

# The Buddhist Self-Evaluation Model of the Community Organization Network

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## ABSTRACT

This research presents the self-evaluation model of the community organization network in Trat province. The results revealed that the network's self-evaluation model focused on learning for the improvement and development of the performance and stakeholders. The network's self-evaluation model was integrated into its routine. The evaluator teams served as working groups. The self-evaluation model was based on **Buddha-Dhamma** and was called the Buddhist Self-Evaluation Model. It comprised two aspects: (1) the perspectives of evaluation, i) the value of evaluation as a tool for learning and development, and ii) evaluation concepts which were the principles of the Fourfold Noble Truths and Kanlayanamittra-dhamma 7; and (2) evaluation consisting of the evaluators and their roles, a self-evaluation process, and evaluation tools. It was concluded that the Buddhist Self Evaluation Model is an essential recommendation for small community organizations. They should add a self-evaluation system to their operating system and develop the capability for regularly evaluation. All project managers, project owners, and the support unit in policy making, should add a self-evaluation system as part of project or organization management.

**Keywords:** self- evaluation, buddhist principle, community organization

## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอรูปแบบ การประเมินตนเองของเครือข่ายองค์กรชุมชนใน จังหวัดตราด ผลการวิจัยพบว่ารูปแบบการประเมิน ตนเองของเครือข่ายมุ่งสร้างกระบวนการเรียนรู้เพื่อ การปรับปรุงและพัฒนาการดำเนินงาน ตลอดจนผู้ที่ เกี่ยวข้อง บูรณาการเข้าเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของกระบวนการ ปกติ นักประเมินเป็นหนึ่งเดียวกับคณะทำงาน เป็น

รูปแบบการประเมินตนเองที่อิงกับหลักพุทธธรรม ประกอบด้วย 1) มุ่งมองต่อการประเมิน ได้แก่ ก) การให้คุณค่าต่อการประเมินในฐานะที่เป็นเครื่องมือ เพื่อการเรียนรู้และพัฒนา และ ข) หลักคิดในการ ประเมิน คือ หลักอริยสัจสี่และหลักกัลยาณมิตรธรรม 7 และ 2) วิธีการประเมินตนเอง ได้แก่ นักประเมิน และบทบาท กระบวนการประเมิน และเครื่องมือในการประเมิน รูปแบบการประเมินตนเองตามหลัก พุทธธรรมหมายอ่ายอิงสำหรับองค์กรชุมชนขนาด

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เลือกในการนำไปปรับประยุกต์ให้เหมาะสมกับบริบทของตนเอง ควรบรรจุระบบการประเมินตนเองเข้าไปเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการดำเนินงาน และควรพัฒนาศักยภาพนักประเมินอย่างสม่ำเสมอ สำหรับหน่วยงานภายนอกที่สนับสนุนด้านนโยบายต่าง ๆ ควรกำหนดให้โครงการหรือหน่วยงานที่ขอรับการสนับสนุนบรรจุระบบการประเมินตนเองเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการบริหารจัดการ โครงการหรือหน่วยงาน

**คำสำคัญ:** การประเมินตนเอง หลักพุทธศาสนา องค์กรชุมชน

## INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that the quality of the population is dependent on having knowledge with morality, public awareness, improvement of people's capability, and the creation of a strengthened community (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, Office of Prime Minister, n.d., p. 47; Pongpit, 2005, pp. 108–109). The quality of the population is therefore one of the important factors for developing the country. To develop the quality of the population, "learning" is an important tool. Learning could be initiated by many active sources; one of these is where the learning process of community members can involve experiences and practices, trial and error, and the connection of knowledge (Wasri, n.d., p. 4). The members of the community have often managed change, and adjusted themselves to the dynamics of a current crisis (Wasrinont, 2006). They gathered as a group, community organization, or network to tackle the problems together hoping for better things and the happiness of living based on social capital community. Community organizations have been established in many communities to handle poverty problems; for example, arranging welfare or what we know as a community welfare group that is there not only to help in terms of economics but also to build good relationships in the community which is the important base of a strong community

(Community Organizations Development Institute [Public Organization], 2008). The community organization can be categorized according to activity: (1) the Small Financial Organization emphasizes saving and loans such as the Model of Community Financial Institute; (2) the Social Organization arranges activities concerning saving money, loans, welfare, producing products, and providing services such as the Saving Group for Production, Sasjha Sasomsup Group; and (3) the Insurance Organization emphasizes only saving money to make welfare payments for members such as the One Day One Baht Community Welfare Fund (Wisatasakul, 2010, p. 4).

Up to now, several community organizations have been successfully self-sustained, and have grown and continued to expand as a network to other areas. However, there are some communities that have failed for various reasons such as the majority of community members are not members of the organization because they are not confident of the organizations' management and the benefits. They do not understand or know of the progress or the performance of the organization because the organization has no self-evaluation system. Most financial community organizations do not have formal self-evaluation for developing and improving performance. There is only a board meeting or an annual meeting and reports on the activities, income, and expenses of the organization during the year (Keemkratork, 2008, p. 102). Apart from those activities, there is almost no communication between the organization and members (Pongnин, Burarak, Pornmanin, Lakhthong, & Suwankarn, 2010, p. 180). The financial community organization has been succeeded in terms of loans, money saving, and welfare management by "Financier villagers" who have financial instinct and can manage group money to a certain level including setting up the criteria that respond to the needs of the members. However, most of them lack guidelines for measurement and follow up (Archawanantakul, 2008) or ignore any apparent evaluation (Pongpit,

2005, p. 205–208) because they have the basic concept of an organization—“Trust”. In some cases, there is a lack of awareness of the importance of evaluation and people do not understand what should be evaluated (Suanmuang Tulapan, 2005, p. 40). When the organization members trust the committee and believe the committee members selected to manage the organization are reliable, capable, and have moral and good behavior, then there is no necessity for evaluation. There are some academics who believe that community organizations are not concerned about self-evaluation because they think that every activity has benefits to all people and the money used for the activity is composed of the grant money, merit money, or money from government that for which there is no obligation to provide a financial return, so they do not have to be responsible for the funds (Susuki et al., 2008, p. 5–4; Archawanuntakul, 2008, p. 62). Hence, there is no evaluation, measurement, or performance analysis in terms of efficiency in costs and making a profit is not necessary. The mentioned profit may not be only in terms of financial aspects but also in terms of social and community benefits or the money may be poorly used or result in unplanned mistakes that lead to problems in organizational management and the eventual collapse of the organization.

However, the claim that all community organizations do not have self-evaluation might not be true. In fact, some community organizations are aware of the importance of self-evaluation and have used it as a tool for creating a learning process to improve and develop organizational management until they became a successful organization and are widely accepted by society. These organizations have become the source of learning and distributed their concept to other areas; for example, the case of the “Sasjha Sasomsup Network for Life Cycle Morality Development in Trat Province (SSN)” that was established from the idea of Monk Subin Paneeto of the Pailem Temple, Trat province dating from May 7, 1990 to build the awareness of

villagers to rely on and manage problem by themselves. The villagers set up a small financial organization in their village—the so-called Sasjha Sasomsup Group (SSG)—which focused on cohabitation between humans, society, and nature to live together peacefully. The main activities are money saving and loans. This working process draws on the Buddhist Principle and Buddhist Economics (Kacha, 2007, p. 90–91), including the principle of commercial bank management concerning savings, withdrawals, and low or no interest loans. It could be considered that the above principle is welfare created by members to relieve preliminary economic problems. However, they learn from self-evaluation through working experience or the exchange of knowledge with other areas and upgrading one of the social components and developing various activities. By 2012, the SSN had developed and expanded its network members from one group to 160 groups that work together and small groups at the village level have turned into a large network at the provincial level (Petchprasert, 2001, p. 16). The main leader is the founder who provided the concept, suggestions, and the principal guidelines, particularly in the review of the working experience of each SSG and determined the standard rules and regulations of SSG. Each group may adjust the regulations based on their context and the conditions in their area. However, all groups must share the same goal in developing the morality of people and self-dependency (Paneeto, 1998, p. 14).

Throughout the process, self-evaluation must be conducted for greater efficiency and effectiveness and for appropriately adjusting and updating activities, especially in adjusting the methods for creating a network by inviting monks from other provinces to attend the training course and to visit each area to explain the concept and principles of SSG to the expected leader (Un-Ob, 2006, p. 30) or to establish a “Sasjha Welfare Fund One Day One Baht” or other suitable groups. The results from the regular self-evaluation over 21 years include the

expansion of network members and increasing funds. In addition, activities are improved periodically. Self-management of the mentioned network is one example that reflects the learning community from regular self-evaluation. It is a continuous process cycle leading to problem solving, developing and improving the efficiency of the self-management process in the community (Ruangtrakool & Damrongpanich, 2010). This is to build the pattern of self-evaluation based on the principles and guidelines that may differ from self-evaluation in other types of organizations. The self-evaluation network has been designed to conform to the social context with specific characteristic. It of interest to study the self-evaluation model, and thus the research objective for the current project was to study the self-evaluation model of the SSN.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There are various words that share a similar meaning to the word “evaluation” including monitoring, assessment, regulation, and appraisal. In the present study, researchers have used the word “evaluation”.

The word “model” was used to explain the relationship among concrete factors. Models can be used to explain relationships among information, symbols, principles of the system, the scheme of things, and how each part of the system relates to other parts (Kanchana-Wasri, 2009, p.46). The evaluation model depicts the theory of evaluation so that the relationships between related components are systematically represented, so that evaluation theories are applicable (Buason, 2007, p. 23–25). The evaluation model is a result of the interrelationship between the concept of evaluation and the approach needed for evaluation. The definition covers both the words “model” and “approach”. Scholars have classified evaluation models and found that most evaluation models share the following points: evaluation objectives, focus or main point of evaluation, evaluation technique,

strengths and weaknesses of evaluation, as well as the evaluator (Buason, 2007, p. 976; Stufflebeam, Madaus, & Kellaghan, 2002, p. ix; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007, p. 138).

Nowadays, investigation is involved with both evaluators and stakeholders. Evaluation and implementation correlation cannot be separated. Self-evaluation is one type of evaluation that originated in the United States. Therefore, the two main components of the general evaluation model—the perspective on self-evaluation (the value of evaluation and evaluation concepts) and the self-evaluation approach (self-evaluation process and evaluation tools)—have been used.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was adopted in the study. The case study on the Sasjha Sasomsup Network was particularly conducted to develop the morality of the life cycle in Trat province. The target group of the research was categorized according to the sections in the network structure: (1) idea support section (provincial level), which included the founder and the ideological committees of the SSN comprising six people; (2) practice support section (provincial level), which comprised two officers in the learning center network; (3) operational section (village level), consisting of the SSG committees and members of the 37 groups. The research instruments consisted of guideline questions for in-depth interviews, guideline questions for focus groups, and observation guidelines for the self-evaluation process. Before collecting data in the field, the proposal and instruments of this study were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Social Sciences Department under the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mahidol University. The data were continually collected in the field until differentiation was produced. However, this information has been kept confidential and an individual participant's details cannot be disclosed.

The period of data collection was from January 2010 to June 2010.

Data analysis used the Atlas ti Version 6.2 program to identify the preliminary concept and characteristics of the data. All received data were analyzed and summarized as concrete induction or visible phenomenon, combining the analysis of categorical data by using theory as a guideline with the comparison of data to find the meaning and conclusion. There was a process of reliability checking involving field visits with consistent observation for 4 months. Three-cornered data checking and various types of data collection were used to check the reliability of analysis. After the analysis, data were returned to the key informants and exhibited in descriptive results. Furthermore, the study results were presented to the target groups periodically in their general assemblies held every Tuesday for the informants to check the veracity and credibility of the data.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The results showed that the self-evaluation model was based on two components: (1) perspectives on self-evaluation—the value of evaluation and evaluation concepts; and (2) self-evaluation approaches—evaluators and their roles, self-evaluation process, and evaluation tools. The details are described below.

Firstly, the perspective of self-evaluation was comprised of two parts. 1) The value of evaluation was implied as a tool to develop work, to create learning and to improve a person. It should emphasize the value of the evaluation rather than the evaluation technique. It reflected the approach of evaluation and the usage of the evaluation result. (2) The main concept of the network's self-evaluation was based on the two main principles of Buddha-dhamma—the Fourfold Noble Truths (Dukkha, Samudaya, Nirodha, and Magga) and Kalyanamittra-dhamma<sup>7</sup> (referred to a virtuous person or a good friend in such a relationship who

possessed seven characteristics: (i) lovable; endearing, (ii) estimable; respectable; venerable, (iii) adorable; cultured; emulable, (iv) being a counselor, (v) being a patient listener, (vi) able to deliver deep discourses or to treat profound subjects, and (vii) never exhorting groundlessly; not leading or spurring on to a useless end).

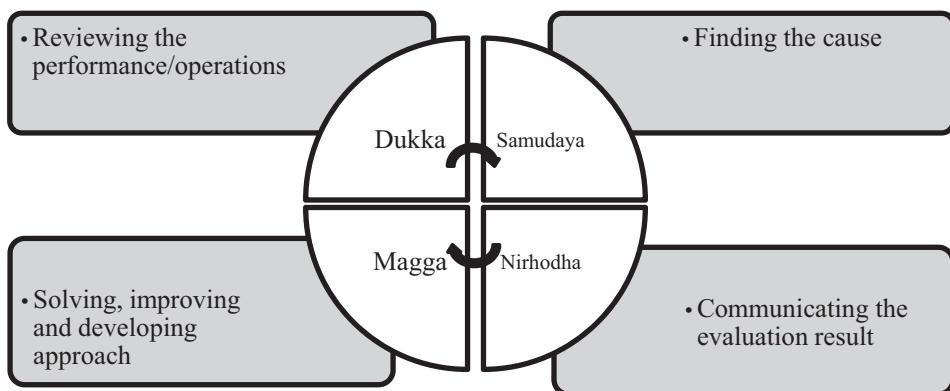
Secondly, the self-evaluation approaches were composed of two sections. (1) The evaluator checked that the network's self-evaluation was developed systematically with the pattern of the network's management, that the organizational structure and roles of the committees in each section (group and network) were clearly established with written commands in such management, and that self-evaluation was designed and merged within the management system. The key person in the network (group committee, network committee, and volunteer) was assigned to the evaluator team in each level (village and provincial level). The provincial evaluator team evaluated the performance of the network level. The village evaluator team evaluated the performance of the group level. The evaluator team for each level worked together. They reviewed performance, examined the causes of problems and communicated the evaluation results in order to find ways to improve the performance of the network. The characteristics of the evaluator team could refer to the Kanlayanamittra-dhamma 7, which were integrity and kindness, good listening skills, consulting skills, ability to maintain principles, ability to have knowledge, ability to give clear explanations, and ability to offer good advice. The evaluator's roles included coordinating, facilitating, mentoring, consulting, collecting, and deciding in the cost benefit analysis. (2) The self-evaluation process could also draw on the principles of the Fourfold Noble Truths, which consisted of four major steps (Figure 1). (3) Evaluation tools for the self-evaluation process could be utilized by the evaluator team, including observation, interviews, field visits, meetings, inquiries, considering documents concerning working rules and

regulations, and the accounting system was appropriately designed for the growth of the network.

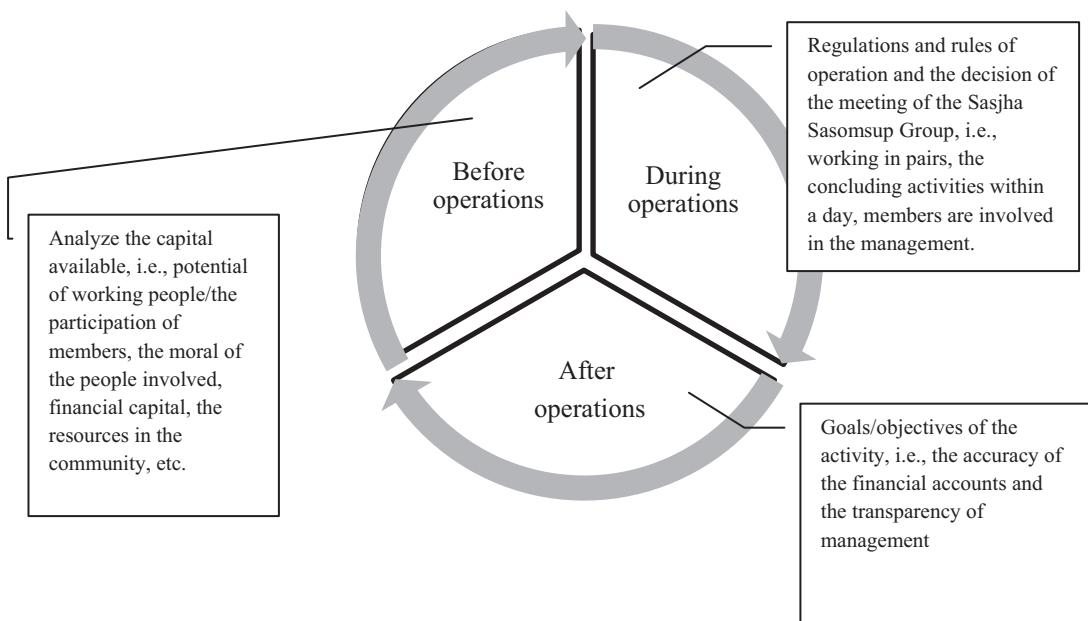
Finally, the **Buddha-Dhamma** concept has been used in the network to determine the self-evaluation approach which consisted of three issues: 1) what to evaluate—evaluation issues. The findings showed that the network's evaluation applied several evaluation tools in accordance with each objective of the evaluation; for example, they evaluated results based on objectives, their operations, community contexts, and the status of

group/network. For instance, the network used evidence and the group's work to evaluate the group's status. One of the SSN's committee members pointed out "...We (the SSN) rely on the rules. In this place, we have just released the rules for operation. If they (the SSGs) don't operate according to the rules, problems will occur in their group..."

Those evaluation issues were utilized to implement the timing of the operation according to Figure 2.



**Figure 1** Relationship between the self-evaluation process and the Fourfold Noble Truths



**Figure 2** Evaluation issues according to the timing of the operation

2) How to evaluate—methods of evaluation.

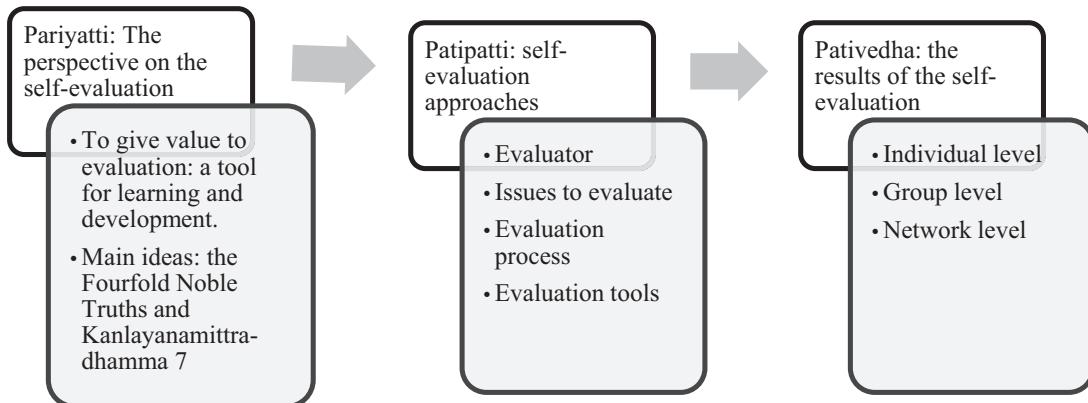
It was found that since gathering into the network (1997–2011), evaluation had developed into a self-evaluation system along with the management of the network, which started to use the same structure. The role of each group's work was quite clear since there was a written statement of appointed tasks. Under this management approach, self-evaluation was designed to blend more with the management system than in the past. The concerned person in the network was assigned to the evaluator group for each level. The evaluator team comprised members at: (i) the provincial level—a committee network that evaluated the performance of the network; and (ii) the village evaluator team—a committee group that evaluated the performance of the group. Both of these teams co-operated to review practices, examine causes, and communicate the results of evaluation to find ways for improvement. The SSN's founder, who was the evaluator at the provincial level, was the means of connection for the self-evaluation system of the SSN. The evaluator team had to have qualifications that complied with Kanlayanamittra-dhamma 7. The evaluator roles included coordinating, facilitating, mentoring, and consulting. Evaluators also had to collect data and decide on the performance of the network based on two evaluation objectives: (1) for learning and developing; and (2) for deciding. The SSN's founder stated "...If this group leader is weak, it will be estimated that his members will decrease in the future. He doesn't know that his group has the problem, so he needs a supporter to consider what is happening. If he knows, maybe he cannot solve it or he doesn't know how to solve it. ...He needs help from others..."

3) Result of evaluation. An important result of the evaluation is the SSN which was able to create learning for the development and improvement of the members and operations. For instance, the committees learned teamwork. They learned honesty, tolerance, and responsibility together. This led to the development of the network's

operations, so that operations could be more systematic. Therefore, it could be said that the network's self-evaluation results improved performances at all levels—the network level, group level, and individual level. Working towards the same goal, in the same direction, led to work improvement. The self-evaluation system was arranged in monthly network meetings on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of every month to share and exchange experiences and knowledge. Such activity led to progress of work development in the network. The adjustment of the overall working concept of SSG and/or the development of new activity was usually derived from the results of group evaluation. Apart from this, the results of evaluation were also used for work improvement including morality and capability building to achieve targets. In addition, the self-evaluation was not only used for developing people at the group level but also used for developing individuals (individual level) in terms of behavioral change; for instance, the case of a loan from a group member. There was a regulation that if one member failed to pay the debt and caused a decrease in the amount of money, the loan activity in that month would not be arranged. Once members had paid out their debts, the loan activity could be reactivated.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The self-evaluation model of the network based on the Buddhist concept was integrated with management and became the normal working pattern. Evaluation and operation could not be separated. The evaluator team was mostly concerned with the network drivers and played a friendly evaluator role as a supervisor and a consultant based on the data, knowledge, and truth in all aspects. The village level and provincial level collected the data and worked together. The evaluator at the village level evaluated the group level and passed the



**Figure 3** Buddhist Self-Evaluation Model

information to the evaluator at the provincial level who evaluated the network level. The network's self-evaluation system developed from informal evaluation into an evaluation system that contained the evaluation process according to the Fourfold Noble Truths. The evaluation process consisted of the process of performance review (Dukka), finding cause (Samudaya), communicating the evaluation result and determining the expected result (Nirodha), and determining the method of correction, improvement, and development (Magga). Various types of evaluation tools were used, such as observation, interviews, site visits, meetings, inquiries, considering the working rules and system documents, and developing an accounting system that was appropriate for the growth of the network. It could be said that the self-evaluation model of the network actually aimed to create learning and to advance knowledge in the cycle continuously and to enhance moral behavior and to improve member performance.

Finally, Figure 3 shows the Buddhist Self-Evaluation Model of the Community Organization Network based on the SSN's self-evaluation model that is adapted from Buddhist's principles known as the Saddharma three (the True Doctrine of the Buddha: Pariyatti/knowledge, Patipatti/practice, and Pativedha/result).

Recommendations following from the study are: 1) the Buddhist Self Evaluation Model could refer to small organizations in the community that could be adjusted according to their contexts. They should include an evaluation system in their management and regularly build up the capability of their evaluators; 2) all project managers, project owners, and the support units in policy making for every grant project should include a self-evaluation system as a part of project management in order to perform more efficiently and to produce more valuable and more practical outcomes.

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