization of the Thai government's aims to decentralize development planning through the establishment of democratically-elected tumbol councils. Through this process of consultation and negotiation, the tumbol councils become more accountable to the people. It is expected that over time the councils would be more accountable to the people than to their superior governing bodies, thus reducing the opportunities for graft and compelling them to conduct their business more transparently than in the past (Sopchokchai 1997).

Appreciation and influence lead to more balanced and responsive action

The AIC workshop is an ideal forum for villagers to consider development options together and move towards collective action. The process resembles 'whole system' approaches where individuals in a group will consider opportunities and think past obstacles in ways that are usually unachievable when individuals think on their own. Like Weisbord (1995) says, "When we explore common ground with others, we release creative energy leading to projects that none of us can do alone. People simultaneously discover mutual values, innovative ideas, commitment, and support. Rarely in daily life do people encounter these key conditions for action all at once." One example in this project was a village that decided to start up a villager-run credit union to stimulate the local economy and raise incomes. The credit union was established with 160 members contributing 16,280 baht (US$651). In another case, a village initiated an educational campaign against the use of narcotics. This model proved successful and was adopted by the tambol council and successfully promoted in all other villages. In order to replicate development innovations such as this, effective means of communication must be in place and stakeholders need to be are inspired to communicate by their increased appreciation and sense of purpose.

The AIC process - which included multi-stakeholder participation - generated a development agenda that was much more diverse than usual. In the past the council focused most of its attention and funds on infrastructure (roads, bridges, electricity), but infrastructure accounted for only 40% of the 45 projects generated by the AIC planning workshops. The other 60% of the projects were categorized as improvement of the quality of life (26.7%), economic development (22.2%), water resource development (6.7%) and environmental protection (4.4%). Although the tumbol council was unable to allocate funds for all projects proposed, as a result of the AIC process, it has begun to place more importance on these critical issues that it has traditionally overlooked (Sopchokchai 1997).

Efficacy of pattanagon as change agents

The pattanagon's capacity as 'change agents' is significantly enhanced after they receive training in AIC philosophy and relevant training and facilitation methods (Sopchokchai 1997). The role of facilitator of workshops is well suited to pattanagon, who are already skilled as animateurs and have an official role as community organizers, planners, and data gatherers.

With its extensive, well-established infrastructure throughout the country, the Community Development Department has the capacity to bring the AIC process to scale. Currently there are 5,312 pattanagon (3,296 male, 2,016 female) who are responsible for the nation's 6,834 *Tambol*. The education level of pattanagon is quite high (78% have at least a bachelor degree), so they are generally able to learn the philosophy and methods of AIC (Sopchokchai 1996 p.37). In this project and previous projects the AIC training course of two days classroom followed by two days field practice seemed sufficient for pattanagon.

The pattanagon are uniquely situated and equipped to be the change agents that can institutionalize the AIC approach throughout the country, thereby contributing to decentralized and effective development planning. Towards this end the Community Development Department's training college recently

incorporated AIC into its official curriculum for training new pattanagon (pers.comm.).

There are several constraints to pattanagon realizing this potential. They have many duties which are not directly related to community organizing and training, e.g. administration of diverse projects, data gathering and processing, reporting etc. While they were once formally secretaries of Tambol Councils, their role since the new tambol council governance laws is not always clear. Some pattanagon, even after receiving AIC training, still communicate to villagers in a traditional, dominating fashion which inhibits relationships of appreciation from occurring (Sopchokchai 1996).

Areas that need improvement

Increased multi-stakeholder participation

A few shortcomings and suggested areas of improvement have emerged from the action research project. First of all, community organizers must ensure that there is ample opportunity for participation. Meaningful, multi-stakeholder participation depends on the diversity of community groups represented as well as the opportunity of each community representative to contribute to the process in all stages of appreciation, influence and control. There was roughly even gender representation in the project (as stipulated), but the composition of the stakeholders was often not as diverse as was desired. Certainly, the breadth of an appreciation-field is to some extent pre-determined by the diversity of participants in the process.

Coordination and follow-up

The outcome of the initial stage of the AIC process is action (control). Many communities in Tumbol Chomphu did move to action after the initial AIC workshops. It appears that more follow up is needed for these actions to achieve fruition. Often the advice and guidance concerning the AIC process from Pattanagon and other officials lacks creativity and timeliness. Pattanagon also require more skills, knowledge and support about inter-agency and grass-roots coordination in order to nurture the process in creative and effective ways. Networking, a key feature of AIC, needs to be more extensive and connective if the AIC process is to initiate a broad-based and concerted movement (Sopchokchai 1997).

Understanding of AIC as an ongoing process

Pattanagon need to understand that AIC is an ongoing process that continuously builds and blends control and influence and appreciation. Pattanagon must adopt an AIC *praxis* of action and reflection where all community development interventions are regularly assessed (appreciation), analyzed by relevant stakeholders (influence) and improved (control). If a series of piecemeal interventions (control) is seen as the culmination of the

AIC process, it could easily run *out of* control and break down. To avoid this breakdown, project leaders and pattanagons should more thoroughly and systematically prepare stakeholders, both in communities and government agencies, for the AIC process by briefing them on the philosophy and purpose of AIC.

Pattanagon might be able to master techniques of AIC, but there is a risk that they will perform them mechanically without first having internalized the principles of AIC. In such a case their behavioral changes, according to Lewin's classic principles of adult learning, will be temporary unless the ideas and attitudes underlying them are changed (Johnson and Johnson 1982). Future training courses should therefore emphasize AIC philosophy , brainstorming and other techniques to use in the appreciation and influence stages and general facilitation skills to bring out maximum and effective participation (Sopchokchai 1997).

Praxis is key to successful development and use of an appropriate regimen of tools and activities within the framework of AIC. Because it is not a specific *technique*, it offers no simple, ready-made set of procedures to memorize and apply. In the spirit of *praxis*, the CD department should continuously reflect and revise its application of AIC and its approach to training pattanagon. One of the strengths of AIC is that it is not wed to particular methodologies (Smith, website). Implementors should develop their own, context-appropriate tools, and not apply imported tools that may be inappropriate and can even skew power relationships by equipping a development "elite" with exotic and arcane planning and assessment techniques. Some techniques that have been incorporated into AIC framework include Search Conferences, Delphi techniques, brainstorming (in the appreciation phase), dialogue and conflict resolution (influence) and Objectives-Based Project Planning (ZOPP), management by objectives, and Logical Framework Analysis (control) (Smith, website).

Difficulties in measuring impact

Increased participation in development planning through the AIC process can be measured by the amount and types of stakeholders that attend the workshops. The amount of appreciation and influence is more difficult to measure as it is both an interpersonal as well as an intrapersonal phenomenon. The dynamics of influence, as mentioned in the previous case above, such as participants 'working behind the scenes' or at home after the workshop, is difficult to assess but presumably quite significant.

V. Prospects for AIC in South-east Asia

Preconditions for success

An important assumption embedded in the approach, indeed in the very existence, of community

development agencies, is that effective community participation does not automatically happen on its own. The role of the outside facilitator in AIC, and in community organizing in general, is often critical. But certain preconditions must first be in place for any interventions to be effective.

Preparation at the grass-roots by the development worker is essential, but of over-arching importance is the prevalence of a basic ability of people to work together, in some organized manner, for common purposes. This basic ability depends, in part, on the existence of *social capital*, which can be defined as "the features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam 1993). Social capital is what enables individual community members to subordinate some of their respective personal interests to the goals or aspirations of the community. Accordingly, AIC must build upon a substratum of social capital, but it cannot substitute for it. Social capital is therefore one essential pre-condition for an effective AIC process. The AIC process in turn can build social capital by enhancing the relationships between community members and communities and other stakeholders.

Suitability in different settings

AIC is a philosophy purportedly based on fundamental universal relationships of purposeful systems - the relationships of parts to parts, parts to themselves, and parts to the whole. While these relationships might logically appear universal, the distribution of or proclivity for, appreciation, influence and control may vary across cultures. AIC, with modifications, appears to work in different countries and cultures that are as diverse as Asian Buddhist countries such as Thailand (which are "high appreciation" cultures) and Anglo-american or English contexts (which are "high control" cultures) (Smith, pers. comm.).

The popularity of AIC in Thailand suggests that it is appropriate for the current socio-political situation in this country that is actively enabling the decentralizing of decision-making in governance and is even encouraging popular participation in the drafting its constitution. Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist country with strong, rural communities and institutions, many of which center around the village temple. It would appear that Thailand has a large amount of social capital to draw from, especially in the north and north-east where village communities are tight-knit and there is generally a higher level of trust between people than in the south of the country (pers. comm.).

PDA's international, affiliate Population and Development International (PDI) has also pilot tested a modified version of AIC in collaboration with the Women's Union in Vietnam and the Forestry Ministry in Laos. These pilot applications suggest that it may also, with modifications, be a useful process for countries with differing socio-political situations (pers.comm.).

The political situation and the store of social capital in Vietnam and Laos differs substantially from Thailand. Both countries have a single party, political system with long traditions of centralized, statist governance. While Vietnam has a "mobilized society", most of its institutions are set-up and run by either the state or the party. In the late 1980's the basic economic unit in society shifted from the cooperative, production brigades back to the traditionally dominant unit, the family. Like its geographical and cultural neighbor China, Vietnam has been profoundly influenced by the doctrine and cultural norms of Confucianism which promote strengthening of familial bonds through moral

education. Family ties, then, appear to be more important and more resilient than other social ties. According to Fukuyama (1995), in societies where there is little trust for people and institutions outside the family (such as China, Taiwan, France, parts of Italy), large-scale economic organizations and other associations, depend on state-intervention and management. In this situation, the formation of spontaneous, "intermediary institutions" between family and state is sparse and fraught with difficulty.

An effective AIC process requires diverse stakeholder participation and the existence of a basic social inclination towards forming voluntary associations for common purposes. Diverse stakeholder participation increases the appreciative field, while social capital facilitates the sharing of responsibility in the control stage. Thailand, with its portfolio of diverse intermediary institutions and some degree of trust between individuals who are not of the same family, seems to have ample raw material for the formation of social capital. The intermediary institutions of Vietnam, on the other hand, are run by the state and party. While this would seem to inhibit the growth of social capital (Fukuyama, 1995), these mobilized, intermediary institutions may be able to adequately represent different stakeholder groups. Vietnam also does not have a community development department, and cannot readily dispatch development workers, like Thailand's pattanagon, to facilitate AIC and similar processes. The experience of PDI, and other international NGOs, suggests that field workers from other agencies, such as the Vietnam Women's Union, the Youth Union, and the Farmer's Association, could fill this role.

AIC and Power

Part of the appeal of AIC is that it is a practical process which appears straightforward and simple in its application. At the same time, AIC's underlying principles reflect a sophisticated understanding of power relationships. While some participatory methods gloss over power relationships altogether (Theis 1994), some treatments of power relationships consider an empowering process to be one that simply enhances access or control *over* something. The development literature regularly mentions capacity building, advocacy, and mobilization as means to empower, but underlying assumptions about the nature of power are seldom made explicit.

Prevailing conceptions of this brand of empowerment are captured succinctly in an article by Shuften (stationed at UNICEF in Hanoi, Vietnam) that states, "in a mostly zero-sum game - the empowerment of some, most of the time, entails the dis-empowerment of others - usually the current holders of power." (Shuften 1996). The author also expresses concern that, "empowering people in community development work may sometimes be dangerous; it can well trigger repressive actions by the authorities." (Shuften 1996).

This notion of empowerment rests on the assumption that power equals control. It is power as "power-over". Accordingly, empowerment calls for increasing control over resources, over decision-making, over one's own life. Shifts in conceptualizing power in the West has undergone a long history which is reflected in the development of the meaning of the word, "power". The original Latin root of power is *potere* (from which we get the word "potent") which meant "to be able". This meaning is still used in popular speech, like when we say "the power of hearing", for example. Over time the word has acquired for its principle meaning, "to have authority or control" over something or someone. Thus when we say the "powers that be", we are referring not so much to those who are efficacious as we are to those who

are "in control".

The use of the metaphor "zero-sum", borrowed from neo-classical economics, implies that the system in question is a closed system. According to Newtonian physics, entropy is inevitable in a closed system. It follows, then, the empowerment only occurs when power is devolved from one body to another. Following the metaphor, the efficacy of the body in power breaks down as subordinate bodies gain power. While the new sciences of complexity and systems theory have shifted thinking from closed, entropical systems to open, self-organizing ones, the Newtonian metaphor still persists. AIC sees communities and organizations as open systems where power is not a zero-sum commodity.

Some authors (Ferguson in Nelson 1995) have proposed a "de-centered" model of power that is neither 'power over' something or 'power to do' something. In a de-centered conception, power is not something that people possess, but rather it is a description of *relations* between people (Nelson 1995). In AIC terminology, power is the dynamic that inheres in relationships within people, amongst people and between people and the whole. Borrowing terms from Foucault, a foundational thinker of this conception, Nelson (1995) considers power to be "subjectless" and describes is as an "apparatus consisting of discourse, institutions, actors, and a flow of events".

AIC maintains that power does not equal control and does not seek to increase power solely by increasing control. Recognizing that *purpose* is what guides the 'apparatus' that is power, AIC aims to empower by enhancing appreciation, influence, as well as control.

When the *appreciation field* is broadened through PRA, brainstorming or nominal group exercises, the *influence field* is increased through dialogue, and the capacity to implement project activities (*control*) is enhanced by a ZOPP planning workshop, then *there is an increase in the amount of power available to the system*. Power, according to AIC means the capacity to achieve purpose (pers.comm.).

In the long run, increases in appreciation are more empowering than increases in control. According to Smith's experience at the BOAC (Smith, 1997), inputs that increase appreciation are not only the most enabling but also the most cost-effective and least intensive.

In the case of Thailand, the sharing of development planning and decision-making between Tumbol Councils and people's organizations can ultimately increase the capacity of each to achieve its respective, as well as their common, purposes. What the authorities fear in countries like Vietnam (according to Shuften), is empowerment that increases control for some at the expense of those currently in power. At a deeper level, authorities fear shifts of power between players who have not been, borrowing Senge's (1991) term, "aligned". Alignment occurs when a group of people or organizations function effectively as a *whole*. According to Senge, "empowering the individual when there is a relatively low level of alignment worsens the chaos and makes managing...even more difficult"(Senge 1991, p. 235). AIC could be attractive to Southeast Asian governments who are trying to manage large and growing populations amidst the politically unstable and economically volatile conditions that exist today. Through increased appreciation, influence and control, governments and people's organizations, NGOs and donor agencies, private and public sectors, could steadily align with one another and work

more collaboratively towards shared development goals.

The long-term impact of AIC in Thailand remains to be researched and assessed, but for now it has taken on a life of its own. Public policy, social capital, macro-economic stability are preconditions to the successful application of any process or methodology, AIC included. The task that concerns practitioners of AIC, as well as community development workers, education reformers, and public servants in all fields, is how to *align activities and programs with purpose*. For practitioners who are presently poised on the edge of possibility of true reform and meaningful action in their fields, many challenging questions pose themselves. As Wheatley asks:

What are the sources of order? How do we create organizational coherence, where activities correspond to purpose? How do we create structures that move with change, that are flexible and adaptive, even boundary-less, that enable rather than constrain? How do we resolve personal needs for freedom and autonomy with organizational needs for prediction and control? (Wheatley in Caine 1997).

Steps to Facilitating an AIC Process
Thailand example

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