

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This study of “People’s participation in solving drug problems in Maehugpattana village, Sansai district, Chiangmai” sought to examine the drug situation in the community and how internal factors which developed among the people were used to effectively fight the problem. Specific data on the community was collected from February to April 2005 using a qualitative approach which involved in-depth interviews with community leaders, youth and other community members. Data was also gathered through participant and non-participant observation at various community events, meetings and activities. The results of this data collection and examination are explained in detail below.

#### **5.1 General community information**

Maehugpattana is a community of 897 people in Chiangmai province. The entire community was relocated to its current location in 1979 from Doisaket district, Chiangmai because of the construction of Maekhuang Dam. Due to the infertile new land residents were no longer able to work as rice farmers and the majority of adults now work for others as labourers both inside and outside the community. The work is low pay and not regular, which has led to a generally low income among the majority of community members.

The village administration is both formal and informal. Formal administration is similar to many other communities and includes a village head, his assistants, a village committee, Tambon Council representatives, village defense volunteers and public health volunteers. Their responsibilities include general administration in accordance with government policies. The informal administration includes the use of seniority and interpersonal relationships among community members to help look after one another and to solve problems or conflicts among themselves in a friendly manner, as if they were members of the same family.

When the community moved to its present location 29 years ago people brought with them their traditional culture and northern lifestyle, which served as an important source of cultural capital that helped to strengthen the relationships among community members and was used to help solve various kinds of conflicts and problems in the community. Though the community has been much influenced by modernity, traditional cultural aspects such as belief in ancestral and community spirits, as well as cultural events, ritual ceremonies and celebrations continue to take place every year.

There are several community organisations in Maehugpattana, some of which were initiated by the government and some which were initiated by community members themselves. A community cooperative was established under the initiation of the local government, aimed at improving the quality of life for residents in terms of cooperation. This particular project did not work well because it lacked residents sincere interest and participation was subsequently very limited. Other community organisations such as a youth group, housewives group and health development group were initiated by the community itself and have worked very well in that there are increasing numbers of activities developed. Many were initially intended to solve drug problems in the community and continued to improve people's quality of life in general.

Prior to the anti-drug campaign, the drug situation in Maehugpattana in 2001 – 2002 was not as serious as many other rural communities in the north, but there were a small number of residents who were identified being involved in the sale and use of methamphetamines in the village. Despite the small number of people who were involved with drugs, the risk was highest among labourers and youths. Since the majority of adults in the village worked as labourers in other assorted communities where drugs were more available there was a tendency for these people to use drugs in order to have more energy to work. Some of them also brought the drug back to the community and gave or sold it to their fellow villagers.

A high number of youth attend schools outside the community in more urban areas like the city of Chiangmai where drugs were more widely available. There is the possibility that these young people may be persuaded to get involved with drug-related

activities with their peers. These youth may then bring the drug or drug-related habits and behavior to their home community and influence their friends there. In addition, a number of out-of school youth do not maintain regular, proper work and are therefore left with a lot of free time. They may use this time to become involved with smoking, drinking alcohol and taking drugs.

Members of the community were rather concerned about youth behaviour in the village since some young people would spend time together at night creating a lot of noise and disturbing the community. They would often get into arguments and fights. Their parents and other adults began to talk about these problems and express their concerns. Eventually they formed a group and discussed the problem and how it could be solved. Finally, strategies were developed to tackle drug problems and improve other aspects of life for all community residents.

## **5.2 Analysis of community development against drugs**

The initial project to tackle the drug problem in the community ran for one year from September 2001 to August 2002. Later, some of the activities that had been developed during that first year were continued and more activities were established to ensure the positive sustainable results. The findings of this study support the hypothesis in that the success of the Maehugpattana village in solving the narcotics problem stemmed from internal factors and mechanisms in the village. Various internal factors served as mechanisms contributing to this success, but the most significant were the process of using social and cultural capital and the strong leadership of the village head.

### **5.2.1 The use of social and cultural capital**

Social capital is a system or practice that brings people together to become a community or a network where people are interdependent on one another. Such a system may be traditional or newly-developed and often includes resources that are produced by members of the community such as basic needs, money, knowledge, local wisdom and experiences. In Maehugpattana, while some aspects of social capital were already in place, resident created much of their social capital when they first moved to

the village's present location to help build their new community. This creation social capital occurred despite the hardships experienced by many due to the unfertile land which meant many people had very low incomes with some even falling into poverty because they were unable to make a suitable living from the limited work opportunities in the area.

It was through these hardships that residents shared a deep understanding of one another's situation, making residents much more willing to help one another in various circumstances. They worked together to improve the community's infrastructure and facilities; they formed groups and shared their knowledge and other resources to help one another improve various aspects of life. This led to a sense of togetherness and unity. For this reason, when people decided to tackle drug problems in the community which they saw to be degrading the community's well-being, there were many residents who volunteered to be involved with the project committee to help pioneer the project. When money was needed for conducting activities against drugs, people donated their own money so that the activities would succeed, despite their low incomes.

With increasing numbers of community development activities there was always a need for people's participation, which meant that some people would be unable to participate in all of the activities and all of the time since they also had to work. However, participation was always voluntary. People tried to be involved as much as their schedules would allow. For example, when the husband was unavailable the wife or children would go and help with programs or meetings. Village defense volunteers sacrifice their evenings to patrol the village every night; the elderly have taken the role of leaders in both religious and secular ceremonies.

Culture and tradition are an important part of social capital, though they are often referred to as cultural capital, which includes social norms and values that are expressed through people's way of life. In Maehugpattana, as in many other rural communities in the north, there are cultural activities that take place regularly. However, these cultural activities and use of cultural capital not only served as part of people's way of life, but were also used by Maehugpattana residents as one of the primary tools in tackling drug problems in their community.

For example, the belief and tradition of merit making such as during *Phapa* was used to gather money for anti-drug activities. Respect and reverence for the royal family was used to make people vow in front of the pictures of the King and Queen that they would help tackle drugs and not to be involved with drugs. In order to mark the beginning of a drug-free community, a ceremony was conducted to bless the community and its people, for their continued happiness and prosperity. The tradition of respect for seniority was used to solve problems and conflicts among residents. When people were involved with drugs the village committee and village head looked to advise these offenders in a friendly manner calling one another father and uncle, as if solving family problems.

The use of social and cultural capital was therefore essential to solving drug problems in the community because people did not feel that they were forced to participate. The activities and their process and procedures were developed within the community among residents, so there was strong sense of ownership of the work, and the outcomes would also profit residents and their community. It was not like having to follow projects that were imposed on them by outside people or organisations. When people were called in to talk about their drug-related behaviour they did not feel threatened or fear repercussions like being arrested by the police. This type of community setting and this particular use of social and cultural capital make it much easier for drug offenders to feel forgiven and change their behaviour.

### **5.2.2 Participation encouragement by strong leadership**

Community development against drugs would not have been successful without the village head. This community leader was once ordained as a monk while living in the former village in Doisaket district. This experience helped him to develop into a knowledgeable and respectable person. He had been actively involved in various community activities ever since the village was relocated to its present location. Because of his experience in community work, he gained more understanding of people's way of life and other internal factors that served as inner strengths which he later ensured were used to create people's unity and strengths to combat drug problems in the community. People knew him to be a good man and good

leader. After he finished his first four-year term, no one else ran for a village head because people wanted him to continue to be their leader.

He has served as a good role model for the people in many ways. He does not drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes and repeatedly made known he was against alcohol and drugs. He demonstrated his seriousness throughout the anti-smoking, anti-alcohol and anti-drug campaigns. He is a modest man and has lived simple life in a very simple house to show people that though poor, they can still live comfortably by being economical. All of these qualities have earned him much respect which has led to his subsequent power and effectiveness in working with village residents.

These positive qualities of the village head not only allow residents to know and trust their leader because of his dedication to community development work, but also allow the leader himself to get to know residents better and ensure positive and effective interaction on different occasions. This has led to the development of a host of strategies that he has used to encourage people's participation in community work, particularly during the first, one-year anti-drug campaign in 2001 – 2002.

It is important for a community leader to have good interpersonal skills which enable him/her to effectively associate with all types of people. This is important because he/she has to act as a coordinator and mediator among community residents, community organisations, development workers, government officials and other sponsors from outside the community. Though people are capable of developing their community, it is financial assistance which allows them to make the work more effective and sustainable. The village head of Maehugpattana has worked very well to make sure that residents are always seeking funding for activities which they initiate.

Mistakes were learned and amended along the way and instead of giving up the village head encourage people to try to improve strategies of community activities to better enable them to achieve their desired outcomes. In order to achieve sustainable community development he encourages people to develop more and more activities to continue to uphold village unity and improve people's quality of life, while at the same time working hard to ensure high levels of participation. His dedication and hard work not only have helped in conquering drug problems and winning people's hearts,

but he has also earned many prizes from the government for being an outstanding community leader.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

This thesis is a case study of a northern rural community that successfully fought against drug problems which led to many other aspects of development in village life. Based on the in-depth examination of this one community's success and the ways in which it was able to achieve its positive results, it is recommended that other communities in rural areas adopt similar strategies in addressing drug problems, which are still severe in many parts of the country. However, it is important for other communities to have good, strong, and dedicated leadership as is the case in Meehugpattana.

The politics of drugs is very lucrative and often leads to corruption among community leaders and local officials. Therefore, it is inherent for community leaders to be role models for other community members in order to build trust and respect among them. This leadership role must include finding strategies to encourage people's participation in community work, because without this voluntary participation the work will not be successful.

There are good people in every village but it is the villagers who must choose the most appropriate among them to serve as the leader and lead the community to better, long-term, and sustainable development. Thus it is particularly important for the leader to know his/her community very well so that s/he will make best use of the community's social and cultural capital to create unity which will then subsequently lead to people's willingness to voluntarily take part in community development activities.

Every community has a certain amount social and cultural capital but it needs a good leader to ensure this capital is used to its fullest. In reality, not all communities have leaders who know well how to mobilize people to work and achieve desired goals, even though they may be very willing to help develop the community. Concerned organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, must work to

support local community leader to ensure they receive the proper support and guidance, providing that the officers know the community very well so to give the appropriate support for individual communities.

Though Maehugpattana's campaign against drugs was successful, the applicability of this success as a model for other communities is likely limited to other similar villages where drug problems exist but are not overly severe. There is an urgent need for more research and exploration to learn more about community development in other communities which have different internal characteristics and circumstances, to develop models for these different types of communities so that drug problems may be successfully addressed on a much wider spectrum. Nevertheless, the keys to success in any community development campaign against drugs, as determined from this thesis, are:

- First, the process of work in which people's social and cultural capital is used as the main tool to address problems; and,
- Second, a good and dedicated leader who knows the community well and thus knows best how to help residents and encourage them to participate in community activities to effectively move forward in developing their community.