

Addiction research centres and the nurturing of creativity

Center for Alcohol Studies (CAS), Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The Center for Alcohol Studies of Thailand (CAS) is a newly established research agency in Thailand. With support from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, CAS was established as the national research and knowledge management institute for addressing alcohol-related harms. CAS possesses some rare qualities. First, it is one of a few alcohol-specific research centres in low- and middle-income countries, and the only one in the Southeast Asia region. Secondly, CAS both conducts research and grants research funding, allowing it to influence to some extent the direction of Thai alcohol research. Furthermore, CAS researchers engage in all components of the research and policy process. In line with the concept of 'the Triangle that Moves the Mountain', CAS interacts closely with partners from all sectors, prioritizes capacity development and frequently operates beyond conventional academic function.

Keywords Alcohol, Center for Alcohol Studies, research, Thailand.

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Submitted 24 June 2011; initial review completed 21 September 2011; final version accepted 10 January 2012

'THE TRIANGLE THAT MOVES THE MOUNTAIN' CONCEPT

In order to understand the modern Thai alcohol policy movement, two things need to be known; the master strategy underpinning the whole process, the 'Triangle that Moves the Mountain', and secondly the Thai Health Promotion Foundation.

Professor Wasi, one of the most well-known medical, public health and social scholars in Thailand, has promulgated the concept of the 'Triangle that Moves the Mountain' since 1997. In order to move the immovable 'mountain', a metaphor for extreme difficulty including complicated social problems and social inertia, he indicates the necessity to strengthen the three interconnected sectors; knowledge, social movements and political involvement.

Creation of relevant knowledge through research is very crucial, but not adequate by itself; it must interact with social movement or social learning. Without relevant knowledge, social movement

cannot go very strong or may deviate to something else . . . Politicians have authority over utilization of state resources and in law promulgation, which are very often needed in development. Thus without political involvement the working structure is not complete. Politics without knowledge and social movement will not solve the problems (Professor Prawase Wasi [1]).

The first task is to generate relevant knowledge, which can be achieved through many mechanisms. The whole problem-solving process, in fact, could also be considered as the learning-by-doing practice for stakeholders, or so-called 'participatory learning through action' [2]. Without knowledge, societal power would be scattered and incapable of moving in the right direction [3]. The second task is facilitating social movement to support the transformation of knowledge into policy. The combination of knowledge and social movement will mobilize demand and guide the appropriate solution(s) for policy makers in the political sector. The third strategy is to fortify the authoritative aspect, the government. This