

Special Report: Alcohol-Free Community, Noan Ma Khur Village, Ubonradchathanee Province

Reported by: The Civil Society Group of Ubonradchathanee province

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Noan Makhur Temple
Temple is a sin-free area.
Our temple supports healthier living.

Residents of Noan Ma Khur village have united and committed to quit drinking and stop selling and buying alcohol beverages. The community set up a common rule banning alcohol from the village area. As a result, this village voluntarily becomes an alcohol-free community.

Background

Noan Ma Khur village is a small community with 84 households located in the town of Gabin, city of Gud Khao Pun, Ubonradchathanee Province, Northeastern region of Thailand. The primary industry in this part of the country is agriculture. Therefore, most of the local people are farmers. They also work in a factory as a general contractor and laborer during non-farming season. As for alcohol consuming behavior, people, especially men, in this region associate alcohol with fun and pleasure. Drinking alcohol and getting drunk during a party, celebration, ceremony and festival become an essential part of any gathering.

Turning Point of Noan Ma Khur

Thailand is a Buddhist country. Buddhism plays an important role in people's daily life especially in the rural area. Most people have high respect to a monk and follow his guidance.



Phra Khruie Supakitmongkon is the head monk of the Noan Ma Khur temple. He observed and noticed a trend that villagers got in debt after arranging a funeral. One of the unnecessary expenses was from serving alcohol to guests during the ceremony. Therefore, he requested villagers not to bring alcohol into the temple when he was present.

Thereafter, the alcohol drinking was fading. People stopped bringing alcohol beverage to the temple even if there was a celebration or ceremony.

Furthermore, Pra Khruie Supakitmongkon performed treatments for individuals who wished to quit drinking by giving advices. Eventually, they managed to gradually stop drinking alcohol. As a result, their quality of life had improved; they spent less and saved

more money. The monk praised for their achievement and shared their success stories with other villagers. In his speech, he also emphasized on the benefits of not drinking alcohol. From then on, more people made the same commitment to quit alcohol drinking.

Later, Phra Khruue Supakitmongkon conducted a verbal survey and found that in the village there were 10 regular drinkers and 40 occasional drinkers. The annual expenditure on alcohol in the village was about 700,000 Baht which was outrageously high for their income level. He shared the data with the villagers. The information was widely discussed especially in the town hall meeting. Thus, the residents came to an agreement to set up common rule banning alcohol in the temple and village area. This rule is applicable to all residents and visitors. If it is violated, the fines are: 500 Baht for bringing and consuming alcohol in the village and 1,000 Baht for consuming alcohol in the temple property.

During Buddhist Lent in 2007, the residents of this village united to do goodwill as a celebration to the King's 60th year anniversary on the throne. They invited all residents and businesses to stop drinking and selling alcohol. Thereafter, they continued this effort and became an alcohol-free village permanently during the King's 80th birthday celebration.

During the past two years of being alcohol-free village, the residents' quality of life has enormously improved. They are healthier and happier. Health problems, violence and accidental rates related to alcohol drinking have decreased as reported by the primary health care unit in this village.

Brighter future

The mayors and governors of Kabin Town and Ubonrachathanee province are honoring Noan Ma Khur village as a role model. They encourage the other villages to make the same commitment and become alcohol-free communities. They are working closely with other organizations in promoting alcohol control campaigns such as participating in Alcohol-Free Buddhist Lent and banning alcohol in all of temple properties in the province. They also have been providing information on the benefits of stop drinking and alcohol's harmful consequences.