Title: Dala's Village Grocery Store for Stability and Peace
Location: Dala's Village, Manangyong, Yaring, Pattani, Thailand
University: Hood College
Project Leader: Irafan Hayiarwae, Thailand, Hood College, UWC Dilijan

Summary:

This project involved constructing a Kerepok (chips made from fish) factory in Dala Village in Thailand. The construction of the factory will create more employment opportunities for young people in an area that has limited job opportunities and high rates of youth drug use.

Project Description:

In mid-July, the village's leaders, youth council members, and the villagers held a discussion meeting. The meeting concluded that we would build a factory producing local food products called Kerepok (chips made from fish) instead of building a village's grocery store. The Kerepo could create more employment opportunities for the youth and elder villagers and generate more profits for the youth council fund since the villagers know where to sell it and expand its market. In addition, this option would help the other villagers who already run the local grocery store businesses.

I arrived in the village on August 19 due to the fact that I had difficulty obtaining an EAD (Employment authorization document). Because of this difficulty, the construction starting date for the project was delayed. The factory started construction on August 26 and is currently under construction. The completed date estimation will be in late October. In addition, four machines producing the Kerepok and the factory's furniture will be purchased during the first two weeks of November.

The villagers expect long-term benefits from the project. Most of them supported creating the village's fresh fish factory instead of having the village's grocery store. They believed the chip factory will address the village's long-lasting issue, the large number of youth unemployment and drugs, and respond to what most villagers need. In addition, many villagers promised to buy our product and will help to expand our production market if it succeeds. Some of them have restaurant businesses in Malaysia. They promised to buy and resell our products in Malaysia if the factory gets constructed. Their advice, ideas, and promise helped us make the decision to build the chips factory for more employment opportunities for the youth and villagers. In addition, this option guarantees that we will have a market to which we can supply our products.

The host site is located fifteen minutes' walk from my house. The project meeting is regularly held in that house. In addition, the land that the factory is being constructed upon is considered a common good. The village leaders purchased this land to create something that could benefit all villagers, and our project has come at the right time for them. The village leader contacted the carpenter, mechanic, and housing technicians inside the Dala village to help us construct the building. They voluntarily came to supervise and support us. In addition, five families served free sweet cakes and drinks while construction of the building took place during the days and nights, and more than twenty youths and villagers voluntarily came to support our factory construction—their voluntary presence showing their strong support towards our project. Many believed our chip factory project would promote village harmony, stability, and long-term prospects of peace.

The UWC Thailand national committee invited me to give my peace project presentation during the UWC scholarship day. The event included Thailand UWC alums and Thai UWC scholarship student parents. At
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The end of the presentation, I provided the project bank account for the project's fundraising purpose. That grateful opportunity helped us receive 315 USD from the event attendees.

Reflection:

Peace is one community with perfect harmony, stability, and freedom. A community with no war and violent fighting emerges among those people in that society. Peace is also a community in which the youth, village leader, and villagers work together to solve the long-lasting community's problems.

The chip factory project promoted closer cooperation and relations between the youth council and the village's leaders. They closely work together to make this project successful. That promotes harmony among them, increasing their authority and legitimacy to influence and shape the village's youth and the next generation to avoid the drug trade. Most villagers show strong support for this project. Their support shows that they hope the employment opportunities from this project will create an alternative to the drug trade for their youth and address the village's long-lasting problem of drugs and poverty. Their close cooperation in this project ensures the stability of the village and emerging employment opportunities in the long run. In addition, this project promotes harmony among the villagers in the short run. It brought together more than twenty youths and villagers to construct the factory, working the day and the night. They are working so hard to make this project succeed.

The village's leader and the youth council already agreed on the idea of the village's grocery store project. Therefore, the youth's president and the village leaders invited villagers to the project's discussion meeting around the mid of July. Around 50 of them showed up. Most villagers disagreed with the idea of having a village grocery store. They feared the grocery store would not survive long term because this business generated little profit. They feared that the store's presence would destroy the villager-owned grocery store. To solve this conflict, the youth and village leaders proposed creating a village's fresh fish chip factory in the middle of the meeting; most supported this idea. To make our project succeed in the long run, we must compromise with the villagers, respect their opinions, and persuade them to get involved with us as much as possible, not breaking the relations with them. Their involvement will result in the strong support that we will receive from them. This will make our project succeed in the long term.

This project changed my views on Thailand's developing rural community. Poverty emerged not because the rural people were lazy, but because they lacked capital access: the capital that would allow them to create their jobs and their businesses. The drug trade dominates the youth, not because they are foolish, but because there are no other employment opportunities that would lead them away from a life a crime.

Personal statement:

The village leader, the youth members, and the villagers are happy with the peace project grant arriving from America in their village; some started to know where the United States is and started questioning how it looks. The word and idea of 'America' started to expand among the villagers very quickly. Many said that word at the coffee shop with their friends.

I sincerely enjoy working on this project. It enhanced my leadership skills and made me a better project coordinator. I learned that to become a respected leader, I must have a clear vision, mission, and a sense of humility. The village’s leader and the villagers would not have allowed me to conduct the project on
land they had already purchased, if I had not shown the humility to work with them. Humility is considered necessary when working in the village where I love. In addition, I learned that clear communication is essential to get things done as a team. Furthermore, the 10,000 USD grant means a lot to the people in my village. Thus, they are committing to use the grant to create a big-scale project that would benefit the village they care about in the long term.

Furthermore, this project allowed me to gain a closer relationship with the village's leader and my village's people. Doing the construction work with more than twenty of them makes me naturally think they are part of my family: One big family doing valuable things for the betterment of our village's next generation. I am glad that the peace project committee has selected my proposal, and I do not regret returning to Thailand this summer to do the peace project in the village I care most about.