

[International summit in Si Sa Ket seeks to promote innovative economy](#)

written by กองบรรณาธิการ | July 20, 2017

The rainy season is well underway as people from around the world step foot in wet Si Sa Ket Province this week. For the next 16 days, local communities will engage with participants from 15 different countries in a co-creative process to develop projects focused on themes, such as artisan entrepreneurship, organic agriculture, and water resources.

The International Development Design Summit (IDDS) comes to Southeast Asia for the first time. Connected with Massachusetts Institute of Technology's D-Lab, it collaborates with communities to design, develop, and disseminate technologies to improve the lives of those living in poverty.

The host for the summit, Raitong Organics Farm, is a social enterprise based in Ban Hang Wao Village in Si Sa Ket Province. It aims at developing a community of local organic producers and customers to promote organic farming methods.

During IDDS Sisaket, Raitong will launch a center to promote an innovation and creativity driven economy in Isaan, Thailand, and Southeast Asia.

The Isaan Record talks to Hermes Huang, Lead Organizer of IDDS Sisaket, about the summit's vision for collaboration with Raitong Organics Farm and surrounding communities.

IR: Why was Si Sa Ket Province chosen for this IDDS?

Si Sa Ket was chosen because of our partner Raitong Organics Farm. The key thing here is that we're not helicoptering in and out. Raitong Organics Farm is based in Ban Hang Wao where the event is being held. They are the key driver of the energy that is being put into this event.

We are focusing the initial program on the intersections between the needs of the community, the needs of Raitong as a social enterprise and sustainable business, and aligning it with the government policy so that we can build momentum.



IDDS (International Development Design Summit) is a series of summits that has been held around the world since 2007.

IR: How do you feel about IDDS Sisaket being the first in Southeast Asia?

MIT D-Lab has historically not had a large presence in Asia in general. There's only been two IDDS's in Asia. One was in Chennai, India and one was in Lahore, Pakistan, so I think there's a really interesting opportunity to expand the International Development Innovation Network [which is organized by MIT D-Lab] to a new region. I see it as an opportunity to leverage global resources for Thailand, Southeast Asia, and Si Sa Ket Province.

IR: How were the project themes chosen for IDDS Sisaket?

When we first announced the summit about a year ago, we collected ideas like water resources, organic agriculture, and education. In terms of a discrete project, these actually mean nothing. They all sort of blend together.

One of the original themes was money management. But the community members didn't identify it as a discrete problem. We didn't feel confident they could work on it in 16 days with people from outside. There are definitely challenges in the community, but they weren't identified by the community as problems like "I have X problem with money."

We know there's an opportunity there, but it wasn't chosen by the community themselves. We'll let it sit and marinate for a while. Maybe in the future we can build a program around that because we will have already gone through the process at this summit.

IR: You partnered with Raitong Organics Farm, but the summit is not focused on organic agriculture, correct?

We aren't really focusing on a thematic sector or a specific technology. We're focusing on the process, the process it takes to build an innovative, creative, and inclusive ecosystem. When we can create systems and processes that create opportunity for everyone and enable people to create

progress with themselves, their families, and their communities, ultimately everyone benefits.

Of course, that mixes with the real-world realities of power, privilege, infrastructure, access to education, all these other things. When we have these lofty sorts of ideals, they are tempered by the reality of the situation.

We acknowledge the powers and the privileges that each individual brings to the table, and we do our best to include more people when they're ready to engage. In the spirit of that, Raitong isn't just interested in organic agriculture; they're interested in lifting up with the community that they're a part of.

IR: How will IDDS Sisaket and Raitong bring long-lasting changes to the region?

Raitong wants to establish itself as a training center as a place of learning, research, and science. Some of the discussions we've always had is this idea of open science. It's this idea that knowledge creation can and should be done everywhere and equal to the knowledge production in the Global North or in academic institutions.

The foundations and drives exist already, but it's a matter of engaging people who share that vision. We're hoping through IDDS Sisaket we'll be able to find more people who will believe in that sort of vision because, at the end of the day, if you don't have people, nothing's going to happen.

IR: What is the significance of establishing the Innovation Center in Si Sa Ket?

The clearest thing in my mind is that this Innovation Center is situated in Si Sa Ket, a place that hasn't been taken very seriously at a national level or an international level. To be able to do research, science, and knowledge creation with the backing of people and partners who believe in the value of contextualized knowledge and have recognition, namely MIT, is a real opportunity for getting recognition of a platform of knowledge creation in a place that typically hasn't.

There are two systems that we're looking at here. Knowledge creation for the benefit of the people in the specific context and time is crucial. If you're just transplanting knowledge that was developed in one place and scaling it to another place, it's not going to work. The other opportunity here is upending the idea that the Global North is the only place that can produce knowledge and to be able to have the backing of people who believe in that vision.

IR: What are the largest obstacles you foresee in moving forward?

The immediate obstacles are geographic and financial. Geography because Si Sa Ket is simply so far from major economic centers in Thailand. We're dealing with problems of migration, of geography, of brain drain. In the short term, it's about finding ways to catalyze opportunities so that people are excited to come to Si Sa Ket.

The other thing is financial. It's about cultivating and finding benefactors and people willing to invest money and time into processes that don't immediately yield results. It's about finding money that comes from sources that are willing to sit down, listen, travel, and get into the dirt a little bit. They need to deeply understand that there are no quick fixes to the issues of the region.

IR: Is there anything else you would like to mention about IDDS Sisaket?

On the afternoon of August 4th, we're having a public innovation festival where the prototypes can be tested. We're inviting local communities around us to come try the prototypes and have people share their experiences. If anyone would like to come, they're more than welcome to contact me and

we can help them make arrangements.

Hermes Huang is the Lead Organizer for IDDS Sisaket and a co-founder of Designing for Social Innovation & Leadership Global. Three years ago, he came to Bangkok for his Master's at Chulalongkorn University and began a partnership with Raitong Organics Farm. IDDS Sisaket will run from July 21 to August 5. If you would like to attend the festival on August 4, please contact Hermes at hermes@dsilglobal.com.

For more information, please visit [their website](#) or [Facebook page](#).