

## Community Wellbeing Indicator: A Study on a Possibility to Utilize in the Northeastern Part of Thailand

Pattaraporn Weeranakin and Buapun Promphakping  
Group on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (WeSD),  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University, HS 02 Building,  
4th floor, Mitraparp Rd., 123 Muang (Amphur Muang), 40002 Khon Kaen, Thailand

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**Abstract:** Currently, an attempt is being made to develop indicators as a tool to efficiently evaluate social development, especially at the local level where the local government is required to respond to the true needs of the local community. With the current known facts, this research aims to discover the way to apply a Community Wellbeing Indicator (CWI) to reflect true development and benefits at the community level. This study is presenting the results from qualitative approach through an expert group meeting to find the possibility of integrating a CWI in Northeastern Thailand at a local level. The results showed that data crucial for developing the CWI should be collected annually after the harvest season from December to March of each year from government agencies including the Local Administration Organization (LAO) a provincial health office and a district public health office. The questionnaires should be submitted on behalf of a community, not by an individual community member or leader. The questionnaire responses should be collected through a participatory approach and should include 7-10 participants selected from a variety of community members attending the community assembly to discuss and find a collective answer regarding community wellbeing issues. The results from expert group meeting to find out the implementation of indicators found that the possibility of indicator implementation was high. The research suggested that the development of the Northeastern CWI should be conducted specifically for the best achievement.

**Key words:** Development planning and policy, Community Wellbeing Indicator (CWI), expert group meeting, local government, Thailand, local administration

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### INTRODUCTION

The study of community wellbeing and its effective indicators is important and results in efficiency monitoring and the evaluation of community development. Since 1973, wellbeing indicators (social indicators) have been continually developed by international and national organizations. At the international level, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) developed a measure of wellbeing in 1973, the Human Well-being Index (HWI) in 1990, followed by the Ecosystem Well-being Index (EWI) in 2001 which includes an environmental aspect. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990 to be recognized as the measurement of a country's development.

Not only mentioned by the supranational organizations but wellbeing indicators have also been developed by various organizations including the New Economic Foundation (NEF) which created the Happy

Planet Index (HPI) and the Gallup office (USA) which launched the Gallup-Healthways Well-being Index (Index, 2009; GAO, 2011). Books have been written about the wellbeing concept as well including one by Robert Prescott-Allen a well-known author who wrote about the wellbeing indicator called Human Wellbeing Index (HWI) with 5 domains in the wellbeing of nations in 2001 (Prescott-Allen, 2001).

At a national level His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth king of Bhutan, declared the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) in 2008. The Austrian Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management created a welfare and wellbeing indicator for sustainable development and the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office defined a wellbeing indicator called WellBeBe in 2009 (Gjoksi, 2010). In some countries, indicators exist at the state level for example, the McCaughey Centre at the University of Melbourne in Australia created the Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) for Victoria state (Cox *et al.*, 2010).

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**Corresponding Author:** Pattaraporn Weeranakin, Group on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (WeSD),  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University, HS 02 Building, 4th floor,  
Mitraparp Rd., 123 Muang (Amphur Muang), 40002 Khon Kaen, Thailand

In Thailand, over four decades, government agencies have played a vital role in developing >40 indicators in accordance with the country's development concepts and goals to monitor and measure development in different areas and levels (Chanthavanich and Siltragool, 1998; Apakro and Intarasuwan, 2010). The indicators established by government agencies have covered diverse issues including basic needs, happiness, wellbeing and human security. However, rapid changes in society affect and limit the ability to utilize the existing indicators in terms of concepts and approaches.

Amartya Sen's concept of functioning and capabilities is the foundational concept for the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) in Thailand, the major government agency responsible for developing wellbeing indicators at the national level. Wellbeing indicators were mentioned for the first time in the 8th national economic and social development plan (1997-2001) (NESDB, 2001). Consequently, other government agencies started developing wellbeing and happiness indicators such as the Thai's Happiness Indicator and Wellbeing Index developed by NESDB and recently, community gross happiness in 2011 developed by the community development department of the ministry of the interior (CDD, 2011). The indicators mentioned are derived from the 10th national economic and social development plan focusing on sufficiency economy philosophy and green and happiness society. Most wellbeing indicators, for example, NESDB's wellbeing index are focused at the country level on issues such as basic needs, happiness, livelihood and security. There is also a wellbeing indicator at the individual level based on the world health organization indicator called the WHOQoL-BREF-THAI.

At the local level, the village profile including economic, education, health and labor aspects has been biennially collected by the Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior, since 1982 and divided into three development levels: underdeveloped, moderately developed and developed (Chanthavanich and Thaiyanan, 1998). It has the distinctive purpose of indicating the community's problems, resulting in problem solving and livelihood development by the government. However, as a result the community's members tend to depend on governmental support than on community self-development led by community's members.

Despite the government's attempts to establish indicators as a means to discover an obstacle that obstructs the wellbeing and development of the society, the diverse context and capacity of communities seems to be abandoned. One of the factors is the complication of

community context for example, the variety source of incomes from agriculture, non-agricultural sectors, contractors and remittances from family members. In addition, community members mainly struggle with society changing from an agricultural to a capitalist society and socioeconomic development policies.

Thus, this research aims at demonstrating an important of measuring a community development and being a guideline for policy makers in following up the society development or change at community level. The research findings can be applied to work plan and policy development of government agencies as community development department, department of local administration, health promoting hospitals and related actors as community leaders and non-government organizations.

#### **A community wellbeing indicator in Northeastern**

**Thailand:** The community wellbeing indicator in the Northeastern Thailand is derived from the research on community wellbeing with Khonkean Province as the focus area. Khonkean Province is in Northeastern Thailand and has the 4th largest population in the country (NSO, 2011). Economically, Khonkean Province is located on the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) running to Hue, Vietnam and Mawlamyine, Myanmar. The province also has number of quality schools, vocational schools and Khonkean University which is the hub of medical sciences and education in Northeastern Thailand.

The research is based on wellbeing and social quality concepts and theories and the data were collected from 400 community leaders from 4 districts in Khonkean Province and data analysis using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) by varimax rotation (DMH, 2002).

From 45 indicators, the result demonstrated 9 domains as social relations, financial resources and environment, community inclusion, community role, residence and land, human resources, community strength, life and asset security and community image. Six new indicators reflecting the community's context of wellbeing have also been discovered and developed from analyzing local community perspectives in Northeastern Thailand as follows.

**Community cleanliness:** Means hygienic conditions and environment, waste disposal without littering (bins are placed around the community and garbage is collected daily and burned at a disposal area) and proper waste sorting-glass and plastic bottles, papers-before disposal.

**Harmonization within the community:** Refers to cooperation between community members, especially on community development projects.

**A religious leader:** It is the representative leading the annual religious rituals and merits of the community. The religious leader will be selected from a well-respected community member.

**A community reputation:** It refers to community pride for example, the community may gain a reputation from a community member who becomes a national athlete.

**A good/strong community leader:** It is key to a community's development and a representative who communicates with the public sector and organizes religious activities.

**Community rules/regulations:** They are defined by community members for a peaceful and orderly community. Consequently, the 9 domains and 45 indicators including new 6 indicators as described above were used as the main source of discussion at the expert group meeting.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**The expert group meeting:** The ultimate goal of this research is to utilize the developed CWI into local policy on community development. A variety of methods exists to collect data for qualitative research. This study selected group discussion as the method. The group discussion method has a different style depending on the objective of the discussion, e.g., Phillip 66, syndicate, roundtable discussion and seminar (Khammanee, 2008). The overall objective of group discussion is to open up the opportunity to comment and recommend solutions regarding an existing problem or issue. Group discussion is widely used in the business, education, psychology and social sectors (Brillhart, 1974). A suitable number for members for group discussion for a collective solution is between 5-7 persons (Julia *et al.*, 1986). Group discussion has certain advantages including the collection of diverse opinions, comments and solutions within a limited of time. However, a group facilitator plays a vital role in controlling group discussions and the atmosphere to ensure an efficient discussion.

Under the concept of group discussion, the expert group meeting approach was selected. The expert group meeting to which policy makers, researchers and academics in the specific area of interest are invited is an approach widely conducted by international organizations such as the united nations and world health organization to provide policy recommendations.

For this study, a 1 day expert group meeting was organized on 12 February, 2016 at I-Hotel, Sila district, Khonkean Province.

The meeting comprised of 10 professionals in policy development and planning for Khonkean Province. They came from government agencies as the office of provincial development (1 person), the office of district development (4 person), the office of provincial social development and human security (1 person), the office of the national economics and social development board of Northeastern Thailand (1 person), the provincial office for natural resources and environment (1 person), the office of provincial culture (1 person) and the office of the narcotics control board (1 person).

The meeting was divided into three sessions. The first session was focused on presenting the CWI in Northeastern Thailand. The second session was focused on commenting and discussing the presented indicator and the third session was a brainstorming session to determine a possibility of utilizing the CWI in developing or recommending development policies at the community level. The results from the second and third sessions were transcribed and analyzed by a researcher.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion and recommendation at the expert group meeting led to the 7 issues found in developing a CWI in Northeastern Thailand (Table 1) as follows:

- The suitability of concepts and theories used to develop a CWI in northeastern Thailand
- The research methodologies
- The name of organizations responsible for collecting data and a suitable period of time
- A community representative for answering a questionnaire
- The possibilities to utilize, apply or adapt the CWI in Northeastern Thailand as a tool for measuring community development
- The CWI in Northeastern Thailand will be a guideline or recommendation for the development of policies
- The limitations and weaknesses of CWI in Northeastern Thailand

**The suitability of concepts and theories used in a development of a CWI in Northeastern Thailand:** The result from the expert group meeting on the suitability of concepts and theories using in developing the indicator was strongly agreed ( $M = 4.5$ ). The concepts and theories covered the area of wellbeing, quality of society and community welfare.

Table 1: Recommendations from the expert group meeting on CWI in Northeastern part of Thailand (n = 10)

Issues	Opinion scales					Mean	Result
	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderate	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
The suitability of concepts and theories	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)	0	0	0	4.5	Strongly agree
The research methodologies	0	9 (90.0)	1 (10.0)	0	0	3.9	Agree
The organizations responsible on collecting data and the suitable period of time							
The office of provincial/district development	2 (20.0)	6 (60.0)	2 (20.0)	0	0	4.0	Agree
The Local Administration Organization (LAO)	9 (90.0)	0	0	0	1 (10.0)	4.6	Strongly agree
Provincial/district public health office	6 (60.0)	2 (20.0)	2 (20.0)	0	0	4.4	Agree
The office of provincial social development and human security	2 (20.0)	4 (40.0)	4 (40.0)	0	0	3.8	Agree
The office of the national economics and social development board of Northeastern part	2 (20.0)	2 (20.0)	5 (50.0)	1 (10.0)	0	3.5	Agree
The annual data collection	6 (60.0)	2 (20.0)	2 (20.0)	0	0	4.4	Agree
The official community leader should be responsible in answering questionnaire	2 (20.0)	3 (30.0)	4 (40.0)	1 (10.0)	0	3.6	Agree
The possibility to utilize, apply or adapt the CWI	2 (20.0)	8 (80.0)	0	0	0	4.2	Agree
The indicator is able to be a guideline or recommendation for development policies	2 (20.0)	7 (70.0)	1 (10.0)	0	0	4.1	Agree
The indicator has its limitation/weakness	0	1 (10.0)	6 (60.0)	3 (30.0)	0	2.8	Moderate

**The research methodologies:** The expert group agreed (M = 3.9) that a close-ended questionnaire (Appendix 1 is an appropriate methodology. The questionnaire contains 45 questions on a 5-point Likert scale related to CWI in Northeastern Thailand. However, the expert group recommended that the detail included in the questionnaire will allow researchers to analyze and interpret information exactly for each community. For example, a question about the relationships between community members as a degree of relationship might have a varied interpretation from responder to responder; the frequency of family visits per week should be identified as a choice for an answer. Some responders might consider a single visit per week as a close relationship whereas others might consider this to be 4-5 times a week.

**The name of organizations responsible for collecting data and a suitable period of time:** The expert group recommended dividing the scope of collecting data in to 2 aspects as an area aspect and a timeline.

**Area aspect:** The expert group suggested that the responsibility and duty of the organization regarding collecting related data should be finalized by executive decision within the organization. However, the expert group strongly agreed (M = 4.6) and agreed (M = 4.4) that organizations working closely with the community and at the local level such as the Local Administration Organization (LAO) and provincial/district public health office, respectively have high potential for collecting data.

**Timeline aspect:** The results was agreed (M = 4.4) that the data on community wellbeing should be collected annually after the harvest season from December to

March of each year. The community wellbeing results will be presented at a community forum on local and community planning.

**A community representative for answering a questionnaire:** They were agreed (M = 3.6) on having an official community leader as a community representative to answering questionnaires. The reason behind this is the demographics within a community (e.g., diversity of career and age). In addition, unofficial leaders can be elderly people, young leaders or village health volunteers who all play vital roles. Thus, the expert group recommended that to accurately represent and reflect a community's wellbeing, questionnaire responders should be comprised of 7-10 selected community members with diverse backgrounds. One questionnaire submitted per community is recommended.

**The possibilities to utilize, apply or adapt the CWI in Northeastern Thailand as a tool for measuring community development:** The result was agreed (M = 4.2) that there is strong possibility to utilize, adapt or apply the CWI in Northeastern Thailand. The recommendation is that organizations should select a pilot community in which to use the CWI along with a community development plan or integrating a basic needs survey conducted by the organization.

**The CWI in Northeastern Thailand will be a guideline or recommendation for the development of policies:** The expert group agreed (M = 4.1) on the possibility of using the indicator as a guideline or recommendation for the development of policies. Three approaches were recommended at the meeting to promote the CWI in

Northeastern Thailand at a policy level. Firstly, the CWI should present the importance of accurately reflecting wellbeing in Northeastern Thailand and how it can assist local administrations and sub-district administrative organizations to strengthen their development plans. Secondly, the government's "basic needs survey" currently is on revising its contents. Thus, the opportunity exists to present the CWI in Northeastern Thailand at a national level and be a part of a new basic needs survey. The fact that the CWI in Northeastern Thailand was conducted in Khonkean province which is one of the government's pilot provinces is an advantage for acceptance by government agencies. Thirdly, the CWI in Northeastern Thailand can act as an alternative indicator focusing only on the Northeastern provinces.

### CONCLUSION

In Thailand, the government is the main actor in developing wellbeing indicators. The indicators tend to measure wellbeing at a specific period of time and implement through government policies. In accordance, the wellbeing and development of communities is highly dependent on the government policies, projects, budgets and facilities provided. However, the research found that for the sustainability of community a tool to understand community context and empower community members through a participatory approach should be considered and developed. Community members should be allowed to define the concept of wellbeing based on each community's diverse context (Murphy, 2010; Kim and Lee, 2014). Given the importance of efficient indicators, this research aims at being endorse and implement a CWI at the local government level. The more efficient an indicator provided, the more competent a community can develop to be. Hopefully, the community will develop using its own resources and mitigate its dependence on external resources from the government, resulting in the sustainable development of the respective community and society as a whole.

### LIMITATIONS

**Limitations and weaknesses of the CWI in Northeastern Thailand:** A specific limitation or weakness was not been mentioned by the expert group with moderate agreement ( $M = 2.8$ ). However, the expert group commented on some questions on the questionnaire which tended to confuse the responders. In addition, problems of youths for example, online game addiction should be included in the questionnaire as well as questions about gambling, family violence, family relationship problems and political conflict. To highlight the recommendations from the expert group meeting, first, there is a strong possibility

that the CWI in Northeastern Thailand will be used by government agencies. The indicator should be integrated with the government's "basic needs survey" which will strengthen the survey. Unfortunately, through the basic needs survey, the indicator will not probe into the community's wellbeing and empower community members to develop their communities as planned. In addition, the indicator can be developed as a specific indicator for specific areas such as Northeastern Thailand. The indicator will respond positively to a focus on community wellbeing and to the objective of empowering communities with regard to self-development. However, time and budget are still necessary for utilizing and implementing the indicator in different contexts not just Khonkean Province.

The second issue is the responsibility and duty of the organization on collecting data should have a clear understanding of the indicator's concept and development approach for the genuine community benefit. There are two factors in using the indicator: executive interest and decision and the community's support in using the indicator for their wellbeing.

Thus, the community should be empowered through knowledge and the use of a participatory approach for being a development actor without depending only on government services (Long, 2001). In the process of developing the CWI in Northeastern Thailand, the community has been regarded as the best source for identifying the meaning of wellbeing. The community has a chance to learn through discussion to identify community problems and find solutions (Promphakping *et al.*, 2009). The strength of the CWI in Northeastern Thailand is that it is a suitable concept and indicator that accurately responds to the needs and contexts of the community and its members. The expert group agreed ( $M = 4.5$ ) regarding this assumption. However, the indicator needs to be developed to cover different areas with diverse cultures and societies.

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**APPENDIX**

**Appendix 1 (sample questionnaire: questionnaire of the community wellbeing indicators):**

Please ✓ in the blank which is accorded with your community in the last year

	According with your community				
Community wellbeing indicators	Very good (5)	Good (4)	Moderate (3)	Poor (2)	Very poor (1)
<b>Domain 1: Social relation</b>					
People in a community maintain good relationships with relatives and family members					
People in a community are harmonious					
People in a community have good relationship					
A community maintains kinship relations					
People in a community have warmed family and live with their offspring					
People in a community are proud to be community members					
People in a community are trust					
A community works with each other both male and female					
People in a community take part in preserving traditions					
People in a community do activities for community (e.g., cleaning community roads, etc)					
People in a community help to clean community					
People in a community feel a part of community					
<b>Domains 2: Financial resource and environment</b>					
People in a community have money saving					
A community has occupation groups					
People in a community have adequate monthly income					
A community has community fund for loan					
People in a community have job					
A community has community welfare					
People in a community take part in environment and nature resource management					
<b>Domain 3: Community inclusion</b>					
People in a community accept their offspring who study in another place and return home when graduated					
People in a community accept community members who migrate and permanently return home					
People in a community accept new comers who live in their community (e.g., son-in-law, daughter-in-law and new comer, etc)					
A community accesses to the security units (e.g., police office, community security, etc)					
<b>Domain 4: Community role</b>					
A community has a good and strength leader					
A community has its rules and regulations					
People in a community take part in community activities					
<b>Domain 5: Residence and land</b>					
People in a community have land right for housing					
People in a community have land right for agriculture					
People in a community have land for agriculture					
People in a community have their own houses					
<b>Domain 6: Human resource</b>					
A community has access health care services (e.g., hospital, hospital of health promotion, etc)					
People in a community concern their health					
People in a community are educated					
<b>Domain 7: Community strength</b>					
A community receives financial supports and activities from government and private sectors					
A community receives budget from government sectors for disabled and elder					
People in a community have knowledge for working					
People in a community can read and write					
People in a community receive right for health care services from government					
<b>Domain 8: Life and asset security</b>					
A community is free of theft					
A community is free of drug users					
A community is no conflict between generations					
<b>Domain 9: Community image</b>					
A community has reputation (e.g., agriculture, handicraft, sport, herb, etc)					
A community has local wisdom or sage villagers					
A community has a religious leader to perform proper religious ceremonies					
A community usually make merit Esan traditional (Heat 12 Klong 14-lunar festival and fourteen laws)					
Thank you for your time and your answer					

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