

Retracing The Sixth National Health Assembly 2006

Wellbeing

For All...with Sufficiency Economy



National Health Commission Office

Retracing The Sixth National Health Assembly 2006 Wellbeing For All...with Sufficiency Economy

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Published by:

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ISBN 978-974-576-728-7

First Printing:

November 2008
3,000 copies

Printing Office: Pimdee Printing Co., Ltd.

*A record of learning
Through
"National Health Assembly"
A guiding and inspirational light
And a confidence builder
for Thai people
To walk together on the
"Sufficiency" path*

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Foreword

The Sixth Health Assembly 2006, on “Sufficiency Economy Leading to a Society of Wellbeing” was held at IMPACT Exhibition and Convention Centre, Muang Thong Thani, Nonthaburi on 27-29 October 2006. The objective was to promote a participatory healthy public policy process in every possible region on the basis of His Majesty the King’s Sufficiency Economy Theory. The assembly format was comprehensive, including keynote speeches, general and panel discussions, seminars, and exchange of learning experiences through case studies on the assembly ground.

Its organization gave rise to the present volume “Retracing the Sixth National Health Assembly 2006: Wellbeing for All...with Sufficiency Economy”, a record of events, stories, thoughts, feelings and recommendations of all the participating partners including those from the public/political, professional/academic and people/civil society sectors. Focus was given especially to shared cases and experiences based on a life of sufficiency.

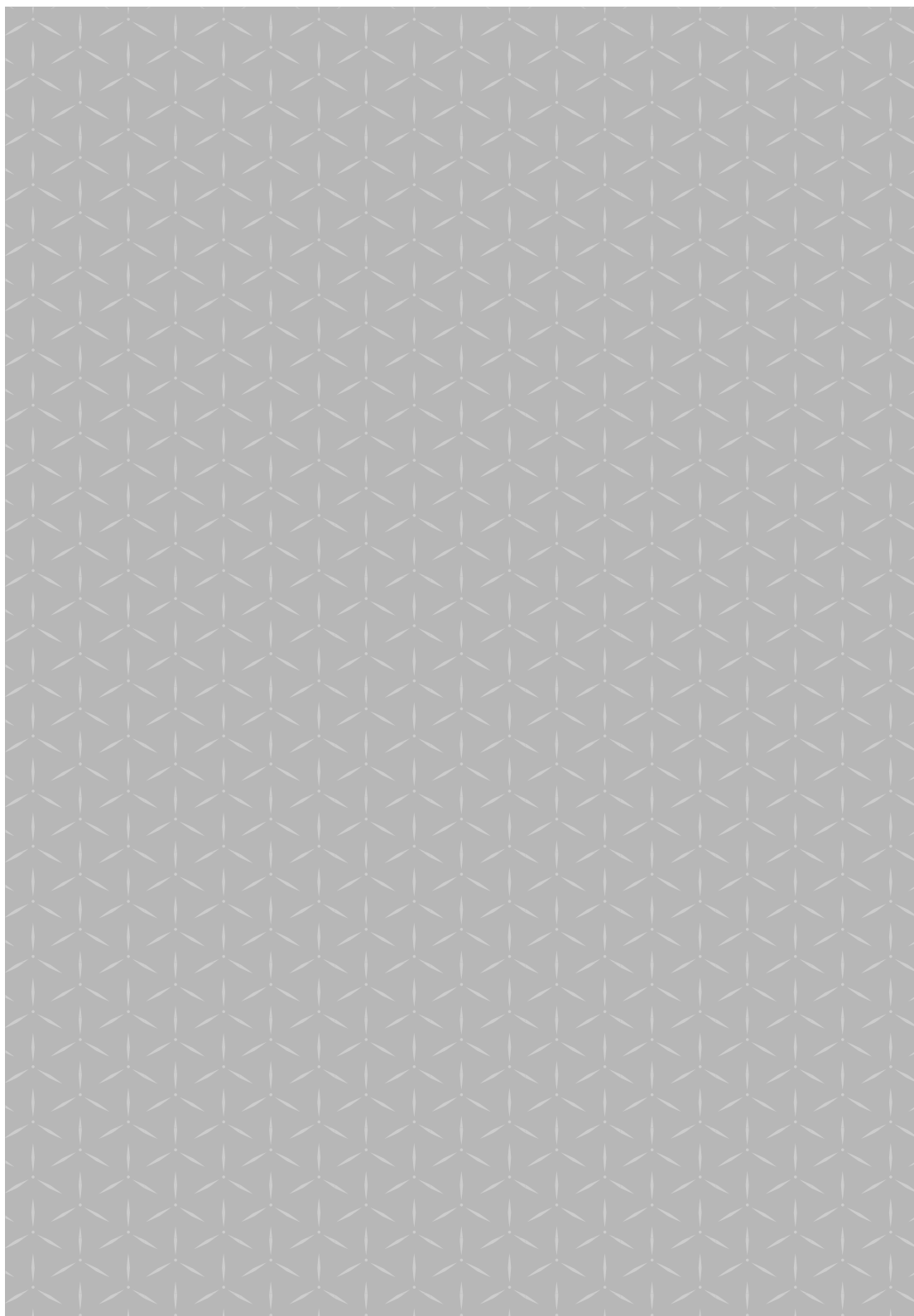
The National Health Commission Office (NHCO) wishes to thank the author- Mr. Wiwat Wanarangsikul, and the editorial team for composing this book. Appreciation also goes to Mr. Amnaj Boonsirivibul, an instructor from Thammasat University, for the translation of this book from Thai to English.

The NHCO hopes that this book could inspire readers to embark with confidence on the sufficiency path together, or in the words of **H.E. General Prem Tinsulanonda**, Privy Council President and Statesman:

“The event is a concerted effort to show how the “New Theory” of His Majesty the King can bring about results that can be duplicated even further. In a sense, it is a gesture of loyalty.”

Lastly, the NHCO would like to express its sincere thanks to all parties concerned for their support in rendering the event a great success.

The National Health Commission Office
November 2008



1. The Root Track

*Going back to the root of ideas and motives
for organizing the Sixth National Health Assembly,
the last demonstration of national health assembly
before the National Health Act 2007
has been enacted.*

*"We will work together to
promote self-sufficiency and
follow the principle of sufficiency
economy as graciously
advocated by
His Majesty the King at the
family, organization, community
and national levels."*

1. The Root Track: The Root Thoughts

"The more development, the more sufferings we see. Perhaps we have clicked the wrong program. We wanted happiness, but we clicked the misery program. If we could create a wellbeing program, click it every day and follow its menu, we should enjoy greater and greater wellbeing..."

This was the opening of the book **"12 Ways to Wellbeing Thailand"** written by **Professor Prawase Wasi**. It served as a guide to wellbeing for Thai society and dared us to take up a challenge that **"if you wish to have wellbeing, you must measure it against a set of indicators"**. The question remained. Who would be honest enough to measure the truth, especially the truth in us!

When highly respectable people made an observation about society being **"unhappy"**, we should seriously ponder over it. If people or organizations did not stop and think about how to create a society of **wellbeing**, the unhappy

situation would weigh down on them without an end in sight. We would no longer be able to have a sound sleep or a pleasant dream.

The National Health System Reform Committee (NHSRC) which played a significant role in preparing the National Health Act attached great importance to the participatory health assembly process. The process would allow all social sectors to exchange knowledge and learning in the spirit of wisdom and solidarity, leading to a healthy public policy. In addition, the committee took in account all dimensions of health whether they were physical, mental, social and intellectual, that concerned everybody and sector. It, therefore, saw it fit to have a trial health assembly held in Thailand and encouraged the people to organize health assemblies in localities and on specific issues as well as national health assemblies on a regular basis since 2001.

In 2005 the theme of the Fifth National Health Assembly was **“Wellbeing”**, as the issue of unhappiness had become more and more apparent. It was intended to be a forum for all partners, networks, organizations, agencies and the interested public to come together to exchange views and learning and to form a synergistic network for greater wellbeing for Thai society. The annual event came up with a Declaration of Intent (nine in all) on **“Working Together to Build a Society of Wellbeing”**, especially Commitment No. 2: **“We will work together to promote self-sufficiency and follow the principle of sufficiency economy as graciously advocated by His Majesty the King at the family, organization, community and national levels.”**





In addition to furthering the cause left by the Fifth Annual Health Assembly, **the 2006 National Health Assembly Organizing Committee**, chaired by **Dr. Banlu Siripanich** I, together with NHSRC, wanted to organize the Sixth Annual Health Assembly as part of the Sixtieth Anniversary Celebrations of His Majesty's Accession to the throne and adopted a theme of **“Sufficiency Economy Leading to A Society Wellbeing”** for the event. The committee believed that “Sufficiency Economy” was the basis for a sustainable health system. Efforts were made to collect all knowledge and examples related to the sufficiency philosophy at all levels, including everyday lifestyles, occupations and social development. The ultimate objective was to call on every Thai citizen to show their allegiance to His Majesty the

King by studying the principle, applying it to their lives and organizations, and sharing the success stories to others in the country. In addition, the committee wanted to advocate the issue as a national agenda, urging the government to pay attention to the “**Gross Domestic Happiness**” (GDH) alongside the **Gross Domestic Product** (GDP).

With this in mind, the committee set the objectives for the annual health assembly as follows: to promote and generate new knowledge for development work based on sufficiency economy; to promote the participatory process for healthy public policy development; to encourage an exchange of learning and innovations about health promotion based on sufficiency economy among various sectors; and to help empower, expand and further develop the networks of health communities for social wellbeing.

The Sixth Annual Health Assembly was like a general assembly incorporating the processes from all sectors under the **Sufficiency Economy** umbrella. It was designed to instill confidence in the partners who were urged to come up with recommendations as one united front. The ultimate aim was to see change to be made move in the right direction. The slogan of the event was “**exchange of learning, expansion, greater confidence, and policy advocacy.**”

"The ultimate aim was to see change to be made move in the right direction. The slogan of the event was 'exchange of learning, expansion, greater confidence, and policy advocacy'."



2. The Form Track

Reviewing the format, rationale, conceptual framework and overall impression during the three days of the event

*"The first time I heard the word
sufficiency was in the phrase
'Sufficiency Economy'.
If everyone lives according the
sufficiency principle,
No one will ever rush to
compete.
We will have a happy society."*

2. The Form Track: Sufficiency Economy

- **Collection of beautiful formats: Exchange of learning, expansion, greater confidence, and policy advocacy**

This three-day national health assembly was held on 27, 28 and 29 October 2006. It was opened to interested people from all social sectors to fully participate in the exchange of learning on the creation of a society of wellbeing. This year the venue was at **IMPACT Exhibition and Convention Centre, Muang Thong Thani, Nonthaburi**. The invited target groups were drawn from the three sectors according to the “Triangle that Moves the Mountain” theory as proposed by **Prof. Dr. Prawase Wasi**: the public/political, professional/academic, and people/civil society sectors. The format adopted was designed to offer as great a diversity as possible, offering food for thought, theory, principle and practice, comprising keynote addresses, general and panel discussions, seminars, demonstrations, training, exhibitions, art and cultural performances, to say the least.

It must be said once again that “the health assembly process” was not intended to be a one-night stand. Rather, the process entailed a series of events carefully planned and worked out. For instance, before this national health assembly started, there had been several other events, including collection, study and analysis of academic data, synthesis of the lessons learnt, local and brain-storming sessions. They came up with general and specific issues to be taken up further. It involved much exploration, selection and synthesis of existing innovations, as well as public media communication. Significantly, the national event saw much coordination between agencies, organizations, and partner networks who, together, acted as its co-hosts from the beginning. The idea behind the assembly was participation and common ownership on the basis of which recommendations would be made. In general, there were two parts of the national health assembly.

The **first part** was concerned with the advocacy of “**sufficiency economy leading to a society of wellbeing**”. There were keynote addresses by national and international experts, discussions in the plenary sessions where successful practices of sufficiency economy were shared, and recommendations made by the participants. There were also health assemblies on specific issues discussing the theme in five different areas that would eventually form the final recommendations on healthy public policy. These recommendations were to be commonly agreed upon by participating agencies, organizations, networks and partners and to be submitted to other policy-related organizations at



local and national levels. In addition, a space was created where concrete examples were displayed. The space was nicely called **“the assembly ground...path for a life of sufficiency”**. This section was designed to show how the **“sufficiency economy”** philosophy could be translated in real life.



The Assembly Ground: "Path for A Life of Sufficiency"

Here one could see a variety of case studies, activities and lifestyles from the public, private, community and people sectors based on the philosophy both in urban and rural areas. At the same time, small discussion groups were formed on the assembly ground covering at least nine issues. Cultural performances were also held on the ground during the three days. In addition, there were demonstrations, training, and exhibitions on a number of subjects including the health assembly process and public policy process, art corners and book corners. All this was intended to show how sufficiency

economy could bring about a society of wellbeing in all dimensions, physical, mental, social and intellectual.

The **other part** was to provide a space an exchange of learning based on the model of **health assemblies on general and specific issues**. Issues had already been selected by the assemblies in localities/on specific issues. They were presented here to incorporate other ideas and synthesized into one common package.

To enable a greater exchange of learning, the working group on public media produced a variety of media before, during and after the national health assembly, making use of all available channels.

For example, it published over 10,000 copies of **“a Manual for Living: Love Father; Live a life of Sufficiency for Father”** (after the assembly, more were printed.). They were distributed to participants and the interested public upon request. The contents of the booklet covered stories of individuals, families, communities, and organizations that had put the sufficiency economy philosophy into practice, together with a practical series of steps for others to follow.

The working group also produced a short documentary film on **“Stories of Individuals, Families, Communities and Private Companies that Have Put the Sufficiency Economy Concept into Practice”** together with commercial spots issuing the following brain-teasing questions: “Is it possible to do a billion-baht business, speculate in the stock market, or make movies on a sufficiency economy model? If so, how? Answers can be found at the Sixth Annual Health Assembly



at Muang Thong Thani". The message was broadcast on radio and television nationwide.

In addition, a website was created to disseminate the information. Posters were posted at various places. Huge stickers were pasted on the side of many buses in Bangkok, inviting the interested public to the annual event.

With everything in place, physically, mentally, and operationally, the Sixth Annual Health Assembly on **"Sufficiency Economy Leading to a Society of Wellbeing"** finally began.

- **"On the stage: Here...were great stories to tell"**

"It puts health in a sufficiency context. We will not eat too much or work too hard. We will not be selfish and will not take advantage of others. We will all be happy. If one person does so, that person will be happy. If many do so, many will be happy. If everyone follows suit, everyone will be happy. Ours will be a society of wellbeing."

The format was organized with a concept of sufficiency in mind. The assembly ground had no product-selling booths. Economy, simplicity and diversity of learning opportunities were the names of the game. There would be no extravagance, the kind that one would find oneself stuck with overspending when the event was over. The layout was not complicated. People could walk and see what happened at leisure. It could

be detected from the happy faces of both the participants and organizers alike.

There were about 3,000 participants attending the plenary and special sessions, while the assembly ground registered about 30,000 visitors during the three days. The participants were those who had already been to former national health assemblies and health assemblies in localities/ on specific issues while some were new faces. They were individuals or representatives of organizations, agencies and partner networks concerned from all over the country from the public sector; local government organizations, education institutes, academic agencies, civil societies, health networks, professional organizations, private sector, business sector and the general public. Besides members of various committees, subcommittees and working groups, there were a large number of distinguished academic, social and political personalities present, e.g. **Dr. Sem Pringpuangkaew, Dr. Mongkol Na Songkhla, and Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva.**

On 27 October 2006, the first day of the event, on arrival the participants would be greeted by so many young volunteers in dark blue shirts who were eager to give information about the assembly.

The presence of the “**young volunteers**” brightened the event. Their blue shirts made them stand out. Who were they? They were members of the “**Child and Youth Network**” from various places. Some were from Children's Discovery Museum in Bangkok, others from other provinces as far as Yala and Ubon Ratchathani. This network had been in existence for quite some time. It became well-known when it joined



“the volunteer project to help tsunami victims” toward the end of 2004; since then, they had volunteered to do other good deeds, starting with the current national health assembly.

“I am responsible for welcoming the participants in front of the plenary meeting room. If the room is nearly full, I have to make sure that the participants will have a seat somewhere. I have to look around for a vacant seat or two. If they come in large numbers, life could be hectic. But I’m really glad to help out. Many older participants like us. They would move over, gesturing to us that there were some seats untaken here and there. It makes life a lot easier. Sometimes, the participants could spot an empty seat by themselves. Was I tired? Not at all, because the older folks love us children working. See? My friends are all smiling.”

“Naen”, a young volunteer from “Suphan Buri Children Council”, together with other ten children, was given the duty to welcome the participants and direct them to the plenary room. She gave her view on sufficiency economy: “The first time I heard the word sufficiency was in the phrase ‘sufficiency economy’. If everyone lives according the sufficiency principle, no one will ever rush to compete. We will have a happy society.” When asked how sufficiency economy and health were related, she replied, “It puts health in a sufficiency context. We will not eat too much or work too hard. We will not be selfish and will not take advantage of others. We will all be happy. If one person does so, that person will be happy. If many do so, many will be happy. If everyone follows suit, everyone will be happy. Ours will be a society of wellbeing.” Such was the voice of a child who might be small, but whose mind

was not. It made people like us wonder “**How profound! How smart, little girl!**”

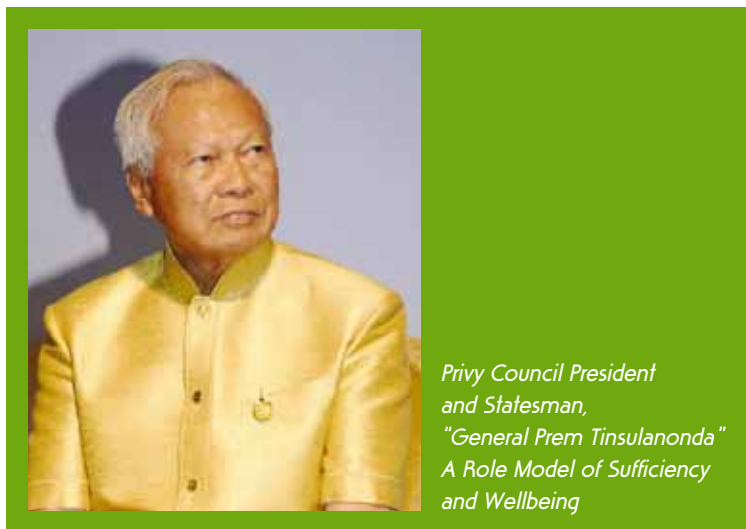
This group of young people was a commendable product of life. They were like saplings that would grow into big trees providing cool shades in the future. They were small forces for who liberal-minded adults should provide more space so that they could learn more and try out many good things. In this way, the future of the nation would be very bright with quality population.

The **Grand Diamond room** was used for the opening and closing ceremonies as well as the plenary. The area in front of the room was designated as the central point. There was a set of human-shaped contemporary sculptures in different postures lying about, each trying to reach wealth. The work was called “**Desires**”. It tried to tell a story of about modern life characterized by competition for **material wealth** at the expense of happiness. This was what happened when “**sufficiency**” was not there.

- **Opening ceremony: Adhering to the principle of sufficiency...and happiness**

“...Sufficiency Economy as taught by H.M. the King is a philosophy of life, a philosophy of development in all aspects based on sufficiency, moderation, rationality, good immunity, especially, morals and knowledge.”





This year National Health Assembly, it was honourable to have **H.E. Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda**, Privy Council President and Statesman, regarded as a role model of sufficiency and wellbeing, coming to preside over the opening.

The ceremony started with a video presentation entitled **"Sufficiency Economy Leading a Society of Wellbeing"**. It depicted how suffering could be overcome by sufficiency economy, with examples from individual lives, organizations and local communities from various parts of the country. The story was clear and quickly went to the heart of the audience.

At the end of the video presentation, Organizing Committee Chairperson **Dr. Banlu Siripanich** gave a report on the background of the Sixth Annual Health Assembly. Then H.E. Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda gave the opening remark. Here was some of the message:

“...Sufficiency Economy as taught by H.M. the King is a philosophy of life, a philosophy of development in all aspects based on sufficiency, moderation, rationality, good immunity, especially, morals and knowledge. Therefore, wellbeing in a person, family, community and society will undoubtedly be made possible by following the sufficiency economy philosophy. A person with good health, a happy family and a society of wellbeing are a result of moderation or in another word sufficiency...”

Coming to the National Health Assembly is a good thing. Here, the knowledge has been synthesized. People from different sectors share their learning and success stories. They also share how policies could be translated into practices. All this will show not only how Thai people are all equal but also how they can help one another equally...

We all believe that health is essential and contributes to the wellbeing of a society. We believe that morals will lead to good things. So, I would like to invite you to consider morals in terms of health. We will see how much in decline many high-level administrators are and how Thai morality suffers. It is the duty of this assembly to find a way to cure Thai moral sickness, especially through a measure of sufficiency. I wish the assembly every success with practical results...”

The following was the last sentence of the opening speech, serving as a commitment given to one another.

“...Most importantly, when we work together to ensure that His Majesty’s “New Theory” bears fruition and is further expanded, it is another way to show our allegiance to His Majesty...”



- The assembly began: Keynote address...on the sufficiency philosophy

"...we would show our allegiance to His Majesty by adopting and disseminating the "sufficiency economy" philosophy in addition to wearing the yellow shirts..."

After the opening, Privy Councilor Professor **Dr. Kasem Watthanachai** delivered a keynote address on **"Sufficiency Economy and Globalization."**



*Prof. Dr. Kasem Watthanachai, Privy Councilor
Delivering a Keynote Address*

When the phrase "sufficiency economy" was mentioned, many people tended to associate it with agriculture and rural society and could not see how it could be relevant to capitalist economy in the age of globalization. So, it was important for

people to understand the essence of the sufficiency economy philosophy and how they could apply it to their life and work. The speaker had long been known for his adherence to the philosophy in real life and had tried to advocate it in every possible way on a regular basis. For instance, he explained the concept to various groups and sectors including the general public in a way that was easy to understand and follow. He would show how the philosophy was relevant to their life and work and how it could lead to a society of wellbeing. The keynote address was therefore a good way to start the national health assembly.

The speaker started by pointing out how an ultra-capitalist society could lead to a total disregard for morals and integrity. Many people found themselves heavily in debt. On average, a Thai household debt was about 120,000 baht. This might be good for consumerism, but it was accompanied by a rise in vices and by reduced self-reliance at grassroots level. People no longer grew their vegetables; they would buy them from traders who drove picks-up to the village. This indicated reduced self-reliance. They would rely on money to do everything for them. So, money was first and foremost on their mind. Therefore, attempts should be made to introduce “liberal capitalism with good governance” based on “sufficiency economy”. In this regard, liberal capitalism was good when everyone in society could be developed to the full, when it could provide a child-care system and a continuing education system to fully develop every member of the society, whether they were children, adults, or elderly.



Liberal capitalism believed in human potentials, because it recognized human dignity in every person. A good liberal capitalism must be based on good governance; otherwise, people in power would exploit the weak. A good liberal capitalism must help the weaker to stand on their feet so they could walk together with others. So, if one combined liberal capitalism with good governance and if people from all sectors, including the public, state enterprise, private and people sectors adopted the sufficiency economy principle, the problems that afflicted society would be solved. These problems could be about wealth distribution, poverty, morality and other health-related issues that led to unnecessary sickness or premature death. **Dr. Kasem Watthanachai** went on to present the conceptual framework of His Majesty's “**sufficiency economy**” (shown in the diagram).

In summary, **sufficiency meant moderation, rationality and self-immunity to fend off adverse effects from internal and external changes in conjunction with the middle path (i.e. not too much, not too little)**. Rationality was defined as reasoning as deemed necessary based on academic/technical principles, social criteria, tradition, culture, and legal and moral reasons. Thus, rationality comprised many components. Self-immunity, on the other hand, meant an internal system that could effectively handle impacts from change factors, both external and internal. These impacts could be material, social, environmental or cultural.

The speaker spelled out three conditions that would bring about the maximum benefits:

1. Knowledge: Whatever we did must be based on awareness, caution and attention to details in planning and living.

2. Morals: This aspect must start from cultivating a spiritual base in the mind of the people, especially government officials, theorists and business people of all levels, so that they would lead a life of morality and integrity

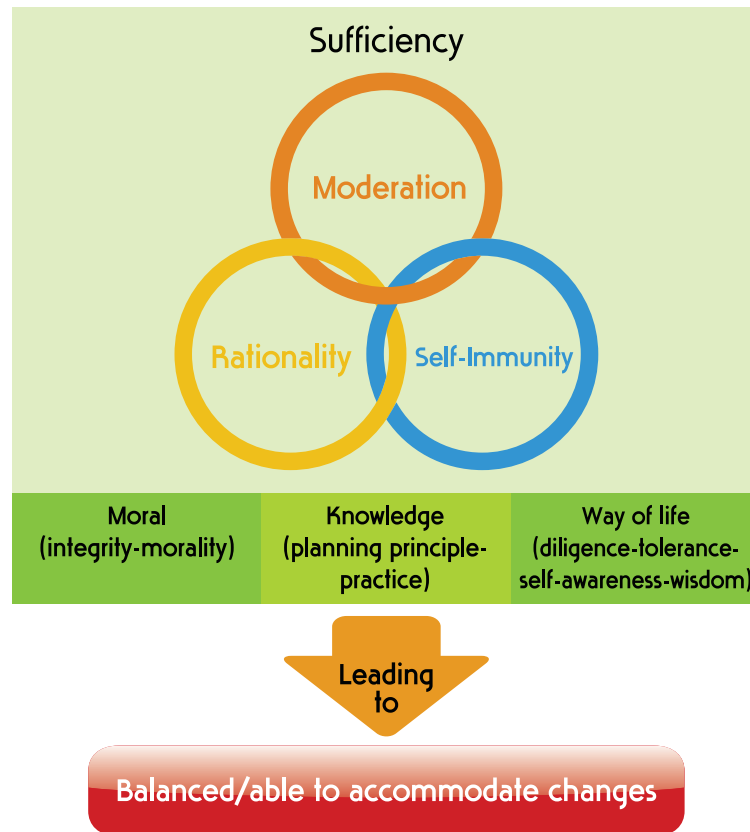
3. Way of life: One should live with self-awareness, tolerance, diligence, wisdom and care.

The speaker reaffirmed clearly that the last statement in the sufficiency philosophy said that if we followed the practice the outcome would be a balanced life, a balanced organization and a balanced nation. We would be able to accommodate rapid and comprehensive changes from the external world, whether they were material, social, environmental or cultural changes. This would mean a sustainable family, community, company, and nation.

That was a summary of the keynote address on **“Sufficiency Economy and Globalization.”** At the end, the speaker urged everyone to study the sufficiency economy philosophy and apply it to their daily work and life. They should start thinking of how to incorporate the principle into the policy at the ministerial, departmental and organizational levels, including the family level. We should plan ahead that for this year and the following year how we would show our allegiance to His Majesty by adopting and disseminating the “sufficiency economy” philosophy in addition to wearing the yellow shirts. If this could be done thus, the benefits would go to none other than the people themselves.



Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: The Middle Path



- **Discussion: Panels on sufficiency**

"Sufficiency economy can bring you wealth but do not abuse it. Wealth must be made on the basis of honesty and no exploitation of others."

The keynote address was followed by an informal panel discussion on **"How Thai People Could Apply the Sufficiency Economy Principle in a Concrete Manner"**. The panelists were people who successfully adopted the principle in their life as follows: **Por¹(Father) Kaeo Sangchu**, coordinator of Community Master Plan Project, Phatthalung Province, **Mr. Prasan Ingkhanan**, moderator of the "Kop Nok Kala" and "Khon Khon Khon" programmes, **Khanin Laowirun**, Grade 10 student from Surasakmontri School, Bangkok, in the "Anuthin Chiwin Wiwat" Project, **Na² Somboon Miharon**, Chairperson of "Maeban Mittraphap Phatthana" Group, Nong Bon Sub-district, Bangkok, **Mr. Sutthichai Lamchareonying**, managing director of Wonderworld Products Co. Ltd., and **Mr. Chaiwat Anutrakunchai**, a famous master of ceremony, as moderator.

The panelists were diverse in their backgrounds: salary earners, urban and rural community members, a member of

¹ A term of great respect for an elder person, literally means "father"

² An endearing term for an older person, literally means "a younger sister/brother of mother" (aunt/uncle)



the younger generation, and big businessman. They all chose to live a life of sufficiency. This panel, therefore, was a testimony to the **practicality of the sufficiency economy principle in real life**. The summary of the panel discussion was as follows:

Por Kaeo Sangchu had had problems with his work and family. He was about five million baht in debt. Since he could not find a way out, he resorted to alcohol and cigarettes as well as buying underground lotteries. A personal problem then became a household problem. One day he saw a note on the wall that he himself had made from His Majesty's guidelines for sufficiency economy. Thinking to himself that he would try the recipe, he started making a daily record of the household income, its source, expenditure and types of problems. The household problems were shared to every family member and discussed until they found a solution. They discovered a philosophy of life that they must start from their existing capital and work their way upward. They cut down expenses through more self-reliance. For instance, by growing whatever crops they were capable of, they were able to reduce the amount of debt and market dependence. The panelist summarized the essence of the sufficiency economy philosophy in three words: **know, understand, and practice**. However, one's act must not violate the rights of others or destroy natural resources and environment. One must adhere to moral and ethical principles and help other fellow beings. He ended his talk with "Sufficiency economy can bring you wealth but do not abuse it. Wealth must be made on the basis of honesty and no exploitation of others."

Na Sombun Miharon, the only woman panelist, said that she had her parents as role models of economy, savings, generosity and care for those who suffered. If their neighbour had too many children who were left unattended, her parents would take them to their home, feed them and send them to school. When they were old enough to work, her parents would let them go. She used to ask her mother why she had done so. She replied, "We are human. We are Thai. We need to care for one another. We share what we have. This is how our parents taught us." After Na Sombun Miharon had her own family and her children were all financially independent, she wanted to help society. She started by turning the house bequeathed by her parents into a centre for teaching Arabic and Malay and a place where groups of housewives could do activities together. She also helped the community members solve debt and unemployment problems. She persuaded people not to leave the community to work elsewhere. She also helped solve drug-addiction and stealing problems among young people. She helped set up occupational groups, savings groups, open community stores, set up community welfare services, income-supplementing clubs for youths, taught morals, promoted physical exercises and encouraged others to participate in religious activities. In her view, this was an application of sufficiency economy to her community.

As the only child from a wealthy family, **Khanin Laowirun** was a spendthrift. He did not care how much things cost as long as he could have them. When he got tired of, say, a pen, he would throw it away and bought a new one. Later on





Khanin Laowirun

he joined the “**Anuthin Chiwin Wiwat**” Project initiated by **Teacher Bunthawi Chaopaknam**, a teacher of Surasakmontri School, his lifestyle changed. The boy explained how the students were taught to record daily income and expenditure. At the end of a certain period, the students would be asked to write comments about the spending habits and how to improve them. For each category of income and expenditure, they would explain how sufficiency economy could be applied. From this exercise, Khanin Laowirun began to realize how he had had wasted money on unnecessary expenses and changed his habit. Now, he knew how to spend money and time wisely. This was just like a lesson on moderation which he said was part of the sufficiency economy principle.

Despite being a salary earner, **Mr. Prasan Ingkhanan** appreciated the sufficiency economy philosophy. He said

that in the beginning he was not aware how it was part of everything in life. As an urban inhabitant, he viewed the principle as something individuals would apply differently to suit their context. It would help people to rely on themselves. When a crisis happened, they would handle it effectively. On a rational and balanced lifestyle, each person might take it to mean differently. For instance, we might like an ordinary looking glass, while others preferred a more expensive one. It all depended on who would be happy with what they got. For him, a life of sufficiency meant learning to live with what he had. He would spend according to what he earned. He could borrow money on condition that he would be able to pay off the debt. He would learn how to live a balanced life and be content with himself. The important thing was not to desire something beyond one's mean and be overambitious.

The last panelist, **Mr. Sutthichai lamchareonying**, like **Mr. Prasan**, said that he was not certain whether he could be a model of sufficiency for others. However, the assembly organizers who visited his company and interviewed him confirmed that he could be. To him, a life of sufficiency was an individual choice before it could be emulated by others. There must be an exchange of ideas between people in the workplace until something concrete emerged, for instance, in the form of figures and steps. His company was a factory and exporter. When customers made a visit, he would explain the nature of his business and instill confidence in them that his company “**was small but beautiful**”. It would not just take order from them but made sure that it was able to



deliver properly. Despite its small size, it wanted to create its own brand without too much dependence on the market order. It would like to set its own agenda as a good company and organization. It wanted to be **“smart and civilized”**. Another function of the company was to take good care of its workers. The panelist explained in detail how his company helped to pay off their debt by persuading them to join **“the development of the quality of life”** project. Under this project, they would develop a **“life account”** listing the household income and expenditure. At the same time the company came up with other supplementary schemes, such as giving them extra work, encouraging them to set up a savings cooperative on the company's premises, paying off their debt for them and deducting an interest-free amount from their salaries. In this way, their debt was quickly settled. Mr. Sutthichai summarized that this was an adapted version of the sufficiency economy model, for it not only helped change the workers' way of spending but also brought happiness to all. Such a helping hand led to the wellbeing of the business sector; in this case, the Wonderworld Products Co. Ltd.

These were some of the success stories of sufficiency economy in real life. The exchange of experiences brought to light how salary earners, urban and rural individuals, members of the young generation and businesspersons had benefited from the philosophy. It was so reassuring to see that the model was practical in all social sectors. If we could start the journey equipped with faith and a strong desire, the journey forward should not be difficult. In the final analysis, it all depended on us...on **whether our faith was strong enough!**

- Sufficiency “Bhutan” style: Learning from our neighbour

“...It is my sincere hope that the health system worldwide would benefit from the strength of the private sector, while maintaining and valuing humanity and providing health care with compassion...”

The following morning, the plenary was much honoured by the presence of **H.E. Dr. Jigme Singye**, Minister for Health, Bhutan, a keynote speaker on “**Gross National Happiness: Experience of Bhutan**”.



Dr. Jigme Singye, Minister of Health of Bhutan

The keynote address could be summarized as follows:
The Bhutanese concept on gross national happiness was based on creating a balance between traditions and modernity and on the premise that true development of human society

would take place when material and spiritual development occurred side by side to complement and reinforce each other. **His Royal Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck**, King of Bhutan, pronounced that pronouncement that “Gross National Happiness (GNH) is more important than Gross National Product (GNP)”. The Bhutanese government put people’s happiness as the ultimate goal of development rather than its by-product. Under the GNH concept, public policy and development projects must always take into consideration people’s happiness.

Besides, the Bhutanese government viewed that economic development was not always equal to prosperity. In the beginning, people might enjoy greater income and physical comfort than they ever had as a result of material gains. At one stage, however, happiness did not necessarily increase at the same rate as wealth. Society would be governed by market demands, greed, maximum profits and consumerism. As a result, people would vie with one another and try to take advantage of others. Then, they would begin to feel depressed and dispirited, while society would decline. This showed that greed, a driving force of such economy, managed to destroy the path to happiness. Therefore, gross national product was only an economic dimension that could lead development astray.

In the Minister’s view, there were three main reasons why Bhutan was able to develop successfully with a fast speed. One, **“Bhutan has a strong and dynamic leadership invested in the king”**. Two, **Bhutan was lucky to have received**

assistance from various funds on a regular and transparent basis. There was no corruption. The third, perhaps the most important, reason, was that **Bhutanese culture was imbued with moral goodness.** These three factors drove forward the country's development efforts, combining traditional culture and economic reality, resulting in the GNH policy and framework.

Nevertheless, Bhutan had another conceptual framework for national development, i.e. holistic planning and administration along the line of the Buddhist social theory. Every social sector and plan depended on each other. The plans reinforced the administrative system. Bhutan's plans and administration were holistic in their approach for greatest social benefits. In addition, Bhutan had learnt from the mistakes and difficulties encountered by other countries. It was similar to the Buddhist concept of how to overcome suffering. The idea was to start by studying and seeing what were potential problems so that ways and means could be found to prevent them from happening. In the Bhutanese case, development must take into account its impacts and consequences. Its main objectives were to prevent cultural decline, prevent unequal distribution of goods and services, and prevent environmental deterioration. It was based on five fundamental principles:

1. Economic growth
2. Environmental protection
3. Balanced development in the locality
4. Decentralization and community empowerment, and
5. Cultural conservation and promotion.



The above framework also included health policy. The Bhutanese government considered health as an integral part of the physical, cultural and social infrastructure. Therefore, health promotion and disease prevention needed to be part of the holistic planning and administration with the cooperation of all sectors concerned. It followed that the administration of town planning, transportation, use of resources and community life must pay attention to their impacts on health and happiness. In addition, Bhutan's public policy attached great importance to the conservation of traditional medicine of “**Sowa Rigpa**”. Considered the country's official medicine, it served as a base of resources to counter the external modern pressure. When integrated with the Western medicine, it offered a holistic treatment both in mental, physical and spiritual terms.

It was one of the most valuable and informative sessions. Nevertheless, the Bhutanese minister pointed out that his country had reached a certain level of success, but it was still at an early stage as far as the implementation of the policy and social infrastructure development was concerned. Specific laws could be passed to ensure Bhutan's GNH objectives. There remained many challenges and uncertainties facing health policy development in Bhutan. Many population groups still could not get access to medical service. Much needed to be done to improve the infrastructure. The number of trained personnel was limited. In spite of all these obstacles, Bhutan was firm on its vision for a sustainable health infrastructure that included spirituality in the national development toward gross national happiness.

The keynote speaker ended with a most memorable note: "It is my sincere hope that the health system worldwide would benefit from the strength of the private sector; while maintaining and valuing humanity and providing health care with compassion, for such was the foundation stone of the medical profession. Only in this way will we able to provide true social service."

- **Final keynote: Application of the philosophy...to national development**

The afternoon session was devoted to another keynote address on **"Role of government and national development toward a society of wellbeing through sufficiency economy"** by Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Kosit Panpiemras. The keynote speaker explored the possibility of Thailand adopting the philosophy. The following was the summary:



*Deputy Prime Minister,
Mr. Kosit Panpiemras*

In the government's view, His Majesty's sufficiency economy philosophy could provide an excellent guiding principle for people's life and livelihoods from personal, family, and community levels to the national level. It could serve as the basis for development, national administration and business management on the path of moderation. The government would adopt the philosophy in its economic and social development. In the speaker's view, if we understood the philosophy well enough, we would see how it could be relevant to economic and social development as well as to everyone's life. The approach advocated rationality, knowledge and self-immunity to fend off any untoward incident that might occur. Most importantly, it advocated moral integrity as governing principle. The philosophy did not go against free economy. In actual fact, it was the basis for free and effective economy. Under the sufficiency economy system, all government actions must be transparent, fair, efficient and effective. It could also empower society. The government wished to see a stronger and happier society in which everyone lived their lives in a reconciliatory and fair manner. It wanted to work with the people, business, civil society, academic and media sectors as well as other religious institutions to develop a caring Thai society, empower local and civil communities, and promote fairness and democracy.

With regard to health, the government wished to see the public enjoy good physical, mental, social and intellectual health. The public health reform would help reduce risk factors found in people's behaviours and environment. It would

operate on a participatory basis, promoting health in normal and emergency times, ensuring a fair and comprehensive health care including disease prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. It was the government's view that the empowerment of the community, locality and civil societies would be possible if they were able to manage their resources, social and cultural environment, community rights, and administration by themselves. The empowerment would be seen in greater roles played by the family, community, organizations, volunteers, business, and religious and educational institutions. Social problems, including drug addiction, would be tackled in earnest on a continual basis. Care must also be provided to children and youth, people with disabilities, the elderly, and the disadvantaged groups. Women's rights must be protected. Life and property must be made secure.

This was part of the government's policy to be submitted to Parliament. The speaker believed that sufficiency economy would bring concrete results and urged each and everyone to carry the philosophy forward and show others how beneficial the principle could be.

We would have to see how this excellent sufficiency economy principle expounded by His Majesty would be taken up by the government and all sectors as the “**guiding**” light.

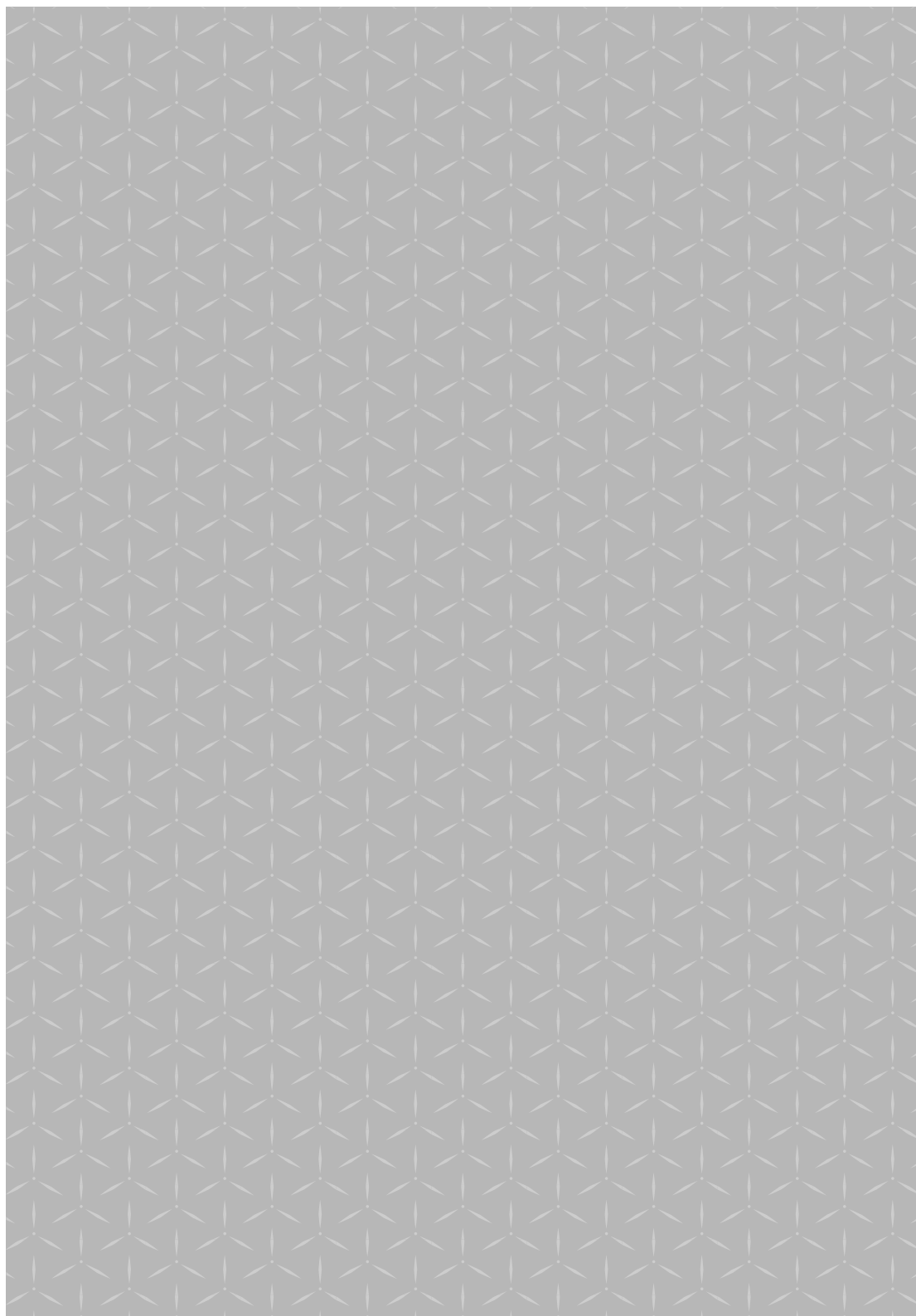
So the plenary witnessed four keynote addresses and one panel discussion on how the sufficiency economy principle could be applied to individual life, organizations and national development. They all showed how a society of wellbeing could be developed. The organizers had brought





the gems of wisdom to the participants. It was up to them to make the most of it.

"The philosophy did not go against free economy. In actual fact, it was the basis for free and effective economy...."



3. The Story Track

*Reflecting the stories, events and findings of
the national health assembly in general and on
specific issues, especially on sufficiency economy*

*"The health assembly process
is like a public sphere where
every party concerned comes
to think and talk together
in a friendly atmosphere
to create a huge web of learning
and a society of wellbeing
guided by His Majesty's
Sufficiency Economy philosophy."*

3. The Story Track: Health Assembly Process

“The health assembly process” is a process that enables all social sectors, including the public, people and academic sectors, to “exchange their learning” in the spirit of wisdom and solidarity in order to come up with healthy public policy and people’s wellbeing.

The health assembly process is like a public sphere where every party concerned comes to think and talk together in a friendly atmosphere to create a huge web of learning and a society of **wellbeing** guided by His Majesty’s **Sufficiency Economy philosophy**.

With the theme of “**Sufficiency Economy Leading a Society of Wellbeing**”, five **health assemblies on specific issues** were organized as separate Special Sessions, each to synthesize the **body of knowledge** on the assigned topic and come up with **recommendation**. These recommendations would then be submitted to various groups/networks and other organizations to consider how best to move the agenda forward to the attention of the public sector.

The five Special Sessions consisted of:

1. Policy on Asian medical hub and national health security on the sufficiency economy path
2. Business and sufficiency economy
3. How could wellbeing indicators promote happiness?
4. Sufficiency use of medicines
5. Sufficiency strategies: Directions in the 10th development plan.

The contents of each Special Session for health assemblies on specific issues could be summarized as follows:

I. Policy on Asian medical hub and national health security on the sufficiency economy path

"...universal coverage was quite a success, as more people, rich or poor, could get access to health service and bear less household burden on health expenditure...."

The public policy on universal healthcare coverage had benefited a large number of Thai people. Since the Health Security Act of 2002, they had enjoyed better access to health



service and paid less and less for their household health expenditure. At the same time there came into being a policy to promote Thailand as the “**Asian medical hub**” in line with liberal economy, resulting in a huge influx of foreign exchange from international visitors who made use of the available health service in Thailand. The policy also prompted action to promote the medical standard and quality and development of medical personnel in the public and private sectors. All this was made possible by the readiness of the private sector in the ever-expanding service business.

On the surface, the idea about public policy might sound very far-fetched. We might not realize that it was an inextricable part of our daily existence. The way we live was affected by the public policy. Even **the policy on the Asian medical hub and universal healthcare coverage**, to some people, came under government’s responsibility or might be totally unrelated. In fact, they were two different sides of the same coin and mutually affected.

They were two different ideas, two different forces, which resulted in two public policies for two distinct groups, groups with two different statuses.

In practice, however, many believed that both policies mutually led to a greater demand for health service and resources, especially with regard to medical personnel, while they had an adverse effect on the national health and healthcare.

Therefore, it was a good idea to consider applying His Majesty’s sufficiency economy principle to the two public

policies while keeping in mind Thailand and Thai people as the centre of attention. How could we come up with ideas to reduce the gaps of inequality that existed between these two groups of people? How could we create a better balanced life for Thai people?...

These were the challenges that the health assembly on a specific issue had to tackle.

These were some of the answers:

The topic of this Special Session might sound fairly academic, but its serious tone was lightened by a short theatrical prelude called **“Universal for Who?”** by **“Klum Makham Pom”** troupe. This was a good crowd-drawing technique. The troupe told a story about how Thailand was conceived as the Asian medical hub and how universal coverage (UC) was developed. Although the two policies had different origins and objectives, they both produced the same effect, creating a bigger demand for medical service by Thai and foreign patients in a short time. In the meantime, the country had an acute shortage of health personnel and resources, while the quality of healthcare was uneven. The play ended with a question, **“How can we together find a balance between the two systems under the sufficiency economy principle?”**

The play was followed by a panel discussion on a fancifully-worded topic of **“Two forces, two concepts: a balance of UC and the medical hub on the basis of sufficiency economy”**. The panelists came from different backgrounds: academic, public and private sectors. The panel consisted of



Dr. Samrit Srithamrongsawat, Director of Health Insurance System Research Office, **Dr. Adisorn Patradul**, Orthopedics Department, Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University, **Dr. Thitiporn Siripan-Panthasen**, Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University, and **Dr. Jirut Srirattanabal**, Faculty of Preventive and Social Medicine, Chulalongkorn University, with **Mr. Kitti Singhapad**, a professional media man from ITV (present TITV) as a moderator. The tone of discussion was light-hearted and appealing to the audience, several of whom were able to share their ideas freely, thus reflecting the views from business-owners, clinic/hospital administrators, service providers and the general public as end-users.

The objectives behind the establishment of the medical hub and universal healthcare coverage were to promote good health and good life for Thai people and to enhance the national economic competitiveness. While the medical hub was more commercially inclined, the universal coverage was more geared toward rights protection and social justice. According to the panel and other research findings, universal coverage was quite a success, as more people, rich or poor, could get access to health service and bear less household burden on health expenditure. There were still important problems that needed to be solved further in that the budget received was lower than the expenditure and that there was a discrepancy in the service standards given to the people.

With regard to the medical hub, admittedly, the country enjoyed more foreign currency because more international patients came to Thai private hospitals for their health care.

At the same time, more medical personnel from the public sector began to move to the private sector, worsening the medical personal shortage problem even further. One of the most serious concerns was related to the high costs of medical service and professional remunerations that the international patients had more purchasing power to bear compared to their Thai counterparts. It could be expected that the traditional Thai healthcare that was based kindness and loving care would be more business-oriented. The relationship between service providers and receivers would change. With this there would be more accusations and legal actions taken against one another.

In view of the situation, the panel asked all the sectors concerned to consider adopting His Majesty's "Sufficiency Economy" philosophy so as to create a better balance between the two health systems and to make them more inter-dependent. The panel advocated **moderation, rationality and good immunity** as the basis of the approach. In other words, efforts must be made to take into account the economic, social and psychological effects of the change that would take place. Every action must be accompanied by wisdom and self-awareness.

The panel made the following policy recommendations. Budgets and resources from all sectors must be integrated under the happiness-sharing umbrella. Attempts must be made to set a number of international patients to receive healthcare without causing an adverse effect on the Thai counterparts. In addition, there should be an independent mechanism to monitor and audit the policy implementation



of the government and business management of the private sector to ensure rights protection, benefits and safety of the general public as a whole.

The agenda of this Special Session triggered much concern. Those that bore the brunt should not think that they were being criticized. The session was intended to gently inform the parties concerned not to run too fast on the development path and to review actions and their consequences carefully before moving on, this time, hand in hand. This was a big issue. The direction that these two policies would take **would greatly affect the national health system as a whole!**

"...the panel asked all the sectors concerned to consider adopting His Majesty's 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy to create a better balance between the two health systems and to make them more inter-dependent...."

2. Business and sufficiency economy

"...We have never seen any business or businesspeople know the bounds of sufficiency... It will be good if they learn how to apply the sufficiency economy principle, so they will not take advantage of consumers like us."

“How could business go together with sufficiency economy?”

This was surely one of the burning questions to everyone.

When the word “business” was mentioned, everyone would immediately think of “**maximum profit**”. Naturally, when the issue “**Business and Sufficiency Economy**” was taken up, people were wondering how the two could mix, for business and sufficiency were too opposite directions, especially in view of the current extreme capitalist trend. Where could one find a balance?

Environmental degradation was a reminder how unrestrained development had already brought an impasse. Business without social and environmental concerns would spell disaster to mankind. That was the reason why the **Social Venture Network (SVN)** was formed by a group of American businesspeople who were aware of the seriousness of the situation and wanted to expand the network to their counterparts all over the world, including Thailand.

SVN Asia (Thailand) was a recently established organization designed to coordinate business networks of global society, serving as a forum for exchange of experiences and businesses between like minds. Its concept was that material prosperity was not enough to guarantee social survival or wellbeing. People needed spiritual growth and good caring environment for future generations. Nature must be taken care of and not exploited. Such a concept was in tune with the theme of the national health assembly “Sufficiency



Economy Leading to a Society of Wellbeing”. Therefore, the Special Session on **“Business and Sufficiency Economy”** was initiated by SVN (Thailand) in conjunction with Thailand Environment Institute, Kenan Institute Asia, Good Governance for Social Development and the Environment Institute, and Faculty of Social Science, Srinakharinwirot University, to advocate corporate social and environmental responsibility using His Majesty’s sufficiency economy principle as guideline. The session also touched on transnational retail business problems.

The session was organized as the result of the recommendations made earlier by a seminar on **“Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Action”**. It consisted of two parts” **“Transnational retail business in Thailand: corporate social responsibility”** and **“Is it possible to mix business with sufficiency economy?”**

The challenge posed by the issue was enough to draw a large attendance. According to some members of the Phuket and Trang health assemblies,

“...We just want to hear how far that is possible. We have never seen any business or businesspeople know the bounds of sufficiency. They only think about profit and not loss. Their philosophy is high productivity and low cost. They do not tolerate low productivity and high cost. It will be good if they learn how to apply the sufficiency economy principle, so they will not take advantage of consumers like us.”

A member from the Sakon Nakhon health assembly gave another perspective:

“...I attended the session, because the Thai business sector has begun to review its practice. Profit-oriented business may not always bring them happiness. I also want to know how business is operated. How much is sufficiency? I operate a small shop in the community and I always think about sufficiency. If they can share good development tips, I’m willing to learn...”

Having generated so much interest, the panel discussion started with **“transnational retail business”**. The first presentation was the research findings on **“Transnational Retail Business and Its effects on Thai Society”** by **Ms. Somlak Hutanuwat**. It was followed by comments from such panelists as **Mr. Kosol Lertsakdamrongkul**, managing director of Next-Products Co. Ltd., **Ms. Saree Ongsomgwang**, managing director of Foundation for Consumers, **Mr. Thawison Lonanurak**, President of Nakhon Ratchasima Chamber of Commerce, and **Mr. Takerng Somsap**, Vice President of Thai Broadcast Journalists Association, with **Mr. Prasarn Marukapitak** as moderator.

Even though the panel was focused on the current situation and its impacts in general, the facts about business operation were useful to the recommendations that were to emerge later.

This was followed by another panel on **“Is it possible to mix business with sufficiency economy?”** led by **Mr. Chaiyot Bunyakit** who presented three case studies. These case studies were taken from the previous seminar on **“Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Action”**. These cases, illustrative



of the sufficiency principle, included **Chumphon Cabana Resort in Chumphon Province, VP Progressive Co. Ltd. that owned Diaro Cafe, and Bangchak Petroleum Public Co. Ltd.** The three cases were different from one another in terms of management concepts and approaches. The audience could see how the sufficiency principle could be applied to businesses without much difficulty.

The two panels inevitably led to the challenge **“How could transnational business and sufficiency economy live side by side?”** The recommendations to be submitted to the business and other related sectors were as follows: Successful businesses that expounded the sufficiency concept should be commended and recommended for others to follow, especially those willing to distribute benefits to all parties concerned with fairness, i.e. shareholders, investors, trading partners, customers, fellow workers, society, community and the environment. Every business should adopt His Majesty's sufficiency economy and, more importantly, help change consumer values, and promote intellectual development and quality of life.

In the final analysis, the health assembly could not once and for all put an end to the concerns about the issue, because the current strong capitalist trend was more complex than had been thought and it was even more likely that the future of retail business would fall into the hands of transnational business giants whose marketing plans were far superior to local operators. At least, attempts had been made to incorporate corporate social responsibility for the country

and the environment. It would help to soften the blow of the ill effects to a certain extent.

Importantly, hopefully, this good concept would be absorbed by as many Thai people as possible. One day in the future, Thai people would not hurt each other. This idea was well received by the audience. A **representative from the Songkhla moral assembly** said very succinctly as follows:

“We should not just let what we have heard stop here in this room. We should advocate and make it known to the public by all means. For example, we could propagate the story by word of mouth. Today, consumers are easy prey to aggressive marketing techniques of transnational business retailers using, for example, low-price offers. On the surface, it may seem as though the consumers are having advantages, because they were able to force the manufacturers to sell their products at a low price. Thai local retailers cannot compete, if they have to bear higher costs than the giant retailers, and sooner or later will be squeezed out of business. Worse, these giant stores have expanded and created more convenience stores in the community. It will not be long before the local store operators will go out of business. Agricultural products that were bought and sold in the community on a friendly and interdependent basis would be forced into the hands of big stores. One day, transnational retailers will take over the entire area. We will have no more cheap products to buy, because all the prices will be fixed by them and consumers will surely be the next victims...”



"...Today, consumers are easy prey to aggressive marketing techniques of transnational business retailers using, for example, low-price offers... One day, transnational retailers will take over the entire area. We will have no more cheap products to buy...."

3. How could wellbeing indicators promote happiness?

"...a happiness index must be worked out from the inside and directly from the people. The important thing is that the movement for community happiness driven by the community itself should lead to a happiness index that truly reflects the local condition."

Despite "**happiness**" being the highest aim of human pursuit, it would be futile if we do not know **what that happiness is**.

Is it true that what makes **happiness** is wealth, billions of baht in the bank account, a large house, or a beautiful car? Many are not certain how to gauge happiness. The tools being used do not seem to give an accurate measurement. Looking back at the national development track, we can only see confusion about how we get about trying to be happy. We have not yet embarked on the search for true meaning of life!

In the age of globalization and liberal capitalism, the indicator for successful national development has been the amount of wealth and capital flow into the country. We measure national economic growth by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in terms of per capita income. However, the society has realized that a higher GDP has almost nothing to do with wellbeing of the nation. On the contrary, it highlights a widening gap between rich and poor. GDP can only measure the growth of the system in quantitative terms but does not reflect the qualitative and effective aspects of development. Worse, it cannot reflect the extent of degradation facing the ecosystem, environment and natural resources depleted by development efforts.

As the GDP could not be a true indicator of happiness, many attempts have been made to find new measurements. In 2005, the Fifth Annual Health Assembly set “**wellbeing**” as its theme regarding ways and means to define and achieve national happiness and came up with **a declaration of intent with nine commitments**, one of which was as follows:

“We will develop wellbeing indicators at the family, organization and community levels and work together to develop indicators of national wellbeing, using the process of indicator development as an instrument to develop wellbeing at the same time.”

Despite all the efforts to measure Thai happiness by various sectors and local groups, their objectives usually were not the same. At the national level, the wellbeing indicators could be found as part of the evaluation of the National



Economic and Social Development Plan. All the indicators so far could not really answer the question of wellbeing, especially at the family, community and local levels.

For this reason, this national health assembly intended to take up the issue again. It was hoped that some sort of conceptual framework and guidelines for database development could be worked out on a participatory basis to formulate wellbeing indicators. The assembly was designed for all social sectors in Thailand to exchange learning on wellbeing based on first-hand experience. Perhaps, something new would come up instead of spending time arguing what happiness was and how it could be measured. The assembly wished to find the answer to **“how can we use wellbeing indicators to develop true happiness in society at various levels?”** The answer could then be disseminated together with the sufficiency economy principle throughout the country and incorporated into the national development plan.

The issue “How could wellbeing indicators promote happiness?” was coordinated by Development Evaluation and Communication Office, National Economic and Social Development Board, together with Public Policy Development Office, ABAC Poll, Assumption University, Centre for Promotion and Development the Strength of the Land (Moral Centre), Wellbeing Indicators Network, and Health System Reform Office (HSRO).

Discussion about happiness was always appealing, even though the issue was nothing new. Every session on happiness was invariably crowded. This was perhaps the most

crowd-drawing session.

At the beginning the discussion was somewhat academic, but the tempo became livelier when a group of experienced speakers took the floor. They were **Mr. Surin Kitnitchewee**, a local sage from Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province, **Por Kamduang Pasee**, a local sage from Buriram Province, **Na Prayong Ronnarong**, a local sage from Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, **Mr. Chusak Hadprom**, a local sage from Nan Province, and **Mr. Muhamad Amin Duraoh**, Chairman of Young Leader Network of Southern Border Provinces from Yala Province. The session was further enhanced by the friendly and easy-going moderator, **Mr. Paiboon Wattanasiritham**, Minister of Social Development and Human Security. The relaxed atmosphere made it possible for a continual flow of ideas and exchange of opinions. The issue of “What is happiness” finally led to formulation of “**indices**” as development tools for a society of wellbeing in the light of His Majesty’s **Sufficiency Economy** principle.

The examples of indicators proposed by local sages and various parties were valuable lessons. Some were national, such as **Wellbeing Index**, **Economic Strength Index** and **Thailand’s Sustainable Development Index** proposed by National Economic and Social Development Board, and **Quality of Life and Thai Social Capital Index** proposed by Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. Others could be classified at a local level, such as **Thai People’s Happiness Indicators** proposed by I-san researchers and local sages, and **Happiness Indicators** by Mahidol University.



Some indicators were based on international experience, e.g. **Human Development Index** by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), **Quality of Life Index** by UNESCAP, Bhutan's **Gross National Happiness** (GNP), and **Happy Planet Index** (HPI) by New Economic Foundation.

The agreement reached by the panel was that every party should collect all the happiness indices or indicators whether they were developed by the organizations, government agencies or community networks and modified them to suit their context and locality. They could be used to measure happiness at family, community or even provincial levels. The function of the public sector was to coordinate and encourage the process on a continuing basis as well as expanding the network, leading eventually to a national happiness index.

*Mr. Paiboon Wattanasiritham
Minister of Social Development
and Human Security*



The panel ended with the statement of the chair and moderator **Mr. Paiboon Wattanasiritham** that:

“...The community map is just like the National Economic and Social Development Plan in that they need success indices. The difference is that what we would like to see most is the kind of wellbeing that has been evaluated by an instrument or index developed by the community itself. Indicators can be developed at various levels, from the community and provincial levels to the national one. So, every party concerned must attach importance to them...”

His conclusion was sound, especially when he said that a happiness index must be worked out from the inside and directly from the people. The important thing was that the movement for community happiness driven by the community itself should lead to a happiness index that truly reflects the local condition.

So to the question “By what the Gross National Happiness is measured?”, the answer would be as follows:

As of today, the true answer would lie with the “village”, because for a happiness index to be real it must be in tune with the local community and people’s highly cherished values.

“...The community map is just like the National Economic and Social Development Plan in that they need success indices. The difference is that what we would like to see most is the kind of wellbeing that has been evaluated....”



4. Sufficiency use of medicines

"...a huge amount of unnecessarily prescribed medicine is wasted every year, while a number of patients cannot get the necessary medicine."

In the age where everything is turned into **commodity**, why should it come as a surprise that **"medicine"** has become a very lucrative business? It is no longer the case that medicine is the product of the doctor's compassion. "Give and take" is no longer a matter of sharing and reciprocation. Finally, the moral value of "medicine" is fading away.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that medicine is not like any other commodity that can be replaced. If the petrol cost has gone up, we could use public transport. But if we have a stomachache, it would not do to take a tablet for a headache. Whatever illness has afflicted us, we have to find the most efficacious medicine for the symptom at whatever price. The dependence on medicine coupled with powerful advertisements results in many Thai people using medicine unnecessarily and excessively. Such a life is a far cry from **"sufficiency"**. There is a common saying today that **"Thai people are one of the nations that consume the largest amount of medicine in the world."** Ironically, their health does not fare better than those of other nations that consume less!

The irrational use of medicines has posed problems not only for Thailand but also for the world. The WHO

commented on the situation that **“more than half of all medicines are inappropriately prescribed, dispensed or sold. Unnecessary and excessive use of medicines wastes resources and results in significant harm far and wide.”**

According to Thai statistics, an annual consumption of medicine is on average 50 billion baht (retail prices) or 35% of the total health cost. This is very high, compared to 10-20% borne by more advanced countries. A number of researches have indicated that a huge amount of unnecessarily prescribed medicine is wasted every year, while a number of patients cannot get the necessary medicine. The damage that ensues not only affects national economy but also relates to the rights to survival of the population. The health of the people is also threatened by the toxicity and adverse side effects of medicine.

Such a crisis has attracted much attention from society. Demands have been made to improve the national drug system. Thailand's **Food and Drug Administration, Ministry of Public Health**, is the lead government agency working with closely with a number of parties, including Pharmacy Council, academic networks, Consumer Protection Network, Health System Reform Office, and mass media. They have come to the same conclusion that His Majesty's sufficiency economy principle should be applied to the drug system at all levels. That is the reason why the Sixth Annual Health Assembly included **“sufficiency use of medicines”** in its agenda. The issue covered the drug use behaviours of the population supported by medical and health research findings.





The assembly invited about 120 members of the target groups including academia, experts, government officials concerned, drug-use-related health personnel, affected groups/networks, and health volunteers to share their views.

The national list of essential drugs was used as an important tool for discussion. The discussion aimed to reach some common grounds for sufficient, rational and practical use of medicines at the community primary healthcare level, hospital level and health service centre level. The question remained whether “the national list of essential drugs could really solve the overused practice of medicine found in hospitals. Wouldn’t the national list restrict the rights of some people under the health security principle? Would the national list earmarked for primary health care really help solve the problem of drug use in the community?

Perhaps, the most important questions that needed to be answered first were “Where does the sufficiency lie”, “How much is sufficient” and “How could one manage to bring about the maximum benefits?”

All eyes were directed to the national health assembly.

The Special Session on **“Sufficiency Use of Medicines”** began with a keynote address on **“Sufficiency Health and Use of Drugs”** by **Professor Dr. Pramual Wirutamasen** with his video presentation on **“National List of Essential Drugs, Tool for Sufficiency Use of Drugs”**. It was followed by panel discussion in the form of a consumer council on **“Can the national list of essential drugs lead to sufficiency use of drug?”** The panel included **Dr. Pison Chongtrakul**, Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University, and **Dr. Yupin Lawanprasert**, a pharmacist from the Food and Drug Administration, with **Dr. Choochai Supawong** as the moderator. The session ended with questions and answers. At the same time, a small discussion group was formed, led by **Dr. Luchai Sringernyuang**, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mahidol University, **Mr. Vinit Asawakitweeree**, Director of Drug Control Division, Food and Drug Administration, **Ms. Wanna Prichanupak**, an outstanding village volunteer at the regional level in the consumer protection category, **Ms. Kamalaporn Kongsukvivat**, Health Development Training Centre, People Sector (Northern Region), and **Mr. Panuchok Tongyang**, Samut Songkhram Provincial Health Office. **Dr. Vichit Paonil** from Faculty of Pharmacy, Mahidol University, served as the moderator.



After the panel and discussion, there was an agreement that **the use of medicines must be made on a rational, correct, sufficiency and balanced basis**. The principles that should govern the decision were technical knowledge, sound judgment, transparency, accountability, sustainability, least risk involved, and, perhaps most importantly, moral/ethical considerations. Drug prescription and sale promotion must be morally bound. The session agreed that **the national list of essential drugs** was a good advocacy tool for sufficiency use of medicines. The process of the preparation must be transparent and scientifically supported, engaging the help of experts, and allowing opportunities for revision and criticisms. The list should be constantly updated in line with the time. The focus should be on creating understanding and persuading the prescribers to make more use of the national list. At the same time, attempts must be made to curtail advertisement and sales as well as generating enough knowledge for the public to modify their drug use behaviours.

Nevertheless, the national list of essential drugs or any other recommendation from the assembly would be only a supporting factor. The important drive that would lead to success must come only from the **consumers**, and **no one else**.

"...the use of medicines must be made on a rational, correct, sufficiency and balanced basis. The principles that should govern the decision were technical knowledge, sound judgment, transparency, accountability, sustainability, least risk involved..."

5. Sufficiency strategies: Directions in the 10th development plan

"...For a sufficiency health system to happen, the focus should be on instilling a sense of moral awareness in the conduct of the professionals and lifestyles of the general public. It was also important to promote a right view or paradigm about life and health.."

Over the past decade or so the Thai health system has undergone a rapid change in terms of concepts, policies, structures, management mechanisms, and the roles played by various sectors. At the same time, health situations and problems have become more complex. It seems to indicate that all the strategies or development efforts in the present health system have not caught up with the fast changing world.

For this reason, the Ministry of Public Health, through the Bureau of Planning and Strategy, has attached great importance to the process in the preparation of the 10th national health development plan (2007-2011). This plan adopts His Majesty's Sufficiency Economy philosophy as a basis for the people's health development. Moving on from the 9th development plan, the 10th plan is designed to encourage the people to live their lives on the sufficiency economy basis, create a balance between urban and rural growths with an interdependent relationship, and promote a society fair for all.



It defines **“a good health care”** as one of the key objectives of the development of Thai people and society leading to a society of wellbeing. It is the **“main thrust”** of the 10th national health plan, and the strategy to materialize the plan draws on the participation from all sectors.

In this connection a panel session on **“Sufficiency Strategies: Directions in the 10th Development Plan”** was organized. In addition to developing the new health paradigm that covered the physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions of health, the Sixth Annual Health Assembly wanted to hear the voices and suggestions on the draft 10th national health development plan from the sectors concerned. So, the event could be considered **“killing several birds with one stone.”**

Despite a rather academic slant, the session attracted a large number of participants. The panelists had much to contribute and were able to involve the audience. The panel cum public hearing on the draft 10th national health plan started with **Dr. Komatr Chuengsathiansap**, Director of Society and Health Institute (SHI) introducing the draft plan. Then it was the turn of the panelists to provide their input based on their experiences on the ground. The panelists were **Mr. Yongyouth Trinutchakan** from I-san Traditional Thai Wisdom Learning Network, **Dr. Tanthip Thamrongwarangkul**, Secretary-General of Sustainable Community Development Foundation, Khon Kaen Province, **Ms. Rosana Tositrakul**, Secretary-General of the Thai Holistic Health Foundation, and **Dr. Prida Tae-araks**, Acting Deputy Director of National Health Security Office for Khon Kaen Area. The panel was

moderated by **Dr. Viron Porntaskul**, Deputy Director of Bureau of Planning and Strategy, Ministry of Public Health. During the panel discussion, questionnaires were circulated to the participants, asking for their opinions on the draft 10th national health plan. This extra gesture was well thought out and very commendable.

A concrete outcome of the panel was a vision for the future health system of Thailand - **“Toward a sufficiency health system leading to good health, good service, a life of sufficiency and peaceful society”** - with the following six strategies:

1. To create health service and medical systems that would bring joy to the provider and recipients
2. To create a sufficiency health culture for a society of wellbeing
3. To create immunity and reduce the impacts from health hazards
4. To create a variety of health alternatives with a well-planned blend of traditional Thai and Western medicines
5. To create a good health system on the basis of knowledge and good knowledge management
6. To create unity and good governance in the management of the health system.

The following were some of the important comments and suggestions from the audience and panel. For a sufficiency health system to happen the focus should be on instilling a



sense of moral awareness in the conduct of the professionals and lifestyles of the general public. It was also important to promote a right view or paradigm about life and health. Ordinary people should be encouraged to play a more important role in the development of a sufficiency health system, including the structure, culture and social mechanisms that helped to create equity, fairness and a sufficiency way of life.

Not only would these valuable recommendations help shape the 10th national health development plan, but they should also be made into the targets and strategies of health development at every level, family, local community, provincial and regional. When every social sector went in the same direction, the movement would be in tandem. The national plan would not remain a dream but would soon become a reality. It was to be expected that all sectors, whether public or people, would be willing to go together!

These were the concrete results of the **exchange of learning** between various social sectors as well as concerted efforts in the advocacy of **“Sufficiency economy leading to a society of wellbeing”**.

It must be mentioned that the Special Session was not limited only to the issue of **“Sufficiency economy leading to a society of wellbeing”**. The following morning, the organizers opened up another set of **“health assemblies on specific issues – general issues.”**

There were nine special sessions:

1. Would people with disabilities ever enjoy wellbeing?
2. Volunteers, the force that makes the world
3. People power and the management of pesticides
4. Viewing the future of Thai health through the manpower strategic plan on health
5. Children and youth and understanding of the media
6. Legal state – world order and society of wellbeing
7. Health impact assessment, immunity for society of wellbeing
8. Health communicators, health communication innovation
9. Translation of health assembly into participatory healthy public policy development.

The outcome was not any less interesting than that of **the health assembly on the special issue of “Sufficiency Economy”**. The topics under discussion, though not the highlight of the event, attracted a large crowd.

The following are the summaries of the nine special sessions.



1. Would people with disabilities ever enjoy wellbeing?

"...there are two parts of disability work, one on the people with disabilities and their families, the other on the support system, i.e. various social systems. The two parts must work together and cannot go separately."

A host of problems facing the disabled people in the urban and rural areas have been raised at various forums. There is a feeling that society has put them in a second-class or even third-class citizen category. They do not always enjoy the same basic necessities of life as other citizens.

The session "**Health for people with disabilities**" was designed to bring attention to them so that the society would acknowledge their presence and contributions given the opportunity. In fact, what they needed was nothing more than an **opportunity** to get equal access like other individuals.

Fully aware of their valuable roles and problems facing them, each annual health assembly has made it their policy to open a space for various groups and networks of people with disabilities to meet and exchange their experiences. A special session was organized to monitor their health situations and collect all the information about their wellbeing in general. The objective was for them to come up with policy recommendations that would improve their lot. Such had been the practice of the annual health assemblies from 2002 to 2006.

People with disabilities were left to deal with their problems by themselves. Now they had a space where they could come together as groups, big and small. In 2005 the Health System Reform Office (HSRO) lent its support to the establishment of **“Committee on Health for People with Disabilities”**. The committee consisted of representatives from organizations, partners, and networks of people with disabilities, as well as parents and guardians of disabled persons, academia and other agencies. Ever since its inception, the committee has been promoting for health policies and strategies for people with disabilities and acted as a focal point in the organization of the health assembly for people with disabilities.

The target groups of the 2006 health assembly on the issue of people with disabilities were all types of disabled persons, including their parents/guardians, academics and agencies concerned. The atmosphere was exciting. The meeting room was packed just like the previous years. Although the atmosphere sometimes might be rather sad and tense, it was friendly and informal on the whole. A lot of opinions were shared. Besides the presentation of the health situations of people with disabilities, questionnaires were circulated to every disabled participant to fill out. This year saw a new campaign for facilities for people with disabilities and the elderly, i.e. **“toilets appropriate for disabled persons and the elderly in public areas”**. The toilet issue had been prepared before the event in two ways. A survey had been conducted on toilets provided in the petrol service stations on the major roads of the country. It was found that the proportion of



the service stations with toilets specially designed for them was still low compared to those without. Another study on the public toilet design for disabled persons and the elderly showed the same result, i.e. the proportion was low. There was a great need for a higher proportion, and every service station should put in place facilities for them. The information was shared to the audience so that recommendations could be proposed.

The presentation of their general health situation was given by **Ms. Pimpa Kachorntham**, Lt. Col. Torpong Kulkanchit and **Mr. Supacheep Disthest**. It was followed by a panel discussion. The panelists were **Mr. Verachai Virachanthachart**, committee member of the Handicapped Foundation, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, **Phra Khru³ Prachoke Sangkhachit**, representative of Association of Parents of the Mentally Impaired, **Mr. Samroeng Wiraratthanan**, representative of Thai Association of Parents of Autistic Children, **Ms. Daranee Thanabhum**, representative of Thai Association of the Mentally Retarded, **Mr. Tham Chatunam**, representative of Thailand Association of the Blind, **Ms. Suchada Kammalakorn**, representative of Association of Parents of the Intellectually Impaired, **Mr. Surachet Lertsattayan**, representative of National Association of the Deaf, and Mr. Supacheep Disthest, representative of Association of the Physically Handicapped of Thailand. **Ms. Puangkaew Kitchtham** led the panel. The panel ended with general discussion and a Declaration of Commitments by Network of People with Disabilities.

³ Reverend Monk

The essence of the declaration was to re-confirm the policy and strategy recommendations on health for people with disabilities made in 2004 and the declaration of commitments of the 2005 national health assembly on the provision of facilities for the handicapped. Those recommendations had not been seriously implemented. New measures were introduced to promote the sufficiency economy principle for people with disabilities and to empower organizations for people with disabilities of all types and at all levels.

Mr. Supacheep Disthest concluded the panel with the following remark:

"If we want to work together to advocate the issue of disabilities, we should start by accepting our disabilities first and then go to the outside world to develop and integrate our work with society. Actually, there are two parts of disability work, one on the people with disabilities and their families, the other on the support system, i.e. various social systems. The two parts must work together and cannot go separately."

2. Volunteers, the force that makes the world

"...It is the spirit of volunteerism that will eventually lead to a 'humanistic health system' with all the gentle and loving touch that brings with it collective goodness, prosperity, and true happiness...."



In a way there are many sides to the world, good and bad. Even bad situations are not always entirely bad, for one could learn something about them and be better prepared for any mishap that might occur. Often, we would find that obsession with the problem could sap our strength. If we concentrate on seeing some bright aspects of the situation, we might eventually find a way out of the impasse.

When the **tsunami** struck the Andaman coast of Thailand in 2004, it brought to light the cruel hand of nature and the practical non-existence of the early warning system. On the other hand, the world had come to know and appreciate the spirit of Thai volunteerism in the relief and rescue efforts. It was even said that “**the waves of donation**” and “**the force of volunteers**” were no less strong than the destructive storm. Many people in the society began to take note of the force of **volunteerism** and raised it to be on the national agenda.

Volunteerism has long been part an important mechanism of social wellbeing. It sparked off the efforts to develop a humanistic health system to which people in society contribute. Such interdependent and concerted action accounts for the success of the movement, while volunteers do not seek any financial return. Their rewards are warmth, happiness, and peace of mind as well as a feeling that they have done something good for the community and society. With social growth and life becoming more complex, the form and structure of volunteerism have also changed, but its spirit remains the same.

In the context of Thai health, **volunteers** have always been the helping hand. At the beginning, they were called **“traditional local doctors”** the practice of which began to lose its force with social expansion. When technology and the government mechanism played a greater important role in healthcare, health volunteers took a more formal status. The titles they received included **“village health volunteers”** and **“family health volunteers”**.

Prof. Dr. Prawase Wasi has long been advocating **“volunteerism”** to the general public. He wanted to see the medical and health personnel work with a spirit of volunteerism, believing that it is a great form of sacrifice that a fellow being shows to another. It is the spirit of volunteerism that will eventually lead to a **“humanistic health system”** with all the gentle and loving touch that brings with it collective goodness, prosperity, and true happiness. The work is likened to that of the bodhisattva who has attained enlightenment.

The special session on **“Volunteers, the force that makes the world”** was an attempt to carry the agenda forward and to trigger the idea of **“volunteers in the health system”**. The forum saw a number of formal and informal presentations of the concept. The volunteers who spoke at the session included **Ms. Panthorn Chongsuwat**, vice chairperson of New Life Revival Group, Friendship Treatment Centre, National Health Security Office (NHSO), **Lt.-Col. Sorasak Rodto**, volunteer from Phra Nangklao Hospital, **Ms. Wanna Charusomboon**, Volunteer of End of Life Care Group, **Dr. Bunruang Chuchaisaengrat**, doctor, Utttradkit



Provincial Health Office, and members of the Maintenance and Care Volunteer Group. The latter comprised **Mr. Yongkiat Kiatsermsakul** and party from Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, Thailand, **Mr. Sombat Bunngamanong**, volunteer of the Blue Angel Group, Mirror Art Foundation and volunteer network, **Ms. Naowarat Yuktanan**, Blue Angel volunteer, Ramathibodi Hospital, **Mr. Sanit Kongman**, chairman of Village Health Volunteer Group, Bangkok, and **Mr. Prasong Mankannan**, chairman of Village Health Volunteer Group, Uttradit Province. **Dr. Komatr Chuengsathiansap**, Director of Society and Health Institute (SHI), acted as moderator.

The speakers brought with them diverse experiences. For instance, **Ms. Naowarat Yuktanan**, a famous actress, said how much she had suffered from illness. She understood and sympathized with other patients. She vowed that when she recovered she would devote herself to social cause. She became a **volunteer of the Blue Angel Group, Ramathibodi Hospital where** she used to be patient. Her duty was to comfort patients. Working as a volunteer, she discovered how happy she was to give. This feeling was different from that of being famous or wealthy, which did not bring true happiness to her.

Ms. Panthorn had been a cancer patient at Ramathibodi Hospital and asked to join “**Friends Help Friends**” Group. This group consisted of cancer patients who wanted to take care and share the feelings among themselves. At present, there were about 500 members who provided an additional therapeutic treatment with love and friendship. It seemed to

work, because over the last four years or so the group had lost only six patients.

Ms. Wanna Charusomboon was a volunteer of End of Life Care that was part of the Volunteerism in Honour of His Majesty Project designed to care for terminally ill patients, while the mission of **Mr. Suchon Sae Heng**, a member of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, Thailand, was to try to purify people's mind with medical and other kinds of activity. Others, including **Mr. Sombat Bunngamanong**, volunteer of the Blue Angel Group, Mirror Art Foundation and volunteer network, or **Mr. Sanit Kongman**, chairman of Village Health Volunteer Group, Bangkok, were given other assignments designed to uplift the spirits of their fellow beings.

The cases from the panel indicated that some of the volunteers joined the cause because something critical had happened to them or somebody close to them. A near-death experience had turned them around or prompted them to think about their sufferings and those of others. They were now more than willing to help other fellow beings. Other volunteers joined out of their inner drive to help others, especially at the community level. The desire to help those close to them had expanded to cover other people. Whatever the origin of the volunteer spirit, the end result was the same, i.e. giving and sharing happiness, especially spiritual happiness and wellbeing.

Not only did the exchange of opinions between volunteers at the health assembly help to inspire others, but it also lent its force to the advocacy for humanistic healthcare.



They first needed to believe that their work could make a difference for the better and were there to give rather than to take. The work was done for collective good and not for self-interest. Importantly, they work as a network with mechanisms to support the development process on a systematic basis.

Volunteerism is another force that has helped move forwards the issue of good health in Thailand. The spirit of volunteerism or public mind is not simply a result of training or persuasion; it takes rise from the inner self. Volunteerism is, therefore, a sustaining force for a healthy world and community in line with the sufficiency principle.

If “**greed**” is the life force that keeps liberal capitalism alive and well, **volunteerism** is something to confirm that life is good and continues to thrive. Whether greed will prevail over sacrifice or vice versa will depend on the state of mind of each individual who plays a part!

“...They first needed to believe that their work could make a difference for the better and were there to give rather than to take. The work was done for collective good and not for self-interest...”

3. People power and the management of pesticides

"...It might take Thailand several generations to return its land and waterways toxic-free again. ..."

The past 50 years or so saw a rapid rise of consumerism which accounted for a huge expansion of agricultural production. In particular, the Thai government's economic development policy was focused on the acceleration of the agricultural sector to meet the needs of the global market. As a result, the use of pesticides had become more widespread. The users were not fully aware of the consequences on their health and the environment. The country witnessed an inevitable degradation of the national resources, including soil, water, forests and lifestyles.

The society was forced to consider **"whether it is worth having such wealth and prosperity in exchange for chemically-contaminated life."**

The national health assemblies from 2003 to 2004 had raised such an issue. Recommendations had been made to improve the management of healthy food and agriculture, conduct studies to form an academic/technical database, and prepare forums for an exchange of experiences. The representatives of the public, private and people sectors were invited to take note of the situation on the ground. They were encouraged to collect cases where situations were successfully resolved. The lessons were to be synthesized and submitted



to the government agencies and other parties concerned. In 2005 National Health System Reform Committee (NHSRC) submitted the recommendations made by the 2004 National Health Assembly to the government. On 31 May 2005 **the cabinet passed a resolution on Policies and Strategies on Healthy Food and Agriculture.** However, after the resolution, there was no sign of effective implementation of the resolution.

For this reason, various groups/networks of organizations concerned, including the public and private sectors, formed a network for healthy food and agriculture. They all agreed to bring the issue to the attention of the 2007 national health assembly serving as a learning forum on how to solve the problem of chemical use at the community level. The forum would also highlight the roles played by local government organizations in promoting food safety and environmentally-friendly agriculture. As grassroots mechanisms, they could influence the behaviours of the community to stop or reduce the use of pesticides, while policy measures were to be strictly implemented by the government.

This special session was focused on the presentation of cases indicative of the successful attempts by the community in managing agricultural chemicals. The stories were mainly about how the soil was replenished by organic or green agriculture and how they fought against the capitalist tendency to use more chemicals on a regular basis. **Mr. Somkid Sikeow**, coordinator of the Self-Reliant Community Plan, Tambon Administrative Organization of San, Amphoe Wiang Sa,

Nan Province, presented the findings of the study on the communities in Nan Province. **Mr. Kanoksak Duangkaewruan**, president of Tambon Administrative Organization of Mae Ta, Amphoe Mae On, Chiang Mai Province, talked about measures to impose tax on pesticides that would be brought into the Mae Ta community. **Ms. Chinda Bunchan**, president of the Alternative Agriculture Network of the Southern Region, presented a view on the application of the sufficiency economy principle to the natural agricultural system. **Mr. Thawatchai Tositrakul** from Sai Yai Paendin Foundation advocated the use of marketing mechanisms to encourage organic agriculture. **Mr. Nikom Chaiyawan** from Organic Agriculture Network, Chiang Mai Province, recommended safe food strategies in the community. **Dr. Kitichai Rattana** from Kasetsart University acted as the moderator, while **Ms. Orapan Srisukwattana** from National Health System Reform Office provided the preliminary background to the audience at the beginning.



Demonstration of Organic Agriculture

Most of the participants who attended the session on **“People power and the management of pesticides”** were community farmers from 55 provinces in the four regions of the country. In addition, there were academics from educational institutions, representatives from government agencies, local government organizations, NGOs, the general public and the media people who were interested in the issue. The room was full. The following was an example of the comments from universities and community institutes:

“...As this problem is closely related to the people who have long been affected by chemicals, while the government failed to control the situation. So, the people must play their role proactively to get the problem solved...”

The recommendations from the session could be summed up as follows: The Sufficiency Economy principle must be applied to the management of pesticides in order to create safe and environmentally friendly agriculture. The focus was on creating a balance. In the beginning efforts must be made to set up a conceptual framework for a life and community of self-reliance through renouncing or cutting down all the bad things. To do this successfully, however, would require participation from all sectors concerned. For instance, a network could be created to reduce the gap between the manufacturers and consumers. Strategies for safe food should be developed at local level. Efforts must be made to empower the community to be more self-reliant, engage the community leaders in the activity for better understanding, develop local curriculums, and integrate moral considerations

into business operation. It was important to include all this into the government policy, including measures for price guarantee of agriculture goods, linkage and integration between the public and private sectors, marketing promotion for better distribution of goods to the community, and research and development based on traditional local wisdom.

The recommendations from the panel at policy and community levels should help all parties concerned come up with new ideas and plans best suited to their localities.

The management of chemicals in the past was a lesson on the failure of accelerated development which did not take into account their adverse side effects or hazards. It might take Thailand several generations to return its land and waterways toxic-free again. However, in the mid of the crisis there was always something good that happened. At least, **there was greater alertness to the problems. All the cases presented augured well for the future.**

4. Viewing the future of Thai health through the manpower strategic plan on health

"...Health personnel are an essential resource in the health system that could determine the success or failure of health work, for they are the leaders and users of health technology..."



Ever since the 1997 financial crisis every administration of the Thai government has accelerated all efforts to restore prosperity, trade and financial stability in every possible way. Everything has been turned into a value and a monetary commodity. Even **health service**, which should be considered a “**public commodity**”, is now a **commercial commodity**.

One of the most controversial government policies has been the attempt to establish Thailand as the **Asian medical hub**. The idea is to encourage international visitors to come for health service in Thailand in the hope that they would bring in more foreign exchange. The gain would contribute to the country's prosperity. When health is thus tied to business, the consequences are not always desirable. People are encouraged to take more drugs than necessary. More health services have triggered enormous demands, including clinics, medical supplies, tools and equipments. There is a pressing need to produce more **health personnel** to cater for the **commercial health service policy**.

Indeed, health personnel are an essential resource in the health system that could determine the success or failure of health work, for they are the leaders and users of health technology who are also responsible for the management of health service with the best public interest in mind. Yet, if their values are misplaced, preferring business and profits to moral and ethical behaviours, they will be the biggest barrier to the health service system of Thai society.

The available resources and health personnel were barely enough to deal with a host of environmental changes,

epidemiology, and diseases that afflict so many people. The problems became more serious in the face of personnel shortage, unfair resource distribution, unequal service quality, discrepancy between personnel development plan and production, and inadequacies of the support systems. When we had to take away some of the resources to take care of international patients, the serious problem suddenly turned into a crisis.

The crisis was a warning signal to the Ministry of Public Health about the need to develop a national health personnel strategy that would guide the planning and development of the country's health personnel in the next ten years (2007-2016). A brainstorming session was organized under the guise of the health assembly on a specific issue by the plan-drafting committee, under the Bureau of Planning and Strategy, Ministry of Public Health, in conjunction with Health Personnel Research and Development Bureau, Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI), and National Health System Reform Office (NHSRO). In this regard, a special session was organized in the form of a panel and public hearing on the draft plan, involving participation from stakeholders including producers (i.e. educational institutions), users from both the public and private sectors, and people who were directly affected by the health service. Besides panel discussion, there was an open and free discussion from the floor. Questionnaires were used and comments were written the board in front of the meeting room, together with a suggestion box.

The panel cum public hearing started with a video presentation on **“Situation and Development of Health**



Personnel Strategies and Policies". It gave the background leading to the current situation. At the beginning the atmosphere was mostly academic and serious, but interest gathered momentum and lightened up when Moderator **Dr. Pongpisut Jong-Udomsuk** from National Health Security Office (NHSO) opened the floor for comments.

The vision of the draft national health personnel strategic plan was that "Thailand has an appropriate health personnel plan in line with and in response to the country's health demands." The discussion and referendum covered the following five aspects:

1. Roles of the public and private sectors, local government organizations, and the people sector in response to the personnel shortage at the local level, including personnel production, development and decentralization.
2. The concept of "selecting people from the community to study at a local educational institute who will come back to work for the community on graduation."
3. Empowerment of the locality (community) in managing health problems on a sustainable basis.
4. Roles of the central coordinating body on health personnel, and
5. Mechanisms or format necessary for implementing the personnel plan.

The outcome of the public hearing was that **there should be more decentralization of the personnel planning and development to the local and private sectors.**

The central authority should act as a coordinating mechanism facilitating the working together of various agencies concerned and making sure that the needs of the community were taken care of. Importantly, everything must be done in response to the needs of the population with a view to promoting good health in Thai society.

5. Children and youth and understanding of the media

"...They advocated the issue of people power and urged the media to review their roles in earnest accordingly. At the same time, they wanted to see a stronger immune system built in children and youth able to better understand the media."

It cannot be denied that the society today is becoming an information society. **"Communication technology"** has made a huge impact on a person's life from the moment he wakes up to his bedtime. Consumerism has become the name of the game. All the media, including publication, advertisement, telephone, radio, television, and the Internet, have become part of our lifestyle, whether we like it or not.

From what is going on, it would not be wrong to say that the media are the most influential factor in the present-day world. Their influence is evident in the thinking, feeling and behaviour of people of all ages, male and female alike.



They can even be said to replace the roles of the family, school/ college, and religious institution, which once were the pillars of Thai society. They account for the good and bad conducts and attitudes exhibited by young people, including inappropriate sexual relationship, violence, consumerism and extravagance. Worse, the government media have been controlled by some capitalist elements. If this trend continues, it will not be long before virtually all media become **commercially-oriented**. Media are becoming commodities designed to exploit the unaware, especially **children and young adults** who we call **“the future of the country.”**

The issue about the media’s influence on children and young people was nothing new. There were individuals and organizations crying foul over the media promoting violence, unthinking spending, imitation of celebrities and sexual risk behaviours. These cries were not very loud, compared to the self-seeking interests. The concern for the innocence of youth was not as strong as monetary gains. For this reason, various sectors had lost hope with the succession of the previous governments and decided to do something by themselves. They advocated the issue of people power and urged the media to review their roles in earnest accordingly. At the same time, they wanted to see a stronger immune system built in children and youth able to better understand the media.

The health assembly on **“Children and youth and understanding of the media”** was organized thanks to the Health Promoting Media Plan, Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth), Health Systems Research Institute



(HSRI), Health System Reform Office (HSRO), and Foundation for Child Development Office. Other participating organizations included Media Network for Children, Family Network Foundation for, National Institute for Child Development, Makham Pom Village Media Group, Catholic Press of Thailand, and Media Monitor. One of the main objectives of the session was to create a greater awareness and immunity in children and young people in their exercise of their judgment and proper utilization of the media. In addition, it was intended to advocate the development of media policy, system and monitoring mechanisms. It promoted media education or media literacy. In this special session, the process was put in place to involve the participants who were encouraged to share their experiences and activities used in their communities. The meeting also came up with a set of strategies that could be developed into policy.

The special session began with a short film entitled “**Luang**” (Deception) and a presentation of the findings of the study on “**Media Education in Thailand**” by **Assistant Professor Dr. Porntip Yenchabok** who pointed out the dangers of media. This was followed by panel discussion on “**Media education in Thailand: readiness and possibility**”. The panelists included were: **Ms. Khemporn Virunarapan**, Director of Foundation for Child Development, **Mr. Virapong Thaweesak**, Catholic Press of Thailand, and **Ms. Ladda Tangsupachai**, Director of Cultural Surveillance Group. **Dr. Walasinee Phipitkul**, Director of Social Marketing Section, Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI), was the moderator. The size of the audience was not large. Most of the participants were professionally engaged with children and young people, coming from the public sector, local government organizations, NGOs, health community networks, business organizations, and mass media.

The idea behind the panel was to advocate a media education policy in Thailand by educating people about the roles and functions of the media. The attempt was to generate a body of knowledge in the form of “model curriculum” to be integrated in the formal as informal education systems. The knowledge would be based on research findings. Another objective was to advocate the establishment of free and independent “public media” which every citizen could get access to and participate in. All this was to ensure that the government media should serve the public interest educationally without any commercial bias. The panel also recommended that the public media be audited by a competent committee

free from interventions from the government and capitalist groups.

There were several proposed measures. For instance, children and adults should join hands in their social advocacy. The Ministry of Culture should categorize media for different age groups of media consumers. Attempts must be made to immunize children against improper media. For example, campaigns could be launched against uncreative media. Disciplinary and punitive measures should be imposed on socially irresponsible media. Educational camps should be organized for children and young people to better understand how the media functioned. They should be encouraged to form groups to discuss the roles played by the media. Recommendations were also made for the Ministry of Education to integrate the understanding of media into its curriculums.

Although the outcome of this session was not substantial enough to form clear-cut strategy recommendations, the health assembly on this specific issue would be able to jolt the agencies concerned into taking some action about it. At any rate, the session provided a good opportunity for future collaboration between like-minded individuals and groups and further networking.

If these voices could be heard by all media about the danger and adverse effects on children and young people, more interest would surely be generated. This in itself would be good news, because one of the roles played by the media was educational. They must be geared toward intellectual growth and positive value creation for the younger generation.



"...because one of the roles played by the media was educational. They must be geared toward intellectual growth and positive value creation for the younger generation...."

6. Legal state – world order and society of wellbeing

"A legal state must not simply issue rules and regulations in its interest. The people must have a say in these rules and regulations that served their needs in the most part."

Like many other countries, Thailand is a legal state adopting the rule of law as governing principle. A legal state is the government operating under law through various organizations or political institutions for the economic, political and social good of the country. The Thai legal state concept is linked with the world's legal governance including those of such economic superpowers as the United States or the European Union. The relationship with World Trade Organization (WTO) or Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is the case in point.

Thai society has also learnt about adverse consequences if it was not on a par with the world order. It has learnt about the mistakes made in the agreements with several foreign colonizing powers in the past. Even in the age of free trade

agreements under WTO and FTA were not free of mistakes. For instance, as a result of the Thai-Chinese Free Trade Agreement, many agricultural workers, hitherto independent, became hired hands under the capitalist regime. The Thai-US Free Trade Agreement was beset with a host of compulsory licensing problems with transnational pharmaceutical businesses. Medicine has become a business commodity, not a public good designed to save people's lives. Other examples included transnational retail business and privatization of Thai state enterprises which were later sold to foreign corporations.

The legal state vis-à-vis the world order has been a point of contention all along. How could we make sure that the Thai legal state would enjoy a balance between the state power, people rights and freedom, or how could the country withstand the challenges posed by the world's new order in the age of globalization? These challenges include external interventions in and influences on the economic, social and political matters of the country.

All this represented a wave of undercurrent problems waiting to upset the balance of the country. For this reason, many attempts were made to raise the issue in various forums. Many questions were asked, including "How could the civil society sector join hands with the public and private sectors to meet the challenges of all-powerful capitalism?" or "How could the legal state principle ensure that the capitalist force in Thai society is free and fair, non-monopolistic and exploitative of Thai consumers and public?" Hence, the inclusion of the issue



“legal state – world order and society of wellbeing” in the health assembly on specific issues! Again, the health assembly was used as a forum for brainstorming, exchange of lessons and possible solutions through a diversity of perspectives of the people sector, NGOs, and public agencies. The objectives were to find a balance between the legal state and the world order and to stimulate the social sectors to have greater awareness of their roles as citizens and bring about just laws for the country.

This Special Session started with a keynote speech by **Professor Amorn Chantarasomboon** who explained the rationale of the public organizations. The important elements that could ensure an effective exercise of rights and freedom were financial institutions, courts, independent organizations, and local government organizations. To arrive at a society of wellbeing, people should not think primarily of self-interests but of collective interests. This was followed by an exchange of lessons from various networks. The speakers were **Mr. Withoon Lianchamroon**, Agricultural Network, **Ms. Saree Ongsomwang**, Health Network, **Ms. Sairoong Tongplon**, Consumer Network, **Mr. Prayong Doklamyai**, Forest Land Network, **Ms. Supatra Nacapew**, Thai Network for People Living with HIV/AIDS, **Mr. Pratin Wekawakyanon**, Slum Network of Four Regions, **Ms. Kannikar Kijtiwechakul** from FTA Watch, and **Mr. Komsan Pothong**. After more comments from the floor, a number of public policy recommendations were summarized by **Mr. Charoen Kampiraparp**. The session was moderated by **Dr. Niran Pitakwatchara**.

The essence of the panel was the concept of a legal state as a basis for the legal community taking into account of the rights, freedom and participation of the people. The population should display a degree of awareness and participate as the civic part of politics. A legal state must not simply issue rules and regulations in its interest. The people must have a say in these rules and regulations that served their needs in the most part. The state must allow the people sector to participate in the monitoring and auditing processes. It must also engage the participation of the population when it wanted to set a policy.

The following were public policy recommendations coming out of the panel: The government must most urgently review all Free Trade Agreements and refrain from signing the Japan-Thai Economic Partnership Agreement. The government should review or cancel the 11 unpatriotic laws that were against the national interests. The panel also came up with a long-term recommendation to promote and support the political reform based on the legal state principle and people participation. In addition, it proposed measures or conditions on which the legal state could contribute to a society of wellbeing. For instance, measures must be put in place to guarantee people rights and access to those rights as prescribed by law. An organization should be set up to protect and enforce the rights. Most importantly, there should be a law setting the criteria, conditions and process for the state to follow when negotiating new international agreements that would have a binding effect on the country as a whole.



In general, a state is said to consist of the state authorities and rights and freedom of the population. A legal state, therefore, is obliged to strike a balance between the two considerations. It would not be right to let the state do it alone. The people should be part of the solution!

7. Health impact assessment: Immunity for society of wellbeing

"...HIA is not a decision-making process in itself; rather, it provides a set of evidence-based suggestions or recommendations as a basis for policy decision."

The world community, including Thailand, is faced with new forms of health risks due to the change in the lifestyles and physical, biological and social environment. Formerly, most Thai people fell ill because of communicable diseases, bad sanitation, or nutrition deficiency. Today, because of the change in their lifestyles and environment people are more vulnerable to heart diseases, pollution and social malaise.

Thus, in 2000 the World Health Organization came up with two strategies for health and risk management: to reduce risk factors related to diseases and health hazards and to promote health dimensions to be included in the social policy. The strategies led to the development of **healthy public policy (HPP)**.

Healthy public policy was characterized by an explicit concern for health and equity in all areas of policy together with accountability for health impact. It proposed to use **health impact assessment (HIA)** as an important tool for achieving the healthy public policy objective.

Health impact assessment is a social learning process making use of a combination of procedures, methods, and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population. The objectives of HIA are to support the decision-making process for health promotion and protection of all groups of citizens. However, HIA is not a decision-making process in itself; rather, it provides a set of evidence-based suggestions or recommendations that reflect concern for wellbeing of people in the society as a basis for policy decision.

HIA started in Thailand only five years ago as a result of the health system reform. It was incorporated into the Research and Development Program on Healthy Public Policy and Health Impact Assessment (HPP-HIA) of the Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI). An organization was created in the Ministry of Public Health for this purpose. Several experiments were carried out and found their way in the recommendation made by the National Economic and Social Advisory Council urging the government to develop a health impact assessment system on a regular basis. In May 2005, the cabinet took note of the recommendation and assigned the Ministry of Public Health to monitor the progress



to the cabinet and the National Economic and Social Advisory Council. It was interesting to note that the draft 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan mentioned the HIA system to be developed accordingly.

In addition, other HIA movements were undertaken by other agencies, e.g. Department of Health; Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment; Foundation for Healthy Policy; and Health System Reform Office (HSRO). In the past, these organizations tended to do their work separately, with little coordination. Therefore, the health assembly on the specific issue of **“Health impact assessment, immunity for society of wellbeing”** was intended to be the starting point of coordination and integration of health impact assessment activities, especially, in the Thai context. The forum was designed to be a public hearing on **“Report of HIA System Development in Thailand for the Year 2006”** and **“Strategies for HIA System Development during the 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007-2011)”**. The report and the strategies would then be revised and submitted to the cabinet and National Economic and Social Advisory Council.

The session started with a video presentation on **“Immunity building leading to a community of wellbeing”** by **Mr. Danai Klaolaew**, followed by panel discussion on **“Lessons from immunity building leading to a community of wellbeing”**. This session consisted of four case studies by representatives of the community affected by the public policy as follows:

1. Quarrying at Mae La Noi, Mae Hong Son Province, a case in which HIA was used to bring the concession to an end, by **Mr. Yongyouth Netpong**;

2. “We Love Tha Chin River” group, a coalition of various organizations concerned about the heavily polluted river. It disseminated information and raised public awareness about the problem. The presentation was made by **Mr. Athiwat Panpracha**



3. Potash mining in the I-san Region. The case provided information on an impact of salt mining in the I-san Region, especially on the Siau River that became salinated. The presentation was made by **Ms. Bampen Chiayarak**;

4. OTOP Risk management, a case of informal workers with no access to the welfare system, by **Ms. Duangduan Khamchai**. The experience was synthesized by **Dr. Dechrat Sookkamnerd**, an academic.

The panel was moderated by **Ms. Surirat Trimanka**. The panel discussion was followed by a presentation of the report on HIA system development in Thailand by **Mr. Supakit Nantaworakan**. The session, moderated by **Dr. Thawilwadee Burikul**, ended with general discussion from the floor.

There were about 100 participants in this special session, most of whom represented the community or organization networks affected by the public policy. Some were academics from educational institutions or government agencies, including interested students. The atmosphere as a whole was friendly, with many comments from the floor. People who were directly affected were eager to speak their mind. The session was informative with many good recommendations.

The following were the recommendations from this session: Efforts should be made to generate more knowledge to enhance and empower the community and to provide more technical support mechanisms from the outside. In several instances, concerted efforts should be made to push the government to pass laws guaranteeing the rights of the people and the community. If the public policy truly followed the sufficiency economy principle, more problems would be solved. In addition, the panel recommended that the draft National Health Act guarantee the rights of the people to participate in the HIA process and that support be given to the establishment of the national HIA institute. The new institute would help support and work closely with the regional and local organizations.

In summary, the principles governing the HIA process were to allow the affected community and all social sectors to participate fully and to make it possible to create support mechanisms in the form of policy, law and network. Most importantly, the health dimension must be given the same importance as the social dimension.

"The principles governing the HIA process were to allow the affected community and all social sectors to participate fully..."

8. Health communicators, health communication innovation

"Health communicators do not operate merely on an individual basis but include those who work for all media, radio and television, as well health personnel. They work with a common objective, i.e. to see good health enjoyed by everyone including themselves, their family, neighbours and others in society."

Health communication is a method of disseminating information to the public on important health issues and maintaining the public interest in health matters at all times. It involves the use of mass media, mixed media and other technological innovations. It touches on personal as well as



collective health, including the health dimension of development. A good health communication system is characterized by two-way communication, with feedback loops between the sender and receiver, an easy access to health information and an opening for public participation in every possible way.

The concept of health communication finally led to the production of “health communicators, thanks to the initiative of Research and Development Program on Health Communication. The main objective was to equip the public with the knowledge of personal healthcare and understanding about access to health communication. It all started with the research on the status of health communicators, the needs and directions of health communication, and support mechanisms available for the health communication system and practitioners in Thai society. The special session on **“Health communicators, health communication innovation”** was designed for the “health communicator” study team to exchange their findings with other participants.

The session started with speech of **Associate Professor Dr. Gothom Areeya**, head of Research and Development Program on Health Communication, on **“Origin and future of health communicators, health communication innovation”**. The talk was followed by panel discussion by five health communicators. **Mr. Praderm Sangsen** was a Shan radio host from Mae Ai, Chiang Mai Province, whose programme on traditional healthcare in the Shan language helped local hill-tribe listeners get better access to health information. **Mr. Padungthai Uppananchaichana**, an herb

expert from Phrae Province, told how he started a plant producing herbal medicine and gave the audience useful advice on the use of herbal medicine. **Ms. Pranee Buntong** was a village health volunteer from Kanchanaburi Province who used her knowledge about health learnt from various media to talk to her neighbours at local meetings. **Mr. Paiboon Panmuang**, a health literary writer, wrote about health service in heart-rending short stories. **Mr. Taengkun Chit-issara** was a young actor and TV host who narrated stories of spiritual health through his television programmes. The panel was moderated by **Mr. Youthyong Limlertwatee** and **Ms. Pimpan Chalayonkup**.

The diversity of health communicators seen on that day helped the audience appreciate their presence and roles. Health communicators as a concept were close to people. It did not come as a surprise, therefore, that the session was very well received. After general discussion from the floor, the session ended with another talk by **Associate Professor Dr. Gothom Areeya** on “Identity of health communicators”. The essence of the speech was as follows:

“As far identity is concerned, a health communicator is someone who cares for people in the community and who is enthusiastic about telling health stories to others. Health communicators do not operate merely on an individual basis but include those who work for all media, radio and television, as well health personnel. They work with a common objective, i.e. to see good health enjoyed by everyone including themselves, their family, neighbours and others in society.”

The following were some important policy



recommendations coming out of the session: Most participants wanted to see “health communication” more widely known and accepted by the society. Attempts must be made to include the subject into educational curriculums. A network of health communicators should be created with the government support to coordinate with other social sectors, both public and private.

The advantage of having public communication via the mass media was that the information could reach the target audience and area better than any other means. Nevertheless, the limitation remained, especially when it came to access and appropriate format and health contents designed for different target groups. Thus, the presence of health communicators would enhance the effectiveness of communication, because of their cultural understanding and personal connection with the target audience and locality. Health communicators were indeed another interesting way of health communication worth supporting.

9. Translation of health assembly into participatory healthy public policy development

“Health is something that must be carefully worked out together by doctors, villagers, farmers, businesspersons, or politicians. They come and work together to ensure our happiness. Good health is happiness, and happiness is wellbeing.”

Under WHO's concept, health is an integral part of human and social development. This new dimension of health is, therefore, comprehensive and sees health as an inter-connecting issue in line with the philosophy underlying the Thai National Health Act which defines health as "the state of human being which is perfect in physical, mental, spiritual and social aspects, all of which are holistic in balance." In this way, health is no longer made and handed over to by some authority. It has something to do with rights and duties that a citizen is entitled to and exercises. The health assembly is a tool or process whereby all social sectors can participate in health work from operational to policy levels. It is not something that belongs only to the medical personnel and the Ministry of Public Health.

In the past, when the word "**assembly**" was mentioned, many tended to associate with a militant approach involving some kind of struggle, demand, or negotiation with the public sector. Quite a few even thought that the assembly movement was responsible for most of the social chaos and conflict. Such belief persists even today.

Today, the word "assembly" is used by the people, academic and even political sectors. The term "**health assembly**" is used in the National Health Act to represent a public sphere where people from all sectors could come together to form a public policy for public good.

Over the past five years, even while still waiting for the draft National Health Act to be passed, the health network, especially the Health System Reform Office (HSRO), had



advocated experimenting with **“the health assembly”** format whether it was the health assembly in a locality or on a specific issue. They also collected lessons and experiences from each health assembly organized. The lessons and experiences were then synthesized into a body of knowledge, the process designed to develop the health assembly to be as suitable to the Thai context as possible.

The lessons from 2001 to the present reflected the roles of the health assembly in Thai societies in four ways:

1. It was a public sphere for expressing opinions and demands in a neutral and friendly manner.
2. It was a process of learning about self and society.
3. It was a network connecting people, organizations and agencies to come to work together in an interdependent way.
4. It was a mechanism for healthy public policy with a participatory approach. To many social sectors, such a mechanism would play a crucial role at the initial stage, in the participatory process and in the overall policy integration.

The Special Assembly on **“Translation of health assembly into participatory healthy public policy development”** was all about expectations, possibilities and directions of participatory healthy public policy. It highlighted the findings of the studies synthesizing the lessons and experiences in the form of presentation entitled **“Draft policy recommendations in the development of the health assembly process”** by **Dr. Wiput Phoolcharoen**, with **Mr. Sompan Techa-athik** as moderator.

The presentation was followed by general discussion from the floor. The participants were from provincial health community groups and networks, academics from education institutions, public agencies and the interested public. The atmosphere of the panel was very participatory despite a small audience. The participants had prior experience in organizing or participating in health assemblies. Their input was substantial and to the point, likely to have a positive impact on the proposed draft recommendations.

The session ended with **Dr. Wiput Phoolcharoen** and **Mr. Sompan Techa-athik** summarizing “**Policy recommendations for the development of the health assembly**”, the essence of which was as follows:

1. With regard to its philosophy and aim, the health assembly was an advocacy mechanism for public policy under the ideology “from public policy to social and economic sufficiency”. The underlying concept was that the public policy must not lead to exploitation or inequality of the affected people. It must offer options for people to choose with reasons, reflecting well-thought-out measures to prevent or mitigate any adverse effects caused by the policy.

2. The guidelines for organizing a health assembly were to support the organization of local health assemblies on a regular basis, to develop potentials of the networks of the assembly partner organizations in their analysis, monitoring and raising of issues relevant to the public policy, and to create mechanism between the public, public and international sectors.



3. Attempts should be made to acquaint the social sectors with necessary knowledge and skills in public policy formulation, by encouraging them to start public policy in various forms, including education, training, and exchange of learning about various policy aspects at the local, national and international levels.

4. An agency should be set up to support health assembly activities, including setting appropriate forms of coordinating mechanisms to support local activities and other policy issues without being tied to the public administrative system.

5. The health assembly should be used to create movements on health rights of the population to be included in the new Constitution.

In the past, to most people, “**public policy**” was a proclamation by the State. Only the State had the full authority to set policy. However, the current public life in Thai society was far too complex to let the government handle the administration of the country alone. The development of the health assembly as a mechanism for healthy public policy was in itself a testimony to the power of participation from all social sectors. It would also pave the way for raising civic awareness of the people sector and for a full-fledged participatory democracy.

In effect, the support for local health assemblies enabled their activities to continue unimpeded. The health assembly process must be driven on a regular basis. It was

not a fad or a flash in the pan.

“The health assembly is a meeting of health-concerned people from all walks of life. Health is something that must be carefully worked out together by doctors, villagers, farmers, businesspersons, or politicians. They come and work together to ensure our happiness. Good health is happiness, and happiness is wellbeing.”

The above quotation was taken from the speech given **Dr. Banlu Siripanich**, Chairman of the National Health Assembly Organizing Committee the year before. Its short and precise message clearly reflected the essence of the health assembly. There were 14 issues covered by the health assemblies on specific issues: five on sufficiency economy leading to society of wellbeing and nine on general topics. It could be said that the 14 special sessions all dealt in some way with the essence of the health assembly.

In other words, the health assembly would lead to a process in which all social partners, including the public, people and academic sectors, could exchange their learning based on intellectual capitals of their expertise. The expertise could be academic/technical knowledge, skills and real-life experience. It would be shared in an atmosphere of solidarity and with a common desire to see Thai society truly beautiful and peaceful.

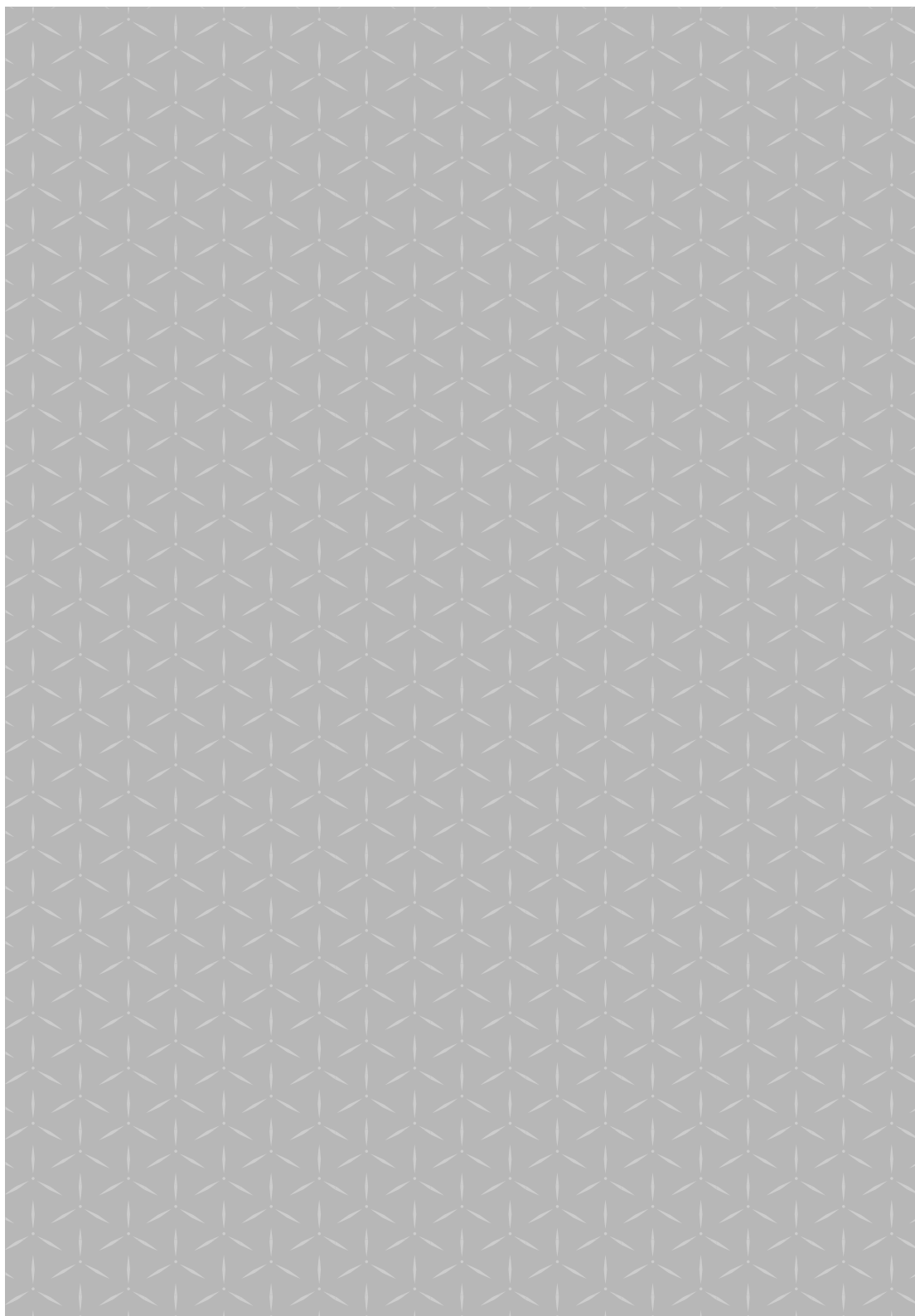
Although at some stage of the discussion there were disputes between the speakers, panelists and members of the audience, they were not really serious. People's ideas could differ. To look at the situation more positively, a clash of ideas



should trigger more exchanges as well as more critical reviews and perspectives between each other. This should broaden the scope of the health assembly, shouldn't it?

Although the health assemblies on specific issues could be divided in two broad separate categories (i.e. economic sufficiency and general topics), all the special sessions were inter-connected. The expected outcome of this kind of participation was the same, i.e. a society of wellbeing. If the world was truly governed by the rule of causation and connectedness, one small flower could change the world. The health assembly on any specific issue would be **likewise**.

"A conflict of ideas should trigger more exchanges as well as more critical reviews and perspectives between each other..."



4. The Ground Track

*Illustrating diverse activities that took place on
the assembly ground, reflecting the sufficiency
economy principle in its concrete forms at
the personal, family, community and
organization levels*

"The ground was a designated area for individuals as well as urban and rural communities, including public and private agencies, to display their cases, exhibits and other examples of how the sufficiency economy principle was applied for wellbeing in their contexts."

4. The Ground Track: The Assembly Ground

One of the main objectives of the advocacy of **“Sufficiency Economy Leading to a Society of Wellbeing”** was to have interested people from all social sectors come together to think and exchange their ideas and knowledge about the lessons on **“How to create a society of wellbeing”**. For this reason, the assembly ground was incorporated into the Sixth National Health Assembly. The ground was a designated area for individuals as well as urban and rural communities, including public and private agencies, to display their cases, exhibits and other examples of how the sufficiency economy principle was applied for **wellbeing** in their contexts.

The health assembly ground covering an area of more than 7,500 square metres displayed more than 80 cases of sufficiency lessons at various levels.

The health assembly ground consisted of two parts. The first part covering 1,500 square metres was designed for the hosting organizations to display their innovations and



case studies, while the second area of 6,000 square metres showed the exhibits and innovations from other individuals and organizations including, local government organizations, education institutes, public agencies, religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, business organizations and community enterprises. The exhibits in the latter area were selected by Health System Reform Office.

- **Stories on the assembly ground**

At the entrance of the assembly ground there was a portrait of His Majesty engraved on a big mirror with a quotation from His Majesty's speech on sufficiency. The message served as a reminder to people of their **path to a life of sufficiency**. The experiences awaiting them were

diverse, e.g. learning booths, demonstrations, training, panel discussion, performance on the central stage in the plenary, movies, art corners, resting areas for reflection, talks and exchange of opinions.

The atmosphere of the path to a life of sufficiency was heightened by a piece of white cloth, with beautiful flowers hanging here and there, draping over the booths. It was symbolic of the connection between different strands of sufficiency.

The following stories were part of the experience found on the path of sufficiency on the assembly ground!

The first stop was the booth of “**the Institute for Sufficiency Economy Research and Promotion**”, a demonstration of His Majesty’s philosophy in action. Here, organic farming was introduced as a natural agricultural practice to revitalize resources and conserve the soil.



A Demonstration of His Majesty's Philosophy: "Organic Farming"

"...Now there are about 30 organizations in the network. Together they will organize events to introduce organic or natural agriculture. The farmers will be taught how to support themselves, not to exploit others..."

Unique in its positioning, this booth drew the attention of many visitors by giving away bags of organic rice seeds. Many people crowded to receive the gifts and learn something about organic farming at the same time.

Ms. Sirikan Sae Tae, the coordinator at the booth, gave an explanation about the innovation as follows:

"...Before the establishment of the Institute, a number of organizations had already worked together as the Federation of Organic Agriculture of Thailand. The networks were expanded and technology was made known to other communities and groups. Now there are about 30 organizations in the network. Together they will organize events to introduce organic or natural agriculture. The farmers will be taught how to support themselves, not to exploit others, and reduce chemical costs. The Institute serves a focal point for information, transfer of knowledge of sufficiency economy, expansion of networks and for public education on sufficiency lifestyles. It also promotes coalition and expansion of self-reliant community networks in every region of the country. It works and cooperates with various agencies on sufficiency projects for public good..."

A noteworthy point at this booth was the network formation of groups of like minds who did similar activities.



Next was the military booth, but there was no tank or weaponry on display. The booth was staffed by soldiers from **Infantry Battalion 601**, Amphoe Su-ngai Padi, Narathiwat Province.

"...sapping rubber trees, which used to fetch income for the villagers, was not always possible, and they earned less income. The military, therefore, decided to use the sufficiency principle with the community to solve poverty problems and foster community relations..."

The booth showed how the soldiers applied the sufficiency principle to the villagers in the area under their responsibility. These villagers were taught to use EM as bio-agents in their farming to generate more income. The booth attracted many visitors, because it not only had a simulation project on display but also gave away liquid EM samples.

Sergeant Nilthep Polsak, booth coordinator, provided the detail of the project:

"...This is an example of integrated agriculture used in the army. Before the project was started here, Infantry Regiment 6, Fort Sappasitprasong, Amphoe Warin Chamrap, Ubon Ratchathani Province had applied the EM technique to farming and kitchen gardening. Later **Major General Pichet Wisaichorn**, Fourth Area Army Deputy Commander (formerly stationed in Ubon Ratchathani Province), applied the idea to promoting community relations with the villagers

in Amphoe Su-ngai Padi, Narathiwat Province. About 300 villagers in the network were given training on the use of bio-agents in farming. Many communities have earned a sufficient income. At present, the network covers about 1,000 members. The EM application was intended to reduce farming costs and promote catfish farming in small ponds so that protein food would be available throughout the year. The fort decided to use EM as a development tool to get access to the people. Our work in the Su-ngai Padi area led the army to discover that a lot of sago crops were left to waste. The army, therefore, mixed sago paste with the rice bran to feed catfish. Su-ngai Padi was considered an unrest area; sapping rubber trees, which used to fetch income for the villagers, was not always possible, and they earned less income. The military, therefore, decided to use the sufficiency principle with the community to solve poverty problems and foster community relations. In addition, the army cooperated with the Siam Hand Co. Ltd., the manufacturer of Taeng Mo Brand tee-shirts, who supported the housewife group of Ban Bo Ko, Amphoe Su-ngai Padi, in making tee-shirts for the 60th Anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne. Not only does this mean more income for the housewives, but it also has brought them pride, unity, and happiness..."

Despite the continued unrest, the villagers of Ban Bo Ko were much happier, because the authorities took note of their plight, offering opportunity and care in a concrete manner. The local people were given a role to play in the development of the community and solidarity building.



Beside this booth, there was another military booth of **Infantry Regiment 6, Fort Sappasitprasong**, Amphoe Warin Chamrap, Ubon Ratchathani Province. Inside the booth army officers were ready to explain and give advice on the New Theory and Sufficiency Economy in detail. Such enthusiasm was most commendable.

At the booth of **Chamthewi Municipal School**, Amphoe Mueang, Lamphun Province, there was a demonstration how to breed crickets on the paper egg tray. It was incredible to see hundreds of crickets jumping up and down in a fish tank. We were told that the crickets were bred for fish feeds. It drew considerable attention.

"... It also allows students to study and become more self-reliant in the current social and economic situations with greater confidence and happiness...."

School Director **Kannikar Mabunmee** gave further explanation:

"...The school's innovation is to undertake activities in light of the sufficiency principle in the context of an urban school under the local government organization. The school has incorporated into its lesson plan a life of sufficiency in the sustainable school development project at the local level, Project No. 21. This project is concerned with environmental

conservation through the cooperation between the Lamphun Municipality and the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion. It adopts an integrated farming approach together with natural ecosystem in the school management. It also allows students to study and become more self-reliant in the current social and economic situations with greater confidence and happiness. They would not cause any social problems. They learn how to think and put to good use something close to them. They can even become vocational role models for others including the community who want to see how the sufficiency economy could contribute to the sustainable school development. The project consists of 17 parks for study. These parks are learning centres. Even before the project, the school has started such activities as fish farming, layer breeding, and organic vegetable growing. Our learning parks include a garbage separation station, garbage bank, beautiful fish breeding, anemone fish breeding, beautiful bantam breeding, solar cell station, biogas made from animal dung, Lamphun ox breeding station, organic vegetable growing, Thai vegetable gardening, Thai herb gardening, organic disposal by worms, flies, and solar energy, smokeless incinerator, steel washing treatment system for agricultural use, agricultural irrigation system, agricultural oxygenating system, sustainable compost production, EM bio-agent production, integrated paddy field demonstration project, and a comparative study between fish breeding in the pond and in the cage net. For these study parks, the school has trained a number of students who could act as guides to explain the operations to the



visitors. In addition, the school has a paddy field farmed by interested school parents and nearby communities under the project “**planting rice on Mother’s Day, Harvesting on Father’s Day**”. The activity is organized on National Mother’s Day on which Lamphun paddy seeds are planted and due for harvesting on Father’s Day. The school has its own mill. Students and teachers have meals together every Friday.”

Such was the school application of the sufficiency economy principle in the context of the local government organization. The students were given a first-hand experience, while engaging the community in the relationship building and environmental conservation at the same time. It was a praiseworthy effort. Most of the visitors to this booth were teachers and educational personnel. The lesson plan was well integrated with activities. This booth might be catered for a specific target group, but it was an innovation that could be applied to other contexts.

Another booth that drew as much attention showed a series of local regional entertainments and performances. There were, for instance, the **Dikehulu** musical play by members of the three Southern provinces, **Lamtat** local singing entertainment, and **live community radio broadcast** to the network areas in Nonthaburi and Kanchanaburi Provinces.

"The public sector must support the population to be more self-reliant by giving them more opportunity to think for themselves and do things by themselves. The sufficiency principle, then, will be integrated in every sector, especially at the level of local government organizations...."

This booth was "Health Communicators, Health Communication Innovation". The exciting performances of the booth were enhanced by the oratorical skills of **Ms.Aree Thitichok-anant** who stopped the visitors in their tracks.

Ms.Aree, a health communicator from Kanchanaburi Province, usually was a radio host who also worked for social cause. On the subject of sufficiency economy, she said:

"...I am a social person, so I like to work for society. I wear several hats as a village volunteer, president of the cultural council, president of the women's group, and village defence volunteer. Recently, I received an Outstanding Village Volunteer award for social development. When we have an opportunity to play many roles, we must do the best we can. We shouldn't be too concerned about whether we are good enough. Sufficiency economy is something very close to us. Every health communicator has been using the philosophy in community and national development. The public sector must support the population to be more self-reliant by giving them more opportunity to think for themselves and do things by themselves. The sufficiency principle, then, will be integrated in every sector, especially at the level of local



government organizations. Sufficiency will lead to more social interdependence and participation...”

At this booth, the visitors would meet **Dr. Gothom Areeya**, a member of National Legislative Assembly, who gave his view on Thai health as follows:

“...Despite having a good health system, Thailand sees many people suffer from diabetes, high blood pressure, heart problems, cancer and obesity. This is because people attach more importance to materialism and consumerism. The media do not often talk about health, since they too are under the influence of consumerism. Health promotion is, therefore, unilateral, i.e. doctor-oriented. The people who hold power in the Ministry of Public Health are doctors. In fact, doctors repair health; they do not promote health. Health-repairing people have the bigger say and tend to take things for granted. There are more specialist repairers than necessary. Sometimes, their repair work is not so effective. The specialists tend to diagnose the patients' symptoms along the line they were trained for. At present, the government has been acting rather strange. It rewards people who do not take good care of themselves – people who suffer from the disease that can be prevented, reckless drivers, promiscuous people, drunkards, people with bad eating habits, and people who do not take physical exercises. They are given free treatments. On the other hand, those who take good care of themselves, eat carefully, have their annual health check-up, and exercise regularly are left out. The State must basically promote personal healthcare and sufficiency, because its policy can have

an impact on how people think and behave...”

Such was the work of health communicators who volunteered to work for the people. However, their number was still small, because their media colleagues were not interested. They were more into money-making business. So, health communicators deserved a big moral support, for sufficiency media organizations were hard to come by.

The above was some of the description on the public and private organizations that had applied the sufficiency economy principle to their work, resulting in considerable benefits to themselves and society as a whole. It could not be denied that the first group of people who adopted the sufficiency principle was the “grassroots”, including farmers and people who lived from hand to mouth. This was so possibly because their lifestyles were close to reality. Their ups and downs were common everyday occurrences. They accepted their lots and did not want to strive for more problems. If only they had everything sufficient, they would be content. So they readily embraced the philosophy without much ado. To start a community network that shared basic lifestyles was an easier feat, compared to a more complex organization with members from different backgrounds. The former could produce better and faster results. Hence, the national assembly this year saw a large number of innovations based on the coalition of smaller communities. The following showed a glimpse of their work.



The “**Mae Ban Mittraphap Phattana**” housewife group from Nong Bon Sub-district, Prawet District, Bangkok, showed how an urban community could successfully lead a life of sufficiency. **Na Somboon Miharon**, head of the group, explained as a panelist on “**How can Thai people adopt the sufficiency economy principle in a concrete manner?**” as follows:

“...The formation of housewives into a group was due to their being in debt and attempt to help one another. Most of the debts were from informal borrowing from a group of motorcycle taxi operators. As a result, the community members had to work very hard to pay the interests. Na Somboon persuaded her friends to form a savings group from which community members could borrow money to pay off the informal debts and to invest in some small business in the community. The only condition was that they must become members and make a monthly saving of 100 baht. The group planned to teach savings habits to children and youth in the village and came up with a piggy bank for them to save one baht a day. The money was deposited with the savings cooperative. It also wanted to teach them how to generate an income and save the environment. They were taught how separate the community garbage in exchange for eggs. The group formation under the Muslim context helped solve many community problems, including informal debt burdens, drugs, and stealing. Training in the Muslim tradition was designed to keep young people from drugs. Essay and drawing contests were held to combat against drugs.

The community has done this together and become more empowered. Many things are getting better. Besides, several organizations, public, private or non-governmental, have come together to develop the community and combat against drugs, poverty and AIDS. Attempts have also been made to expand the network to other communities..."

Evidently, the **"Mae Ban Mittraphap Phattana"** housewife group was a remarkable example of how to get together to solve the community problems through participation and joint activities, drawing on the strength of religion. This was indeed a new approach to sufficiency economy through an Islamic lifestyle.

The **"Lat Bua Luang" Community** from Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province was another innovation of how people got together to solve rural community problems under sufficiency economy.

"...they launched a marketing campaign called 'How to have a life of sufficiency?' In this regard, they turned to natural agriculture, growing fruits and vegetables enough to earn a living and not for material gains...."

Pi⁴ Samruoi, the booth coordinator, explained the community work as follows:

⁴ An endearing term used to call someone older



“...Formerly the Lat Bua Luang Community was an arable area, with 60% growing paddies and 40% fruit crops. After the land reform in 1975, the people were led to believe that paddies would make them richer. They borrowed more money for further investment and incurred debts that could not be paid off. Many were forced to sell their land. Anxious to sell their crops, they were unfairly exploited by middlemen. So they got together under the slogan **“Think together, work separately, learn and summarize the lesson learnt”**. Desiring community welfare, they launched a marketing campaign called **“How to have a life of sufficiency?”** In this regard, they turned to natural agriculture, growing fruits and vegetables enough to earn a living and not for material gains. With regard to marketing, they sent young people to the market to learn how to sell without the middlemen. The community became more organized and empowered. With more systematic agriculture in place, they were able to develop the marketing system and create more markets in the community based on ethical management. They have learnt how to deal with the market demands, calculate production potentials, make market intervention, plan the amount of crop to grow, allocate land for practical use, and strengthen community management...”

This interesting success story of innovation was based on the ability of the community to solve their problems through sufficiency economy and existing capitals. The result was happiness to every family and the community.



At the booth of the model community of **“Mu Ban Nong Machap”** village of Amphoe Sansai, Chiang Mai Province, villagers and students stood at the gate made of banana trunks welcoming the visitors with refreshing herbal drinks of lemon grass, roselle, or bael fruit. It was a charming sight of hospitality. It was difficult for any passerby not to stop and visit the booth.

A member of the community explained its history as follows:

“..The Nong Machap Community had long had environmental problems. The villagers were addicted to gambling and heavily in debt. The social foundation was shaky. Several attempts had been made to organize discussion, talks, community forums and public forums as the problems were getting more serious. Some community members who

had studied community problems first made a presentation, supported by academics from Chiangmai University and Maecho University who came to collect preliminary data. This eventually led to the community master plan, the development of the village into an integrated farming community, and its becoming a model community for strong and sustainable health. Now there are model wat (Buddhist monasteries) for health promotion, schools for health promotion, and outstanding gold-level schools for wellbeing. It has an outstanding development level at national level, a community-based data system in place, and a welfare fund for community members. It has produced 35 community researchers. There are also food processing groups, herb-growing groups, weaving groups, fishery groups, basketwork groups, and turning-garbage-into-gold groups that generate income by selling the garbage. The community grows chemical-free rice for consumption. Perhaps, their greatest pride is to see their elders teach the Lanna language to young children in the village..."

The information and examples at the booth were enough to see how the Nong Machap Community operated in line with the sufficiency economy principle. This was the case in which people and community institutes were able to act as one in solving their problems. In particular, the value placed on the role of the elderly was noteworthy. The elderly were not just people left behind from another age and uncared for by the community. Thus, the generation gap was commendably bridged.

There were still many other booths worth mentioning.

The “**Suan Phak Bon Dat Fa**” (Vegetable Growing on the Flat Roof of the House) Group of the Lak-4 District Office, BMA, showed how there was no difference in growing vegetables on the flat roof of the house and on the ground. It was an answer to the challenge “vegetables could be grown not just on land”. The officials at the booth were able to give advice on bio-liquid fertilizers, growing and maintenance of different kinds of vegetables.

The “**Chumchon Bunniyom**” booth displayed a great variety of homemade inhalants, lozenges, shampoos, and dishwashing liquid for personal use or for income generation. At this booth there were many resource persons taking turns to demonstrate the manufacturing of inhalants, lozenges, shampoos and others several times. There were also several how-to books provided for those interested in crop and vegetable gardening and processing, as well as producing household items.

The “**Bang Saeng Thian Learning Centre**”, Nan Province, demonstrated how to produce “**Nam Som Kwan Mai**” smoked bio-liquid made from such biological solid wastes as wood, fruit and vegetables. These wastes were burnt and turned into something more than fuel, for the smoke could be distilled into liquid used to spray against pests or fertilize crops. This was indeed another innovation based on local wisdom. Apparently useless objects could turn into something wonderful and practical.



The **“Na Haeo Community”** booth offered economical products. Macadamia nuts from the hills of Loei Province were sold in small packages at an economical price compared to those sold in regular department stores. These nuts were grown on the Thai soil, thanks to the temperate fruit plantation promotion project and brought considerable income to the villagers.

The **“Chumphon Cabana Resort”** booth was set up like a small café, attracting many coffee lovers. Another attractive booth was **“Tha Yang Agricultural Cooperative”** from Phetchaburi Province. It was stacked with “Kluoy Hom Thong” golden bananas. After trying the free samples, visitors could buy them at a fantastically cheap price, 40 baht per kilo. The big fruit were good for health, as they were chemically free.

The booth **“Produce and Processed Products Fresh from the Farm”** belonged to **Mr. Vilit Techapaibul**, former businessman from a famous family who became a rice farmer. Not only did he grow rice for home consumption, but he also shared it with others. He used local natural rice seedlings in his chemical-free plots.

The **“Plan Choi Community Learning Centre”** booth, Ubon Ratchathani Province, was all about “dynamic meditation” led by **Mr. Bancha Tangwongchai**. The meditation master had a restaurant and compute business in USA before realizing that all the wealth he accumulated did not make a

happy family. He finally found the answer in meditation, left the big business behind, and returned to Thailand. He set up Plan Choi Community Learning Centre, Ubon Ratchathani Province, where people could learn how to live with nature harmoniously and earn their livelihoods without having to leave the community.

Mr. Jone Jandai from Chiang Mai Province, known for her earthen buildings, set up a booth where she demonstrated how to mix earth for house building. It was something to marvel at. The building was cheap and cool. It did not come as a surprise that the booth attracted many inquiries about a cool sufficiency-based house. The material was simple and strong.

- **The front line...the courageous: People on the assembly ground**

The cases narrated above were examples of innovation in line with the sufficiency economy principle at the group and organization levels. It was evident that sufficiency economy did not mean bare necessities. If people were determined to embrace **sufficiency**, they would surely be free from misery and on their way to happiness.

This section covered three case studies representing the **front line** of people **courageous** enough to take on sufficiency as their way of life toward wellbeing as they saw fit.



I. Metta Sutsawat: About-turn...and paint her life away.

"...We are bent on creating our brands abroad. With better production, we expect to see our brands better received and more visible a good trade fairs. If we have enough money, we want to do more marketing and more advertisement abroad. One day when people talk about "Propaganda", they will know it is a Thai-designed product, in the same way as Singha beer is Thai beer..."



Metta Sutsawat

This is part of the interview with Metta Sutsawat, a former managing director of Propaganda, a product design company well known among users of quality and elegant products. The interview with the Open magazine in September

2002 was about a leading businesswoman in the export sector who attached great importance to profit.

The businesswoman admitted that she had been **entrapped** by two different sorts of **desire**: one to prove herself worthy of the challenge posed by the task to bethe best in class, and the other to enjoy a life of luxury and overarching ambition.

The following was an excerpt from her book “**Suk.. Chon Tong Rabai**” (So Happy that It Must Be Told):

“In the past I was carried away with social currents. I thought I was someone very important. Wherever I went, I would be noticed. People would look at me from head to toe to see what I was wearing. So, I had to make a show of my vanity. Nothing ever sufficed...”

It was a wonder how far could one go astray.

Who would believe that less than two years after the interview the same lady turned the tide. Her life changed from being a wild, capable and ambitious designer with a lucrative career and full of self to living a simple life of sufficiency. She renounced luxury and materialism. She turned away from eating meat and took up painting. Each day was devoted to doing something simple that she really enjoyed – painting.

What miracle brought about this extreme lifestyle change?

Those who used to work with her as well as other interested parties would like to know the answer to this question.

After being bombarded by so many enquiries, Metta



finally explained her decision through newspapers, panels, and even TV programmes. It still left people wondering how long she could sustain the new lifestyle.

About **her about-turn**, she said that she had known all along that a business life did not suit her. Despite all the glittering paraphernalia, she was not really happy. It was as though she tried to pretend to be happy. Something happened to her one day when she went to Hua Hin without a camera. So, she painted instead. This gave her a new taste of happiness that she did not receive from wealth, elegant clothes and high society. She was able to concentrate more and became a calmer person. This was what happened when she started to **paint**. Who would believe this?

She was asked the same question by different people, but her answer was the same. She had found happiness.

"Painting is the source of my happiness. Others may have difference sources for their happiness. It is wonderful to find it at the right time. I have known happiness here and now. I needn't wait till the end of my life to find it. It does not depend on money. I wasted more than half of my life seeking it from the outside when all the time it is within me..."

Today **Metta** lived a simple life in a small room of a condominium as a vegetarian. She was no longer a shareholder of the company she had contributed to. She no longer owned a Volkswagen New Beetle. All former material belongings had been turned into assets that would enable her to live for the rest of her life. She found that she did not need much. One did not need much money. A small capital would suffice.

So she wrote in her book "Suk..Chon Tong Rabai" (So Happy that It Must Be Told).

"How expensive do you need your clothes to be? How much can you eat? You need enough to keep warm, enough to be satisfied. You don't breathe in more air than others, and the air is free. Now, everything all seemed sufficient, because the heart says so."

What happened to Metta Suksawat's life was indeed like a miracle. A woman who spent nearly half of her life pursuing worldly matters suddenly changed her life completely, simply because she was in touch with something extraordinary while painting. It was a wakeup call that could happen to anyone if he/she was courageous enough to acknowledge and follow it!

"...Congratulations for those who have found happiness. For those who are still seeking, good luck. When you start looking, it will not be hard to find..." **Thus was the message from the same woman.**

2. Klin Din Musical Band: Song of life from young children

"...a sustainable solution to environmental problems must start by inviting social participation and introducing the concept to children when they were still young...."



In one of the Aesop's fables about **the lion and the mouse**, the more powerful animal was amazed by the power of the smaller mouse. Similarly, adults at the national health assembly were impressed by the ability of the children's musical band "**Klin Din**".



Played with musical instruments made from local materials, the music imitated the sounds of nature. Dry grass pods were shaken to give the sound of the rain. Nails were screeched along the top of the carbonated drink bottle to give cricket sounds. Green peas falling into a bamboo cylinder represented the flow of water. Wood rubbing against the top of the bamboo cylinder gave the frog sound, and so on. The listener's unaccustomed ears were pricked by the children's talent. The band was given a standing ovation.

Klin Din was a product of **the Rabbit in the Moon Foundation**, a non-governmental organization consisting

of a group of individuals willing to dedicate themselves to doing good deeds for society. The organization focused on activities to inculcate environmental awareness in young people, believing that a sustainable solution to environmental problems must start by inviting social participation and introducing the concept to children when they were still young. Therefore, the Foundation's activities were mainly targeted on children as in the following projects.

The kids project:

The project came into being as a result of children's quest for an opportunity to do something good by their own initiative. Children in every part of the country were invited to take care of the environment by turning off a light in their houses at 10.00 pm. This gesture not only demonstrated the power of children's participation in promoting social and global wellbeing but also encouraged them to show their abilities in the **children's forum**.

Project to study nature through artistic means:

This project was designed to create spiritual happiness, combining the ecosystem with imagination and direct experience from all the six senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and most importantly feeling). When children appreciated the ecosystem how the living organisms depended on one another harmoniously and the wonders of nature through all the senses, they would feel a sense of aestheticism in life and have a constructive imagination on the inter-



dependence of social beings and environment. The project aimed at preparing the children to be responsible and caring adults in the future.

“Children make media, media make children” project:

This project created a forum for children to express their ideas, dreams and other feelings toward everything around them. It was based on the assumption that given the media space and opportunity people could tell stories with greater confidence and learn to love nature and the community at a more personal level. When children were given an opportunity to think and write, they would acquire greater communication skills. They would also learn to give **value** to something most **ordinary**, thereby seeing their own worth, just as the Klin Din members had demonstrated.

That was the root cause that made it possible for **Klin Din** to play music in front of the audience about the happiness that pervaded nature and environment.

That was the root case that allowed confused children like **Su Chaeng** or **Chaeng** for short to have self-worth and move onto the right path. Chaeng, the head of the band, had the following story to tell.

“...Before I joined the band, I was a problem child. I caused trouble nearly every day. I had a row with my mother and ran away to the Rabbit in the Moon Foundation because I had some friends there. I saw them play music and I liked it. So, I started practising playing the guitar. Later we formed

a band, using any available equipment provided by nature together with other Western musical instruments. Ours is really an integrated musical band consisting of members from 6 to 15 years of age. Besides playing music, I am a volunteer teacher at Sin Rae Sayam School, teaching young children how to study nature through artistic means. When occasions arise, for example, at the monk initiation ceremony, wedding party or any other big event like today, I will take them to show off their talents. This is my happiness. In addition to being a useful member of the society, I can make people happy. I'd like to make people smile and laugh..."

Thawee Putthong or Chin, another band member with similar life problems, explained the composition of **Klin Din**:

"...When I started playing music with Pi Chaeng, I never thought I could come this far. I thought I just played for the fun of it. However, when I really came to perform on stage, I was filled with pride and began to dream it could be my career. I felt all weak-kneed and nervous at the beginning, but after a while I got used to it. One of the benefits of joining the band is that I have become more expressive and confident. I used to be so shy and self-conscious..."

From seemingly insignificant persons, these young people had evolved into beautiful and meaningful productive members of society.

For a **small** musical band, they had done **a lot** for themselves and for other people who became more aware of the environment. Their music carried the message.



One of the charms was that their musical instruments were made from natural material.

At present, the Klin Din band was more sophisticated. The musical instruments were more varied. It went on to show how these small people with big hearts could do to convince others of the value and beauty of nature and how nature was the source of happiness. When they appreciated nature, they would never harm it.

3. Sathya Sai: A new education institute...for human values

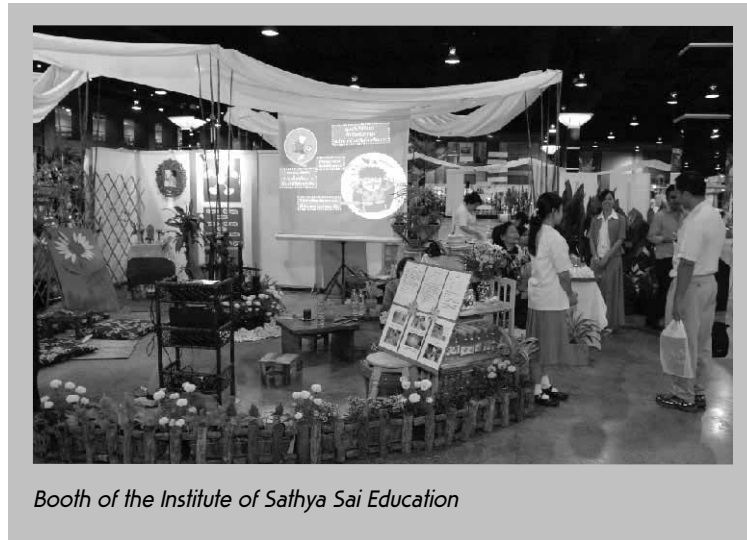
"...There was no tuition fee, as according to the school's philosophy education should be free. The parents paid only for food, clothing and other personal items..."

People flocked to hear Sri Sathya Sai Baba, a famous Indian holy person, speak. The following was part of the lecture delivered in July in 1983:

"...Could we devote the rest of our lives to the education of children? If we take care of education, there is nothing better in life. Spending time educating children is the best ever thing to do. Our life will be full in every possible way..."

Dr. Art-Ong Jumsai na Ayudhya, another good genius of Thai society, was there, impressed by the guru.

He became his disciple and dedicated his life to producing educated moral citizens!



That was how the **Institute of Sathya Sai Education** came into being at Amphoe Chai Badan, Lop Buri Province, a small school that offered alternative education in a peaceful environment. It was designed to produce citizens with human and moral values rather than ambitious small-minded individuals.

The Institute of Sathya Sai Education, under the patronage of the Sathya Sai Foundation, was founded in 1992 with the programmes approved by the Ministry of Education. Operating as a boarding school, it was managed by Dr. Art-Ong Jumsai na Ayudhya. Unlike any other ordinary school, it was focused on good character building and academic

excellence under the motto **“to establish good character.”** Intended to serve as a model school on human values where learners would be developed into excellent citizens, the school was based on five crucial values: **compassion, honesty, right conduct, peace, and not taking advantage of others.** The goals were moral excellence, ethical conduct, social awareness and responsibility, respect for religious beliefs, cultures and traditions of self and others, as well as peaceful and happy life in society. Every subject incorporated moral lessons or activities through hands-on experience. English was taught by native teachers for communicative purposes. The students learnt about foreign cultures in order to live happily with others. The school had seven aims as follows:

1. To establish good character in the learners, school administrators, teachers and parents as role models of well-integrated human beings living in harmony with society.
2. To be a centre for social learning and, more importantly, for producing good students.
3. To provide learning and training environments in light of the learners' potentials.
4. To promote academic excellence, sports and games, and other skills according to the students' interests.
5. To encourage students to learn from a variety of sources, both locally and internationally, in line with lifelong learning philosophy.
6. To provide the school with security and sustainability based on His Majesty's sufficiency economy principle.
7. To serve society without wanting anything in return.

As a boarding school, it provided a dormitory equipped with facilities suitable for the students. Vegetarian food was served to promote good health and peace of mind. There was no tuition fee, as according to the school's philosophy education should be free. The parents paid only for food, clothing and other personal items. Such expenses were usually small. The school put an emphasis on a life of sufficiency and self-reliance. The students were encouraged to grow rice and vegetables as well as keeping chickens and fish for sustenance. As boarders, the students could concentrate more. They would practise meditation and other Dhamma activities. TV entertainments were available although the school would encourage watching useful programmes. The teachers would explain why some programmes were not suitable for the students and suggest other viewing choices.

The students did not have to carry money with them, because there were no shops. In the vast area of more than 300 rai next to the Pa Sak River one could see only woods, streams and necessary facilities. Nothing else was allowed.

Offering a unique and different type of education, the school combined academic curriculums with moral living based on **“Sila (moral conduct), Samathi (meditation), and Panya (wisdom)”**. Perhaps, that was why all the students from the pre-primary to upper secondary education levels were **good-mannered, spiritually inclined, mindful of life, composed and calm.**

Pookie, Mananya Tor-udomsap, a bright grade-9 schoolgirl, gave her view on the school with a rather unique name:



"I think I am one of the luckiest persons to go to the school of my dream. I am very happy. I will not let my teachers down. Sometimes I miss home, but there are so many things to do at school that there is hardly any free time left. For instance, we make washing liquid, liquid detergent and herbal soaps. We extract fragrant oil from herbs. We cultivate, plough and fertilize the soil. The rice we harvest will be sent to a small mill. This is great fun. We also produce bio-diesel for the school trucks."

Pookie explained the rice farming process with such happiness that it was easy to see how the students had absorbed the values taught by the school.

That was the view of a student. What about the teacher?

Teacher Anusara Thongpuak, a graduate from Thepsatri Rajabhat University, Lop Buri Province and master's degree holder from Naresuan University, said:

"...I am always eager to learn, see and experience life. What I have experienced is a beautiful state of Dhamma..."

Her desire to teach there was due to her faith in Dr. Art-Ong Jumsai. After the interview, she attended a three-day training programme to test whether her ideal would match with the school's philosophy of producing good rather than capable people. The teacher was not there to exploit the students. For this reason, **all the teachers including Teacher Anusara** were devoted to their work and students. They were willing to give up their personal time for the school cause. Their beliefs were echoed by **Teacher Loraine**, the School

Deputy Manager for External Affairs:

“The school and teachers believe in the children’s potentials. Each person has a different gift. It is the duty of the teacher to nurture and develop them to the full. Whatever they want to learn will be provided.”

For fourteen years Sathaya Sai school initiated by **Dr. Art-Ong Jumsai na Ayudhya** had served as a new type of educational mill based on the principles of sacrifice, morality, and life of sufficiency.

Today, the school was still going strong in its attempt to produce naturally good human beings against the tide of harmful anti-social forces.

- **Telling Stories: In the resign area of the assembly ground...**

Besides innovations and case studies, there was another forum at the centre of the assembly ground where people could stop to watch miscellaneous activities including entertainments, demonstrations, performances and “light talks”. The number of activities was enough to draw the crowd on a regular basis for the three days of the event.

The following were some stories told in the resting area of the assembly ground...



Story I:
A sufficiency community

"...the real development all came from trial and error and from the public involvement in the process. That was how the community became healthy..."

Sufficiency community" covered how the sufficiency economy principle was applied to rural communities in the northern part of the country, the southern coastal areas, semi-urban and urban societies.

On the panel were **Ms. Chinda Bussaket**, community leader from Tambon Ban Mai, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, **Mr. Padet**, community leader from Satun Province, **Mr. Samruoy Misomchai**, community leader from Tambon Phraya Banlu, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province, **Mr. Pat Abhaimul**, community leader from Tambon Mae Tha, Chiang Mai Province and **Mr. Somkit Duang-ngern**, Pradit Thorakan community leader, Bangkok. **Teacher Surin Kitnitchee** and **Mr. Chatchawal Thongdeelert** were moderators.

The moderators asked the panelists to explain **their group activities in the community, inspiration and outcome**.

The first panelist, **Mr. Pat**, from Mae Tha Community, Chiang Mai Province, said that as a result of the green revolution the community adopted single-crop farming, especially peanut farming. At first, it brought good income. However after its price had dropped, the community switched to young

corns in 1983 when the price was 20 baht a kilo. The price had remained unchanged since then while the household income was no longer adequate. The community then came together and realized that it was without intellectual capital and remained stuck in the monetary cycle. For this reason, it decided to change from farming for commerce to farming for own consumption. Only the surplus would be for sale. In this way, the people became much happier.

Mr. Padet from Satun Province said that his community was blessed with the sea, mangroves, and canals. After the concession of the swamp forest, natural resources became depleted. Forest and aquatic resources became less and less abundant. The community came together for solutions and discovered that “the real assets are resources especially land, water and forest”. These resources were the answers to the community problems. The community’s approach was based on the assumption that “when you live with the forest, you must conserve it. When you live with water, conserve it. When you live with the land, conserve it.” The people’s effort to conserve and revitalize the mangroves resulted in more aquatic animals. The community was awarded “**the green globe award**” by the Petroleum Authority of Thailand.

Ms. Chinda from Nakhon Ratchasima Province said that the community had learnt many lessons from various forums. However, the real development all came from trial and error and from the public involvement in the process. That was how the community became healthy. When people in the community became aware, life of sufficiency would follow. Problems could be effectively managed by the community



using local cultural capitals. In this connection, the public sector should facilitate the process.

Mr. Samruoy from Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province said that after the land reform in 1975 the community members focused on rice farming mostly on borrowed money. Unable to pay off the debts, many were forced to sell their land. Eventually, they came together to correct the situation. They asked themselves “What can we do to be self-sufficient and live sufficiently?” They adopted sufficiency agriculture, growing fruits and vegetables in a natural way. The farming would be based on the sufficiency principle and not material gains. They adopted a marketing approach without middlemen, organizing strong community organizations. The result was that the villagers were able to follow a self-reliant way of living.

Mr. Somkit Duang-ngern from Bangkok said that Chatuchak was an urban community whose members led a life different from those outside Bangkok. Sharing the common background, they made use of the local intellectual capitals inherited from their forefathers in their livelihoods, especially in “**knife making**”. In the more recent time, they diversified into making household utensils such as spoons and tableware. All the products were designed for export.

The point to be made from the forum was that the lessons learnt and learning process led to a sustainable solution to the problem on a continual basis. Learning and follow-up action would bring results. Happiness would follow if the people learnt to work together and knew how to make savings and live a life of sufficiency.

Story 2:

How to manage business happily

"...good society was governed by civilized principles. Sufficiency did not go against progress. However, sufficiency alone might not be enough; people also needed happiness as another indicator of wellbeing. Sufficient business might not always mean sufficiency. More importantly, business must be ethical."

The topic **"How to manage business happily"** covered the perspectives and the ways sufficiency businesses operated. The approach was noteworthy to the general public who tended to believe that an issue of sufficiency usually applied to agriculture while business was more profit-oriented. The panel discussion served to inform and educate the audience about new corporate possibilities. The panelists came from different organizations including **Mr. Pramote Tiasuwan** from Pranda Jewelry Co. Ltd. (Public), **Mr. Sutthichai Eamcharoenying** from Wonderworld Products Co. Ltd., and **Mr. Prasert** from Chao Phraya Abhaibhubet Hospital, Prachin Buri Province, with **Dr. Chirmsak Pinthong** as the moderator.

Mr. Pramote, a businessman in the jewelry business, said that he started the business with only seven workers whose number had increased to 3,500 today. His business motto was: **"Capture the right customers with a low-risk business and earn sufficient profits"**. The company provided its own



personnel training with a people-centred approach. This made it possible for the workers to stay with the company for a long time. To the question why the jewelry business needed long-term employment, Mr. Pramote replied that he learnt the lesson from his past experience in Hong Kong. Despite higher wages, the workers there were not always loyal to the company. About 95% of the jewelry business problems were due to dishonest and corrupt workforce. Therefore, to oversee a large number of workers, he adopted a brotherly caring approach to personnel management. If the workers could not live sufficiently, problems would ensue. His people-centred approach paid off in the long run.

Mr. Sutthichai, an export toy businessman, developed a great variety of toy designs for risk diversification purposes. The immunity that his company enjoyed was based on risk diversification, good product designs, innovations, and a “small is beautiful” concept. He believed that good society was governed by civilized principles. Sufficiency did not go against progress. However, sufficiency alone might not be enough; people also needed happiness as another indicator of wellbeing. Sufficient business might not always mean sufficiency. More importantly, business must be ethical.

To **Mr. Prasert**, an herbal product manager from Chao Phraya Abhaibhubet Hospital, herbs had long been valuable local and national resources. Being well received, the hospital herbal products were able to generate a sustainable income. Not only did the locally-manufactured products provide employment to community members, but they also



kept the family together. The herbs, fruits and vegetables, being chemically free and pesticide-free, were truly organic. Growers and consumers enjoyed good health. The income thus derived was enough to purchase medical equipment for the hospital without depending on the government budget. Such a business could, therefore, be said to provide a life of sufficiency in which income and happiness were accessible to all. This was one way to contribute to the country's strength.

Story 3:
Learning for a life of sufficiency

"...Producing a good person was a nobler act than producing a capable person or any other. Good people would depend more on themselves and make useful contributions to the school, community and society..."

The topic "**Learning for a life of sufficiency**" was discussed covering the relationship between the formal schooling and sufficiency economy principle. It touched on how children and young people could be trained to lead and enjoy a life of sufficiency. The panelists included **Ms. Kannikar Mabunmee** from Chamthewi Municipal School, Lamphun Province, **Dr. Art-Ong Jumsai na Ayudhya** from the Institute of Sathya Sai Education, Lop Buri Province, **Ms. Kanpima Chuamchit**, Chulaphonnaratchawitthayalai School, Petchaburi Province, and **Mr. Chanchai Panthusen**, President of the Rabbit in the Moon Foundation. The session was moderated by **Mr. Sakchai Abhinainath**.

Ms. Kannikar said that her school adopted a learner-centred approach with an integrated lesson plan. In the past, one of the challenges was that the school water was rust-coloured. Through a natural treatment the water was rendered clear. The school had fish-farming ponds and vegetable-growing plots. Students were given hands-on experience according to the lifestyle of the community which participated in the school activities.

Ms. Kanpima told the meeting how her school applied science lessons to everyday life. Under a philosophy of academic and moral excellence, the students were encouraged to holistically view the world in all dimensions, social, economic, environmental and cultural. Most importantly, they knew how to use their time productively even while at school.

Dr. Art-Ong told story about how a Buddhist-based school applied the threefold method of training in morality, concentration and wisdom to pedagogy. Mellowed by wisdom, the students would be content with themselves and desire less. Producing a good person was a nobler act than producing a capable person or any other. Good people would depend more on themselves and make useful contributions to the school, community and society. A life of sufficiency would come from within. The Sathya Sai school taught the students to be self-reliant and able to grow vegetable and rice crops. The school was equipped with a rice mill, solar cell facility, washing liquid and others for training the students how to live and think harmoniously, thus preparing them for a life of sufficiency, cooperation and wisdom.

The lesson learnt from this forum was a variety of perspectives on formal learning in school and sufficiency economy. A life of sufficiency was possible with actual learning and training while the students were still young until they were internalized.



Story 4:

Learning to move at a faster or slower pace

"...whether in a slow or faster society one must be aware of oneself. Knowledge and understanding would follow. Happiness would surely be the result ..."

The topic "**Learning how to move at a faster or slower pace**" was initiated by the title of a translated book "**Reo Mai Wa, Cha Hai Pen**" (It's OK to go fast, but it's good to learn how to go slow). In essence, it said that "things need not be always done in haste. You can do it at a faster or slower pace, but one must always be mindful."

All the panelists were known for their life of sufficiency, including **Mr. Taenkhun Chit-issara**, a TV programme host, **Ms. Rosana Tositrakul**, member of the Thai Holistic Health Foundation, and **Ms. Darunee Srijui**, water-colour painter. The session was moderated by **Ms. Saree Ongsomgwang**, managing director of Foundation for Consumers.

As a media person, **Mr. Taenkhun** viewed the media role as capable of spreading spiritual viruses rapidly. It was important for media people to position themselves with moral awareness. A fast-moving life must be governed by awareness. They must come to grips with themselves as soon as possible. Work should not be done exclusively for money. Money would not always be the answer to happiness. A good life must see a reduction of the following five misconducts:

1. Violence including anger and grouchiness that could degenerate the mind.
2. Extravagance: with emphasis on less desire and taking less advantage of others.
3. Sex: with emphasis on sexual awareness to avoid such problems as unwanted pregnancies and abortion.
4. Illusion: with greater awareness of media exposure.
5. Vices including gambling and addiction.

As an artist, **Ms. Darunee** viewed that happiness could easily be obtained from everything around oneself. Art in all its forms could bring people happiness. She observed that current society used money to buy happiness. It was a fast-moving society depending a lot on mobile phones and resulting in people getting confused and miserable. If one could go at a slower pace, giving more time to one's surroundings, life would be more enjoyable.

In **Ms. Rosana's** view, life needed not be moving at a fast pace or it could lead to stress. Natural growth usually went at its own slow but steady place. Life would reveal itself in all its clarity.

The exchange of views between the speakers made one think how a life of sufficiency should start by **“learning to go at slower pace”**. The lesson learnt from this forum was that whether in a slow or faster society one must be aware of oneself. Then, knowledge and understanding would follow. Happiness would surely be the result.



Story 5:

Role of local government organizations in support of sufficiency economy

"...sufficiency economy would eventually lead to a state of contentment and happiness. The prospect of success and happiness depended, however, on each person's background and potential."

The discussion took off in the morning in a friendly and informal fashion. The speakers on "the role of local government organizations in support of sufficiency economy" were all from local government organizations: **Mr. Chanchai Silpa-uaychai**, President of Phrae Provincial Administrative Organization, **Mr. Surapong Phuthanapibul**, former President of the National Municipal League of Thailand, and **Mr. Pichai Nuannapasri**, President of Tambon Administrative Organization of Hua Dong, Amphoe Mueang, Phichit Province. The session was moderated by **Mr. Pachara Sarmpimpa**.

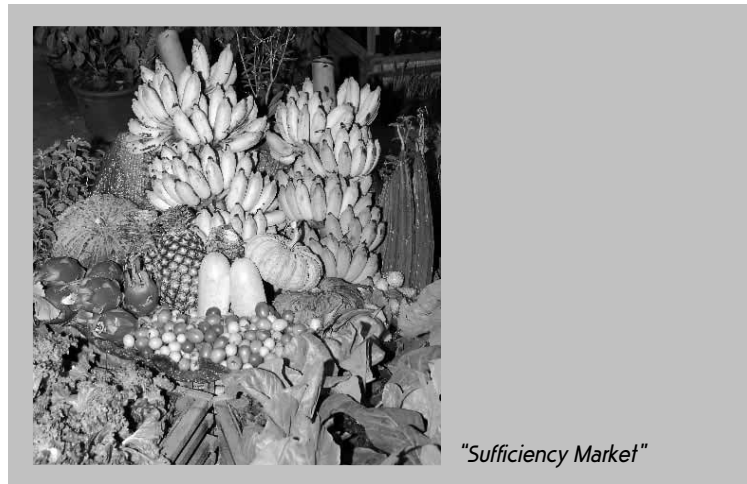
The panelists shared the view that sufficiency economy would eventually lead to a state of contentment and happiness. The prospect of success and happiness depended, however, on each person's background and potential.

Story 6:

Sufficiency market: Something more than a market

"A sufficiency market was governed by a number of moral principles... it was not easy to come by, because it required much effort to move beyond consumerism that was more interested in profits than morality."

The topic **"Sufficiency market: something more than a market"** was a crowd drawer, for many wanted to know more about a sufficiency market that was more than a market.



The speakers were **Mr. Thawatchai Tositrakul**, advisor to Green Net Cooperative, **Ms. Nawarat Khwanmuang**, manager of Tha Yang Agricultural Cooperative, **Mr. Misutami Koichi**, Toto Consumer Cooperative, Japan, and **Mr. Pongsak**

Thamrongrattanasilp, Organic Asparagus Farming Network, Sa Kaeo Province. **Mr. Prapot Phuthongkam**, an MC well-versed in local lifestyle, volunteered to act as a moderator for the session.

A sufficiency market was governed by a number of moral principles. Manufacturers and sellers must be honest and trust each other. For instance, when manufacturers produce quality-certified goods, sellers would buy from them at a fair price, resulting in friendly and fair marketing. Such ideal marketing was not something farfetched, as testified by the presence of the organizations in the field. Admittedly, it was not easy to come by, because it required much effort to move beyond consumerism that was more interested in profits than **morality**.

The above examples represented the atmosphere of informal panel discussion on the assembly ground. They covered diverse experiences of individuals, organizations and communities. The diversity highlighted a rich body of available knowledge that proved the practicality of the sufficiency economy principle. Its dissemination might take time, but where it was planted it was sustainable. It was like seeing an expanse of water-absorbing sand. At a glance it was just another stretch of sand. The moisture of the sand was only apparent at the touch of the hand, giving a firm and lasting feeling.

- **Goodbye...from the assembly ground**

In addition to serving as a forum for an exchange of ideas, innovations and case studies, the health assembly ground was open to all kinds of learning. An area was reserved for a quiet resting place, an art corner and a book corner, including a small theatre, to reflect a sense of sufficiency. There was also an exhibition area explaining the health assembly and public policy processes.

At the booth of the **Wonderworld Products Co. Ltd.**, one would see a group of young children playing with toys. It was a favourite place for children where they were engaged in various kinds of activities, including book binding and postcard painting, under the close supervision of their parents. This was indeed a training ground for young artists.

At the art corner one would see furniture exhibits made from hay. The corner served as a creativity-training ground as well as a meeting place between speakers and interested members of the audience. There, one could listen to the speakers and other honorary artists sing.

The Forest-Loving Group organized their exhibits under the theme “Eating is Important” as if wanting to show the relevance of forests to people’s wellbeing. An indicator of wellbeing was seen in the abundance of natural resources. The group’s exhibition showed how serious the consequences



would be with the destruction of forests, unscrupulous foreign exploitation, and lack of community interest.

The Department for Development of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine, Ministry of Public Health, made a colourful contribution, setting a massage service station. The booth provided traditional massage as a health promotion ploy and career training for the interested public.



*Feeling Tired and Needing a Rest:
"What can be more comforting than a nice massage?"*

On the assembly ground there was a “**market**” where transactions took place with cordiality between buyers and sellers, involving not money but a sense of shared happiness.

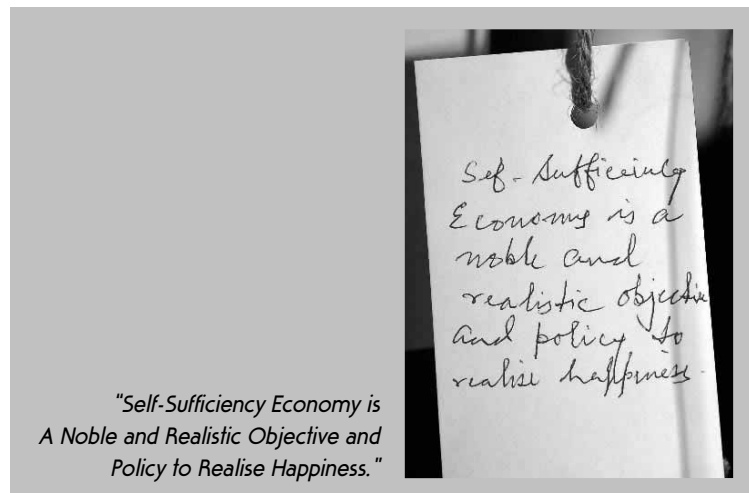
In one corner of the assembly ground there stood the **theatre**, a simple structure surrounded by cloth, as often seen in the rural areas. Some very good films were shown,

such as **“Duay Klao”**, **“Dek To”**, **“Akha Community”**, **“Être et Avoir”**, **“Off the Map”** and **“Pom Poko”**. The theatre was also used for presentation. A topic that attracted a large audience was **“Write it down and become rich”**. It was about how to manage finance in a sufficiency manner. It was given by an expert from the Stock Exchange of Thailand who advised how to write down the income and expenditure, making sure that savings were invariably maintained. In this way, one would never be poor.

On either side of the aisles, there were wooden seats or stacks of hay under the trees in which area were posted postcard-size photographs. These photographs were submitted for the photograph competition under the theme **“Wellbeing”** and reached the final round. The event was sponsored by the organizers and **“Sarakhadi”** Magazine. Several copies of the photographs were left on the table for those who wanted to take away for souvenirs. (The actual photographs were displayed at the exhibition in one corner of the assembly ground.) At the **Reflection Corner** near the exit of the assembly ground one could visit a Zen-like garden under the theme **“Less is More”** where bunches of tied bamboos decorated a small patch of green grass. In front of the lawn was a piece of unbleached cloth with maxims from such distinguished writers as **Buddhadas Bikkhu**, **Khalil Gibran** and **Dr. Ravi Bhavilai**. It befitted a place of peaceful contemplation.

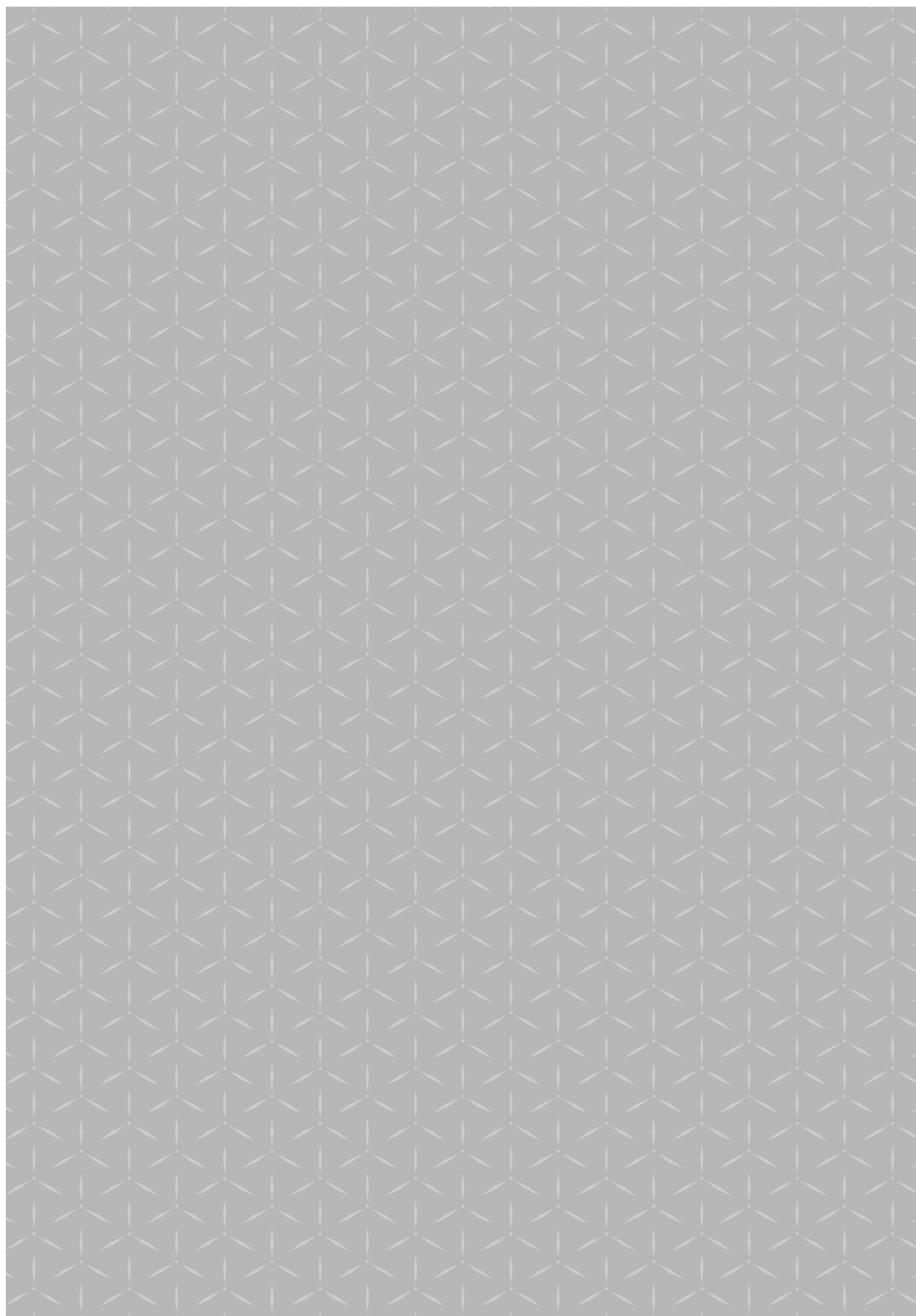


Before leaving the assembly ground one would see a large bamboo fence. The visitors were requested to write their comments on the health assembly on a piece of paper and stick or tied it on the fence. By the close of the event, it was covered with thousands of pieces of colorful paper.



Over the last three days, the IMPACT Exhibition and Convention Centre, Muang Thong Thani, Nonthaburi was like a town of sufficiency citizens seeking wellbeing (and, of course, happiness). They crowded the place and made it a **friendly gathering of like minds**.

"A concrete result of the health assembly ground this year was the application of the Sufficiency Economy principle to daily living, inspiring people to walk on the path of sufficiency with confidence towards a society of wellbeing!"



5. The Overall Track

*Summing up the outcome of the Sixth
National Health Assembly, including general
findings and evaluation*

*"...We are committed to the
sufficiency economy principle
which will be applied to
our daily life, a life of sufficiency
and reason, to suit the lifestyles
of the individuals, families,
communities...."*

5. The Overall Track: Closing the Assembly Advocating... Coming Together... Sharing Happiness

Before the closing, a keynote speech on “**The role of the government and national development toward a social wellbeing through Sufficiency Economy**” was delivered by Deputy Prime Minister **Mr. Kosit Panpiemras**. The challenge was how Thailand would adopt the Sufficiency Economy principle to its national development.

After all the discussion and other activities in the plenary and 14 special sessions as well as on the assembly ground, the national health assembly came to a close with a declaration of five commitments by the assembly members. Reflecting the sufficiency economy principle, the declaration would serve as the guidelines for living and social development in all dimensions. The ultimate aim was a society of wellbeing

in Thailand that would bring happiness to all Thai citizens.

After Deputy Prime Minister **Mr. Kosit Panpiemras** delivered the closing keynote address, he declared the meeting closed. Representatives from all sectors, public, private and civil society, went on the stage and together pronounced a declaration of five commitments:

We are committed to the sufficiency economy principle which will be applied to our daily life, a life of sufficiency and reason, to suit the lifestyles of the individuals, families, communities, organizations and agencies.

We hereby shall come together to advocate and expand the sufficiency economy principle from the operational level, to the local policy level and to the national level in order to render Thailand a society of sufficiency and wellbeing.

We shall work together with the civil society sector, business sector, public sector, local government organizations, religious organizations or institutions, and all mass media to disseminate the sufficiency economy principle, especially its moral and ethical implications, and the examples thereof to the general public.

We wish to see the government's sincerity and earnestness in its attempts to advocate the sufficiency economy principle by declaring it as a national agenda with concrete plans of action and promoting research on the translation of the principle into practice. The health assembly networks will lend their full support to promote



public participation, advocate the development of the strategic master plan of sufficiency economy, while the public organizations and local government organizations should seriously allocate adequate budgets for the purpose.

We expect to see the government apply itself to the implementation of its social policy in a significant and accelerated manner. The government will bring about good health in all its dimensions, physical, mental, social and intellectual, for all people through health system reform. It will attempt to reduce risk factors due to inappropriate behaviours and environment. It will attach importance to the participatory approach and development of the healthcare service system both in normal and emergency times. It will promote a balanced and quality approach to health promotion, disease prevention, healthcare service, and rehabilitation to all in a fair manner. In addition, it will make known a recommendation for the passage of the National Health Act.

Besides, they reaffirmed that henceforward they would strictly adhere to the declaration and make sure that the sufficiency economy principle would be implemented and expanded further. The aim was a life of sufficiency and a society of wellbeing.

These **courageous vanguard** really deserved commendation.

The gist of the declaration was for everyone to successfully advocate **Sufficiency Economy Leading to a Society of Wellbeing** as a **national agenda**. It was followed by the actual closing ceremony in which all sectors participated just like the years before. All the VIP members and representatives of all the sectors stepped onto the stage together reaffirming that they would truly advocate the declaration as a national agenda.

- **The Next National Health Assembly: With hope... as the guiding light...**

The essence of the Sixth National Health Assembly was how to build upon the theme **“Sufficiency Economy Leading to a Society of Wellbeing”** as a basis for practical sustainable health at all levels, including in the daily life, work, and formulation of policies and measures for sustainable community and social development. To do this, the National Health Assembly Organizing Committee tried to sound out the views of the participants of the assembly as to what they would like to see as the focus and directions of the next National Health Assembly. Questionnaire was, therefore, designed asking the respondents to choose between the four choices: **Happiness and Good Health, Medicine and Public Health, Healthy Policy, and Factors Affecting Health and Specific Target Groups**. From 641 responses, the issue **“Happiness and Good Health”** came out on top, with suggestions that sufficiency economy should receive a



greater focus to make society realize that a happy and healthy Thai society is essentially based on the sufficiency economy principle.

The issue with the second highest demand was “Healthy Policy”, followed by “Factors Affecting Health and Specific Target Groups” and “Medicine and Public Health” respectively. The outcome of the survey would be submitted to the Organizing Committee of the next National Health Assembly for further consideration. The setting of the agenda of the national health assembly in its entirety must be based on the participation of all concerned.

The Sixth National Health Assembly had come to an end. It was hoped that with the passage of “**National Health Act**” the next health assembly would be able to function more effectively than it did in the past. The organization would be more comprehensive in its conceptual framework and practice. In addition, the incoming law would serve as a master health plan, a real milestone of wellbeing, for the Thai nation. The final aim was that the indicator for Gross National Happiness would be used in conjunction with that of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

“When that day comes, people in society will be full of happiness, enjoying financial stability and good health in all dimensions!”

Ms. Umaporn Bhatravanich, a researcher from Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom Province, shared her appreciation thus:

“...This is my first visit to the national health assembly. I am impressed by the theme of sufficiency economy. This is a well-organized event with all kinds of demonstrations and work of communities and agencies that have adopted the sufficiency approach. The visitors got a clear picture of the concept that can be applied to their everyday life... My expectation is to share learning with various networks. My institute is interested in producing books on Thai health. Next year, the focus will be on the sufficiency economy principle as an indicator of happiness. I usually take an interest in the issue of people participation. This event provides a good learning opportunity...”

Ms. Nonglak Thanompong, a retired teacher from Moral Centre of the Satun Community Network, said:

“...I have participated in several provincial health assemblies. This is my second time to participate in the national event. I really want to come to the health assembly this year, because it is about morality and sufficiency economy, which can be applied to our community. There is so much to learn here, which will very useful to our community...”



Dr. Sem Pringpuangkaew, former public health minister, who gave an interview to the Newsletter of the Reform Forum, in the October-December 2006 issue:

“...I am very glad to see so many participants. Discussion with many people will lead to fruitful results. There might be some disagreements, a natural occurrence in democracy. Everyone had the right to expression. They all meant well. They were both learners and teachers at the same time. They were the source of help to one another, with a common cause for solidarity, although their number was more than a thousand...

...Although the efforts made by the health assembly on health policy have not yet brought clear results, let's observe the dictum that problems are successes in disguise. Without problems, there will be no successes. We should not be tired of or unhappy with the outcome. If there is no problem, we will have nothing to do...

...So, we have to talk and consult without getting angry and making enemies. If they do not agree with us, do not get angry. Just thank them, because they make us think of other ways to get results and do our best...”

*Dr. Amphon
Jindawatthana
Director of
the National Health
System Reform Office
and Secretariat of
the National Health
Assembly Organizing
Committee*



*Sign Language Interpreter:
For those who could not hear*

*The Children's
World: A world
of play and
imagination*





Participants from Overseas: Listening attentively to the panel



Discussion on Happiness...Different Perspectives

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