

## **PLAN Thailand: Community Capacity Assessment**

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### **Abstract**

PLAN International Development Agency has been developing programs in health, education and improving the livelihood of children in rural communities in Thailand since 1981. During the late 1990's the agency adapted Child Centered Community Development (CCCD) approach as a key strategy to building development capacity to communities to manage their own development programs. Currently many communities are lagging behind in self reliance and still depend on the development agency. The purpose of this study is to investigate in details the existing capacities of selected communities under PLAN supports and to identify targets for further strategic intervention by PLAN and its other partners based on the CCCD approach. There are many significant tangible and intangible changes in the communities as a result of Plan's work. Tangible changes are witnessed in the overall improvement of community's infrastructure system, housing, health condition, income, education, and environment. Intangible changes are reflected through community's improved attitudes knowledge and skills needed for their development. In terms of their self-reliance ability, the communities covered in the assessment demonstrated high level of self-reliance capacity in all 7 dimensions including community economy, environment, health, religion and culture, capacity development, community management and security.

**Keywords:** PLAN International, PLAN Thailand, Child Centered Community Development, Community Development, Community Capacity Assessment.

### **1. Introduction**

PLAN International is an international humanitarian, child-centered development organization which started to work in Thailand since 1981. Its works concentrates in the northeast, the poorest region in Thailand and some of the remote and indigenous communities in the north. The development agency's programs covers areas including health, education and livelihood specializing in humanitarian "child-focused development (Raymond, 2005). PLAN's approach in working with its communities has gradually shifted from a welfare approach towards the capacity building of the communities and the children in designing and managing their own development programs. Since late 90s onwards, PLAN Thailand has adopted the Child-Centered Community Development (CCCD) approach as its key strategy which focuses on developing social capital and capacity of poor and vulnerable children, their families and communities in all phases of program management circle, programs, projects and approaches involved in promoting the lives of rural and urban poor children (Singh, Kapoor, Bhattacharyya, 2009). Recent reports on the impact of this approach on some communities reflected promising signs in a number of ways. However, many communities are still lagging behind and need further strengthening by PLAN and its other partners before they can fully assume the leading role of their own development.

Specific objectives of the assessment include: (a) to assess capacity of PLAN’s communities in selected areas in relation to program operation and self-reliance development; (b) to review PLAN’s community capacity building process and CCCD approach and to feed the information into PLAN Thailand’s strategic planning and exit strategies development process, (c) to increase capability of PLAN’s communities in self-assessment and strategic planning, (d) to develop a system and tools for the assessment of community capacity and community capacity building process for future use by PLAN, and (e) to train PLAN Thailand staff in the process of community capacity assessment by directly involving them in the exercise

Due to time limitation and urgent needs for the information, the scope of the assessment was limited to only 12 communities which were selected in consultation with PLAN team based on a combination of criteria such as community’s high motivation towards self-sustained development, their demonstrated ability to organize as effective groups/networks with clear operational direction, women and children groups and a mixture of community programs which addressed different children-related development issues such as income generation and livelihood improvement, environment, financial institute and education. Of the 2 cases, 7 cases were assessed at community and group level whereas the other 5 cases were assessed at network level.

## 2. Research Area and Methods

### 2.1. List of Communities/Community Groups and Community Organization Networks Under the Assessment

Level of the assessment	Name of community/group/Network	Focus of the assessment
Village and group level	Nong Bua Pae village, Mahasarakham province Women’s Weaving Group, Nong Waeng village, Khon kaen province. Nong Sai children groups, Khon Kaen province. Khambon Wiangchai Women Group, Udonthani province Nong Lumpook village, Udontani province Waenglao-Khaonoi villages, Mahasarakham province Ban Koop village, Sri-saket province	Income generation groups and children group. Income generation activity; natural dye cotton weaving and finished products Development activities by children groups Savings and cooperatives shop operated by women’s group Community-based financial institute School-based and community-based development activities Livelihood improvement through participatory and sustainable natural resource management
Groups at network level	Association of Community Organization Federation, Khon Kaen Province. Nong Khu Khat Savings Groups Network, Mahasarakham province Suwannakhuha Community Forestry Network, Nong Bua Lamphu province Young Conservation Network, Nong Bua Lamphu province Namkham Watershed management Network, Chiang Rai province.	Community-based financial institutes network at regional level Savings groups network at tambon level. Environmental inter-villages Conservation network Children’s environmental conservation network Community development through CCCD process

### 2.2. Key Concepts Incorporated in the Assessment Design and Interpretations

- (1) **Community self-reliance:** Thailand’s ultimate goal for community development; a concept which goes beyond poverty alleviation and is perceived in terms of political empowerment, economic sustainability and social security.

- (2) **Community capacity building:** a process that increases the assets and the attributes that a community is able to draw upon in order to take more control of and improve the influences on the lives of its members; a concept which is a means and end in itself in the process of community development and also is fundamental to the concept of empowerment (Mayer, 1996).
- (3) **Community capacity assessment:** a process which enables communities and development agents to understand more thoroughly about existing skills and competencies within the communities as well as competency gaps.
- (4) **Child Centered Community Development (CCCD):** an integration of child-centered approach with community development which emphasizes the need for poor children, their families and communities to participate in and take ownership of the development process
- (5) **Immersion:** a continuous face to face process of building relationship and mutual learning between community organizers and the children, their families and community, , based on mutual respect; the process which shows the community the commitment of the outsider and competence of the individual achieved through personal experience (Mrazek, Haggerty, 1994).
- (6) **Reflection:** a continual process of translating experiences and learning into new levels of understanding and consciousness which results in a sustained and committed action due to higher levels of consciousness of issues, values and attitudes.

Based on the above-cited concepts, the assessment coverage, methods and tools were developed.

- (7) **Assessment coverage:** The assessment focused on both community and PLAN's process in building community capacity. For community assessed, i.e. community generic capacity towards self-reliance and community capacity for program operation. Elements covered in the assessment of community capacity towards self-reliance were capacity of community leaders (3 categories, 15 items), capacity of community groups/organizations (4 categories, 14 items), capacity of community organization networks/ associations (4 categories, 17 items) and the communities (7 categories, 20 items). Meanwhile, the assessment of community capacity for program operation focused on 11 capacity areas which were fundamental for effective operation of development programs. The details of capacity categories/areas, capacity items and indicators covered in the assessment are provided in Chapter One of the full report. The assessment of PLAN's capacity building process aimed to obtain information on what PLAN staff did in such process, how and with what effects as well as to review the extent to which the CCCD principles were applied and its impact on the communities. Assessment methods and tools included the 4-scale questionnaire for the assessment of community capacity towards self-reliance, focus group discussion and weightings for community capacity for program operation and facilitated discussion/small group work for PLAN's work process. (See Chapter 1 for detailed explanation about the methods and tools). Participants of the assessment were leaders of the target communities and selected community groups and networks being assessed, representatives of women, children and the poorest of the poor households and PLAN frontline staff. (See Chapter 2 of the full report for details about participants from each of the communities).

Field data was collected during 22 March 2-April 2005 by two consultant teams, facilitated by PLAN staff from the country office and respective PU.

### **3. Research Results**

Detailed findings about each of the 12 cases along with observations and recommendations from the assessment team for each individual case are presented in Chapter 2 of the full report. This summary

report will focus only on the overall assessment of the 12 cases together as well as key recommendations based on the overall results.

### 3.1. Findings about Community Capacity Towards Self-Reliance

#### 1). Leaders

The majority of the participants rated the capacity of their leaders as high (level 4) in 2 items, relatively high (level 3) in 11 items and moderate (level 2) in 2 items. Table 1 provides findings on capacity levels of the leaders of the 12 communities/community groups/community networks as rated by their members and Table 2 provides the average scores for each item and for the 15 items together.

**Table 1:** Capacity levels of the leaders as rated by the members.

Capacity	Participant's rating	Description of the level
Self Management 1. Personality	Level 4 (41%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to express oneself properly and to choose proper words and language in communicating with others which could eventually create a good atmosphere in the communication process.</li> </ul>
	Level 3 (34%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to always communicate nicely with others.</li> </ul>
2. Knowledge and ability	Level 4 (43%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to generate and disseminate new knowledge based on hands-on experiences which are well-received by people from within and outside the community.</li> </ul>
	Level 2 (32%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eagerness to learn new knowledge from various sources and use the knowledge to improve oneself.</li> </ul>
3. Ethics	Level 3 (43%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to serve as a role model in following religious and cultural practices and to persuade others to follow the same practices</li> </ul>
	Level 2 (40%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eagerness to participate in religious and cultural activities on a regular basis and ability to relate harmoniously with people whose religious and cultural beliefs are different.</li> </ul>
4. Self-discipline	Level 3 (46%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to take care of one own business and one's family in a balance way.</li> </ul>
	Level 4 (35%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to manage own time for personal and work-related priorities without losing a balance in life.</li> </ul>
Social management 5. Human relations	Level 2 (45%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to express generosity and willingness to help others without being requested.</li> </ul>
	Level 4 (30%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to understand and consider other people's feelings which could eventually lead to a win-win solution.</li> </ul>
Capacity	Participant's rating	Description of the level
6. Democratic characteristic	Level 3 (54%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Willingness to listen to different views and to adopt ideas which are useful.</li> </ul>
	Level 2 (26%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to give reasons to support one's opinions or actions while working in a team or with others.</li> </ul>
7. Coordination	Level 3 (40%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to link groups together as a network for mutual benefits</li> </ul>
	Level 2 (33%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to accurately obtain and transfer information to others for common understanding on the issue.</li> </ul>
8. Capability to advice	Level 3 (36%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to provide information to help others solve their problems and point out some potential problems which may follow such solution.</li> </ul>
	Level 2 (25%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to provide advice to others for their problem solving based on well-rounded information</li> </ul>
Work management 9. Planning	Level 3 (41%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to systematically analyse situational trends inside</li> </ul>
	Level 4 (28%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to choose the best methods to implement the plan for maximum benefits of the groups</li> </ul>
10. Problem solving and decision	Level 3 (46%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to solve present problems by using well-rounded information and anticipate the impact of the solution.</li> </ul>

making	Level 2 (27%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to identify problems, analyze and prioritize their causal problems</li> </ul>
11. Financial management	Level 3 (41%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to propose financial and accounting system which is appropriate for the group's activities.</li> </ul>
	Level 4 (33%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to use financial and accounting information for sound decision making to improve the group's activities</li> </ul>
12. Work improvement	Level 3 (42%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to improve the group's productivity and maximize the use of limited resources</li> </ul>
	Level 4 (31%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to use new technologies to significantly reduce costs and time for the group's activities activities and work process.</li> </ul>
13. Monitoring and quality control	Level 2 (38%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to identify when and what to monitor resulting in improved performance of the group</li> </ul>
	Level 4 (29%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to use M&amp;E information to improve work plan and activities before the problems grow big while still maintaining the same level of quality.</li> </ul>
14. Team building and development	Level 3 (44%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to effectively transfer relevant knowledge to group members</li> </ul>
	Level 2 (37%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to bring people from different backgrounds to work together towards the same goal.</li> </ul>
15. Accountability	Level 3 (49%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to demonstrate accountability for mistakes even without evidence</li> </ul>
	Level 2 (26%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not putting the blame on others when being criticized.</li> </ul>

**Table 2:** Average scores on capacity of the leaders as rated by the members and PLAN frontline staff.

No	Capacity Item	Members	PLAN staff
		$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$
<b>Self management</b>			
1	Personality	3.18	3.00
2	Knowledge and ability	3.22	3.08
3	Ethics	2.81	2.83
4	Self-discipline	3.34	3.50
	Average for items 1-4	3.14	3.10
No	Capacity Item	Members	PLAN staff
		$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$
<b>Social management</b>			
5	Human relations	3.00	2.83
6	Democratic characteristic	2.97	2.58
7	Coordination	2.92	2.42
8	Capability to advice	2.89	2.50
	Average for items 5-8	2.95	2.58
9	Work-related abilities		
	Planning	2.94	2.33
10	Problem solving and decision making	2.83	2.25
11	Financial management	3.13	2.67
12	Work improvement	3.01	2.33
13	Monitoring and quality control	2.94	1.75
14	Team building and development	2.95	2.08
15	Accountability	3.00	2.33
	Average for items 9-15	2.97	2.25
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>2.64</b>

From Table 2, the average rating by the community and groups' members about their leaders' capacity was relatively high ( $\bar{X} = 3.02$ ) with capacity in category self-management receiving the

highest average score. PLAN staff's overall rating was lower than that of the community members ( $\bar{X} = 2.64$ ) PLAN staff also rated capacity items under category self-management as the highest.

It is obvious that while the community members rated item monitoring and quality control quite high ( $\bar{X} = 2.94$ ), PLAN staff gave it quite low rating ( $\bar{X} = 1.75$ ). This should be further investigated.

## 2). Community Groups Organizations

The analysis was made from the 7 cases which included activity groups at village level.

All of the three groups of respondents, i.e. community members, community leaders and PLAN frontline staff rated the overall capacity of the groups under the assessment as relatively high with means scores 3.04, 3.07 and 2.98 respectively. While the members of the groups and PLAN staff rated capacity items under category structure and work process as the strongest capacities of the groups, the leaders of the groups felt that their strongest capacities were under category benefit management. However, these differences are not at a significant level. All of the three groups agreed that the weakest capacities of the groups were those listed under category resource management. However, the average scores for this category are still in a good range ( $\bar{X} = 2.90, 2.96$  and  $2.79$  by the members, leaders and PLAN staff respectively). Details of these findings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Average scores about capacities of the community groups from 7 communities Including *Nongwaeng Women's Weaving group, Khambon Wiangchai women's saving group, Nong Sai children's group, Nong Bua Pae village bank, rice mill and fertilizer groups, Waenglao Kaonoi community groups, Nong Lum Pook community groups, and Ban Koop community groups* as rated by their members, leaders and PLAN staff.

Capacity Items		Members	Leaders	PLAN staff
		$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$
1	Structure and work process Elected committee with clear terms and duties	3.21	3.24	3.28
2	Clear and well accepted rules	3.36	3.40	3.43
3	Devoted and committed members	3.15	2.98	3.40
4	Well-established office/center	3.01	2.75	2.90
5	Effective work process and management system	3.18	3.07	3.01
	Average for items 1-5	3.18	3.09	3.20
6	Resource management Sufficient resources and budget to support activities	2.52	2.60	2.68
7	Resources managed and utilized according to priorities	3.01	3.02	2.69
8	Effective auditing mechanism	3.16	3.25	3.00
	Average for items 6-8	2.90	2.96	2.79
9	Capacity development Continual learning and capacity building process	3.07	3.07	2.70
10	Use of local wisdom/folk knowledge to improve group activities	2.98	3.13	2.72
11	Linkages with other groups for mutual support	3.02	3.11	2.98
	Average for items 9-11	3.02	3.10	2.80
12	Benefit management Ability to support members in problem solving process	3.02	2.96	2.99
13	Benefits distributed based on members' consensus	3.05	3.22	3.24
14	Provision of welfare to members and community on consensus basis	3.06	3.16	3.10
	Average for items 12-14	3.04	3.11	3.11
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>2.98</b>

### 3). Community Organizations Networks/Associations

The analysis was based on findings about the 5 networks/associations under the assessment including Association of Community Organization Federation for Development, *Namkham* Watershed Network, Young Conservation Network, Community Forestry Network and *Nong Khukhat* Savings Groups Network. The overall capacity of the 5 networks as rated by their leaders and members was high with a means score of 3.25 from 4. The strongest capacity category was structure and work process while the ones under resource and financial management were the second best and the other two categories in organizational capacity development and benefit management were the lowest ones but still within a good score range (means scores of 3.15). PLAN staff rating was a bit lower than that of the network members and leaders. However, order of the strongest and weakest capacity categories were quite consistent with that of the first group, with structure and work process being the strongest and organizational capacity development being the weakest.

**Table 4:** Findings about the networks' capacity.

No	Capacity Items	Members & leaders	PLAN staff
		$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$
1	Structure and work process		
	Member organizations participate on voluntary basis	3.57	3.67
2	Capable committee to mobilize network towards the achievement of its objectives	3.31	3.33
3	Effective work process with emphasis on member's participation and data based management	3.25	2.67
	Average score for items 1-3	3.38	3.22
4	Resource and financial management		
	Participatory auditing system	3.16	3.00
5	Effective financial Planning and control mechanism	3.44	3.33
6	Budget and resources are used with maximum benefits	3.41	3.33
7	Collection and utilization of traditional knowledge in community development	3.24	2.67
8	Network committee and members are trained in relevant areas to better manage network's activities	3.24	2.67
	Average score of items 4-8	3.30	3.00
9	Continual learning and experience sharing process among network members	3.11	3.33
10	Expansion of network-generated knowledge to other groups/networks	3.13	.67
11	Expanded membership on voluntary basis	3.21	2.33
12	Inter-network activities mobilized based on joint decision	3.16	2.67
	Average score of items 9-12	3.15	2.75
13	Benefit management		
	Fair distribution of benefits among member organizations	3.25	3.00
14	Exchange of resources, materials, tools, etc. for livelihood activities among member organizations	2.91	2.67
15	Member organizations united to negotiate to protect or increase mutual benefits	3.13	2.33
16	Network plays a vital role in community development and communities are benefited from activities of the network	3.36	3.33
17	Provision of welfare schemes in accordance with objectives of the network	3.08	3.00
	Average score of items 4-8	3.15	2.87
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>2.96</b>

#### 4). The Communities

Analysis of the communities' self-reliance capacity was made from findings about all communities participating in the assessment as rated by their leaders and members as well as PLAN frontline staff. In general, the capacity of the communities were perceived as relatively high by both the communities and PLAN staff with means scores 2.96 and 2.71 respectively. The strongest capacities in the opinion of the community people was those under religion and culture category with the ones under security being the second best and community economy being the weakest. PLAN staff rating was relatively lower than that of the communities. The strongest capacity of the communities in PLAN staff opinion was also under religion and culture category and community economy being the weakest.

**Table 5:** Findings about the communities self-reliance capacity.

No	Capacity Items	Members & leaders	PLAN staff
		$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$
1	Community Economy Households earn enough income and have some savings	2.46	2.33
2	Majority of population of working ages are employed	2.41	2.17
3	Community enterprises successful, products continually improved to meet market demand	2.43	1.92
	Average items 1-3	2.43	2.14
4	Environment Natural resources well managed and rehabilitated for sustainable use	2.80	2.50
5	Non-polluted environment	3.02	2.75
6	Sufficient infrastructure system	2.84	2.83
	Average items 4-6	2.89	2.69
7	Health Community health care developed and well-accepted by community and support agencies	3.00	2.67
8	Community members have good health-related habit	3.09	2.58
9	Community safe from epidemic	3.35	3.25
10	Community members can take good care of their health using both modern and traditional health care practices	2.88	2.42
	Average items 7-10	3.08	2.73
11	Religion and culture Community members committed to religious teachings and practices	3.23	3.25
12	Community members closely knitted with mutual care and support	3.30	3.33
13	Community members value and conserve local tradition and culture	3.35	3.33
	Average Items 11-13	3.29	3.30
14	Capacity development Community can collect, preserve and disseminate local knowledge and wisdom	2.93	2.83
15	Community has a data base which is used for community planning and development	2.92	2.42
	Average Items 14-15	2.92	2.42
16	Community management Community has an integrated development plan	2.87	2.50
17	Members of activity groups received more welfare supports where necessary	2.82	2.67
18	Community participate in local planning process with Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO)	3.14	2.75
	Average Items 16-18	2.94	2.71
19	Security Community safe from crimes and has good preventive mechanism	3.14	2.58
20	Community has preventive mechanism for disasters	3.18	3.00
	Average items 19-20	3.16	2.79
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>2.96</b>	<b>2.71</b>



### **3.2. Findings about Community's Capacity for Program Operation**

The assessment of community's program operation capacity covered 11 capacity areas, including: participation, leadership, organizational structure, problem assessment, resource mobilization, ability for critical questioning, links with others, roles of outside agents, program management, assertiveness and advocacy. Cross cutting issues such as gender and children participation were assessed across all areas. Full details about each of the 12 cases regarding their capacity in these 11 areas are provided in Chapter Two of the full report. This summary will present only key issues which need PLAN's special interventions in the time to come.

#### **1). Participation**

In all communities, it was found that participation level of community and groups' members in the planning and implementation of their activities was very high. It was the top capacity weighted by all groups following their focus group discussion. Participation took various forms such as in decisions to establish groups/networks, in designing the group's structure, rules, regulations and working procedures, in planning the group's activities and mobilizing fund and other resources to implement the activities and in following up on the progress of the activities. Most of these groups use monthly meeting as an M&E tool. Women have increasing role in these groups, especially groups which were set up to respond to their specific interests. Their ability to express ideas in public meetings has significantly been improved and many of them have been selected by government agents to serve as resource persons in some of the government training courses inside and outside their respective provinces. At household level, many families agreed on a new division of responsibilities on household chores between men and women to allow women to have more flexible time to participate in community development. In a few communities, women were selected as village chiefs. However, women's leading role in network level is still limited. Children participation in development activities have also increased, especially since the past few years when PLAN adopted the new CCCD approach. Children participation took various forms such as children groups set up to implement activities responding to children's specific needs, school-based activities which involved children in the management and community-based activities where children learn to work with adults on issues that affect the whole community (Chalard, 2004).

While community's participation in many communities continues to increase, the leading role of PLAN staff has gradually declined, especially in the communities which have been working with PLAN for over 10-15 years and have established linkages with other partners and communities outside their own for mutual support. These communities have demonstrated clear ability to move on towards the direction which is determined by themselves with some facilitation from PLAN and its partners, such as the case of the Association of Community Organization federation which comprises more than 200 member organizations and networks from two provinces. Most of these organizations have been working under PLAN supports for more than 20 years and have accumulated hand-on experiences in various areas. They have recently registered as a legal entity to pursue development activities towards their shared vision and aspirations. This is a clear case of self-sustained development resulting from PLAN's empowerment process as well as internal strengths of the communities. Information system and data base for problem assessment and community planning. Many of the 12 communities/cases do not have their own database which could be used for their planning and monitoring activities. Although PLAN has facilitated participatory planning in some of these communities through CCCD process, there is no clear data updating system for on-going monitoring purpose. There is also a lack of gender aggregated data base for community planning and strategic intervention on gender development by PLAN staff.

#### **2). Administrative System**

Most of the groups under the assessment demonstrated high level of administrative capacity, particularly in relation to group structure and work process. They felt that their groups/networks had

committee with clear terms and duties. Rules and regulations of the groups were formulated through participatory process and were well-accepted by most members with some flexibility to adjust to the changing situations. Work process of most groups were perceived as effective with some exceptions to a few groups which were newly established mostly those managed by the children. At network level, the structure and work process are more complex. Some of the networks such as the Association of Community Organization Federation, the *Namkham* Watershed Management Network, *Nong Khu Khat* Savings Groups Network have carefully designed structures which enables member organizations to participate in the process of planning and decision making at all levels with some flexibility for adjustment if the current structures could not function effectively. In terms of financial management, most groups have developed their own systems and felt that their resources were managed according to priorities with effective planning and auditing mechanism.

### **3). Fund raising system**

Most of the groups/networks have a mechanism to raise fund from both external and internal sources. External funding is raised mainly from PLAN who is the key provider of financial and technical services to these communities. Other external funding sources are government line agencies, TAOs, CEO governors and a few international donors such as the World Bank and UNDP. Groups with proven success tend to be able to attract more external funding than those who are relatively weak or new. Certain skills needed for resource mobilization, such as proposal writing and negotiation are still lacking in most communities. In many communities, the groups have mobilized fund from internal sources through various channels such as from community's savings, share holding in the groups' business, fee for the groups' services as well as profits from their income generation activities. A few communities, however, still depend quite heavily on outside funds. This dependency is due to two main reasons: one is the people's own attitudes to rely solely on external assistance and secondly is their financial inability to subsidize their own development activities. Both factors need to be carefully dealt with as they are obstacles to 'self-reliance' development.

### **4). Leadership**

The overall leadership capacity is quite strong and is characterized as capable, dedicated and forward-looking although with some varying degrees across the communities. Most of the leaders were between 35-55 years old. Some of them have been in leading position for more than 10 years. Hence and have accumulated hands-on experiences in relation to problem assessment, planning, group and financial management as well as specialized skills such organic farm production, organic farming, rice mill operation, weaving, environmental conservation, etc. In some groups such as in *Nong Bua Pae* village and the *Namkham* Watershed Network there is a good combination of old leaders who are rich with hands-on experiences and new leaders who are young, enthusiastic and who possess certain skills to cope with new challenges and development demands. This kind of combination is beneficial to the groups and is one of the factors contributing to their success. Leaders at network level are usually people who are rich with experiences and ideas as well as strong determination for self-driven development. Most of them have critical and systematic thinking ability and are able to analyze situational trends inside and outside their communities and to use the information to identify future direction and develop proactive plan to cope with future challenges. Women play an increasing leading role in many groups, especially in activities related to traditional skills such as weaving, food processing and savings. They prove to be effective in mobilizing active participation of the members in the groups' activities such as in the case of *Kham Bon Wiangchai* savings group. They also demonstrated a high level of dedication and accountability. However, their leading role at network level is still limited. Despite these strengths, some of the leaders need more skills to cope with a more complex management task, especially when their activities are moving towards larger scale of operation such as community enterprises. Skills which need to be strengthened are, for example, coordinating, monitoring and evaluation, coaching and enterprises management. Links with others

Apart from the 5 networks, most of the groups under the assessment have not developed official linkages with other groups outside their own. However, there were some informal exchanges of knowledge and expertise between some of these groups and groups/networks in other PLAN's communities.

### **5). Advocacy**

A few groups/networks have "advocacy" as one of their objectives such as the Association of Community Organization Federation and the *Nong Lumpook* savings group. Some communities such as the *Namkham* Watershed Management Network have joined the Assembly of Hill tribe Peoples in Thailand to advocate about citizenship and natural resource management policies. At local level, some community and group leaders (e.g. from *Nong Bua Pae* village) sit in the provincial taskforce to formulate provincial policies on community development. However, it is found that most of the communities have limited advocacy skills and experiences.

### **3.3. Findings about PLAN's Process at the Community Level**

PLAN's approach in working with these poor communities have evolved over the years from direct service delivery by PLAN staff towards community empowerment and child-centered community development (CCCD) during the past few years. In communities where the genuine empowerment process is practiced, its impact is obvious, especially in communities with high level of social capital such as capable leadership, strong community ties, rich knowledge-base, etc. In such communities, the people can quickly assume the leading role in their own development activities while PLAN's staff play a facilitating and coordinating role.

Among PLAN frontline staff, there is diversity in their approaches as described in details in Chapter Two of the full report. While some have moved towards more participatory and empowerment approach, the others seem to be slower in shifting their paradigm and work process due to two main reasons. Firstly, most of the staff have to cover many activities and communities, some of them find it difficult to focus intensively on one community to trigger bottom-up changes through participatory process. Secondly, some of them lack participatory skills. Although most of them have been trained on participatory techniques, it is not easy for them to master these skills if they do not apply them in their day-to-day work with the communities. Despite increased efforts by PLAN staff to mobilize stronger participation and ownership by the communities, there are some communities which remain quite dependent on PLAN and external agents to lead their change process. These communities are usually characterized by having old styled leadership and centralized decision making and management. Some of them have high seasonal migration rate to big cities resulting in low members' participation in community activities.

In communities where the CCCD approach is fully applied since PLAN's inception period with the communities such as in *ban Koop* in *Srisaket* province and *Namkham* Watershed Project in *Chiang Rai*, significant changes have been made in relation to community's awareness and participation. The CCCD process involves community members, women and men, children and adults in a series of consultative workshops to identify their needs and community's potential and limitations in addressing these needs. The process is highly participatory and proves to be a powerful tool to mobilize the whole community towards the same goal especially if conducted on a continual basis. It is remarkable that in the CCCD process, PLAN has tried to involve other partners such as government agencies (schools, community development, forestry, agriculture, health, etc.) in developing integrated strategies and to support community-based development. This kind of collaboration is not clearly reflected in communities where PLAN staff have not adopted CCCD approach. Other ways of working as suggested in CCCD framework such as addressing children's issues, facilitating participation, mobilizing resources and supporting groups and organizations have been practiced by PLAN frontline staff in all communities although at varying degrees.

Immersion and reflection as two key elements for community capacity building are practiced to some extent but not with much effort as it should be. This depends mainly on the attitude, understanding and ability to apply them. In some communities, although direct service delivery by PLAN staff is still the core approach, staff are able to identify relevant activities to respond to the communities needs as a result of their constant interaction and immersion with the communities. In communities with CCCD approach, the immersion period prior to activity planning with communities took quite a long time to develop full mutual trust and rapport. Reflection is systematically practiced by some of the groups and networks such as the *Namkham* Watershed Development Project the Association of Community Development Organizations. In many of the remaining communities, however, reflection has not been reinforced or emphasized by both PLAN staff and the communities. There is a lack of systematic and effective mechanism for groups to continuously translate their experiences and learning into new level of understanding which could help them deal more effectively with the issues they face. What is also missing is effective facilitation during reflection sessions.

Gender issue is addressed, in most cases, through women's groups and activities. It is evident that this approach results in increased opportunities for women to address their specific development needs, their improved capacity to manage development activities, their self-confidence and self-esteem as equal partners to men in development process and their improved status in the family and community. Apart from women's groups which are established to respond to women's specific needs, it is found that not much efforts have been made to mainstream gender issues into the planning and implementation of other development activities.

Children participation is increasing in many communities. Children become more involved in development activities in many ways such as by participating in community development planning process by managing their own projects according to their capacities and by participating as equal members of the adults in some activities where they can use their specialized skills to fill the group's operational gap. All of these have benefited the children and resulted in their improved skills in development management, their increased access to education, increased consciousness among adults about the children's needs and increased awareness among the children about the issues affecting their lives, their families and communities. Despite these positive signs, it is found that children participation in development activities could still be improved in a number of ways. In some of these communities, children still lack certain knowledge and skills to support their full and effective participation in their activities and there is no systematic approach to enhance children capacity in this regard. General attitude of the adults to promote child-centered development is not yet very strong.

#### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Recommendations listed in this executive summary is drawn from main content in Chapter three of this report where more details about each of the recommendations can be found.

##### **4.1. Conclusions and Recommendations about the Community Capacity Towards Self-Reliance**

PLAN`s continual commitment to enabling deprived children, their families and their communities to meet their basic needs and to increase their ability to participate in the society has yielded remarkable results in these poor communities. There are many significant tangible and intangible changes in the communities as a result of Plan's work. Tangible changes are witnessed in the overall improvement of community's infrastructure system, housing, health condition, income, education, and environment. Intangible changes are reflected through community's improved attitudes knowledge and skills needed for their development. In terms of their self-reliance ability, the communities covered in the assessment demonstrated high level of self-reliance capacity in all 7 dimensions including community economy, environment, health, religion and culture, capacity development, community management and security. These improvements are due mainly to intensive inputs and technical support from PLAN during the past 10-20 years as repeatedly reflected by the participants during the assessment. Despite these

positive results, there remain rooms for further improvements in many areas. Following are observations and recommendations for some of the community capacities which should be furthered support by PLAN and its partners.

## **1). Community Economy**

### **(1). Conclusion**

As a result of PLAN's continual support to community's income generation activities, most of the communities have been able to increase their income and improve their living condition in a significant way. Efforts have been made to reduce production and consumption costs and to mobilise more income through community business such as community rice mill, bio-fertiliser factory and cooperatives shop. Some communities tried to reduce their dependency on informal money lenders by mobilising savings among themselves and providing low-interest loans out of their own savings . However, some communities are still caught in a vicious circle of chronic debts and dependency on remittance sent from family members who go to work outside the communities.

Review of several studies on rural poverty in Thailand reflects interesting phenomenon that during the past 40 years, rural communities have gone through several transitional periods, moving from a subsistence farming system to commercial farming, from a traditional towards a more modernised society, from a closely knitted to a more individualistic lifestyle. Going through these change processes many communities were able to grow stronger economically and socially. Some communities, however, faced with difficulties in trying to maintain a balance between economic growth, social well-being and environmental management. To deal with these problems and promote more sustainable development, Thailand's current National Social and Economic Development Plan adopts the philosophy of sufficiency economy which is based on (a) the adherence of the middle path, (b) the step-by-step economic development , and (c) the shift from GDP to GDH (Gross Domestic Happiness) where other indicators of well-being such as life security, physical and mental health, happy family, strong community, good living environment, freedom, self-pride and access to religious teachings are taken into account.

Studies on community-based poverty reduction experiences in Thailand also reveal that many communities have adopted the principles of sufficiency in their approach to tackle poverty problem and to strengthen their self-reliance ability. In so doing , they move step by step in their economic development from step one: production for household and community consumption to level two: production for local markets and exchanges and level three: production for larger scale markets and export. In moving from step 1 to step 2, community enterprises play a vital role. The ultimate goal of sufficiency-based development also shifts from growth-oriented towards value-based sustainable development. Therefore, in order for PLAN to have more impact on community holistic well-being, it needs to tackle poverty problem in a more comprehensive way through a multi-dimensional approach.

### **(2). Recommendations**

- **Promote the development of community's vision, goal and integrated master plan for self-reliance development based on sufficiency principle.**

The process of community planning may involve 5 major steps, including: (1) reviewing community's past development and its impacts on the community's life; (2) identifying community's resources and assets as well as prioritized needs/problems; (3) exploring and exposure to different alternatives; (4) analysis of options and identifying the best alternatives; and (5) creating the plan. The plan should build upon existing resources and expertise of the communities as a first step towards self-reliance. Self-reliance could be demonstrated in several ways such as replacement of external production materials with local ones, use of local experts in stead of external experts, use of local wisdom and appropriate technologies to create income-generation activities in stead of adopting expensive and unfamiliar techniques, reliance on local resources and funds in stead of external borrowing, hands-on and take Community master plan for self-reliance on sufficiency basis should also

put more emphasis on strengthening social capital along with economic capital and should be holistic in its approach, including activities in various dimensions such as economic, health, environment, culture and religion, education, welfare and security (Wiput, Decharut, Puttapong, 2003).

- **Strengthen and promote community enterprises**

Community enterprises play a vital role in the process of self-reliance development. The assessment findings indicated that the majority of the communities rated their capacity for community enterprises development and management quite low. However, there are also some good models on community enterprises such as the community's rice mills and bio-fertilizer factories in *Nong Bua Pae* and in many villages under the Association of Community Organizations Federation for Development. The primary objective of these enterprises is to reduce the communities' dependency on outside markets, i.e. to process rice and sell it in local markets and to reduce their dependency on expensive and imported chemical fertilizer. These community enterprises should be further strengthened by PLAN and its partners. The findings about community capacity for enterprise management and other related skills described in Chapter Two of the full report should be used as a basis to identify areas for further strengthening. For some other groups which have potential to upgrade their current income generation activities to become community enterprises such as the weaving group of *Nong Waeng*, PLAN should assist them to develop a step by step plan to upscale these activities. The first step is to identify potential markets for the enterprise commodities. As the primary goal of community enterprises is for mutual help among their members and networks, the commodities should primarily serve community's consumption or production needs. The investment should come from people in the community and its networks. Therefore, internal resources such as money, raw materials, experts, traditional knowledge should be mobilized and more jobs created for local people through the operation of the community enterprises. PLAN should promote active learning and experience sharing among different community enterprise groups. This is one of the best ways for people to learn and enhance their linkages for mutual support. Relevant training on specific skills should also be provided where necessary. Training should be action-oriented and result-based.

- **Implement short-term measures for poverty alleviation**

For some communities where poverty incidence is especially high and severe such as in Ban Koop , *Sri Saket* province and in *Nong Sai* and its neighboring villages in *Khon Kaen*, short term measures should be immediately implemented, based on information gained through participatory planning process with the communities. In Ban Koop, for example, most of the villagers are ethnic minorities who have language and cultural constraints to participate in the mainstream economic activities in the area. Many of them earn their living as wage earners outside the village because the whole village is located in forest area, so most villagers have quite limited farm land. PLAN has facilitated the process of strategic planning with the communities two years ago. These strategies should be reviewed and short-term and long-term measures for poverty alleviation and quality of life improvement of the community should be identified to meet immediate needs of the poor households and their children. These short term measures could include activities such as home-based work sub-contracted by some local enterprises/business (where PLAN should play a coordinating role in the initial stage) or home-based food processing for food security purpose.

In *Nong Sai* and its neighboring villages, most households are engaged in rain-fed rice farming with relatively poor income. Almost all households are indebted with the BAAC and informal money lenders. Many depend largely on remittance sent home by family members who go to work in Bangkok. Many children are left home with their grand parents while their parents are away. Some children also have to go to Bangkok during school vacation and work in factories or on construction sites to get money for their educational fee. In such severe case, PLAN's strategies for poverty alleviation in this village should be revisited. Where possible, linkages between current income generation groups with the Association of Community Organization Federation should be strengthened too upscale economic activities of these poor villages so that they could potentially become main sources of income of the villagers.

## **2). Community Social Capital**

### **(1). Conclusion**

According to the assessment findings, the 12 communities and PLAN staff assessed capacity under religion and culture category as the highest one. This implies that these communities are quite committed to religious teachings and practices. Their relationship in the community is closely bound with mutual care and they still value and conserve local tradition and culture. This results in the overall development of their well-being such as in the case of *Khambon Wiangchai* village, the *Namkham* watershed network, the Association of Community Organizations Federation whose development goal is not to get rich, but to create a livable community where every one could have a sufficient basis to live on and where physical development and spiritual development are equally important goals. The use of local knowledge and wisdom in community development activity is also significant in some communities for example, the environmental conservation network which uses local knowledge to build community's consciousness about the need for forest conservation. In some other communities, children and youth are engaged in cultural conservation activities such as traditional music and dances. These activities not only create the sense of pride in their cultural root, but also build solidarity among community members.

### **(2). Recommendations**

- **Participatory assessment of existing social capital in the communities**

It is worth for PLAN to facilitate community forum where community members, men and women, adults and children participate in the assessment of their social capital, i.e. social factors contributing to sustainable development and community's overall well-being. This process will help reveal "hidden" assets of the communities as well as raise people's collective awareness and pride about their own strengths which are conducive to self-help development. It is also useful for PLAN staff to understand these non-monetary factors and capacities of the communities in order to develop the right strategies to support them. The result of the assessment could potentially be used to design development activities which build upon these social assets, such as village savings based on 'pledged' system, development practices based on religious and cultural values or application of traditional wisdom in production activities to reduce dependency on imported technologies or inputs, etc.

- **Mobilizing local experts' participation and contribution**

Following the process in recommendation 1, communities should be motivated to mobilize their local expertise for their own development. Local resource persons specialized in indigenous skills as well as people with new knowledge and modern skills in the communities should try to work collaboratively blending their knowledge and skills to address common interest of the communities. Regular forum should be held for knowledge sharing.

- **Documentation of good practices**

In some of these communities, there is a pool of good practice about how social capital can be strengthened and how it contributes to the achievement of community development. PLAN may want to support the documentation of these good practices to add to the communities' knowledge base as well as to share with other communities.

## **3). Community learning and knowledge management process**

### **(1). Conclusion**

It is found that many of these communities have generated valuable knowledge through their actual experiences. But in most cases, it remains as "tacit" knowledge within some of the people. There is no system to make it an explicit knowledge which could be managed and shared for community learning together. It is also evident that most people regarded "training" as their only way of learning. PLAN has provided intensive inputs to support training programs and study tours for these communities. However, there is no clear system to follow-up whether and to what extent new knowledge from the training could be or had been put into practice.

From these 12 cases, a few communities have demonstrated high ability to collect, conserve and disseminate local knowledge and wisdom and some of them have a data base on local knowledge which is used for community planning and development. The use of local knowledge in local development is not a new idea and the concept of community-based knowledge management has received increasing attention from communities, governments and development practitioners as it builds upon the systems which already exist in the community's life rather than replaces it with something totally new from outside, some of which could be alienated or disconnected from the community's traditional wisdom and learning system.

## **(2). Recommendations**

### **• Learning as an ongoing process**

Based on the CCCD principles, PLAN staff should put more efforts in promoting on-going learning process as a key capacity building strategy for the communities. Frequent reflection sessions should be held in community groups to draw lessons and insights based on their experiences.

### **• Documentation of community knowledge**

As a result of globalization process, communities are overwhelmed with information and knowledge from several sources. While new knowledge is necessary, some of the traditional knowledge is still important as it was based on the cultural roots of the communities. Meanwhile, many communities have accumulated a wealth of new knowledge generated through their actual experiences and through constant reflections. In many of these cases, the new and old knowledge are nicely blended together and applied in actual situation, resulting in a new set of knowledge which is more applicable to the present context of the communities. To promote knowledge-based development, PLAN should support the communities to draw out their tacit knowledge and document it for learning and development planning purpose.

### **• Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

As an empowering learning tool where PAR combines the action research aims of improving society (Julian, Ronnie, 2005). To enhance community's learning capacity, PLAN may want to involve the communities in participatory action research (PAR) process where specific questions to the community's problems are identified and solutions are found through an action-based research. Through the PAR process, communities developed skills in problem identification, action planning and action-based learning to build new knowledge relevant to their lives. This process could create a continual learning atmosphere among villagers and the communities should increasingly become "a learning society" where development is led by grounded knowledge in which the social group is helped to formulate a critical analysis of its own situation, its problems, weaknesses, needs, strengths and resources. By identifying and consolidating the knowledge and skills, which they already possess (Matthias, Dilip, Melba G., 2005).

### **• Linkages between community knowledge and school curriculum**

The current Educational Act provides channels for the immersion of community knowledge and school curriculum. Schools in the communities should develop local curriculum which builds on community's knowledge and development experiences.

## **4.2. Recommendations to Community Capacity for Program Operation**

### **1). Participatory Data Collection and User Friendly Data-Base System**

The process of community master PLAN development as already recommended will result in a rich pool of community profile in diverse areas such as community's resources, strengths, problems, alternative solutions to problems, etc. These data should be systematically recorded for future reference. PLAN should also facilitate the communities to update these information every year through simple and practical methods such as PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) or other methods which could mobilize active participation of the villagers (Suchin, Sukesini, 1987). A technical assistance is also needed to help the communities develop a practical and user-friendly data base system. Local



institutions with expertise in this area could be a potential key player in this activity. The communities may also want to involve their children in this process as they, possess some skills such as writing, graphic design and IT which are useful.

## **2). Capacity Building in Advanced Management Skills**

For community organization networks which are moving towards a larger scale of activities and community enterprises, it is necessary for them to have an effective management system a clear business PLAN and a capable manager in business management. Decisions for investment and management should also be made on well-rounded information and risk assessment results. PLAN could support the communities by linking them with learning sources or advisory services in this regard and by providing on-going supervision while they move forwards.

## **3). Capacity Building In Proposal Development**

Under Thailand's public reform and decentralization scheme, rural communities have increased access to the government fund e.g. through Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO), *Tambon* Administrative Organization (TAO) , and CEO governor budget. To access these funds, the communities must have ability to develop good proposals for their activities. PLAN should strengthen capacity of these communities in this regard to enhance their opportunities for external funding.

## **4). Community-Based Micro Finance Institute**

Many of the savings groups in these communities have potential to become community-based micro finance institutes which could provide a broader coverage of services to respond to the community's complex and rising needs. PLAN should conduct a survey or an assessment to identify these potential groups and develop a systematic PLAN to leverage their status and capacities. There is a variety of models which could be adopted based on proven experiences of many communities across the country. Whatever models will be adopted depends on the communities' decisions and PLAN should play a facilitating role by introducing them to different alternatives, taking them on study visits, training them on relevant knowledge and skills, etc. It should always be reminded that that these community-based finance institute should not run on strict market principles, but should be devoted to maintaining the community, its ethics and its way of life.

## **5). Enhance Leadership Skills**

To enable leaders of the groups and networks to cope more effectively with new development challenges and more complicated management tasks, PLAN should enhance their leadership capacities in the areas that they are still weak, based on the assessment findings in Chapter Two of the full report. The 14 items under 3 categories (self-management, social management and work management) could potentially serve as benchmarks in designing capacity building programs and in monitoring improvements in attitudes , knowledge and behaviors of these leaders. Capacity building for these leaders can be done in several ways, such as training or continued education. *Rajabhat* University in many provinces offer courses on leadership skills such as strategic Planning, result-based budgeting, result-based management, IT, etc. Other local universities also have certified or degree programs in these areas. PLAN may want to coordinate or to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with these institutes to involve interested group leaders in these programs.

## **6). Participation in Government's Community Development Benchmarking system**

The Department of Community Development and its partners is implementing a nationwide program aiming to enhance community self-reliance capacity through a system called: Community Development Benchmarking System. The system covers capacities for 4 groups, i.e. community leaders, community organizations, community organization networks and the communities . Indicators for each groups were developed through active participation of community representatives from across

the country, and part of these indicators have been used in the questionnaire for this assessment. Interested communities in all provinces are invited to voluntarily participate in the program where they have to assess their present capacities, identify competency gaps develop PLAN for self-improvement, implement the PLAN and evaluate the changes in their capacities at the end of the implementation. Throughout this process, they will be assisted by multiple agency teams in their respective districts and provinces. In line with its "working with partners" principle, PLAN should regard this as a very good opportunity to participate in this program as an active partner. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) could be made between PLAN and the Department of Community Development and PLAN's further role in this program be determined based on the agreement. At community level, PLAN's communities should be encouraged to participate in the program for their own benefits.

#### **7). Community Empowerment Process to Enhance Advocacy Capacity**

To enable the communities to have better advocacy capacity, PLAN staff should adopt a process which empowers the communities to take a lead in their own development and to better voice their needs and concerns for policy and structural changes. In such process, the communities must learn to (a) build their community power to solve problems independently; (b) build their community power to negotiate cooperation with outside agencies; and (c) build their community power and networks to claim and protect community rights

#### **8). Community Networking**

Networking among community groups is another powerful way to consolidate community's efforts for advocacy as it increases their negotiation power over the issue. The Association of Community Organizations Federation for Development is a good example of this process as one of its objectives is "to collaborate with GOs and NGOs inside and outside Thailand to promote child-centered community development". PLAN should draw lessons and good practices from the experience of the association regarding the motivation and process which bring their member organizations to work collaboratively on issue of common concern. These lessons then should be shared with other community groups which have potential to develop linkages with other groups for advocacy purpose. Study tours to these model communities should be organized to expose interested communities / groups with the networking process in action.

### **4.3. Recommendations about PLAN's Work Process**

Based on the findings of this assessment, PLAN should further identify its strategic interventions in these communities groups and networks during the next few years with a clear goal to enhance community capacity towards self-sustained development. Interventions could take various forms. Following is the list of some potential activities which PLAN could consider to improve its working approach to achieve its vision and mission before the agency withdraws from Thailand.

#### **1). Change Management for Paradigm Shift**

To enable frontline staff to shift their approach towards community empowerment and child centered community development, there is a need for enabling systems and effective change management procedures at every organizational level, i.e. country office, PU and community. PLAN's strategies, systems, skills, and styles of working should be reviewed and modified where necessary to support the paradigm shift. Strategies and plans should gear towards creating opportunities for the poor to effectively act on their issues so children, their families and the communities may influence the reform of institutions and their relationships with other levels of their society. Systems needed to support the achievement of these strategies include competency-based personnel development, result-based performance evaluation, and process-oriented monitoring system. Staff competency profile should be reviewed and necessary changes made to enable them to perform new roles more effectively. Based on new competency profile, training needs assessment should be conducted and training courses provided

to equip staff at all levels with skills and knowledge for the new approaches. Staff performance evaluation should also focus on both process and outputs of their work. To ensure that community empowerment and CCCD principles are adopted and become an integral part of PLAN's approach, PLAN may want to start by setting a target of "one staff-one CCCD oriented community" in the first year and allowing enough time and resources for the staff to operate along the new line. Best practices should be drawn from the staff actual experiences and used as models to illustrate effective CCCD-oriented working style.

## **2). Capacity Building of PLAN Staff**

As already mentioned in recommendation 1, PLAN staff need to be equipped with new skills needed for their new work approach. Capacity building should be competency-based and could be done in several ways such as on the job coaching and supervision, in house training, training by academic institutions, or as an ongoing action and after action review process. Whatever methods are used, they should be designed as result-based training / learning events where impact of the programs on staffs' attitudes, knowledge and skills as well as staffs performance with the communities could be assessed.

## **3). Setting Priorities and Working Strategically**

PLAN work in Thailand is very comprehensive in terms of numbers of communities and activities involved. To achieve its vision and mission, there is a need for PLAN to set priorities and develop effective strategies as it will gradually withdraw its assistance to communities in Thailand during the next few years. Priorities should base on what PLAN wants to achieve globally and in Thailand as well as on PLAN's potential to achieve it. In order to achieve these priorities, PLAN may want to work more collaboratively with other partners, especially with government agencies and local NGOs. As Thailand is undergoing a big public reform scheme with a strong focus on "citizen centered" approach through the CEO governor's system, it is the very right timing for PLAN to join this mainstream and perhaps to serve as a role model in community empowerment approach based on CCCD philosophy. PLAN's close collaboration with government agencies and other NGOs to address poverty and to build community's capacity for self-reliance should be one of the best way to secure sustainability of PLAN's activities after it withdraws. Therefore, PLAN should put more emphasis on working with partners at upper levels, i.e. provincial and national.

To accelerate changes in PLAN's communities, community networking process should be promoted. Evidence from many places have shown that "people-to-people" learning is one of the most effective way to trigger changes in the communities and community networking process helps to leverage community's capacity to deal with their multi-dimensional problems in a more effective and comprehensive way. For PLAN staff to have more impact at community level, the focus should be shifted from working with individual groups to facilitating the groups to establish network for mutual supports. Working through networks will also save the staffs time and enable them to concentrate more on the quality of their work process. Community networks could be area-based or theme-based depending on the interest and decision of the communities.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) should also be introduced in some communities where different solutions to their common problem could potentially be generated through their action-based interactive learning. In the PAR process, communities will develop skills in identifying problems, designing alternative solutions, implementing solutions, reflecting and comparing the results and drawing lessons learned. Through this process, communities generate new knowledge relevant to their life and become more capable of managing their own development through knowledge-based approach.

## **4). Promoting Gender-Based Development**

Gender equality should be mainstreamed into all activities that PLAN supports, not just activities by women's groups. Gender mainstreaming aims to: (a) raise awareness of groups/organizations to be

conscious about gender inequality issues, their causal factors and consequences in the overall development of the community and society; and (b) develop activities which take into consideration about gender in equalities and ways to improve them. To enable community groups to do this, PLAN staff must have relevant skills, such as gender analysis and advocacy. For gender analysis, the staff should be able to: (a) Analyze economic, social and political factors causing gender inequality; (b) Analyze the impact of macro policies and work PLANS on gender inequality issues; and (c) develop indicators for change process towards gender equality. For advocacy skills, the staff should have at least gender aggregated data of their communities to use in advocacy planning.

#### **5). Promoting Children Rights and Participation**

PLAN's Child Centered Community Development Working Paper should be referred to as a guideline to help field staff promote children rights and participation with a greater impact. There are two basic assumptions about children participation: (1) children can fully participate when supported by their families; and (2) families and communities can better meet their responsibilities towards children when their own capacity to address their needs and rights are addressed. To pursue along this line, it must be ensured that all development activities that PLAN supports through adults in the communities do in fact benefit children. Communities should be assisted to conduct an assessment on children rights situation and develop appropriate solutions to present issues as well as preventive measures for future threats. Children participation in development should also be enhanced through activities which are suitable with levels of their ability and ages. Involving children in an active learning process, e.g. young researchers to generate knowledge from actual experiences is one of the powerful learning tools.

#### **6). Modeling Cultural-Based and Rights-Based Development Approach**

PLAN works in ultra poor and disadvantaged communities which, in many cases, have limited access to regular government services due to their remote location or exclusion from the official village registration system such as hill tribe communities in the north and some ethnic villages in the northeast. Through PLAN's support, the rights for development, education, environment management and political participation of these communities have been enforced resulting in the overall improvement of their life. In ethnic indigenous communities, the CCCD approach empowers the communities to identify and apply their positive indigenous knowledge and cultures in their development process. Hence, development is culturally sensitive and is more relevant to the community's way of life. Some of the indigenous knowledge and practices are valuable and conducive to sustainable development. For example, the hill-tribe's traditional forest management and land-use system. The CCCD process also involves key stakeholders and agencies in the process of development Planning and implementation, resulting in a more concerted development towards the same direction and shared vision. PLAN should further strengthen and meanwhile document the process of its rights-based and cultural-based working approach with supporting cases from some of its indigenous communities. The documentation could be used for advocacy purpose to influence changes in practices among development partners, GOs and NGOs, inside and outside Thailand.

#### **7). Promoting Learning Sites**

Communities with proven knowledge, process and outputs should be promoted as "learning sites" for other communities. To serve as learning centers, they should receive special support from PLAN such as budget to produce learning materials and to arrange learning activities as well as technical advice on how to run effective learning programs. They may want to mobilize resources from this kind of service so that it can be self-sustained in the longer term. In this case, effective resource mobilization and management system needs to be developed.

### **8). Documentation and Dissemination of Best Practices**

Over the past 20 years of its committed existence, PLAN Thailand has accumulated a wealth of experiences and good practices. PLAN has been working in communities with less access to regular state services and its expertise in addressing the needs of the poorest of the poor is exceptionally invaluable. Therefore, PLAN should document these experiences and share them with its partners and communities or use them for advocacy and public-relations purpose.

### **9). Apply Lessons Learned from this Assessment with the other PLAN's Communities as Appropriate**

Although these recommendations are drawn from experiences of 12 community groups and networks, their applications should not necessarily be limited to only these 12 cases. PLAN may want to selectively apply some of them with other communities as appropriate. Managers from all PUs and PLAN frontline staff in all of the 12 communities were also involved in this assessment process. So they should be able to repeat the same process in the rest of their communities, using the guideline prepared by this assessment team as a reference.

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