

# Creating Citizen Youth Journalists for the ASEAN Community

**Sukanya Buranadechachai\***

## **Highlights:**

- Proposes an effective model to prepare Thai citizen for the ASEAN Community that can be applied by practitioners in the region
- Discussion on the importance of citizen journalists
- Mixed method research design combining action research with survey
- Action study allows impact on the research participants that potentially will increase Thai youth's benefit from the ASEAN Community

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### **Abstract**

Thailand entered the ASEAN Community in 2015, yet Thai citizens are ill prepared to benefit from this next step of regionalization. The aim of this research was it to find a best practice model that can be successfully employed to increase the Thai youth's readiness for the ASEAN Community. To achieve this, we employed an action study. During a two day interactive workshop 70 youth from the Eastern region of Thailand were instructed in different issues concerning ASEAN and equipped with journalistic skills. By applying themselves as citizen youth journalists it was hoped that the workshop participants could disseminate knowledge about ASEAN well beyond their own group. With a questionnaire survey it could be shown that the participants had increased their knowledge about ASEAN. Two years after the workshop had been conducted follow-up interviews with a number of participants took place. This showed that many of them remained active citizens or even professional journalists. They actively engaged with their communities to spread information about ASEAN. The goals of this research have been achieved and we recommend the model presented here as best practice that can be applied in other localities.

**Keyword:** Citizen Journalist, Thai Youth, ASEAN Community

## Introduction

The ASEAN Community was finally launched in 2015. This next step of regionalization brings with it a multitude of challenges for the public and private sector but also every citizen in the 10 member countries. This article will focus on this latter group, setting aside the institutional factors that mostly impact government agencies and private enterprises. While the impact that the entrance into the ASEAN Community has on each individual will vary on a multitude of factors, no citizen of the member states can evade it completely.

The people of the ASEAN member states need to process a set of skills that will allow them and their citizens to fully benefit from the community. The ASEAN Charter as well as the AEC, ASCC and APSC blueprints spell out the aims and objectives of the community which will penetrate many aspects of life. These include labor rights, food safety, and free movement in the community, to name just a few examples. Many of these objectives are for the benefit of all people living in ASEAN. To reap these benefits, it is crucial that the people understand the implications on their daily lives.

They need to understand the structure and working of the organization. They should also have a basic knowledge of the history and culture of the ten member states. Furthermore, English language skills are of fundamental importance, as English is the official and working language of ASEAN.

It has been repeatedly pointed out that Thailand's population in particular is not ready for the entrance into the ASEAN Community. A number of studies have shown that Thai citizens do not yet have the necessary skills needed to take advantage of the ASEAN Community. Their knowledge about the institution and member countries is limited (Barbin & Nicholls, 2013; Jathurong, 2015; Muttanachai, 2012; 2014; Nipon, 2012; Nongnuch 2013; Thompson & Chulanee, 2008). However, the greatest deficits are found in the area of English language proficiency. In a global ranking of English proficiency, Thailand placed 62 out of 70 countries. Amongst the ASEAN countries, it had the lowest ability to use the English language (Fernquest, 2011; James & Fredrickson, 2015; Wannapa, 2012).

To address this lack of readiness of Thai citizens to excel in the ASEAN

Community, we conducted an action research with the goal to create youth citizen journalists who could disseminate information about ASEAN.<sup>1</sup> A group of 70 young people from Thailand's Eastern region were trained as journalists. They were equipped with the skills needed to choose news topics, to conduct research on those topics and communicate the finished stories employing a multitude of media outlets. Simultaneously, the participants took part in seminars and discussions about ASEAN to prepare them for the entrance into the community. To verify the effectiveness of the action study the researcher also conducted a questionnaire survey before and after the workshop. The survey measured the knowledge of participants about ASEAN. Two years after the completion of the training workshop, we followed up on the participants in order to confirm the long lasting effects of this research.

The action study was successful in increasing the participants' knowledge about ASEAN and created a number of citizen youth journalists with a long-term

commitment to these issues. The results of the questionnaire survey clearly showed that participants had increased their knowledge on ASEAN as an institution and its member countries. It was also observed that a number of the participants continued to engage in citizen journalism long after the action research had ended. Without supervision or initiative from the side of the researchers, some participants used the gained skills and knowledge to spread information about ASEAN and other issues relevant to their communities. Thus, it has to be concluded that the model introduced here is effective and should be used to increase the readiness of Thai citizens for the ASEAN Community.

### **The Importance of Citizen Journalists**

In modern societies, journalism fulfills a number of functions, of which that of spreading information about current events is one of the most important. Without newspapers, or more recently, televised news reports, the general population would have little

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<sup>1</sup> In this project we focused on knowledge of ASEAN and its member countries, rather than the participants' language abilities.

knowledge about current events. Issues covered by the media are broad and include government policies, finance, health, and entertainment. This allows all members of the public to be informed about issues that will affect their lives. This will allow them to participate in the public sphere. In particular, in democratic systems, this is important, as such information is necessary for an educated vote (Karlekar & Radsch, 2012).

Free media is an important aspect of the democratic system but it is often limited by political and financial circumstances. The media's duty to inform the population, for example, includes the investigation into government mismanagement when it takes place. The media functions as a watchdog who informs the voters of their government's actions. To achieve such investigative journalism, the media needs to be free of political bias. This means that ideally the media should not have any party affiliation. It should not be subjected to censorship or violence against journalists. This also means that the media should not be owned by the government or political parties. Often, however, media is in the ownership of politically motivated bodies or individuals

who can try to affect the reporting in their outlets (Witschge, 2009).

Wide-ranging technological changes have transformed journalism and democratized the way news is reported today. With the advent of the internet and smartphones, journalism is no longer limited to the professionals. Any owner of a smartphone or any other digital recording device can take photographs and make video clips. These materials can be uploaded onto a myriad of platforms, such as blogs, Twitter, and Facebook. When combined with some thoughtful words or analysis, such uploads can become news. Some of this news is even further distributed through the mainstream media outlets. This new form of journalism is often called citizen journalism. Citizen journalism has become possible with the technological development of the past few decades. What is remarkable about it is that with a limited number of skills and little budget, news can be reported on by a wide range of people (Mana, 2009).

The new emerging citizen journalism presents both opportunities and challenges. When potentially anybody can be a journalist now this means that it is possible that news becomes much more

engaged with local communities than in the past. Mainstream media often has little interest in covering small scale news that is of importance for one community. A citizen journalist can now easily cover such stories without spending a large amount of money. This has, to some extent, democratized media. However, the lack of journalistic training also has disadvantages. An integral part of an education in journalism is the journalistic ethic. This covers, amongst other things, the question of appropriate reporting and the protection of privacy. With a lack of knowledge and often awareness of such issues it is easy for citizen journalists to cause damage that they have not anticipated (Mana, 2009).

This action study seeks to use the potential of citizen journalism and prevent possible damage by providing the youth reporters with a fundamental education in journalism. Citizen journalists are placed inside their communities, which enables them to communicate ASEAN related issues in a relevant manner. ASEAN for many might appear of little importance to their lives. Journalists who understand both ASEAN and how it matters for the people are

needed to effectively communicate information. Citizen journalists have the possibility to do this. To minimize the problems that a lack of knowledge of journalism and ethics could cause, we have provided them with training during a two-day workshop. The workshop was successful and some of the youth trained are still active citizen journalists today. We would like to propose this model as a possible solution to the lack of knowledge about ASEAN amongst Thai youth.

### **Creating Citizen Youth Journalists**

In a two-day workshop, students from the Eastern region of Thailand were trained as citizen youth journalists. 70 students from 7 high schools aged between 16-18 years in the region were invited to participate in the workshop. Of the 70 participants, 51.3% were male. 97.4% are Buddhist with the remaining 2.6% being Muslim. This composition of participants at the workshop is a representative sample of Thai society at large. While a two-day workshop may appear to be too short to effect lasting change in the participants, the workshop should be understood as a catalyst and inspiration for independent engagement of the

students with ASEAN over the years to come. Thus, the workshop delivered a foundation on which the participants could then build themselves.

The workshop consisted of three elements. Firstly, students took part in icebreaking and entertaining activities in order to acquaint themselves with each other and make them comfortable in the unfamiliar surroundings. Second, seminars and lectures equipped them with theoretical knowledge about journalism and ASEAN. Third, students were given the opportunity to apply the skills they had been introduced to on a practical level. This was done employing different media, such as newspapers, Facebook, and YouTube. These three elements will now be discussed in more detail.

Icebreaking activities were crucial in helping to make the students receptive for the other activities. The participants in the workshop did not know each other before attending the sessions. Thus, it was crucial to allow them time to get to know each other. Entertaining activities, such as a visit to the aquarium, further encouraged a lively and relaxed atmosphere during the training sessions. It should also be seen as a break from more taxing activities.

Participants attended a seminar and lectures that gave them fundamental knowledge about ASEAN and the benefits that Thailand will receive from it. These lectures covered a wide range of issues. First, students were introduced to the history of ASEAN and how it was founded. The speakers also elaborated on the impacts that regionalization is expected to have on Thailand. It was noted that Thailand was particularly well placed in ASEAN in order to lead in the tourism industry (Olds & Robertson, 2014; Thai PBS, 2015). This is due to its natural and cultural beauty as well as to its expertise in the culinary field. However, as a result of a lack of professional and language skills, the country might fall short of reaping benefits from the ASEAN community in terms of participation in the regional labor market.

Subsequently, participants were provided basic skills in journalism. The main aim was to communicate to the participants how to make news fun and, thus, interesting for the audience. It was emphasized that the choice of topic is very important. The choice of topic is the starting point of every investigation and news coverage. News agencies compete

with each other by the means of selection of topics that attract the most attention. Further, the citizen journalists were made aware of the key elements that make up a news story. A successful news story should be timely, relevant to peoples' lives, or prominent. The stories should have an impact on society and should investigate important issues. The audience interest can also be awoken with issues that have a sexual or comical element.

After participants had been provided with journalism skills and factual knowledge about ASEAN, they were asked to produce articles and content for various media outlets. The outlets chosen for the participants were newspapers, Facebook, and YouTube. A newspaper was chosen as an outlet because it is the most elemental form of media which has a long history, and the majority of the Thai population is well accustomed to consuming news stories through this outlet. It offers a good opportunity for the citizen journalists to practice their newly acquired skills. However, newspapers have a number of limitations. The production and distribution of newspapers can be very costly. A physical newspaper has to be printed,

which involves the costs of paper and printing. The distribution also involves a number of challenges, such as logistical outreach and financing (Free Press Unlimited, 2016). Citizen journalists are unlikely to have the required funds for the production and distribution of newspapers. Furthermore, income from advertisements and sponsoring will likewise be limited. As a result, newspapers should not be seen as the media outlet of choice for citizen journalists.

The citizen journalists produced a trial newspaper with a lead article on the lack of English language skills of the Thai youth, which is perceived to be one major obstacle for this group to fully benefit from the ASEAN Community. The newspaper they produced can be seen in Figure 1. With reference to Dr. Jakree Chaipinit, a renowned scholar in the field of ASEAN Studies who has lectured the participants, the citizen journalists explored the issue of language skills in relation to the entrance into the ASEAN Community. The official language of ASEAN is English, and, more importantly, it is a lingua franca used to communicate in the region. With the entrance into the ASEAN Community, the movement of people with

ASEAN will become easier. This is, in particular, the case for professionals in a number of occupations that have been defined as skilled labor by ASEAN. These professions include medical professionals, engineers, and accountants. These professionals will be able to work in any ASEAN member state of their choice, which potentially could increase competition in these fields. The above-mentioned scholar and the citizen journalists perceive this as a threat to Thai youth. This threat is seen as particularly prominent because

of the low competency of English among Thais. Thai youth has repeatedly placed significantly lower in English proficiency tests than their counterparts in other ASEAN member states. Thus, it is perceived that Thai professionals will lose out in the ASEAN labor market. The citizen journalists suggested that the Thai government should pay more attention to this issue in order to increase the benefits that the Thai population can attain from the ASEAN Community.

**Picture 1**



As newspapers have a limited appeal to citizen journalists, other online media outlets and their usage were also included in the training. Online outlets do not face the same obstacles as newspapers. Facebook and YouTube are available for anyone with a connection to the Internet and are relatively inexpensive, as subscriptions are free of charge. In terms of outreach, online outlets potentially have a broad distribution without involving any logistical issues. Anyone with an Internet connection can potentially consume news presented through Facebook and YouTube. Furthermore, it has to be noted that most participants in the workshop were already using Facebook and other social media on a daily basis. They were well versed in using the medium. Thus, limited training in terms of the usage of these online outlets was needed. The training mainly focused on professional writing skills

and journalistic ethics. The disadvantage of online output is that the multitude of content on offer makes it difficult for the citizen journalists to stand out. To attract viewers and build up a following they have to work hard and continuously come up with interesting news stories. Nevertheless, online outlets are more suitable for citizen journalism than traditional media, such as newspapers.

The participants produced news articles that were posted on Facebook and video clips that were uploaded onto YouTube. These are shown in Figure 2. The Facebook article discussed the position of ASEAN in the global market. It portrayed the community as one way to counter the forces of the capitalist world. The YouTube video was an interview about ASEAN with Dr. Jakgree Chaipinit, a researcher at the Faculty of Political Science and Law, Burapha University.

**Picture 2**

นักข่าวพลเมือง เยาวชนรักษ์พลังงาน ครั้งที่ 3 การศึกษา

22-24 พฤษภาคม 2557

นักข่าวพลเมือง เยาวชนรักษ์พลังงาน ครั้งที่ 3 การศึกษา

จัดโดยสาขาวิชาสารสนเทศ

ดูใจแล้ว ถูกใจ ถูกใจ ถูกใจ ถูกใจ

นักข่าวพลเมือง เยาวชนรักษ์พลังงาน ครั้งที่ 3 20 มิถุนายน 2013

- น่าจะลุกfacebook

การค้าข้ามติดต่อที่การต่างในโลก ประเทศที่เป็นประเทศมหาอำนาจมีได้ เบรบประเทศเล็กๆอยู่เสมอ เนื่องจากความมีอิทธิพลทั้งด้านเศรษฐกิจ สังคม วัฒนธรรม รวมถึงเทคโนโลยี ที่มีประชากรและคุณภาพชีวิตที่มีขนาดเล็กกว่าประเทศมหาอำนาจ ที่มีประชากรอย่างมาก ทำให้彼らต้องมีส่วนร่วมในการต่อรองนั้นเป็นไป มากนัก ดังนั้นจึงทำให้ประเทศที่เล็กกว่า ขาดดุลการค้าอยู่บ่อยครั้ง

เหตุการณ์เมืองด่านเจดีย์ท่าให้ประเทศไทยในแผนเวลาขึ้นด้วยรัฐบาลออกกฎหมายให้จับมือกัน สร้างสมาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียน (AEC) ขึ้น โดยเป็นการร่วมมือกันของประเทศใน แผนเวลาขึ้นด้วยรัฐบาลออกกฎหมายให้ เพื่อเพิ่มประสิทธิภาพในการต่อรองทางด้านเศรษฐกิจ รวมถึงการต่อรองในด้านนี้นี่ เพื่อรักษาผลประโยชน์ที่ได้ก่อให้ประเทศในสหภาพเศรษฐกิจ

ดร. จักรี ไชยพินิจ อาจารย์ประจำคณะรัฐศาสตร์และนักศึกษาศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัย บูรพา กล่าวว่า การเปิดประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียน เป็นการรวมตัวกันของ ประเทศในทวีปเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ 10 ประเทศด้วยกัน เพื่อเพิ่มประสิทธิภาพ การต่อรองในด้านต่างๆ รวมถึงการให้การเดินทางและแลกเปลี่ยนแรงงานภายใน ประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียนที่ความสงบมากยิ่งขึ้น แต่ประเทศไทยนั้นคง ต้องเร่งพัฒนาเรื่องของการสื่อสารทางด้านภาษาอังกฤษ เพราะในกลุ่มประเทศ AEC นั้น ประเทศไทยยังคงเป็นภาษาหลักเรื่องภาษาอังกฤษ เพราะในกลุ่มประเทศ

การรวมตัวเศรษฐกิจอาเซียนนี้จะเพิ่มความสามารถการต่อรองให้จริง และจะเพิ่มรายได้ให้แก่ประเทศต่างๆในประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียนอย่างแน่นอน ถือเป็นภาระ รวมของประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียนนี้ ยังคงได้ผลลัพธ์ในมีเหตุการณ์ได้ทั่ว ท่าให้การรวมตัวของประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียนล้มเหลว ดังนั้นการรวมตัวของ ประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียนนี้ น่าจะประสบความสำเร็จมากพอสมควร นาย ดร. จักรี ไชยพินิจ กล่าว

## **Creating Knowledge about ASEAN**

One of the aims of this action study was to increase the participants' knowledge about ASEAN. Previous research has shown that the Thai youth does not possess a comprehensive knowledge about ASEAN as an organization or the cultures of the member states (Leoni, 2014; Roy, 2008). As a result, young citizens are not well prepared for the entrance into the ASEAN Community and will not be able to fully benefit from the opportunities presented. To enhance the participants' knowledge about ASEAN and the member countries, a number of lectures were provided. These were supplemented by a booklet in comic form. This booklet communicated information in an easily accessible way that appealed

to the young reader. The knowledge that was transferred to the participants was to function as a basis for their continued engagement with ASEAN related issues after the workshop.

A questionnaire survey was conducted with the participants before and after the workshop in order to measure the increase in their knowledge. The questionnaire consisted of twelve multiple-choice questions covering general information about ASEAN. The content of the questions varied in the depth of knowledge required by the participants from superficial to in-depth, detailed knowledge. The questionnaire administered before and after the workshop was identical. The results of the survey are shown in Table 1.

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Sukanya Buranadechachai

**Table 1** Participants knowledge about ASEAN

Question	Percentage of Participants who answered correctly		Perceptual increase in correct answers
	Before	After	
1 What is the official name of ASEAN?	82.1	100.0	17.9
2 Which are the funding members of ASEAN?	87.2	100.0	12.8
3 What is not an important aspect of the ASEAN Free Trade Area?	61.5	84.6	23.1
4 What is the CLMV?	15.4	100.0	84.6
5 Where and when was the Vision 2020 formulated?	23.1	92.3	69.2
6 What is not one of the three ASEAN Communities?	41.0	94.9	53.9
7 Which of the following articles are included in the ASEAN Charter?	15.4	56.8	41.4
8 Which one is the official language of ASEAN?	84.6	100.0	15.4
9 Which of the following articles is not included in the AEC Blueprint?	25.6	69.2	43.6

**Table 1** Participants knowledge about ASEAN (cont.)

Question	Percentage of Participants who		Perceptual increase in correct answers
	answered correctly	Before	
10 Which of the following is a coordinator of ASEAN?	46.2	71.8	25.6
11 Which of the following are not members of ASEAN+3 and ASEAN +6?	59.0	94.9	35.9
12 Which of the following is not a currency of an ASEAN member states?	46.2	92.3	46.1

The results show that the knowledge of the participants increased after taking part in the workshop. The percentage of correct answers on all twelve questions improved. However, it is possible to differentiate between three groups: questions with little, medium and significant improvement. Little, medium and significant improvement have been defined as an increase of correct answers of below 25%, between 25%–50% and over 50%, respectively.

The questions that experienced a little increase in correct answers are question 1, 2, 3, and 8. These questions consisted of more general knowledge about ASEAN, such as the official name and language. It can be noted that a great majority of over 80% of participants already answered these question correctly before attending the workshop. Thus, little improvement was possible. After the workshop, three out of the four questions were answered correctly by all participants.

Medium improvement could be observed for questions 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12. These questions involved in-depth knowledge concerning the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) blueprint and the ASEAN Charter. As the questions require detailed acquaintance with legal texts, it was to be expected that few participants knew the answers before the workshop. Thus, an increase of correct answers to the question of up to 46.1 % is an achievement of the workshop. Question 12 should be considered separate from the remaining questions in this category. The question about the currencies of ASEAN member states differs from the remaining questions in the group as well as the questionnaire in general. The knowledge required from the participants to answer this question is of general nature and not directly related to ASEAN as an organization. The question required much less specialized knowledge and should be easily answered. However, only 46.2% of the participants were able to answer it correctly before the workshop, showing that there is a profound lack of general knowledge about the countries in the region. After the workshop, this number doubled and rose

to 92.3%. Thus, it can be surmised that participants gained a considerable amount of general knowledge of the region.

A significant increase in correct answers could be shown for questions 4, 5, and 6. These questions cover issues of contextual knowledge about ASEAN. These questions are not in-depth but they do not represent general knowledge leading to a low percentage of participants answering them correctly before the workshop. Question 6 should be examined separately from the other questions that have achieved a significant increase in correct answers. The question concerned the three ASEAN Communities, namely the Political-Security Community, the Economic Community and the Socio-Cultural Community. Participants were asked which of the four possible choices was not one of the ASEAN Communities. The right answer would have been Information Technology Community, which does not exist. Before the workshop, 41% of the participants answered this question correctly, compared to 82.1% who know the official name of ASEAN (question 1). However, the three communities should be considered one of the most basic facts about ASEAN, on par with the official

name. The great discrepancy between the correct answers to two questions of equal level can be explained by observing much of the official and unofficial dialogue about ASEAN in Thailand. When referring to ASEAN a majority of people prefer to use the acronym for ASEAN Economic Community, e.g. AEC. By wrongly using AEC instead of ASEAN, the Thai public is greatly misinformed about the goals, aims, and nature of the association. This is reflected in the low awareness of the participants of the three communities, or pillars of ASEAN, as illustrated by the low number of correct answers. Following the workshop, this misinformation was rectified, and the number of correct answers increased by 53.9% to 94.9%. Due to the immersion into ASEAN-related issues and the opportunity to apply newly acquired knowledge during the production of news articles, a much higher percentage of participants were able to correctly answer these questions.

The questionnaire survey has clearly shown that the participants in the workshop have gained a significant amount of knowledge about ASEAN.

In all areas the percentage of questions answered correctly has increased. This is particularly marked in detailed and specific questions on which the participants had little preexisting knowledge. Thus, the workshop has shown an immediate effect on the participants' readiness to enter the ASEAN Community. We now have to turn our attention to the long-term impact of the workshop on the participants.

## **Two Years On – The Success of the Project**

Two years have passed since the workshop. After the workshop, I had the opportunity to take part in many related activities within the school. The first activity I engaged in was the production of news for my school. We established a small studio, which we named PSP Studio. I was active as a reporter and I could use the experience from the workshop in many ways. I learned how to work in a team, journalistic investigation and the presenting of news. We published our

news via YouTube and the school's website. Another activity I took part was in an 'ASEAN Ties Camp' for primary students. On this occasion, I could share information about each country's history and lifestyle with the young students. [...] Through the participation in the workshop I have found the courage to express myself. It has motivated me to do what I love best.

This is the account of Chotika Khaekram, who after graduating from high school started to study for a bachelor degree in Communication Arts at Burapha University. For her, the participation in the workshop was a pivotal moment in her life. It has helped her to establish her professional aspiration and develop her personality. However, apart from her personal development, she has also significantly engaged in increasing knowledge about ASEAN in her community. Through the participation in a school news agency and other school activities she has spread knowledge about ASEAN to teachers and fellow students. Once she has graduated from university,

it can be expected that she will further these efforts on a more professional basis.

Another of the participants, Whichada Nataworapad has graduated from high school and is currently working as freelance journalist producing radio programs for children and youth. Her major concern is reporting on children's welfare and other social issues which she actively promotes. She is a member of the Thai PBS citizen journalists for the central region. When asked about the impact the workshop had on her work she reports:

We are living in the age of technology, the speed at which news develops is rapid. The knowledge that I learned during the workshop has been very beneficial because I can employ it in my current work. This applies to all platforms that I am responsible for, such as the moderation of radio programs, the production of television programs, posting news on the Facebook fan page. [...] I also apply the knowledge gained when I am a trainer for other citizen journalists. Journalism is used

as a tool for youth capacity building. All this has to be under the journalistic ethic, so that those who have passed the training will be careful, act responsibly and be aware of the effects of the media, in particular, the media which we have in our own hand.

She has used the knowledge and a skill gained to go straight into professional life and remains dedicated to the spreading of information on ASEAN so as to help her community.

Currently working as a news anchor for a local television canal is yet another of the participants: Isada Waitee. In his work he covers a wide range of local news including issues such as tourism, health, social welfare, culture, and lifestyle. About his work and the influence of the workshop on his life he reports:

The news we make is made by the people for the people. The issues covered are news of the people for the people. The training I received during the

workshop has influenced my private and professional life, the life of a local journalist for which I have been trained. I can apply the knowledge I have gained about ASEAN, the news content, and the production of news to my work. As a journalist, I can bring many benefits to the community. I can use inventive news stories for our local audience, so that they can have knowledge about the entrance into AEC.

Isada, like many of the other participants, sees the importance of increasing the knowledge into issues related to ASEAN and local news. This awareness has been ignited by the workshop. The skills gained at the same time allow him to effectively engage in the development of his community.

The three examples of former participants cited here show that the end of the workshop was only a beginning for the youth citizen journalists, as was the intention of the action study.<sup>3</sup> The workshop equipped the participants with

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<sup>3</sup> It has not been possible to keep track of all former participants, as many of them have moved on to study at universities or to follow a career.

journalistic skills and knowledge about ASEAN. However, even more importantly, it woke an interest in journalism and the benefits it could bring to the participants' community. Some of the participants decided for a career in journalism which was inspired by the workshop. More, however, have gone in other professional directions, but most continued to integrate the knowledge and skills gained into their lives. The workshop did fundamentally affect the participants life choices and activities. It had a long-term impact on increasing the readiness of Thai citizens to benefit from the ASEAN Community.

## Conclusion

This action study has successfully established a model that effectively enhances the readiness of Thai citizens for the ASEAN Community. A number of studies have shown that Thai citizens are not well prepared for the challenges and opportunities offered by the ASEAN Community. Therefore, it is essential that Thai citizens increase their knowledge about the organization and its member countries. This action study aimed to offer a model that would help to prepare

Thai people for the ASEAN Community. It was decided to create a number of citizen youth journalists. In a two-day workshop, 70 high school students from the Eastern region of Thailand were trained in journalistic skills, professional writing, and journalistic ethics and also attended lectures on ASEAN. The questionnaire survey that was conducted before and after the workshop showed that the participants' knowledge on ASEAN had increased significantly. Before the workshop, most participants only possessed general knowledge. After the completion of the training, most participants had gained in-depth and specialized knowledge about the organization and its member countries. The knowledge they had gained during the workshop was further disseminated to the participants' communities. The participants applied the journalistic skills to spread information about ASEAN to teachers, students and members of the larger community. Two years after the completion of the workshop a number of participants were still active as citizen journalists and passionately engaged with issues relevant to ASEAN and their communities. In this fashion, a multitude of the original

participants were positively affected by this action study and their readiness for ASEAN has increased. It has to be concluded that the creation of citizen youth journalists is an effective way to prepare Thai citizens for the ASEAN Community. We, therefore, recommend that this model be applied in other localities in Thailand.

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