***Case Study***

***Slowing Population Growth in Thailand – A Success Story***

In 1971, Thailand adopted a policy to reduce its population growth. When the program began, the country’s population was growing at a very rapid rate of 3.2% per year, and the average Thai family had 6.4 children.

Fifteen years later in 1986, the country’s population growth rate had been cut in half to 1.6%. By 2004, the rate had fallen to 0.8%, and the average number of children per family was 1.7.

There are a number of reasons for this impressive achievement. They include the creativity of the government-supported family planning program, a high literacy rate among women (90%), and increased economic role for women and advances in women’s rights, and better health care for mothers and children. Other factors are the openness of the Thai people to new ideas and support of family planning by the country’s religious leaders (95% of Thais are Buddhist). A key factor was the willingness of the government to encourage and financially support family planning and to work with the private, nonprofit Population and Community Development Association (PCDA).

Mechai Viravidaiya (Figure 1) led the way in reducing the country’s population growth rate. This public relations genius and former government economist launched the PCDA in 1974 to help make family planning a national goal. PCDA workers handed out condoms at festivals, movie theatres, and even traffic jams, and they developed ads and witty songs about contraceptive use. Between 1971 and 2004, the percentage of married women using modern birth control rose from 15% to 70% - higher than the 58% usage in developed countries and the 51% usage in developing countries.

Viravidaiya helped establish a German-financed revolving loan plan to enable people participating in family planning programs to install toilets and drinking-water systems. Low-rate loans were offered to farmers practicing family planning. The government also offers loans to individuals from a fund to increase as their village’s level of contraceptive use rises. Education and economic rewards work.

[http://www.who.int/entity/bulletin/volumes/88/6/BLT-10-010610-Fa.png](http://www.google.ca/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&docid=A8A7JljxHIN9lM&tbnid=CkfOmkjkYM3t9M:&ved=0CAUQjRw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.who.int%2Fbulletin%2Fvolumes%2F88%2F6%2F10-010610%2Fen%2Findex.html&ei=E7EqUb-2I-ei2wXw6ICoCw&bvm=bv.42768644,d.b2I&psig=AFQjCNG35sOdthXNOmAijsrjY-A_KHHmEg&ust=1361838714904784)All is not completely rosy. Although Thailand has done well in slowing population growth and raising per capita income, it has been less successful in reducing pollution and improving public health. Its capital, Bangkok, is plagued with notoriously high levels of traffic congestion and air pollution.

**Figure 1:** Mechai Viravidaiya, displaying one of his innovative population growth control strategies.

Case Study taken from “Living in the Environment” (Miller & Hackett)