

New Media for Equal & Sustained Development in Thailand

1) Kamolrat Intaratat

2) Piyachat Lomchavakarn

If we talk about using computer and internet, it is commonly known and used now in generally because of its easier access especially among the urban communities..... but for the rural or the remote communities spreading all over Thailand.....there is still some gap then the MICT has launched the facilitated policy to help lesson the digital gap as well as equity share among all Thai communities.

The global telecentre is set up with the purpose to empower the disadvantaged people and communities mainly through ICT knowledge and self development. Its aim is to get participation from people in the community to process the social change that will lead to any sustained social development. The ICT knowledge would be one among the main tool for people empowerment.

Thailand as one of the developing countries that also can not avoid the modern world's situation of ICT which evidently being one of the vital component for the "new economy" even of its high disparity of ICT accessibility between the rural and the urban as well as "the have" and "the have not" since its initiating till currently. The disparity among the three groups : the well served, the under-served, and the un-served keep increasing as observable called "digital gap".

Telecentre as one among the new media type has functioned itself as the bridge of digital divide within the nation. It offers public access to computers, the internet and other communication technologies. The telecentre also provides trainings and supply certain business services for people in the community.

Then Thai government has launched its ICT policy to apply ICT in social and economic development : the IT 2010 policy continuing from the ICT Master Plan 2002-2006 as well as clearly posted in the present 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan of the country under its 3 main categories : 1) Knowledge Management ; 2) Access to Information and Knowledge ; 3) Knowledge Application for Self-sufficiency and Sustainable Development under five 5 main national strategies : 1) e-Government, 2) e-Commerce, e-Industry, e-Education, and e-Society.

Yet despite the drastic increase of ICT activities in Thailand, the rural community which is majority of the country still quite slow in the ICT adoption. Under year of 2000, the National Electronic and Computer Technology center (NECTEC) as of its ICT direct Government agency at the times had started its first four community telecenter as well as other agencies such as 6 telecentres by Loxley company supported by Canadian International Development Agency : CIDA called "The Thailand Canada Telecentre Project", 4 telecentres by NGO : The Community Organization Development Institute : CODI, 4 telecentres by Chulalongkorn University and local agencies as well as business agencies, 6,745 internet tambon (sub-district) in all Local Administrative Bureaus supported by the

Ministry of Interior, 4 ThaiRuralNet telecentres by Thammasart University supported by World Bank, 1 telecentre supported by the Nonformal Education : Ministry of Education and the Educational Development Foundation, 1 telecentre supported the Educational Development Foundation as well as others, 4 telecentres as well as the pilot public internet booth by The Telephone Organization of Thailand : TOT, and 1 mobile internet centre supported by the temple .

Actually, the Telecentre in Thailand is at its beginning stage. The word “Telecentre” is still very new for many of the Thais; they do not know what the benefit of telecentre is. For some of them, this might only be a computer room where they can play computer games, surf internet and chat with friends. The MICT has launched the Project of “ the Community ICT Learning Centre” since 2007 with its number of 20 Centres, follow by 40 Centres in 2008, and 200 in the year of 2009 with its provision of various kinds of training to all the operators of the Community ICT Learning Centres all over the country as well as creating the coordinating website WWW.ThaiTelecenter.org to be as a hub for all kinds of coordination and sharing among all stakeholders especially direct from the communities themselves.....aimed for its self sustained in the long run.....

This is because of its main purpose to serve the community equally....anyone, any group could use the Centre anytime such as

-**The Youth** : for their learning and opening up more perspectives;

-**The House wife and the Vocational Groups** : for their vocational development, more income generations, etc.

- **The Farmers** : for their farm production development as well as doing farm online, etc.

-**The Monks** : for their learning, opening up more perspectives, and religious distribution

-**The Vocational Group, the Homeworkers**” use for their communication, more channels for production’s materials, as well as marketing and online discussion, etc.

How this new media help supported the rural or even urban development? The evolution of the telecentre phenomenal of Thailand occurred during the year 2000 under the economic crisis of Thailand and Asia caused lots of laid off back to the rural, the government at the times has promoted the “Self Sufficiency Economy” initiated by the King of Thailand to help lessen all those economic crisis. The “**One Tambon, One Product**” (OTOP) based on each 700,000 community’s local wisdom has been promoted to be more value added products sold both off-line and on-line locally and globally via the www.thaitambon.com . The impossible myth to link between the rural poor and the ICT gradually emerging up with their more awareness, more accessibility, more adoption, etc. The telecentre at the times could be said to be the **golden opportunity** for all rural communities especially rural women who are quite being left behind to access more in many aspects such as ICT literacy, SMEs skills, leadership skills, etc.

The main challenging are as follow; 1) how can all the stakeholders, partners, and network could more collaboratively, 2) how can the policy especially the Government : MICT as well as the others such as the ITU would have their concrete and holistic policy to support both directly and indirectly such as the ICT infrastructure, the regulations, the R&D, and all kinds of empowering activities, etc. 3) the telecentre academy is also one among the urgent need because of its more systematic, and demand-base to serve al relevant stakeholders especially the telecentres' operators, etc.

All those integrated collaboration has reflected to be more multiplied and sustained success stories all over Thailand even of many further steps to gear up more for all equity ICT media uses for more equal and sustainable development in Thailand.



Paper presented in the interconference “Communication & Sustainable Development in the Next Decade” 11-13 Feb, 2009

1) Assoc. Prof. from Communication Arts School, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Pakkret 11120, Thailand

www.ccdkm.org, e-mail : kamolratchim@hotmail.com

2) Assoc. Prof. from Communication Arts School, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Pakkret 11120, Thailand