

SPAFA-IDP International Conference on Issues of Culture, Context and Choice in Development



by Sarat Imcharoen

H.E. General Prem Tinsulanonda (Statesman and President of the Privy Council Thailand, and former Prime Minister of Thailand) together with H.E. Mr. Pongpol Adireksarn (Minister of Education, Thailand and President of SEAMEO Council) and Dr. Pisit Charoenwongsa (Director, SEAMEO-SPAFA) at Windsor Suites Hotel, Bangkok, during the first day of the SEAMEO-SPAFA and IDP International Conference on Issues of Culture, Context, and Choice in Development.

Left to right: H.E. Mr. Pongpol Adireksarn, H.E. General Prem Tinsulanonda, Dr. Pisit Charoenwongsa



Reception of the two eminent figures of Thailand at the venue, Windsor Suites Hotel



Presentation of the conference programmes and paper abstracts to H.E. General Prem Tinsulanonda by Dr. Pisit Charoenwongsa





Opening day



Participants registering on the first day



Dr. Richard Engelhardt, Regional Advisor for Culture (Asia and the Pacific), UNESCO-RACAP, making his presentation to kick off discussions



One of the various exhibitors at the NGO marketplace, set up during the conference

Dr. Mechai Viravaidya, Chairman and Founder of Population and Community Development (PDA)



Mr. Phayungsak Phuaphankul, Country Director of IDP Education Australia (Thailand), welcoming participants at the cocktail reception

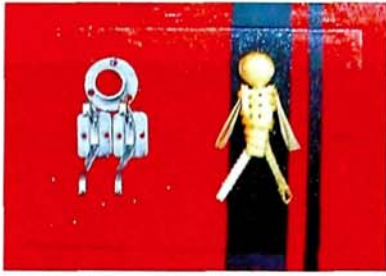


Mini pow-wows

Dr. Ruben Villareal, Director of SEAMEO-SEARCA, Philippines; contributing comments during a plenary session



Photographs, 'Never End' No.1 and 2 Conference Art Competition Entries by Chon Janepreaphan, Silpakorn University.



1st Prize Winner, Mixed Media of Conference Art Competition, 'Untitled' by Savitree Tanatchayanon, Rajamangala Institute, Poh Chang Campus



Dr. Reena Marwah, Asia Fellow Scholarship Researcher



Ms. Lawan Jirasuradej, Producer of a video documentary 'Mama Wahungzi', made in Africa (on the plight of those who live in wheelchairs) and shown during the conference



Parallel discussions



Plenary in Session



Exhibition area of the Conference, to promote NGO activities, services and products



Dr. Pisit Charoenwongsa, Director of SEAMEO-SPAFA; speaking at the reception of opening day



'Two Angles', crayon Conference Art Competition Entry by Bua Maneerat, 15-years old, Duang Prateep Foundation

All photographs by Nipon Sud-Ngam

International Conference on Issues of Culture, Context and Choice in Development

*November 28-30, 2002
Windsor Suites Hotel, Bangkok*

In an international conference lasting three days, SPAFA and IDP Australia collaborated in gathering more than one hundred and fifty individuals to participate in a discussion on the issues of culture with reference to development and developmental projects. The participants came from various parts of the world (such as Australia, Belgium, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Laos, Vietnam, and more). The following is a summary of the event, selected papers presented at the conference, and in conclusion, an overview.

Background

The conference came about in response to a growing recognition that there is an urgent need to ensure the successful outcomes of 'responsible' development policies in order to decrease the marginalisation or exclusion of various sectors of society that more often than not occurs along ethnic or religious lines. The consequences of not seeking to rectify 'development' policy and goals can not be ignored; they are far-reaching and affect everyone. Thus, the major aim of the Conference was to provide a vital stimulus to the conceptualisation and conduct of development projects, firmly placing culture, context, and choice, as key issues of concern.

Objectives

1. Increase mutual understanding and tolerance for diversity in the design and implementation of development programmes;
2. Promote the achievement of sustainability and future independence of donor-initiated projects for the benefit of the communities they intend to serve;
3. Further inculcate in the implementers of development projects the need to prioritize the emphasis of the cultural context within which the projects are proposed;
4. Serve to heighten the relevance of *choice* in obtaining successful outcomes through the presentation and dissemination of related experiences; and
5. Contribute to the pursuit of an equitable social and intellectual environment by providing a forum for the exchange of views on what defines responsible development and on how to proceed, thus having a direct impact at the grassroots level for the people who are the stakeholders of development undertaken.

Themes and Streams

a) Security, Solidarity and Co-operation

It is in the interests of every government to foster diversity in the interests of global peace and stability. Key issues to be addressed in this stream were:

- What factors encourage citizens to initiate and pursue courses of action to address their concerns and what factors hinder them, including issues of language and literacy as well as gender;
- How to strengthen, promote, encourage, and catalyse the wide variety of initiatives by citizens to address issues and problems in their everyday lives;
- Cultural autonomy, focusing on issues of identity and ownership;
- Exploring the balance between interventionism and integration.

b) The Changing Landscape of Knowledge

Wealth creation in the global village is shifting from a resource to a knowledge base. This stream focused on the knowledge economy. Themes to consider were:

- Communities and individuals as innovators;
- How to use knowledge effectively and efficiently, taking into consideration where relevant knowledge is obtained, how it is collected, stored, and transmitted to others;
- Developing strategies to take advantage of the knowledge economy including investing more in education and information and communications infrastructure;
- Examining the tensions between providing intellectual property rights and the desirability of disseminating knowledge at a marginal cost.

c) Reconciling Requirements with Reality

This stream focused on the issue of choice, and how to maximise opportunities to facilitate the attainment of balance – a balance that reflects both donor and recipient needs whilst taking into account the social, political, and economic realities that must also be prioritised. Key areas to be highlighted were:

- Reconciling national directives with local aspirations – including strategies for promoting conflict prevention, mediation and resolution;
- Reconciling donor and recipient requirements/needs – including strategies for promoting conflict prevention, mediation and resolution;
- Exploring project partnership to widen outreach, impact, mutual benefits and the maximisation of participation – involvement of corporate sector, issues of human resource development, and capacity building;
- Examining how issues of accountability, monitoring and evaluation impact on choice.

Target Audience

The Conference aimed primarily to attract participants and organisations from the Asia-Pacific region, with an interest in development issues and, in particular, projects related to training, technical assistance, human resource development and organisational improvement in such areas as the environment, agriculture and rural development, health, finance, governance and education. Areas of work included research, policy, planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Information was thus sent to:

- Major international development banks and national banks involved in the financing of major infrastructure projects
- Private/Corporate sector financiers who invest in infrastructure projects
- International donor agencies
- NGOs and IGOs
- National and international organisations and government agencies involved in policy, planning and implementation
- National and international charity organisations and trusts
- Private trusts, foundations and organisations who sponsor research or assist with the planning and implementation of community projects

Other groups included:

- Economists, sociologists, anthropologists, environmental scientists, heritage specialists, historians, educationalists, language specialists
- Students majoring in these areas

Of the above-mentioned groups, most were well represented. We were, however, not as successful as we had hoped in drawing national government agencies involved in policy, planning and implementation. Another important group that was not represented at the conference was the so-called 'recipients'. It was widely commented on in feedback that any future event would benefit from recipient involvement in discussion.

Feedback & Evaluation

The following key areas dominated feedback for delegates:

- 1. Speakers** – Feedback from delegates, both unofficially in conversation and officially in the forms received, commented on the unusual level of openness and honesty of speakers. The fact that speakers talked about the issues stated rather than using the conference as a means for marketing and promoting an organisation or particular initiatives of that organisation was said to be refreshing.
- 2. Participants** – Whilst some felt that there was a broad range of people and organisations represented, others identified national government officials, major international donor agencies and the actual recipients as lacking.
- 3. Networking** – the fact that the conference was small contributed to some extremely worthwhile networking. A number of possible partnerships and information exchanges were cited as examples. However, one delegate pointed out that if a second conference were to happen, it would be worth considering introducing some more structured networking possibilities.

Conference Programme

His Excellency Mr. Pongpol Adireksarn, Minister of Education of Thailand and President of the SEAMEO Council, and His Excellency General Prem Tinsulanonda, President of the Privy Council, presided over the Opening Ceremony. The Conference comprised Keynote plenary, Featured speaker and parallel sessions. The **Keynote Sessions** consisted of 6 speakers, representing 3 countries (Netherlands, Philippines, Thailand), while the 11 **Featured Speakers** were from 6 countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand, UK, Vietnam). The 34 **Parallel Sessions** included presentations, workshops, poster sessions, debates, and documentary film screenings.

Participants & Countries Represented

There was a total number of 157 participants representing 17 countries. Participants came from Australia, Belgium, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Netherlands, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, UK, USA, and Vietnam. A comprehensive database of participants, including country of origin and organisations can be accessed at www.seameo-spafa.org

NGO Marketplace

Thai NGOs were offered free booth space where they could display information about their organisation, as well as sell products related to their activities. The participating organisations included Development Support Consortium/Thai Fund Foundation, UNICEF, ISAREC, Suan Spirit Thai Crafts Association, WORLDVISION Foundation of Thailand, Population and Development Association, Duang Prateep Foundation, Association for the Promotion of Women, and SIL International.

Additional booths were allocated to the organisers, main sponsors, and participating SEAMEO Centres. This included SEAMEO SPAFA, IDP, Japan Foundation, UNESCO, SEAMEO Secretariat, MacMillan Heinemann, SEAMEO VOCTECH, SEAMEO TROPMED, and SEAMEO RIHED.

Student Art Exhibition

A total number of 38 entries were submitted to this student art competition which was organised as part of the conference. Students in two age-groups had been invited to send in their creations, based on the theme of "Rich Man, Poor Man". Winners (one from each category) were announced on the second day of the conference. Postcards of the winning works will be printed and donated to the organisation nominated in the winning student's application.

Post-Conference Outcomes and Activities

1. The ASEAN Foundation has offered their support to the organisation of one of the training outcomes. The training programme, entitled "Training for Managing the Integration of Culture into Development Programmes", is scheduled for 2003;
2. Discussions have already been undertaken with Shell Foundation, Manila, Philippines, on future collaborations concerning training and support for a future follow-up conference;
3. SEAMEO INNOTECH, which holds an international education conference every 2 years, have agreed that their next conference, to be held in December 2004, would be a joint INNOTECH-SPAFA Conference following a similar development-culture theme;
4. A project proposal, "Cultural Analysis in Development and Cultural Impact Assessment" is under consideration of the Japan Foundation;
5. Publication of a 'Selected Papers' volume of the conference;
6. Currently, all papers presented at the Conference are being posted on the web site www.seameo-spafa.org