

6. MAXIMUM USE OF LOCAL RESOURCES FOR SUCCESSFUL NFE INCOME GENERATION PROGRAMME: INTRODUCTION TO UBON RATCHATHANI CONTEXT

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Provincial General Background

Ubon Ratchathani (from Pali “uppala rajdhani”, literally translated ‘The Royal City of Lotus’, is located 629 kilometers away from Bangkok in the Northeastern Region, on the left bank of the Moon River, bounded on the east by the Mekhong - designated naturally as the Thai-Lao border. Its spacious area covers 15,517 square kilometers, adjoining Yasothorn and Amnateharoen on the north, the Dong Rak mountain range on the Thai-Kampuchean border on the south.

The Moon and other smaller rivers and their tributaries flowing through the province of Ubon are major sources of water for agriculture and home consumption. They are like the main artery through which blood is circulated to nourish all parts of the body, namely, the province of Ubon.

The province is rich in certain natural resources: forest trees, rock salt, fresh water fish. The majority of people in Ubon are engaged in agriculture, growing rice, cassava, jute, etc. Many young people choose to leave the province for industrial areas such as Bangkok, Smut Prakarn, Cholburi and Rayong to find job in manufacturing and service.

The province of Ubon is divided administratively into 20 districts and 5 sub-districts. It has a population of approximately 1.7 million, ranking the 3rd place in size of the population among all provinces in the country after Bangkok and Nakhon Ratchasima.

The main part of Ubon population belongs to the Thai - Lao racial origin, while minority ethnic groups, especially those residing in urban areas are mostly descendants of the Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants. One unique quality of the Ubon people is the ability to live together peacefully and cooperatively in the multi-cultural environment.

The province was inhabited by pre-historic people 3,000 to 4,000 years ago as evidenced from the rock paintings at Pha Taem, the riverside cliff on the bank of the Mekhong. The city of Ubon was established about 200 years ago in time of the first king of Bangkok. It is at present one of the most important cities, a gateway to Lao, Kampuchea and Viet Nam.

Ubon is rich in folk culture. It has its own local script and literature. Some local people excel in traditional skills such as hand-weaving, local cuisine, brass and silverware making. Most of the Ubon people are strong adherents to Buddhism. Wat Pa Nana Chat (“The International Buddhist Temple”) attracts a number of foreigners - some of whom have been ordained monks and have learned to practice the Dhamma. The people would participate actively in all annual traditional events such as the Candle Festival (at the start of the annual Buddhist Lent), the Harvest Festival, The Mahajati (Great Rebirths) Festival, etc. Such festivals attract a lot

of visitors from all parts of the Kingdom as well as abroad.

Education

Ubon has been renowned as the seat of learning since its foundation. In the past, the Buddhist temple was the principal center of education. Children and youth went to the temple to learn the local script and the Buddhist scripture. Ubon was so prominent in the area of education that so many Northeastern people chose to come to Ubon for education. It has been named ‘The City of Scholars’ for the said reason.

At present, Ubon has provided its people with most types and levels of educational institutions. It has nurseries and kindergartens serving young children of pre-school age, elementary and secondary schools, vocational and technical colleges, two degree granting institutions: Rajbhat Institute at Ubon and Ubon Ratchathani University, offering mainly engineering science courses.

In the area of religious studies a Buddhist University campus of Mahachulalongkorn Rajvidhayalaya was established at Wat Mahavanaram. This institution offers degree courses on Buddhism for the monks.

In the area of Nonformal Education, Ubon boasts a fine system of NFE provision. It was the seat of Thailand-Unesco Fundamental Education Centre (TUFEC) in the past, offering a Diploma course in the field of adult education and community development to officials from Thailand and Laos. Today, with its new name “The Northeastern Nonformal Education Center” - it offers a range of training and development services to NFE officials in the Northeastern provinces.

The main unit responsible for providing NFE programs in this province is Ubon Provincial Nonformal Education Center. This center is responsible for planning and management of nonformal education programmes throughout the province. It has its own subsidiary offices at the district level called “The District Nonformal Education Service Center” - each staffed with a few officials and some paid volunteers.

This provincial nonformal education management system operates a number of programs in response to the growing needs of the people in this province. At present, the following programs are offered:

1. General Education

This program is designed for those who wish to obtain a school equivalency certificate comparable to elementary, lower secondary and upper secondary education.

In this category of provision, literacy courses for those who are totally illiterate or partially literate are also provided.

2. Vocational Education

This category of provision is aimed at those who want to acquire or to upgrade their vocational skills for the betterment of their lives. The training is conducted in many formats depending on circumstances. It may be carried out within the center or outside, by the center’s own staff and volunteers or by experienced people available on the spot. Subjects of training vary according to the needs assessed. The NFE center uses all available resources to organize the program, including local experts, space, materials, etc.

For those who find time to study for a vocational education certificate comparable to the regular vocational education certificate issued by the Vocational/Technical Education college, the Department of Nonformal Education through its provincial NFE centers also organizes the training program based on the concept of the dual system. According to this system, students learn general education through regular teachers, and learn to practice vocational skills through the workplace. A number of NFE learners have joined this program in such fields as tourism management, business and some others.

The vocational education program will be discussed in detail later.

3. Provision of Information Services

The Department of Nonformal Education through its provincial office organizes public libraries at the provincial and district levels and village reading centers at the village level. These resource centers are designed to inculcate reading habit among children and adults and contribute to the sustenance of literacy skill acquired in school or from NFE literacy courses.

Vocational Training for Income Generation

Vocational Training for Income Generation, in the true sense of the term, is quite new to the NFE staff. In many training programs currently organized, only knowledge and skill are imparted and the trainer leaves it open for the trainees to find out for themselves how to apply the things learned. In most cases, the trainees have never used what they have acquired from the training course, and as a consequence the programs are totally unsuccessful.

Realizing such shortcomings of vocational training, the Department of Nonformal Education has tried to change its tactics in the provision of vocational training. Instead of training only knowledge and skills of the vocation and leave the trainees on their own, a more comprehensive training plan is arranged for them. The outline below will serve to explain the process of vocational training for income generation as conducted by the NFE center in some villages.

Principle The main principle of vocational training for income generation is the development the trainee's capability in the management of a combination of related factors contributing to the income generation program on the course of training. Specifically, to start any self-employed occupation, one needs man, money, material and management (for land, labor, capital and enterprise in classical economics). In the modern economy, we may need to add "a market" to these factors so that the product and service can be sold or exchanged for income.

Steps to be taken in income generation training

1. Approach the community

It is improbable that the income generation project could be met with success without cooperation of the community. Consultation should be sought from its leading members such as the community council, the farmer group, other occupational groups, and concerned agencies regarding possibility of the income generation project.

The ideal way is to work with the community's occupation promotion committee, which may have already existed in that community. Let them participate fully, if possible, in all steps of the project management.

2. Survey existing community resources

The organizer needs to know, first of all, what resources are available in the community and how to make use of such resources in the conduct of vocational training for income generation. The first thing one needs to know is the kind of raw material available in the community. If there is a large quantity of water hyacinths (Java weed) in the village swamp, for example, one might think of using them for producing a basket, baby cradle, and some other salable articles. In rural communities, there are so many kinds of raw material that can be used for commercial production.

The survey should also be made of marketing opportunity, resource person available, present income level of the people and their needs for increased income

3. Plan the project

After the resources are known, the training project should be planned, focussing on the preparation stage, the training stage, the application stage (for production and distribution).

Use of resources mentioned earlier should be taken into consideration with regard to vocational program training. For example, the program should be relevant to available local resources. There should be raw material, marketing opportunity, trainer within or outside the community, needs of the target learners for increased income, space for training and all other contributing factors (including feasibility of loan from financial institutions).

4. Prepare the training inputs.

In this stage, there are a number of actions to be taken. First, public relations should be carried out to ensure that interested persons are informed and are able to participate. Second, formation of a learning group should be made, bringing in those who are willing to join. This learning group will be the prime focus of the project, and will be empowered to carry out the income generation activities all through the project. Third, construct a training course based on needs identification and relevance to the community context. The course should cover, besides skill mastery, managerial knowledge, for example; planning, organizing, budgeting, staffing, directing, etc. Fourth, produce training materials such as booklets worksheets, posters, pictures, charts, audio cassette tapes, etc. to be used in conjunction with training activities. Fifth, identify and bring in resource person (s) capable of vocational training in the chosen area.

5. Conduct the training

All things being ready, the training can be conducted. Although the focus of training is usually geared to vocational skills, other aspects of the income generation activity are of no less importance and should be trained along with vocational skills, for example: how to identify the potential market, how to invest efficiently, how to keep a balance sheet, showing loss and gain, how to organize themselves into a cooperatives group, etc. More importantly, to satisfy the learner needs for literacy and numeracy knowledge, the teaching of such basic skills

should be carried out along with all content components. In the other words, they should be integrated into the training program.

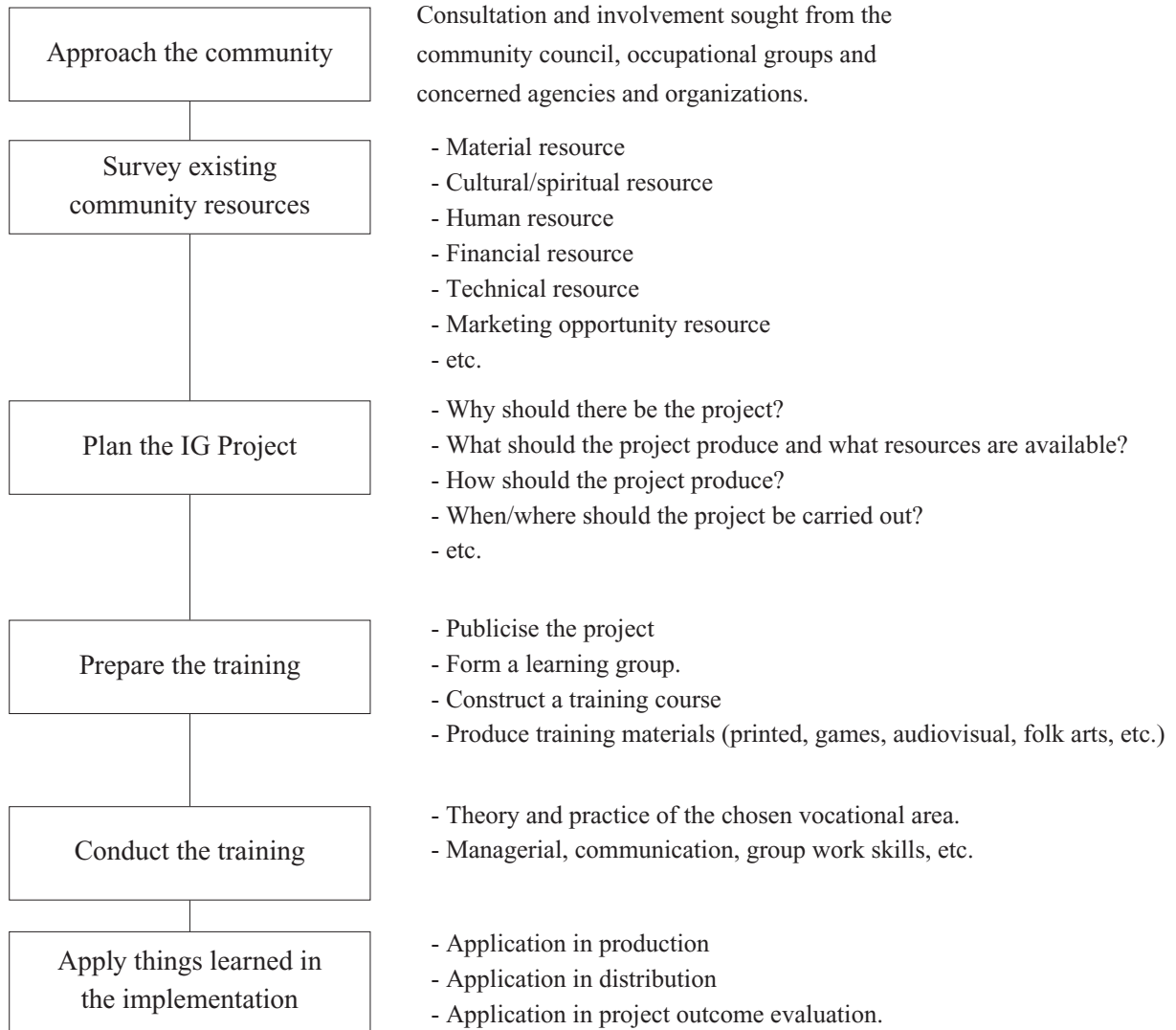
6. Apply the knowledge and skills learned in the implementing stage

Knowledge and skills needed at this stage are, for example, vocational skill, planning skill, communication

skill, leadership skill, salesmanship skill, etc. These competencies may have been trained before or during the implementing stage, but they are really needed for successful operations of the generation programs.

The six steps are put together in the same chart as shown.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR INCOME GENERATION



Successful income generation activities are attributed to a number of potential factors. With reference to the Northeastern region, some of them are:

Cultural heritage

The village people in this region, generally speaking, prefer to live close to their neighbors in a village unit, unlike the people in some other parts of the country who tend to live separately from one another in a more isolated manner. This tendency seems to strengthen the cooperative spirit of the villagers in this region as seen in many successful village projects. Besides, the Northeastern villagers are strong upholders of traditional beliefs and practices. Background knowledge and

information on their beliefs, if properly utilized, may serve as a good starting point of the project. For example a group venture can be safely formed due to their cultural background of cooperation.

Self-sufficiency ideology

Since the start of the economic crisis in Thailand in 1997 resulting in the closing of a large number of financial institutions and industrial and business enterprises, millions of wage earners have left large cities and returned to their own villages. The government of Thailand following H.M. the King's advice has adopted a new economic initiative, the self-sufficiency model of economic development, in parallel with the existing

market-led model. This self-sufficiency model is based on the belief that dependence on international capital, market and employment is highly risky. One possible alternative is to produce for one's own consumption first, and trade only the surplus to others for income. This approach is more secure because no matter the world market world be, the person could still survive. Although this self-sufficiency model is better illustrated by a small scale farming activity, the core concept is still feasible in many self-earning project activities.

Folk arts and crafts. Ubon has maintained its folk arts and crafts. As mentioned earlier, hand weaving, wood carving, basket-work, brass-ware making and mat making are carried out by people in some villages. The income generation project may be initiated upon such knowledge and skills of folk arts and crafts, and add some innovative design and improved quality to make the product more attractive and appealing.

Local expertise and wisdom

In all communities, there are people with special knowledge and skills acquired through families and communities which could be tapped for income generation resource. There are, for example, some who are engaged in an integrated farming such as raising chickens, fish etc. while growing rice, vegetables and fruit trees in the same piece of land. There are some who know and practice herbal medicine (which in some case is quite effective and much less costly compared to modern medicine). There are farmers who practice natural farming, namely, growing plants without tilling and using no chemical fertilizer and pesticide, etc. It is, therefore, possible to learn from such resource people to conduct the income generation project.

Official information resources

In most villages, some kinds of information resource are available. Beside the villagers themselves who could serve as resource persons, the government, through its ministerial agencies, has appointed officials at the field level responsible for assisting the villagers in their particular areas of expertise. They are, for example, the community development official, agricultural extension official, public health official. The Department of Nonformal Education through its provincial and district offices also place the NFE volunteer at the tambon level. It has also set up a village reading center and a community learning center to serve the villagers who need more education and training. Such resources can be utilized when an income generation project is formulated.

Financial resources

Another indispensable component of the income generation project is financial input. People need some money to start the project with. There are many ways to obtain the money. With a well-reasoned project proposal, the learning group may request for loan from financial institutions such as the government Savings Bank which has been entrusted to help the unemployed workers affected by the current crisis to establish their own income generation project. The learning group may raise their own fund, or if there is a village collective fund, they may request a loan from it. Some other government and non-government agencies may be able to provide financial assistance to the people in need of such a help.

Marketing service resources

In every province, the government unit responsible for marketing service is the Ministry of Commerce's provincial commerce office. This office can provide information regarding marketing opportunity existing within and outside the province. It is advisable to consult this office to know what kind of product is being on high demand and where the product can be sold. The learning group may make their own survey by discussing the matter with concerned people in trading business.

APPENDIX

Selected Statistical Data Ubon Ratchathani

Population 1996 Survey

TOTAL	1,717,172
Male	860,727
Female	855,445
Residing in municipal area	154,357 (9.0%)
Population growth rate	1.19%
Population density	108 persons/square km.

Communication

- Province reached by train, airplane, car & boat.
- 22 offices offering internal and international postal service.
- Telephone service linking towns and most villages
- TV and Radio broadcasts covering all villages.

Public Utilities

Electric power supply covering 99.3% of all villages. 2 Hydro-electric dams serving as the main sources.

85.1% of homes outside municipal areas using electricity.

Education

Transition Rate of School Students	
No. of Sixth Grade Graduates	28,978
No. of those entering Seventh Grade	24,972
Ratio of Seventh Graders : Sixth Graders	86.17%
No. of Ninth Grade Graduates	19,461
No. of those entering Tenth Grade (General Stream)	11,937 (61.34%)
No. of those entering Tenth Grade (Vocational Stream)	3,868 (19.88%)

Number of NFE Learners - Classified by Levels / Categories of Provisions.

Type of programs	Level/Category	No. of Learners
General Education	Functional Literacy	1,910
	Elementary	9,276
	Lower Secondary	33,537
	Higher Secondary	19,362
Vocational Education	Lower Vocational Certificate	187
	Short Course	7,824
	Interest group	11,160
Total		83,246