

“Empowerment, Equality and Dignity: Strengthening the Health System”

By Professor Dr. Krisana Kraisintu

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The Management Association of the Philippines’ Executives and Members,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends from all walks of life,
And the young people who will lead our present and future.

Sawasdee from Bangkok, Thailand, and Thank you very much for all your kind words. I am deeply honoured by the recognition that the Management Association of the Philippines has placed in my life-long endeavour to bring about positive change to increasing access to essential drugs for all, regardless of race, sex, ethnicity, social strata and especially for the most vulnerable segments of societies, particularly the poor, women, children and the emigrants/stateless people.

It is delightful to be present, even though virtually, among visionary leaders at this gathering in the midst of Bangkok lockdown caused by the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated new variants. For 18 months since the first outbreak, although I have constantly been under movement restrictions, I have never stopped working. In fact, I feel the sense of urgency to continue to empower communities near and far in Thailand, to invent new methods of qualitatively produce herbal medicines, to strengthen the Thai health system at its fundamentals (the local health personnel, medical equipment and supplies) and to advocate for men, women and the youth at the grassroot level, to economically and socially participate and be partners in our endeavour.

My works now focus on the communities, most are located in the remote and security challenging regions of Thailand, namely the three southern border provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, along the northern Thai-Myanmar border at Mae Sod district in Tak province and in the villages of northeastern Sakonakorn and Surin provinces. This chapter and very likely the last chapter of my life-saving journey commenced in 2009 when I returned from the African continent after spending 10 years there assisting and providing technical know-how in manufacturing HIV/AIDS and antimalarial drugs, constructing new drug factories and renovating the existing manufacturing facilities in hospitals and teaching the local personnel on quality assurance of medicines in 17 African countries.

I believe in teaching people how to fish for themselves rather than giving them fish. Empowerment matters! Empowerment helps to create Equality and for the people to attain the overriding pride of Human Dignity. Through my countless journeys in this endless health mission, I have witnessed the economic and social transformation of the Thai communities and the individuals involved in our various projects.

I have an abiding faith in global sustainable development and in its pursuit, I follow the footsteps of His Majesty King Bhumibol The Great's signature approach: Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (SEP). "To understand the local people's desire, to be accepted by them and to help them develop their full potentials". To put it simply, we must empower the local communities so that they can stand up for themselves, be creative and take care of their communities and take ownership of the efforts to solve the problems at hand, thus, the notion of "Explosion from within". Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but we can learn best practices and solutions, innovations, achievements and mistakes from each other.

By Embracing the SEP and holistic approach to development, I have worked with all stakeholders (hospitals, provincial/district health personnel, the business companies, regional university, local schools, religious community leaders, farmers, women, and the youth) in the local communities in remote areas of southern Thailand under the framework called "Langkasuka Model" for 12 years to alleviate poverty and generate additional income for local farmers in organic herbal plant cultivation and processing. The majority of the population are Muslims (82%) with the Yawi language predominantly used in verbal and written language. Unrest and violence since 2004 have undermined trust between the central government and the local population, many of whom are disaffected by the perceived injustice and heavy-handedness of the crackdown. They feel mistreated due to their ethnic Muslim identity as well as deprived of infrastructural development, investment and job opportunities, education and good standard of living.

Against this backdrop, I discovered the huge potentials in natural herbal resources in the southern border provinces and the genuine will of the local people to unite and work in harmony in order to create job opportunities, generate additional income and promote their health and wellbeing through the widespread use of Thai Traditional medicines from organic medicinal plants produced locally. They collaborated with me in the research on the fauna and flora unique to southern topography and climate, and the medicinal plants grown in their districts/villages. They underwent the training courses on Good Agricultural Practice (GAP), Post-harvesting Technology, Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), as well as methods

of preliminary processing of raw materials prior to delivery to the factory and the needed tools and machineries.

Our collaboration and bond of friendship have grown from strength to strength over the years and everyone who takes part in our various projects get happiness and satisfaction in return for their contribution. I've also fulfilled another dream. My dream comes in the shape of a truck that weighs 5 tons. This truck was donated to Krisana Kraisintu Foundation by "ThaiBev", Thai Beverage Public Company Limited. My team and I then designed and installed tailored-made herbal medicine processing machines in the back of the truck in May 2018. **It is Thailand's first prototype mobile herbal raw material processing truck** and has passed vigorous and strenuous operational tests in the production of **dry Curcumin** to preserve its high active ingredient. Right at the cultivation area, the herbal medicinal plants are quickly processed to produce fresh ingredients without having to wait for long for collecting big volume to send to faraway factory.

It helps the farmers save up on the transportation, storage, labour and energy costs, and especially, shortens the production time. Inside the mobile herbal processing truck, specialized machines wash, slice and oven the herbal plants in microwave which helps to reduce the drying process from 4 – 7 days to only 2 hours. The speedy processing of small amount of herbal plants gathered at one time decreases the chances of them getting rotten or causing fungus. This new innovation in the installation of specialized herbal processing machines on the truck for the cleaning, slicing, drying and packing the herbal raw materials sets a new standard for learning on the development of herbal medicine. The unique processing method of organic herbal plants grown according to Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) contributes to the conservation of the natural environment by not dumping waste onto the surrounding area. Thorough quality control process at every step of processing ensures the issuance of quality certificate of product prior to delivery.

One year later, an old rusty orange bus formerly belonged to the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) was donated to Krisana Kraisintu Foundation. In partnership with Tipco Biotech Co. Ltd., we transformed the bus into a **Prototype Mobile Herbal Quality Control Laboratory**. It has been in service in the South since July 2019. The rationale behind this invention lies in my attachment to the great importance of the quality control process of medicines to ensure both their efficacy and safety for public consumption. This principle applies to herbal medicines in order to manufacture the premium products filled with the highest active ingredient of medicinal property. Recently, I've completed the construction of a third truck;

A specialized mobile herbal processing unit for the production of Andrographis paniculata

While I was doing the test run on the first mobile herbal raw material Processing truck's operation, I visited Suan Saranrom Psychiatric Hospital in Surathani province in the south of Thailand to work with the Director of the hospital, his medical personnel and the patients suffering from the mental effects of Narcotic Drugs whom I'd like to call '**my students**', all of them young men and women on the rehabilitation of their health. The students learned to grow vegetables, herbs and medicinal plants and shortly delivered their products to the market to earn income. They also learned skills and techniques in herbal plant processing which enable them to make a living when they return home.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The success of the Suan Saranrom Model project which continues in its third year does not depend on medicinal plants alone. The persons' commitment is a powerful curing force in the treatment, their attitude of self-worth and recognition by those around them will return and sustain them to be good and productive citizens. It is our collective "**Duty of care**" that will make a positive impact on the future of our society.

The truck and Suan Saranrom Model propelled me to travel to Peru in Latin America in September 2019 for a collaboration project between Thailand and Peru on the Rehabilitation of the vulnerable people from Narcotic drugs by Herbal Medicine and its income-generating livelihood. In 2016, Peru was the second-largest cultivator of coca, with an estimated 46,500 hectares under cultivation. Despite the Peruvian Government's effort to address drug addiction and trafficking, domestic consumption of illicit drugs is growing, particularly in mid-sized cities east of the Andes where much of the drug production occurs and in coastal transit cities where most of the Peruvian people live. There are approximately 60,000 people addicted to cocaine, and the larger number of marijuana users while the number of treatment centers cannot keep up with the demand. Abuse of the low-priced and highly addictive coca paste is also increasing. This project was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic and I hope it can resume in the near future.

Meanwhile, I found myself traveling north to Mae Sot District in Tak province, on Thailand's long natural border with Myanmar, and encountered stateless women and children, who could easily become the victims of human trafficking due to their non-existing legal status and economic hardship. This led to my two cooperation projects

with UN Women on the setting up of Thai-Myanmar Co-organic Farm Learning Centre on a 7.9 acre piece of land for female migrants from surrounding Muslim communities and with Dr. Cynthia Maung of the Child Development Centre of Mae Tao Clinic on the Mae Sot Model Project on Permaculture in agriculture and similar workshop for stateless children, respectively. Concurrently, I had a chance to visit Tak Central Prison and initiated the Project to promote health and poverty reduction for detainees at Tak Central Prison by organizing workshops on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). Now I work with a number of large prisons in Thailand, including the implementation of the Project on growing organic vegetables for detainees at Ratchaburi Central Prison with the Thai Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

In addition, Krisana Kraisintu Foundation works in partnership with Buddharakasa Foundation of DT Group of Companies (DTGO) and Charoen Pokphand Group (CP) to award hundreds of scholarships to disadvantaged students in border districts as well as children of former prisoners.

I envisage that all these health strengthening projects will act as Sustainable Development Models that others can learn from and make an application in their own context.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I firmly believe in the human potentials and their capacity building to be creative and inventive. Life goes on with or without the pandemic. We live in exciting times, Challenging, yes, Unpredictable, yes, but steeped in numerous possibilities if we choose to make things happen and **never give up** until we reach our goals. This is a belief instilled in me by my grandmother who was a nun and could not read and write, but she taught me many good lessons and life experiences. Let us engage all sectors of society - government, the business sector, educational institutions, communities, and individuals to realize this altruistic vision: Empowerment, Equality and Dignity for All.

Thank you very much.
