Bupatip Chamnil

Position  Director
Organization  Rak Khao Chamao Group, Rayong Province
Expertise  Community Development

Education
Faculty of Economics Child Development and Family Branch,
Sukhothaitammatirat University

Award
Awarded the smart woman years 2542 branch Environment Institute of
gender roles.

Biography
Ms. Chamnil is the Director of Rak Khao Chamao Group. She was born in 1967
into a middle-class family in a small village in Rayong Province on the fringes of Kao
Chamao park. She was inspired to enter the field of community development by a well-
known novel she read in high school. While at Ramkamhaeng University in Bangkok,
Ms. Bupatip took part in university-sponsored camping trips to rural areas and became actively involved in Thailand's civic movement. In 1992, she returned to eastern Thailand where she began to organize activities for youth in her community, while taking a leading role in establishing adult citizen sector networks in the region. In 1998, Ms. Bupatip started powerful activities to preserve the Rak Khao Chamao, training youth leaders both to manage the group and to interact and communicate with adults in the community. Since then, she has focused on integrating the group into regional and national youth networks, helping them secure additional partners to address larger issues.

Bupatip is building a citizen participation movement that addresses the two principal obstacles facing citizen action in Thailand: a multitude of complex and interrelated problems, and the challenge of building a sustainable movement that transcends and outlives any individual issue or campaign. Her solution to the first problem is to create groups that define themselves and their agenda according to place rather than issue. Any issue of public concern that might come up–forest encroachment, municipal corruption, local elections–is within the purview of a local association. She tackles the issue of sustainability by beginning with a community's most valued, most visible, and most renewable resource, its children. Essentially, what Bupatip does is to draw disengaged citizens out of their homes by turning children in semirural areas into visible, public advocates who eventually draw in their parents and neighbors.

Bupatip is fond of saying that her job is to "produce people," and by people she means citizens who are fully invested in their societies. Because her central strategy is to work with children, in one sense she means that she is producing the good
citizens of tomorrow. At the same time, because the associations she builds incorporate everyone, not just the young, she means that she is changing how the citizens of today relate to their world. Preserve Kao Chamao, the first group she founded—it takes its name from the area surrounding a local mountain peak—shows Bupatip educating the young for tomorrow, and activating adults today. When local elections take place, most people keep their heads down and submit to the time-honored tradition of patronage. A race for local office can be a dangerous affair, and few voters are willing to embroil themselves in public discourse about candidates or election procedure. The young people in Kao Chamao, however, were able to carry out some innocuous public advocacy by interviewing candidates, reviewing their literature, and putting up public signboards comparing the candidates and their election promises. They then set up a day-long festival to which they invited candidates to take the stage, present their platforms, and answer questions. The audience, of course, was not composed merely of children, but of citizens from all the surrounding townships. The Kao Chamao group regularly stages similar forums on forest encroachment, natural resource use, and a range of public issues.

What Bupatip started at Kao Chamao is taking off throughout Thailand's eight eastern provinces. She made this spread possible by reaching out to traditional youth groups that already existed—those devoted to sports, camping, extracurricular activities—and promoting her more progressive activities through a program of exchange and exposure. Moreover, Bupatip's active involvement in a series of national youth development institutions allows her to contact and influence colleagues in the field throughout the country.