

**Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and their
roles for narrowing the development gaps in rural and remote
areas in Thailand**

Thesis presented in fulfillment of the requirements of Doctor of
Philosophy

The Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management

Faculty of Social Science

The Flinders University of South Australia

By

Paisal Nanudorn

"Ever bigger machines, entailing ever bigger concentrations
of economic power and exerting ever greater violence against the environment, do not
represent progress: they are a denial of wisdom.
Wisdom demands a new orientation of science and technology towards the organic, the gentle,
The non-violent', the elegant and beautiful"
E.F. Schumacher, *Small is beautiful*, prefaced by Kirkpatrick Sale

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFTA	Asean Free Trade Area
APEC	The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
BOI	The Board of Investment of Thailand
BOT	The Bank of Thailand
CEMR	The Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency of USA
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
ITU	The International Telecommunication Union
NECTEC	The Thailand National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre
NESDB	The Thailand National Economic and Social Development Board
NGOs	Nongovernmental Organizations
NSTDA	The Thailand National Science and Technology Development Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAO	Provincial Administrative Organization
TAO	Tambon Administrative Organization
TDRI	The Thailand Development Research Institution
UNDP	The United Nations Development Programme
WAICENT	The World Agricultural Information Centre of FAO
WCED	The World Commission on Environment and Development of the United Nations
WTO	The World Trade Organization

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and their roles in narrowing the development gaps between developed urban and rural areas in Thailand

Paisal Nanudorn

Supervisors:

Dr. Janet McIntyre Principal Supervisor

Asst. Prof. Colin Sharp Co-supervisor

The Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management

The Flinders University of South Australia, 2005

This thesis describes a case study of a rural sub district in Thailand, develops a network model for development and makes policy suggestions that stress the importance of participatory governance processes. The aim of this thesis is to learn from a limited case study and explore the extent to which ICT could bridge the gaps in rural and remote areas and thus aid development and empower those who are marginalized by virtue of gender inequality, poverty, lack of education and limited access to resources. The thesis

- Investigates how a case study of rural and remote communities, particularly in North Eastern Thailand, can gain more capacity to: i.) harness and obtain the potential advantages of information and communication technologies and ii.) promote the interconnectedness and network partnership across public, private and community sectors.
- Describes the lack of connection across public, private and community sectors and argues for the need to develop and promote the capacity of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions in these rural areas. In this limited case study, the lack of capacity leads to an inability to use ICT in many sectors that could support community development goals in Thailand. Without access to or the ability to share new information and

knowledge across the remote and more developed regions, it is difficult to create success in development projects for individuals and institutions and to mobilize and allocate tangible and intangible resources from the workplace, family, and community. Amidst the flood of information and knowledge globally, including within a nation itself, partnerships among public and private sectors and other stakeholders both inside and outside a community can play a substantial role in harnessing the new technologies to pool information and knowledge, in order to develop the community's capacity and people's capability to achieve their goals sustainably.

- Argues that the development gaps in these rural and remote areas could be reduced if the people there are promoted and empowered to be significant and active partners equally able to share and contribute information and knowledge to others outside their communities.

The focus of the research is on the powerful knowledge brokers in the society such as the monks, the village leaders, local government officials and the school teachers who know about ICTs. The research focus is not the powerless who (in this case) may not have access to ICT. The thesis points out the way in which the powerful view the shortcomings and barriers to ordinary people having access to computers. As such 'the gaze' (in the sense used by Foucault)¹ is upwards at the powerful, not downwards at the powerless. 'Power and knowledge are linked' (Foucault)², according to Foucault and this thesis looks only at the way in which the powerful see themselves.

Although I argue for participatory governance, my thesis only looks at the powerful. This is in part as a result of my being a member of the knowledge broker stakeholders as I am training to be a Buddhist monk and live in the temple. My thesis makes a contribution, by studying the powerful knowledge brokers, instead of researching the powerless. I have researched issues with the powerful as I was able to access them, in my role as a trainee monk and because of my position in and connections within the community.

¹ Janet McIntyre, pers comm. 2005.

² Gordon, C. (Ed.). (1980). *Michel Foucault: Power-Knowledge*. Brighton: The Harvester Press.

Gaventa, J. & Cornwall, A. (2001), "Power and Knowledge", in Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (eds.), *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*, SAGE Publications, London, pp. 70-80.

There are usually two areas in research in Thailand that are not discussed; they are religion and the role of the state. This thesis addresses some causes or sources of difficulties or conflicts that have occurred as a part of the obstacles for the development in selected case study areas, in order to understand what significantly lies underneath the difficulties.

This thesis does not engage in a discussion on the diverse needs of the Southern region. Muslims, who live in the five southern provinces adjacent to Malaysia, see themselves as second class citizens compared to others (in particular Buddhists who make up about 95% of the population³). This is supported by international criticism of the handling of separatist movements.⁴

This thesis is written from the perspective of a Buddhist monk -to- be who lives and works in the Northern area and who is concerned with his case study area. I have been in training to become a monk my entire life as I was brought up in the Buddhist temple. I acknowledge that my experiences contribute to the way that I see the world⁵ but that I have tried to be as reflexive as possible. Much of the research draws on my role and position in the society in which I live. I have strived to understand the wider world. To that end, I was trained in the private and public sector in leadership skills in Bangkok Life Insurance Company and in Bangkok Business Administration School including in Naluang Temple, Udorn Thani province. I have been trained to work with the community leaders such as schools and local government officers with a view to help with community development as the temple representative.

This thesis does not argue that information and communication technologies (ICTs), in and of themselves, are the means to achieving social justice and socio-economic being. Instead it argues that they can support and enable the stakeholders to participate in decision making and greater access to information and resources amongst and across local stakeholders – village, school, temple and local government - in the rural areas.

I stress that if there is no political willingness and community spirit (social capital) to support this, then information and communication technologies (ICTs) are

³ Thai insurgency on the rise, May 19th 2005 <http://www.abc.net/news/newsitems/1-2>

⁴ Thai insurgency on the rise: Policy exacerbating the problem. 19/05/2005 <http://www.abc.net.au/news items/>

⁵ Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000), Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 733-768). London: Sage.

of no value. ‘Thick democracy’, in the sense used by Edgar⁶, is dependent on better communication with all the stakeholders. Knowledge management is not about technology alone it is about pooling and sharing ideas so that development opportunities can be developed. Technology is the means to achieve joined-up government. It is not an end in itself. My thesis shows how the lack of ability to work together, and lack of willingness to cooperate amongst some players, undermine the potential of people to access information and resources.

I argue that the geographical isolation of rural areas nowadays can be theoretically bridged by investing in telecommunication infrastructure. It is debatable if the state could achieve this alone. Local institutions cannot serve, help and work in partnership with other organizations. They need to be able to work collaboratively, in order to deal with the complexity of problems. Some temples, for instance, lack capacity to apply the local, tacit knowledge⁷ of people that is needed for balanced development in the community. A consequence of the isolation of local institutions, in this case study, is that it can lead to insufficient co-operation across community, public and private sectors. Also, it can reduce and demote institutional and social capacity necessary for working together effectively. The aim of this thesis was to establish to what extent ICT can bridge the gaps in rural and remote areas and thus aid development and empower those who are marginalized by virtue of gender inequality, poverty, lack of education and limited access to resources. At the outset the limitations of the small sample are acknowledge and the analysis is limited to the discussion of themes that could have potential relevance, but nevertheless the thesis aims to

- Explore the issue of capacity building (by means of a small purposive sample) drawn from 7 rural communities, in North Eastern Thailand;
- Consider the themes from the purposive sample to explore the potential development role for information and communication technologies;
- Consider the extent to which the technologies (as part of a development process) could support the creation of networks and partnership across public, private and community sectors; and

⁶ Edgar, D. (2001), *The Patchwork Nation: rethinking government-rebuilding community*. Sydney: HarperCollinsPublishers, p. 152

⁷ These key terms will be defined and discussed below (see section headings) accordingly

- Describe the themes that emerge in the small sample about the lack of connection across (public, private and community) sectors and argue for the need to develop and promote the capacity of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions in this purposive sample.

The lack of capacity in this small sample indicated that in these communities there is limited capacity to use ICT in many sectors that could support community development goals in this part of Thailand. Perhaps the themes that are evident in this sample could be explored further to assess their more general relevance. It is possible that without access to or the ability to share new information and knowledge across the remote and more developed regions, it is difficult to create success in development projects for individuals and institutions and to mobilize and allocate tangible and intangible resources from the workplace, family, and community. Amidst the flood of information and knowledge globally, including within a nation itself, partnerships among public and private sectors and other stakeholders both inside and outside a community can play a substantial role in harnessing the new technologies to pool information and knowledge, in order to develop the community's capacity and people's capability to achieve their goals sustainably. I argue that the development gaps in these rural and remote areas could be reduced if the people there are promoted and empowered to be significant and active partners equally able to share and contribute information and knowledge to others outside their communities.