

Prince Mahidol Award Conference 2009
Mainstreaming Health into Public Policies
28-30 January 2009
Imperial Queen's Park Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

FIELD TRIP PROGRAM (28 January 2009)

An optional one day field trip for conference participants is set on the first day, Wednesday, 28 January 2009. The objectives of the field visit are

- To expose to the Thai healthy public policy initiatives in different settings
- To debrief by conference participants on lessons learned

Participants who wish to attend the field trip should indicate their 2 preferred choices in the Response Form. The field trip will be based on demand and first come first serve basis.

There are 5 interesting sites nearby Bangkok as follows:

1) Local government and its role to support better quality of life in Bang Rakam, Nakhon Pathom province, Thailand

The local government in Thailand has started increasing its role in promoting better quality of life for the people. This has been done through various policy implementations and the case of Bang Rakam Sub-district Administrative Organization in Nakhon Pathom, a province nearby Bangkok, is a good example. Many public policies have been developed and implemented by the local government including establishment of a community saving fund to promote saving behavior and a welfare fund to provide welfare for its members, as well as providing support for the establishment of various groups of people with different interests to promote social interaction and their dedication to the community development. Some examples of these groups include the women's group, elderly club, canal loving group, organic agriculture group, and morality group. In addition, a community hall has been constructed as a place for all group activities. Although all these initiatives have been implemented not long ago, a significant improvement in the community and the environment can be observed.

2) Farmer Field School for Healthy and Sustainable Agriculture: Khao Kwan Foundation, Suphanburi province, Thailand

Thai agriculture policy has often been focused on promoting the use of chemicals and pesticides without adequate and effective bio-pest control mechanisms. This creates many environmental problems and, eventually, affects people's health. A demand for improving policy process towards sustainable agriculture has been echoed in Thai society. In recent years, there are many movements from local communities trying to shift their agricultural patterns towards sustainable agriculture with a belief that this new choice will free them from the situation of high production costs but low market prices, debt as well as poor quality of life.

Khao Kwan Foundation located in Suphanburi province has been recognized as a leading NGO in the field of organic agriculture for twenty years. This organization set up a Farmer Field School (FFS) providing the core concept of organic agriculture and supportive skills to local farmers. All curriculums in FFS such as seed technology, bio-pest control, and bio-fertilizer are

designed to help farmers to attain self reliance. In FFS, farmers play a major role in assessing negative impacts of chemical agriculture. Not only providing a learning process, Khao Kwan Foundation also offers many agricultural services to Thai society – native rice seed bank, organic market, networking, and policy advocacy. The experience of this foundation proves that agriculture practices based on a balance between the economy, environment and health is a practical solution.

3) A Tale of Two Samut Cities: Different Development Paths and People's Health: Samut Sakorn and Samut Songkram provinces, Thailand

Fifty years ago, the two Samut provinces, Samut Sakorn and Samut Songkram, shared quite similar characteristics, particularly in terms of eco-cultural backgrounds. As neighbors to each other, both are located almost on the same terrain and influenced by the same climate of tropical rain zone, which previously led to similar ways of life. People's occupations were closely bound to natural resources in the areas. These similarities were clearly recognized prior to the introduction of the First Five Year National Economic and Social Development Plan.

Taking different economic development paths, the two cities are now faced with totally different economic and social structures. Unlike the modernization theory, the richer economy does not gain better quality of life in this case. While Samut Sakorn has a much higher economic growth, Samut Songkram shows a more balanced development and, consequently, much better well-being outcomes. Moreover, Samut Songkram recently became one of the most well-known sources for Thai exotic products and life-styles. This may lead Thai society to reconsider their development paradigm, especially during the quest for a sufficient economy.

4) Occupational and Environmental Health Problems and Management: the Experience of Map Ta Phut, Rayong province.

Map Ta Phut is a coastal area in Rayong province. In the past, it was a small rural farming and fishing community. Since the 1980s, the government has implemented the Eastern Seaboard Development Program, and Map Ta Phut was identified as a main target area for large industrial development. Since then, natural gas pipelines, petroleum refinery facilities, petrochemical factories and its downstream industries, power plants, industrial seaports, and many other infrastructures have been developed and operated in the area. Billions of US dollars were invested and tens of thousands of jobs have been created, both direct and indirect employment.

Despite those positive impacts, the industries cause many adverse environmental, social, and health impacts. Ten years ago, a pollution crisis was incurred in Map Ta Phut area. Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) have been identified as a serious danger in Map Ta Phut for a long time. Recent analysis also found that all water samples from 80 local wells in the Map Ta Phut area are contaminated with several kinds of heavy metals and in the most contaminated samples, levels of these hazardous metals are 6 to 151 times higher than the Thai standard.

Since 1992, the figures of respiratory disease out-patients in Rayong have risen rapidly. The health survey report of workers in the Industrial Estate made by the Provincial Health Office also confirms that many workers working in the plants with toxic raw materials have unusual health indicators. Moreover, mental and social health impacts from an industrialized society, such as increased suicide rate and child and youth problems, are manifested.

Nowadays, Rayong Hospital is appointed as the regional occupational and environmental health centre. Several pollution control and monitoring programs are also being implemented. However, the results are yet to be known and the solution for the degrading social conditions is yet to be identified. This field trip visit will observe some of these efforts, the current situation, and the challenges for the future of Map Ta Phut.

5) Prevention of Road Traffic Accidents in Bangkok: Can the Dream Become True?

Road traffic accident is the major cause of death in teenagers and young adults in Thailand. Prevention of road traffic accident can be succeeded only when comprehensive measures are implemented with multi-sectoral collaboration and full participation of civic groups including the private sector. Bangkok as the capital city of Thailand has the highest incidence of road traffic accident and only the value of asset lost is more than Baht 1 billion per year. There are several attempts to prevent road traffic accident in Bangkok using research evidence to improve traffic engineering, campaigning for no-alcohol drivers and training for motorcyclists provided by a private company. There are some initial successes which could encourage all partners to continue their collaboration in the future and experiences are worth sharing.