

## Mahidol proposes BCG economic model to revive APEC after COVID

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The over three-year coronavirus crisis put pressure on every country to find ways to "live with COVID-19" sustainably.

Recently, **Professor Piyamitr Sritara, M.D., FRCPT, FACP**, Dean of Faculty of Medicine Ramathibodi Hospital, Mahidol University, as one of the sub-committees on driving forward the Bio-Circular-Green Economic Model (BCG) in medicine and vaccines which is one of the 10 goals of Thailand's economic development strategy, joined the meeting to exchange experiences with working groups from 21 member states of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The meeting discussed ways to rescue the economy from the COVID-19 crisis and prepare for the new wave of outbreaks. Amid all sectors, Mahidol University as one of the country's main higher education institutions, is fully aware of playing a strong role in advancing the BCG policy, with its high potential to help develop the economy in this region in many clusters like food and agriculture, as well as medicine and wellness.

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**Professor M.D. Piyamitr** emphasised that building stability and driving economic growth has to focus on value creation through the process of cross-disciplinary technology use, recycle and upcycle, maximum life cycle usage and Zero-Waste under this BCG policy. Mahidol University can add value to food and agricultural products through the development of nutraceuticals, biotechnological production and precision agriculture, apart from the field of medicine and health concerning precision medicine, genomics technology, the development of herbal products and medical plants that contain bioactive compounds together with the promotion of being a medical hub, and others.

In the APEC framework, strengthening international cooperation in knowledge building, business networking and mobility of high-potential personnel is another important element. It works in tandem with the sufficiency economy concept to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are related to food security, health security energy security, career security and sustainable ecosystem.

**Prof.Piyamitr Srithara, M.D.** also shared successful experiences from previous related research studies of the Faculty of Medicine Ramathibodi Hospital Mahidol University. One of them is in collaboration with Thailand Center of Excellence for Life Sciences (Public Organisation), or TCELS, that has discovered Panduratin A and Pinostrobin extracts in Thai white galangale plants which have an inhibitory effect on the COVID-19 virus in vitro. Cooperating with the private sector, the research has extended the findings to develop health products and then, by joining hands with communities, help support the sustainability of the country's economy. An example of communities in Nan Province was given for the problem of forest invasion and destruction for corn farming to feed industrial plants. But the rewards are not worth it because the farming uses a wide area, reducing forest by 28%. The Nan Forest Conservation Project was thus initiated and developed into "Nan Sandbox" based on the idea of Mr. Banthoon Lamsam, Chairman Emeritus of Kasikornbank Public Company Limited to restore forest land, which is currently underway.

With the cooperation between Nan community residents, the government, the private sector and researchers from higher education institutions including Mahidol University, the project has agreed to plant forest in a ratio of 100 trees per 1 rai of land, using the free space between each tree for benefit by planting valuable cash crops that can grow under the shade of large trees, including white galingale herb plants that show inhibitory activity against COVID-19.

The project also looked at the promotion of the cultivation of turmeric medicinal plants which is recognised in Thailand and Asia as a medicinal plant with "curcuminoid" which is a powerful antioxidant with medicinal properties that can be processed into many pharmaceuticals.

No matter how long and continuous the COVID-19 crisis is, Mahidol University is ready to stand up for the "Wisdom of the Land" and maintain its commitment to developing research to create a body of knowledge for the survival of the nation and mankind.

