

# Bangkok Post **กรุงเทพธุรกิจ**



## Towards the 21st Century

by  
**Dr. Chira Hongladarom, Executive Director, Human Resources Institute, Thammasat University.**

Last week Asia was certainly the center of world attention as 18 leaders gathered in Indonesia for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting. In my opinion this organisation has moved so fast that the implications for Thailand have yet to be properly analyzed. The agreement for 2020 trade liberalization may seem a long way off, but the motions towards this end have already begun. In order to prepare ourselves, the first thing is to communicate what is going on to the business community and the general public so that they can make necessary adjustments. I heard that there is already some behind-the-scenes bureaucratic in-fighting between the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Commerce as to who should take the lead. So far Foreign Affairs appears to be winning, along with Deputy Prime Minister Supachai Panichpakdi.

I remember a professor in England who used to say that the most important formula for success in terms of regional co-operation is to have good coordination among the ministries in the individual countries and between the equivalent ministries in each country. Having myself worked in ASEAN affairs for 10 years, I have observed first-hand the enormous complexities of managing such an organisation. I do not believe we should proceed any further with this until the government and private sector have organized proper training for the participants in negotiations and implementation. The issues are simply too complicated to grasp without proper training. For one thing Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines have a linguistic advantage since English is the language of communication in ASEAN. I suggested some months ago at a seminar that at least ASEAN should have a research and policy think tank looking at regional co-operation and taking charge of training government officials working with ASEAN. Now that we have signed another APEC agreement, we must look at the implications for our 58 million people and how we can get the most out of the deal.

The seminar which I told you about last week, dealing with the implications of globalization on rural people went well. The Faculty of Economics, Chiangmai University, HRI and the Institute of Policy Studies for Development pooled their resources for the occasion. One of the main themes of the session was the fear among Northern farmers that the growth triangle involving Laos, Southern China and Myanmar will undercut their own produce. For instance the price of garlic in neighbouring countries is nearly 50% cheaper than in Thailand. After taking everything into consideration we were able to suggest 3 possible courses of action, and we undertook to give these further study over the next six months.

1. The first study will look at the role of agro-industries and contract farming and determine exactly what benefits and risks are involved. Many farmers still don't know much about contract farming and the Ministry of Agriculture doesn't have enough manpower to offer advice and assistance in this field.

2. Secondly, we will look at the role of modern management in the agricultural sector. The problem here is that there is a lot of misunderstanding about what 'management' actually entails. We identified five specific management areas of particular relevance:

- ◆ management of financial resources
- ◆ project management
- ◆ human resource management
- ◆ marketing management
- ◆ information management

As usual, successful implementation is the key issue and again everything boils down to upgrading the human resources involved, starting with the Ministerial officials. I have never seen officers from the Ministry of Agriculture attending MBA or mini MBA courses at Thai universities. The Ministry of Agriculture does not appear to have a vision for the future and lacks the will to change. However, next year we will at least make a beginning as HRI begins the first training project for officials in the North.

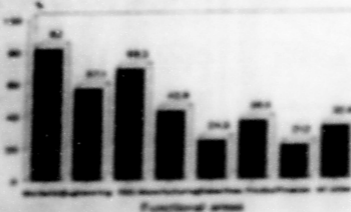
3. Finally, we will look specifically at the role of human resources development in the rural sector. The idea is not just to do more training, but to assess the current training programs available in the various departments concerned. Many of these are redundant, but we can see what can be salvaged and improved.

The seminar taught me a lot and I hope that other northerners will help us.

Finally, I hope you will tune to Channel 11 tonight at 8.30 p.m. for my program on 'Women and Work', which I think will be very interesting indeed.

See you next week!

### Functional areas involved in new product work



Source: The Institute of Human Resource Management, HRI